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# Pre-schoolers missing out on education

Switzerland is neglecting the education of pre-school children, according to the Swiss Unesco committee, which has launched the first in-depth study of the issue. With only 23 per cent of three to four year olds attending some form of pre-school, Swiss children have a lot of catching up to do with their European counterparts. The European average was 65 per cent.

At 0.2 per cent of GDP, Switzerland spends less than half of the level recommended by the OECD on pre-school education and significantly less than its neighbours. Pre-school education has been neglected for so long because society did not perceive the need for it. However, in recent years several Swiss studies have shown the significant skills difference between children entering the school system, depending on their previous exposure to education.

Pre-school education plays a key role in future success, academic and otherwise, and also helps to overcome initial learning difficulties, according to the

Unesco committee. The committee warns that the race is already lost before children start school, claiming that "the unequal starting chances that have been ac-



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cepted in such a matter-of-fact way are the major injustice of our educational system."

In a bid to streamline and improve the fragmented education system, a new harmonisation programme has been put together by the directors responsible for education in the cantons. Known as HarmoS, the reform package includes compulsory schooling from the age of four.

Every school will be obliged to offer extra care options to families outside the traditional school day, such as school meals or supervised homework.

The teaching of foreign languages will be harmonised and it will not be obligatory to begin with one of the other national languages.

*from swissinfo*

*Comment:* How come we turned out the way we did, since most of us missed out on this vital early childhood education? I didn't even attend kindergarten, as the only existing kindergarten was deemed to be too far away! I spent my pre-

school years at home with my mum and sister and played with the many other children in our street. And although I escaped the education system till I was 7 years old, I learnt a lot before I was 7; my mum let me 'help' even with jobs she would have accomplished in half the time without my help, and she told me stories and answered my questions... *tb*

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