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Recently, researchers have questioned diagnostic categories as eligibility criteria for special support as these categories may reveal little of the actual functioning of individual children in preschool environment. This thesis is built on four empirical studies where the aims were to test the applicability of a functional approach to social competence of preschool children in need of special support. According to functional approach, children’s functioning is viewed in children’s natural contexts and everyday activity settings. Therefore, preschool teachers’ definitions of children in need of special support and social competence were explored in this thesis. The main findings were that according to preschool teachers’ perceptions 17.3% of children in the study had difficulties in functioning in the preschool environment. However, only 3.7% of these children had an established diagnosis. Further, children identified to be in need of special support due to traditional diagnostic categories and undiagnosed children perceived by teachers to be in need of special support, showed similar type of difficulties, mainly related to speech- and language and interaction with peers. Thus, the amount of children in need of special support may be larger than the amount of children identified as in need of special support by traditional eligibility criteria. Focusing on the functional profiles of children may facilitate identifying children in need of special support and providing effective interventions.