



Fontys

Opleidingscentrum
Speciale Onderwijzer

Roehampton
University 

*I, Anahit Stepanyan declare that I developed this
dissertation independently with the use of the*

Inter-professional Collaborations to Support Children with SEN in Preschool

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfillment of the joint degree of
Ma/Mgr SEN-Erasmus Mundus, Charles University and Roehampton
University 2009/2010

Module code: ERM030L003Y

Student No:

Charles University:

89281139

Research Supervisor

Doc. Paed. Radka Wildova

STE09285666

Student Name

Anahit Stepanyan

Fontys University:

2156090

2010

Declaration

I, Anahit Stepanyan declare that I developed this dissertation independently with the use of the resources listed in my bibliography.

.....
Signed by: Anahit Stepanyan:

Date: 30.07.2010

Student No:

Charles University: 89281139

Rochampton University: STE09285666

Fontys University: 2156090

Abstract

This research aims to explore inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool. Related research findings suggest that inter-professional collaborations in support service delivery improve the outcomes for children. It is also discussed that early childhood development is holistic and only conditionally can be subdivided into physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional and social development. Children with special educational needs receive various support services by different professionals, including medical, social, educational and psychological. Considering that all these dimensions in children development are interconnected there is a need to call for collaborative services to increase the effectiveness of each service. Communication between professionals is very important to ensure the awareness of the context of children and thus to provide comprehensive services.

This research seeks to understand the nature of collaborative practices among professionals providing services to children with SEN in preschool, focusing on the processes of inter-professional collaborations and also on revealing the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations from the view of the professionals.

The research aims to contribute to the improvement of quality and organization of professional support for the children with SEN in early childhood settings.

To achieve this aim a case study within the context of a preschool with special care in Prague, Czech Republic is investigating inter-professional collaborations. The study uses qualitative approach. The main research methods used by this study are semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The findings of this case study identify the support system for children with SEN in preschool and the perceptions of professionals about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations. Based on the research findings practical recommendations are developed to improve inter-professional collaborations and recommendations for further study are presented.

Key words: inter-professional collaborations, special educational needs, early childhood education, support services, preschool children

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my research supervisor PaedDr. Radka Wildova for her support and strong encouragement. I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Ann Cheryl Armstrong for her valuable support in specifying my dissertation topic and layout. I express my gratitude to Jana Matousova for her help to find a preschool with special care for my research. I thank the principle of the preschool for the permit to carry out the research enquiry in the preschool and also for her interest in this research.

I thank all the research participants for their time and willingness to participate. I am especially grateful to the social worker of my research preschool for the overall support, for the coordination of interview schedules and for language interpretations. I thank Petra for her kind help with the translations of documents.

I also thank the program conveners Dr. Sulochini Pather, Dr. Jan Šiška, Dr. Jacqueline van Swet and all the lecturers in three partner universities throughout this study program. Finally, I thank European Commission for the scholarship that made my participation in this program possible.

2.1.1 The impact of the research program	16
2.1.2 Challenges of inter-professional collaboration	16
2.1.3 Inter-professional education	16
2.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT SERVICES	19
2.3 INTEGRATED POLICY ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	24
2.4 CONCLUSION	27
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	28
3.0 INTRODUCTION	30
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	28
3.1.1 Research paradigm of the study	29
3.1.2 Research questions	30
3.1.3 Conceptual framework of the study	32
3.1.4 Research strategy	33
3.1.5 Research context	33
3.1.6 Research participants	34
3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURES	34
3.2.1 Observations	35
3.2.2 Document analysis	35
3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews	36
3.2.4 Focus group interviews	36
3.3 DATA ANALYSIS	38

Contents list

DECLARATION.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
CONTENTS LIST	V
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VII
LIST OF TABLES.....	VII
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	VII
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	1
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH.....	4
1.3 THE CONNECTION OF PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH	5
1.4 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY.....	6
1.4.1 <i>The aim, objectives and research questions of the study</i>	6
1.4.2 <i>The research design and methods</i>	7
1.4.3 <i>The research context</i>	8
1.4.4 <i>Data collection and analysis</i>	8
1.4.5 <i>Implications of the study</i>	9
1.5 ROAD MAP OF THE STUDY	9
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	11
2.0 INTRODUCTION	11
2.1 INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS.....	11
2.1.1 <i>Benefits of inter-professional collaborations</i>	15
2.1.2 <i>Challenges of inter-professional collaborations</i>	16
2.1.3 <i>Inter-professional education</i>	18
2.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT SERVICES	19
2.3 INTEGRATED POLICY ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	24
2.4 CONCLUSION.....	27
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	28
3.0 INTRODUCTION	28
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN	28
3.1.1 <i>Research paradigm of the study</i>	29
3.1.2 <i>Research questions</i>	30
3.1.3 <i>Conceptual framework of the study</i>	32
3.1.4 <i>Research strategy</i>	32
3.1.5 <i>Research context</i>	33
3.1.6 <i>Research participants</i>	34
3.2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURE.....	34
3.2.1 <i>Observations</i>	35
3.2.2 <i>Document analysis</i>	35
3.2.3 <i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	36
3.2.4 <i>Focus group interviews</i>	36
3.3 DATA ANALYSIS	38

3.4 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	39
3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	40
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	42
4.0 INTRODUCTION	42
4.1 PARTICIPANT CODES	42
4.2 WHAT PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT DO THE CHILDREN WITH SEN RECEIVE IN PRESCHOOL?	43
4.3 WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONALS OF THE BENEFITS OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL?	48
4.4 WHAT ARE THE PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL?	49
4.5 SUMMARY	52
CHAPTER 5 EVALUATION	54
5.0 INTRODUCTION	54
5.1 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL.....	54
5.1.1 <i>Categories of support services in preschool for children with SEN</i>	54
5.1.2 <i>Willingness to collaborate</i>	55
5.1.3 <i>Awareness of context in providing support service</i>	56
5.1.4 <i>Large group size as a challenge to provide support to the children with SEN</i>	57
5.2 THE PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS OF THE BENEFITS OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	57
5.2.1 <i>Developing same approach to the work with children</i>	57
5.2.2 <i>Information from others professionals</i>	58
5.2.3 <i>Alternative services</i>	58
5.3 THE PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	59
5.3.1 <i>Lack of communication</i>	59
5.3.2 <i>Personal characteristics in inter-professional collaborations</i>	59
5.3.4 <i>Lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction</i>	60
5.4 SUMMARY	60
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION.....	62
6.0 INTRODUCTION	62
6.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....	62
6.2 SUMMARY AND EVALUATION RESEARCH FINDINGS	62
6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	63
6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY	63
6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS	64
6.4 CONCLUSION.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	IX

Chapter 1 Introduction

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 THE CURRENT RESEARCH PROBLEM WITHIN BROAD CONTEXT	2
FIGURE 2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	31
FIGURE 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	32

List of Tables

TABLE 1 TERMS USED IN RELATION TO INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS	12
TABLE 3 BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS	15
TABLE 2 HIERARCHY OF TERMS	24
TABLE 4 PARTICIPANT CODES	42
TABLE 5 PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS ON PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	43
TABLE 6 CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	44
TABLE 7 PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	48
TABLE 8 PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SEN IN PRESCHOOL	49
TABLE 9 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	52

List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1 TIME PLAN FOR THE RESEARCH	IX
APPENDIX 2 RESEARCH STATEMENT IN CZECH	X
APPENDIX 3 RESEARCH STATEMENT IN ENGLISH	XI
APPENDIX 4 LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS	XIII
APPENDIX 5 INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	XIV
APPENDIX 6 INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS	XV

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter starts with the statement of research problem and continues by the introduction of significance of the study. Later, as an introductory chapter it presents the brief overview of the entire study, including the main research question and sub questions, as well as the implications of the study. Finally, it provides the roadmap of the study briefly describing the content of each chapter.

1.1 Statement of the research problem

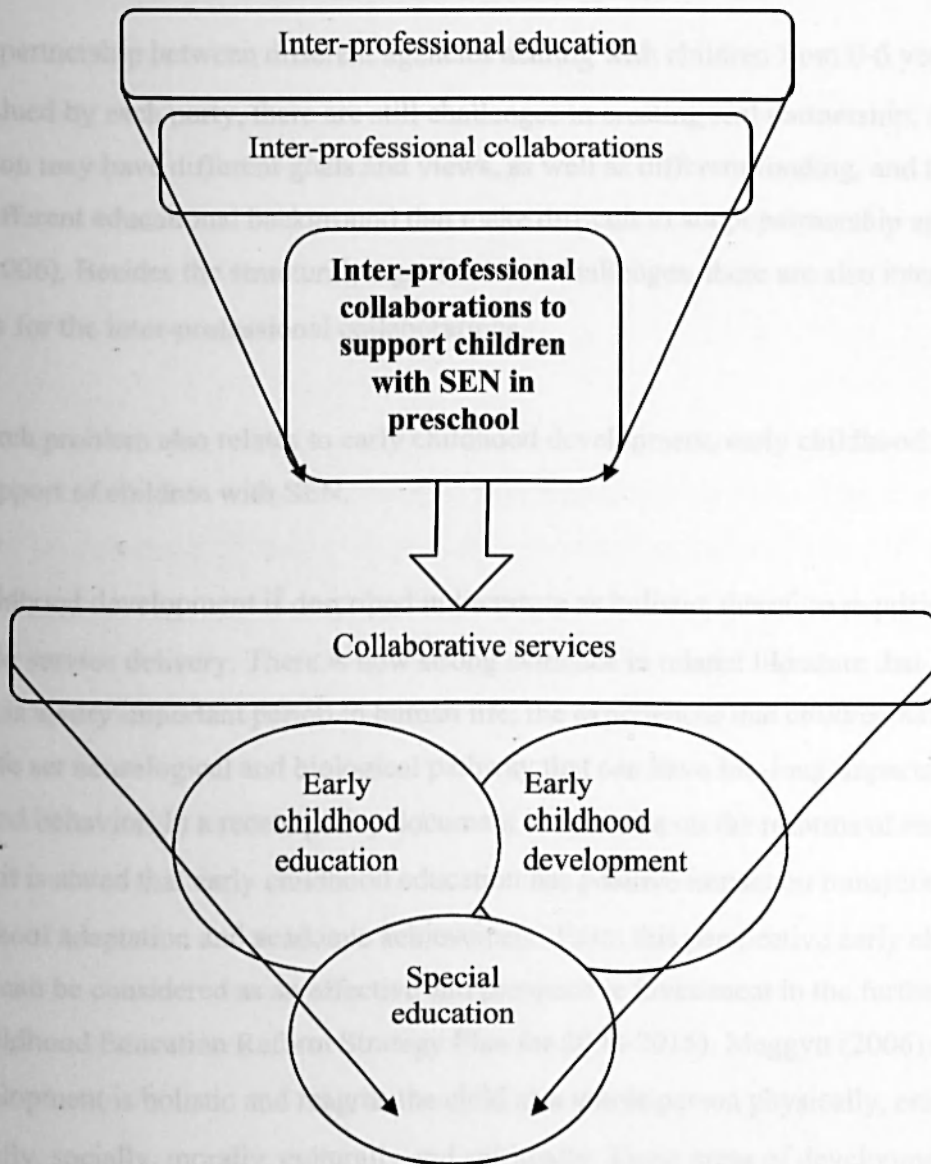
“The first step for establishing the research agenda is problem formulation. The problem formulation is simply the specification of what problem is being addressed, what information is sought, and for what purpose”.

(Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007:52)

As Stewart *et al.* (2007) explain, the problem formulation of a research has to begin with an assessment of what is already known about the phenomenon of interest and what additional information is required.

The topic of this study is ‘Inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool’. The idea that inter-professional collaborations of early childhood professionals providing support services to children with SEN improve the outcomes for the children has become the impetus for this research. The research problem of this study captures the following domains; inter-professional collaborations, early childhood development, early childhood education and support provision to children with SEN. The research problem of this study relates to all these disciplines and domains and is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 The current research problem within broad context



The figure 1 shows that the inter-professional collaborations start from inter-professional education and result in collaborative services that imply to inter-related disciplines of early childhood education, early childhood education and special education.

There is evidence stated in literature that the nature of inter-professional collaborations has significant impact on the outcomes of the services. Leathard (1994) discusses inter-professional practices as a possibility to share professional knowledge and expertise, as well as potential for

comprehensive integrated services (Leathard, 1994). Partnership between different service providers can create an effective network to address young children's' needs.

Although partnership between different agencies dealing with children from 0-6 year's age is usually valued by each party, there are still challenges in creating real partnership, as each organization may have different goals and views, as well as different funding, and the staff may be with different educational background that make difficult to adopt partnership approach (OECD, 2006). Besides the structural, organizational challenges, there are also interpersonal challenges for the inter-professional collaborations.

The research problem also relates to early childhood development, early childhood education and special support of children with SEN.

Early childhood development is described in literature as holistic, therefore requiring holistic approach in service delivery. There is now strong evidence in related literature that early childhood is a very important period in human life; the experiences that children have in early years of life set neurological and biological pathway that can have life-long impacts on health, learning and behavior. In a recent policy document in Armenia on the reforms of early childhood education it is stated that early childhood education has positive impact on transition to primary school, school adaptation and academic achievement. From this perspective early childhood education can be considered as an effective and prospective investment in the further education (Early Childhood Education Reform Strategy Plan for 2008-2015). Meggytt (2006) suggests that child development is holistic and regards the child as a whole person physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, morally, culturally and spiritually. These areas of development are separated conditionally; they are interconnected and influence each other. Holistic approach is important also from the perspective of service provision by different professionals. "Domains of children development- physical, social, emotional and cognitive are closely related.

Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domain" (Deiner, 2010:83).

Children with special educational needs receive various support services by different professionals, including medical, social, educational and psychological. In literature there is an evidence of collaborative services to increase the effectiveness of each service by filling the gaps, avoiding duplication and considering the overlaps. Wilson (2003) states that young children with SEN are both alike and different from their same age peers, therefore they need services that are both integrated and individualized, which also calls for professional expertise in both typical and atypical child development. In terms of curriculum and program planning this belief translates into a merging of developmentally appropriate practices and exceptionally appropriate practices in inclusive settings.

Discussing the provision of specialist support to persons with learning disabilities Gates (2007) mentions that it has traditionally been equated with segregated provision. Service provision in mainstream settings requires changes in professional education and provision. Future of specialist services is represented to be based on needs rather than on professions, which suggests that the staff providing specialist services will need to develop skills of inter-professionals, be flexible and share common skills (Gates, 2007).

Although the children with SEN represent heterogeneous group and require specific services depending on their individual needs, there are traditional services established for them, such as medical, psychological, educational and social. Working in different disciplines, having different professional background may cause difficulties in communication on organizational and professional level, which may have negative impact on providing comprehensive, integrated support services to children with SEN in early childhood settings. Timely, comprehensive and coordinated services for children with SEN at the earliest possible stage of their development are the necessary conditions for the improvement of outcomes for the children and assurance of their successful inclusion into mainstream settings.

1.2 Significance of the research

The significance of current study is discussed from theoretical and practical perspectives. The concept of inter-professional collaborations is widely discussed as precondition for integrated

service provision. There is also certain conformity in academic literature about the statement that inter-professional collaborations have positive outcomes but are hardly achievable.

The majority of the literature on inter-professional collaborations traditionally has been in the field of the health and social care. The term Inter-professional Education (IPE) is referred to health and social care field, which aims to improve the quality of care by means of effective collaboration (Lidskog, Löfmark, & Ahlström, 2008). Anyway, the field of inter-professional collaborations attracts attention of the researchers in different disciplines and recently published literature also includes researches on inter-professional practices in educational field. However, there is lack of researches focusing on inter-professional collaborations in the field of early childhood education.

The research seeks to contribute to the theory in this specific area by trying to provide broader insights into the collaborative practices to support children with SEN in mainstream settings. From the practical perspective the current research is significant for the goal to emphasize the positive outcomes and to reveal the main challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN, which will provide ground to develop practical recommendations for professionals and service providers.

1.3 The connection of professional background to the research

I have professional experience with preschool children as a psychologist in a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Armenia. I have been working with children with SEN in the NGO and also have been providing psychological support to children in preschools.

In Armenia the services to children with SEN at preschool age are mainly provided by local and international non-governmental organizations unlike the services for school age children that are provided in special or mainstream schools. Support services are offered in different locations and sometimes using different approaches. This usually results in non-coordinated services that reduce the effectiveness of services and may even confuse children and parents, for example, a child with hearing impairment is being taught sign language in one center and is being discouraged to use it in another center, as the professionals in the latter center find that the child

is able to develop speech and the sign language is preventing from successful speech development.

So, the support for children with SEN is not well coordinated; the parents are the only coordinators that sometimes may not be able to handle it.

This research is believed to contribute to the improvement of services in the environment I work by providing the understanding of challenges and positive practices from the perspectives of different professionals, as well as to offer insights into better organization of the services for children with SEN.

1.4 Brief overview of the study

The topic of this dissertation is “Inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool”. Considering inter-professional collaborations as a potential to improve the outcomes of services for children with SEN in preschools and to ensure the comprehensive services addressing their needs, a case study has been designed with the following aims, objectives and research questions.

1.4.1 The aim, objectives and research questions of the study

The initial plan for this research was to investigate inter-professional collaborations not only from the perspectives of involved professionals, but also with focus on the outcomes of inter-professional collaborations, which could be done via evaluation of the quality of the support services. The involvement of the parents of the children with SEN in research was planned as service users. Although the aforementioned scenarios of research was more comprehensive, it was changed for two reasons; first, involvement of parents as research participants required broad interpersonal communication, which was found impossible with a language barrier, second, outcome-based approach would require more time than it was available.

The current research has a focus on the processes of inter-professional collaborations from the perspective of professionals, including their perceptions about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaboration.

The aim of this study is to explore inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in a preschool in Czech Republic.

The specific objectives that derive from the aim of the study are the followings:

- To explore the professional support system for children with SEN in preschool.
- To explore the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool.
- To understand the perceptions of early childhood professionals about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool.

The main research question addressing the objectives is the following:

What are the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool?

To achieve the answer to the main question the following sub-questions have been advanced:

- What kind of professional support is provided to children with SEN in preschool?
- What are the perceptions of professionals of the benefits of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool?
- What are the perceptions of professionals of the challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool?

1.4.2 The research design and methods

To reach the aim of the research a case study has been designed by qualitative approach that mainly relies on narrative, phenomenological descriptions. The case study uses qualitative inquiry methodology. The main research instruments to collect the research data are semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Semi-structured interviews have been chosen as they are flexible and allow the interviewer to collect in-depth information not only about certain questions, but also to find out about related issues. Focus groups discussions have been conducted as a tool to explore the topic in detail. This research instrument enables to get range of information from group members' discussions. Additionally, document analysis and non-participant observations have been used as supplementary methods to gain background information and to triangulate the findings from the data collected by the main methods.

1.4.3 The research context

The research is carried out in a preschool in Prague, Czech Republic. The preschool has been chosen critically ensuring that children with SEN attend it. It is typical state preschool with special care. There is a special education center (Speciálně pedagogické centrum), which is the part of the preschool. There are about 120 children attending the preschool, 15 of them have special educational needs. The preschool has mainstream groups and a special group. There are 10 children in special group and 5 included in mainstream groups. Regular teacher, special teacher and two teacher assistants are working in special group. The psychologist and social worker also support the children with SEN.

The chosen preschool is appropriate to the research purpose and provides with all the possibilities to conduct the inquiry for answering the research questions. In the preschool with special care children with SEN are included both in special and mainstream groups, which provides with opportunities to gain information on SEN services in different settings by different personnel integrated in one preschool.

1.4.4 Data collection and analysis

The data was collected from the psychologist and social worker of the preschool by means of individual in-depth interviews and also from the preschool teachers teaching in special and mainstream groups by means of focus group discussions.

Qualitative data analysis has been conducted. The data was tape-recorded by gaining prior consent from research participants, transcribed and categorized into themes according to the research questions. After the data analysis, the results were framed into main findings of the research, followed by perspectives for further research and practical recommendations.

1.4.5 Implications of the study

This study provides implications for early childhood professionals as well as for service providers in regard to the improvement of services for children with SEN. This study will provide a model of SEN support in preschool based on the findings that can be used in other mainstream educational settings to organize support for children with SEN. The study will develop recommendations how to improve inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN.

1.5 Road map of the study

This study includes abstract, acknowledgments, list of contents, list of tables and figures, six chapters, bibliography and appendices. The brief descriptions of chapters are presented below.

Chapter one presents the statement of the research problem, the significance of research from theoretical and practical perspectives, brief overview of the study, including the context of the research, descriptions of the research design, inquiry methodology, data analysis and ethical considerations, implications of the study and road map of this study.

Chapter two presents the critiques, analysis and synthesis of related literature, particularly of literature on early childhood policy, SEN support services, early childhood professionals, inter-professional collaborations and inter-professional education.

Chapter three presents the research design, explains the paradigm of this study. It is followed by detailed description of research methodology, context, participants, data collection process,

ethical considerations, validity and reliability of the research, data analysis approach and procedure.

Chapter four is on data presentation and analysis collected by qualitative methodology. In this chapter collected data is analyzed and presented in themes according to the research questions.

Chapter five evaluates the data, discusses the research findings and links them to the theory presented in literature review.

Chapter six evaluates the study in regard to research purpose and questions, states the limitations of the study, presents the research implications, develops recommendations, summarizes the findings and concludes the research.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter the literature review is developed in accordance to the research focus and goals. This chapter starts with the overview the concept of inter-professional collaborations, including vocabulary, definitions, as well as the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations in educational settings. Later the literature around early childhood support services with special focus on SEN support is analyzed and highlighted in accordance with the research focus and research questions. In the end, inter-professional collaborations are discussed in the context of integrated policy of early childhood education.

Exhaustive literature review, when every available piece of research on the topic is considered would be the best approach for this research, however, considering the time constrains of this research, literature selection approach was chosen to take a purposive sample, when only central and pivotal articles are examined (Randolph, 2009).

2.1 Inter-professional collaborations

“Collaboration between professions is a two-way process grounded in mutual respect for diversity and difference. On one hand it presupposes readiness to listen, to value what the other has to contribute, to be receptive to new ideas and information and prepared to change attitudes, perceptions and behavior in response. On the other hand it calls for generosity, openness and trust in a spirit of inclusion. More than mere mechanics, communication is at the heart of inter-professional collaborations”.

(Barr, Koppel, Reeves, & Hammick, 2005:3).

Number of academics state that there are some confusions and unclearness around the terms multi-professional, inter-professional, as well as around the terms collaboration, coordination, partnership and teamwork.

Easen, Atkins and Dyson (2000) state that inter-professional collaboration is not adequately conceptualized in the sense of clear, consistent and coherent idea of what constitutes 'collaboration' between different professionals. There is also no comprehensive model of the factors that may be relevant to its success. Many different sorts of relationship and interaction occur between professionals which might be called 'collaboration', but which are differentiated in terms of their focus, purpose, timescale and context. There is a need of clear picture of what a framework for considering inter-professional collaboration may look like (Easen, Atkins, & Dyson, 2000).

Collaboration is defined as an active and ongoing partnership often between people from diverse backgrounds who work together to solve problems or provide services (Barr, Koppel, Reeves, & Hammick, 2005).

Leathard (1994) suggested classification of the alternative terms that use academics in relation to inter-professional collaborations. The terms presented in Table 1 are classified based on the concept, process and agency.

Table 1 Terms used in relation to inter-professional collaborations

Concept based	Process based	Agency based
Inter-disciplinary	Joint planning	Inter-agency
Multi-disciplinary	Joint training	Inter-sectoral
Multy-professional	Shared learning	Trans-sectoral
Trans-professional	Teamwork	Cross-agency
Trans-disciplinary	Partnership	Consortiom
Holistic	Coordination	Alliance
Generic	Groupwork	Inter-institutional
	Collaboration	
	Integration	
	Cooperation	
	Inter-linked	

	Inter-related	
	Joint project	
	Participation	
	Involvement	

(Adapted from Leatheat 2004:5)

Despite the variety of the terms mentioned in Table 1 with slight differences in their meanings, all of them are usually used by academics to denote learning and working together.

Weinstein, Whittington and Leiba (2003) clarify the differences between the terms collaboration and partnership that are sometimes used interchangeably; partnership is formal, institutional-level label attached to the idea of working together that has to be achieved, maintained and reviewed, while collaboration is more active and less formalized joint work between different professionals and agencies. The term collaboration is otherwise stated as an active process of partnership in action. (Weinstein, Whittington, & Leiba, 2003).

Collaboration is sometimes used as a synonym of the term teamwork. Barr *et al.* (2005) clarify, that every teamwork is collaboration, but not every collaboration is teamwork, as collaboration may involve a wider range of practitioners working together as accasion requires.

There is also a need to clarify the often used terms intra-professional and inter-professional collaborations; intra-professional collaborations take place between the individuals with the same professional education and inter-professional collaborations take place between individuals with different professional education. There are more challenges stated in related literature in regard to inter-professional collaborations than intra-professional collaborations. Moreover, not shared professional education and culture are often stated as factors undermining inter-professional collaborations.

Graham and Wright (1999) developed a collaboration scale with 21 indicators consisting of three types of activities in inter-professional collaborations; planning activities, sharing activities,

goal-achieving activities. The scale is suggested to be used in variety of settings where there is a commitment to provision based on a multi-professional approach to meeting SEN (Graham & Wright, 1999).

The literature on inter-professional collaboration suggests that it is desirable and beneficial, although difficult to achieve. "The idea that inter-professional education and practice should be encouraged has been almost universally supported, but invariably not achieved" (Leathard, 1994:3).

Graham and Wright (1999) find that there is uncertainty about the meaning of inter-professional collaborations by professionals involved in delivering services to meet SEN. Collaboration is dependent on factors including therapy service delivery models and school ethos, organization and flexibility and is providing an environment in which inclusive education can occur (Ibid).

While analyzing the related literature a common statement is notable; working together is providing better outcomes in any field than working individually. Numerous researches state the difficulties of inter-professional collaborations, but no research was available to doubt in the argument that inter-professional collaborations tend to improve the outcomes of service provision. It is accepted by policy and also by professionals that inter-professional collaboration is something very important to achieve which is also very difficult process on practical level.

Anning *et al.* (2006) state the challenges of researching multi-professional teams. While designing the research should be clarified what is exactly being examined. One focus is service outcome based, when the experiences of service users are examined and evaluated. In this case there is a need to find the measure of quality of service, to decide how is service provided better or worse while working multi-professionally. The other focus is on process rather than on outcomes; in this case the structural systems and the experiences of professionals are examined, mainly the professional affiliations and personal feelings in connection to providing joint-up services (Ibid).

As the focus of this research is mainly on the process of relationships between professionals, the term “inter-professional” and the term “collaboration” are found the most appropriate. The term “inter-professional” indicates that professionals involved have the same joint goals and are likely to work in the same building (Leathard, 1994). The term “collaboration” has been chosen for this research indicating an active process of joint work between professionals.

2.1.1 Benefits of inter-professional collaborations

In literature inter-professional collaborations are mainly illustrated from the positive perspective. It is presented as beneficial both for the professionals regarding their professional development and for the quality of the service they provide.

Leathard (2003) highlights positive aspects of inter-professional practice as followings; it helps to recognize that what people have in common is more important than difference, as professionals acknowledge the value of sharing knowledge and expertise and it also creates more satisfying work environment within an arena where professionals can share and support each other. The other positive aspect of inter-professional practice is responding to the growth in the complexity of health and social care practice, with the potential for comprehensive integrated services (Ibid).

Cheminais (2009) outlines number of benefits of collaborative partnership for educational settings that can be summarized as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Benefits of collaborative partnership for educational settings

Benefits of collaborative partnership for educational settings
It leads to improved outcomes for the children through a range of joint up services, advice and support being available and easily accessible
It benefits teachers to understand multi-agency practitioners' activities and services to signpost pupils to enabling them to focus on their core role of teaching.
It helps to build consensus, to break down professional boundaries and parochial attitudes.
It helps to address local needs jointly, avoiding overlap and duplication of provision.
It promotes the mutual support, exchange of ideas and sharing the expertise between the staff.
It helps to improve understanding and raise the awareness of issues and other professionals practice.

(Adapted from Cheminais, 2009:26).

2.1.2 Challenges of inter-professional collaborations

While widely stated by academics to have number of advantages and benefits, the challenges of inter-professional collaborations are not less. As Hall (2005) describes, different professional cultures can create real obstacles in partnership. While studying to gain a particular profession, different socialization processes influence on individuals' values, habits, and professional language. These different characteristics combined with differences in background and social levels contribute to challenges of inter-professional partnership (Ibid).

Easen, Atkins and Dyson (2000) state as an outcome of a research that inter-professional collaborations were facilitated when professionals shared values and purposes. In other words, collaborations were more effective while professionals were implementing a joint project with a joint goal, than when collaborating was formalized requirement by organizations (Ibid).

Letheart (2003) states that both organizational and interpersonal factors are involved in inability to achieve effective team working. Interpersonal relationships were undermined by power structures and differences in beliefs about team working and were challenged further when professionals roles needed to be reconstructed in the light of new policy.

In literature the main factors mentioned to hinder from effective inter-professional collaborations are the followings; communication difficulties, commitment, resistance, differing professional views, lack of collaborative skills, lack of resources, role ambiguity, and voluntary nature of collaborations. Inter-professional collaborations can also be hindered by competitive services and also fear of professionals of 'cut' of funding (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warmington, 2009).

As Edwards *et al.* (2009) stated, collaboration between services was not being achieved mainly because local authority budgets for different services were different and priorities for services set out in policy guidance did not encourage collaboration and professional cultures work against the collaboration.

Easen, *et al.* (2000) investigated the possibility that collaboration is difficult to achieve not just for practical reasons but because different professional groups may conceptualize their practice in quite different ways. For example, health visitors who are trained to be expert in certain aspects of child rearing and to dispense that expertise to their clients came into conflict with community workers whose expertise lies much more in the 'political' activities of challenging and empowering the members of the community within which they work. Such differences can be fundamental as the two groups operated with radically different notions of what constitutes 'health work' (Ibid).

2.1.3 Inter-professional education

Inter-professional education (IPE) has for some years now been proposed as a means to meet the calls for effective collaboration and cooperation in health, social care and education.

Collaboration is assumed to improve the quality of care through improved communication, effective use of resources and prevention of errors.

The most important learning experience is working together in a real-life setting. This means that collaborative competences are learned through social experiences where interaction and reflection are central conditions for learning to occur. The learning is seen as a continuous process inherent in the inter-professional experience itself.

The main factors challenging the relations between professionals are poor communication, proliferating professions, coping with complexities, working in teams, collaborating more widely, resolving competition, improving quality, reforming the workforce and reforming education (Barr, Koppel, Reeves, & Hammick, 2005). Learning for communication may have less to do with one profession challenging another to explain its jargon and more to do with facility in a range of discourses resulting from the breadth and depth of the educational foundation that each profession needs to enjoy. However, wider repertoire of discourses cannot resolve all communication problems between professions. Effective inter-professional education generates inter-professional discourses that shape collaborative thinking and behavior (Ibid).

Cognitive blindness may also be a problem, when one profession filters out information which might prompt actions beyond its perception of the role or competence of the other professional. Barr *et al.* (2005) identified the options that practitioners could use facing a problem that is beyond their education, experience and prescribed roles.

1. To work within their own limits, leaving wider problems unaddressed,
2. To work beyond those limits without the necessary education, experience and expertise
3. To collaborate with other professions qualified to address the wider problems.

Inter-professional education can help to enhance practitioners' understanding of the roles and competences of other professions, the boundaries and overlaps with their own and ways of working across these. Inter-professional education can also help to extend the competence beyond the preconceived roles of one profession as it learns from others.

Numbers of researches consider the work based learning to be the main way to develop inter-professional skills. Edwards, *et al.* (2009) mention that usually professionals learn to do inter-professional work while doing inter-professional work.

Weinstein, Whittington and Leiba (2003) underline two essential areas to be addressed in inter-professional education; first is working with diversity within teams and second is conflict and its management. It is important to develop skills to deal with professional diversity and possible conflicts focusing on shared goals rather than professional differences.

“Professional learning is a process of increasingly informed sense-making and action” (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warmington, 2009:21).

2.2 Early childhood support services

There is now a strong acknowledgment in academic literature and early childhood policy documents that early childhood is a very important period in human life.

The Australian governmental document on early childhood education states: “Early childhood is a critical time in human development. There is now comprehensive research that shows that experiences children have in early years of life set neurological and biological pathway that can have life-long impacts on health, learning and behavior. There is also compelling international evidence about the returns of investment in early childhood service for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. (National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, 2008:3).

What children learn and experience in their early years can shape their views on themselves and the world and can affect their later success or failure in school, work and their personal lives.

Early childhood, birth-5, is a critical period in the life of every child. During this period, the foundation is laid for all later development and learning, including critical skills and dispositions for academic learning, for relating to others, and for becoming positive contributors to peer groups, families, and communities (ISBE, 2005). The education, environment and care at the early age are crucial for the harmonic development of human being. The early childhood care, education and development at the first years of life are interconnected and equally important (Early Childhood Education Reform Strategy Plan for 2008-2015).

A focus on individual children and their support networks brings coherence to inter-professional work on supporting and if necessary disrupting children's trajectories to ensure that they are being directed from social exclusion to inclusion and engagement in what society can offer. The idea of a trajectory is helping to see inter-professional work as collaboration over shared professional problems, no matter how different they might be interpreted by the collaborating practitioners. Following children's trajectories requires practitioners to move from working only with stable categorizations of their own organizations and professions to engage with other professionals identifying children's strengths and needs. Regardless of the location and type of the provision to meet the complex needs of the children, adopting a holistic approach is very important (Edwards *et al.* 2009).

Practitioners involved in preventing children's social exclusion share a common interest in children's wellbeing. This shared focus encourages inter-professional work that is more likely to be child-led than service led. The need for practitioners to be able to understand the totality of a child's life circumstances has led to major reconfigurations of children's services. Education and social care have been merged under single directorates. This merging has the potential to produce the infrastructural conditions for inter-professional work and it represents a massive shift in provision of children's services (Edwards *et al.* 2009).

In the current climate with the focus on inclusion a clear understanding of the issues involved in providing a co-ordinated approach to meeting SEN is essential. The necessity for further research into inter-professional collaboration is highlighted in literature and indicates the importance of developments in provision being made in mainstream schools for pupils who require the support

of a range of professionals. Collaboration, to provide an environment in which inclusive education can occur, is dependent on factors including therapy service delivery models and school ethos, organization and flexibility (Graham & Wright, 1999).

Children's vulnerability is often complex and may not be evident unless one looks across all aspects of a child's life. Therefore practitioners working in universal services, that is services open to all children have a role to play in spotting vulnerability if not in responding to it with specific support. Social exclusion is not a static condition but is dynamic process. Vulnerability may not be visible until a picture of accumulated difficulty is picked up by looking across a child's life. All services that work with children need to be brought into the process of prevention (Edwards *et al.* 2009).

Quality child care and education is possible only when there is an integrated approach towards them (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2003). The whole child perspective is concerned with the comprehensiveness of children's lives through the viewpoint of the child. It recognizes that children's development is influenced by three broad domains and these are:

1. Their innate capacity, which deals with the extent of children's own capacities. It recognizes the child as an active participant in their own development and is the starting point for growth and development. The capacities are expressed in different ways as children grow, develop and express themselves as individuals.
2. The relationships around them; the whole child perspective sees childhood as a complex set of dynamic relationships which interact in ways which are, as yet, not fully understood, but are recognized as essential to a satisfying and successful childhood. The whole child perspective recognizes that children affect and in turn are affected by the relationships around them.
3. Formal and informal supports: essential supports and services are provided for children through the primary, social networks of family, extended family and community, known as the informal supports, and through the formal support services provided by the voluntary sector, commercial sector, the State and its agencies (Edwards *et al.* 2009).

In different countries early childhood education has different roles. According to OECD (2006) in France and UK the role of kindergartens is to prepare children to the school. In other countries, such as Nordic and central European countries, there is a different approach towards early education. The approach towards the early childhood education in these countries is shown as “kindergarten is a broad preparation for life” (OECD, 2006:60). Services provided in early childhood center depend on the overall approach to early childhood education and vary in different countries.

According to the law in Armenia on the preschool education, the preschool age is divided into three age groups; 0-3 – early age, 3-5-junior preschool age, 5-6-high preschool age. Different educational and developmental approaches and goals are set for each age group depending on the age characteristics. For the early age group (0-3) the government values the role of the families in the education and development of the children, encourages and fosters the implementation of programs on parental education and supports the communities to run nurseries. For junior age group (3-5) the government values the increase of enrolment to the early childhood education (ECE) centers and the governmental assistance is mainly directed to the capacity building of the centers. As stated in the ECE strategy document, special attention is given to the issue of primary education preparation of 5-6 years old children, which will provide with equal opportunities to continue the education in primary school, as well as will create a solid basis for the development of their personality and social skills (Early Childhood Education Reform Strategy Plan for 2008-2015).

The term ‘special educational needs’ also has different meanings in different countries. Usually concepts of disability, difficulty and disadvantage are used to broadly describe the students ‘for whom countries make additional resources available so that they could access the curriculum more effectively’ (OECD, Students with Disabilities, Difficulties and Disadvantages: Statistics and Indicators for OAS Countries, 2007:11).

In literature there is a broad description of benefits that children with SEN get in the preschool, including development of social skills, cognitive development and self-identity development.

Discussing the provision of specialist support to persons with learning disabilities Gates (2007) mentions that it has traditionally been equated with segregated provision. Service provision in mainstream settings requires changes in professional education and provision. Future of specialist services is represented to be based on needs rather than on professions, which suggests that the staff providing specialist services will need to develop skills of inter-professionals, be flexible and share common skills (Ibid).

There were five outcomes that embodied the principles central to the Children Act 2004 in UK: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, economic well being. These five outcomes became a new mantra for the delivery of services for children in the UK. They formed the basis of common national frameworks for inspecting and monitoring the effectiveness of children's services (Anning *et al.* 2006).

Another document representing Ireland states dimensions set out in the whole child perspective that can be understood as areas around which outcomes can be expressed. The nine areas should be understood as relatively discrete but interrelated dimensions and there is no hierarchy of importance intended between these dimensions: physical and mental wellbeing, emotional and behavioural wellbeing, intellectual capacity, spiritual and moral wellbeing, identity, self care, family relationships, social and peer relationships, social presentation.

Having identified the general outcomes for the children, the further questions arising are what has to be done to gain better outcomes and how to evaluate these outcomes. In the literature there are statements that high quality services are providing better outcomes. Talking about the quality of services it is worth to mention that quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest rather than an objective and universal reality (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2002). For most people quality remains a challenge, something to be achieved, rather than a problem, something to be questioned.

Support is a commonplace term in providing for learners with special educational needs; support for both pupils and their teachers by staff both within and outside of the school. The principle behind supportive structures is that all learners should participate as far as possible in the mainstream school culture and curricula. Supportive education is about organizing help

appropriate to special needs of learners and to the needs of their regular teachers. In this sense the supportive principle calls for the removal of all sorts of barriers to education in the classroom and the school instead of removing the children from there (Clough & Lindsay, 2004).

Pugh and Duffy (2010) state among contemporary issues in the early years that there is need of recognition that sector of children's services needs to start weeding out ineffective approaches to service delivery in order to concentrate more on what works.

2.3 Integrated policy on early childhood education

Frost (2005) suggests the hierarchy of terms to characterize a continuum in working together which is presented in Table 2.

Table 3 Hierarchy of Terms

Level 1: Cooperation	Services work together towards consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence.
Level 2: Collaboration	Services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision towards common outcomes.
Level 3: Coordination	Services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals.
Level 4: Merger/integration	Different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery.

(adapted from Frost, 2005:13)

The hierarchy suggested by Frost (2005) shows the possible progress of cooperation into organisational integration for improvement of the service delivery, which is important for this study not only for differentiation of terms, but also and more for the actions behind the terms, such as planning the services together, sharing the goals and integrating into one organisation.

Early childhood education policy is a field that has different contexts. It is focused on young children's education along with their social welfare and health. The policy on early childhood education may also include issues like women employment, equality of opportunities, etc.

Traditionally, these aspects have been governed by different authorities, and in many countries it is still the case. The policy on early childhood education is not unified and so, responsibilities on early childhood education are shared, which usually does not promote better outcomes of the activities.

As it is mentioned in the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) report "Countries that aim to create systems that can deliver services to parents and young children in a coordinated way, feel the need to pull together these various policy strands. A systematic approach entails developing a common policy framework with consistent goals across the system and clearly defined roles and responsibilities at both central and decentralized levels of governance. One policy option has been a creation of an inter-departmental and/or inter-governmental co-ordination body to generate co-operative policy frameworks." (OECD, 2006:47).

During the last decade a number of countries have developed administrative integrity, which implies that the responsibility for early childhood education and care including all the connected aspects is taken by one ministry.

Since 2007 a new ministry has been created in the Netherlands, which is responsible for youth issues. It is named as 'Ministry for Youth and Families' and cooperates with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Welfare and Sport, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of

Education, Culture and Science. All the services for youth (0-24 years old) are coordinated by youth and family centers, which are available in communities.

In 2004 UK has released a document "Every child matters: Changes for children" (DFES 2004) with the following long-term vision: the development of integrated education, health and social care through children's centers, extended schools and improved services for young people, targeted services are planned and delivered within a universal context.

A new early years model has been planned and implemented in UK when the early years sector involves relatively large number of providers. Pugh and Duffy (2010) underline that the process of building this model involved long structural and cultural changes. It is also stated that 'while being far from plain sailing in terms of implementation, this whole system model really does work in practice and can produce better outcomes for children' (Ibid:25)

The further studies have shown number of advantages of administrative integration under one agency, including higher quality services for young children and improved management of services. Meanwhile, it is not very important whether it is the ministry of the education, social welfare or any other ministry, the main idea is to provide the early childhood education and care coherently and under one authority.

In some countries that have long traditions in early childhood education there is a tendency to merge preschool programs and out of school programs into one program in the same site. Partnership between different service providers can create an effective network to address young children's' needs. Although partnership between different agencies dealing with children from 0-6 year's age is usually valued by each party, there are still challenges in creating real partnership, as each organization may have different goals and views, as well as different funding, and the staff may be with different educational background that make difficult to adopt partnership approach (OECD, 2006). Besides the structural, organizational challenges, there are also interpersonal challenges for inter-professional collaborations.

Ebbeck & Waniganayake (2003) find the role of professionals working in early childhood education sector very important. They mention that early childhood education professionals

have to function as skilled administrators, managers and leaders to cope with all the challenges in the field successfully. They also emphasize the multiple roles and responsibilities that have the early childhood educators. For example, in secondary schools no psysics teacher will be expected to explain the student about the history because the student is having difficulties, but early childhood teachers are very often expected to act as a social worker, psychologist, remedial teacher and coordinator, as it is needed (Ibid).

Shonkoff & Meisels (2003) put forward that there are structural challenges in integrateing child care, early education and early intervention. Those three domains historically have had different purposes. The responsibility for early child care and education have been traditionnally taken by families. The government provided early child care and education only when families had failed. Early child care was designed for children from low-income families. Early intervention programs were developed to provide services to handicapped children. According to Shonkoff & Meisels (2003) the beginning of early intervention programs is connected with the time when a new legislation (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) have been adopted ensuring preschool education for "handicapped children". The child care programs are accepted mainly as custodial service for the children whose parents are working and early intervention programs are accepted as service for children with dissabilities. Purcell, Horn, & Palmer (2007) in their research on initiation and continuation of preschool inclusive programs emphasize the importance of developing organizational structure for sucessful inclusive programs.

2.4 Conclusion

The literature related to the central themes and concepts of this research has been analyzed and synthesized. The literature review has been constructed around the concepts of inter-professional collaborations, early childhood support services and integrated policy of early childhood. The main theories, as well as the policies including current issues and developments in the field have been analyzed and presented.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The chapter starts with the discussion of research design including paradigm of the research, research questions, strategy, context, participants, data collection methods and procedures. Further, the data analysis methods are presented. Afterwards, validity and reliability of the research are discussed. Finally, the ethical considerations are discussed in relation with this research.

3.1 Research design

“Research design concerns with turning research questions into project” (Robson, 2000:38).

Considering all the alternative ways to design the research the researcher should make sure that the way chosen is the most appropriate to find answers to the research questions. Research design is a logical structure of the inquiry. The function of research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables to answer the research questions.

Different researchers define different components for research design. Maxwell (2005) suggests a model of qualitative research design with the following five components: goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methods and validity. To the aforementioned Flick (2009) adds more components that a researcher should consider while designing a research; degree of standardization and control, generalization of goals and temporal, personal and material resources available.

For this study the following components of research design are discussed below: research paradigm, research questions, conceptual framework, research strategy, research methods, context and participants.

3.1.1 Research paradigm of the study

There are different classifications of research paradigms in the literature, but two major research paradigms, positivistic and interpretivist, are discussed the most. The definitions of both have a lot of variations. Robson (2000) has presented various definitions of both paradigms: positivistic paradigm can also be labeled as scientific or quantitative and the interpretive paradigm can be labeled as ethnographic or qualitative.

Mertens (2005) has classified research paradigms using ontological, epistemological and methodological criteria to define them. The term "Positivism" is imported from philosophy. The main assumptions of positivism are that while studying the social world the researcher can use the same methodology when studying the natural world. In the terms of ontology, which explains the nature of reality, positivism is a philosophical system where it is believed that the reality is one and that it is stable, objective and knowable. Post positivists are the successors of positivists and as representatives of critical realism they are critical about the human ability to know the reality. From the point of view of the post positivists reality can be known only partly. From the epistemological perspective, which explains the nature of knowledge, positivists believe that the objectivity is important and the researcher should observe in an objective way. Within the positivist paradigm the researcher and the subject of study are independent, and the researchers have to stay neutral towards the subject of the study. The positivistic researchers use predominantly quantitative research methods borrowed from the natural sciences. Although quantitative methods in research were initially developed in the natural sciences, now they are as well acceptable for the social sciences along with qualitative methods. The choice of the research methodology is determined by different research needs.

Interpretivist or otherwise labeled as constructivist researchers consider the reality as a perception of reality and believe that different perceptions of reality are possible. Moreover, the perceptions of reality in their turn may change during the research process. From the epistemological point of view within the interpretivist paradigm the researcher and the subject of research are interconnected and strongly influence each other. Qualitative methods are being

used in the interpretivist paradigm. The qualitative methods in this paradigm, such as interviews, observations, document reviews require interaction between the researcher and the respondents.

Some researchers second the idea against the polarization of research paradigms. Edward (2002) calls for researchers' collaboration to make the research interactive, dynamic and useful for real life practice.

This research is within interpretive paradigm. As defined by Robson (2000) the interpretive research model differs from the positivistic research model by the theory occurring during the inquiry (Robson, 2000). Data collection is not for confirming or denying the existing theory, it is for creating theory. A qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study, when open-ended emerging data is collected with a primary intent of developing themes from the data.

3.1.2 Research questions

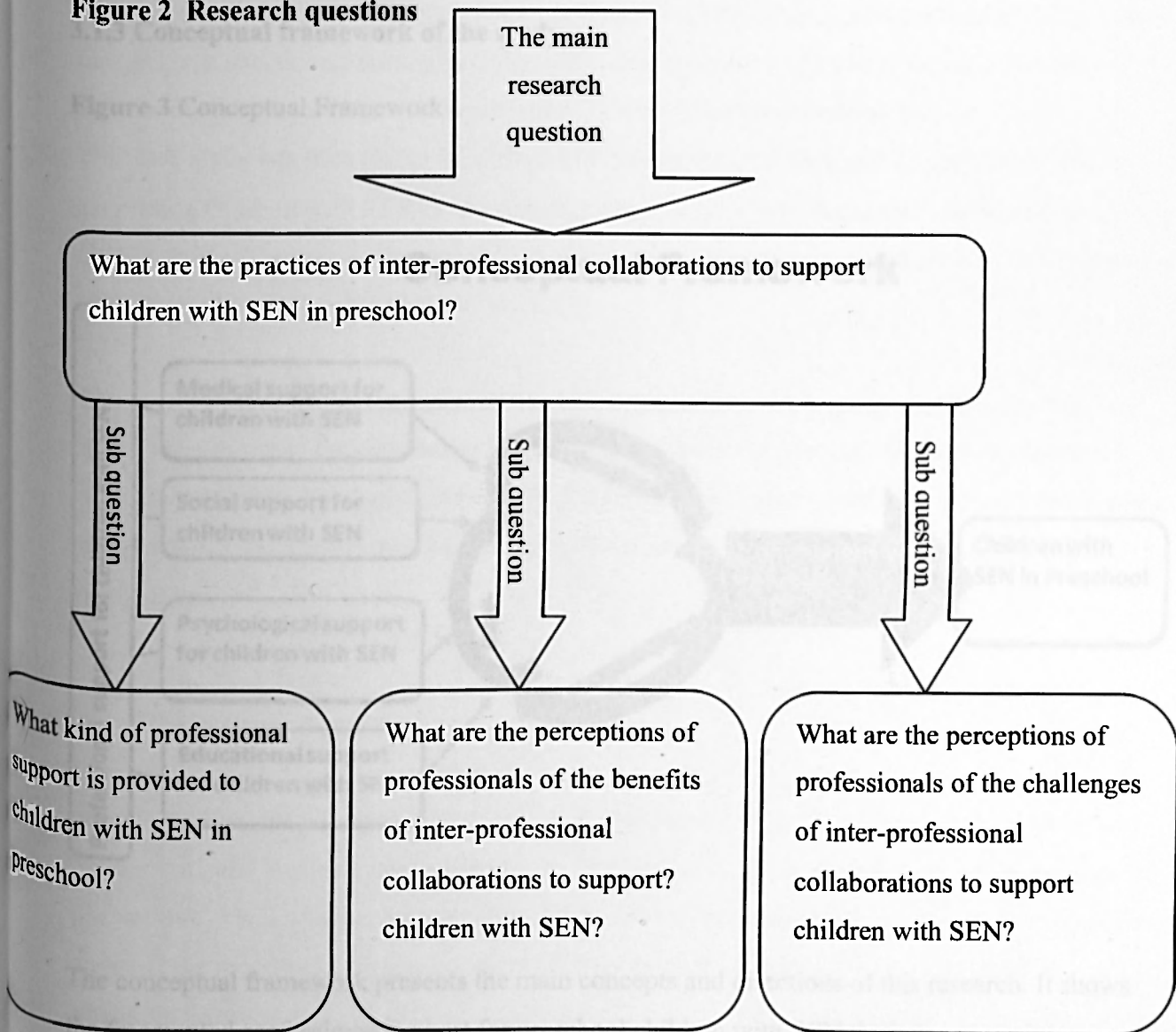
The aim of this study is to explore the inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool in Czech Republic.

The objectives of the study are the followings:

- To explore the professional support system for children with SEN in preschool.
- To explore the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool.
- To understand the perceptions of early childhood professionals about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool.

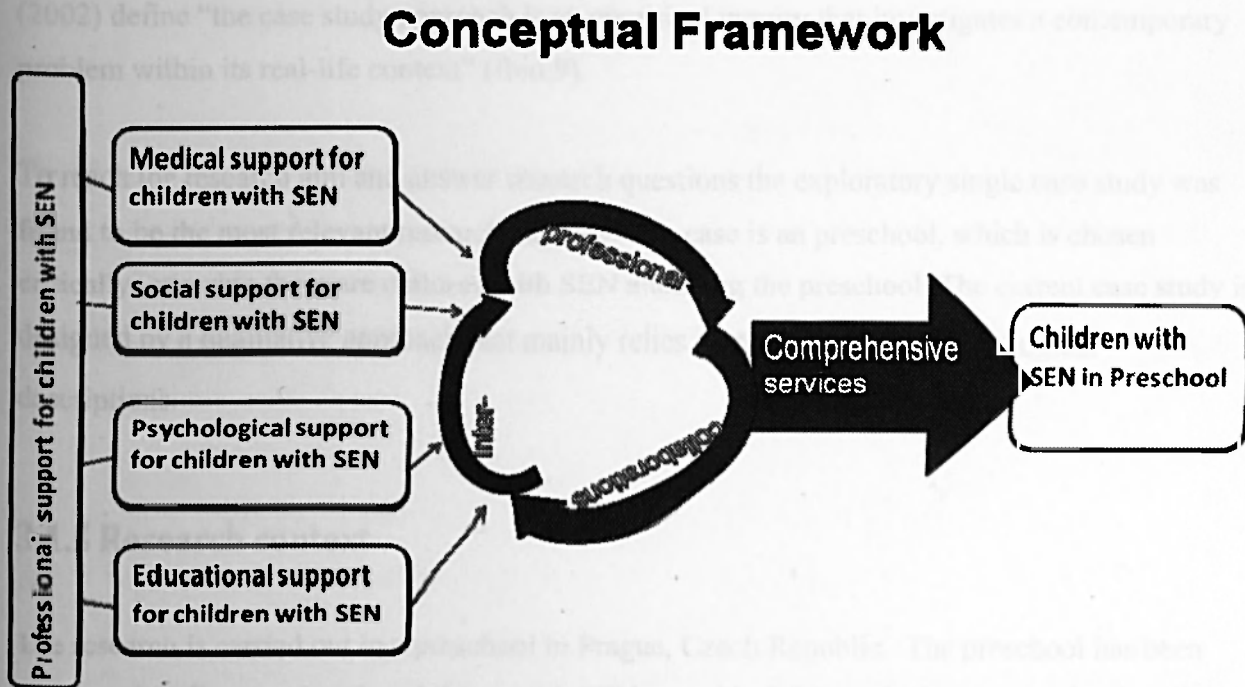
The main research question and sub questions are presented in figure 2.

Figure 2 Research questions



3.1.3 Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 3 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework presents the main concepts and directions of this research. It shows the fragmented professional support for preschool children with SEN that progresses into comprehensive services as a result of inter-professional collaborations.

3.1.4 Research strategy

“Strategy refers to the general broad orientation taken in addressing research questions” (Robson, 2000:37). The orientation taken to address the research questions of current study is ‘case study’. “Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Ibid:52).

The purpose of this research inquiry is exploratory, seeking to find out what is happening, new insights, ask questions, assess phenomena in a new light. According to Robson(2000) the exploratory purpose of research inquiry usually uses qualitative methodology.

This case study has been designed with an aim to explore inter-professional collaborations in supporting children with SEN in one preschool in Prague, Czech Republic. As Scholz and Tierje (2002) define “the case study approach is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary problem within its real-life context” (Ibid:9).

To reach the research aim and answer research questions the exploratory single case study was found to be the most relevant research strategy. The case is an preschool, which is chosen critically, ensuring there are children with SEN attending the preschool. The current case study is designed by a qualitative approach that mainly relies on narrative, phenomenological descriptions.

3.1.5 Research context

The research is carried out in a preschool in Prague, Czech Republic. The preschool has been chosen critically ensuring that children with SEN attend it. It is a typical state preschool with special care. There is a special education center (Speciálně pedagogické centrum) functioning as a part of the preschool, but also provides external services. There are about 120 children attending the preschool, 15 of them are diagnosed to have special educational needs. The preschool has mainstream groups and a special group. There are 10 children in special group. The children with SEN have different diagnoses, including Prader-Willi syndrome, Speech disorder, Spastic Hemiplegia, Meningitis, Autism, Mental retardation, ADHD, Developmental delay, Muscular Dystrophy, low weight, heart disorder, Asperger Syndrome.

Children with SEN usually are accepted to special group. After an adaptation period they may be transferred to mainstream groups. Regular teacher, special teacher and two teacher assistants are working in special group. Children with SEN are also supported by psychologist and social worker.

The demand for preschools with special care is higher than the offer. It is not possible to extend the services according to demand, as there are limited places in special class. There is a waiting list; unless a child graduates or moves to a mainstream group, it will not be possible for a new child with SEN to be enrolled to preschool. Sometimes due to the limited places, the child with special needs is admitted to the mainstream group immediately, though the teachers think it would be better for the child to adapt in special group first, as it is smaller and has more special support.

The chosen preschool is appropriate to the research purpose and provides with all the possibilities to answer the research questions. In the preschool with special care children with SEN are included both in special and mainstream groups, which provides with opportunities to gain information on SEN support services in different settings by different personnel integrated in one preschool.

3.1.6 Research participants

The sampling purpose was to include in the research all the staff members of the preschool that work with the children with SEN. However some of the mainstream group teachers refused to participate in the research. The overall number of research participants was 13. All the participants were the staff members of the preschool. In depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with social worker and psychologist of the preschool. Two focus group discussions were conducted; one with teachers and teacher assistants of special group (three participants) the other with teachers and teacher assistants of mainstream groups (eight participants). Two of the research participants were male, eleven of them were female. The following four professional groups were represented in the research sample; 'psychologist', 'social worker', 'special educator' and 'teacher'.

3.2. Data collection methods and procedure

The following research methods have been applied to address the research questions of this case study; non-participant observations, document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

3.2.1 Observations

Non-participant observations have been carried out both in regular and special classrooms. Non-participant, or direct, observation is where data are collected by observing behaviour without interacting with the participants (Robson, 2000). The observations were initiated in the beginning stage of data collection to gain background information about the preschool, the staff and the children.

Observations are used in this enquiry as a supportive technique to complement the data obtained by document analysis, individual interviews and focus group interviews. Robson (2000) states that the major advantage of observation as research technique is its directness. It provides with an opportunity to observe what is happening in real context instead of asking about it during interviews or by questionnaires. It is also stated that observations can be used to validate the messages obtained by other research instruments (Robson, 2000).

Two observation sessions have been conducted with duration of 3 hours. Notes were taken immediately after each observation. The observations helped to understand the routine of teachers and other professionals in real-life work settings, as well as to observe the main ways of communication between them. The information obtained from these observations was used for the preparation of further stages of the data collection.

3.2.2 Document analysis

The next stage of data collection was to gather documents; the individual plans of children, personal files of the children with SEN and information about the organizations that the center was collaborating with (Appendix 4). The collection of documentary data was seen as important for the following reasons; the information gained through these documents provided the background knowledge about the support system and about the practitioners engaged in the

support services, as well as about the external organizations that were providing services for children with SEN and their families. The document analysis was also used to validate data obtained through the other research methods.

A statement presented by the administration of the center to make sure that all the data collected from the documents will be used anonymously and confidentially has been signed by the researcher.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as research instruments, as they are flexible and enable the interviewer to develop additional questions during the interview, the format enables to clarify answers and elaborate on specific issues. The interviews have been tape recorded with the consent of interviewees. The tapes with interviews have been transcribed and transcripts have been coded into categories.

Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with the psychologist and the social worker of the preschool. Each interview lasted 30 minutes. The interviews were held at the time chosen by participants. The interview questions are presented in Appendix 5.

3.2.4 Focus group interviews

Focus group research is a tool to explore a topic in detail. This research instrument enables to get range of information from group members' discussions.

"The focus group interview generally involves 8-12 individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and ensures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest" (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007:37).

"Focus groups are conducted to obtain specific type of information from clearly identified set of individuals" (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

Focus group participant selection is very important, as the participants have to be willing and also able to provide the desired information and have to be representatives of the population of interest.

There is an assumption that the ideal number of participants should be 6-12. Fewer than 6 participants make for a dull discussion and reduce the variety of inputs in discussion and more than 12 difficult for moderator to manage. Anyway, some moderators find that small groups of 3-6 provide with more possibilities for in depth discussions.

Interview guide was developed to set the agenda for focus group discussions based on the research questions.

Two focus group discussions were conducted in the center. The first was with special group teachers and teacher assistants; the second was with mainstream group teachers and teacher assistants.

When estimating the time for focus group interviews it is important to consider that homogenous groups develop discussions in less time. The sessions lasted from 30-45 minutes and were translated simultaneously by an interpreter.

The greatest difficulty in carrying out a focus group is to schedule number of people together. In the case of this research the only possible time to have all the mainstream teachers together was before their monthly staff meeting which was held after working hours. The suggested time was not ideal for focus group discussion, considering that it was after work and before the staff meeting, but it was the only time available for all focus group participants. The other focus group consisted of fewer members and was easier to appoint a more convenient time for the focus group discussion. The main questions for interview guide are presented in Appendix 6.

As Stewart *et al.* (2007) state the purpose of interview guide is to provide the direction of discussions; usually it is flexible and entitles the moderator to make changes on the flow. In practice interview guide consists of number of questions and the moderator can probe the responses and add new questions when actual discussions are in progress (Ibid).

3.3 Data analysis

As Robson (2000) mentions case study data analysis can be started at relatively early stages, while the enquiry is still in progress. As case study design is flexible this intermediate data analysis may help to improve the enquiry. Following this principle, the data analysis of observations and documents was conducted at the early stages of enquiry and the findings were used while developing the interview guides.

3.4 Validity and reliability

The data from individual and focus group interviews was tape-recorded by gaining prior consent from research participants. The recordings were transcribed and the transcripts were sent to research participants to confirm the accuracy. Qualitative analysis of the text collected through the individual and focus group interviews was conducted to identify the themes that were categorized in groups according to the research questions. The themes were further analyzed and evaluated based on the theory and research focus. After the data analysis and evaluation, the results were framed into main findings of the research, followed by perspectives for further research and practical recommendations.

An example of the process of identifying, categorizing and evaluating the themes attracted from the interviews is presented below in 4 steps.

1. A fragment from interview text; *"Sometimes we have difficulties with working with teachers, we have one bad experience with one school, we have one boy who is integrated in school and he has a lot of problems with teachers, they don't want to provide extra support and we recommended them to have extra support for him, but they always say that they don't have time or they say he is only lazy, they say this about the boy and they don't accept us or our recommendations"* (Interview 2).
2. The main theme is identified; *some teachers do not accept professional recommendations concerning children with SEN.*

3. The identified theme is condensed and grouped under research question; *Perceptions of professionals about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations*

4. The themes in groups are further analyzed and evaluated according to the theory.

3.4 Validity and reliability

“Validity is concerned with whether the findings are ‘really’ about what they appear to be about” (Robson, 2000:26). Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2005) describe validity as a requirement for every research as when a piece of research is invalid, it is worthless. “In qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher. In quantitative data validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of the data” (Ibid:122).

Meanwhile Cohen et al. (2005) discuss the impossibility for research to be entirely valid. 100 percent of validity is described as ‘optimism of perfection’. Therefore, at the best researcher should ‘strive to minimize invalidity and maximize validity’ (Ibid).

While concerning about the validity of the research there is need to consider the paradigm of the research. Some researchers argue that validity is a term used in positivist paradigm and suggest alternatives for the qualitative researches. The term ‘authenticity’ is suggested instead of validity for qualitative researches.

‘We, as researchers, are part of the world that we are researching, and we cannot be completely objective about that, hence other people’s perspectives are equally as valid as our own, and the task of research is to uncover these’ (Cohen *et al.* 2005:123)

Internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides can actually be sustained by the data

External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases or situations.

Schofield (1992), cited in Cohen, *et al.* (2005) suggests that it is important in qualitative research to provide a clear, detailed and in-depth description so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalizable to another situation.

Reliability is defined as consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents.

Reliability in qualitative research can be regarded as a fit between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage (Cohen *et al.* 2005).

The following steps have been undertaken to maximize the validity and reliability of the research.

- Triangulation; the data was triangulated with the theory and also with the data obtained through other methods when possible.
- Respondent validation to increase the credibility of the data; all the interview transcripts were sent to the participants to check the accuracy, correct errors and to add further information.
- Peer debriefing; discussions with disinterested persons on the focus, structure, methods and procedures of the study were held throughout all the stages of the research.
- Prior observation was conducted to establish the relevance of the characteristics for the research focus.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The following actions have been carried out to conduct the research ethically.

- The data collection processes were organized considering research participants work schedule and their own time preferences for interviews.
- Research statements (Appendix 2) have been delivered to all research participants that included the research topic and purpose, explained what is required from the participants in

the case they agree to participate and how long will it take. Participants were informed that they may withdraw any time during research without obligation to explain the reason, also about anonymity and confidentiality of the data provided by them.

- A statement has been signed by researcher presented by the administration of the center concerning the confidentiality and anonymity of the data concerning the children, including the name and address of the preschool.
- Permission to tape-record was asked from each participant.
- Measures have been carried out to ensure that no messages are delivered prompting inadequacy of professional work of the participants.

4.3 Participant codes

Table 4 Participant codes

Participant	Code
Psychologist	P
Social worker	SW
Special educator	SE
Teacher in mainstream group	TM
Teacher in special group	TS
Teacher assistant	TA

Participant codes stated in Table 4 are used in data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 4 Data analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the qualitative data obtained by the study. The data is presented and analyzed according to the research questions.

The data obtained from interviews was tape-recorded, transcribed and coded into themes based on research questions and on the relevant themes emerging from the data. As Robson (2000) defines the codes are typically related to research questions, themes and concepts. A code is a symbol applied to a group of word to classify or categorize them. Coding is usually carried out by two phases; first-level coding, which is labeling group of words, and pattern coding, which groups the initial codes into smaller number of themes for further analysis (Robson, 2000). Each sub-chapter analyzes and presents the specific data categorized according to research questions. The related issues raised by the participants are categorized under specific sections. The chapter ends by a summary of the findings.

4.1 Participant codes

Table 4 Participant codes

Participant	Code
Psychologist	P
Social worker	SW
Special educator	SE
Teacher in mainstream group	TM
Teacher in special group	TS
Teacher assistant	TA

Participant codes stated in Table 4 are used in data presentation and analysis.

4.2 What professional support do the children with SEN receive in preschool?

The answer to this question is expected to provide understanding of the context of support that children with SEN receive in preschool, which is found important for revealing the patterns of inter-professional collaborations. The answer to this question will also shed light on to what extent are different support services interconnected and mutually informed.

Table 5 Participants' comments on professional support for children with SEN in preschool

Participant code	Response
P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I work here as a psychologist and, I do assessment of children, I work with children, I work with teachers, I help teachers with education plans, I work with parents, we help parents with finding schools for children, we write recommendations". • psychologist, special educator, social worker, teachers work inside the school, outside the school speech therapist, physiotherapist, sometimes psychiatrist, and other doctors, for example if the child has hearing problem, the specialist doctor is working with the child. • Usually one psychologist, one special educator and social worker are enough to work with a child with SEN, we usually know what to do and don't need other specialists, of course it depends on disability.
SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am social worker, I provide social information for parents of handicapped children, about their rights, I do social counseling for parents with handicapped children, I also do social diagnostics, if some families have social problems, I work with them, I am trying to find places where they can get help. • Children in special group have very good support; teachers are

	working with them individually.
SE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am special educator, I work with children with special needs, we make individual plans with the teacher and the psychologist confirms it.
TMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To work with children with special needs we are limited, our possibilities are limited with the number of children that we have in each class, we have to work a lot, and we have to work with more children, than we want.

Based on the above responses the professional support in kindergarten can be categorized by four dimensions; type of support, way of support subject of support and quality of support. The categories of support are presented in detail in Table 6.

Table 6 Categories of support services for children with SEN in preschool

Type of support	Way of support	Subject of support	Quality of support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological Social Special educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual learning support Intervention Counseling recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child The parent The teacher Other professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Good” in special class “Limited” in mainstream class

Psychological support includes psychological assessment of the children (initial, after the child has been admitted to preschool and follow-up assessment), counseling and providing recommendations to parents and teachers.

Social support is provided by a social worker and mainly includes providing information, counseling, offering orientation to the organizations where the parents can get support for the children with SEN, including financial, juridical and medical.

Special educational support is provided by special educator who is based in special group but also provides counseling and recommendations to the teachers in mainstream groups concerning the work with children with SEN. Special educational support is focused on the holistic development of the children instead development of certain skills and knowledge.

"We don't have program to teach them different knowledge or skills, here we have holistic approach to child development" (focus group interview 1).

The support is provided directly to the child by means of interventions and individual support, and is also provided indirectly by counseling and providing recommendations to the teachers, parents and other professionals.

Interventions are conducted by the psychologist in the classroom or in psychologist's room. Individual learning support is provided to children with SEN in mainstream groups by teacher assistants. Here is a fragment from a conversation with a teacher assistant after observation of individual work with a child in mainstream group diagnosed as having ADHD;

"I am supposed to be the teacher's assistant not the child's personal assistant, but when the teacher is busy with other children, I work with the SEN Child, or when the teacher is working individually with the child with SEN, I work with the group, it's flexible, I also help to make individual plans" (informal conversation with teacher assistant).

Counseling and recommendations are provided by psychologist, social worker and special educator to the parents, teachers and other professionals working with the child with SEN. The professionals commented that counseling and recommendation for parents appeared to be more effective as the parents were applying for it themselves and were interested, while there was a certain resistance by teachers towards the efforts of psychologist or special educator to discuss

certain problems concerning the work with children with SEN. So, it is emphasized that counseling and recommendations are effective if the recipients are interested in it and apply for it.

"Most of the time they¹ are cooperative, because they come to us for services (interview 1).

"Sometimes we have difficulties with working with teachers, for example, we have bad experience with a school, we have a boy who is integrated in school and he has a lot of problems with teachers, they didn't provide extra support and we recommended them to have extra support for him, but they always say that they don't have time or they say he is only lazy, they say this about the boy and they don't accept us or our recommendations" (Interview 2).

There were also certain persistent comments concerning the professionals' experience with external medical personnel working with the children with SEN. The comments included certain hints on some professional arrogance of medical doctors.

"It depends on doctors, but usually doctors do not want to contact or be contacted" (focus group interview 1).

"They think as we are not medical doctors, we have nothing to say about children, about their behavior, emotions and there is no reason to cooperate" (interview 2)

"....they² don't feel interest in collaboration; they are not interested in us, it is not accepted as normal that kindergarten teacher is a part of team around the child, working with child" (focus group interview 1).

It is also highlighted that knowledge of context is very important for the professionals to counsel or to develop recommendations.

¹ Parents

² Doctors

4.3 What are the perceptions of professionals of the benefits of inter-

"... in other schools it is sometimes very hard to give them simple recommendations, they need it often, but it is hard, as we don't know the context" (Interview 1).

The answer to this research question is given by the perceptions of the professional

The participants evaluated the quality of the support services provided for children with SEN in preschool as better in special groups than in mainstream groups, and it was mainly explained by the large number of children in mainstream groups.

"Children in special group have very good support; teachers are working with them individually. In other groups support is quite good, but it would be nice to have less children in the classroom, there are 26 children in group. For children with special needs it is good to be in regular classroom, but 26 is too much, also teachers are not enough, 1 teacher, 1 assistant and 26 children, there are assistants in every group but still it is difficult, especially if there are more than one child with special needs, it is difficult" (interview 2).

"...our possibilities are limited with the number of children" (focus group interview 1).

"Teachers³ don't have enough knowledge and enough experience with children with handicap, they have a lot of children in class, a lot of duties, they do not earn enough money, they are tired, they don't have energy" (interview 2).

In conclusion the following findings can be stated:

- Categories of support services in preschool for children with SEN (Table 5),
- The effectiveness of counseling and recommendations are dependent on recipients willingness and interest to accept them,
- Awareness of context is important for support service delivery,
- The main challenge to provide support to children with SEN in mainstream group of preschool is the large number of children.

³ Teachers in mainstream groups

4.3 What are the perceptions of professionals of the benefits of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool?

The answer to this research question is meant to provide the understanding of the professional benefits and possibilities of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN.

Table 7 Perceptions of participants about the benefits of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool

P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We try to collaborate; we call them⁴, and talk to them, if there is something we want to discuss.
SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's important to cooperate and to tell for example, the psychiatrist about the children, what we know from families or from kindergarten. • I have contacts of organizations that provide assistance and social services. • There are some lawyers consulting us about handicapped children or parents of handicapped children. • There is an NGO for handicapped children and department of social affairs to consult about social problems.
TM1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the child first comes to the kindergarten, they have reports from other psychologists.
TM6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the child is having for example behavioral problems, it is important, that the teachers have the same approach, it is also important that the other staff working here, like cook or someone else follow the same approach.

Based on the aforementioned responses the followings can be summarized as the main benefits of inter-professional collaborations mentioned by participants:

⁴ External professionals

- The same approach to the children,
- Information from other professionals,
- Participation of different professionals in making the individual plans of children with SEN,
- Contacts with external organizations providing support services to children with SEN.

4.4 What are the perceptions of early childhood professionals about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool?

The answer sought for this question will provide understanding of the main challenges of inter-professional collaborations from the perspective of early childhood professionals.

Table 8 Perceptions of participants about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool

Participant	Response
P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are not in good relationships with one psychiatrist, he doesn't want to give us information, and he gets very angry that we need something from him. • Children with speech disorder need speech therapist, because we don't do logopaedics here, and children with physical handicap need physiotherapist, but it is their⁵ work and it is not very often that we know about their work. • In other schools it is sometimes very hard to give them simple recommendations, they need it often, but it is hard, as we don't know

⁵ Speech therapist and physiotherapist

	<p>the context.</p>
SW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He didn't want to discuss the medications that the children used, he didn't want to tell anything about the child and he didn't want to hear anything from us, he thinks we want to educate him. • They⁶ think as we are not medical doctors, we have nothing to say about children, about their behavior, emotions and there is no reason to collaborate. • Sometimes we have difficulties with working with teacher, they don't accept us or our recommendations, they don't have enough knowledge and enough experience with children with disabilities, they have a lot of children in class, a lot of duties, they do not earn enough money, they are tired, they don't have energy.
SE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The only information we have are the copies of medical reports of children, which we have through parents, we don't have any other information. • In order to be interested in inter-professional collaborations, one has to be interested in his own profession first.
TS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration is a big problem in our republic, it doesn't exist, it is historical-social problem, problem of post-socialistic country, where teamwork is not normal. • Medical workers they don't feel interest in collaboration; they are not interested in us, it is not accepted as normal that kindergarten teacher is a part of team around the child, working with child. • Collaboration is a problem also inside the kindergarten, with other teachers or other staff, problem here is about some children going from this special class to other classes, after two years here, they go to normal class, so we have problems with communication with teachers in normal classes, we often offer our help, our information we have about the child, but they don't have interest.

⁶ Medical doctors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need minimal communication, the problem is in communication • It depends on doctors, but usually doctors do not want contact or be contacted
TM1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes other institutions and professionals look at the child only from their perspective, from only medical or only orthopedic perspectives, and don't see that the child is holistic • the problem is that some teachers that work here have different approach to the children and to the work, for example if the child is having behavioral problems, it is important, that the teachers have the same approach
TM2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem is in communication, it is not directly between the doctors and teacher, it is through the parents
TM5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends on individual or personal characteristics of doctors or professionals, I had good relationships with the previous psychologist, but they are not good now with the current psychologist, the communication is very formal
TA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher in this group is changing very often which is not good for children.

Based on the above responses the followings can be summarized to express the perceptions of participants about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations;

- The participants find important to collaborate with other professionals and mainly portray themselves as willing to collaborate and explain the difficulties as caused by the other side not willing to collaborate using expressions such as “they don't want”, “they are not interested”, “they don't accept”.
- Lack of communication is a challenge for inter-professional collaborations

- Some professionals are not interested in collaborations and do not accept recommendations
- Inter-professional collaborations depend on personal characteristics
- Seeing the child only from professional perspective is a problem
- Teachers are not satisfied with their job conditions

4.5 Summary

This chapter has analyzed and presented the findings of the research following the data analysis of individual and focus group interviews. The data have been categorized under three main topics; support services in preschool, the benefits of inter-professional collaborations and the challenges of inter-professional collaborations. The findings are summarized in Table 8.

Table 9 Summary of the findings

Support services in preschool	The perceptions of professionals about the benefits of inter-professional collaborations	The perceptions of professionals about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations
Categories of support services in preschool for children with SEN (Table 5)	The same approach to the children	Lack of communication
The effectiveness of counseling and recommendations are dependent on recipients willingness and interest to accept them	Information from other professionals	Lack of commitment

Knowledge of context is important for providing support service	Participation of different professionals in making the individual plans of children with SEN	Narrowness of professional perspective
The main challenge to provide support to children with SEN in mainstream group of preschool is the large number of children	Contacts with external organizations providing support services to children with SEN	Personal characteristics
		Job dissatisfaction

In the next chapter, the findings will be discussed and evaluated in accordance with presented literature and research questions of the study.

Chapter 5 Evaluation

5.0 Introduction

This chapter evaluates and discusses the findings of the study presented in previous chapter in accordance to the literature presented in chapter 2. The discussion is organized according to the research questions. First, the findings on the support services for children with SEN provided in preschool will be discussed and evaluated. Later the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaboration from the perspective of professionals will be discussed under the light of the related literature. Additional literature is provided to support the findings. The chapter will end by a summary.

5.1 Support services for children with SEN in preschool

Support services are discussed in this study in two perspectives. As mentioned in previous chapter, the system of support services in preschool has been explored with a purpose to understand the current and possible patterns of inter-professional collaborations. In their turn, inter-professional collaborations are explored in regard with their possibility to improve the outcomes of the support services. Improvement of the services to support children with SEN in preschool can be defined as the far-reaching purpose of this study.

5.1.1 Categories of support services in preschool for children with SEN

The categories of support services presented in Table 5 identify the professionals providing services to children with SEN and also identify the means, recipients and quality of support services. Categorizing the services was an attempt to show the overall picture of support that children with SEN receive in preschool. Considering the research context, while discussing the means of support that are intervention, individual learning support, counseling and recommendation, the focus was on the services that are meant for the other professionals and teachers. Intervention and individual learning support are provided directly to the children, social and psychological counseling to the parents of children with SEN and recommendations to the teachers and other professionals working with the children with SEN. Recommendations can

hardly be defined as collaboration, when it is delivered without the other side being interested in it. The participants underlined tensions in the process of providing recommendations to teachers and other professionals, explaining it by the fact that they don't apply for recommendations.

While categorizing the support services for children with SEN in preschool, the quality of services is also discussed, though very slightly. These comments concerning the quality of the services are found necessary to be presented, although investigation of quality requires involvement of service users rather than providers. This research is not focused on the support service outcomes, when the experiences of service users are examined and evaluated, including the evaluation of the quality of the services, but is focused on the process of inter-professional collaborations, when the structural systems and the experiences of professionals, professional affiliations and personal feelings in connection to providing joint-up services are examined (Anning *et al.* 2006). Discussions about the quality of the services that emerged during the enquiry indicated that the quality of services in provided in special groups was better than in mainstream groups. This finding is important to discuss as it shows the participants beliefs that it is better for the children to be in special groups, as they have better support there. There is a need to promote the message that these differences are result of organizational errors and not something natural to happen. Discussing the provision of specialist support to persons with special needs Gates (2007) mentions that it has traditionally been equated with segregated provision and service provision in mainstream settings requires changes in professional education and provision.

5.1.2 Willingness to collaborate

One of the findings of the research is that the effectiveness of counseling and recommendations are dependent on recipients' willingness and interest to accept them. The participants mentioned that interactions with parents were more effective and easier than with teachers, because parents apply for help and teachers do not. This is a challenging situation, when some professionals think there is a problem to solve regarding the work with children with SEN and offer help decidedly and some think there is no problem or at least they don't need help to solve it. There is a need to reach a consensus in defining what the problems are. Restating the definition of inter-

professional collaborations as an active and ongoing partnership between people from diverse backgrounds who work together to solve problems or provide services (Barr *et al.* 2005), it may be concluded that when one side is not interested in collaboration, some problems may stay not addressed.

Another finding concerning the willingness of collaboration is the fact that the participants mainly find important to collaborate with other professionals and in most cases portray themselves as willing to collaborate and explain the difficulties as caused by the other side not willing to collaborate using expressions such as “they don’t want”, “they are not interested”, “they don’t accept”. This is very important finding to focus on considering two reasons; first, it can be recommended to be used in inter-professional education to demonstrate the subjective perception of the willingness of others to collaborate, and second, it can be emphasized that as soon as the professional boundaries between “us” and “them” are reduced and there is no other side to blame for the problems, there would be possible to find more effective ways to solve the common problems or to reach the common goals collaboratively.

5.1.3 Awareness of context in providing support service

Participants emphasized that for successful service provision the awareness of the context of children and their environment is necessary. The findings also suggest that seeing the child only from professional perspective is a problem and doesn’t provide better outcomes for the children. This finding is in one line with Edwards *et al.* (2009) where it is stated that practitioners need to be able to understand the totality of a child’s life circumstances to provide high quality children’s services. Ability to look across all aspects of child’s life is mentioned as very important to identify vulnerability (Ibid). Meggitt (2006) also puts forwards that quality child care and education is possible only when there is an integrated approach towards them. This finding confirms that inter-professional relations are believed to improve the services for children, as it is possible to know the context the child by collecting information from all the people involved in different aspects of the child’s life, which requires at least communication with different professionals and parents.

5.1.4 Large group size as a challenge to provide support to the children with SEN

Large group size is stressed by the participants as the main challenge to provide support to children with SEN in mainstream groups in preschool and thus, is found important to be discussed here.

According to the participants, although there is always a teacher assistant in the group, it is still a challenge to provide individual support to the children with SEN. The participants explained the support quality by the size of the groups; teachers physically are not able to pay necessary attention to the children with SEN. In special group there are 10 children, 2 teachers and 2 teacher assistants, unless in mainstream groups there are 25 children 1 teacher and 1 teacher assistant. There are researches proving that smaller classes have a positive impact on student achievement, although only small size doesn't provide quality. Vander Ark (2002) has mentioned that small classes especially benefit young children and children with disadvantaged backgrounds. These benefits occur due to increased teacher contact, differentiated instruction and improved classroom management (Ibid). Clough and Lindsay (2004) define the principle behind supportive education as participation of all learners in the mainstream school culture and curricula. Supportive education is about organizing help appropriate to special needs of learners and to the needs of their regular teachers. In this sense the supportive principle calls for the removal of all sorts of barriers to education in the classroom and the school instead of removing the children from there (Ibid). Following this principle, if the large class size is identified by teachers as the main barrier to support children with SEN in mainstream groups, then efforts should be focused on the removal of this barrier.

5.2 *The perceptions of early childhood professionals of the benefits of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool*

5.2.1 Developing same approach to the work with children

As it has been mentioned in Table 2 indicating the benefits of collaborative partnership, it helps to build consensus, to break down professional boundaries and parochial attitudes (Cheminais, 2009). The research findings are consistent with this statement; the participants highlighted that seeing the child only from professional point of view does not favour the holistic development of the child.

The importance of having the same approach while working with children was underlined by the participants. This point has been already mentioned as one of the motivations of this study.

Different approaches while working with the child may impact the child negatively. The possible way to correlate the approaches is the comprehensive discussion and agreement on approach which is acceptable for all the involved professionals. This solution seems easy for the professionals working in the same organization, but when they work in different organizations and organizations may be governed by different authorities, significant structural changes are necessary to make it possible.

5.2.2 Information from others professionals

Inter-professional collaborations have been valued by the research participants for the possibility to gain information from other professionals. For example, the participants mentioned that the reports from other professionals were very useful, although the reports were mentioned to be the only information that they received about the child through the parents. The participants also underlined that direct communication with the professionals providing the reports would be more useful. Shared activities with involvement of different professionals were mentioned as positive, such as making individual plans for children with SEN. This finding is consistent with the statement of Easen *et al.* (2000), that inter-professional collaborations are effective when professionals are working towards a joint goal.

5.2.3 Alternative services

Contacts with external organizations providing support services to the children with SEN are mentioned by the participants as very important. These organizations offer wide range of services to children with SEN and their families that are not provided in preschool (Appendix 4). Bar *et al.* (2005) states as a benefit of inter-professional collaborations the possibility to lead to

improved outcomes for the children through a range of joint up services, advice and support being available and easily accessible.

5.3 The perceptions of early childhood professionals about the challenges of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool

5.3.1 Lack of communication

Lack of communication is mentioned as a big challenge for inter-professional collaborations by number of participants. Barr et al. (2005) states that more than mere mechanics and communication is at the heart of inter-professional collaborations, it also presupposes readiness to listen, to value what the other has to contribute, to be receptive to new ideas and information and prepared to change attitudes, perceptions and behavior in response (Ibid). Not opposing this statement, the findings of this research suggest that although inter-professional collaborations are more than communication, communication stands as the basic condition of inter-professional collaborations. Easen et al. (2000) states that there is no comprehensive model of the factors that may be relevant to the success of inter-professional collaborations. In the way of developing the mentioned model, communication can be put in the forefront, as inter-professional collaborations are not possible without communication.

5.3.2 Personal characteristics in inter-professional collaborations

The research participants highlighted that the success of inter-professional collaborations depend on personal characteristics. Barr et al. (2005) identified the options that practitioners could use facing a problem that is beyond their education, experience and prescribed roles.

1. To work within their own limits, leaving wider problems unaddressed,
2. To work beyond those limits without the necessary education, experience and expertise
3. To collaborate with other professions qualified to address the wider problems.

Following these options, it is notable that personal characteristics can influence in the choice of options. However, according to the findings of research, there are other factors causing the failure of inter-professional collaborations, for example, the general job dissatisfaction.

5.3.4 Lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction

The major reasons for job dissatisfaction were mentioned as the low salary and hard work explained by large groups sizes.

“The teacher of this group is changing too often which is not very good for the children” (from informal conversation with teacher assistant).

“For example in this center, we need three specialists, psychologist, special educator and social worker, but have money only for 1.03 positions, I work for 0.3 position, and I don't have time to do the work, if I am here only for my working time, I'll not have the time to do the work well, I stay here as I am studying, later I'll have to look for other job” (interview 2).

Leathard (2003) highlighting positive aspects of inter-professional practice mentions that when professionals acknowledge the value of sharing knowledge and expertise, it also creates more satisfying work environment within an arena where professionals can share and support each other. The participants expressed another opinion explaining the lack of commitment to inter-professional collaborations with job dissatisfaction:

“In order to be interested in inter-professional collaborations, one has to be interested in his own profession first” (focus group 2).

Job dissatisfaction is very important issue to address when trying to improve the support services for children, as it affects not only professional and inter-professional relationships, but also the quality of the work outcomes.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter the findings of the research have been discussed and evaluated. The findings have been categorized under related topics and correlated to literature. The topics emerged from the

data analysis and were developed considering their relevance to the research focus. In consequent chapter recommendations will be developed accordingly.

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter begins with referring to the purpose of the study. This is followed by summary and evaluation of main findings of the study and implications of the study for future practice and limitations of the study. Afterwards, practical recommendations and an agenda for further study are presented. The chapter ends by an overall conclusion.

6.1 Purpose of the study

This research started with an assumption that inter-professional collaborations have potential to improve the support delivery for children with SEN in preschool. The overall purpose of this study was to explore inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool considering the fact that children with SEN receive number of different services but may not be mutually informed. The findings of the study provide answer to the main research question on the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool, including positive practices and factors hindering inter-professional collaborations.

6.2 Summary and evaluation research findings

The research findings provide the overall picture of support services for children with SEN in preschool. It has been found out that some of the challenges to provide quality support services to children with SEN in preschool are connected to the large size of treatment groups and the lack of inter-professional communication. Personal characteristics of professionals, lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction are found to be challenges for inter-professional collaborations. Although personal characteristics of professionals can also help in inter-professional collaborations, it is defined as a challenge because of the fact that professional practice can depend on others personal characteristics. Job dissatisfaction is a challenge not only for inter-professional collaborations, but also for professional activity. The research findings also emphasize the conditions to provide high quality support services to children with SEN in

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This final chapter begins with returning to the purpose the study. This is followed by summery and evaluation of main findings of the study and implications of the study for future practice and limitations of the study. Afterwards, practical recommendations and recommendation for further study are presented. The chapter ends by an overall conclusion.

6.1 Purpose of the study

This research started with an assumption that inter-professional collaborations have potential to improve the support delivery for children with SEN in preschool. The overall purpose of this study was to explore inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool considering the fact that children with SEN receive number of different services that may not be mutually informed. The findings of the study provide answer to the main research question on the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool, including positive practices and factors hindering inter-professional collaborations.

6.2 Summary and evaluation research findings

The research findings provide the overall picture of support services for children with SEN in preschool. It has been found out that some of the challenges to provide quality support services to children with SEN in preschool are connected to the large size of mainstream groups and the lack of inter-professional communication. Personal characteristics of professionals, lack of commitment and job dissatisfaction are found to be challenges for inter-professional collaborations. Although personal characteristics of professionals can also help in inter-professional collaborations, it is defined as a challenge because of the fact that professional practice can depend on others personal characteristics. Job dissatisfaction is a challenge not only for inter-professional collaborations, but also for professional activity. The research findings also emphasize the conditions to provide high quality support services to children with SEN in

preschool, such as the awareness of the context of the child, willingness to collaborate and developing the same approach to child.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The following limitations have been identified while carrying out the enquiry:

- a) Because of the language barrier there were difficulties to establish rapport with the participants effectively, as the interpreted communication was creating a certain formality.
- b) The focus group interview with the mainstream group teachers was conducted after work before teachers' monthly meeting as it was the only possible time suggested by the administration. Some teachers refused to participate, despite their prior consent, possibly because of being tired.
- c) During focus group discussions the participants might have felt not comfortable to discuss difficulties in collaborations with colleagues in their presence. Individual interviews would provide more objective information about the issues that may include tensions in interpersonal relationships.
- d) I couldn't arrange an interview with the psychotherapist, who was working in the preschool on voluntary basis and was not available at the period my data collection. The interview with her would make the data richer.
- e) Only professionals working in preschool were involved in the research, considering time limitation. The involvement of the professionals in research who work in other organizations and provide support to the children with SEN would make the findings more comprehensive.

6.3 Implications of the study

The study has implications for my personal practical experience. First of all, I strengthened and improved my knowledge in the field by exploring the related literature. Conducting this research helped me to critically evaluate my practice and come up with new visions for future

professional practice. The findings of this research provide basis to develop recommendations that will be suggested in the settings I work.

This study provides implications for early childhood professionals as well as for service providers in regard to the improvement of services for children with SEN. Based on the findings of the research, this study provides a model of SEN support in preschool that can be used by other centers to organize support for children with SEN in mainstream settings. The study also develops recommendations how to improve inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool based on the research findings.

The study contributes to the literature in the field of inter-professional collaborations in service provision to children with SEN in early childhood settings.

6.4 Recommendations

In this section practical recommendations and recommendations for further study are presented. The practical recommendations are developed with the aim to improve the inter-professional collaborations.

- Inter-professional collaborations can be effective if all the involved parties are interested and value the possibility to share professional experience. The current model of offering recommendations to teachers by other professionals is not effective; there is a need to find alternative ways that depend on context and problems and involves teachers as an interested party. Different professional representatives need to develop respectful relations without challenging other professions.
- As the lack of communication between professionals was found the main challenge for collaborative practice, it is recommended to the service providers to create platform for the professionals to communicate. Current structure does not provide opportunities to the professionals working in different organizations to communicate effectively. As it has been mentioned in literature, structural changes are difficult, but even structural changes

are not enough, it has to be followed by cultural changes to be succeeded (Pugh & Duffy, 2010). It may be a long way to establishment of effective collaborative practice in early childhood settings, but the necessary condition to initiate any collaboration is to enable inter-professional communication by promoting motivational and structural changes.

- The positive practices of inter-professional collaborations can be used as models for promoting effective collaborations. For example, emphasizing the development of the same approach to the work with children as a result of inter-professional collaborations, which is highly valued by teachers as a positive practice, may uphold the motivation for inter-professional collaborations.

The following recommendations for further study have been developed. This research was designed as a case study, the purpose of which was exploratory. Exploratory research is meant to find out what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light (Robson, 2000). The directions recommended for the further study will require explanatory purposes, seeking explanation of a problem or situation. The directions recommended for the further study are the followings;

- a) To conduct a research on the quality of services to support children with SEN in preschool defining the inter-professional collaborations as variable. Parents of the children with SEN in preschool will be involved in this suggested research as service users.
- b) In current research only professionals working in the preschool were involved. A larger scale research involving all the professionals providing services to children with SEN, including medical, non-governmental and other sectors is recommended. This will provide ground to understand the nature of inter-professional collaborations taking place between professionals working in different organizations and governed by different authorities. The findings of this study indicated some tensions in collaborations between the preschool personnel and medical personnel. A further study with focus on perceptions of medical professionals providing support to SEN children of inter-professional collaborations would shed light on these tensions.

6.4 Conclusion

Providing support to the children with SEN in mainstream settings and ensuring the highest possible quality of support services can be the formula for the successful inclusive education and wider social inclusion of children with SEN. This research was an attempt to explore inter-professional collaborations as a way to improve the outcomes for the children with SEN in preschool. As early childhood is a period when the children's health, development and education are strongly interconnected, such an interconnection is also required for the early childhood professionals and service providers.

This research explored the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool and also the professional's perceptions about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations. The study identified the support system in preschool, underlined the benefits and challenges of collaborative practice and developed recommendations based on the findings.

Cheminais, R. (2009). *Effective Management Practices Every Child Needs Into Practice*. London: Sage Publications.

Cheminais, R. (2007). *How to Achieve the Early Childhood Standards: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications.

Clough, P., & Lindsay, G. (2004). *Supporting Children with Special Needs: Changing Roles in Special Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Classroom Research: Methods in Education*. (3rd Edition). London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Council of Australian Governments. (2008). *Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the States and Territories on the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education*. Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.coag.gov.au/secretary/agreements/early_childhood_education_national_partnership

Bibliography

- Anning, A., Green, J., & Robinson, M. (2006). *Developing multi-professional teamwork for integrated children's services*. New York: McGraw-Hill International.
- Barr, H., Koppel, I., Reeves, S., & Hammick, M. (2005). *Effective interprofessional education: argument, assumption, and evidence*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bolton, G. (2005). *Reflective practice: writing and professional development* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications LTD.
- Bryan, T. H., Wong, B. Y., & Donahue, M. (2008). *The social dimensions of learning disabilities*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.
- Bryant, D. M., & Graham, A. M. (1993). *Implementing early intervention: from research to effective practice*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Cheminais, R. (2009). *Effective Multi-Agency Partnerships: Putting Every Child Matters Into Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cheminais, R. (2007). *How to Achieve the Every Child Matters Standards: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Clough, P., & Lindsay, G. (2004). *Integration and the support service: changing roles in special education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2005). *Research Methods in Education*. (5th Edition). London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Council of Australian Governments*. (2008, December). Retrieved January 16, 2010, from http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership/national_partnership_on_early_childhood_education.pdf

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. R. (2002). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: postmodern perspectives*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Deiner, P. L. (2010). *Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Development, Resources, and Practice*. Wadsworth: Gengage Learning.

Early Childhood Education Reform Strategy Plan for 2008-2015. (n.d.). Retrieved March 30, 2010, from http://www.edu.am/DownloadFile/1494arm-Microsoft_Word_-_ECD-VERJNAKAN.doc.pdf

Easen, P., Atkins, M., & Dyson, A. (2000). Inter-professional Collaboration and Conceptualisations of Practice. *CHILDREN & SOCIETY*, 14, 355-367.

Ebbeck, M., & Waniganayake, M. (2003). *Early childhood professionals: leading today and tomorrow*. Sydney: MacLennan+Petty.

Edwards, A. (2002). Responsible Research: ways of being a researcher. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28 (2), 157-168.

Edwards, A., Daniels, H., Gallagher, T., Leadbetter, J., & Warmington, P. (2009). *Improving Inter-professional Collaborations: Multi-agency working for children's wellbeing*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.

Frost, N. (2005). *Professionalism, Partnership and Joint Up Thinking*. Dartington: Reserach in Practice.

Gargiulo, R. M., & Kilgo, J. L. (2005). *Young Children with Special Needs* (2nd ed.). NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.

Gates, B. (2007). *Learning disabilities: Toward inclusion*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone Elsevier.

Graham, J., & Wright, J. A. (1999). What does 'inter-professional collaboration' mean to professionals working with pupils with physical disabilities? *British Journal of Special Education*, 26 (1), 37-41.

Hall, P. (2005). Interprofessional teamwork: Professional cultures as barriers. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 19 (s1), 188-196.

ISBE. (2005). *Preschool Inclusion/LRE*. Retrieved December 16, 2009, from Illinois State Board of Education: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/ECSE_LRE_guidance.pdf

Kemple, K. M., Hae, K. K., Ellis, S. M., & Heejeong, H. S. (2009). A Test of a Measure for Assessing Teachers' Judgments about Social Interaction Practices in the Preschool Years. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 10 (2).

Klein, D. M., Cook, R. E., & Richardson-Gibbs, A. M. *Strategies for including children with special needs in early childhood settings*.

Leathard, A. (1994). *Going inter-professional: working together for health and welfare*. London: Routledge.

Lidskog, M., Löfmark, A., & Ahlström, G. (2008). Students' learning experiences from interprofessional collaboration on a training ward in municipal care. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 7 (3), 134-145.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Meggitt, C. (2006). *Child Development: An Illustrated Guide*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.

Mertens, D. M. (2005). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Nutbrown, C. (2006). *Key concepts in early childhood education & care*. Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Cromwell Press Ltd.

OECD. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD PUBLISHING.

OECD. (2007). *Students with Disabilities, Difficulties And Disadvantages: Statistics and Indicators for OAS Countries*. Mexico: Edebé Ediciones Internacionales.

OECD. (2003). *Transforming disability into ability. Policies to promote work and income security for disabled people*. Paris: OECD Publications.

Pugh, G., & Duffy, B. (2010). *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*. London: Sage Publications.

Purcell, M. L., Horn, E., & Palmer, S. (2007). A qualitative study of the initiation and continuation of preschool inclusive programs. *Council for exceptional children*, 74 (1), 85-99.

Randolph, J. J. (2009). A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, 14 (13).

Robson, C. (2000). *Real World Research*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Scholz, R. W., & Tietje, T. (2002). *Embedded case study methods: integrating quantitative and qualitative knowledge*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Meisels, S. J. (2003). *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(2005-2006). *Special Educational Needs, Volume 1*. Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: Education and Skills Committee.

Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus groups: theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousands Oaks: Sage publications.

Vander Ark, T. (2002). The Case for Small High Schools. *Educational Leadership* , 59 (5), 55-59.

Wilson, R. A. (2003). *Special educational needs in the early years*. London: Routhledge Falmer.

January, 2010	Develop research proposal
February, 2010	Develop methodology of the research
March, 2010	Define the context of the research, start data collection
April, 2010	Continue the data collection
May, 2010	Data analysis
June, 2010	Data evaluation
July, 2010	Finalize the study
August, 2010	Submission

Appendix 1 Time Plan for the Research

January, 2010	Develop research proposal
February, 2010	Develop methodology of the research
March, 2010	Define the context of the research, start data collection
April, 2010	Continue the data collection
May, 2010	Data analysis
June, 2010	Data evaluation
July, 2010	Finalize the study
August, 2010	Submission

Appendix 2 Research Statement in Czech

Univerzita Karlova v Praze
Pedagogická fakulta
M.D. Rettigové 4
116 39 Praha 1
Česká republika
Oddělení pro zahraniční a vnější vztahy
Tel.: +420 221 900 236-7

INFORMACE PRO ÚČASTNÍKY VÝZKUMNÉHO PROJEKTU

Název: Mezioborové spolupráce za účelem podpory dětí se speciálními potřebami v mateřské škole

1) O čem bude studie?

Tato studie bude zkoumat mezioborovou spolupráci vedoucí k podpoře dětí se speciálními potřebami.

2) Kdo studii zpracovává?

Výzkum povede Anahit Stepanyan jako součást svého studia v rámci vzdělávacího programu Erasmus Mundus MA SEN.

3) Co studie zahrnuje?

Účastníci projektu budou požádáni o to, aby diskutovali o profesních tématech, týkající se práce s dětmi se speciálními potřebami. Rozhovory budou nahrávány, veškeré získané informace zůstanou přísně tajné.

4) Kolik času účast na studii zabere?

Předpokládá se, že rozhovor bude trvat přibližně 45 minut.

5) Mohu od spolupráce na studii odstoupit?

Účast na této studii je zcela dobrovolná – nemáte žádný závazek se jí účastnit – a když svou účast přislíbíte, můžete od své spolupráce na studii kdykoliv odstoupit. V případě, že se rozhodnete ukončit spolupráci, veškeré audiozáznamy budou smazány a informace, získané od Vás, se do studie nezahrnou.

6) Kdo bude znát výsledky studie?

Veškeré závěry, vyplývající ze studie, budou přísně tajné a pouze autorka studie bude mít přístup k informacím od jednotlivých účastníků. Zpráva o zpracované studii možná bude publikována, ale informace o jednotlivých účastnících ani školách v takové zprávě nebudou uvedeny konkrétně.

Budete-li mít jakékoliv otázky či komentáře, prosím, kontaktujte **Anahit Stepanyan**.

Tel.: +420732969578

E-mail: a@web.am

Tento informační letáček je pro Vás.

Appendix 3 Research Statement in English

Charles University in Prague
Faculty of Education
M. D Rettigove 4
11639 Prague 1
Czech Republic
Department for International and Public Relations
Tel.: +420 221 900 236-7

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Research Project

Title: Inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool

1) What is the study about?

The research will investigate inter-professional collaborations to support children with special educational needs

2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Anahit Stepanyan as a part of Erasmus Mundus MA SEN Programme

3) What does the study involve?

Persons participating in the study will be asked to discuss number of questions about professional work with children with special needs. The discussions will be recorded using a digital recorder. All information volunteered will be kept strictly confidential.

4) How much time will the study take?

It is anticipated that the discussion will last approximately 45 minutes.

5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time.

You may stop your participation at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants and schools will not be identifiable in such a report.

For any further questions or feedback please contact **Anahit Stepanyan**

Telephone: +420732969578

Email: a@web.am

• **Kolpingův Dům Azylový Dům pro Matky a Děti**

(www.kolpingpraha.cz)

This information sheet is for you to keep.

• **Centrum Filipovka Osobní Asistence**

(www.hanemlynska.cz)

• **Odborné Sociální Poradenství**

(www.nrzp.cz/poradna)

Appendix 4 List of Organizations

List of organizations the preschool collaborates with:

- **Kolpingův Dům Azylový Dům pro Matky s Děťmi**

(www.koplingpraha.cz)

The mission of this organization is to provide support and assistance to socially disadvantaged families, especially young lone mothers with young children. The main objective of the organization is a functional family fully integrated into normal social environment.

- **Centrum Filipovka Osobní Asistence**

(www.honomlynska.cz)

The main mission is intense work on changing the attitude of the state and the society towards children with disabilities and to systematically defend their equal rights, including rights to the natural integration into society.

- **Odborné Sociální Poradenství**

(www.nrzp.cz/poradna)

The mission of the counseling center for people with disabilities through professional social counseling is to achieve increased self-sufficiency of persons with disabilities in their integration into society. The aim of counseling is to provide advice, information, assistance and support to people with disabilities who find themselves in difficult life situations and unable to address this situation themselves or with the help of the surrounding area.

Appendix 5 Interview Guide for Semi-structured Individual Interviews

The semi-structured interview guide/questions;

- Can you please describe your main job responsibilities?
- What do you think what kind of professional support children with SEN usually need?
- While working with children with SEN do you need any other professional's involvement?
- Who are you usually collaborating with?
- Do you work with external organizations?
- What do you think about collaborative work?
- What are the challenges and benefits of working with other professionals?
- Is there anything else you want to say on this topic?

Appendix 6 Interview Guide for Focus Groups

Interview guide/questions used for focus group discussions to find out about the practices of inter-professional collaborations to support children with SEN in preschool;

- What kind of professional support do children with special needs receive in you preschool?
- What can you tell about inter-professional collaborations in your preschool to support children with SEN?
- How do you collaborate with other professionals concerning the children with SEN in your groups?
- What can you tell about the benefits and challenges of inter-professional collaborations, can you bring examples?
- What can you tell about the challenges of working with children with SEN?