AUTONOMY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD:
A CASE STUDY FROM AN INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING SCHOOL

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'We're born curious. We need that curiosity in order to survive, in order to make meaning. People are natural inquirers and inquiry learning in the classroom builds on that. '

Kath Murdoch (2015)[1]

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[1] Taken from Murdoch, K. (2015). *What is inquiry learning C hires*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sFBadv04eY

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Abstract

Many authors have supported autonomy in education. However, few studies about this are done in early childhood and most of them refer to autonomy as a free play or free choice. This research is a case study that aims to analyse Helsinki International School, where autonomy is highly supported, in order to know how teachers can enhance autonomy in class. The analysis will take into account educational strategies, teacher-child interaction and classroom structure and planning, what will be analysed through an observation chard and a daily journal. The reality from the class will be contrasted with teacher's ideas and opinions from the school, which will be obtained through interviews.

Key words: Autonomy, early childhood, inquiry approach.

Resum

Diversos autors han parlat de fomentar l'autonomia en l'educació. Tot i així, hi ha pocs estudis sobre aquest tema realitzats a educació infantil i, la major part d'aquests, parlen d'autonomia com a joc lliure o lliure elecció. Aquesta recerca és un estudi de cas que té l'objectiu d'analitzar l'Escola Internacional de Hèlsinki, la qual dóna gran suport a l'autonomia, per tal de saber com els mestres poden augmentar-la a la classe. L'anàlisi tindrà en compte les estratègies educatives, les interaccions entre mestre i alumne, l'estructura de la classe i la seva preparació. Tot això serà analitzat a partir d'una taula d'observació i un diari de camp. La realitat de la classe serà contrastada amb les idees i opinions de les mestres de l'escola, obtingudes a partir d'entrevistes.

Paraules clau: Autonomia, educació infantil, *inquiry approach*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is based on different education philosophies, approaches and values. Some of the leading philosophies appeared at the end of the 20th century with the studies of physiologists as Piaget and Vygotsky. They both supported the idea of children as active learners, although they had different ideas about how the adults should help children's learning. Piaget focuses on the child's active exploration and movement in rich-environments in order to learn. He states that children should explore freely, observe, record and plan opportunities; seeing environment as a priority for learning. Vygotsky focuses on the learning as a process where children should be helped for adults (teachers and parents) to move to next stage. So, for him, the role of the adult is really important and children's learning depends slightly on it. Years later, Freinet described school as a place where children could design their own work and so, they learn problem solving by overcoming their own weaknesses. The role of the teacher, according to Freinet, is helping children achieve a positive attitude toward learning and organizing situations where children can experiment. Montessori also talked about children's autonomy. Her approach supports children's autonomy by proving them with specific materials to work on their needs. Montesori, as well as Freinet and Piaget, supports hands-on activities. However, she uses a specific process to use the materials, and so, the hands-on activities are directed by different steps. Other authors, such as Bruner and Gardner argued that the focus of learning is to make connections between learner's existing knowledge and new knowledge.

Considering this vast range of theories and philosophies is not surprising that we can find different pedagogic practices in different educational sectors, as each practice will be influenced by different theories. However, what all of them agree is what Murdoch expresses in the frontal quote: all children are born curious and so they are willing to learn.

After studying and getting information about educational approaches, one concept aroused my curiosity: autonomy in the classroom. Eventually, I found

out Inquiry approach, which understands learning as a continuous exploration. Inquiry approach, also called Inquiry based learning (from now on IBL), is a constructivist approach that believe in children as active and lifelong learners. It encourages children to take an active role and also, gradually be more autonomous in their knowledge acquisition. This made IBL a perfect approach to focus on how to apply autonomy in early childhood classrooms.

There is little research about IBL and even less about IBL in early childhood education. This was one of the reasons why I wanted to go deeper and learn more about it. With this research I would like to broaden the knowledge about this topic for future people who is interested in it or, at least. Most of the studies focused in IBL are related to a science field, because this structure follows structure similar to the methodology used in science researches. So I found interesting to carry out a research about IBL without applying it to science, because most of the research that is done is related to this field. This, can help to have another perspective about IBL in early years, it can make people realize that it is an interesting approach to work on different topics, not only on scientific ones.

As far as I am concerned, novice teachers are willing to organize motivating classes but many times they find it difficult to start planning them. After starting my placement in the International School of Helsinki, I found out that IBL is a very interesting approach because through this methodology, teachers can consider children's interests and so, they can plan motivating sessions.

International School of Helsinki is one of the few schools that apply inquiry learning from kindergarten to upper school. As I have done my internship in this school, I took advantage of this opportunity and I decided to frame my final degree thesis on autonomy as a tool for learning in early childhood.

The main aim of this project is to deeper my knowledge on IBL approach, as well as to learn different methodological strategies to plan sessions, which enhance autonomy and consider children's interests.

1.1. Objectives

The current study focuses on how inquiry can be applied with young learners, specifically, on how can teachers use autonomy-supportive educational practises in early childhood education classrooms. Therefore, several objectives are posed:

a) General objectives:
- Understand how the Inquiry based approach is applied in early childhood education.

b) Specific objective:
- Finding out what kind of strategies are useful to plan autonomy-supportive practises inside IBL approach in early childhood education.
- Learn how the teacher interact to foster children's autonomy.
- Learn how to plan language classes bearing in mind autonomy.

The purpose of the general objectives is to acquire a global comprehension of Inquiry approach and to understand what kind of strategies can I use as a future teacher to plan autonomy-supportive practises. Furthermore, I would like to be able to plan and carry out activities which enhance pupil's autonomy, but taking into account the directed instruction and support that is needed to organize these type of sessions.

1.2. Methodology

The methodology used in this research will consist on a case study based on direct observations done during a period of 3 months in the International School of Helsinki, a daily field journal, three interviews to teachers of the same school and an analysis of the school documents. For this project, a case study was chosen because the aim of the research is to explore how autonomy is introduced in a specific context: the International School of Helsinki, which follows an IBL approach shared with other International

Baccalaureate[2] schools in the world. As it is said in the introduction, International School of Helsinki is one of the few schools with IBL in early childhood. To contextualize the school and understand its organization I will analyse the school documents. Moreover, I will write a daily field journal to describe the context and contrast the curriculum and other documents with daily reality.

The case study will count, on the one hand, on the observations that will be taken down daily in a journal to capture the general context and organization of the school, the classes, as well as the role of the teachers. I will also do more guided observations focusing only in Language Arts periods, as it is in one of the moments where children have more autonomy.

My observations will consider autonomy in terms of choosing activities, topic of the tasks, group members and evaluation procedure. Also, I will take into account if children's opinions and concerns are important into the planning. Finally, teacher's explanations or justifications about the activities that are carried will be also taken in mind.

There will also be an analysis of the school PYP curriculum, as it is the one used in early years. This analysis will help me to understand the context of the school, the teacher's role, the subject organization and methodologies used. Specifically, I will focus on the parts that they explain the inquiry based and the curriculum structure, and I will try to take the information related to autonomy. Once I understand properly the context, I will be able to do a proper-guided observation with specific questions about autonomy and inquiry-based.

On the other hand, I will also realize interviews to three different teachers.

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[2] International Baccalaureatee is an organization founded in 1968, which offers non-profit educational programmes of international education around the world. These schools offer an inquiry approach curriculum.

Two of the teachers are the ones that I have worked with during my internship, the teachers from Grade 1. They are the teachers from the classes I have done the observations. One of them has been working in the International School of Helsinki for more than 10 years and she has long experience inside the IBL approach. The other Grade 1 teacher started working with IBL 3 years ago. Their interviews will give me the opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences and how these experiences can change their classroom organization. Finally, I will interview the coordinator of the Lower School of International School of Helsinki. She has been working for many years with early childhood education and she knows a lot of strategies to work in an IBL approach with young learners. I find really interesting to interview her because she can provide me with a lot of ideas to plan autonomy-supportive sessions.

The three interviews want to determine teacher's perceptions and opinion about autonomy-based practises inside an IBL approach, in order to be able to discuss the importance of them in early years classes.

The project is divided into two different parts, a theoretical one and a case study based on International School of Helsinki. The theoretical one is composed by a theoretical framework whose aim is to present an accurate idea of IBL, including a description of its characteristics and structure, integrated curriculum and the role of teachers in an early years classroom. This is followed for a last part point of the theoretical framework which deals with the role of autonomy in early childhood and strategies to enhance autonomy-supportive practices. The case study counts on a description and discussion about the structure of 'Language Arts' classes, in terms of autonomy-supportive practices and directed learning, from International School of Helsinki. The description will be focused on autonomy-supportive elements observed in Grade 1 classrooms and the discussion will compare them with the directed instruction from the teachers in the same sessions. Moreover, with the intention to offer a complete study, I have interviewed two teachers from the school to find out about their perceptions about autonomy in early childhood.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Inquiry approach in early childhood education

Many educators agree that learning should be an active process, as it occurs optimally when there is an intrinsic motivation on the learner's part to engage and assimilate information (deCharms, 1976; Thomas, 1980). In the last twenty years, we have seen a renewed interest in the use of both inquiry approach and integrated curriculum to plan and implement engaging classes for students (Murdoch, 2006). Currently, a variety of methods of directing or motivating learning exist that vary considerably in the learner's internal motivation or autonomy (Ryan, Conneli & Deci, 1985). One of these approaches *is inquiry-based learning (IBL)*, also called inquiry approach. It is a constructivist, student-centred pedagogy and curriculum approach based on authentic and holistic learning (Learning, 2004; Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2007). IBL provides learners with opportunities to construct knowledge by acquiring information from outside the school, and developing a personal understanding of it through exploration, observation, investigation and reflection of their learning environments (Feletti, 1993). Keselman (2003) defines it as an educational strategy in which students follow methods and practices similar to those of professional scientists in order to construct knowledge. While doing active investigation, students are encouraged to unify acquaintance to move from the acquisition of facts to the development of broader concepts and generalisations. Inquiry-based learning encourages students to ask questions and pursue investigations to get the knowledge related to their needs and interests. In the words of Hamston & Murdoch: "It opens up channels of investigation which subject-specific curriculum may otherwise close and emphasises the learning of fundamental principles and concepts – the big 'ideas' " (1996, cited in Murdoch, 2013, p.5).

The main goal of inquiry approach is involving students in learning to make them understand and make meaning through hands-on experiences, research and communication. As de Jong & van Joolingen state: "Inquiry-based learning emphasizes active participation and learner's responsibility for discovering knowledge" (1998, p.183). It is through experience, open–ended

questions and active participation that children are engaged in their own learning. Harste (2001, p.1) argues that:

Education as inquiry provides an opportunity for learners to explore collaboratively topics of personal and social interest using the perspectives offered by others as well as by various knowledge domains (psychology, anthropology, economics, etc.) and various sign systems (art, music, language, mathematics) for the purposes of producing a more equitable, just and thoughtful world.

Inquiry-based learning reflects the belief that active involvement on the part of students in constructing their knowledge is essential to effective teaching and learning. Caine and Caine (1990) argue that as the brain seeks pattern, meaning and connectedness, methods that move from rote memorisation to meaning-centred learning are ultimately much more successful.

Inquiry model of planning is organized into inquiry phases, it starts from student's prior knowledge and experience and moves through a research process where that knowledge is extended, challenged and refined. During this process, students and teachers set a range of questions, resources and aims that will help to structure the course of learning. Different authors have divided the inquiry learning into different phases, for example Gouley (2008), named the set of parts as '*Inquiry circle'.* Other authors such as Kuhithau, Maniotes, & Caspari (2012) named the process as 'Guided inquiry design'. You can see the different authors and suggested parts in the following table:

Table 2.1 Information seeking, inquiry, and research process models

Big6 (Eisenberg & Berkowitz, 2012)	Information search process (Kuhlthau et al., 2007)	Guided inquiry design (Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2012)	The information process (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2007)	Inquiry circle (Gourley, 2008)	The inquiry process (Brunner, nd)	Research skill development framework (Willison & O'Regan, 2007b)
Define task	Initiate select	Open Immerse	Defining	Tuning in	Pose real questions	Embark and clarify
Search	Explore	Explore	Locating	Finding out	Find resources	Find and generate
Locate	Formulate	Identify	Selecting	Sorting out		Evaluate and reflect
	Collect	Gather				Organize & manage
Use	Present	Create	Organizing	Going further	Interpret information	Analyze & synthesize
Synthesize		Share	Presenting	Making conclusions		
Evaluate	Assess	Evaluate	Assessing	Taking action	Report findings	Communicate and apply

Table 1. Phases of IBL[3]

To talk about the different phases and sub-phases of the inquiry learning, we will use the classification from Pedastre, Mäeots, Siiman, de Jong, van Riesen, Kamp, Manoli, Zacharia & Tsuorlidaki (2015), who compared different inquiry phases and did a synthesis with the concepts that were used for most authors. According to them, the general phases can be named: Orientation, Conceptualization, Investigation, Conclusion and Discussion. However, many of them are divided into two sub-phases to concrete the path that should be followed.

1. *Orientation* focuses on stimulating curiosity in relation to a topic and addressing a learning challenge.
2. *Conceptualization* is a process of understanding the theoretical concepts related to the topic. It is divided into two sub-phases: Questioning and Hypothesis generation. Firstly, children should generate research questions and afterwards, create hypotheses regarding the problem. Both of the sub-phases are based on theoretical justification.
3. *Investigation* is the phase where students explore, experiment, collect and analyse data based on hands-on activities and explorations. The sub-phases are: Exploration, Experimentation and Data Interpretation.

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[3] Taken from Wichmann, A., & Leutner, D. (2009). *Inquiry Learning Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie* (Vol. 23). Elsevier Ltd.

The difference between the first two is that Exploration is a process of systematic and planned data generation and Experimentation consists of designing and conducting an experiment to test the hypothesis.

4. *Conclusion* is the process of comparing inferences resulting from data collected.

5. *Discussion* is the last phase of the process and it is where students communicate and present to others all the findings of the topic. There are two sub-phases in this final stage: Communication and Reflection. While Communication focuses on presenting outcomes and collecting feedback, Reflection enables teachers and students to control the whole learning process through evaluating, discussing and describing the inquiry cycle.

As a result of having this structure, inquiry- based learning is often seen as an approach to solving problems, as children need to use several problem-solving skills (Pedaste & Sarapuu, 2006). In this process, students often carry out a self-directed, partly inductive and partly deductive learning process by doing experiments and investigations about a topic (Wilhelm & Beishuizen, 2003). Therefore, the IBL curriculum is not subject-centred, as all the subjects should be connected during the process. The usual curriculum used by schools with Inquiry approach is interdisciplinary, also called integrated curriculum. This is the reason why the next part will deal with integrated curriculum.

2.2. Integrated curriculum

A common concern among educators is how to teach with an inquiry approach when there are so many curriculum aims to address and work on (Natural Curiosity, 2011). It is essential for teachers to have a deep knowledge and understanding of the essential expectations of the curriculum, only this will allow them to set the course to curriculum goals. As teachers have more freedom to plan in the integrated curriculum, sometimes can be harder to give the same importance to all the skills and accomplish the aims of every subject without subject-based programmes. This is why a profound knowledge of the curriculum is needed. Moreover, because children's ideas

play such an important role throughout the inquiry process, it will be natural for students to see the need to gain access to their ideas and to express them in a variety of ways. In this way, IBL gives reason to value, use and develop different skills in a meaningful context for the students, as the skills will be related to their ideas (Ministry of Education of Ontario, 2013). Skills such as reading and writing are used in most of the disciplines, as they help children to get and communicate knowledge. In an integrated curriculum these skills will not be only practised in language subjects, but they will be taken into account in all the curricular disciplines.

In words of Murdoch: "The essence of this approach is the relationship between those learning areas concerned with 'the world around us' (science, technology, health, and environmental and social education) and those areas *through* which we explore and come to understand the world (language, mathematics, art, drama, music and aspects of technology). Units of work are planned around topics of substance (drawn from science, SOSE., technology and health) and, as students investigate these topics, they develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of their world" (2013, p. 2).

While traditional curriculum is objective-driven, discipline-based (divided into subjects) and teacher-controlled; IBL can be defined as an approach which uses integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum. In other words, the disciplines are connected through student exploration. In IBL, the emphasis of the curriculum would be on the child's questions and interests rather than on content determined by syllabus, taking advantage of the links between allied fields of knowledge. Just as Grennon, J. and Grennon, M. say: "Real inquiry is inherently interdisciplinary and, interdisciplinary problems are inherently broad and open ended. Such problems rarely have one easily accessible right answer" (2001, p. 86). In inquiry design, units of study should bring together the full range of disciplines in the school's curriculum.

The main aim of the curriculum integration is to bring meaning to the curriculum; this is, making the curriculum more connected to what is happening in the real world. The only way to create a meaningful curriculum

to learners is that they can see the links between what they are learning in school and the skills, knowledge and information that they use in real life situations. Since in real life content is not segregated, 'integrationists' support curriculums where information is a whole body of related information.

Working with most of these integrative learning curriculums can also provide opportunities to work on thinking skills. Moreover, integrative theme fosters the level of abstraction in student's thinking (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1989). However, to produce such benefits, the integrative approach has to engage students in thinking and encourage them to use the integrative lens by themselves. If they only listen other's reflexions and contrasts, it will not be enough.

There is still little consensus on the definition of integrated curriculum. Some authors such as Dewey (1910), Kilpatrick (1918), Squires (1972), Vars (1969,1987) and Beane (1993) agreed that integrated curriculum could be defined considering the following aspects:

- The curriculum is related to students' interests and so, students are engaged in the learning process.
- Knowledge is not divided into bits or by disciplines.
- Teachers and students work co-operatively to ensure learning.
- Knowledge is not static, during the process it changes and develops. Individuals learn how to think and question critically.

Depending on how previous aspects are applied, there are different types of integrated curriculum. For example, one school can apply the integrated curriculum bringing together two disciplines of the curriculum, fostering comprehensive epistemological experience. Another possibility could be applying interdisciplinary approach by working on problems emerging from children's interests and working the content through children's questions and interests. Some authors have talked about integrated curriculum and they have distinguished between different types of integrated curriculum.

Heidi Hayes Jacobs (1989) defined five different options for an integrated curriculum. The different options are organized depending on the curriculum planning and their 'degrees' of integration; starting from disciplined-based to complete programme integration.

- *Parallel disciplines:* the disciplines remain separately, but teachers arrange the topics so that related information is taught at the same time.

- *Multidisciplinary:* related disciplines are 'partnered' for analysis and study. This model supports the creation of 'new' courses, which will be placed between two existing disciplines.

- *Integrated day:* a topic-based full-day programme focusing on student interests and needs. It is based upon the British Infant School movement of the 1960s, when it was promoted as an alternative curriculum in early childhood programmes.

- *Complete integration:* students determine their curriculum out of their interests needs and experiences. It will depend on student's priorities and goals.

Few years after Jacobs, In *The Mindful School: How to Integrate the Curriculum* (1991a), Robin Forgarty also defined different models of integrated curriculum; some of them could be related and compared with Jacobs' ones. The models are organized depending on the curriculum planning; they start from the discipline-based curriculum to a completely networked curriculum.

- *Connected:* ideas from different content areas are related and there are connections between prior knowledge and knowledge yet to be learned.

- *Nested:* the emphasis is on learning skills and organizational skills, which will be the key to understand the content of the discipline. In this model, the content area remains as the major focus of the lesson, but the skills of thinking and organizing ideas are highlighted. For instance, in a mathematics lesson, a thinking skill like classifying could be related to specific knowledge of geometric shapes. By developing classification and organizational skills, information is stored and can be used in further reference.

- *Sequenced:* topics within a subject area are rearranged to coincide with those of another one. The content from one subject can help students understanding better the content of the other one. This model is comparable to the one that Hayes named *Parallel disciplines.*

- *Shared:* different disciplines are 'partnered' and units are planned to focus on a specific topic. For example, English teacher and History teacher plan a unit about the Ancient Greece. Therefore, History classes will focus in Greek history and Language teacher will select specific literature related to Ancient Greece (drama, theatre, Greek authors…). Heidi Hayes refers to a similar model with the name *Multidisciplinary.*

- *Webbed:* curriculum is based on themes. Disciplines use the topics to teach specific concepts and ideas within the disciplines. For instance, teachers may select ethics as a topic. Afterwards, each teacher will address ethics as it is appropriate to the subject matter. Subjects remain intact, the content of the disciplines is not changed, but the teachers address the theme as they individually work with the students on the content to be learned.

- *Threaded:* a 'meta-curriculum' is designed around specific social, study and thinking skills. The content becomes the vehicle to work on these skills. Therefore, the content is preserved and the emphasis is on the process of learning.

- *Integrated:* teams of teachers from all disciplines work together to find ideas around which they can plan units for the common teaching time. In this model, teachers work together and share responsibilities.

- *Immersed:* students immerse in a field of study and go through the content of different areas by their own. Thus integration and knowledge learning becomes the responsibility of the student.

Some of the models from Jacobs and Fogarty have the same aim and structure. However, Jacobs presents the models in a more child-centred approach, as the interest of the children is always present. Fogarty mentions more teachers and their decisions than students and their interests and responsibility to choose.

Contrarily of all these authors presented above, Bruner (1975) states that the structure of the disciplines is necessary for knowledge acquisition. Disciplines enable schools to investigate with systematic attention to related concepts; however, it is also necessary to provide learning experiences which demonstrate the relationship of the disciplines. So, the intention is not to replace the discipline-based curriculum, but to alternate both, discipline-based and interdisciplinary activities, as they are mutually supportive.

The classifications and researches from these authors will be taken as a frame of reference to understand the case study that will be carried out. The different curriculum models will help me classifying and describing the curriculum I will observe in Grade 1 in the International School of Helsinki.

With regard to early childhood curriculum, there is not a unique design but there are different organizational arrangements. Some of the curriculums are organized in areas of knowledge; within we can find objectives and skills from different disciplines (i.e. Catalan pre-primary curriculum). Others are divided into subjects and the aims and skills that need to be developed are inside each of them (i.e. Finnish pre-primary curriculum). However, Finnish National Core of Education, who decides and writes the curriculum, supports the

interdisciplinary curriculum and the integration and dialogue between subjects. From 2016 it is obligatory to connect subjects, working in a curricular integrative way, at least once a year.

When selecting an option for curriculum there are some considerations that should be done. First of all, the flexibility of schedule to be able to work together with other teachers and change timetable, depending on the needs and interests. Secondly, the curriculum requirements, in other words, how the subjects are presented and the flexibility in the school philosophy. Finally, the support of the staff should be also considered. Kysilka states: "there is no one best organizational structure for curriculum integration. The success of any curriculum lies within the teacher's acceptance of the particular curriculum (1898, p.206)". There are teachers who feel comfortable working in an integrated curriculum, others may find this approach too challenging and they do not want to move away from the 'safety' of the disciplinary approach.

This section has addressed the definition of integrated curriculum and its varieties. The next part will deal with autonomy-supportive practices and different teacher strategies that will determine student's autonomy in learning.

2.3. Autonomy-supportive classes: Learners as Inquirers

Autonomy in the educational context can be defined as the capacity to hold the responsibility and take charge of all the aspects of one's own learning (Yu Meigen, 2016).

Learning itself has an autonomous nature, as it is an active, self-constructed and intentional process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989; Lamber & McCombs, 1998; Sinatra, 2000). Maybe is for this reason that some authors such as Kapasi and Gleave (2009) state: "Children should be relatively free from adult intrusion and direction, enabling them to exercise agency, self-regulation, ownership, and control, and to direct their own learning" (sited in Wood, 2014, p.4). However, autonomy and free-choices cannot always be founded in class even if teachers control them within educational settings.

Autonomy and initiative motivate students' interest of connections among ideas and concepts. Students who take responsibility of their own learning by framing questions and becoming problem solvers are led by their own ideas and the ideas of others. These students claim for autonomy to explore issues and encounter new information (Grennon, J. & Grennon M., 2001). IBL enables students to be autonomous, always with teacher's guiding. This approach assists students to ask questions and pursue investigations related to their interests and needs. Nevertheless, teacher has to determine learning objectives and monitor individual progress to facilitate learning. Many teachers design tasks with structures and routines that encourage students to self-manage and work independently, allowing more opportunities for small group or individual teacher-student interaction (Murdoch & Wilson, 2006).

Tuzo (2007) argues that teacher control and children's autonomy can be balanced and can be developed in continually interactive ways. Supporting the same idea, Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R & Bell, D. research suggest that the most effective settings for learning provide balanced opportunities for children to benefit from teacher initiated activities and freely chosen yet potentially instructive activities (2002).

This balance can be achieved with teacher's organization for assignments. Because depending on the way teacher frame a discipline, students may be autonomous (Grennon, J. & Grennon, M, 2001). There are some leadership styles and several characteristics of classroom contexts which enhance autonomy, motivation and production. Teachers, as it is said previously, have an essential role on it. A clear example of it is what Reeve, Bolt & Cai (1999) found out in their study. They discovered that teachers who listened to students and allowed them to manipulate materials and change ideas were teachers with better autonomy-supportive educational practices. This fact can be related and compared to IBL approach, as it is through children's questions and research that pupil's learn and increase gradually their autonomy of learning.

In regard to the teacher autonomy-supportive behaviours, Astor, Kaplan and Roth (2002) fount that autonomy can be distinguished depending on different features:

- Offering choice
- Offering explanations of relevance
- Offering opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the efficacy of the learning tasks.

These features show that not only free-choice supports autonomy, but also good explanations about the topic that is being taught and opportunities for students to express their opinions. This information links with the characteristics that many researchers agreed to describe autonomy support. Skinner & Belmont (1993) identify autonomy support as the provision of freedom and decision making, as well as clarifying the relevance of the learning. Deci, Vellerand, Pelleiter & Ryan (1991) described as a positive feedback about children's competences. Finally, Reeve et al. (1999) added justification as a value of learning in a non forced environment.

In 2004, Stefanou, C., Perencevich, K., DiCintio, M. & Turner, J. defined three different features of autonomy support depending on where de focus of autonomy was.

- *Organizational autonomy support* is related to learning environment. Students have the opportunity to choose over environmental procedures, such as choose groups members, create classroom rules or choose evaluation procedure.

- *Procedural autonomy* is related to form and can include the opportunity for students to present ideas and discuss their aims, choose materials or choose the way they want to carry out the learning.

- *Cognitive autonomy* encourages students to make decisions about their own learning. It gives them the opportunity to justify their ideas and strategies, generate their own solutions to problems and even

evaluate their own ideas. The main characteristic is students as problem solvers.

In their study Stefanou et al. found out that autonomy support exists not only through offering students choices and opportunities for decision making, but also as supporting student independence in thinking or allowing children choice in how to think. Furthermore, they suggest that organizational and procedural autonomy support can be superficial engaging, while cognitive autonomy may be more long-lasting effects on engagement and motivation.

All of these components described above will be taken into account in the case study in order to have a more critical view to describe the classroom practices. These features will help to realize if the observed practices are autonomy-supportive. With the analysis of the observation I would be able to find out what kind of strategies used in an IBL context are useful to plan autonomy-supportive classes. Furthermore, I will have the opportunity to find out what kind of teacher-child interaction is used by the teachers form early years classes in the International School of Helsinki to foster children's autonomy. Their interactions will be ideas for my future teaching.

This section gave a closer look to autonomy and how teacher's can plan autonomy-supportive classes. It can be observed that teachers have an essential role in children's autonomy and this is why the next section will deal with the role of the teacher in class. Because it depends on teachers' interactions with the students and the activities they plan, among others, that children will be more autonomous or dependent on teacher's guidance.

2.4. Teacher's role

Throughout the last 50 years, teacher's role has developed in many ways. Some of the authors who contribute to the evolution of educational approach are Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey, who researched about the process of learning. Before their studies, teachers were seen as knowledge bearers. So, instruction was based in listening the teachers' speech and memorizing their ideas. After the researches of these authors and the reflection of authors such

as Loris Malaguzzi, teacher became a collaborator and co-learner. Therefore, instruction travels in a two-way direction through the collaboration between children and adults.

IBL understanding of teacher is similar to Malaguzzi's essential ideas; most of the adjectives used to define teacher's role are shared in both approaches. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of Reggio Emilia education, goes through the studies of the main authors in education (i.e. Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey) to explain and built the image and role of learner and teacher. Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education, an approach from the Northern Italy, is known as one of the most innovative, high-quality infant-toddler and pre-primary systems in the world. According to Reggio's educational approach, teacher is seen as collaborator and co-learner, as they need to create reciprocal exchanges throughout the ones the knowledge will be acquired, valued and fostered. Teachers should not control children's learning, but rather, demonstrate respect for the child's rights through mutual participation. IBL approach encourages teachers in early childhood to support students' interests, respond to spontaneous events and support their development of skills in all the areas of development. Thus, will help students building up their self-esteem and confidence, which is really important to keep pupils motivation for learning high.

Teacher is also seen as a guide and facilitator in Reggio Emilia approach and also in IBL. According to Carolyn Edwards (1993), the teacher's role "centres on provoking occasions of discovery through a kind of alert, inspired facilitation and stimulation of children's dialogue, co-action and co-construction of knowledge" (p.154). Teachers have an active role in children's learning, as they ought to provide children with necessary tools and provocations to let children achieve their personal goals. With students of early years, teacher is a thoughtful participant in the continuous investigation of the students. Teachers of young students need to be mindful of the role o the learning environment when presenting provocation to the students, to stimulate curiosity and purposeful play.

The role as a teacher as a guide and facilitator is consistent with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development[4] (ZPD) within adult assist children in their learning. By adult's help, children can achieve a goal that without the help, he cannot achieve yet. Teachers need to make sure that students move from their current level of understanding to a deeper one. To do so, teachers must be familiar with child development and learning, be aware of the cultural and social context in which the student lives and learns and also, be conscious of students' interests. Furthermore, teachers need to provide a secure environment in which students are valued and respected, because only if pupils feel comfortable, they will take responsibility for their own learning.

Finally, teachers need to be researchers and reflective practitioners according to Reggio Emilia, which could be compared to IBL definition of teachers as life learners. Documentation through pictures and short texts and comments is a substantial tool to reflect on teacher's own practices and improve them regularly. Besides, this documentation will be a good tool to establish a good relationship with families and work in the same direction, which is essential to get a good communication between the school and the outside world.

The challenge for educators is knowing when and how to introduce students to new ideas that will help them to move forward in their inquiry. To help with it, they should develop ways to assess children's prior knowledge and skills in order to plan the inquiry unit. Good assessment practice requires that teachers ensure a continuous and varied assessment tasks, liked to the central idea of the interdisciplinary unit of inquiry and also to any subject of the outside program.

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[4] Lev Vygotsky (1893-1934) developed the concept of ZPD to describe the area of learning where the student needs the adult or peer assistance to learn something or develop a higher skill. In other words, the ZPD is the difference between what the children can do without help and what they can do with help.

According to Kath Murdoch (2013), when planning an integrated unit it is important that teachers bear in mind the following concepts:

- Select a significant topic and develops understandings (from SOSE, Science, Health and Technology) to drive a unit.
- Use an inquiry framework to select and sequence learning experiences across key learning areas.
- Employ a range of strategies to help learners make connections and develop understandings, skills and values.

Inquiry units are planned taking into account children's interests in order to provide students with motivating learning experiences. As it is said in the first part of the theoretical framework (2.1. Inquiry approach in early childhood), IBL emphasises active learning and learner's responsibility for discovering knowledge. Hence, teachers support students with strategies and interactions which enhance autonomous or self-directed learning. Taking in mind Murdoch planning (2013) should help to guarantee a complete integrated unit in all the learning areas.

This section has address a detailed description of teacher's role. From my point of view, teacher has a big responsibility on children's learning and as a future teacher I want to have a vast knowledge about myself as a teacher and my way of teaching. The different articles that I have read gave me the opportunity to reflect on that and gave me the tools to know myself better. Also, they gave me the tools to be able to plan autonomy-supportive classes and be conscious about what kind of interactions can I use to enhance children's autonomy in class.

I think it is very important for all the teachers to reflect on their own teaching. For me it is the first step to analyse one's own educational practices. Moreover, it will be with this analyses that I will have the opportunity to improve.

3. CASE STUDY

3.1. Context of the study

As I mentioned in the *Introduction* of this project, this study was carried out in the International School of Helsinki, which works with IBL approach. The International School of Helsinki, from now on ISH, is an international school located in the western part of the centre of Helsinki, in an area called Ruoholahti. The school offers education for students from ages 3 to 18; it is divided into three stages: kindergarten, primary school and high school. ISH is one of the 4,000 International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in the world. International Baccalaureate (IB) is an organization founded in 1968, which offers non-profit educational programmes of international education around the world. These schools offer an inquiry approach curriculum.

School population is made up of children from middle and high-standard from different countries around the world. Many of the families travel frequently because of work and so, there is a wide range of nationalities in the school (American, Indian, English, Polish, Russian, Spanish, etc.), in total there are about forty different nationalities. There are also mobile expatriate families and few families who seek for education in English.

It is one of the few private schools in Finland, which is a country where the education is free and funded by public funding. However, in ISH the families need to pay school taxes. Another difference between ISH and regular Finnish schools is that the language of instruction is English, while Finnish is only taught as a foreign language.

ISH was founded in 1963 as a British Preparatory School. In 1976, when the school moved to Töölö (Helsinki) it was renamed as International School of Helsinki. After 6 years, the school expanded to offer grades 7 through 9 as well as kindergarten through grade 6. However it was not until 1992 that the school offered grades 11 and 12. That same year, IB Diploma Programme was introduced. In 1996 the school's facilities were moved to its present site in Ruoholahti (Helsinki) and in the following years ISH was authorized to offer

Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP). In 2005, ISH became Finland's first fully IB accredited school, in other words, it was the only school of Helsinki area that offer the three IB programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students in grades K-5, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students in grades 6-10, and the Diploma Programme for students in grades 11 and 12.

IB programmes follow a student-centred and an inquiry-based educational approach. The main aim is the development of skills, attitudes, confidence and responsibility to enable students to succeed academically and in life. To do so, they work on different units of inquiry that enable children to learn, while they work on their skills and attitudes.

Regarding to the inquiry approach, in ISH, the students from the lower school works through six units of inquiry, that is, through different projects that children carry out during the whole school year. ISH children do not choose the topics of the units, the general topics are already chosen and they repeat every year with a different focus and, sometimes, order. The different units of inquiry are the following:
- Who we are
- How we organize ourselves
- How we express ourselves
- Where we are in place and time
- Sharing the planet
- How the world works

Each unit of inquiry lasts for 6 weeks. However, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten do not follow all the units of inquiry, they only do a few and so, they spend more time in each unit.

To give an example of the focus of the units of inquiry, I will explain the ones from Grade 1. For instance, the question 'How we express ourselves' was focused on different artists and their art techniques. So children researched about different painters such as Dali, Picasso, Kandinsky or Mondrian. After

their research, they tried to use the same art techniques and did their own art pieces.

The next question 'Where we are in place and time' consist on a research about games and toys. The main aim was to see the changes in time, so children learned about the years that toys were released and the materials they were made from.

Since the case study of this research will be settled in an IB school, it should be said that its curriculum is divided quite differently from other regular Finnish schools where the curriculum is divided into subjects. PYP curriculum is an integrated curriculum divided into 3 different parts: the written curriculum, the taught curriculum and the assessed curriculum. The written curriculum explains the essential knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes that children are supposed to learn. The attitudes that PYP curriculum points as essential are appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect and tolerance. And these attitudes are part of an integrated curriculum shared in all the disciplines. Moreover, the written curriculum defines the different subjects and the different units of inquiry that children will work on. The taught curriculum refers to the methodology, as well as suggestions for improving teacher's practices. Finally, the assessed curriculum is where the targeted assessment strategies are explained. The three components are interrelated because the content from a school curriculum should be taught as an interactive process. This is, the even if the curriculum is divided in three parts with different content, it has to be applied as a single one, because all the parts are interacting inside the classroom.

3.1.1. Participants of the study: Grade 1 classes

The current case study is developed in the classes of grade 1 in ISH because it is the one where I have been doing my internship during 15 weeks and so, I was really familiar the context of both grade 1 classes.

I started my internship in the International School of Helsinki in January as an exchange student from Uvic University- UCC. At the beginning everything was new for me, as I was not familiar with inquiry approach and integrated curriculums. It was during this very first moments where I observed that the classes seemed more autonomy-supportive. Furthermore, I found really interesting the flexibility that teachers had in their timetables and units of inquiry. For this reason, I decided to focus my research in autonomy-supportive classes in an inquiry-based context, in order to learn more about the school I was working with. I could say that I did not choose the school, but the school chose me to carry out this research.

I was a supportive teacher in the class and I participated in all the subjects with the different teachers. I felt really comfortable with the teachers and the inquiry approach used in the school and so, I think that I integrated easily. Regarding to grade 1 classes, there are two groups of children aged 6 and 7 years. There are two different classes; grade 1ML which has 15 children and grade 1SL that has 14. There are many nationalities; the larger in number are children from India, followed by Japanese children. Between both groups, there are around 11 nationalities. The majority of the children speak English fluently, except four Japanese children who arrived in the middle of the year and have low English level. They attend English as an additional language twice a week to improve their level of English and help them with their communication.

Another point that should be taken into account is that even if all the children are the same age, they have really different levels of reading, writing and Maths skills. This is, there are children who can read difficult texts and other that struggle in recognizing some of the English sounds and are not able to pronounce a whole sentence properly. The situation is similar in Maths, as some of the children do mental calculations with high numbers, while others still need physical support to count simple calculations. A characteristic of 1ML classroom is that many kids are more active and struggle to keep a long time concentrated and sitting down doing quite work, while 1SL can work for a long time in a quite environment without problems.

Half of the children of grade 1 started new in the school at the beginning of the year, only some of them were doing to the kindergarten in ISH. However, the groups were done at the beginning of grade 1, so the ones who were together in kindergarten were mixed and divided into two different groups. Furthermore, there are two pairs of twins, which are split, so there is one of each in each classroom.

Both classes work together in many occasions and there are subjects where children are divided in 4 groups and both classes are mixed. For instance, during *Jolly phonics* or *guided reading,* two subjects to work on the language skills, children from both classes are mixed and divided into two or three groups.

Each group has a classroom teacher, who accompany the children during the year, and also a support teacher who works with both groups. The supportive teacher is there because there are many children with special needs or that need some extra help. The ones that need more help are a set of twins that have behavioural problems and need special support. However, these twins do not have a diagnosis yet, they are having some tests.

After this contextualisation to ISH, having introduced briefly the context and curriculum and, specifically, grade 1 as a group, I will focus this part to describe deeply the tools that I used to collect the data. So, in the next section I will explain the different data that was collected in both grade 1 classes and which methodology was used to collect it. While I will present the data, more details about the approach used in the school and the level of autonomy-supportive practises will be described.

3.2. Collection of data

The theoretical framework of the project helped me to deepen my knowledge about IBL and autonomy-supportive classes and gave me information enough to develop different tools to analyse my specific context: grade 1 classroom in the International School of Helsinki. It is through the different tools of data

collection that I have been able to achieve the objectives that I establish for these research.

As mentioned in the section *Objectives*, the main aim of my project is to understand how the inquiry based approach is applied in early childhood education in order to find out possible strategies to plan autonomy-supportive practises inside an IBL approach. Also, to learn how teachers should interact and how should they plan the classes to foster children's autonomy.

One of the first tools that I used was a daily journal, where I took down notes of my observations in grade 1 classrooms, the interaction between teachers and children and the activities they carried out. It helped me to comprehend the general context of the school, the type of families that there are, the schedule, the different teacher profiles that are working there, how is the school organized, as well as how the teachers interacted with the students and what kind of activities have they worked with. One of the most important ideas that I found out was that most of the activities were hands-on, so children had an active role and they were the ones to practise and apply the new knowledge in the activities. In Language Arts classes and Maths, two of the subjects where they were in their classrooms, teachers organized different centres and children moved from one to another working, most of the time, independently and autonomously.

Daily journal was also an effective tool to make reflexions about the methodologies that were used. With it, I could achieve my general objective, as I learned some autonomy-supportive strategies to work on Language or even Maths.

In order to understand better the curriculum of ISH, I had to analyse the PYP curriculum, which is the IB curriculum used in the kindergarten and lower school. Trough the analysis I discovered how was the curriculum divided, which are the attitudes and skills that children should develop and learn. Accordingly, I familiarized with the vocabulary used and I could easily see the relationship between the daily observations in class and the curriculum

content. However, to achieve my specific objectives, I had to go deeper on autonomy and analyse the activities in depth. To do so, I designed two different tools: a chard to realize guided observations focusing in Language Arts classes and three interviews to contrast daily practises with teacher's perceptions and opinion about autonomy-based practises.

The observation chart was designed with the objective of doing an analytical description about the role of autonomy in the Language Art classes of grade 1. The instrument was based on Astor, Kaplan and Roth (2012) different features in regard to teacher autonomy-supportive behaviours and also, the ones described by Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio and Turner (2004); both of them detailed in the section *Autonomy-supportive classes* of the theoretical framework.

The chard was divided into different questions, which guided the observation in different ways. Some of them were focused on choices; for example which choices could children make, the others were more focused on teacher's intervention and interaction with the children (see appendix 1 to see the observation chard) and their explanations or justifications about the activities.

The three interviews wanted to determine teacher's perceptions and opinion about autonomy-based practises inside an IBL approach, in order to be able to discuss the importance of them in early years classes. Furthermore, I wanted to compare the daily practises that I had observed and the theory that I have found related to these topics with their thoughts and experiences about IBL and autonomy-supportive classes. For these reason, two of the interviews were done with the Grade 1 classroom teachers, who were the teachers who I observed. I chose them because they have really different profiles relating to IBL and teaching experience. First of all, Mrs. M[5]., who is the classroom teacher from 1ML, is new in IBL and her first experience as a teacher was in ISH. She has been working in ISH for 3 years now, but it is the first year that

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[5] The full names of the teachers are not used in order to preserve their anonymity. Instead, the first letter of teacher's name is used.

she teachers in Grade 1, before she was a classroom teacher in Pre-kindergarten. Secondly, Mrs. S. is the classroom teacher from 1SL and she has plenty of experience in IBL. She started working in ISH more than 20 years ago and she has worked in other IB schools around the world. Furthermore, she has been teaching for a while in a Finnish national school.

Apart from the two interviews to the grade 1 teachers, I also did an interview to the lower school assistant principal and PYP coordinator. Mrs. R. has been working in ISH for more than 15 years. Before being the lower school assistant, she was a classroom teacher in early childhood classes, apart from being the Arts teacher too. Currently, as lower school assistant principal she is the one to help with strategies to lower schoolteachers if they have doubts, problems or they need some tips. She knows a lot about IBL and I interviewed her because she could give me good strategies to plan autonomy-supportive classes.

In this part of the project I have done a deep description of the tools that I used to collect data and the main ideas that appeared. To go in depth to the ideas and compare them with the theoretical authors, I will analyse the data in the next section. This will help me to draw conclusions and conclude the objectives of the project.

3.3. Analysis of data

After the deep explanation about all the data collection tools that have used in this research, this section will analyse and discuss the collected data. To do so, I will use a structure with three main topics closely related to my specific objectives: Teacher-child interaction, Classroom planning and Autonomy-supportive strategies. I chose these three topics because they can include all the important ideas from the interviews and observations. I would say that these are the three major pillars when preparing an autonomy-supportive environment.

The first topic will deal with the interaction between teachers and students, since teacher-child interaction is one of the keys to achieve an autonomy-supportive environment in early childhood. One of the main ideas from two of the interviews was that it is throughout teacher's questions and provocations that children will reflect on their own learning and will request new topics of inquiry.

Secondly, in the second topic, classroom planning, I will discuss the different elements that teachers talked about when I asked how would they prepare autonomy-supportive classes. Two of the main ideas emerged from classroom observations and teacher's interventions are free-choice and individual planning. Therefore, both topics will be considered deeply, contrasting different ideas from the Grade 1 teachers. Furthermore, observations from Language Arts sessions will help me explain and contrast teacher's ideas of classroom planning with the observations of their own practises.

Finally, Autonomy-supportive strategies are meaningful because some of them are helpful when you want an autonomy-supportive environment. This section will deal with some of the strategies that ISH teacher explained to me during the interviews, most of them, simple strategies to take into account inside the class that could help with autonomy. Moreover, I will compare the strategies that they mentioned with the ones that I observed during Language Arts periods.

3.3.1. Teacher-child interaction

After my research, I have seen that it is essential in Early Childhood to build a strong relationship between teachers and children. This relationship will let teachers guide their students in their paths, while they are helping children being increasingly more autonomous. Grade 1 teachers pointed out two key elements for teacher-child relationship in early childhood: questions and documentation. Questions enable teachers guide students but making them more autonomous, letting them make their own decisions and choosing the

path they want to follow. Documentation is essential for early years children to remember the aims and their process, because they struggle to remember the different activities that they have made if they do not have visual elements such as photographs.

The three teachers agree in their interviews that early childhood is by nature autonomous and curious about learning. One of them mentions it and makes a connection with the teacher role. As Mrs. S remark in the interview:

> "I think it is a natural instinct for children to be curious, to be creative, is natural for them to want to know. As a teacher we can squash that curiosity and trying to get that balance between teaching children the skills they need for their everyday life and that balance of following their own inquiry or their own interest is really challenging" (Mrs. S, 2017).

To get this balance teacher's need to take children's ideas and guide them in the good direction to achieve their aims (Mrs, M, 2017). This idea is similar to teacher as a guide and facilitator from Reggio Emilia approach. In order to guide them teachers should interact with their students within questions and provocations. In the interview, Mrs. R. and Mrs. S point out the importance of teacher's questions and provocations to develop and raise learning. Mrs. R states: "teacher's job is to ask questions to positively keep pushing that sparky curiosity" (2017).

Mrs. R adds that not only is important to do the questions to guide their learning, but also to teach children how to ask good questions, in order to give them the tools to be totally autonomous once they are ready.

At variance with the ideas that teachers expressed in the interviews, and after my observations in grade 1 classes, I can tell that there is a lack of questions and provocations in class. According to the observation chards, it can be seen that in Language Arts teachers do not ask children's opinions or concerns about the activities. There are two questions about teacher direct interaction with students: *Does the teacher ask for their opinions? Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express*

concerns regarding the learning tasks? Both of them have a negative answer in all the observation chards, which show a divergence between teacher's ideals and their practises.

In grade 1, the major part or teacher—student interaction is not done by questions, but during the morning meetings. Everyday, during the first minutes of the first period, children sit in circle and the teacher tells them the date and schedule of the day. Afterwards, she asks if someone want to share something. On Mondays, as it is the first time they see each other after the weekend, morning meetings are longer. As I describe in my journal: "Before writing in weekend journals, we have done a long morning meeting in which children could talk about their weekend and different experiences" (Daily journal, 6/1/17). After the morning meeting, teacher had an idea of children's weekends and she could help them with questions if they had trouble writing.

Another issue that the three teachers pointed out was the importance of a phase of pre-teaching where the new concepts are explained to the kids. We can see that Mrs. S talks about the balance between this teaching or *pre-teaching* and the autonomy of children. Once the concepts are explained, children can explore and experiment freely and it will be during that time that they will be autonomous and will decide how they want to use their learning and where do they want to go. In Mrs. R's words:

> "In Language Arts in early childhood you start building up their knowledge, so they do need the teaching with phonics, they do need to be taught sentence structure, they need to be taught spelling, but how they apply it? That is autonomous. I.e. how they choose to write a story, how they choose to write instructions, how they apply everything." (2017).

Respectively, Astor, Kaplan and Roth (2002) autonomy-supportive features suggest that not only free-choice supports autonomy, but also

good explanations about the topic that is being taught. So, they agree that explanations are also when supporting autonomy.

Another important point is the self-reflection and capacity of thinking about their own aims, what is strongly related to *Procedural* autonomy (Steafanou, C, Perencevich, K. DiCintio, M. & Turner, J., 2004). Teacher's questions and interactions should make children think on their own abilities and development. Children need to have control over what they do in order to be autonomous. However, Mrs. R says: "Kids in the young age do not remember it[6], but if you have documentation you can actually show them and they can actually remember. (Mrs.R, 2017)." Documentation is a really important issue in early childhood that was not considered for any of the authors that I have read. It is important in order to facilitate the self-reflection and help the children talk about their own learning. If they have some visual items to help them, it is easier for teacher to ask for connections (i.e. How did that help you going to the next step?). Mrs. M. supports this idea as a difficulty in IBL. She indicate that documentation is needed to know the stage of the kids and to be able as a teacher to ask questions and dig deeper, because that is what Inquiry is all about. This idea gives connections to the role of teacher as observer, because the observations will be essential to know what kind of questions are needed and when it is the best moment to ask them.

ISH teachers' idea about self-reflection can be also related to Kapasi and Gleave (2009) idea of children being relatively free from adult direction, enabling them to self-regulate and control their own learning. But in early childhood it is not possible for the children to control their learning as an individual process, but they need the guidance and interaction from the teacher.

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[6] It refers to the learning journey.

3.3.2. Classroom planning

With my analysis of IB curriculum I have noticed that it is really flexible and I also have seen that teachers have more autonomy than in any other type of schools in terms of classroom and curriculum planning. This is, apart from the content that they need to work on and the general topics for the units of inquiry, teachers can choose how do they want to work in their own classroom and when they want to teach each unit. I also have noticed different teaching styles and I think this is due to the autonomy that they have; they teach in their own way. For instance, Mrs. S has a more flexible way of working and Mrs. M. needs more control about what she is doing and so, she needs a more defined classroom planning.

The three teachers said in their interviews that their aim is to make learning interesting and funny for children. Mrs. S suggests: "It cannot be only a fun activity; behind the fun activities there has to be the foundation of a learning skill or their thinking about something. It is not just fun" (2017), what means that a really good planning has to be done before. During the planning teachers should think about many things, such as learning styles, autonomy, special needs or special support, timing, among others. However, I will focus on two of the main elements suggested by the teachers while talking about autonomy-supportive classes: free-choice and individual planning.

Free choice is really used in early childhood education, however, it is usually used to compare or replace autonomy. In the course of this project I have seen that decision-making has an essential role in autonomy-supportive environment, but choice is not always free.

In Grade 1, children from both classes could make decisions by themselves in many of the activities. However, the type of choices was different. In 1ML, as we can see in the observation chards, some Language Arts classes were planned as different centres and children had different activities and they could choose which one they wanted to do. For example, in the Observation chard 1 from 1/3/17 the options were:

- Working on the imaginative writing story if they have not finished. This centre counted with the help of one teacher.
- Playing with cards where there is a sequenced story and they need to put it in order.
- Using a material called *Silly sentences chard* where children could make different combinations and write sentences down.

During this class period, children could decide what activity they wanted to do, change when they wanted and if they were tired they could do *Quiet reading*[7]. Moreover, while children were working on one of these activities, the classroom teacher called them individually to do a reading assessment with her.

Even if children were working individually, I witnessed that some of them were playing with the material, but not using it in a proper way to practise the language skills that the teacher wanted them to practise. Maybe this is the reason why Mrs. S says: "In the ideal world you would have centres, peer work" (2017) when talking about classroom planning for Language Arts subject.

In her interview, Mrs. R mentions: "For early childhood (from 3 to 6) it is really challenging for them to be self-directed. You can sit and do it collaboratively remembering what we are working on and asking 'What do you think we could try?' and you are kind of leading that a little bit." (2017). What I think that can be another reason why children play with the material, because they do not remember the aim of the activity. Mrs. R idea agrees with Tuzo (2007) idea of balancing teacher control and children's autonomy in interactive ways. As she recommends questioning the children in order to make them realize about the aims. So, maybe it would be useful during early childhood to work with centres but going around asking questions to children to remind them why

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[7] Quite reading is another way to say individual and silent reading. Children could read by themselves or with pairs quietly.

they are doing that activity. Because it is really difficult to make sure that early years students are learning if the teacher cannot see how they work.

In relation to Mrs. R idea of early years children difficulty of being self-directed, Mrs. S said:

> "Children of this age (1st graders) are pretty honest. They know what they can do and what they cannot do. They are better judges than us (teachers) and they know where they need to go. So we could do a lot of goal setting. The kids need to know where they are going and they need to know in which direction, so that is a lot of autonomy and that is also from where a lot of autonomy comes from: reflecting on their work" (2017).

Which is complementary to Mrs. R's idea about reminding the aim to give them control of their own learning. In early years, if children have the documentation to visualize their process, they can reflect on it. Afterwards, teacher's interaction is important to help them to make decisions that will enable them achieve their aims.

Regarding to other Language Arts sessions, there was only one activity: *Weekend journals* (Observation chards 2, 3, 5 and 8), so children could not choose activity, but they could choose what they wanted to write about. Usually the topic was reduced to 'weekend' so they could choose what they wanted to explain about their weekend, but in other sessions they could choose a topic to write about. This is also a choice, but it is not free choice as children have path to follow and their decisions are limited. This kind of decision-making was the one that was normally used in 1SL during Language Arts classes.

According to the observation chards we can affirm that in almost all the sessions from Language Arts, children could choose some element about their work. Siraj-Blactchford et al. (2002) state that this kind of choice is beneficial for children's learning. In their research, the authors suggest that the most effective settings for learning provide balanced opportunities for

children to benefit from teacher-initiated activities. This is, balanced opportunities between teacher's instruction and children's choice.

Choice is positive and necessary to plan autonomy-supportive classes, but it can also generate disadvantages. Mrs.R says: "too much choice can be overwhelming and sometimes it prevents children from getting started" (2017), which is an interesting issue that I have not found in any research before. Maybe it is for these reason that grade 1 teachers gave children different options, but do not give them completely freedom to choose what they wanted to do. Going back to what Mrs. S said in her interview, the activities cannot be just for fun, but they have an educative aim behind and so, teacher's planning is essential to achieve it. What takes us back to Siraj-Blactchford et al. idea (2002).

Another aspect highlighted during the interviews was the importance of the individual aims and the individual planning in order to enable students to enhance autonomy, giving them the opportunity to decide how they want achieve or improve their skills.

In Mrs. R's interview, she commented that settling down individual aims for each child in every single subject is really time consuming and it is almost impossible when classroom teachers have 15 or 20 kids per class. Afterwards, she also declares:

> "You know when you plan a lesson what your aims are. […] You can practise and tell the students the aim of the week and then comment with them if they have practised or achieve it or not. It does not need to be formal, but the kids need to hear and that is also what make the kids motivated (2017)".

This idea can be compared to *Procedural autonomy* (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Tyrber, 2004). One of the ideas of this autonomy feature is the opportunity for students to discuss their aims and to choose the way they want to carry out their learning. It is not the same as settling individual aims,

but it gives the opportunity to talk about them and discuss how children want to move forward. However, as it is mentioned in the previous part, early years children struggle being self-directed and so, they might be able discuss the aims with the teacher but teachers will be the ones defining the path to their learning.

Mrs. S mentions that it will depend on children's learning styles, you will plan the class differently, trying to find the best way for all the kids to express themselves. She also adds: " When I plan an activity I think about the kids that will need an extra support, the kids that can be a little more challenged; it just a natural think to do" (2017). So, maybe it will be a good to establish more than one aim, or the same aim with different difficulties. By doing so, children that can be more challenged, can work to achieve the most difficult one and the others just work to achieve the basic aim.

Planning is crucial in Inquiry approach because children need to feel relax, comfortable, they also need to know the boundaries and that there are some expectations. Only in an environment like this children will feel free to ask, explore and make reflections about their own process in order to learn more. Grade 1 children feel comfortable and relax in class and they normally feel free to ask if they have doubts or even share ideas and experiences. However, in regard to learning objectives, classroom teachers do not talk about it with the children. In the observation chards we can see that teacher never explains or justifies the aim of the activities. Grade 1 teachers do not discuss the aims with the students; so children do not take part in the process of choosing the path to achieve specific skills.

3.3.3. Autonomy-supportive strategies

During my internship in ISH I could observe different strategies that could be useful to plan autonomy-supportive classes. Moreover, during the interviews the teachers also suggested me some more strategies that they would use to foster autonomy. The main idea that all teachers mentioned was to work individually, in pairs or in small groups. In Mrs. S words: "In the ideal world

you would have centres, peer work. So you have 3 centres or groups on the go." (2017). According to both grade 1 teachers, setting up the class with different centres and activities would be a good way to work on children's autonomy. It was also an idea shared with the PYP coordinator, as she mentions it as a good strategy to set the class to be autonomy-supportive. Murdoch & Wilson point out that many teachers design tasks with structures and routines that encourage students to self-manage and work independently, which is what ISH teacher try to do with the centres. The two authors affirm that these activities allow more opportunities for small group or individual teacher-student interaction (2006), what we can see in Grade 1 in the observational chard 1[8], where children were working individually and the teacher was doing an individual assessment working with one child at the time.

In terms of classroom set up, teachers suggested planning different spaces with structured short activities with different materials were children could work autonomously in small groups or pairs. Mrs. M states:

> "More group work where they can help each other. So like little groups or pairs where they can check each other's work. I think it would be part of it too. That would give them the ownership and the confidence that they are good enough to check their friend's work. You know? Building this sharing trust" (2017).

She suggest that group work can help not only with the different autonomy levels, but also with being more critic about work and feeling capable to correct and comment other peer's work. The idea of reflecting on the own work is also commented by Mrs. S interview, as well as Stefanou et al. (2004), who says that evaluating the own ideas and generating solutions for the own problems is also an idea from *Cognitive autonomy*.

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[8] Observation chard 1 can be consulted in Appendices, page 70.

Working in pairs or small groups can be a good option to manage different levels of autonomy. Mrs. M calls it *buddy system* and it consist on mixing children with a high autonomy level with another one who usually asks for help during an autonomous activity. The three teachers agree that putting children in little groups makes them feel a little bit more comfortable. Mrs.R says: "It is a form of differentiation, and sometimes differentiation is in the materials, sometimes in the person with them." (2017) She continues giving small tips to help children with low autonomy levels within these words:

> "Sometimes children only need a question in the ear or a suggestion, or looking for examples; just a little bit of help to reassure them that is still ok that they are thinking and deciding and it is ok if they take their time. […] I think that this is what autonomy is about: you are in your place right now and you are still moving forward, you are just moving forward at a different pace and that is ok." (Mrs. R, 2017).

During my observations in 1ML I could see children working on centres autonomously, as I explained before in *Classroom planning* part. However, the work was mostly individual and rarely children worked in pairs or small groups. It would have been interesting to see if the *buddy system,* mentioned by Mrs. M, was effective to make children work on their aim in a conscious way.

As I mentioned in the section *Free choice*, reflection on the own work is difficult in early childhood without documentation or any visual help. Mrs. R told me a strategy that can help guiding the students throughout reflection. It consists on an egg or circle with three layers to keep in mind the own path. In the middle layer, children write the most important question of their research, the following layer is for the questions that are pretty important and the last layer contains what is not essential. This strategy is similar to visual thinking, which is important to make sure that children understand their own thinking and know how to sort their thoughts (Mrs. R, 2017). I think it is interesting and it would be good to try it with young learners to support and try to make classes more autonomy-supportive.

After this extended explanation about the results of the collected data, there will be a part with conclusions. In this section the main results reached after doing the entire research will be summarized and some considerations for further research will be exposed.

4. Conclusions
4.1.1. Results of research

In order to answer the questions exposed in the specific objectives, we can summarize the results in six ideas. All of them are strongly related to the context of Helsinki International School. Though we cannot generalize these ideas, they can contribute to understand better IBL and also they can give some suggestions in order to plan an autonomy-supportive classroom.

Regarding to the specific objective related to the kind of strategies that are useful to plan autonomy supportive classes inside an IBL context, I identify two main ideas from the teacher's:

- Working in pairs or small groups with different centres in class is a useful strategy to achieve an autonomous environment.
- Sharing the aims or objectives with children is a positive tool to enhance autonomy, as long as there is no pressure on students.

As I explained in the discussion, the three teachers mentioned centres as a very good strategy to enhance autonomy in the classroom. The centres would be set in different spaces of the classroom and will have a specific objective. They also suggested children working in small groups or pairs, as they feel more comfortable. Furthermore, in case of children with different autonomy levels, making pairs can help the ones with a lower autonomy level. The second idea talks about sharing the aim with the children in order to give them the opportunity to work autonomously towards an aim.

In regard to how teachers should interact foster autonomy, I can highlight two ideas:

- Teacher's guidance throughout teacher-child interaction, specifically, with questions and provocations support autonomy in class.
- In early childhood, documentation is essential in order to help children think and reflect about their own work.

Both ideas are connected in the importance of thinking on the own work and reflect about it. However, in early childhood, teachers need to document all the process in order to make visual the process from the children and help them reflect about it. Documentation was a new idea in regard to autonomy supportive classes, which was suggested by ISH teachers. Furthermore, teachers suggested interacting with children throughout questions and provocations that will guide them during their learning, but giving them the chance to be autonomous; taking their own decisions.

Last but not least, I point out two ideas that ISH teachers recommended when I ask their opinion about Language Arts planning.

- It is very important that all the activities have a planning to work on specific aims.
- Decision-making is very important in an autonomy supportive class. However, teachers need to delimit the choices to guide students to their aims.

Both ideas are closely related to the two previous ones, it is very important for teachers to have in mind the specific aim of each activity in order to be able to guide children. However, children are the ones making decisions if we want to enhance autonomy and make them responsible about their learning. Teachers support and guide them.

All of the summarized ideas have in common that to support children's autonomy, they have to be the ones carrying out the learning and deciding their learning path, however teachers have to be there to help and guide them with questions and provocations, in order to make them think and reflect about their own work.

4.1.2. Limitations and further research

During this study I encountered some limitations. One of them was the flexibility of the schedule from grade 1. This is, teacher did not follow the same subjects every week and it was difficult for me to plan an exact amount of observations in Language Arts, as there were weeks that Language Arts was only done once. At the end, I could observe eight sessions of Language Arts, but I think it would have been interesting to observe more and also, to be able to observe the same subject but in different moments throughout the academic year (i.e. at the beginning, after Christmas and the last two weeks of grade 1). Maybe the structure of the classroom would have changed.

Another thing that would have been interesting would have been to have the opportunity and time to interview more teachers from ISH, to know their opinion about autonomy. If I would have more time I would like to create a discussion group with the teachers from early childhood and talk about autonomy. However, I did not have time enough to do so while I was doing my internship in the school.

While I was analysing the data that I have collected during my internship, I realized that on interesting topic to do a further research would children's self-reflection in Language Arts. To do so, I would ask the children two or three questions such as: 'Why have you written it this way? Could you think about other possibilities to write the same?'. These questions will be focused on self-reflexion on students' writing errors. I found that It would be interesting as further studies to research more specifically in what kind of questions allow children to be more autonomous. This research would give me the opportunity to apply the suggestions from grade 1 teachers and see how students react to

the questions and which ones make them more autonomous. It is a possible topic for the research that I have to do next year focused in primary education instead of early childhood. It seems a good option to go further in the research of autonomy-supportive classes.

4.1.3. Personal reflection

Concerning my personal experience, this research allowed me to learn more about IBL context, which was unknown for me before my internship in Helsinki. At first, my research was about a completely different topic, but once I got in touch with the context, I figured out that the possibilities that I have to investigate that topic were low. Hence, I decided that was more interesting to realize a research about a topic from IB context, because it was an opportunity that maybe I will not have again. The change of topic obliged me to organize myself the time and the tasks in a short time. At first, I struggled, but afterwards I went on without any problem. As a future teacher, I think that flexibility during the planning is really necessary, so it was good to face this situation in order to practise flexible thinking.

In a professional point of view as a future teacher, this research was a good in order to lean tools and strategies useful in the real classes, which sometimes is difficult to learn if you do not have the opportunity to apply them in class. Furthermore, I feel that my knowledge about autonomy in class is wide enough in order to be autonomy-supportive during my planning and my activities. I find this a good way to motivate the students and achieve meaningful learning for all of them.

Finally, this final project was a positive for me to be more autonomous as a life-long learner, which I consider that is very important for a teacher. From my point of view, teachers should learn new things everyday, because their curiosity will be reflected in their classes. Moreover, as society changes and the needs of children change, teachers need to be updated and the only way to do so is reading and learning throughout life. These autonomy and

flexibility to the context was also enhanced during the research, as I was in a new context, in a different country.

As a final part of my degree, this research gave me the opportunity to focus on a topic which we have not studied in the university: IBL. Which is very interesting because as a future teacher I can work on an IB school and it is meaningful to know the context. Furthermore, even though we have talked about autonomy in many university courses, this topic was really related to children from 0 to 3 years old. This project gave me the opportunity to see that autonomy can be set in all the courses; it only depends on the teacher's will. It has been a good way to finish the first part of my degree on early childhood education. I was autonomous and I felt ready to go and work in a school,

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6. APPENDICES

6.1. Interview to Mrs. S

INTERVIEW TFG: AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE LEARNING IN AN IBL CONTEXT

Interviewer: Dolors Raurell

Interviewee: Ms. S

Position of Interviewee: Teacher in grade 1 SL (experienced in PYP and IBL)

Date: 4/4/17

Place: Grade 1 classroom in ISH

Starting time: 7:45h

Finished time: 8:05h

Context: In grade 1 classroom, in the morning before children come to the school. We were alone in the classroom and the context was relaxed.

This interview is part of my data collection for my final degree project about autonomy-supportive learning in early childhood education. The purpose of this study is finding out which strategies could be useful to plan autonomy-supportive practises in early childhood, as well as, learning how the teachers should interact with children to foster their autonomy. As ISH is an IB school that follows an Inquiry based learning, the project is contextualized in an inquiry approach.

The data collected during this interview will only be used for academic uses, specifically, for my final degree project. Furthermore, it will be completely anonymous, so your names will not appear on the interview.

1. **What do you understand by autonomy (educational context)? What is your opinion about supporting autonomy in early childhood classes?**

'In this environment, in the IB school we do have a lot of flexibility in our curriculum, so I think we have a lot more autonomy than any other type of school. At the same time we need also to make sure that we stay on track.'

'From a personal point of view, in this environment I can decide how I teach, not exactly what I teach, but how I teach and when I teach it. We have a lot of autonomy as educators'.

'As this is an inquiry based curriculum, the biggest focus is the child, basically the old-fashioned type of child-centred education, that the child comes first. Our idea is that children develop their own autonomy over their learning, so they actually develop the skills, routines that help them to have more autonomy in the classroom.'

'We encourage the children to think, so if you are encouraging the children to think on their own abilities or their own stage of development, it also promotes the idea of life-long learners' 'They know they have some control over what they do and it is more meaningful for them'.

'Early childhood children are probably the most autonomous learners of all, because anyway they are egocentric and because we haven't spooned them or directed them.'

2. **How many years have you been working with Inquiry approach? Is ISH the only one that you've worked with it? What difficulties do you find working with inquiry approach?**

'I think it is a natural instinct for the children to be curious, to be creative, is natural for them to want to know. As teacher we can squash that curiosity and trying to get that balance between teaching children the skills they need for their everyday life and that balance of following their own inquiry or their own interest is really challenging'.

'Some difficulties are the different learning styles; making sure children are really learning in their own way'.

'As a teacher is really hard to see their progress and to see what are they actually doing'.

Have you worked with PYP school before?

'Actually no, when I came to the school I came through the whole process when it started with PYP and then implemented. I worked in another PYP while I was in Laos, for a year and a half, about seven years ago and that school was just implementing PYP, so it was quite interesting. Here in ISH I have been 10 or 12 years.'

3. **Do you take in mind autonomy when you plan your classes?**

'In this stage of my teaching I think it is in my head, in my heard. I know what my children can do, it is like a natural given for me. As a teacher, it does not matter how the system is, you instinctively know where you kids are. So when I plan an activity I think about the kids that will need an extra support, the kids that can go a little more challenged, it just a natural think to do.'

4. **Did your schooling centred in autonomy? How did you learn to apply autonomy-supportive classes: here in the school, with the other teachers from the school?**

'My teaching training was about dinosaurs and that is the reason why I can do PYP, because when I trained as a teacher it was all about child-centred education, integrated day, vertical grouping. There was no phonics, no reading skims, there was no writing skims, there has all to come from the kids. It was project based, topic learning; which is what PYP is, tough they do not use the word topic. My background is child-centred education anyway, so for me PYP and inquiry based learning I have been doing it forever. So I do not find it too difficult.'

5. As a teacher, how would you define your role during the classes?

'We are a community, a team, we are working all together and supporting each other and finding out how things work together as a big family.'

6. Which kind of strategies or class organization would you set to foster children's autonomy in early childhood? Offering them the possibility to have free-choices? Offering them the opportunity to explain and express their concerns and opinions regarding to the learning tasks and creating solutions to problems? Giving them the opportunity to make decisions about their own learning?

'As we have a curriculum, there is a need to encourage them to see the world through different lenses, try to make it interesting enough. For example in the units of inquiry making provocations, getting the kids exited about what you are doing.'

'It cannot be only a fun activity; behind the fun activities there has to be the foundation of a learning skill or their thinking about something. It is not just fun'.

'That is another thing for inquiry; they have to feel relaxed, they have to feel save, they have to feel comfortable, they have to feel that they know the boundaries, that there is an expectation and the kids reflecting on their portfolios and work.'

7. What about the Language Arts classes? (How would you plan a Language Arts class if you would like to work with autonomy-supportive learning?)

'The ideal world you would have centres, peer work. So you have 3 centres or groups on the go. It is a reading focus, then, ideally, you have the three groups which should be very day to day because an important think is that they have to have something where they have sense of independence, where

they can work alone. That could be something like: a table with matching games or a board game where they are practising phonics, something that they can be by their own or with a partner. Then you have a group where you are reading with the students or another autonomy group could be a group working on Raz-kids. iPads are a useful tool, as long as they are using it for learning something. The teacher would work on a focus group that would be focused for example in reading with expression or looking at punctuation… And then you can alternate the groups. So you have three things going on at the same time'.

'The autonomy part would get in when they can choose the books from the library or the classroom to read.'

8. **How do you manage or you would manage if the children have different levels of autonomy?**

'Some children who have a lot of structure at home or a lot of parental guidance, are skilled based learners can sit by themselves and do stuff, but that does not necessarily mean that their brain has been challenged. There is the other ones that maybe are not emotionally ready for the inquiry based learning or just they are not ready for it, it is difficult to find their best way of learning that does not disrupt the rest of the kids.'

'The learning would have to be differentiated, you will have to work in group, in pairs or individually... Depending on the learning styles that is the way you have to tackle it; creativity, paper work… find the best way for that kid to express themselves and show what they are thinking.'

- **Do you consider children able to plan their own assessment?**

'Generally speaking, if you are asking children of this age to be honest, they are pretty honest. They know what they can do and what they cannot do. They are better judges than us and they know where they need to go. So we could do a lot of goal setting. The kids need to know where they are going and

they need to know in which direction, so that is a lot of autonomy and that is also from where a lot of autonomy comes from: reflecting on their work. We do a lot of reflexion (i.e. 'What do you think?'. 'Where are you going next?'). Reflexion is an important think in this programme.'

9. What kind of difficulties do the children have when they have autonomy in class?

'A challenge is that children do not want to do things that are difficult, so it is how to motivate them. They just want to do things that they like, things that they find easy and challenging'.

6.2. Interview to Mrs. M

INTERVIEW TFG: AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE LEARNING IN AN IBL CONTEXT

Interviewer: Dolors Raurell
Interviewee: Ms. M
Position of Interviewee: Grade 1 teacher (3 years experience in IB schools)
Date: 6/4/17
Place: ISH School, grade 1 classroom
Starting time: 15:35h (interruptions 15:50 till 16:00h)
Finished time: 16:16h
Context: Relax and comfortable environment, without a rush. However, the two interruptions we had made it a little bit difficult to keep the truck and I have the impression that they did not help to go deeper in some of the questions.

This interview is part of my data collection for my final degree project about autonomy-supportive learning in early childhood education. The purpose of this study is finding out which strategies could be useful to plan autonomy-supportive practises in early childhood, as well as, learning how the teachers should interact with children to foster their autonomy. As ISH is an IB school

that follows an Inquiry based learning, the project is contextualized in an inquiry approach.

The data collected during this interview will only be used for academic uses, specifically, for my final degree project. Furthermore, it will be completely anonymous, so your names will not appear on the interview.

10. **What do you understand by autonomy (educational context)? What is your opinion about supporting autonomy in early childhood classes?**

'I guess having the control not only just over your own classroom, but what you are teaching the kids. It is decision-making and try to focus on the kids; you want the ideas coming from the kids and, as a teacher, how you take their ideas and in what direction you guide them. But I would say that is the teacher's role to guide the students, because the ideas must come from them.'

'Coming from having worked two years in pre-k and a lot of play-based learning, you know, it is hard to let the early childhood kids take the ownership of what they are doing. And I think that as the kids get older and they understand more about learning, then sure that they can take more ownership of what they are doing and they want to learn.'

'I like the idea of autonomy, A. told me that in her previous school, in the pre-k class they trained them how to take pictures of their own work and do a lot of things independently. They just spend a lot of time going along the steps really simply and they were able to do it. I thought that was amazing that the teachers even attempted that, because then by the time that they arrive at K1 they know what they are doing. I think it is a fantastic idea to get them understand it really early.'

11. How many years have you been working with Inquiry approach? Is ISH the only one that you've worked with it? What difficulties do you find working with inquiry approach?

'Well, three years, this is my forth year, and I have never taught in other schools so this is all I know. I did my first practicum here in 2007 and then I had my daughter and I took time off from my studies. We had to go back to Australia to do my second practicum and that was in a public school with thirty kids in each class, a lot of defence families and there were two or three kids in the class with special needs. So that was my other experience.'

'Last year working in pre-k it was much easier, I think because of the age group. Now that we have to teach actual skills as Math skills and writing skills… it is hard to grasp what is expected at this age level and also, it is an International school and all the kids are coming into grade 1 will all different skill levels, so I am finding it quite challenging actually.'
'It is really hard to define what it has to be taught. There is no standards to check what kids should be doing at these stage of the year.'

'The documentation to prove in what stage are the kids. Inquiry is all about asking questions and digging deeper and then if you are not taking copiest notes about what they are saying, which is not always easy, you know, 'how do you know?' I think that inquiry learning in that aspect can be challenging.'

12. Do you think Inquiry approach foster's autonomy-supportive classes in early childhood education? In which ways? (What makes Inquiry based learning special to work on early years children's autonomy?)

'It probably should, but in practise… you have seen how fast we need to get through the units of inquiry. What if one kid came in tomorrow and said: 'I have got this fantastic idea for sharing the planet', as we are at the end of the unit, we cannot spend time in that. We could probably spent one activity doing something, but in the end you cannot create a week sort of activity around it.

You have to stick to the schedule. So I think that inquiry learning should probably encourage autonomy within the classroom, but in reality I do not think that always happens.'

13. Do you take in mind autonomy when you plan your classes?

'No. That is a straight out answer because I do not feel that this year has been my normal working style. I am trying to follow S. (the other grade 1 teacher), getting used to the age level and getting used to the materials that there are available to me…'.

- **But when you set up materials in the class you let them a lot of space and choice.**

'Yes, I guess that subconsciously thinking I want to have one centre that is an independent table and I do not have to look after them and sit with them. They can take the activity and continue by themselves. Next year I guess I will plan for this a lot more.'

'As a reflexion, I have seen that get really peassed off if the kids come while I work with one table or one kid. I feel really frustrated when other kids are coming up to me looking for help'.

14. Did your schooling centred in autonomy? How did you learn to apply autonomy-supportive classes: here in the school, with the other teachers from the school?

'I do not think so, thinking back to primary school, we just did the work that was given to us. And it still was fun and we had a lot of great games but we did not have a choice in what we were given.'

'During my teacher training there was a lot of child-centred, play-based learning… and knowing how to guide students, because they come with what they know already and there was a lot of Vygotsky and finding the children's level of scaffolding'.

15. As a teacher, how would you define your role during the classes?

'I would hope my role is to make learning fun for them and make it so it is not learning, that they are learning but they are having fun. Really encourage the curiosity and that love of finding out stuff. I would love to be able to foster that in my students and really encourage their curiosity about life. I think that this comes from more experience.'

16. Which kind of strategies or class organization would you set to foster children's autonomy in early childhood? Offering them the possibility to have free-choices? Offering them the opportunity to explain and express their concerns and opinions regarding to the learning tasks and creating solutions to problems? Giving them the opportunity to make decisions about their own learning?

'In terms of classroom set up, I would like to have a space where they could go as a writing centre, I'd like to have a computer for the kids to go and do stuff in the computer. So like a computer station, a writing station, a centre where there is like writing prompts, you know? Photographs that they can just pull out and writing something about. It would be great to have a Raz[9] corner with cousins where they could sit and read.'

So you would work all the skills with stations?
'No, that would just be like if you finish something early you can go to the stations independently. If they finish work now they can go and play with the white boards or the green books, but it is not being checked. So something where they can have their tray and I can check it'.

'More group work where they can help each other. So like little groups or pairs where they can check each other's work, I think it would be part of it too. That would give them ownership and the confidence that they are good enough to

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[9] Raz comes from the programme Raz-kids that consists on a virtual library where children can select books, listen and read them by themselves.

check their friends work. You know? Building this sharing trust. I would like to set up more stuff like that next year'.

17. What about the Language Arts classes? (How would you plan a Language Arts class if you would like to work with autonomy-supportive learning?)

'I think it would be similar kinds of things. So again just pair work, some more group work… something that they can do that is just not a time filler. Really have structured short activities which children can do themselves and have fun. But again is setting up that trust to make get them to complete the activity and not start mugging around.'

18. How do you manage or you would manage if the children have different levels of autonomy?

'I would probably the ones that are better equipped at doing stuff to help the others; like a buddy system.'

19. What kind of difficulties do the children have when they have autonomy in class?

'Staying focused, valuing what they are doing, distractions, but that is staying focused; engagement, like how engaging is the activity to start with.'

6.3. Interview to Mrs. R

INTERVIEW TFG: AUTONOMY-SUPPORTIVE LEARNING IN AN IBL CONTEXT

Interviewer: Dolors Raurell
Interviewee: Ms. R
Position of Interviewee: Lower School Assistant Principal and PYP Coordinator
Date: 5/4/17
Place: ISH School
Starting time: 8:05h
Finished time: 8:25h
Context: Rachel's office in the morning before the children arrive. Quite, relax and comfortable environment.

This interview is part of my data collection for my final degree project about autonomy-supportive learning in early childhood education. The purpose of this study is finding out which strategies could be useful to plan autonomy-supportive practises in early childhood, as well as, learning how the teachers should interact with children to foster their autonomy. As ISH is an IB school that follows an Inquiry based learning, the project is contextualized in an inquiry approach.

The data collected during this interview will only be used for academic uses, specifically, for my final degree project. Furthermore, it will be completely anonymous, so your names will not appear on the interview.

1. **What do you understand by autonomy (educational context)? What is your opinion about supporting autonomy in early childhood classes?**

'For autonomy I guess we can analyse in two parts because we have a structure to provide the students and what all educators as IB we believe we need to follow at a certain stage. But the autonomy comes kind of within the

context of what we set up. So, for example, now that you are in the unit of recycling and so, what are the students interested in through that; what questions they have, what do they already know and how you can keep building on that. So, for me autonomy is built to the programme and we kind of expect almost, but is a meaning that not everything is pre-prescribed. Like a journey of their own discovery.'

'It is different in early childhood and primary school. Early childhood is by nature autonomous and inquiry based, but again within the instructor. If I say, I want to explore number bonds with an intend, then is their own discovery like how they make that strategy, how they choose to learn the bonds to understand the connection after some teaching. So, there is always this pre-teaching and after that, what can they discover by their own, what do they discovered in the real world and you can connect with you have already seen.'

'My opinion is that I love it. I totally encourage it because I think it is the spark. Like if they are interested you want to encourage that and, you job, actually is to facilitate it, to ask the write questions, to positively keep pushing that sparky curiosity.'

2. **How many years have you been working with Inquiry approach? Is ISH the only one that you've worked with it? What difficulties do you find working with inquiry approach?**

'Uy!, now I feel old, but about 20.'
'Right from when I started my student learning, in Scotland that is how we learn and that is their approach for the curriculum; it is not an IB curriculum and it was not called inquiry, but it was that, this idea of being inquisitive.'

3. **Do you think Inquiry approach foster's autonomy-supportive classes in early childhood education? In which ways? (What makes Inquiry based learning special to work on early years children's autonomy?)**

'Yes, it does because you are setting a framework, giving provocations; you are putting objects in the room to *conspire* this kind of interest. You are teaching how to ask a good question and you are expecting this not only in the classroom but also at home. That idea that they have this openness to ask and to try something, when they can own their learning they can move a lot further along and they are much more motivated to do things'.

4. **When you were teaching did you take in mind autonomy to make you classes autonomy-supportive?**

'Absolutely, whether it was childhood, Art or upper primary school, it looks different in every grade.'

'For example in Art like you set a scene and they go for it, so they are on their own path anyway. Always keeping in mind that you are setting up the classroom for the day and you know that you will have a Language lesson, a Math lesson, Unit lesson… and sometimes they merge, but either way, the structure is in place that they can follow that autonomy. That takes your planning, it does not happen automatically, you have to make it happen. It starts from the beginning of the year when you meet your class, like setting the expectations, setting routines, so that they understand when it is their own time and when is a more structured time.'

5. **As a teacher, how would you define your role in the classes?**

'Mostly an observer. This comes definitely form the early childhood teaching, you observe and you are soaking in everything. How do you document the learning to keep moving on, because we keep a lot of things in our head, but if we plan the documentation and we know what we are looking for, then it is

easier to build and show the learning journey. Kids in the young age do not remember it, but if you have documentation you can actually show them and they can actually remember and that is really powerful not only for them, but when they can explain it to their parents, to a friend is really exciting for them.'

'Really mostly to facilitate, always there is the job to teach, but in terms of the autonomous stuff is much more the observing, whether add. Sometimes you refocus because a part from the autonomy is that you can get really distracted and not keep in the own track. But then if you are observing carefully you can keep redirecting them back to the path.'

6. **Which kind of strategies or class organization would you set to foster children's autonomy in early childhood? Offering them the possibility to have free-choices? Offering them the opportunity to explain and express their concerns and opinions regarding to the learning tasks and creating solutions to problems? Giving them the opportunity to make decisions about their own learning?**

'As a teacher, your job is to facilitate the reflexion and, it can be a couple of minutes, because if not it is a little bit overkill.'
'Asking for connections (i.e. when we look at this, do you think it was relevant? Do you think it was important? How did that help you going to the next thing?). That is really useful for fieldtrips because the whole purpose is to garnish some kind of information or some kind of connection to the unit. If you do not ask it, they won't think about it.'

'Making them think about what helps them to remember the letter sounds while writing, or the other things of their learning through questions. Every student has a different tool that works so they have to know it.'

- **Would it help setting or planning with each student his or her own objectives?**

'That is also really time consuming. You can have it in mind and you know when you plan a lesson what you aims are. In countries like England you have to have it in the wall every week, even if the kids can read it or not.'

You can practise and tell the students the aim of the week and then comment with them if they have practised or achieve it or not. It does not need to be written or formal, but the kids need to hear and that is also what make the kids motivated.

'For early childhood (from age 3 to 6) it is really challenging for them to be self-directed. You can sit and do it collaboratively remembering what we are working on and asking 'What do you think we could try?' and you are kind of leading that a little bit. Sometimes, especially with the little ones they can be really frustrated by things and embarrassed, and then they do not want to try anymore. So sometimes setting goals in a really formal way is kind of more damaging actually.'

7. **What about the Language Arts classes? (How would you plan a Language Arts class if you would like to work with autonomy-supportive learning?)**

'In Language Arts in early childhood you start building up their knowledge, so they do need the teaching with phonics, they do need to be taught sentence structure, they need to be taught spelling, but how they apply it? That is autonomous; i.e. how they choose to write a story, how they choose to write instructions, how they apply everything. If you look how they learn to write, even if you have done teaching of phonics and sentence structure, children apply that differently.'

'There is obvious patterns, but you can se as they are practising, as they are noticing and as they are learning, how they are building up their learning in the language as well.'

Strategy: 'Egg with three layers to keep in mind the own path. The middle layer is the most important question that the child has, the following one is what is pretty important and the last layer contains what it is ok, but not essential. Using a tool like that is really helpful. Even with you kids, when they ask questions you can use that model and that goes a lot with visual thinking. Showing them your thinking, so your documentation, and also their thinking, so that they can see it pretty obvious and sort of talking them through it. Making sure that they understand their own thinking, because as they get older and they do reflections around their autonomy, they have to know that, they have to sort their thoughts.'

8. **What kind of difficulties do the children have when they have autonomy in class?**

'Too much choice. Sometimes too much choice can be overwhelming and sometimes it prevents them from getting started. Sometimes giving a small choice helps and it is still autonomous because they have a choice, but it is not completely free.'

9. **How do you manage or you would manage if the children have different levels of autonomy?**

'You can put them in little groups, sometimes they are a little bit more comfortable, or you can be the one to work with them. It is a form of differentiation, and sometimes differentiation is in the materials, sometimes is the person with them. Sometimes children only need a question in the ear or a suggestion, or looking for examples; just a little bit of help, just to reassure them that is still ok that they are thinking and deciding and it is ok if they take their time. And I think you can talk about it in every area of the curriculum because I think that this is what autonomy is about: you are in your place right now and you are still moving forward, you are just moving forward at a different pace and that is ok.

6.4. Observation chard: template

Date:	Grade:	Subject:	Time:

Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Can children choose group members?	
	Can children choose evaluation procedure?	
	Have the children create classroom rules for this activity?	
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	
	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	

6.5. Observation chard 1

Date: 1/3/17	Grade: 1ML	Subject: Language Arts	Time: 9:00 - 9:25

Question	Answer
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?	
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?	
Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Yes. Children that do not have finished to write their *soft toy* stories, imaginative stories, can work on them. The ones that
Can children choose group members?	They have to choose the activity, not the group members. However, once they have finished their stories and the sheet about the author, they can choose and so, they can work with the ones they want.
Can children choose evaluation procedure?	No.

have finished have to complete a sheet with information about themselves to put in their books, as authors. Once they have finished they can choose between playing with cards with images where they have to sequence the stories, or building sentences and writing them down with the *silly sentences* chard.
Finally, they were called to go individually with Mrs. M, who made them read to assess their reading skills.

Have the children create classroom rules for the activities?		No, teacher gave them the options and the classroom rules are the ones from the beginning of the course.
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	There is not a big margin of choice, children know what to do in each activity and they follow the way they know.
No.	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Yes.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	No. They do ask if needed during the whole session, but normally they asked me, as the teacher was working individually with other students.
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	No, only the one that she is carrying out about reading, where she expects to assess children's reading skills.
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		

Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	No
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?	Not really, only during the soft toy story, they invented the story about whatever they wanted.
Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	No

6.6. Observation chard 2

Date: 13/3/17	Grade: 1ML	Subject: Language Arts	Time: 9:00 – 10:10

Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Yes. Children have to write but they can choose if they want to write about their weekends in their weekend journals or if they want to write about the outdoor space and invent a story.
Can children choose group members?	It is an individual group.
Can children choose evaluation procedure?	No, no evaluation is done in this activity.
Have the children create classroom rules for this activity?	No, the classroom rules are the same as always and normally is the teacher to remind the children.

Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	They can choose what to write.
	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Not really, for writing pencil is used.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	No, she do not ask for the concerns of opinions, but she listens the topic they are writing about.
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	Yes, they can ask for help anytime.
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		No.
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	No.	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help? No, teacher helps them with the writing and doubts about writing.
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?		Yes. They can choose the topic for the task between two options, though if they have a new idea the teacher lets them write about it.

Date: 10/4/17	Grade: 1ML	Subject: Language Arts 'Weekend Journals'	Time: 9:05h-9:25h

Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Can children choose group members?	They worked individually.
No	Can children choose evaluation procedure?	There is no evaluation procedure for this activity. They need to write 5 sentences and then teachers revise them.
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Have the children create classroom rules?	No. The teacher determines the rules for this activity. They need to remember capital letters and full stops while they write 5 sentences.
	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	Yes they can choose if they want to write or draw first and then continue. They have some freedom.
Yes, before the activity they talked about it and their ideas to write. But not exactly about the opinion about the activity itself.	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Yes, though they cannot use markers. So, they normally have to write with pencil and colour with colour pencils.
	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	Teacher do not offer opportunities for students to express their concerns, but normally children express themselves anyway. This is, she does not ask for their weekend activities to be able to help them with the writing.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		No. Just if they ask her they told that it is to practise writing.

Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	They get teacher's helps.	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	No, they are helped by the teacher in two ways. She sounds the words out or she write the word for them to copy.
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts...)?	Not really, in this activity they all have to write about their weekends.		

6.8. Observation chard 4

Date: 13/4/17	Grade: 1ML	Subject: Language Arts	Time: 9:05-9:30h

Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Yes, children arrive in the morning and the teacher gave them some choices. Children could choose between: - Quite reading - Green books - Word magnets to work on spelling	Can children choose group members?	Yes, they can choose if they want to work individually or with someone.
		Can children choose evaluation procedure?	No. There is no evaluation.
		Have the children create classroom rules?	No, not for this activity. And some of the activities, as 'green books' they have the rule to write apart from drawing, but teacher made the rule.
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?		Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	Yes, they can decide the way and how much time do they want to spend in each activity. Afterwards, they can change activity freely.

Yes, though she does not ask them their opinion.	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Yes. However, they can choose the books they want to read and what they wanted to do by draw o colour.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	No, if they have problems or concerns they can ask anytime, But children do not make any explanation.
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	No, if they have problems or concerns they can ask anytime, But children do not make any explanation.
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		No.
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	No, they get teacher's help if needed.	Depends on the problem. Sometimes teachers answer with a question such as 'what do you thing it is?' and so, children solved by their own with this small encouragement.
	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	Depends on the problem. Sometimes teachers answer with a question such as 'what do you thing it is?' and so, children solved by their own with this small encouragement.
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?		Yes totally. They can choose what they want to draw, created and drive about during the whole period.

6.9. Observation chard 5

Date: 20/3/17	Grade: 1SL	Subject: Language Arts	Time: 9:15 – 9:35
Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Can children choose group members?	It is an individual activity, however they can choose where do they want to sit and if they want to work on a table or on the floor with a chair.	

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No, it is the same activity for everyone. Children need to write at least 5 sentences in their writing journal.	Can children choose evaluation procedure?	There is no evaluation for this activity.
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Have the children create classroom rules for this activity?	No.
If children tell her directly yes, if not, she does not ask about it.	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	Yes, they can decide what do they want to write about and what kind of pencil or pen do they want to use to write.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Can children decide the material they want to use?	Yes. Though they have to write in their writing journals so they cannot decide everything about material.
	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	No. She does not ask for opinions about this activity. However, children can ask about concerns or doubts during the whole time.
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	No.
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	They need to solve or try to solve by themselves sound it out, with the teacher helping them.	
	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	Kind of. The teacher helps them from the beginning but guide them with questions and try to get them doing by themselves. If they do a mistake or cannot solve it by their own, teacher writes the word for them or spells it.

Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?	Yes, they can write about whatever they want. The teacher give some ideas about what can children write about. Furthermore, before starting the writing activity, she reads a book to inspire the children and give a specific idea. She explains that to the children so as they know the aim of the story that the teacher reads.

6.10. Observation chard 6

Date: 23/3/17	**Grade:** 1SL	**Subject:** Unit of inquiry + Language Arts	**Time:** 9:40 – 10:00

Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Can children choose group members?	It is an individual task.
	Can children choose evaluation procedure?	No evaluation procedure in this activity.
No. She asks children to choose a book from the ones of the unit of inquiry. Afterwards, to choose or look for a fact that they find interesting and write it down.	Have the children create classroom rules for this activity?	No, teacher has set the rules and procedure.
	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	No, they have to follow the few instructions of the teacher.
Does the teacher listen students' opinions about the activities?	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Yes, they can choose the book they want to look for the fact and also the materials they want to write it down.

6.11.   Observation chard 7

Date: 3/4/17	**Grade:** 1SL	**Subject:** Language Arts; 'Weekend Journals'	**Time:** 9:10-9:35

Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	No.
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		No.
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	Non of them ask for help in this activity.	No.
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	They can choose the topic of the fact they want to write down and the book.
Does the teacher offer different activities and let children choose which one do they want to participate?	Can children choose group members?	They work individually but they can choose the place they want to sit and next to who. It does not need to be on the tables, they can work on the carpet or on the floor.
There is a unique activity and children cannot choose, they can only choose what do they want to	Can children choose evaluation procedure?	No, there is no continuous evaluation in this activity, only the review from the teacher to correct spelling mistakes and check the work.

write. After writing they can work with the iPads and they are more autonomous. In the iPads they can work with Raz-kids, an app to practice reading skills.

Question		Response
Have the children create classroom rules?		They created the rules of the classroom at the beginning of the year, but not specifically for this activity.
Does the children listen students opinions about the activities?	Can children decide the way they want to carry out the activity?	They are kind of guided, they need to draw and write what they did during the weekend. They can choose what they want to write and if they want to draw and colour. However, the activity is not decided by children.
	Can children decide the materials they want to use?	Yes, they can choose what do they want to write with.
Does the teacher offer opportunities for students to express concerns regarding the learning tasks?	Does the teacher ask for their opinions?	The teacher do not ask their opinions and do not give them time to talk about the activity. It is an activity that is done every Monday morning so they are quite used to it and they only ask for help when they need it.
	Can they ask anytime or only during/after the explanation?	
Does teacher explain and justify the aim of the activities?		No
Are the students supported to solve their problems by their own?	Yes.	The problems are about spelling and teachers help children. At the beginning the teacher tries to make the kid sound out the different sounds and if he does not succeed, teacher tells him directly.
	Are they supposed to try to solve the problems alone before the teacher gives help?	
Do the children choose the topics of their tasks according to their interests (i.e. reading books, writing texts…)?		Not in this activity, however they can write about whatever they want from his weekend.