



SYNTHESIS REPORTS
PROJECT MEETING
TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS
2013-2016





About the Forum:

The Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY), a 3-year project convened by the King Baudouin Foundation in partnership with several European and American foundations, aims to explore policies and programs supporting the early childhood development of children from migrant and low-income families in Europe and the United States. The Forum brought together leading policy-makers, practitioners, philanthropists and academics for each of its twice-annual meetings held in the EU and the US, from January 2013 until February 2016. These stakeholders had the opportunity to exchange the most recent research, strategies, policies, and innovations surrounding these issues, with the aim of leveraging and scaling up existing knowledge and research, and making early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from migrant and low income families a priority on the political agenda in Europe, the US, and beyond. Each meeting focused on a specific theme relevant to the challenges facing these populations in ECEC, and was organized by the King Baudouin Foundation and the two operating partners for the initiative, the VBJK Centre for Innovation in the Early Years in Belgium, and the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, DC.



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First meeting: 21-23 January 2013

Ghent, Belgium

Quality Early Childhood Services for All: Addressing Disparities in Access for Children from Migrant and Low-Income Families

Introduction

The Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY), a 3-year project convened by the King Baudouin Foundation in partnership with several European and American foundations, aims to explore policies and programs supporting the early childhood development of children from migrant and low-income families in Europe and the United States. The Forum brings together leading policy-makers, practitioners, philanthropists and academics for each of its twice-annual meetings held in the EU and the US. These stakeholders have the opportunity to exchange the most recent research, strategies, policies, and innovations surrounding these issues, with the aim of leveraging and scaling up existing knowledge and evidence-based research, and making early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from migrant and low-income families a priority on the political agenda in Europe, the US, and beyond. Each meeting focuses on a specific theme relevant to the challenges facing these populations in ECEC, and is organized by the King Baudouin Foundation and the two operating partners for the initiative, the VBJK Centre for Innovation in the Early Years in Belgium, and the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, DC.

The inaugural meeting of the TFIEY, *“Quality Early Childhood Services for All: Addressing Disparities in Access for Children from Migrant and Low-Income Families,”* took place on January 21-23, 2013, in Ghent, Belgium, and addressed the issue of accessibility. The meeting sought to explore:

- What existing data reveal about rates of enrollment and access to quality early childhood programming for children from low-income and migrant families;
- What primary barriers continue to impede equal access at the macro, meso and micro-levels, and how they might be addressed;
- What can be learned from examples of successful policies and practices that target these populations; and
- Where challenges of scaling such effective approaches have been overcome, and what elements of these successes might be adopted by others.



Common Points and Starting Assumptions

A certain set of starting assumptions universal to all contexts, however, can be identified from the background literature as well as an opening keynote presentation from Joan Lombardi to create a common ground from which the meeting's discussions can follow in a spirit of exchange and shared learning. These assumptions are the following:

- ***High quality ECEC is beneficial for all children, but even more so for children from vulnerable families.***

Recent advances in brain research have shown the critical importance of the early years in laying a strong foundation for future cognitive, social and emotional development. The potential of high quality ECEC services to bolster school readiness for underserved children and the long-term positive effects of these services on academic achievement, which may aid in closing gaps in later school outcomes make these programs critically important in promoting future academic, personal, and economic success for all. Meanwhile, research in the US shows that children of immigrants, particularly those who speak a language other than English in their homes, may benefit disproportionately from high-quality formal ECEC experiences compared to their native peers, as referenced by Park. Vandenbroeck and Lazzari similarly find in the European context that high-quality ECEC especially benefits the most disadvantaged children, particularly when it is provided in the context of social mix.

- ***Positive effects on development depend on the level of quality of ECEC.***

Studies have shown that ECEC attendance alone does not necessarily have a significant impact on children's healthy social and cognitive development, particularly in situations where service provision may have been of diverse quality. This suggests that not only access to ECEC programming, but access to programming of consistently high quality that meets certain standards, are necessary conditions to produce positive outcomes for children and for society as a whole.

- ***Child-centered investment strategies serve several goals that are critical to the success of society.***

In addition to short-term and long-term positive effects on academic achievement, high quality ECEC programming, particularly for disadvantaged children, has the potential to contribute significantly to larger goals of poverty reduction and increased intergenerational social mobility, benefitting economic development for society as a whole. In the EU, equitable access to high quality ECEC services is considered an important step toward the success of the European Commission's EU 2020 strategy, particularly in making progress toward targets concerning early school leaving and the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

- ***Many barriers to access persist beyond obvious economic and supply-related obstacles.*** In both the US and the EU, as elsewhere, differential rates of usage of ECEC programs are often misunderstood to be a result of parental choice and preference resulting, for instance, from cultural norms regarding care and family structure. This perception, however, has been largely disproven as evidence indicates that several constraints, including but not limited to availability and cost, influence parents' decisions regarding their children's care. Several of these constraints



and barriers are specific to immigrant families, necessitating a more comprehensive understanding and approach to the issue of unequal rates of access.

The European Context

The background papers written to introduce the issue of accessibility to ECEC in the European context provide an overview of the nature and scope of the challenges facing children from migrant and low income backgrounds and their ability to participate in high-quality programming in their early years.

Differential rates of access to high-quality non-maternal care and preschools among children from ethnic minority and low-income families have been well-documented in several European countries.

Vandenbroeck and Lazzari show that children from ethnic minority and low-income families are enrolled at lower rates in preschools and formal child care, and that even when enrolled, these children are more likely to be found in lower quality services than their peers. Explanations for these discrepancies include, at the policy level, public policies that lead to greater availability of high-quality ECEC services in more affluent areas, both in market-driven and in more comprehensive welfare systems, indicating the importance of entitlement, funding and affordability of ECEC provision in increasing access. Programmatic design may also discriminate against children from poor and migrant families, by prioritizing working parents or through rigid and limited hours of service that do not meet the needs of parents with irregular schedules. Lastly, characteristics of the families themselves, who often have smaller informal networks, less access to information, and may experience language and cultural barriers, may also impede ease of enrollment.

Reinforcing the above understanding that high quality ECEC particularly benefits those children who are the most disadvantaged, studies also show that vulnerable children stand to benefit most from ECEC services when they are provided in a universal context, with a mixed social demographic. These European findings suggest that universal provisions may be preferable to targeted services in terms of outcomes for the populations in question. Moreover, embedding high quality ECEC services within a system of broader social welfare provisions that work to combat child poverty and increase social equality is necessary to achieve desired goals, as ECEC provisions alone cannot ultimately accomplish all ideal outcomes for child and social well-being.

Vandenbroeck and Lazarri include in their briefing a framework for successful inclusive practices as recommended structural conditions for increasing access to ECEC for children from ethnic minority and low-income families, outlined below:

Policy level

1. Public funding
2. Integration of education and care
3. Entitlement (population based), possibly with geographical targets
4. Regulations on cost (fees)
5. Quality monitoring



Provision level

6. Democratic decision making
7. Priority criteria
8. Outreaching
9. Flexible opening hours matching diverse local needs
10. Diverse workforce
11. Inter-agency cooperation
12. Involvement
13. Accessible and meaningful information

The US Context

The landscape of ECEC services in the US differs significantly from that of the EU, perhaps most importantly in the relatively limited public provision of early learning services for children under age 5. Though state provision targeted to at-risk children in the past several decades has expanded significantly, only 50 percent of 3-year olds and 75 percent of 4-year olds overall are enrolled in formal early learning experiences, with only half of these enrolled in public programs. Without subsidies, full-day child care can cost anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 annually or more in the US, making ECEC access a challenge for many families. Even within this limited environment of provision, in the US, as in Europe, evidence demonstrates that rates of enrollment for children of immigrants compared to their native counterparts remain low. These uneven rates of access, moreover, differ depending on immigrants' region of origin, with children of immigrants in Hispanic and Southeast Asian families having the lowest rates of access, and those of Black African, Black Caribbean, and European families' actually exhibiting higher participation levels than children of US-born parents.

These differential rates of access are especially concerning given that disparities in achievement between children of immigrants and native-born children are often demonstrated even prior to kindergarten entry in the US, further emphasizing the importance of reaching these children in their early years at a critical time in their social, emotional and cognitive development.

As in the EU, factors that influence differential enrollment rates in the US are many and include poverty, particularly given the high fees associated with private provisions, as well as related challenges including availability of transportation; parental educational attainment, which is highly predictive of educational outcomes overall and is also strongly associated with preschool participation; language proficiency; and citizenship status; as well as family structure and workforce attachment.

Key Points Learned through Presentations and Discussion

The speakers and participants for the closed 3-day meeting in Ghent included a diverse group of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and philanthropists representing 15 different countries and bringing their varied experiences and expertise to the transatlantic conversation. The following are some of the key points that were raised through both the research and practitioner presentations that provided a starting point for each of the meeting's sessions.



- **What can be learned from international and comparative study: trends in access and equality**

A presentation from Wim Van Lancker of the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, showed using country-level data that higher levels of child care use are positively correlated with lower rates of child poverty internationally, with countries that have higher rates of formal childcare use demonstrating lower rates of child poverty overall, indicating that increasing access to high-quality childcare services is an important part of mitigating inequalities starting in the early years. This presentation also demonstrated that insufficient supply of childcare places, including the issue of distribution across, for example, rural and disadvantaged neighborhoods, is a more likely explanation than insufficient demand in resulting unequal rates of access to ECEC services, reinforcing Vandebroek and Lazzari's assertion that differential rates of use are a result not of parental choice, but rather of environmental constraints on parents' decisions. Maternal employment and family policies are also shown to play an important role in determining rates of access, implying that not only should supply and access to high-quality childcare services be expanded, but that this policy should be embedded through a larger system of social protections, including family-friendly policies that encourage maternal labor market participation, particularly for low-skilled mothers. On the other hand, international data also show that while child poverty is on the rise in almost all OECD countries, austerity measures in most countries are simultaneously leading to less rather than more redistributive policies.

- ***What can be learned from long-term longitudinal study: the positive impacts of high-quality ECEC***

Edward Melhuish's presentation from the University of London and University of Oxford, meanwhile, illustrated what research can reveal regarding the impact of high-quality ECEC and various factors and variables that are most powerful in influencing outcomes. According to the EPPE study conducted in the UK, aside from the home learning environment and socioeconomic status, quality of ECEC programming as well as its duration (in months) were the most important factors in determining successful outcomes for children's development. This was demonstrated to be true for both part-time and full-time preschool, which were determined to be equally beneficial.

The impact of high-quality ECEC for disadvantaged children was shown to be particularly important as high-quality ECEC was shown to insulate against later low-quality schooling, with the positive effects of preschool persisting through teenage years. Disadvantaged children were shown to benefit most when their early childhood programs were socially mixed, rather than targeting only the disadvantaged.

Overall, the EPPE study alongside results from several other national studies from France, Denmark, Norway and others shows strong evidence that longitudinal gains resulting from ECEC programs are clear in terms of not only achievement, but also behavior, employment, and future criminal behavior.

- ***What can be learned from a case study of the Hispanic population in the US***

The case of the young Hispanic population in the US offers an instructive case study in the significance of the issue of accessibility, as presented by Professor Eugene Garcia. Hispanic children under age 5



account for 21 percent of the total US population under 5; their share of the young child population has grown by 400 percent since the 1960's. High-quality ECEC is of especially great value for this group of children, given the achievement gap that opens up between Hispanics and Whites in later years of schooling; yet, Hispanic families in the US are less likely to be using pre-school services. Notably, gaps in immigrant achievement in the US are found not at basic academic levels, as may be expected, but rather in more advanced academic, language and numeracy skills. Similar to the EPPE study, a longitudinal study of the Tulsa pre-kindergarten program shows that high-quality ECEC services have a significant positive impact on later school success, and that these effects are particularly high for the Hispanic population compared to their native peers. In spite of these findings, lack of information and knowledge about services, language barriers, financial constraints and poor geographic distribution all contribute to low levels of access for this population compared to both white and African American children. Garcia's presentation further underscored the issue raised in the US background paper that access to ECEC is not a monolithic issue, but rather that different groups, even among immigrant families, have often dramatically different experiences that must be understood in order to craft successful policies and practices.

- ***Lessons learned at the program and provision level***

Beyond academic and research-oriented contributions, several country-level experts offered lessons learned in increasing accessibility for migrant and low-income children in their programs and service offerings. Across all presentations and discussions, there was an agreement that service providers require a deeper understanding of the situation of poverty in order to effectively serve their communities. A need to recognize that children arrive with their own cultures, values and background, and that, conversely, teachers and staff also arrive with these same constructs was raised, indicating that a recognition of these potential clashes and a more genuine embrace of diverse cultures, values and background is needed in ECEC services.

As a means to achieving these conditions, staff diversification was identified as being key to successful outreach and service of diverse populations—not only hiring staff from diverse cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds, but hiring staff who have had the experience of living in poverty can be a key cornerstone of success, and will be examined in greater detail at the second meeting of the TFIEY, which will focus on the issue of workforce quality. *Kind en Gezin*, an agency of the Flemish community in Belgium, for instance, relies on family supporters as a first point of contact with socially vulnerable families, and these are often employees who have themselves experienced poverty and can serve as effective liaisons between programs and families. The Walloon counterpart, ONE, has implemented an extensive home visiting program for every young family in the French speaking community in Belgium.

Using diverse methods of communication—for instance, the use of films and pictures was another identified strategy to meet diverse needs, given the difficulties low educated parents or speakers of other languages may have in understanding written notices. *Kind en Gezin* provides pictographic information regarding nutrition, safety, child care, and pregnancy which is used as an instrument to support communication and guidance. The *Head Start* program, meanwhile, has a Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness that



produces guidance and materials to aid programs in meeting the needs of their diverse families, including, for instance, assessment guides for bilingual learners and professional development resources.

Another key challenge that was raised by several speakers and participants was that of disparities between city, state, country and federal level policies which can create confusion and inconsistencies at the program level. A lack of alignment and understanding across levels—for instance, between national policy recommending continued support of home languages in programs versus state policy that demands English-only approaches, as is the case for the US *Head Start* program—was a commonly raised concern. Even at the program level alone, an alignment of services and the maintaining of an overall strategy to meet the needs of disadvantaged families, rather than disparate and ad-hoc attempts, was identified as being essential to success. Accordingly, the existence of systems-level standards is seen as being insufficient to achieve high-quality services for marginalized families; rather, internalization of these standards by service staff who are invested and have a deep understanding of their importance is necessary to effectively reach out to these families and children.

An over-arching theme across program discussions was that of the importance of respecting parents and families and building on the skills and capacities that they can offer, taking a true strengths-based approach toward their inclusion in services. A need to focus not only on risk factors but also on the skills, such as bilingualism, that children and their families bring to services was emphasized particularly in a presentation of the *International Step by Step Association*. Here, the idea that parents themselves are potential leaders and agents of change, as they can be effective, for instance, in reaching out to newly arrived immigrants and drawing in new families to important services, was discussed. Ultimately, “inclusion” can be viewed not only as a way of adapting families to the existing system, but also and perhaps more importantly about adapting systems to diverse families and a changing demographic reality.

Lessons Learned in Policy and Finance, and a Look to the Future

The Forum’s three days of discussion culminated in a policy-based discussion in an attempt to learn from past attempts to improve accessibility of ECEC for vulnerable families at local and regional levels, and to examine potential opportunities and threats on the horizon in the policy climate surrounding the possible expansion of early childhood provision for low-income and immigrant populations.

Much of this conversation centered around issues of political will and strategies for translating the now widely available and accepted research on the importance of high-quality ECEC into expanded provisions at the systems level, and approaches and messaging that might move countries and systems closer to a state of universal provision. **Progressive universalism as a strategy toward combining universal and targeted services** and garner broad-based support for redistributive policies was discussed, with the current Flemish education system examined as a model of this approach. Under this system, a baseline of funding is allotted for every child, with additional funding provided based on specific risk factors, such as low household income, low maternal educational attainment, and home language other than Dutch. This has been an effective



policy within the context of the education system, which is already widely accepted as being a universal provision that should be publicly available to all. Within the world of childcare, however, where accessibility remains highly variable both within and across countries, this will likely prove a more challenging policy to introduce. Exploring other means of combining universal and targeted approaches to foster political support and provide realistic funding options is an area for future inquiry.

Maintaining a rights-based mentality in framing the issue of early childhood services was also intensively discussed as an important strategy that remains critical in making progress on this issue. In order to make strides, ECEC must eventually be envisioned by the public and by policy-makers as an essential right, similar to primary education. A plea was made to continue to maintain a strong focus on democratic values and not resort only to return on investment arguments at the policy level for fear of losing this mindset, particularly in the EU context. Similarly, in maintaining a critical eye toward assessment and evaluation, several participants reminded the Forum of the importance of being mindful of “why we measure what we measure”, calling academics and practitioners alike to keep sight of the intrinsic value of ECEC services rather than having a purely outcomes-focused approach.

Also important in successfully messaging and framing the issue of ECEC expansion is that of **winning the middle-class majority’s buy-in** to the issue. Particularly given the current economic climate, public sentiment toward investment targeted only toward the disadvantaged may be less enthusiastic overall, and middle class resentment may arise in the instance of limited funding leading, for instance, to scarcity of childcare slots for their own children. Maintaining a sense of solidarity around the issue of ECEC is therefore crucial, particularly as the middle-class majority is often the most influential in driving policy decisions. For this reason, too, mixed universal services, when they can be achieved, are often more likely to be successful than services targeted toward low-income families.

At the same time, as rates of child poverty continue to increase across most OECD countries as illustrated by Van Lancker, **framing ECEC issues within the larger context of child poverty reduction** can also be a powerful strategy in advancing the agenda. As poverty is often viewed not as an individual but rather as a societal problem, and children in particular are seen as being blameless in their disadvantaged position, this can be a successful political approach for winning support for investments in ECEC, particularly within the framework of EU2020 goals to reduce poverty and the upcoming social investment package to be released by the European Commission. The Flemish government, for instance, has an integrated and coordinated policy to fight poverty across all relevant departments, addressing over 200 indicators and drafted in cooperation with families experiencing poverty. In this way, not only is ECEC expansion likely to gain more popular political support, but it is also more likely to be part of an aligned strategy that addresses child well-being overall. Moreover, the fact that ECEC on its own cannot eliminate poverty, but rather must be embedded in a larger system of welfare policies, similarly calls for **increased interdepartmental cooperation** as well as **intergenerational solidarity** in an age where Europe is home to a wealthier aging population but an increasingly poor young child population.



Remaining Questions and Challenges

Taken together, the background papers, presentations and discussions that served as inputs to this event demonstrated that, whether in the US or the EU, accessibility to high-quality ECEC services for disadvantaged children and families remains uneven and problematic, in spite of several instances of good and innovative practice. Moreover, while an established research base makes highly evident the importance of investing in the early years, political motivation and consistency surrounding its funding and provision, particularly for the most disadvantaged, is either lacking or highly variable over time, leading to practices that lag far behind research in most countries. The Forum's discussion illustrated that policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and philanthropists each have an important role to play in raising awareness, forming collaborative partnerships, improving practice, and moving forward the political agenda on this issue.

Over the course of the Forum's debate, key points and recurring themes pointed to several major challenges that remain to be addressed and questions that embody the principal concerns raised throughout the meeting:

- Alignment of services—from the state to federal level, the national to EU level, and from birth through primary school—is lacking and needs to be improved. Increasing interagency cooperation and dialogue is necessary.
- High-quality ECEC services must not only be accessible, affordable, and available, but also desirable and relevant to all families and responsive to changing demographics in order to be successful.
- Parents must be included alongside their children as their first teachers and key partners in their learning and development, and should be drawn in to services in a meaningful and respectful manner.
- Services with a social mix are important for child outcomes and for avoiding “ghettoization”, but are highly challenging to achieve in the face of segregated neighborhoods. Staff diversification in this context also remains a challenge that must be addressed.
- We must find a way for access to high-quality ECEC to be maintained as a social and political priority even through times of economic austerity and frequent administrative and political changes.

Forthcoming convenings of the TFIEY, of which there will be seven in total, will focus on themes that will seek to explore several of the above issues in greater detail. Future planned themes, all of which will focus on low-income and migrant families in particular, will include: Workforce Preparation and Curriculum Innovations; Parent Engagement and Dual Generation Strategies; Multilingualism and Multiple Identities; the Role of National Governments, Policy Levers, and Effective Decentralization; Integrated Systems; and Evaluation.



Second meeting: July 10th – 12th, 2013

New York, USA

Workforce Preparation and Curriculum Innovations

Introduction

The first TFIEY meeting focused on the issue of (in)accessibility of ECEC¹. This is of fundamental importance given the many benefits ECEC can have for all children, and especially for children with a background of migration and/or poverty. It was made very clear that these benefits depend on the condition of high quality of services. In turn, this quality will depend largely on the quality of the professionals working in ECEC and the work they do with children and parents. This leads us to the theme of the second meeting: *workforce preparation and curriculum innovations*. During this meeting - July 10th – 12th in New York, USA – a diverse group of researchers, policymakers, practitioners and philanthropists presented their experiences and expertise in a transatlantic dialogue. Among others, the following questions were explored:

- In response to demographic changes that are being experienced in cities and districts across the EU and US, what kinds of purposeful changes in instructional practice and workforce preparation and professionalization have been successful in addressing the challenges presented by increasing diversity in the young child population? Does this new demographic reality present a need for major changes in prenatal and early childhood education strategies, and how do these demands intersect with other ongoing calls for reform and improvement of early childhood systems?
- What types of innovative curricula have been successful in engaging children of migrants and children from low-income families, and what elements of these curricula may be applicable in diverse settings?
- What steps are local institutions, systems and different levels of government taking in order to better prepare professionals, teachers and care givers to work effectively and competently with children of immigrants and children experiencing poverty and their families through both preservice and in-service training and professional development?
- What successful strategies have governments, cities and districts used to diversify their early childhood workforce and recruit from former migrant populations to reflect the changing demographics of their child populations?

¹ For all information, background notes, presentations and video, see www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years



THE CURRICULUM DEBATE

The debate on the ECEC curriculum is an ongoing one at both sides of the Atlantic. What should ECEC be about? What should it 'teach' young children, especially those children who are already at risk of being or getting behind? Do we settle for delivering school-ready children who master the basic 3 R's ('reading, writing and arithmetic') or do we aim higher and look at ECEC services as democratic spaces where young children can safely experiment in getting to know themselves, the world, their peers and where they are respected and stimulated to grow, in the most broad sense of the word? The general feel during the Forum clearly tended to the latter (in some case going against policy tendencies). How such an open curriculum should then look like and how it could and should be implemented is yet another issue and a debate in itself.

- ***There is an increasing agreement on certain principles of early childhood curriculum design, while discussion does remain on the way this should or could be implemented.***

Children learn in many different ways. ECEC curricula need to be open and provide children with a variety of resources for play, self-expression, sharing experiences, meaning making, engaging with their peers and the world around them, rather than aim at pre-set goals. In a setting of responsive interaction to children's needs (diverse as they are), their sense of identity and belonging can be fostered. Bennett gives a more detailed description of the main principles of such an open curriculum, in which some of the essential characteristics are: aimed at the holistic development of the child with respect for and knowledge of his/her background, inclusive, equitable, democratic, experiential and educational. Stimulating the child's well-being, by being responsive, warm and supportive, is essential to better enable the child to also engage in the curricular learning. Alongside, there is also a clear warning: over accentuating the curriculum in terms of outcomes may make us lose sight of all the other in-school and out-of-school factors that heavily weigh on these outcomes.

Formal curricula as such have little impact on the development and learning outcome of children with a migrant and low-background compared to the significant impact of the family background and the level of the inter-relational and pedagogical skills of the practitioners in ECEC.

- ***Dealing with the increasingly diverse population, early years professionals do not only need to engage with children to support their holistic development; they also need to intentionally involve parents and local communities.***

With the systemic exclusion of Roma children as a strong illustration throughout his presentation, J. Bennett looks at how curriculum characteristics can help to overcome exclusion and increase mutual understanding among different groups in population. (It should also be clear however, that measures on a wider societal level are necessary as well to get to a more equitable society in general, but this lies beyond the focus of the meeting). The ECEC curriculum should develop more beyond standard setting (with the same targets for every child) and traditional learning targets; it should focus on the well-being of children and their holistic development as well.

Looking at the children with a background of migration and poverty, it should aim at respect for their different backgrounds and cultural identity, preferably in a setting of a socially mixed population. The curriculum



should shape children's rights in their daily life and build on principles like non-discrimination, access, having all children involved, providing a safe and warm environment where they can be challenged.

Shifting the focus to oral language is recommended, particularly but not exclusively in the official tongue, with attention for the home languages of attending children.

A new look on methods of assessment and testing school-readiness should be developed for children with a migrant or low-income background, since the outcomes of these assessments largely depend on their family background and other out-of-school factors as well and merely accentuate the existing gap instead of bridging it.

Alongside new curriculum development, ECEC should also enjoy proper financing, recognize the value of staff diversity and engage in welcoming parents and the dialogue with them.

Bringing the immigrant parent's perspective into ECEC is also one of the main messages of Prof. Tobin. ECEC shouldn't only be about socio-cultural assimilation of minority groups; it should also be about intercultural dialogue on education, on what children need, on what ECEC should offer. The search is for a delicate balance, a reconciliation of different norms and values, needs, expectations, ideas on learning. This can only happen when different perspectives are brought together in a setting of mutual respect and a willingness to meet on equal terms to discuss what high quality ECEC actually means. Including the perspective of parents and local communities is both necessary and full of tensions as parents and teachers do not always see eye to eye on this matter. Some (immigrant) parents may wish ECEC to focus on learning results and school readiness, and on helping their children to integrate, while respecting their own identity and cultural background; whereas teachers are keener on experiential and play-based learning. And while introducing new cultural issues may be quite simple when it comes to food, dress and dance, it is quite more complicated when it touches on the more fundamental issues like gender roles, values and pedagogy. Creating mutual trust, understanding and respect is not so much a question of giving up one's beliefs and values, but rather to create the space and willingness to openly discuss these issues.

- *Inspiring practices on both sides of the Atlantic*

As already introduced in the opening session, it was made clear that ECEC needs to move forward from the traditional school readiness and mere cognitive development goals. A stronger focus on the holistic development of young children and working on diversity were among the recurring issues.

The Tools of the Mind program (D. Leong), based on Vigotsky, works on improving children's social and self-regulating skills through 'make believe' play. As the focus in (US) preschools shifts increasingly to academic outcome, non-cognitive skills tend to remain less developed and there is less room for play.

With Tools of the Mind, structured play has proven to be beneficial in the development of self-regulatory and socio-emotional skills of young children.

The Berliner Curriculum (C. Preissig) is based on the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity and considers education as a holistic socio-educational concept. It is now used in over 2000 ECEC centres for children 0-6y. Children and their families, as well as the community around them, are at centre stage. Practitioners are not



supposed to test the children but to enable them to develop at their own pace, to discover what they are good at (or not), what they enjoy (or not). The curriculum is constantly being (re)shaped in a process of negotiation with the team, the families and the children. With children with a different home language, 'deep' one-on-one dialogue (work on what the child finds interesting, what makes sense, use things like the family wall, welcome words in the home language) seems effective in getting more familiar with the majority language.

Organizational measures have been taken to make this possible: time for team meetings, for one-on-one parent-teacher communication, for family stories, for formal and informal participation, for training etc.

WORKFORCE IN THE EARLY YEARS

Vandenbroeck, Lazarri and Peeters refer to EU documents and several studies to describe what competences ECEC staff need in the context of diversity. It is clear that these go quite far beyond the traditional competences of caring and teaching. To have more children from vulnerable groups take part in ECEC services, these need to open up and reach out to their families in a context of respectful dialogue. They need to get involved, not only with the children, but with the families as well as with the local communities to get them engaged in the decision-making process on all aspects of the ECEC services (management, quality, curriculum...)

Working with families with a migration or low-income background requires additional competencies and attitudes: welcoming diversity, respecting different family backgrounds, values and beliefs, outreach work, reflectiveness, commitment, responsiveness, ability to build relations of trust and mutual respect, teamwork, and cooperating with other organizations and structures. "Getting the structures right is essential, but so too is working on ethos and practice".²

- ***A combination of both initial training and continued professional development is vital in maintaining an effective workforce. In these different types of training, a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice is essential.***

Although there is ample evidence on the importance of staff formal qualifications, the ideal level – bachelor – is not reached in many countries (especially for the under 3 year olds). At the same time, there is also evidence that these qualifications as such, still can't fully predict the quality of ECEC. The CoRe study³ for example, showed that continued professional development and diverse methods of on the job training also contribute to quality improvement. With the group of children with a migrant and low income background in mind, training is needed on issues like anti-bias education, social justice, inclusion, multilinguism and super diversity. Continued pedagogical support, sufficient enough in length and intensity, is also vital, as are

² Bennett, J. and Moss, P. (2011), *Working for inclusion: how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens. Final report of the cross-European program Working for Inclusion: the role of early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion.* (www.childrenscotland.org.uk/wfi), p.62.

³ <http://www.vbjk.be/files/CoRe%20Final%20Report%202011.pdf>



supportive mechanisms working on competences of reflective practice, dialogue with parents or pedagogical support.

- ***Where the required competences need to be acquired by the individual practitioner, this is also true for the whole professional system, including the necessary coherent policies.***

Developing more competent practices for vulnerable groups implies a joint effort of the individual practitioner, the team and the management, but certainly needs to imply training centres, local administration and regional/national governance as well. The CoRe study reported on the importance of coherent policy and practice on all those levels, combining among others measures like: training in and among ECEC centres on all staff levels, creating learning communities, investing in pedagogical mentoring and other supportive measures, increasing the number of bachelors, increase opportunities for job mobility, deploy a variety of on the job training, allow for 'non-contact' time and connect and cooperate with other sectors (health, social services, schools...).

- ***The workforce, engaging with diverse groups of populations, should reflect the diversity of the public addressed.***

The added value of diversifying the workforce is becoming clearer and there is an increase in ECEC services of bridging persons, bilingual practitioners/teaching assistants or staff members with a background of migration or poverty. Staff from ethnic minorities can challenge stereotypes and prejudice within the team and may lower the barrier for some families. However, experts have also formulated some reminders on this issue. 'Ethnic matching' should be avoided: all staff members should be able to work with all families. Avoid repeating society's inequalities within the team (a typical example would be the cleaning lady, from an ethnic minority, in an 'all white' team). Include lower qualified staff in job mobility programs in order to lead them to similar qualifications and job conditions as average staff. Include the whole team in staff development or team meetings.

- ***The competence debate: the need for a competent system for all children.***

In Europe, as in the US, there is clearly more work to be done in both workforce preparation and continued professional development.

Opposed to the sector of mandatory education, there is no coherent regulation on qualification of the workforce in ECEC. Prof. Whitebrook explained how these qualifications are different, depending on the location, state, type of program, funding and most of all, family resources. Translated to the vulnerable group of children and families with a background of migration and/or poverty, this leads to the problematic conclusion that those children most in need of high quality services are least likely to receive them (this is quite similar in many European countries). Moreover, in working with children from diverse backgrounds, a similar diversity is still hardly reflected among the staff in ECEC services. Workers from minority groups will



most often be employed on an assistant level, while teachers and directors are predominantly white and middleclass.

The fact that many children of immigrants are being taken care of by informal, non-licensed providers, of which all data are lacking, adds to the insecurity on the level of quality.

Not only the (lack of) qualification requirements raises questions. There is also a lack of attention for professional development, once on the job. Measures such as teaching support, learning communities, adult well-being, job crafting and program leadership should be put in place.

On European side, Dr. J. Peeters presented some findings of the CoRe study⁴ on competence requirements in ECEC throughout Europe, which are also very diverse. The qualification requirements are higher in the integrated systems (where care and education are linked for children up to mandatory school age) than in the split systems. In some countries up to half of the ECEC workforce consists of formally unqualified auxiliary staff, working with the higher qualified practitioners, even though they take up a lot of very important care work with the young children and they play an crucial role in the interaction with the parents, especially those of disadvantaged groups. There is hardly any in-service training for them or opportunities for upward job mobility. The division of tasks, with the auxiliary staff performing the more practical caring tasks, brings with it the risk of jeopardizing a holistic pedagogical approach. In Europe too, rethinking professional development is highly recommended, e.g. to provide these assistants with qualifying training trajectories and investing in continued professional development that is based on reflecting on practice. In a rapidly changing society and to work with diverse groups, it is now clear that, while qualifications are certainly a factor for high quality ECEC for all, initial qualification alone will no longer suffice.

The CoRe study also marks the importance, not only of competent individual ECEC workers, but also of a competent system, referring to the team and the organization, but also to interagency cooperation and supportive governance of ECEC workforce. Policies on working conditions that provide supportive measures like reflecting on one's practice, learning communities or pedagogical coaching are still lacking in several countries. Other problematic areas in many countries are a.o.: high staff turnover, unbalance child/staff ratio, lack of child free hours (for training, meetings, reflection...), poor working conditions.

- ***Inspiring practices to support and prepare practitioners.***

T. Mussati¹⁰ (Italy) makes a case for continuous professional development (CPD) and strong pedagogical coordination, showing how this improved staff quality, even in the complicated Italian split system of ECEC, being a patchwork of regulations, levels of governance, qualifications and funding.

In Italy CPD is systemic, systematic and situated. ECEC workers have both the right and the obligation to take 'child-free' hours, making time for team meetings, planning, documenting, contacts with parents, or training. CPD aims at improving reflecting attitude and collective competence building.

Pedagogistas coach the teams and link them with parents. Peer interaction and parental involvement are seen as major sources of support.

⁴ Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazarri, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011), *CoRe, Competence requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Final report doe the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. Research documents. <http://www.vbjk.be/en/node/3818>



Since this is all still happening on team level, future networking among ECEC services with exchange visits, regional documentation centres, more support for the pedagogists themselves and interagency cooperation on children's rights and inclusion is recommended.

Prof. J. De Maeseneer wants to see healthcare workers as agents of change and introduce transformative learning and a more direct link to real practice during university studies. He talked about an initiative at the Ghent University where students at the Faculty of Medicine were merged with students of the Master in Social Work in day-to-day practice to become more aware of and responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups. This way, they learn about family-systems and parenthood, they actually see the consequences of socio-economic differences and they get to understand how health care is related to environmental constraints. The technical medical education is broadened with innovative educational modules with a strong focus on community-based health care, communication skills and awareness of social accountability.

Both from England (UK) and New York City (USA) new developments in the ECEC profession were illustrated aimed at improving both knowledge and skills and dispositions.

Prof C. Cameron explained the development of the Early Years Professional in England. This bachelor level function is aimed at bridging the care and education divide, to work with 0-5 year old children, to lead change on practice and implement new curricula. Although shortcomings persist in working conditions, the benefits are becoming clear: a better understanding of theory and how to apply in practice, a feel of being better equipped with pedagogical language, more enjoyment of work and lower staff turnover, more confidence

In New York City, with all its diversity, quality of ECEC provision is still very different depending on the socio-economic status of the parents. There are huge disparities in quality and effectiveness between professionals working with children from low-income families and those working with middle and upper class children. Guaranteeing quality and excellence to all is a major challenge. J. Howe talked about several system reform related initiatives that are being developed such as a workforce registry, early learning guidelines, a higher education inventory, quality rating and improvement systems and a core body of knowledge.

The importance of bringing in the context in workforce preparation became clear in the specific setting of Northern Ireland, where peace-building initiatives on different levels and targeted at different groups are being developed and implemented. Several examples were presented by S. Fitzpatrick such as: media campaigns, opening conversation among young children on conflict symbols, in-service training for teachers and management teams (reflecting on prejudice, meaningful dialogue on culture and religion, sensitive communication with parents...), parent education and support and community engagement and empowerment.

RAISING THE STAKES: BOTH ON THE FIELD AND IN POLICY AND ACCORDING BUDGETS

- Where working in the early year's sectors (care, education, health...) requires several specific competencies, knowledge and attitudes, **additional competencies and attitudes are needed when working with families with a migration or low-income background.** The level of quality and



preparation of staff in ECEC contributes to a large extent to the overall quality level of the services offered. To make ECEC and health provisions more inclusive, more accessible and more valuable for these vulnerable groups diversity must be welcomed. Throughout the presentations, recurring issues were: respecting different family backgrounds, values and beliefs, outreach work, reflecting on practice, commitment, responsiveness, ability to build relations of trust and mutual respect, teamwork, and cooperating with other organizations and structures.

- **To offer quality services, not only individual professionals, but also the system as a whole needs to be highly competent.** Developing competent practices should be a joint effort between individuals, teams, training centres, pedagogical coaches, actors at the governance level, and (international) exchange fora. These practices lead to higher levels of professionalism and more democratic ways to deal with conflict or misunderstandings. Such exchange should not only be enabled within the ECEC sector but should also cross over to other sectors like health, social work and education. Alongside, the low status of ECEC workers could be improved by better working conditions as well.
- As children learn in many different ways, we **need ‘open’ curricula, where children’s life experiences and their own learning strategies are valued.** Separate or specific curricula for vulnerable children do not seem to have additional value; any core curriculum should meet the strengths and needs of diverse groups of children and ensure equitable educational outcomes and well-being in all areas.
- **A holistic view of education, including not only cognitive and academic development but also healthy, socio-emotional development is necessary in approaching** both the issues of curricula and workforce development. In many countries, both curricula and teacher preparation still keep a strong focus on academic success, on outcome and performance of children. From this session we learned that if this focus is too strong or dominant, it minimizes the chances for a safe setting to negotiate what and how young children from disadvantaged background could or should learn.
- Working in early years doesn’t only imply working with children. **Engaging in respectful dialogue with parents, especially those of minority and vulnerable groups, is equally important:** to strengthen mutual understanding of norms, values and backgrounds and to recognize the expertise of parents.

How could and should these messages be translated into policies and according budget lines? Where can and should changes be made? How can investing in (young) children be connected with investing in ECEC workforce?

While both the EU and the US understand the necessity of raising the level of professionalism in ECEC, the policy approach is somewhat different. The EU 2020 targets⁵ are clear on a.o. education and the fight against poverty, both in which ECEC has a major role to play, but the search for the required budget remains highly problematic. Choices will have to be made and there is no clear overall agreement on what level of ECEC

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/targets/index_en.htm



education is required exactly. On US side, there seems to be a growing acceptance on the importance for quality ECEC for all children. Political attention and budgets are increasing. The major concern is that, when more ECEC workers are needed, and when they have to be highly educated and competent (bachelors/masters), not enough financial resources will be available. Some voices say that, instead of focusing on degrees, we should develop systems of validating certain qualifications and capacities, which meet the need of young children. Others then, point out the paradox of having higher teacher requirements as children grow older, when we know for a fact how important those early years are in a child's development.

To attract more people to ECEC, the work in ECEC services will need an upgrade as well. The difference in status, salary and working conditions between ECEC workforce and school teachers is no longer acceptable.

Early intervention (e.g. home visits) for children at risk, is considered to be one of the keys to get children to those services that will help them prepare to get to school. But shouldn't ECEC be more than just that?

Policies should be aimed at valuing early year's provisions as such, as a basic provision that children – and their parents – are entitled to. There is enough evidence of the value of high quality ECEC, but this not always used as a basis for policies. In developing such policies, the families at stake should also get a stronger voice; their needs and opinions rarely get a place in the discussions

FINAL TAKEAWAYS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

- **ECEC Curricula** should serve all different categories of children. Specific curricula for children with a migrant or low-income background have not led to better outcomes. The focus needs to be on the holistic development of children, including learning and academic outcomes, but also wellbeing, positive identity formation, inclusion. Curricula need to be defined in dialogue with parents (what do they need, what do they think is important) in a reciprocal relationship of respect and mutual trust. And finally, they have to be implemented by committed, competent and qualified staff.
- Investing in children means investing in the professionalization of **workforce**. There is a proven link between quality of the workforce and outcomes for children BUT this link is strongly influenced by the level of actual working conditions, the presence (or lack) of systemic support of all staff. Quality of ECEC staff is not only a question of qualifications and pre-service preparation but also of different types of sustained training on the job, favorable working conditions, and pedagogical mentoring and support. Transformative education and workforce preparation is needed to get the reflective practitioners that we need in a context of hyper diversity and multilingualism. ECEC practitioners are to be 'actors of change'. Therefore investments in leadership are also crucial. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and support must be provided to all staff, with sufficient length and intensity to be effective and leading to change. Both pre-service and in-service training are necessary. For instance, a minimum of 50% of the staff should have a bachelor degree. Staff from different backgrounds can increase the awareness of stereotypes and prejudices within the team and move



forward in learning to deal with these. In diversifying the workforce, ethnic matching should be avoided: all staff members should work with all children and families. Diversifying the workforce is not only an issue of ethnic background but also an issue of gender.



Third meeting: January 20 – 22, 2014

Lisbon, Portugal

Successful Parent and Family Engagement in the Early Years: Reaching out to Immigrant and Low-income Families

Introduction

The third meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY), held in Lisbon, Portugal from January 20-22, 2014, was titled “Successful Parent and Family Engagement in the Early Years: Reaching out to Immigrant and Low-income Families.” The discussion sought to explore, among others, the following issues:

- How can the needs of families with a migrant background and parents experiencing poverty be addressed, ensuring that they are truly the “first educators” for their children and enabling them to act as advocates for their children’s success and well-being?
- What are innovative and effective practices being used in family engagement for children from migrant and low-income families across local systems and NGO’s that can be integrated at a systemic level?
- What are some models and programs that work successfully with low-income and immigrant parents and families with young children that incorporate health and early learning strategies in their curricula?
- What are effective ways in which ECEC programs can be leveraged as an opportunity to engage parents in training and other services as part of a dual generation poverty reduction and integration strategy?
- What are ways in which systems alignment affects ongoing parent and family engagement in children’s early years, and what are some lessons learned from cities and nations that have begun to implement integration and alignment efforts?

The speakers and participants for the closed 3-day meeting included a diverse group of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and philanthropists representing 16 different countries and bringing their varied experiences and expertise to the transatlantic conversation. The following are some of the key points that were raised through both the research and practitioner presentations that provided a starting point for each of the meeting’s sessions.



The importance of parent engagement

Dr. Weiss' presentation gave an introduction to the importance of parent engagement as a major predictor of later school success, and its importance in particular for low-income children and others who typically experience lower levels of parent engagement for many different reasons, several of which are discussed in the [US background paper](#) for the event. Her presentation discussed the need to move past the dominant assumption that "learning" occurs primarily or exclusively in schools, and understand the critical importance of out-of-school learning that can occur and the vital role that parents and families play in promoting these opportunities. Moreover, parents' roles in sharing responsibility with early childhood programs, schools and communities to contribute to children's learning and development must be continuous from birth throughout early childhood and school years, and must be provided systemically rather than as a series of random acts.

Dr. Weiss also introduced the idea of "demand parents", setting the stage for an ongoing discussion regarding the tension between training parents vs. training professionals in order to bridge the divide between home, families, and schools, and what it truly means to create demand-led services. Promoting the idea of "demand parents" means empowering families and responding to each unique families' interests and needs and engaging in true dialogue with families, reaching out to them in ways that build trust, comfort, and confidence. This is in contrast to practices where developed programmes are 'offered' to vulnerable families (and where they can almost be morally obliged to participate in because of their vulnerability).

The Role of Fathers

Dr. Lewis, meanwhile, focused on the issue of paternal engagement within the larger picture of family engagement, making the case that studying men and children leads to a better understanding of how families function and children develop within the family context, with fathering behavior and patterns often serving as a "barometer" for overall family functioning.

In the UK, fathers are increasingly responsible for the care of their children, and research has shown that fathers do influence the development of their children, particularly in later years. Father-child play, as opposed to paternal attachment, has in particular been linked to improved school adjustment and peer competence, though these effects are embedded in a network of family and other relationships.

For migrant families and those experiencing poverty, paternal involvement is perhaps increasingly important to examine as paternal migration can place strains on individuals and families. And for fathers who are constrained by long hours of work and difficult and low-paying jobs, increased work-home conflicts often arise, affecting not only their parenting patterns but also co-parenting patterns for mothers as well as fathers.

Parenting programs as well as leave policies have sought to increase the involvement of fathers in their children's development—studies have shown that involvement in parenting courses can lead to increased engagement of fathers with their children, as well as improved relationships with their partners and an increase in financial support. However, the challenge of recruitment into such programs was raised as an issue, with a need to understand the unique "culture" of fathers and to conduct outreach accordingly, through relevant channels and in the right venues.



These points were later echoed by Roger Olley, the former Head of Services for Children North East in the UK. His presentation also raised the importance of reaching fathers early, during the prenatal period, in which fathers are often ignored. The idea that “early involvement predicts later involvement” holds true across all areas of family engagement, including paternal engagement. The importance of early involvement was similarly emphasized by Silvia Pasqua, Professor at the University of Turin, who spoke not only of the higher rates of return on earlier interventions, but also the higher impact that parental time investment has on earlier years as compared with later in childhood.

Some of the key conclusions and major questions arising from these overview presentations that provided direction for the rest of the meeting included the specific challenge posed by the current economic climate, with families needing a baseline of resources and time in addition to relevant services, as well as the acknowledgement of a gap between the intentions of parent and family services and the actual outcomes they are able to deliver.

Promising Practices in Reaching and Serving Low-Income and Migrant Families

Several administrators, experts, and practitioners presented models of inspiring and innovative practice in working with low-income and migrant parents and families. While “family engagement” can refer to a wide variety of activities, the meeting broke down the types of programming encompassed under this term into a few major categories:

1. Parent Engagement in ECEC Program Provision and Policy

Nancy Aardema of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and Gjalte Jellesma from BOinK presented on provisions that engage parents in existing early childhood programming and empower them to successfully navigate ECEC systems and successfully advocate for their children. Both of these programs, active in Chicago and all over the Netherlands, respectively, organize parents to give them a voice to negotiate for their rights and interests and those of their children. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association accomplishes this through a parent-mentor program, which seeks to bridge the divide between school culture and home culture for parents, many of whom do not speak English and are otherwise isolated in their communities. Parents are given training and are also engaged as paraprofessionals in their children’s classroom to take advantage of their language skills, empowering them first to act as equal partners in their children’s learning, and also to become leaders in their community to serve as advocates on other issues including, for instance, housing, wage, and immigration issues. This way, it becomes clear from firsthand what these families really need, which can be quite different from what professionals presume they need.

BOinK serves as some kind of parent’s union on ECEC and out-of-school care. BOinK gives a framework for parent’s voices to improve the quality of ECEC services through increased parent engagement, particularly for parents from low socio-economic backgrounds. BOinK, however, takes the approach of negotiating on behalf of parents in order to improve legislation and insert important issues of quality in Dutch ECEC law through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Several other instances of parenting programs that are combined with early childhood education programs are also outlined in a background paper for the meeting on Two Generation Programs by Dr. Wim de Mey and Michel Vandenbroeck.



2. Family-Oriented Services with Active Parent Engagement

Two different models of interdisciplinary family centers in Sweden and the US were presented and discussed as instances of family-oriented services with active parent engagement. Both centers have practices built upon a thorough analysis of the social problems and social strengths of a specific neighborhood and context, addressing the question: what are the needs of a diversity of families, children, and how can we address their needs in order to improve the health, learning and development of all children and support the parents in their parental role as in their role as members of a society? The discussion was focused on the different underlying funding models of the two types of family centers and the advantages and disadvantages of both systems. While in Sweden, the centers are fully paid by the national and local government, in the US, the Mar Vista Centre in the US is fully privately funded.

In Sweden, traditional child health care services consist of pediatric nurses and pediatricians giving advice to families in a separate entity. These services reach, however, mostly middle class mothers born in Sweden. Vibeke Bing, founder of the National Organization of the Swedish Family Centres, presented the Swedish model of a Family Center as an alternative model in which there is a strong link assumed between the well-being of children and the living conditions of their parent. A Family Center integrates maternity health care, child health care, an open pre-school and other social welfare activities in one building. By locating services in one place, the accessibility for children and parents increases, especially for immigrant parents. This health model, which originally started in the seventies as a bottom-up movement, is now officially recognized as an important part of the public child health policy. Family centers are free of charge and manage to reach a socio-economic diversity of families. By including an open preschool, these centers offer a meeting space for children and parents which positively affects the social network of parents, stimulates social learning and offers them social support. In an evaluation study, parents stressed the importance of being validated as a 'normal parent with a 'normal' child as one of the success factors of this program.

The Mar Vista family Centre, a member organisation of the Los Angeles Preschool Advocacy Initiative (LAPAI), was founded in 1977 as a community preschool seeking to engage parents as partners in their children's education and social development. Lucia Diaz, director of the Mar Vista Family Centre, presented their 'Parent Engagement Model', built on the principles of personal responsibility and empowerment through education and leadership training. Parent and family engagement is considered a key for success in transforming a community, combating many social problems such as drugs, domestic violence, criminality and early school leaving. Currently the Mar Vista Family Center provides different services such as ECEC, college preparation, youth and parent leadership, health, wellness and recreational activities. An evaluation study demonstrated how long-term involvement with entire families has improved family functioning, decreased domestic violence and improved youth's academic successes and rate of attendance at institutes of higher education. More than 500 community leaders are trained in the community leadership and advocacy graduate program.

3. Parent Engagement in Health Services

In addition to focusing on early learning experiences, the issue of successfully engaging parents in preventive health services working with mothers of young children was also discussed. Perrine Humblet of the Brussels Free University presented the results of research on perinatal health services for vulnerable families provided in Belgium by ONE. Some of the key issues raised in this presentation focused on the asymmetric relationship between beneficiaries and the professionals serving them, particularly in the context of home visits, and



ways in which this might be addressed, such as the need to work in a participatory way and engage “co-educationally,” through open discussion and a strong effort to discover where parental concerns truly lie. She also made the point that although, in the case of Belgium, there is a perinatal system in place, a lack of recognition of the alignment between pre- and postnatal services is still evident, and a shortage of training, evaluation, and resources is prevalent.

Michelle Sarju, meanwhile, spoke about her program, Open Arms Perinatal Services in Washington State. Open Arms provides doulas for low-income mothers to give mothers the support they need to give their newborn children the best start possible. The program provides a parenting curriculum delivered in the language of the women of the communities they service, and provided by staff of the same race. Similar to ONE, Open Arms strives not to “tell mothers what to do”, but rather encourages mothers to reflect on what good parenting practice means to them and give them the strength and confidence they need to meet the socio-emotional and other needs of their children.

A key point in the discussion of these presentations focused on the need for increased networking and integration between pre-, peri and post-natal services and cross-agency collaboration to ensure that health and learning interventions for both children and families are able to work additively and cooperatively with one another, as outcomes are closely linked. The debate regarding targeted vs.

universal services was again resurrected here with a discussion of the challenges surrounding a desire to scale up and mainstream effective services and diversify universal provisions, instead of referring specific groups to more targeted services. Another aspect in the discussion was the need to focus not only on standardized outcomes in rigorous evaluations, but also to place at least equal importance on equity and access.

4. Family Literacy Programs and other Family-Centered Services

Heide Spruck-Wrigley of Literacy Work International spoke about the Family Literacy model in the US, in which the four basic components of parent skills development, early childhood education, parent and children learning together, and parent education are brought together in one program. Through research and observation of over 40 family literacy programs across the country, promising practices within the Family Literacy approach specifically for children of immigrants were identified. These include: taking an additive rather than subtractive approach toward dual language development; focusing heavily on the use of vocabulary in context for young children; focusing heavily on face to face communication skills for their parents; introducing relevant content and ideas for adults in working on language development; integrating technology into adult instruction; emphasizing how children learn and thrive rather than on culturally specific child rearing behaviors; and teaching parents strategies for negotiating education and other systems to advocate for their children. Most importantly, programs need to be of high quality in order to be effective, and this means having well-trained bilingual and culturally competent staff.

Flor Perez from Families in Schools presented on their specific model of Family Literacy called Families reading Together for Student Success. This program is based on the idea that parents’ role both at home and at school can be strengthened to benefit both children as well as the schools.

Both of these presentations emphasized the importance of not only bridging the gap between home and school through the inclusion of families in children’s educational experience, but also the crucial part that parents can and must play to aid their children in striving for educational success, and the skills and support



that they require in order to play this role, which led the forum's discussion into issues of dual generation strategy.

Promising Practices in Dual Generation Strategy

The challenges raised in enumerating the obstacles to effective family engagement policies and practices led naturally to issues of dual generation approaches, as the need for education and workforce support for parents in order to give them the resources, training and capacity to participate in programming opportunities was a recurring theme of discussion. With mothers' levels of education continuing to be the strongest predictor of children's academic success, there is an increasing interest in intergenerational approaches, according to an understanding that such programs can address the multigenerational, multidimensional challenges facing poor and migrant families, as explained in a Dr. de Mey and Vandebroek's background paper. Two presenters with proven programs provided examples of how such strategies can be designed to improve both child and family outcomes by addressing some of the structural challenges faced by low-income and immigrant families that are related to, but extend beyond their children's early learning experiences.

Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Professor at Koc University and a founder of the Mother-Child Education Foundation, spoke about the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP), a program focused on training and enriching mothers through home-based support supporting their knowledge of children's cognitive and socioemotional development, as well as conducting empowerment activities for mothers based on a strengths-based approach. These activities were combined with provision of educational day care for these mothers' children to study the impact of the combination of these factors, which were expected to have an optimal impact on the overall development of the child. Through longitudinal study, it was found that these interventions had a significant impact on child outcomes, including not only cognitive development and school performance, but also long-term outcomes such as later workforce participation, credit card ownership, and computer ownership as adults.

The TEEP also provides a valuable lesson on the ways in which rigorous evaluations can inform future program and policy design, as the Mother-Child Education Program, which is now available in 13 countries and reaches over 700,000 beneficiaries (primarily migrants), is based on the TEEP model as a result of its success.

Jon Kerr, Adult Basic Education Director for the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, gave a presentation on Washington's I-BEST model, an accelerated pathway model that pairs basic skills instructors with career and technical instructors in the same classroom to allow students to earn college and workforce credentials while at the same time mastering critical skills, such as English language proficiency in the case of immigrant students. Data tells us that in the US, the greatest increase in economic attainment along the spectrum of adult education and training comes at the threshold of achieving at least one year of college level credits plus a credential of some kind. The economic stability that can result from effective training is important both for parents' ability to engage effectively in their young children's education, and also for child outcomes more generally. Moreover, as the US background paper for the forum illustrates, language proficiency and basic literacy skills are a necessary first step that many parents of young children require in order to participate in existing family engagement initiatives. Yet programs that provide



such skills are often unavailable or inaccessible for the families that need them most. The presentation also discussed the need for parents to feel like true leaders in their families—a relationship that can often be reversed when children, even at a young age, are more proficient in language and with navigating education systems than their parents.

The discussion following these presentations spoke to the need for better ways to link data sets to look at outcomes for adults simultaneously with those of their children. Other points emphasized the incredibly high return on investment of the TEEP program, as a home-based program that utilizes the services of para-professionals and is not costly as a result. Several participants in this and other sessions raised the necessity of forming an articulated economic argument detailing the need for effective and accessible family services for marginalized populations in order to successfully steer policy debates alongside compelling data. At the same time, there was a shared agreement that the economic rationale should not be the only basis for advocating for the importance of these services.

Systems Integration, Alignment, and Reform

The forum's final panel was an interview discussion regarding the challenges inherent in incorporating diverse needs and new populations into mainstream systems and strategies to scale up the types of effective practice presented at the meeting and incentivize needed reform efforts to work effectively with diverse groups of parents. Discussants on the panel included Ludwig Gartner, Vice-Director of the Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office, Aisling Gillen, National Policy Development Manager at the Office of the Director of Children and Family Services in Ireland, and Delia Pompa, Senior Vice President of the National Council of La Raza, a Latino advocacy organization in the US.

The need for integrated systems

Aisling Gillen spoke about the ongoing roll-out of a new integrated model bringing health and other early childhood services under one umbrella in Ireland. A new Child and Family Agency has now been established, with over 106 family resource centers all under one roof alongside their Educational

Attendance Board as well as their Psychology Services, with the possibility of also bringing in public health nursing. Related to this integration initiative, she also raised the importance of having a designated Minister for Children as is the case in Ireland, and the impact that the Minister has had in being personally very supportive of the implementation of the current integration plan.

The many benefits of bringing together diverse professionals concerned with children's holistic development to work collaboratively was witnessed at one of the forum's site visits, Lumiar kindergarten, where teachers were seen working alongside social workers, doctors, oral hygienists and other professionals to support children's overall well-being, physical and mental health and self-confidence in a way that allows each of these workers to reach all children with ease, and without stigmatizing low income and/or migrant families. This was a direct implementation of Portugal's National Health Plan (2012-2016), which covers the entire country and is based on values of equity, development, quality and democracy. This policy is translated at the community level, where local partners select those issues that are most urgent within their community context to address within their schools, depending on need.



Scaling-up, mainstreaming and communicating evidence-based parenting approaches

In terms of scaling up best practices, Aisling also spoke about steps being taken in Ireland to extract learning from local sites and mainstreaming proven practices across the country. She also discussed the importance of then communicating known evidence to practitioners to encourage them to incorporate more evidence-based thinking in their practice. To this end, a recent publication entitled “50 key messages in supporting parents” has recently been made available, outlining an evidence-based approach to parenting and listing relevant evidence below each principle. Yet the idea that at times, steps must be taken simply because “it is the right thing to do”, and not necessarily because of an existing evidence base, is also important in making progress. In Ireland, only a small percentage of work is currently evidence based, though there is a steady, incremental move toward an evidence-based approach.

The federal role in a decentralized system

Ludwig Gartner discussed the difficulty of influencing policy change in a country such as Switzerland which is a federal state with all responsibilities for early childhood education being delegated at the Canton level, with little or no competences at the federal level, though ongoing debate continues about the role that can be played by the federal government through, for instance, subsidies to promote specific policies in the field and through the roll-out of a more general program combatting poverty in early childhood.

Empowering families as agents of change

Delia Pompa provided an overview of the early childhood policy landscape in the US, where the federal government similarly can only impact policy at the local level through the provision of federal funds which are then used for local implementation, though even these funds are limited in the impact that they can have. She also discussed the power of family advocacy and encouraging civic engagement as the core strategy at the National Council of La Raza to effect change through families. In this way, families can be given voice rather than being told what they need or should be doing. For vulnerable families who often do not speak English and have limited resources, there is a danger of becoming “pawns” of opposing political forces rather than being empowered to make decisions for themselves and their children. Currently, there is some hope that through immigration reform, some provisions for immigrant integration support will be included, creating room for families to be engaged in improving outcomes for their children through, for instance, access to language learning opportunities and information about legalization strategy. The site visit to the National Immigrant Support Centre (CNAI), for instance, demonstrated the power of providing information to parents and giving them the opportunity to be true decision-makers and agents of change.

The discussion following the interview panel continued to focus on a call for integration across systems, particularly for cross-agency collaboration both at the country and federal level. Several of the site visits, including the visit to CNAI as well as the presentation on the National Early Childhood Intervention System, showed the benefits that arise from effective linkages between departments that normally operate independently, allowing practitioners to get a more holistic view of the challenges facing young children and the integrated strategies that would best address them. The need to create a transdisciplinary approach toward ECEC at the EU level was also discussed, with a discussion of the problem posed by the fact that 0-3 year olds are currently overseen by Social Affairs/Welfare whereas 3-6 year olds are overseen by Education. As a result, policies and resources tend to be overly focused on the 3-6 year old population, when more



investments are needed in the earlier years, and there is a need for continuous and aligned policies and practices.

Reinforced Points from Previous Meetings Running Throughout Forum:

Several of the recurring themes in discussion in this meeting of the TFIEY were points that had also arisen at the forum's previous meetings, thereby reinforcing their importance and bringing attention to some of the most critical policy and practice issues in the ECEC field that impact underserved populations. Some of these included:

- The issue of quality and relevance and the ways in which they affect access: again, the question of hard-to-reach parents or rather hard-to-reach services? Many of the presenters framed their discussions around how to improve schools and services rather than asking how to engage parents, with the underlying assumption being that parents will not make use of services or stay engaged in them long-term unless they are of high quality. Clearly, the policy question is not whether to choose quality or access, but rather to pursue both hand-in-hand. Working on accessibility and serving the real (and not just the presumed) needs of vulnerable families is, in fact, an essential element of quality.
- The importance of involving parents in families in the process of policy and program creation: listening to the needs of parents and families and using this information as a starting point for effective programs is essential to success, rather than starting with a rigid definition of what parent engagement should be.
- The desirability of services that contain a social mix: the tension between targeted vs. universal services is a debate that has been constant throughout the forum. Many presenters and discussants have put an emphasis on the importance of having socially mixed services, and the policy challenge of how to achieve such a balance is one that continues to be raised.
- The need to ensure accountability and responsibility on the parts of governments: in this meeting, as in others, it has been made clear that simply mandating effective practices of universal services is not enough, and necessary funding and support must be provided to back up these policies must be provided. In the absence of these resources, provisions can have adverse effects, and large gaps are often evident between policy and practice.
- Early childhood services alone are not sufficient to address issues of poverty: programming in early childhood, and in this case in parent engagement, is not enough to solve the problems of the sub-populations being discussed through the forum. Good services for parents as well as children must be embedded in other structural supports and anti-poverty measures including employment, social security, housing and, for instance, literacy and language skills and workforce training as raised in the dual-generation conversation at this meeting.



Conclusion: Remaining Questions and Challenges

Several tensions repeatedly arose throughout the forum’s discussion, and pointed to a few key questions and challenges that were left as key takeaways for participants to consider in their own work as practitioners, policymakers, and grantmakers.

How to create truly “demand-led” services?

Perhaps the primary question echoed throughout the forum’s discussion was that of training parents vs. training professionals in achieving effective family engagement in early childhood services, and how to balance these two elements. While many in the forum advocated that listening to parents is crucial in order to build good services, the challenge of how to create truly “demand-led” services is one that must continually be revisited. In spite of very good intentions, it still seems quite difficult to really engage in a reciprocal relation with parents, to listen to their input and to start co-constructing services and provisions that have real meaning to them. Offering services to vulnerable families and hoping they will engage in them is still different from engaging them in the services as such.

How to navigate through the “labyrinth” of demand led services?

The second issue, rising out of the first, is that of the specialization that has grown out of this move toward demand-led services and how to better integrate and align the services that are currently available. The understanding, for instance, that Somali mothers must be treated and approached differently from Hispanic fathers is one that has led to specialized services for many different target groups, with a huge breadth of knowledge on how to work with these specific groups at the practitioner’s level. As a result, we now need specialists in order to help beneficiaries to navigate this “labyrinth” of services that have been created. The result is a need for a new era of integration, networking, and comprehensive systems built through real collaboration. Discussions from the meeting’s presentations centered around, for example, a need to integrate pre- and post-natal services as well as a need to include effective paternal outreach as part of family engagement services through effective gender diversity strategies rather than treating them as a separate entity.

What does integration, collaboration and consolidation mean for grassroots organizations

Lastly, the matter of what such integration, collaboration and consolidation might mean for grassroots organizations that have proliferated over the past decades is another critical question. Should such effective organizations be scaled up in order to maximize impact, or should their knowledge and best practices be incorporated into mainstream services? And how might each of these strategies be effectively pursued?



Fourth Meeting: June 30 – July 2, 2014

Amsterdam, (The Netherlands)

Evaluation issues in Early Childhood Education and Care: Choices and Implications for Diverse Populations

Setting the scene

The multiple beneficial effects of ECEC for children and families, especially the more disadvantaged ones, have been well illustrated and described by research worldwide. But, this positive impact depends on whether the provision deliver high quality services. To monitor the required quality level, adequate evaluation and monitoring is necessary. And this is quite a complex issue.

The 4th TFIEY meeting focused on evaluating ECEC services. What needs to be evaluated and how do we do that: the outcomes, the impact, the process? Who decides what should be evaluated? Why do we need evaluation and whose interests does it serve? What kind of evidence is valid enough? What method should be used? How can evaluations be related to issues of migration and poverty?

As generating support for high quality ECEC is necessary, positive evaluations can definitely add to the advocacy efforts to convince policymakers that ECEC is indeed an investment for the whole society and not a cost. At the same time, monitoring and evaluating results can explain what has been done with public funds and whether the defined targets were achieved. Other stakeholders as well (parents, children, ECEC staff, partnering sectors...) are entitled to know whether programs and services are effective and whether quality is ensured.

We also need to look into monitoring systems that are sensitive to the situation of the not-so-middleclass families and their needs in ECEC. While not every standard program will work for everyone, a case can be made that, what works for vulnerable groups, will usually benefit all.

Throughout the evaluation debate, caution is needed. Findings may differ depending on the method used. Research also points out that it is very hard to isolate and identify the impact of one given evaluation tool or method because quality is such a complex issue and a result of different aspects and experiences within and beyond a given ECEC service. It is, in other words, 'difficult to attribute causality between a monitoring process or practice and quality'.

In this synthesis report we cover the main issues that were discussed. For illustrations and presentations of concrete examples, (research) projects and evaluation systems, we refer to the contributions on the TFIEY website.



Evaluate WHAT?

ECEC quality is never a given; it needs constant attention and efforts towards improvement. Evaluation of ECEC programs and services often points at the expected outcomes and outputs. Did children actually develop a richer vocabulary? Are they doing better in school? ...But evaluation should be more than that. A 360° view on evaluation is needed. It is important to illustrate the complete scope: not only measure or show what outcomes for children could be, but also what contributes to good service delivery or to staff quality, how services are delivered, how families are reached, how quality can be maintained.... Sometimes, what made a program successful, doesn't only have to do with the outcomes but can depend on the level of commitment, the inspiring leadership, the style, the personal relationships. These elements are not always so easy to grasp or measure, but they often do make the difference. Facts and figures are important, but so are the processes and interactions. Merely assessing whether a child can count to 20 (or not), doesn't say much about his or her well-being. Proving that parental involvement did in fact increase, doesn't explain why this happened. Such 360° view also includes keeping an eye on how the (local) context is also changing. When serving certain target groups (e.g. a specific ethnic minority), or trying to tackle certain problems (e.g. poverty), we need to keep an eye on the changes of these groups and issues.

A salient factor in quality is the competence of the staff, both the leadership and the practitioners. This becomes clear in several major, systemic evaluations (e.g. NCKO in the Netherlands, the Sure start evaluation in the UK). However, information on how this quality level can be reached and maintained, is rather thin.

Other questions that need to be addressed, are e.g.: what standard is being used (often the middle-class standard is used as the golden standard), who is compared to whom, what about the danger of ethniclinguistic-cultural bias, who decides what outcomes to look for? Evaluating practice should also monitor the broader impact (including possible unwanted side-effects), processes and implementation. And even so, defining the topic of evaluation in itself is not neutral. If we say e.g. that migrant children's language and pro-social behavior has improved, are we then problematizing these children from the start?

Evaluation also has to do with the content of the ECEC services and with what definition of quality is being used.

In several presentations, elements to look into as aspects of quality were e.g.:

- Having a clear and explicit pedagogical project, negotiated with all stakeholders
- The relationship between children and practitioners (sensitive responsiveness)
- The involvement of parents as first educators
- The material environment, including the use of outside space
- The group dynamic
- The level of training of practitioners and continuous professional development, more specifically on (dealing with) diversity
- Building partnerships
- ...



On EU level⁶, extensive work is being done on drafting a 'European Quality Framework of ECEC', which is planned to be finalized by the end of 2014. Access and inclusion/diversity are considered to be part of ECEC quality, besides workforce preparation and training, curriculum and parental involvement, monitoring in the best interest of the child and governance and funding.

In addition, working with diverse and more vulnerable populations, add some more challenges. There is the issue of cultural bias in (standardized) tests, as well as the additional barriers that migrant and low income families experience⁷. Examples of these barriers are: being unfamiliar with (division of) tasks and conventions, discomfort in educational settings, language and trust barriers, forms of respect for teachers and professionals (as having a higher status). This can influence the validity of results: when inadequate methods or tools are used, the result loses relevance. E.g. whereas narrative assessment can surely be more inclusive in general, it can be problematic for verbally weaker respondents or respondent with another native language.

Evaluate WHY?

Evaluations can serve different, sometimes conflicting, agendas.

For policymakers it is important to see an effective use of public funds, especially in times of economic downturn. Monitoring and evaluation reports can also support policymakers in the choices they want to make for the future.

Families and children would want for ECEC services to really answer to their needs and expectations and that the quality level remains stable or improves. The mere concept of quality also needs to be defined together with the main users of ECEC. Especially looking at families in the context of poverty and migration, it is important to monitor (unwanted) effects of exclusion.

For the professionals as well, it is important to have a good view on the quality of their work and to know what works or how they can improve their practice.

Influencing policy

The case was made that monitoring and evaluations could maybe have a stronger impact on policies if it would move beyond the mere measuring of outcomes. These are not always as available, as convincing, as relevant in the long run as one would hope. Illustrating results of certain processes, of a given local approach, of a type of leadership, of a level of training can be as important and enlightening for policymakers to better understand what really works in ECEC. Several examples were given to illustrate this. Both the German and Dutch example clearly show how systemic quality monitoring can influence policies, which in turn influence quality of service delivery on the work floor.

However, monitoring and evaluating results alone will not always lead to the wanted or needed change. Between reports on quality and policy decisions stands reality: economic crises, political convictions and the need to make choices in spending,

⁶ See e.g.

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/495867/IPOLCULT_ET\(2013\)495867_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/495867/IPOLCULT_ET(2013)495867_EN.pdf)

⁷ See e.g. [Tobin](#) during the 2nd TFIEY meeting.



Reporting on monitoring and evaluation, informing different stakeholders

The results of evaluations often don't get widely published or debated, even though this is also important. The use of media e.g. can support the evaluation outcomes and policymakers can use this, either to favor expansion and continue support or to push for policy reform and additional resources.

In doing so, a certain translation is needed to make it more understandable, accessible and convincing. A common language needs to be developed and clarity on vision, purpose and values within ECEC needs to be given. The mere sharing of evaluation results has to be completed: drawing the (local) context, explaining on how and why the evaluation was done, why certain choices were made.

Telling the truth, naming the issue, is also vital. If e.g. problems such as lack of access, poor quality services for the poor, not reaching unserved groups (who may benefit the most) are not openly discussed, solutions will not surface either.

Maintain and improve quality, share knowledge, learn from one another

One of the main reasons to evaluate and monitor practices and services, is of course, keeping an eye on the quality of the work, learning where and how improvements can be made and reflecting on practices and current issues. In order to make this possible, evaluations shouldn't be judging but rather stimulating and supporting. In the Italian example this is clearly illustrated. By means of reflective, self-assessing methods, teams of practitioners can receive a form of support and competence building, while the use of discussion and negotiation on the concept of quality within an open context of cooperation reduces competition. The focus is the sharing of ideas and views, not an idea of who is winning.

Monitoring and evaluating systems do not only report on the positive and negative aspects of practice. It can also point at where the gaps are, suggest in what areas improvement is possible. It should function, as Barnett stated, like a GPS: not pointing to who got us lost, but to what it takes to reach the set goal.

Evaluate HOW?

Different elements of ECEC ask for different evaluating methods. E.g. work processes, levels of parental involvement, well-being of children will need to be monitored in a different way than for example access rates or personnel turnover. Just to give one example: there is a positive link between the use of non-formal practices and child outcome and quality (e.g. the use of portfolios resulted in a significant improvement of classroom quality in Head Start). OECD gave the following overview of what methods are most frequently used for evaluating which aspect of quality:



SERVICE QUALITY	STAFF QUALITY	CHILD DEVELOPMENT
Inspection	Observations	Summative vs. formative assessments
Self-assessment	Self-assessment, evaluations	Tests (standardized or other)
Surveys by staff, management, parents	Tests	Observations (rating scales, checklists...)
Self-assessment/surveys, independent or part of a wider monitoring practice	Interviews of children/parents	Narrative assessments (portfolios, storytelling, documenting)
Specific monitoring for special needs	Surveys (internal/external)	Screening

Considering the different methods of evaluation, there is a tendency to install a certain hierarchy. This should be avoided, given the fact that different aspects of ECEC are best evaluated through different methods. It is advisable to look for the most appropriate method, linked to what needs to be monitored. All methods have their strong and weaker points. It is also important to consider the Different levels of ‘evidence’, of validity. Expert opinions are certainly valuable but can be less persuasive or more biased, depending in the context in which they are used.

Several presentations pointed at some conditions for adequate monitoring and evaluating, such as:

- It is advisable to begin with a clear goal and plan, to have developers and researchers work closely together with practitioners and policymakers from the start, to also explore long term effects besides the short term outcomes and to measure implementation as well as outcomes.
- Assessing or screening the personal interactions (staff/children/parents) should be a major part of evaluating ECEC quality.
- Before measuring quality, quality needs to be defined, practical relevance needs to be ensured, evaluators need to be well trained, piloting before implementing is strongly advised, cultural and other differences in the groups needs to be taken into account and results should be disseminated and linked to the purpose.
- To get all perspective covered, all stakeholders should be involved and the local context should be clearly understood.

Discussions on methodology add some tensions to the evaluation debate. E.g. on the tension between standardization (ideal world) and diversity (real world), between quantitative evaluation and the need to apply participative methods, between RCT methods with control groups and the ethical issue of exclusion, between the need for cost-effectiveness and the cost of evaluating long term interventions...

More particularly, in the context of poverty and migration, we need to be aware of certain barriers that these families face (unfamiliar, respect, language, lack of trust, fatalism...)



Participatory approaches

Monitoring and evaluating gains relevance when the directly concerned parties can be involved in the process. If not, the risk of making the wrong assumptions is very present.

Powerful examples of participatory evaluation methods were discussed in a breakout session. Participation of stakeholders/interested parties can happen in different ways. It is essential that conditions are in place for participants to really speak their mind and that they can really give input, given their position, abilities and perspectives. Users in general, and more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in particular, more often find themselves in a position of dependency or unfamiliarity with the context. Designing respectful and adequately adapted ways to participate are a necessity here, so they can actually feel safe and valued in the process. No assumptions should be made and the level of participation and follow-up, or consequences, of the results must be clearly explained.

The children themselves can also be involved, observed, documented, even when they are very young and not (yet) verbally strong. The SICS scale, a Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings, provides a step by step procedure in which well-being and involvement of every child in a childcare setting is described and documented. It deals with both child, context and circumstantial factors such as the offer of activities, room

for initiative, group climate etc. and gives provisions a practical instrument to see on what quality level they are operating and where they can improve. Children are being 'screened' individually as well as in the group and on given moments in time so the changes can also be documented.

Parents as well can and should play their role in monitoring quality of ECEC, both on the outcome and the process level. This should go beyond the obligatory annual satisfaction questionnaire but involve them from start to finish and continue to feed into the discussion on the quality and the service, on feedback on the results, on meaning making. Creativity and sensitivity is needed to reach out to the most vulnerable parents to make them feel safe enough to participate in an authentic way. Working with focus groups, interviews etc. can be very valuable here.

Staff members are equally valued actors on quality monitoring. Methods of peer evaluation and self-evaluation can add to the quality level of the service, heightening awareness, reflecting on practice, clarifying and debating on issues and, in short, add to the collective process of meaning-making. Self-evaluating and reflecting can thus serve both a function of quality improvement and continuous professional development. It also tends to lead the way to solutions that are actually feasible, not only advisable in theory.

The reported effects of monitoring staff quality seem to go either way: examples were mentioned where this had no real impact on quality as such, while in other settings it did positively influence aspects of quality (e.g. higher awareness of children's needs or better language skills).

Self-evaluating methods can also vary, going from measuring instruments or by (pedagogical) support of a kind of facilitator, as it has been developed and implemented in the Emilia Romagna region in Italy. In these settings quality is being negotiated in a participative and democratic way among all stakeholders. It involves reflective discussions on context, habits, behavior, working methods and leads to a co-constructed idea on



quality and movement towards change and improvement through a step by step methodology. This whole process is accompanied by a well-trained facilitator, who supports this process of 'promotion from within'.

Evaluating for diversity

Whereas assessing young children already is a critical issue in itself, sometimes too focused on school readiness only, it gets even more complex in a context of diversity. Still, sometimes we may need to evaluate a program on children's outcomes to see if children, especially the most vulnerable ones, gain something with it. In those cases however, the tools that are used need to take into account the effect of diverse backgrounds of children, e.g. the use of language. The tools and the reason for the assessment need to be clear, the underlying values need to be made explicit, the children's background needs to be well known. Assessing without taking all this into account will not in itself improve their educational outcomes.

A useful tool can be found at ISSA, International Step by Step Association. Diversity and inclusion are fundamental elements in their view of quality and these issues as such are included throughout the focus areas, principles and indicators of quality in a tool that has been developed for ECEC practitioners. This professional development tool can be used as a self-assessment tool, as a group assessment tool, as well as a tool for mentors or to monitor and rate child worker's practices.

The research on effects of ECEC for children in more vulnerable contexts (poverty, migration...) shows that the gains seem to be larger than in general, but still, some programs seem more effective than others. The most difficult question to figure out is, what actually makes the difference?

Takeaways: no fixed recipes?

- Any monitoring or evaluating of quality has to be based on a definition of quality and this definition should be topic of debate with all parties concerned, including the most disadvantaged groups. No matter how high the quality of a service may be, if the targeted audience doesn't appreciate it or barely knows about it, they will not attend.
- Evaluations do matter but evaluations alone will not change quality of ECEC services
- Use language that makes sense and that takes into account the broader context
- Supporting, reflective and participative methods can lead to more culturally sensitive monitoring than standardized, more judging evaluative systems
- There is no hierarchy of evaluation methods: how an evaluation should be done is defined by the question what needs to be evaluated
- The topic of the evaluation is directly linked to the reason why there needs to be an evaluation
- A combination of evaluation methods is advisable. One result will often lead to new questions for which other methods will be more adequate. There seldom is 'one' perfect setup for evaluation.
- Involvement and recognition of all stakeholders is necessary
- The impact of a monitoring practice is difficult to identify
- Pay attention to studies that can help understand variations in outcomes
- The debate on what is 'good or bad' for (young) children needs to be an ongoing one, both in a pedagogical and a legal sense. The world changes constantly and their world of today is quite



different from the world adults knew. In moving from a parochial to a more cosmopolitan way of thinking, dual language e.g. becomes an asset instead of a problem.

- Quality is never a given and needs to be guarded in a constant and systemic manner
- Between research and policy stand ... opinions, political decisions and commitment, which are also needed.



Fifth meeting: January 26-28, 2015

Dublin, Ireland

Integrated systems for Children and Families – Continuity and alignment of Services

1. Setting the scene

Quite a range of different services in our welfare states support families with young children in many different ways. Not only do people have a right to these kinds of basic provisions and mechanisms, but there is also overwhelming evidence on how important these services can be in the early years for children's holistic development, now and in the long run. The most vulnerable groups however, those who would benefit the most, not only experience huge barriers in accessing them; they also experience difficulties in finding their way in the maze of existing services or in making smooth transitions from one provision to another. More and better integration and alignment between such services (childcare, preschool, preventive health, social services, parenting support...) is being developed or under discussion in many countries, with strong arguments, both on cost efficiency and on content improvement. Albeit that the Irish Minister for Children and Youth affairs, James Reilly, correctly pointed out that the focus often still remains with older children, more needs to be done in the early years and that better integration and alignment of service need to render higher quality services.

Researching, discussing and working on quality, which includes accessibility as well, has led the ECEC sector to move forward on this issue of integration and better alignment of services. Michel

Vandenbroeck sets the scene, starting from the common issue of poverty: a multi-faceted, persistent and intergenerational problem of lack of both material and immaterial resources. An increasingly shared answer could lie in more integration of services, offering more accessibility and addressing real needs, albeit in diverse ways, for different reasons, set in different contexts and thus raising new questions to solve. While there is a common agreement on the necessity to work towards more integrated services, more cooperation, smoother transitions and better alignment, practice shows that this is often easier said than done, as most (ECEC) services all have their own history, visions and missions and as responsibilities remain scattered among different authorities.

Bronwen Cohen adds on to this diversity in services, pointing out the differences in e.g. the staff qualifications, the programmes offered, the finance system, the orientation etcetera. While the discussion on integrated services is not all that new as such, shifts in the content are noticeable. It is not only a question of efficiency and closing the gaps. It is also about universal entitlements, having and exercising equal rights on access and enjoying services, reaching all families and raising the general level of qualifications of staff. This debate is also framed by the larger policy context: is there a split system in ECEC or not? On what policy level are services being financed? Figures show that a more integrated ECEC system, as we know them in some Scandinavian countries, is more successful reaching disadvantaged groups of babies and toddlers, compared to countries with a split system.

Another issue in the integration debate is the question of what there is TO integrate. Charlie Bruner brings illustrations on child poverty and the lack of basic provisions in the US altogether. He points out on the benefits of combining knowledge on children's well-being and development opportunities in a multidisciplinary way and makes it clear, yet again, that it does take a village to raise a child. Systems need



to be built, in which links are made between services of ECEC, health, family support with attention for the diversity among families and children (e.g. disabilities, ethnicity, socio-economic situation...). In such a system, every service has and knows its role and everyone does what fits his practice and expertise best. More specifically, Charlie Bruner warns that 'If we don't give opportunities to children in poverty, there will be no more middle class left in the US.'

2. The many shapes and forms of integrated systems

Integrated services, cooperation, networking ... these are all frequently recommended strategies, while it is not always clear what it really means in the heads of all professionals and organisations involved. Different models have been developed. Some have grown bottom-up, some were introduced top-down. Some build on stronger links between two sectors, some comprise the whole range of early year's services. During the 5th TFIEY several illustrations were presented.

The case of Ireland (see Canavan , Doherty and Lughadha): strategic planning and monitoring

In 2000, the Irish government drafted a first National Children's Strategy, based on the UN CRC and aimed at proactive work on improving children's well-being on different levels (education, health, social inclusion etc.). Starting from the child's perspective, instead of a services' perspective, was a radically new way of thinking and working. However, joining policy levels did not automatically or immediately translate in joined up workforces and services. A shared vision, clear planning and strong monitoring are all required tools to foster and shape better and meaningful cooperation.

Several strategies and frameworks were to follow, designing agenda's for children's services, including clearly defined outcomes to be reached, as well as specific guidelines for all professionals involved, on all levels. In this national context, 1 single stand-alone Children's department and 1 minister for Children were established for the first time in 2011. A new national framework 2014-2020 – Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures - was drafted containing 136 policy commitments on 5 overarching 'national outcomes' for children and young people: Active and healthy, physical and mental well-being/ Achieving the fullest potential in all areas of learning and development/ Safe and protected from harm/ Economic security and opportunity and Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

This framework also contains more general transformational goals, such as emphasizing the role of parents, value investment in early years, listening to the voice of children, focusing on quality (effective, efficient and trusted services) and keeping an eye on transitions by minding the gaps.

National targets are set for services to gather around and identify a shared agenda and common, comprehensive and coordinated approach in order to reach the expected outcomes.

In order to translate these high ambitions into real changes for children, some new structures were set up, while existing structures were reorganised towards more alignment. Drafting plans is important, but implementing them is what makes a change. The implementation is to be carefully monitored and full commitment is expected from all sectors on all levels. Ongoing communication needs to make the whole framework and approach to become 'common sense' for all services involved. This is work in progress, as views on tricky issues such as 'poverty' and how to fight it, are not always the same.

This kind of collaborative work requires a collaborative mindset: all stakeholders need to get involved from the very first start to decide what the most needed actions would be, in order to actually make a change and reach the desired outcomes.



The case of Switzerland (see Neumann , Tschumper , Zimmerli) : putting the puzzle together on different policy levels

ECEC in Switzerland is characterised by its administration on canton and community level, which results in many different regulations and services. Care arrangements have several sources for diversification and complexity. They are influenced by a complex interplay of affordability, accessibility and desirability. Determining factors here, are for example: the parent's needs and choices, different structures of day care services, the amount of facilities on the local community level, different regional childcare cultures and different rules and the conditions of enrolment in the settings.

Integration on this rather scattered ECEC-field should first and foremost serve the interests of the children involved and it should answer to the needs of families and the specificities of the local context (rural/urban, disadvantaged/affluent areas...). More integrated policies have been advocated both on the national (Primokiz programme) and the city level (Primano programme). The Primokiz programme is a cross sectoral programme - health care, social services and education – by which services are offered on different levels: basic services for all, more specific services for specific groups, and early prevention and intervention services where needed. The whole programme aims at positive outcomes for all children's development. Crucial elements are political will and strong networks between all providers (both horizontal and vertical). The Primano programme, successfully implemented in Bern, aims at improving access to ECEC services, linking childcare, home visits and schools.

The case of UK and Ireland: cooperate towards social change

In the UK, the Pen Green centre was developed in the 1980's by practitioners and families together from the very start, building on local resilience and the shared commitment to improve children's life chances. In a context of severe poverty, high unemployment and lack of services, the Pen Green centre for Children and Families started with a strong vision on emancipation and empowerment, building on what was there, on actual needs of families and children. Many different services are deployed, such as ECEC, adult community education, health services, inclusive education as well as training and research. Principles of mutual respect, inclusion, cultural negotiation, co-construction, capacity building and commitment are translated in all programs and actions. "Co-production is what Pen Green is all about." Parents are involved in the planning, the programming, as volunteers, as learners, as advocates for their children and possibly staff in training. Parents and staff bring together 2 sets of knowledge: the professional, public, generalised theoretical knowledge about children and their development and the personal theory about a child in a given context. On the level of staff this requires a.o. a qualified staff with a theoretical basis but being reflective and open to dialogue, good working conditions in a well-resourced and securely funded provision and a focus on social change. Principles of equality, cultural humility and proactive work are at the basis of all the work.

Stepping away from classical approaches in working in severe disadvantaged areas has also proven to be successful in Dublin, with the Early Intervention Programme in the Colin area. In this program the vicious cycle of disadvantage has been turned around into a virtuous cycle of better chances. Both private and public sectors have started to cooperate in developing programme outlines with clear goals, to be measured by detailed indicators. In cooperation between several sectors (health and social care, schools, community work, volunteers, local business...) a detailed action plan was developed, containing services such as home visits, speech and language therapy for children, an early parenting programme, outreach work, counselling and community based activities, fostering social cohesion. On all actions a programme performance management is monitoring the outcomes in detail.



The universalist perspective: low threshold Family Centres

Universalist services, combining different functions in a low threshold setting, have been developed to serve a wide range of families with advice and support and to allow people to meet and share parenting experiences. Fostering the holistic development of children in diverse contexts is a central aim. The input from parents themselves is essential in the underlying philosophy of families and professionals learning from each other.

In the Scandinavian model of Family Centres, different services work together on fostering stimulating factors for children's well-being and holistic development, while trying to bring answers or mediate the negatively influencing factors. Both parents and children are welcome to a complete range of services – maternal health care, childcare, preventive social work - within the same premises, aligned with the local needs and context and ready to respond to all kinds of questions and issues that turn up in any possible course of parenting (parental stress, poverty, pedagogical questions...). In the Family Centre model, different levels of advice, help and early support are available: ranging from universal services for all (e.g. preventive health for babies, parent meetings), over selected interventions for specific pedagogical questions (e.g. referral to a social service) to indicated interventions for serious problems (e.g. prevent placement of a child). More specialised support or intervention is not offered in the Family Centre but there is an openness for parents to feel at ease to ask questions and receive timely and adequate referral when necessary.

Research has resulted in describing 5 types of centre models, of which the multidisciplinary model has shown to be the most integrated one. Critical success factors would be: clearly defined and understood goals and action plans, strong and cross-sectoral coordination, multi-professional cooperation and integrative management. Specific competences that are needed in order to deliver qualitatively strong services are: communication and customer orientation, problem solving and innovative thinking, knowledge of different (sub)cultures, leadership and teamwork, pedagogical skills, knowledge on special needs and intercultural issues. The multidisciplinary model has been proven to be an effective one and the preferable one for parental involvement, peer support, low threshold meeting places and the build-up of social networks. There is however, still room for improvement on the level of dialogue and stronger participation of both parents and children.

Another example of accessible basic support provisions is the Flemish concept of Family Centres, the 'Houses of the Child', that have recently been constructed. In order to keep it as close as possible to local context and needs, the idea is to have local municipalities and services to engage themselves in a system of cooperation, bottom-up. The legal requirements are kept to a minimum to allow adaptation to the local context and leaving a range of freedom to the initiators. This results in a variety of cooperation and integration schemes throughout Flanders.

To be eligible for funding as a House of the Child, certain partnering organisations/functions need to be engaged as a minimum: preventive health care, parenting support and social support and social cohesion. They can either work in shared premises or not, mix private and public services or not and add other providers as well. The goals of these partnerships are a.o. to increase accessibility of services, more adequate and timely referrals, increase professional competences, avoid both gaps and overlap and exchange knowledge and experiences. A House of the Child is not aimed at specific groups but open to all parents and children, which should avoid stigmatization. As all parents at a given time have questions or need advice, they can all simply walk in and look for what they may need. The starting point is not so much an actual problem, but simply being a family or having a baby. Very often, the start is with an Infant Consultation



Bureau, a well-known service in Flanders since many years and with an attendance of over 95% of parents with young children. The element of bringing families together in a non-formal setting is an important focus, adding to social cohesion. Having families, both parents and children, actively participate, beyond the mere 'customer' status, does remain a challenge.

3. What makes integration and cooperation work?

Out of all these varied examples, some elements seem to come up over and over again. While most of these may seem evident, they don't always prove to be so easy to achieve. Working together and building bridges between sectors and services takes time and commitment. What was mentioned as key points in any model of integration of services and programmes:

- A shared vision on the issue and the approach
- Deep-rooted respect for democratic values, such as reciprocity, participation and dialogue, respect for diversity and an open, no-blame approach
- Multidisciplinary work, without a hierarchy between disciplines
- Clear planning, knowing who is responsible for what, setting goals and agreement on how to monitor outcomes
- A child perspective instead of a service perspective
- Approaching parents as partners, not customers
- Strong leadership and integrative management
- Aimed at structural, systemic change (not just individual solutions)
- Involving all stakeholders from the start, including reaching out to families to begin to understand what is really needed
- Co-constructing practice and actions: professionals and families thinking, working and acting together
- Staff is well-trained, knowledgeable of social and cultural diversity, and open for reflection and questioning
- Use a combination of impact measuring methods, both qualitative and quantitative.
- Respecting and considering the local context and needs of the community

4. Working on smooth transitions between home, care and education

From an early age, most children will be spending their daily lives in several different settings. They make a first move from home to childcare and later they move on to Kindergarten, primary and secondary school. Depending on the care and education systems, some of these transitions can be either smooth enough or pretty harsh. In essence, every transition can hold promises and excitement or can represent (yet another) barrier or challenge, especially for children with a background of poverty and/or migration. What factors can make transitions easier and more positive?

From home to ECEC

An Italian and a French example show how the move from home to childcare or Kindergarten can be made easier and beneficial to the child, the parent and the practitioner at the same time. It is important to bridge the gap between both worlds.

In a small scaled French action research, involving the views of children, parents and professionals, it becomes clear how different systems of care and education can influence the child's and the parents' well-



being and promote the feeling of being welcome and at ease. In so-called transition classes, presented as a good practice, teachers, teaching assistants and an additional 'éducateur jeunes enfants' work together in a non-hierarchical setting, invest in communication with parents and in offering a warm, responsive group environment where children can both play and learn. Children and parents are not simply expected to adjust to a school setting, which is not reciprocal; they become part of the group and shape it together. Different than in school-like Kindergarten classes, children are considered competent, can make choices and become part of a group: they are allowed some time to 'become' pupils. In more classical school settings they need to 'be' a pupil from day one and there is not really a place for the parents to get involved in their children's growing up. Different underlying ideas of childhood (here and now or future citizen-in-the-making) and of growing up (in a process of continuity or based on test results) will shape different practices.

Involving parents, being aware of the importance of their input, is also the main consideration behind the Italian 'ambientamento' approach in childcare. This entails more than an 'adjustment' ('inserimento'), mostly sharing information on the child and the childcare centre, at the start as it was the case earlier. Based on a changed view on childcare – from necessary evil to a valued educational setting – and influenced by a growing diversity and interculturality in Italian society, the necessary reflection on adjustment approaches lead to a shift from the 'inserimento' to the 'ambientamento' approach. As described by Mantovani, ambientamento refers to the emotional and psychological process of gradual acclimatization, exploration, knowledge exchange, emotional investment, representations and ambivalences, solutions and connections that all involved actors – being children, parents and educators alike – play out during transitions. It is no longer just an issue of going through the motions when a child first starts attending childcare aimed at gaining the necessary information. It is a process of mutual acclimatization, getting to know each other on a daily basis, by which children are gradually getting used and feeling welcome in the childcare service. It involves welcoming each family and respecting all their peculiarities, their education style and beliefs, and building a relation of trust step by step. This becomes even more important in diverse societies. This approach is based on practices like pedagogical documentation, parental support and in-service training of practitioners. A recognised risk is that this approach, being essentially co-constructive and reflective, could also become some kind of traditional procedure, taken for granted and thus losing the negotiative character. Another risk could be the effects of the economic crisis, leaving access to childcare only to middle class families and losing the focus on social cohesion.

From ECEC to primary school

The issue of transitions was also illustrated in an EU study on early school leaving, building on the link between attending ECEC and later school success. In this study transition was considered as part of the quality debate. Where high quality ECEC has been proven to be conducive to later school achievement in general, this has certainly been the case for children with disadvantaged backgrounds, e.g. by closing the language gap, reducing grade retention, better integration, reducing risk behavior and better physical and mental health. Attending ECEC helps children to be more socially and emotionally mature and prepares them better for school. Therefore, when ECEC is expected to, in a way, prepare children for (lifelong) learning, we need to consider the effects of the transitions between childcare, preschool and primary education as well. Such transitions can be experienced as a cultural shock and they can bring many challenges, again more often for children in poverty. Most transitions are tailored to the standards of middleclass parents, who are able to better prepare their children. Disadvantaged families often seem more scared of transitions because they are confronted again with their 'own' failure. Also the visions and expectations between professionals of ECEC and primary education are different. ECEC workers focus on the



behavioral and non-cognitive and social development, while teachers are trained to prepare children for learning, counting, reading. The differences between both settings are multiple: relationships, teaching style, activities, environment and space and coping with all these changes is not always so easy.

Attention is needed here since positive transition experiences provide important motivational attitudes towards (later) learning, school and abilities to succeed. It is important to view transition, not as a one-time event, but as a process of continuity, beginning well before school starts (but avoiding the risk of 'schoolification' of ECEC). Smooth transitions require a readiness of the family, of the community, of ECEC and of the school. This re-conceptualised view of school readiness requires in other words a continuity in education, with ECEC as an essential part of it, building the foundation for the subsequent levels, while the situation today still shows too much fragmentation between the different education levels. Education continuity is also reflected in continuity with home and the surrounding community. Effective transition approaches, therefore, need to take families and the community into account. With the increasing heterogeneity of today's families, parental involvement and partnership with ECEC and schools is crucial to adjust (pre-) school services to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other forms of diversity. Moreover, active parent participation in the life of their children from the very early years may guarantee their participation in the education of their children at later stages as well.

Not only a pedagogical continuity is needed but also a continuity in quality in order to sustain the many benefits of ECEC throughout the education career. A well-balanced education system is reflected in 4 dimensions: efficiency (with every part reinforcing the results of previous stages), equity (with equal opportunities for every child, regardless of their background), cohesion (shared vision on education and co-responsibility) and representativeness (diversity of pupils being mirrored by diversity of staff). It should be obvious that these dimensions are more difficult to reach in a split system than in an integrated system. Pedagogical and professional continuity is hindered by the different visions on children's learning, different training and qualifications of staff, different teaching approach and a perseverant view on ECEC being mostly care and little education. Curriculum continuity, fostering a smooth transition from play-oriented and child-centred early year settings to more structured and systematic school settings, is hard to obtain when several countries still lack a 0-3 age curriculum. In combination with a lower qualified workforce this can be a cause for large discrepancies. For structural continuity, allowing easier transitions, we need close cooperation between educational levels and most importantly close cooperation between teachers working with children. While this does happen on the initiative of professionals, little is regulated on a more structural policy level.

The transition debate is often still set within a 'school readiness' debate, but is this the correct or only question? Throughout the development of children, the relational approach, social interaction and communication is important for their sense of self and well-being. Emotional well-being comes from engagement, interaction, companionship, identity, sense of self, pride in achievements, reciprocal relationships and inter-subjectivity. Ideally, we can see this in transition processes as well. The purpose of ECEC is not only to prepare children for school. Aiming at school readiness, without considering differences in family income (25% of children in Scotland live in poverty!), housing and nutrition, overall set goals for children can and will not be reached. Poverty has been having a huge impact in children's school success and even on average life expectancy. It has become clear that curricula or standards on school readiness have not been differentiated enough to correctly assess children's development and competencies. And again, the issue is not simply to get children ready for schools, but also to get schools ready for the different needs of children. E.g. Save the Children Scotland recognizes the need to provide additional support in the early years for children living in poverty, because there is clear evidence that children who grow up in poverty are



starting school at a serious disadvantage compared to their classmates. In this sense, school readiness is a problematic concept since it is usually based on a particular model of the (middle class) child and it is often being used as gate keeping for school. This gate keeping puts families under pressure. Transitions and gate keeping are associated with certain skills, but parents and teachers can have different views on which skills are important. Transitions can be positive, containing opportunities for change and growth. But for children with a disadvantaged background, it can also be negative and create challenges, new barriers and risks of exclusion. To foster the positive aspects of transitions, some elements need to be carefully considered, such as:

- the extent to which children are able to develop a sense of their own identity in the early years through opportunities for choice, self-regulation, success (in real things) and positive engagement with others, and how this is sustained over time,
- having friends and going to school with friends,
- the child's first teacher in school,
- having opportunities to start afresh and re-invent yourself,
- the extent to which any new setting allows children to demonstrate what they already know and are able to do and the extent to which children and young people feel valued in the new setting
- being in an environment where the focus is on learning rather than behavior
- the initial contacts families have with the educational system
- the capacity of professional educators to work with families rather than telling them about education and their child.

Rethinking transitions will require more cooperation between ECEC and primary school practitioners, and more involvement of and communication with parents and children. The primary school sector can get inspired by the ECEC sector here: how to get to know children through play, how to relate better to children when you get information from the parents, how to communicate better with parents and improve encountering skills, how to create a sense of belonging and being accepted for who you are.

From Birth to Third Grade – Equal Opportunity for All (the US context)

Ensuring readiness for future academic success through aligned preparation in the early years is critical, particularly for language minority learners (or English Language Learners, in the US context). Through a focus on family and parent engagement, quality teaching in the Pre-kindergarten to third grade years, and expanded learning opportunities, all driven by strong program and system data capability to allow for continuous program improvement, the Road Map Project in Washington state, as presented by Lynda Pederson, seeks to create a pathway to success for all students from “cradle to career”.

A repeated theme that arose over the course of the Forum was the importance as well as the limitations of aligned and shared data in order to achieve service integration. Several speakers alluded to the importance not only of having access to comprehensive data, but of the need for training and assistance in the effective use and employment of such data, echoing the importance of investing in people and training in order to successfully integrate across programs and sectors. The deliberate inclusion of such training opportunities was an important piece of the Road Map Project

Making explicit considerations of how to ensure that aligned services are meeting the needs of migrant and other minority children in particular, Sam Whiting and Roxana Norouzi presented the Racial Equity Theory of Change being undertaken as a strategy in collaboration with the Road Map Project to ensure that an



integrated birth to third grade strategy not only aims to narrow opportunity and achievement gaps for minority populations, but that it does so in an inclusive way that is mindful of potential underlying tensions. The Racial Equity Theory of Change emphasizes the need for individual as well as organizational change in order to sustain a real movement toward equity and inclusion—as such, the importance of increasing community input and giving a voice to those least likely to be heard is a critical element of the strategy, which is meant to inform every aspect of early childhood practice and policy in Washington state. Again, this presentation provided a reminder of the importance of the quality of human relationships in fostering effective communication and collaboration.

5. Governance and effective cooperation

After presentations on different models of integrated services, Vibeke Bing gives an overview of elements in an integrated system that works, the Swedish Family Centres. These centres combine different services (ante-, peri- and post-natal health care for babies and parents, social services and preschool services) in one location. This is not just a question of sharing a workplace by professionals who used to be settled in their own business; it is above all a search to find a common set of values, common goals and a shared vision on quality in servicing families. What are the priorities? How to offer services that are felt as needed by different families with different questions? How to assure access for all? ... Many questions which require more than a formal cooperation to get sorted. Resources (staff and budgets) from the different services are collectively organized and managed and the underlying idea is that it is the parents who actually feed into the concept of continuity; they start coming by during pregnancy and keep coming back for the other services (open pre-school, meeting places, health care, parenting support ...).

Remarkably, there is no national legislation on Family Centres, but they have grown on the municipal level from 35 (1997) to 220 (2013) throughout the country, fuelled by local initiative and now, national policies on health and welfare do highlight the advantages of this type of cooperation.

This may all sound easier than it actually is. It is necessary to invest e.g. in time, energy and funding to get agreements between different responsible agencies and authorities, in developing a multidisciplinary steering group, in strategic planning and setting goals and in an effective management structure. Content wise the Family Centres honour the principle to maintain a balance between universal policies, aimed at providing for the well-being of all children and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged. It is vital that all elements in the system agree on what the content of the services should be to avoid confusion among staff itself and among the families that use the service. To support and facilitate the work in this multi-professional and multi-agency setting, daily communication and self-reflection tools are available. Also, a new training module ‘working at a Family Centre’ has been developed.

All in all, this model has proven to be successful and led to better outcomes for children, especially because of the low-threshold open pre-school, which has been highly appreciated by parents and children of all social strata. It has become clear that putting the main focus on the universalism (basic services for all) is key; working too much on targeted services or more interventionist approaches creates the risk of losing the ‘ground floor’ of the house. This has led to inspiring thoughts to consider for the future: why not increase the links to primary schools and how to strengthen efforts to better support immigrant families?

On US side, the Alameda County Early Childhood System is presented by Janis Burger. In this system as well, universal, more preventive services are linked to more targeted interventionist support for ‘at risk’ and ‘high risk’ families and situations. For different age groups, different services are offered such as e.g. parental support, playgroups, home visits, parent café’s, socio-emotional and development support. The main principles are shared: parents in the lead, holistic approach, well trained workforce, common outcomes and



data sharing and formal and informal supports. On a cross-sectoral level, the focus is on improving communication, developing child friendly policies and practices and initiating system changes. Indicators were developed to monitor whether children are in fact thriving, healthy and ready to move on to school. Different than in many European states (public funding), the funding here relies on combined efforts of state budget and private funding (e.g. by philanthropic organisations).

6. Policy debate and takeaways

Policymakers (Richard Buery, New York, Sean Holland, Northern Ireland and Håkan Linnarsson, Sweden) all agreed on the added value of cross-agency cooperation and the sense of strong leadership. Support can be offered in many different ways: better and reliable funding, less bureaucratic requirements, alignment of regulations, support staff, time and space for dialogue and coordination.

Clear thinking needs to be done on the question whether to create new structures or more collaboration among existing ones. E.g. integration of health and social services in Ireland has not really done so much better for young children than before, as they need to serve all age groups and choices need to be made. There is also the risk of overlap and duplication. In every field of public work, there is 'waste' that could be decreased by integrating services but this has to be carefully considered. Different professionals will have different perspectives on children's lives and chances. This again, may turn out to be a barrier instead of leading to better services. Politics usually react on crisis situations. In child protection e.g., the death of a child can be a trigger, but at the same time it distorts reality and the real daily work in early years. Policymakers need to keep an open look, start from the perspective of the service users and their needs, and focus on the larger picture: invest in early years from a universalist perspective, not only in problematic areas or child protection issues.

There is also the 'Be careful what you wish for' challenge. When professionals want to share more data, they have not always thought beforehand what should be shared, when, why and with whom. There is a tendency to join cooperative integration of services as long as the co-working is relevant for the professional themselves. In order to have efficient and successful cooperation, all participants will need to give up some of their own beliefs, working methods and vision. There is a need for not only regulations and protocols, but also for human relationships, and building a common understanding and language. We also need to be realistic: cooperation takes enormous amounts of time even when there already is communication. There is competition among partners as well and mandatory cooperation does not always result in real cooperation. Another danger is the one of using 'averages' as policy bases. While Sweden e.g. is considered to be the ultimate welfare state, there is also the reality of severe poverty, xenophobia, social exclusion and even young children who are starving. Moving away from the average and address the problem where it is and share this with public opinion. "We all know places where we don't want our own kids to live." (Linnarsson). Looking at the need for sustainability of integrated services, public funding seems essential. "Charity will never guarantee sustainability, only taxes will!" (Holland) Private or charity funding can serve the need for experimental space, adding new possibilities, try out time, but it should be used wisely and with an eye on the long term. Great ideas are not enough here: think about how funds can transform practice in the end. Philanthropy can in fact innovate, transform, change, inspire but political commitment for adequate public funding is the only guarantee for sustainability and long term effects.

Offering integrated services in itself will have little effect on living conditions of families as such. Action on different levels is needed combining commitment of parents, authorities and communities to address the lack of personal resources, provide material resources and install supportive services in the community. It really does take a village...



In order to monitor what really works, what really makes a difference for families, big scale quantitative data need to be completed with 'small' qualitative data: observations, self-evaluation, documentation, children's and parent's voices ... There is more evidence than only RCT outcomes. Combining several data can add to the arguments for more investment in early years. Professionals also need this diversity in data: a social worker cannot use the child abuse statistics in his daily practice, but he can use what qualitative research shows on how to relate to abuse victims. The quantitative return on investment argument can have its value but "we should not ever turn children's lives into a future commodity!" (Holland) We should stop to justify investing in basic children's services only when it concerns children in poverty. These debates, are not only politically, but also ethically framed. Policymakers need to take up responsibility and foundations can be active advocates in these debates.

7. Lessons learned

- Integration of services seems to ease the access for disadvantaged groups (Cohen) and it can be financially sound (Kekkonen)
- Both horizontal and vertical networking is important (Primokiz)
- There are many ways and drivers of integration and alignment: very structured or regulated, bottom-up initiatives, combining existing services or new services emerging thanks to inspiring people (Pen Green)
- Integrated servicing does require very strong leadership and commitment of all participants to build a common vision, share values
- Investing in integration = investing in people
- Transitions are not just set moments in time, but a process of change, in which reciprocal adjustment is essential
- Links are made not only between services, but also between and within families and communities
- Integration of services requires ongoing dialogue and the development of a common language/understanding.

In sum, there is not a single answer to the question of what kind of collaboration works best. What is effective and efficient will inevitable depend on the goals and the history of the network as well as on local and political conditions.



Sixth meeting: July 8 – 10, 2015

Washington DC, USA

Multilingualism, Identity and Diversity in the Early Years

1. There is no fast track recipe: current paradigms

Over the past century, societies in Europe have been changing from rather monocultural entities, with a clear range of (presumed) agreed values and norms, into multidiverse societies, in which people from several different cultures, religions, languages need to find ways to co-exist, to work and live together. Ideally, this should happen in a sphere of mutual respect and a willingness to engage in open dialogue, but this is far from the current reality. The challenging part of this reality is that this superdiversity will not disappear and can no longer be ignored, but also that, instead of considering this to be a problem, all these diversities can be considered to bring new strengths and richness.

In the context of ECEC, this complex issue has not yet led to clear cut answers.

ECEC should be about offering safe places where children have their first encounters with the society they live in and where they are seen and respected for who they are. The ultimate pedagogical question then is how to balance colour blindness, denying the many disadvantages of children from vulnerable backgrounds, and reductionism, where children are reduced to the background of their parents and to develop educational policies that embrace diversity and stimulate social cohesion. ECEC settings seem to be the ideal place for this, but some concepts require more clarification. Language is part of one's identity. But what are we talking about? Minority languages, dual language learners...or multilingual children in multilingual classrooms? Language policies need to deal with not only the individual level - what language does a child need to learn? How and why? - but also the group level, the social level - what place can different languages have in a superdiverse society?

In the US the increasing number of bilingual children (Spanish-English) continue to have less optimal academic outcomes, such as low reading proficiency and higher dropout rates. The challenges are multiple and linked to their minority status, a higher poverty rate, discrimination and the mainstream English educational culture. Alongside the remaining English-only policies in several states, new approaches seem to bring positive results. In these practices, the focus is not only on high quality language instruction (oral language abilities, open ended questions, more conversational engagement...) but also on bringing in the home language, the child's cultural and linguistic background, as a basis for further learning. Allowing the home language to be spoken or used in teaching does not hinder the acquisition of another language and enforces teacher-child relationships as well as the child's socio-emotional development. Children's knowledge in their home language helps them to better understand a second language. It is also important to give time to bilingual children and not compare them with monolingual children from day one. There is still a



lack of good models for multilingual classrooms, especially in preschool, but immersion ('sink or swim') or taking children into separate classrooms have not been shown to be successful.

Simple recipes are not found on the European side either, where several strong assumptions on diversity and language continue to dominate the debate. While diversity is recognised as a main trait of current society, it is still not seen as a basic principle: all that deviates from the dominant norm remains a problem, an abnormality, a deficiency. In a monolingual ideology, different languages are considered to be a problem for the child's development and educational success. As mastering the dominant language is still seen as the ultimate condition for success, other home languages can only be an obstacle that has to be overcome. However, there is no real evidence to support this assumption. The true situation is far more complicated, multilayered and dynamic. If anything, the socio-economic background of children is the strongest explaining variable in cognitive development and academic success. Still, home language is often banned in ECEC and school and the use of the dominant language at home is still strongly encouraged, regardless of the possible negative impact of parents becoming less certain, leading to less interaction between parents and children. It also denies potential high literacy in home language to build on. Although the belief in the superiority of monolingualism remains quite strong, we do know that interaction is key in language learning. If we continue to force people into the dominant language, undesirable results are likely to follow.

Shouldn't we wonder why we still hang on to believing in immersion education (in the dominant language) while there has been little to no evidence that it works? Why not build on the increasing empirical evidence for bi- and multilingual education? There is a need to recognize that there are different repertoires (e.g. at home vs in school) and to use these to connect to what is relevant to children as well as build on existing literacy in the home language which contributes to the learning of another language, instead of hindering this process.

Developing multilingual educational settings requires new approaches, more involvement of (bilingual) teachers and of parents. A step beyond the divide between the mono- and multilingual thinking could be 'functional multilingual learning' in multilingual and L2-dominant learning environments. In this model, all home languages have a place in ECEC and school settings. The gains here could be multiple: build on home language knowledge and understanding, raise multilingual awareness, create positive attitude towards linguistic diversity, better contribute to a child's identity, wellbeing and status, increase children's self-esteem, expression and opportunities to really participate. It could move current school systems from a language learning model towards a 'multilingual social interaction model for learning'. Multilingual learning settings can transfer learning from one language into the other, bridge the language gaps between the school and the home (teachers and parents), while making them all co-constructors and partners in education. This will require well trained and coached teachers, some preferably with bilingual backgrounds themselves, a change in mindset of all people involved: promotion of multilingual interaction in schools, learning materials in home languages, and the combination several repertoires in several settings so that multilingualism can become an asset for the holistic development of young children. There are no easy shortcuts to accomplish this, but continuing to deny the reality of multilingualism is equal to agreeing that yet another generation will fall behind.



2. Moving from theory to real life settings and policies

Rethinking and changing strong monolingual beliefs and practices cannot be done by practitioners and teachers alone. Policymakers need to be audacious and accept the challenge to move towards more multilingual approaches as well. Both the state of Illinois and the city of Ghent (Belgium) presented inspiring initiatives.

The state of Illinois already valued native language instruction (meaning instruction IN the home language not OF the home language) and developed Bilingual Education Rules in 2010 in all preschools administered by a school district. The number of ELL's in preschool increased quite dramatically since then.

The cultural shift is critical here: the language issue is also a civil rights issue and serving children with different linguistic (and often different socio-economic) backgrounds is an essential part of educational quality in itself, not a formal addition to check at the end of the line. Up until now however, bilingual education at a young age has still been aimed at education in English later on, rather than being the start of a coherent bilingual education. Currently, the Illinois State Board of Education is making efforts to integrate needs and considerations of Dual Language Learners and other diverse young children into all aspects of their early learning system to ensure that the very definition of "high quality" is responsive to the needs of all children and families, and not only the dominant cultural and linguistic majority.

For example, based on a screening of home language, children are identified according to their English and home language proficiency. These screenings need to be age- and developmentally appropriate, as well as culturally and linguistically sensitive. Multiple measures and methods are used and staff as well as parents are involved. This information can then be used to implement different programmes, such as transitional bilingual education, transitional program of instruction or language support systems. All teachers must meet certain certification requirements related to working with linguistically diverse learners. The Head Start principles were adapted to the state context and contain e.g. the rule that 'Effective programs for children with limited English speaking ability require continued development of the first language while acquisition of English is facilitated'. Other quality systems such as Quality Rating and

Improvement Systems (QRIS) were also reviewed with a focus on addressing diversity and the principle that addressing children's linguistic needs is part of high quality ECEC programming.

In the city of Ghent, a home language project was set up in an overall monolingual education policy context, involving 4 to 8 year olds in four primary schools and two out-of-school services. In a city with some 160 nationalities and a 20% school dropout rate, a new approach was deemed necessary. The project aimed at developing school skills via the use of the home language (mainly Turkish) in teaching, focusing on literacy in the first language with involvement of native speakers. Both quantitative and qualitative instruments were used. The project resulted in recognition of the interdependence between home and (second) school language in the sense that a well-developed home language indeed leads to high scores in the second language in school. As described by Piet Van Avermaet, there were no negative effects of using the home language.. On the contrary, other positive results were observed: a higher self-confidence and wellbeing of the children, children



supported each other more, teachers gained awareness of linguistic diversity, the use of more native language materials in class, an increased dialogue between teachers and children and more parental involvement. There was a higher involvement in learning Dutch as well as an increased tolerance among the children. All in all a more powerful learning environment was created. This was quite a change, especially given that in one of the participating schools, the use of the home language was still sanctioned before the start of the project. It is a clear success when the teachers involved do not want to return to the former system. Within the policy margin of a local authority, the city of Ghent wants to continue to focus on multilingual learning and will keep investing in pedagogical guidance, needed to support the teaching staff. Moreover when the project has proven to be financially feasible (2 pedagogical coaches); the major change seems to have been made in people's minds.

3. Inspiring approaches and philosophies that work

An inspiring example of "Functional Multilingual learning" was presented by David Little and Deirdre Kirwan, on the experience in a primary school (4,5 – 12 year olds) in Dublin. The most remarkable thing being that this school is in no other way remarkable or unusual, nor more expensive or with higher subsidies. It uses the mainstream curriculum and educational goals as any other school and it doesn't have a terribly multilingual or specifically trained staff. What makes this school so special, is the determined will to find a solution to the reality of linguistic (and other) diversity. The multilingual practices in this school have led to a high pupil engagement and effective learning across all subjects. As a result of former involvement of the school in inclusive education projects, the commitment grew to move further towards an integrated approach in language policy. The school's vision is based on the recognition of a person's basic need for autonomy, self-awareness and identity and the role of language in supporting these needs. Language is seen as the "soil in which autonomy grows and the medium through which we exercise it".

80% of the pupils knew little or no English or Irish when they started school and around 50 home languages are spoken. The school adheres to 4 main principles:

- Inclusive ethos: diversity is welcomed and every child can contribute to their own education
- Open language policy: all home languages can be used, in and out of the classroom
- Strong emphasis on developing language awareness: home language being a resource for all -
Strong emphasis on development of literacy skills in English and all home languages: writing and speaking and supporting each other in many different ways, involving parents.

Important helplines are e.g. regular staff meetings, ongoing support by the principal, regular reviews of the language policy and explicit discussion of how it works, continuously looking for new ways to support the multilingual educational setting and involving the parents. English, Irish, French (with a separate time slot in the school's curriculum) and home languages are also used throughout the various subjects, with children explaining things to each other, reaffirming each other's language development, and becoming agents in the learning process.



More specifically for the young children, a secure, nurturing class environment is created in which they can express themselves in any language. Everyday life stories and topics are expressed in different languages and the teacher gradually introduces all present languages in displays and learning activities (e.g. learning to count). As the children move on, more English and Irish is introduced in class but the home languages still remain an important vehicle for communication and (peer) learning.

Working with the children's own knowledge, skills and interests while respecting their different backgrounds stimulates their engagement. The development of literacy in English as the main language of schooling feeds into but also depends on the child's literacy in the home language (and additional languages they pick up in school).

This example showed how a multilingual educational environment can work: on obligatory standardised English and math tests for 1st class pupils, every year in May, this school's children scored above the national average for the past 2 years.

In the US, the Head Start and Early Head start programs have been promoting cultural and linguistic responsiveness as well, as many Head Start programs serve families and children who are not native English speakers. As the country's only national early learning program, moreover, Head Start's practices and policies have been greatly influential in promoting more responsive and research-based practices for Dual Language Learners in other programs across the US.

The recently reviewed program standards, which are being updated for the first time in decades, reflect both the evidence from ECEC research and experience and include regulations on the needs of dual language learners, while recognising the strengths of learning more than one language. Services need to provide appropriate materials, curriculum, assessment, instruction, staffing, supervision and partnerships in order to achieve set program performance goals. Staff e.g. must be familiar with the ethnic backgrounds and heritage of families served and be able to communicate with all of them; or, when a certain home language is spoken by a majority of children, a staff member must speak that language as well. For infants, home language development is recognized as being crucial; in preschool, teaching practices are focused on both acquisition of English and the continued development of the home language, where possible. Regular screenings assess both developments and should be culture and language sensitive.

While service delivery and the implementation of these guidelines will likely vary across Head Start grantees, depending on their demographic contexts, the national office provides information, training, and other resources to help promote culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

One example of a Head Start grantee putting these guidelines into practice is the Washington based Campagna Center which provides several types of ECEC services in which home languages are fostered and supported. One of the strategies employed is to have staff members who speak the home languages of the children and families served. Materials (songs, books...) in different languages are used to add home language experiences in the classroom. Staff members receive professional support through e.g. initial and continued training on cultural competences and understanding language acquisition, by coaching, by teacher meetings in which they can monitor progress made. Parents are considered as active partners in the service, in the classrooms and program activities, strengthening the home-school connections and giving them the opportunity to



meet and support each other. Some parents volunteer in the centre and start working at the centre as they get an opportunity to follow a bachelor programme in early year's education. This is also a strategy to get children's home languages represented amongst the child care personnel.

4. Reframing diversity and identity: from problem to richness

Demographic changes and socio-economic trends have significantly changed the picture of diversity in Europe. We can no longer speak of clear majority and minority groups as we have witnessed the influx of many different, smaller ethnic groups from many countries as well as a growing diversification within certain ethnic groups. Diversity has become super diversity, in most European cities especially, making it difficult, if not impossible, to speak about one majority. This has several consequences: as there is no majority group anymore, integration of newcomers into such a majority becomes obsolete, and the development of targeted systems for specific groups is no longer feasible. If we see that in an Amsterdam high school class only a minority of young people have Dutch parents, in a group of 15 different ethnic backgrounds and 18 different home languages spoken, we can presume that the diversity level in ECEC is or will become even higher. This reality challenges traditional instruments and programs, which no longer provide valid answers in this context of super-diversity. As contexts can differ from country to country, not all policies and measures are easily transferable. In the case of the Netherlands, the choice for targeted ECEC services with less preschool accessibility and attendance has increased the language gap, which in turn has led to an overrepresentation of non-Dutch native speakers in vocational schools, as language is a major component in standardized tests. This gap cannot be closed solely through functional multilingual learning.

Additional measures are needed, such as: desegregating ECEC, expansion of preschool hours for vulnerable groups and improvement of second language programs.

In the US as well, the population is becoming more diverse than ever. Still, the majority-minority language paradigm is the leading one. ECEC in general is not adjusted to the different needs of the many different groups of children. The school readiness gap between groups of children is growing, while the educational success of children with a different cultural and linguistic background is critical for the overall success of the education system and economic future. This growing diversity is a reality, calling for new approaches that move away from monocultural and monolingual educational systems. A variety of factors (country of origin, history of migration, SES, parent's education level...) result in children having different proficiencies in different domains, which all need to be addressed in a strength-based perspective. Bilingualism affects all developmental domains, and early experiences and exposure to multiple languages indeed changes the structure of the brain, so the language factor needs to be taken into account very explicitly. Moreover, also important to consider are apparently negative effects of acculturation for minority ethnic groups—in some cases, research has shown that the longer immigrant children stay in the US, the worse their developmental outcomes become. All of these factors point to the fact that high quality instruction alone is largely insufficient to support equal academic success for language minority students, and that additional considerations and supports need to be added to current strategies in order to change prevailing inequities through a holistic and interdisciplinary approach.



5. Working on inclusion and embracing diversity in multicultural settings

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RECONCILIATION

While embracing tolerance for differences is a moral and realistic imperative in our world today, this issue has even higher stakes in specific settings of historic conflict, as shown in presentations from Israel and Northern Ireland.

In trying to find educational programs as opportunities for reconciliation, top-down policies, often driven by economic and political ideology, do not seem to work as well as the more local, bottom-up approach, in which schools e.g. create their own language education policies, based on the very local unique nature and features. These policies are to be generated by principals, teachers, parents, school boards, neighborhood leaders and students themselves and reflect the local context and actual needs. Shohamy talks about 'engaged language policy', grown out of dialogue and reflection instead of imposed policies. School principals have a strong position here: while also being tied to government agencies, national policies and legislation, they can make a bridge between the top-down policies and the reality around and within the school. This is shown by the example of the Bialik-Rozogin school in Tel Aviv (see trailer of the 'Strangers No more' documentary on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)) with children from extremely different backgrounds and 48 home languages. Within a Hebrew only policy, oblivious to diverse needs, some universal values and a broad view on what 'language' is (arts, science, sports...) a transformative dialogue is developing in the school, creating a new sort of language policy that respects diversity and creates opportunities for the students' future. Different languages are used: Hebrew as a second language for many children, English as a safety net for the future and the home languages, focussing on the advantages of multilingualism. (other mentioned examples are the Hand in Hand schools where Arab and Jewish children attend school together in a multilingual setting. See [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))

Within the political context, this is hardly evident and much depends on the commitment of the principal. The Tel Aviv University has developed a course for future principals to learn how to work in a multilinguistic context. The goal is to familiarize principals, most of them with a strong Hebrew only ideology, with the multilingual reality in Israel and to encourage and support them in enhancing the visibility of diversity rather than to hide or deny it.

In Northern Ireland, an ECEC initiative works on peace building and fostering positive attitudes from the start. Research shows that prejudice and awareness of differences are developing at a young age. Today, the Northern Irish context is still heavily influenced by the former conflict and attitudes of 'ready for peace, prepared for war' are still present. The initiative combined several tools such as cartoons, a 'respecting difference' curriculum, resource packs and training programmes for staff, and parents and other actors of change and supporting ECEC specialists as critical partners during the implementation. Children's attitudes on exclusion (how it feels, how you recognise it) and accepting differences (willingness to play with others) were measured before and after the pilot program. Even after a short implementation period, attitudes had already changed: increased awareness of exclusion and how that must feel and increased willingness to play with other children that are different from oneself. The pilot was enlarged with a full blown media campaign and the



full development of the Respecting Differences programme. Teachers, parents, communities and children themselves are all key partners. Reflecting on prejudice and encouraging dialogue on culture, identity symbols and issues of conflict are important elements of the programme. Research on the initiative in 2010, both randomized control trial and qualitative case study, have shown clear positive changes among the teachers, parents and children in their attitude and awareness of diversity, as well as in addressing diversity. Starting at the preschool level, the programme is now being continued in primary schools and the consolidation process is ongoing. The programme developed into more than just an ECEC initiative and fosters a community development approach, working towards social justice, participation and self-determination in a context of agreed identity and culture and mutual respect.

ACTING IN CONTEXTS OF DIVERSITY AND MULTILINGUALISM

Introducing multilingual policies and practices in ECEC seems to be quite a complex and difficult challenge, as discussed in presentations on the French (Strasbourg) and the German contexts. The search to find how we can support multilingual language acquisition and socialisation is only just beginning. This in a reality where hardly any ECEC service is limited to serving a monolingual group anymore.

Research has shown the negative effects on young children of the pressure to learn a dominant language without making links and continuing to support the home language. Ignoring children's home languages in educational structures has negative consequences for identity development because it can cause a loss of self-worth, values, traditions and beliefs; it can lead to breakdown in family relationships and socialisation and it prevents opportunities for cognitive development which are well known in bilingual learning contexts. Language is linked to social status and not being allowed to use one's own language is perceived today as a form of discrimination.

In France, a growing number of ECEC provisions have become bi- and multilingual because they are attended by multilingual children. But examples in Strasbourg show some of the shortcomings in relation to language development. All children are indeed welcome in such structures, but they are welcomed in French. When other languages are used, the working languages (French, German, English) are not always the home languages of the children attending. While the openness to different languages is growing, this doesn't result in home languages being used or supported on the work floor. However, practices are changing here and there. In one Strasbourg bilingual child care structure, where 13 languages are spoken by parents and staff, parents are encouraged to engage in activities where they can use their home language with all the children present. In another centre, both the children and the staff use their first language and discover the multiplicity of languages spoken, simply by living together. But these practices show that it is difficult to implement multilingualism in ECEC structures, more difficult than developing bilingual practices where only two languages are used. In bilingual structures, it is common to use the 'one person one language' policy to support two languages and to keep them separate in order to prevent language mixing. The fear of translanguaging is still rather prevalent, but managing multilingualism in ECEC is rather complex



if one wishes to support the language development of all children. Yet, while dominant languages are entering ECEC structures, minority migrant languages on the whole are still very rarely used as working languages with the young children who speak such languages at home.

In Germany the legal entitlement to a place in ECEC made attendance rates grow extensively, although this growth is slower for children with a migration background. This changes the questions on (home) language acquisition. How is this affected by enrolling in ECEC and how does it change identity formation and social education processes? It is important to look for ways in which both home and second language acquisition can be facilitated and promoted in ECEC. In this context, pedagogical work in multilingual settings is about co-construction within socio-cultural frameworks, giving children opportunities to construct cultural and linguistic knowledge that is also compatible with social education goals. In their play and peer interaction, they engage in meaning-making in the specific context and use language to understand and cope with social reality, and engage with each other. Focusing on language as a cognitive tool is about framing and creating stimulating surroundings and social interactions where children engage in negotiating meaning toward self-regulation and higher forms of language use. Taking up the children's languages is crucial to paving the way to participation and building plurilingual identities in the community of practice.

An inclusive approach to multilingualism means encouraging activities and interactions in all languages children bring with them, including and mixing different repertoires and symbols. Valuing these languages and encouraging their use in social interaction supports the formation of multilingual identities.

ENGAGING MIGRANT FAMILIES IN EARLY YEARS CENTRES

While Portugal, compared to many other EU countries, has a lower percentage of immigrants as a share of its total population, the number of immigrants, in particular of young refugees (70% of all immigrants in Portugal in 2014 were below the age of 30), has been growing in recent years, creating a unique challenge. The country's reception centers are full of children, and many unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria have sought a home in Portugal. Until recent years, most of the immigrants living in Portugal arrived with a fluent knowledge of Portuguese (arriving from e.g. Brazil and Cape Verde), again making the current demographic change a new challenge to be addressed.

One response to the growth of young immigrants in Portugal has been the creation of the ESCOLHAS program, set up by the High Commissioner for Migration, to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for children in vulnerable contexts. A complete program was designed to develop intercultural schools, including certificates, training activities on intercultural and integration issues, intercultural mediation...all with the goal of promoting the understanding of cultural diversity, raising awareness of integration issues as well as developing intercultural skills and knowledge.

Similarly, the Aga Khan Foundation places social inclusion and gender equity at the heart of their work in the Madrasa Early Childhood program. In this model, the communities being served by the program are truly in charge of every aspect of the program, in terms of its direction as well as its



content. Community members sit on the governance boards of the initiative, and through their guidance, a focus on quality and relevance is achieved.

A project in Germany adds the voice of migrant parents and ECEC practitioners to the language debate. Many parents confirm that learning the new country's main language is important (as a vehicle for school success and a symbol of belonging) but at the same time they are concerned about the family language disappearing. The home language is a symbol of belonging to a culture and they worry about possible communication problems, alienation within the family and identity problems when their children are pressured to learn German. In German ECEC, the German only approach is still predominant. Strategies to handle linguistic diversity or understand the perspective of parents is still lacking. ECEC practitioners feel that they should explain to parents the goals and concept of ECEC, but they are not accustomed to doing so, and they encounter communication problems, partly because of language barriers. Parents feel that the practitioners do not understand or respect their cultural background, while this could help them in working with their children. While there is a willingness among practitioners to work on addressing diversity, the skills, knowledge and approaches to do so are still limited. With a shared common goal – the best possible education for children – more meaningful partnerships need to be developed between parents and practitioners. Both in-service training and sustained dialogue with parents can improve approaches to diversity in ECEC.

7. System level responses to linguistic and cultural diversity

The WIDA Early Years project, in partnership with Massachusetts' state Department of Education, developed a comprehensive approach to support Dual Language Learners between 2, 5 and 5, 5 y old (35% of all children under 8y in Massachusetts), with an intentional focus on comprehensive and authentic assessment of young children's language development to support teaching, learning and development in two, or more, languages simultaneously or sequentially. It is a cross sectoral project, including e.g. Head Start, childcare, preschool and home visits and working closely with parents, and also seeks to improve alignment between early learning and K-12 curricula, particularly in light of the implementation of the Common Core standards across many states in the US. The WIDA language standards are extracted directly from existing state early learning standards (in this case from Massachusetts' standards but the same can be done in all states), including social and emotional, physical development, early literacy, and cognitive development, and creates a crosswalk to identify language standards and expectations across all levels and sectors to support teachers and other professionals. As in many other practices discussed already, multilingualism is considered to be an asset instead of a problem and home language is considered to be important. The programme combines resources and tools on language standards, professional learning, assessment and family engagement. The language standards for example need to monitor whether children meet the social and academic language development in order to meet existing state early learning standards. The professional learning tools support teachers in supporting instructing and assessing DLL's. Teachers and providers also get the necessary resources, tools and training to improve and maintain relations with the families involved. As of now, the standards have been fully developed in both English and Spanish, with plans to expand to other languages in the future.



System level responses to linguistic and cultural diversity can also be learnt from southern experiences and research. European and US approaches and experiences with multilingual education settings may have only scratched the surface in comparison with the context in African countries, where multilingual education has been a reality for over 100 years, especially in non-formal education areas. At the same time recommendations for teaching children in their home or community language have been a recurrent theme of educational reports regarding formal education for at least 120 years. However, while communities are usually multilingual and engage in multilingual practices in their daily lives, for the most part, governments of Africa have ignored research reports and tried to implement formal education systems based on European models of education since the late 19th century. For the first five decades after independence (in the mid-20th century) this has meant a forced transition from the local language towards one of the international languages of wider communication as the default language of formal education. The result has been that children have been expected to move too abruptly to a language that they do not understand, particularly in regard to reading materials and assessments. Retention of children in education systems in which they have not understood either the language of learning or the epistemological foundations of the system, has been disastrous.

From a vast body of research, several conclusions have been confirmed (but not always translated into policies). As indicated earlier, having children bring their home language, knowledge and expertise into educational settings does build confidence and a stronger sense of identity. It also strengthens the links between home, community and school and stimulates mutual respect and understanding between children and teachers of different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds. The research data from several countries indicate that the longer the use of home language, the higher will be student retention and achievement. Eight years of home language medium appears to offer the best chances for students to finish secondary schooling and with success. Children do not seem to have a problem in learning and three languages, even if this involves two orthographies. Children learn as much, or maybe even more, outside classrooms than they do in schools. They pick up languages in addition to their home language/s in the immediate surroundings (local language/s, new urban or hybrid languages) and they develop several repertoires that they can build upon. There is a particularly strong correlation between local community participation and student achievement. The more opportunities there are for parent and community engagement with the school (e.g. community plantations generating funds for school resources) the higher the student achievement. Decentralisation of educational responsibility appears to be linked to the degree to which communities participate, the greater the degree of decentralisation, the greater the likelihood of parent and community participation. Increasing centralisation appears to close off opportunities for parents and communities to believe that they can participate and make contributions. Alternatively, greater centralisation appears to increase a sense of alienation of parents and community from the school.

There is considerable evidence to show the relationship between achievement and the medium through which assessment is conducted in both the South African and Ethiopian cases. Student achievement is higher when both teaching and assessment occur in the home / local language. When the new South African multilingual education policy was introduced after apartheid,



assessment nevertheless continued in English and Afrikaans only. It therefore did not match the new policy. Worse than this, most African language speaking students found themselves in situations where they had no choice in regard to the language of assessment, because they were only offered English as the language of assessment from the fourth grade to the end of secondary school. The result has been catastrophic student achievement since 1997, on a scale that has exceeded the worst failures of apartheid education. A trilingual assessment design, introduced by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) in 2006 only, was able to demonstrate a better correspondence between community language practices and language/s of assessment. This design offers greater opportunity for linguistic and epistemic equity for students. Respect for different learning processes and epistemologies, and making effective use of the home language in education, does require their inclusion in assessment. The HSRC study demonstrates that there is no valid reason why assessment does not permit students to make use of their entire linguistic and epistemic repertoires so that a more holistic understanding of student achievement can be captured in assessment.

8. Policy debate and takeaways

The policymakers in the panel (Kristina Cunningham, European Commission, Roberto Rodriguez, US, Claude Sevenig, Luxembourg Michael Hempel, Germany) all agreed on the importance of ECEC, especially for children with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the policymakers agreed that the link with the super diversity and multilingual reality in our society needs to be made and strengthened if we do not want to lose large groups of children in the education process. Super diverse realities need to be reflected in education and care, as is described in for example the European Framework on Quality in ECEC. The concept of quality should include the need to make the most of every child's linguistic knowledge and competences. Making reference to what is happening in the world (IS, Charlie Hebdo, intolerance towards refugees...) a warm appeal is made to start as young as possible with educating people in an environment of openness, mutual comprehension and respect.

Links also need to be made between different sectors that have historically worked in parallel of each other for too long. In Luxembourg for example, school, childcare, out of school care and ECEC services have now been integrated within one ministry of Education. This illustrates a shift in paradigm: ECEC is now a pedagogical issue rather than an economic one. Luxembourg is building on its experience of multilingualism (3 official languages) with French and German being the languages of instruction even though most children speak Luxembourgish and recent policies aim to have all children from the age of 1 to have access to linguistic development in a multilingual context.

The US focus on the early years is largely motivated by huge gaps in achievement among different groups of children. Increased investments and resources have been allocated to improve the quality of ECEC services (the main precondition for successful outcomes), to expand home visiting programs and to move towards public ECEC for all. Valuing bilingualism and considering the home language as an asset is a rather new trend in the US, but important to further develop. New standards are



implemented in the federal preK-programme of Head Start and set new benchmarks in promoting dual language development.

With all that we already know (e.g. OECD reports), there is surely a consensus on what should be done to offer high quality ECEC to every child. Learning to work with bi- and multilingual children, families, and communities is part of this broader picture. The holistic approach toward child development should always remain at the centre of policies and practices. In this view, we should be careful with the apparent need to assess the possible outcomes as fast and often as we can; we know that outcomes cannot be so easily predicted and that it takes more than 2 weeks to fully assess one child. We should not base assessments on just one element such as language proficiency. Many other factors – poverty, disability, living context, family support or other vulnerabilities – have such an impact on a child’s development and wellbeing that singling out just one feature simply doesn’t make sense. Keeping the child-centered focus of ECEC in mind, too many assessments and indicator schemes may as well “put everything at risk that is important in Early Childhood Education and Care”. We should measure what matters (Hempel). ECEC is also featured on the UN post- 2015 agenda: access to high quality ECEC should be guaranteed for all, boys and girls alike by 2030. A relevant indicator, in a holistic perspective, would be the number of under 5y olds being on the right track in health, learning and psychosocial wellbeing.

As the issue of multilingualism, diversity and identity form a complex puzzle, it is not easy to draw general conclusions or look for a ‘one size fits all’ solution. However, there are some clear directions to keep in mind, such as:

- Separation of groups/languages does not work very well. On the contrary, including the multilingual reality in pedagogical practice is positive for the socio-affective development of children and creates no disadvantages in learning the main language(s) of the respective country.
- Contexts are different, and need to be taken into account
- Functional multilingual learning can support and develop both the home language and the common (dominant) language. It respects the child’s background, eases transitions and uses the home language as a basis to learn other languages
- It takes time for children to develop: give them that time, be careful and patient and don’t rush into assessments too quickly
- Adapt assessment methods to the diverse and multilingual backgrounds of children
- Besides carefully designed programmes, committed, open minded and well trained professionals are needed to actually deliver them
- Teachers do not have to be multilingual, but they need to be tolerant and respectful towards multilingualism. Sustained and long term coaching and support can help them.
- Invest in teachers and good leadership: the cost of implementing multilingual policies may be relatively limited; the greater challenges lie in changing the mindsets (and training) of childcare & education professionals.



- Parents need to be included as well: Investing in strong, safe, warm relationships between staff-children-parents results in higher well-being and better outcomes
- Make better use of good practices, spread successful experiences and scale them up to higher decision-making levels
- Be aware of the risk of schoolification of ECEC



Seventh meeting: February 3 - 5, 2016

Turin, Italy

Looking ahead: opportunities to improve and expand high-quality Early Childhood services for all

Where are we now?

The TFIEY project is coming to an end and it is time to take stock of what we have learned and witnessed and to draw relevant policy recommendations from it all. Along the way, some of the presumptions at the start have been supported by research and practice. To name just a few: high quality ECEC is beneficial for all children and even more so for children living in vulnerable situations, respecting parents and working with them as equal partners is necessary and supports the child's wellbeing, high quality services require well trained and highly competent professionals.

Besides several insights in what quality means in ECEC and in possible approaches for servicing the most vulnerable families, the issues of funding and building political and public support were also examined during this meeting. Throughout all TFIEY meetings, we saw increasing evidence and a growing consensus on how high quality (which includes accessibility for all) ECEC can benefit the most vulnerable children in particular in many different levels, how this can be instrumental in fighting inequity and in achieving equal opportunities, there is however less agreement on how these ECEC services could or should be financed.

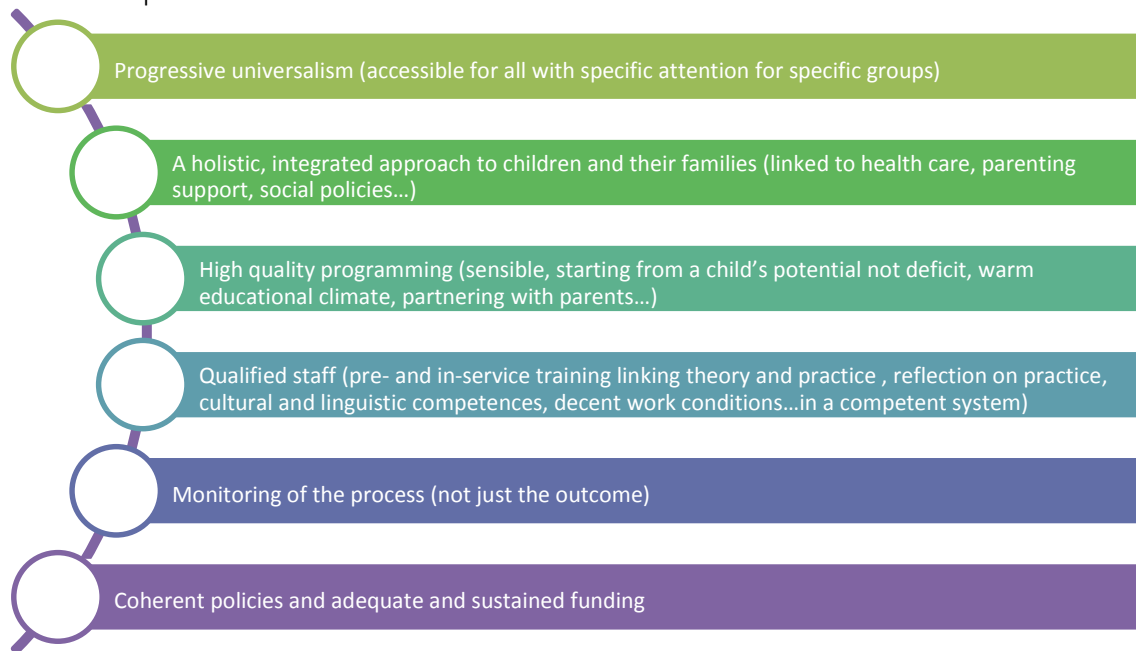
In this meeting we summarized the main statements, as well as the conditions that need to be met.



ECEC matters

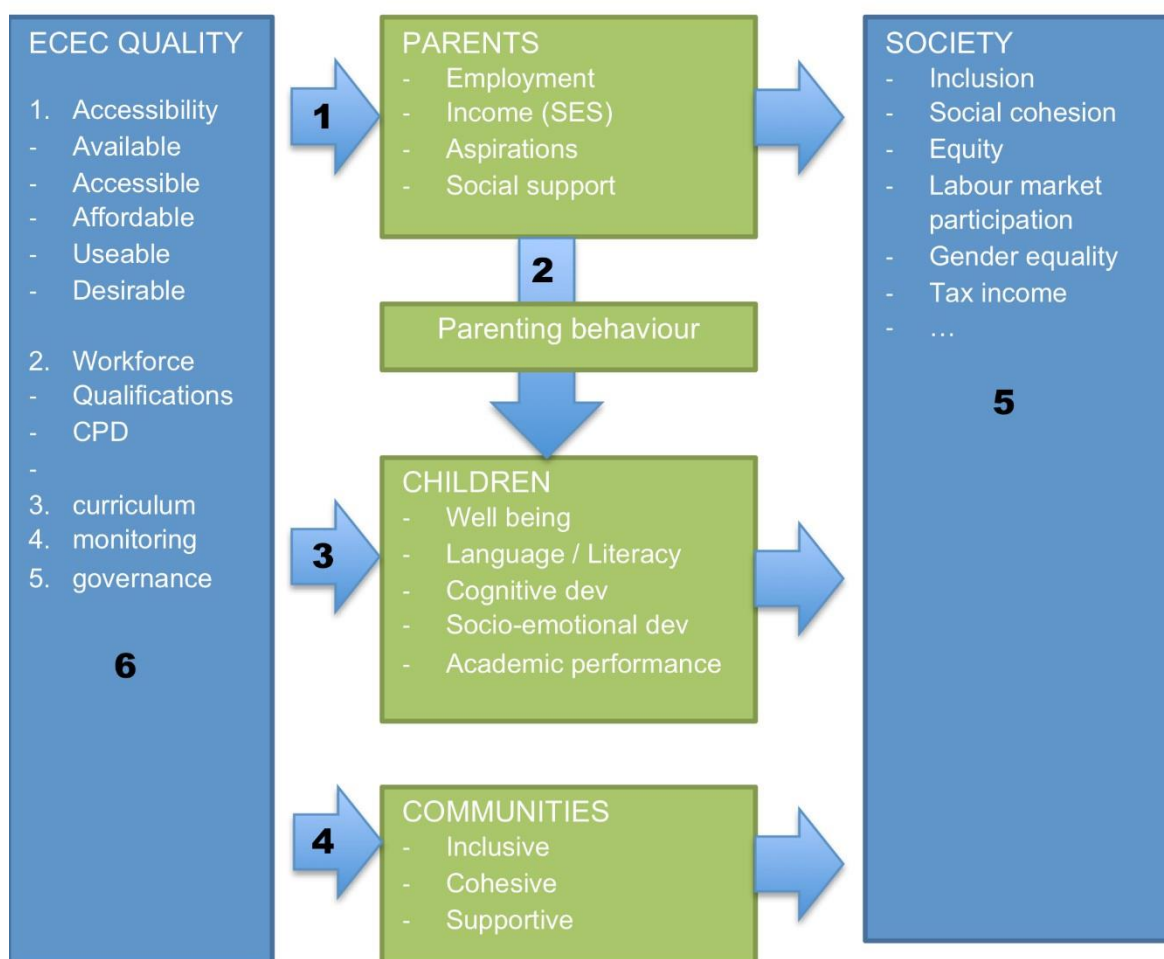


But this requires:



Main challenges?

The TFIEY focus has always been on high quality ECEC in the context of poverty and migration. Both in Europe and the US, we see that education and care for young children is hardly available for all. While children in vulnerable situations could benefit the most from these ECEC services, we have seen that they still encounter way too many barriers and that the early years sector is still more often excluding groups that including them. Looking back at the previous meetings, Michel Vandebroek summarizes the most relevant issues to make a strong case on why we can't afford NOT to invest in high quality ECEC for all. This scheme contains most of the topics of the previous meetings:



When we say that ECEC matters, we need to add some nuance. From the start of TFIEY, it has been argued that the many benefits of ECEC will only manifest themselves if a certain level of quality is guaranteed, if supportive policies are developed, if the workforce is ready and able to do the job well etc. Throughout the meetings we have understood that it is quite a challenge to combine all these critical success factors.

A recurring conclusion in this context was the appeal to progressive universalism as targeted provisions for specific groups have serious disadvantages: they seem to be less effective, they rarely gain enough public support, they can be stigmatising... Designing and implementing policies aimed at mainstream provisions, while also focusing on specific needs of certain groups, accessible for all and creating a social mix, have proven to give better results. Not only for the children themselves, but also for their parents, which is a unique opportunity to stimulate more social cohesion. Because of the children's young age, quality in ECEC also means getting engaged with parents, taking responsibility in the education and care of children in partnership and dialogue with parents. This two-way approach is part of the power of ECEC: it not only has a long term impact on children's



holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional, physical...), but it affects the life of parents as well, both directly (employment, training, gender equality...) and indirectly (informal parenting and social support, meeting other parents, improving the home learning situation...). This way, ECEC doesn't only open doors to the outer world for young children, but also for their parents.

And finally, beyond the benefits for children and their families, high quality ECEC also affects the wider community with its potential to work in a more integrated way with other supportive services, to work on warm transitions to school (and thus avoiding new gaps), to offer parents opportunities to connect and to add to social cohesion and support. ECEC plays an important role in co-educating all children beyond difference in race, income, education level...both in bonding with equals and bridging to 'the other'. Never before did young children spend so much time outside the home so we shouldn't underestimate the potential of ECEC to develop and strengthen all these links and work towards more inclusion, equity, democracy and social cohesion.

AjayChaudry pointed out that the gaps in early learning are quite large, starting at a very early age and accumulating quite rapidly throughout childhood. ECEC in the US has high rates of exclusion and this affects mostly the children living in poverty. While programmes like Head Start, Perry Preschools, Abecedarian... have been running for some decades now, the achievement gap is still showing clearly and poverty is one of the main factors here, next to racial and ethnical background. Chaudry concludes from facts and figures that still too many children are left behind and that inequality in children's cognitive skills e.g. is larger in the US than in other countries. This is problematic as we know that durable gaps from the start are hard to address over the years. Many of the gaps in primary school are already showing at school entry. Differences in scholastic achievement by racial, ethnic or immigrant background are persisting, while gaps by income level have even been growing. As a lot of ECEC services are to be 'purchased' by parents, we see that only children from higher income families start attending at a very young age (1-1,5y). Even middle income families, let alone low income, start using these services at a later age (4-5y). By that time, the pronounced and growing inequities in what young children experience are already clear; not only in terms of access, but also in terms of the quality of services and provisions (see also John Bennett, 'poor services for poor people'). And as quality could be far better overall, there is strong evidence that children from lower income families experience lower quality education and care on several levels (emotional support, instructional quality and overall quality).

Some US examples have shown how public investment can be successful in giving children living in poverty a fair chance of a good start, but the investment level is far from meeting the actual needs. Overall investment is needed to guarantee universal access, starting at age 3, providing continuous ECEC at an early age to the most vulnerable until school entry.



What have we learnt from research?

One of the most impressive studies in this field is the EPPSE study – Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (see Kathy Sylva and also Edward Melhuish, EPPSE). This is a longitudinal study on the effects of preschool, involving 141 preschools and over 3000 children. It is worth noting that this study was done in mainstream preschools. More than 3,000 children were assessed at the start of pre-school around the age of 3 and their development was monitored until they entered school around the age of 5. They were assessed again at key points when they were 11 y old and are currently being followed through their final year of compulsory schooling and on to their post 16 educational, training and employment choices. As Edward Melhuish already illustrated, the effects of quality early years education last throughout the school years and shapes the future development of children. These effects are even stronger for children whose parents have low level qualifications. The positive effects were on several domains: not only academic success but also on social behavior and self-regulating skills. Quality also refers to the quality of relations, interactions and dialogue: “enthusiastic thinkers make killer pedagogues!”.

From this research, it is clear that high quality ECEC actually protects children from the risks of social and familial disadvantage. It also points towards elements of this required quality and adds that the public sector, with better leadership and qualified staff is more able to deliver high quality than the private or charitable sector. The study also led to major policy changes as the results were so undeniable, making free preschools accessible for all children in the UK as of 3y and starting at 2y for children from disadvantaged groups.

Along the same lines, research by Daniela del Boca points at the beneficial impact for children – cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes - as well as for their mothers in terms of participation in the labor market. While children’s outcomes – school, behavior, health - are surely also depending on both parent’s input, formal ECEC serves as a solid addition to the home environment, where children also learn from and with their peers. Early interventions seem to have higher rates of return than later interventions and these last for a longer period of time. Pisa-data show that the link between preschool attendance and test scores at the age of 15 is higher in countries that have a higher spending per pupil in preschool, higher enrolment rates and higher levels of training and of wages of the ECEC staff.

Looking into supply and access of ECEC over different countries, we see considerable differences in enrolment, especially for babies and toddlers (0-2y), with e.g. attendance up to 74,5% in Denmark and barely 20% in Greece. Enrolment rates increase with age (3-5y) up to over 90% (e.g. in Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, France) and over 55% in the US, and almost 50% in Greece.

ECEC in the US and UK, childcare for the youngest children (under 3y) is very heterogeneous, most often privately funded and informal. This is quite problematic as studies show that in both countries and especially for vulnerable children, formal childcare shows better and more lasting results. Simulation in the UK, introducing formal childcare for children under 3 shows a reduction of children with low test scores, a reduction in the



dispersion of cognitive outcomes among children from low-income families, as well as a reduction of inequalities among children. On the European continent childcare is most often formal, publicly funded and more homogenous. Here as well, we clearly see that positive impact increases along the lines of higher availability and higher quality. Again, in countries like Norway and Denmark, with high levels of available, universal and high quality provision, strong and positive effects were registered, such as educational success, college attendance, adult earnings. And again, this was even more significant from children in vulnerable situations (low level of education of the mother, low income family).

Some regions in Italy show a divergent picture in a way: while municipal child care is of rather high quality, availability is low, especially in the Southern regions. Higher availability results in higher language test scores. A new study on the internationally renowned Reggio Emilia approach offers some preliminary results of interesting correlations of preschool attendance and later school success for children from immigrant and low-income families. In Germany also, research showed that attending childcare increases e.g. language skills and that these effects are higher in childcare centres with experienced and trained staff, adding to the quality of the provision.

When we see the research results pointing at a correlation between attendance of high quality ECEC and positive outcomes on many levels and long term, policymakers should have no choice but to invest thoroughly in affordable and universal high quality ECEC. Alongside investing in ECEC, and valuing parents - both mothers and fathers! - as first educators, policies on parental leave and smoother combination of work and private life should also be reconsidered, especially to benefit the development of very young children.

What does practice tell us?

In earlier meetings, especially in the Washington meeting focused on multilingualism, we have seen how children who do not speak the dominant language or have a different cultural/ethnic background have more thresholds to overcome to enter mainstream ECEC provision. As this plays a major role in their underachievement, we need to find ways to get our ECEC systems better equipped to welcome these children and give them as good a start as any other child.

One of the viable strategies to respond to needs of minority language groups is to better prepare and support the workforce for their work with so-called Dual Language Learners (DLL). Marlene Zepeda reports on the lack of a uniform standard in ECEC teacher's preparation, ranging from high school diploma's to bachelor degrees throughout the states in the US and the different programmes. Quality of staff however is one of the salient factors in ECEC quality, especially in the context of underserved populations. Data on the education levels of staff working with the 03y old children show that these levels

are far lower than for teachers working with older children. Added to this, many children of low-income and migrant families don't attend the formal ECEC centres but are in



informal care (family, child minders...often unlisted, some also unpaid). This means that the children most in need of decent ECEC are being served by a low qualified workforce. And while these childminder's are in fact more likely to match the cultural and language characteristics of the families they work for, little is known about the pedagogical quality they are able to offer.

Over and over it is stated that high quality ECEC is good for all children, but for children who are not – in the US case - native English speakers this may not be sufficient either, as long as we do not get better prepared staff or do not reconsider our measuring instruments as well. As e.g. language acquisition has its own peculiarities, general language tests will never show a fair result. As for the ECEC staff, a large majority has no other language knowledge than English. Some groups also have larger percentages of Spanish speakers (e.g. 23% of family-based childcare workers, 15% of ECEC workers) but the majority of the workforce is monolingual.

Workforce preparation and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is highly needed to increase their competences to work in a context of diversity. Cross cutting themes in teacher training are e.g.: understand the links between early brain development and language development, understand how children become bilingual, understand that language acquisition takes time, support oral language development on both languages used, assess children's progress in their native languages as well as in English and learn to identify and implement appropriate pedagogical practices. Besides the language issue, there is a need to expand culture sensitive competences as well, e.g. in understanding the impact of a child's cultural background (parent-child interaction, parent's expectations and priorities..) or respecting the fact that the child's primary language is the medium through which he/she learns about the values and beliefs of their culture. As we have seen in some inspiring practices during the 6th meeting of the TFIEY (see e.g. Little and Kirwan) a well-equipped workforce also needs firm and committed leadership, working from a clear vision on how to prioritise ECEC for a diversity of young children and their families.

With the case of Berlin Christa Preissing and Henrietta Heimgaertner illustrate how the concept of quality needs a systemic, participatory and multi-layered approach. Defining or describing quality is not a monopoly of policymakers or academics alone. It is an ongoing process of dialogue between experts, researchers, policymakers, ECEC staff, parents and children, a process of constant reflection on a changing world and living context (e.g. now with the refugees in Europe) and of learning from each other. Thinking about and shaping quality requires combining different sources of knowledge, backgrounds and experiences. The Berlin ECEC curriculum – Bridging diversity was drafted in 2003 by a group of practitioners, academics and policymakers and discussed by many more within the ECEC sector before being accepted by the Ministry of Education of Berlin in 2004. Starting from a children's rights perspective it is built on a holistic understanding of education in the broad sense of the word (education, upbringing, socialisation...), aimed at empowering the



potential of every child and their families, while respecting diversity. It starts from a vision of shared responsibility for human/children's rights and for the natural and cultural environment of all involved. It supports participatory work and empowerment of staff, of children and their parents, of communities.

Children learn from exploring the world around them in all its diversity, exploring social cultures, communicating through languages, literacy, media, art, maths and so on. The program offers opportunities for ECEC teams to (self-)reflect, to raise awareness on children's rights and feelings of belonging to foster children's well-being, to view children as agents and to continuously be aware of interactions between children and adults and of possible discrimination and how to act upon that.

As of January 2006, this 'Bildungsprogramm' was implemented and made compulsory for all publicly funded ECEC centres in Berlin (over 2000 centres). It is monitored accordingly, with regular internal and external evaluations and provides for in-service training modules. The internal evaluation is a detailed instrument on orientation-, task- and cooperation quality, which are all monitored in different ways: individual self-reflection with built in quality criteria, peer observations, team discussions and internal contracts on steps to take to improve. In addition, an external evaluation was designed as well, built around 3 central elements: valuing achievements of a centre, constructive-critical assessment of necessary changes towards the goals of the curriculum and tailor-made recommendations for further quality development (taking into account the concrete situation of each centre). External evaluations like this serve as a support for ECEC centres rather than a merely controlling instrument. Both types of evaluations are well received by the workforce, both the management and the practitioners.

Concluding, as quality is the challenge, policies need to support this in different ways, as they do in the Berlin program: by intensive communication between all parties concerned, by an improved professional-child ratio, by financial support (10€ per child per year extra for evaluation) and by recognition of the quality increase in politics and the media.

On the US side, the Head Start programme has been working over several decades, making links between knowledge, policies and practice. Robert Stechuk's presentation illustrated how Head Start evolved during its 50 year existence. Head Start has always focused on low-income families and opportunities for their children and worked on the design of a federally regulated program, including technical assistance and monitoring, starting from a vision of inclusion and respect for (racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and developmental) diversity. Throughout the years, system revisions were introduced and capacity building efforts were made in order to continue growth in terms of quality.

Looking back on how program implementation around responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity can effectively be monitored and how the needs of diverse learners are being met, this is clearly still a challenge, even in this program that has historically set out with the explicit purpose of serving disadvantaged and minority groups. Initially, there was an effort to try and include issues of linguistic diversity at the broadest level of program standards, which would be the ideal scenario. However, this effort was rejected, so specific indicators are now included within each generic standard to directly address the needs of



Dual Language Learners. In addition, many resources are made available in the form of technical assistance to individual programs by the national office, including a program preparedness checklist that helps programs to investigate themselves how well they may be serving Dual Language Learners and children of immigrants, and handouts that are designed to inform staff and families about the importance of home language and the basics of first and second language acquisition.

Ultimately, while there has been an upward trend in Head Start's commitment toward taking a truly inclusive and holistic approach to address the needs of immigrant and DLL children in the past few decades, the size of the program and the difficulty of controlling all aspects of implementation make this difficult to achieve across all classrooms, and much remains to be done in ensuring that all providers are using research-driven best practices to promote the success of all children.

Funding Models and Innovations

If anything, the TFIEY collected many sorts of extensive and convincing evidence, proving that high quality ECEC is of major importance to every child's holistic development and that this is definitely the case for children in vulnerable situations such as migration and poverty. And while ECEC issues are moving up on political agenda's worldwide (see the European Quality framework for ECEC - EQF and the Strategic Developmental Goals of the UN - SDG4), universally accessible ECEC is far from reality in many countries. And the current refugee situation in many of our countries will add even more urgency to this challenge.

Looking at the benefits of ECEC on so many levels (child development, support to families, (female) employment, social cohesion, inclusion, poverty...) the question now is how to develop adequate policy strategies and funding schemes. Different views and options are possible here, depending on the underlying paradigms, such as children's rights, ECEC as a basic provision or as a marketised service. Different funding systems can be considered and will be influenced by the political context.

Researching the Dutch system, Janneke Plantenga looks into innovative funding in the shape of a market-system for ECEC. To reach all the goals of ECEC the question is how to finance all this as efficiently as possible. In Europe different systems exist: public funding, supply subsidies, tax deductions, demand subsidies (such as vouchers for parents for service purchase) etc. In most cases we see a mixed system, in which the state and private partners (for-profit and not-for-profit) all have a role in the provision, the funding and the regulation of ECEC. In many Northern European countries and countries like France and Belgium, ECEC is considered to be a basic provision that should be funded by public resources. The UK and the Netherlands have chosen a different path and introduced the market approach in ECEC. All systems have pro and contra arguments depending on what you aim for: controllable spending, goal oriented, demand driven, flexibility, pedagogical quality, etc.

In the case of ECEC, the basic idea is that the market will create a more efficient incentive structure as the market driven approach will increase competition and will force suppliers



to increase internal efficiency resulting in lower prices. In addition, the introduction of market forces may lead to a better balance between supply and demand. Consumers are expected to select the provider that offers the best price/quality ratio and the sector may adapt quicker to changing circumstances. The introduction of market forces should therefore increase both internal and external efficiency. Reality however raises other issues.

Looking at ECEC in a market-context, it is the parents, and not the children, who are the consumers and consumers are assumed to be very well informed, free to choose their preferred and available service as well as free to change provision as they see fit. This raises access as well as quality issues. Low-income families may not have all that much choice, if any, putting equal access at risk and by doing so decreasing overall quality (as access should be viewed as part of quality). In the Netherlands e.g. only working parents are eligible for vouchers for child care and it is mostly higher income dual-earner families that are using formal childcare services. Quality may also be at risk as reality mostly shows that the race is for 'a' place, rather than 'the best' place, given the shortage in supply of ECEC services. Also, parents may not be that well equipped to define and recognise pedagogical quality, so ECEC providers will not be competing on this domain. In general, information on process quality in the Netherlands shows that the quality level has been rather low between 2001 and 2008, with some increase as of 2012.

At this point, Plantenga concludes that there is not enough evidence (yet?) to state that the market mechanism would result in higher or lower quality levels than public provision.

A model of social entrepreneurship is illustrated by June O'Sullivan, CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. In this, a business strategy has been deployed to provide in high quality childcare (38 community nurseries in London) in poor areas. The LEYF business model has 4 main goals: delivering financially viable childcare in poor areas, enduring high quality through the LEYF pedagogy, investing in local employment and in-service training of staff and building a multigenerational community and social capital. The focus is on many different aspects of the child's development, such as literacy, basic life skills (e.g. perseverance self-regulation, sociability, self-esteem...), attention for the home learning environment and creating mutual learning cultures. Inspection (Ofsted UK) has shown that the LEYF centres score from good to excellent. Within LEYF as well, a monitoring system has been developed to measure the benefits for the children.

The ambitions are high within a very challenging context. High quality as the main focus has the advantage that services are created that attract high income families which support the financing of lower fees for children from low income families (Robin Hood principle). Half of the staff is recruited locally, from low income families, with immigrant background and including men. About 80% of the children attending are not native English speakers and not all parents have a supporting family network. The LEYF centre can offer them social support and opportunities to meet with other parents to escape from their isolation. In this way, LEYF does not only offer childcare, but also creates possibilities for social mobility, for fighting child poverty, for parental support, employment etc.



Bill Crim introduces the first system of Social Impact Bonds in the context of early childhood provision in the US, in which venture capital is used to set up new services in ECEC. Appealing to the sense of urgency (not investing in ECEC is losing generations of children!) investors were encouraged and excited to fund social programmes where the state is unwilling or unable to do so. This way, private investors are taking all the risks at first and contribute to expand preschool to low-income families. Based on research, the case was made how low-income children would benefit from preschool and how much this would save on public spending in the end if they would have access to preschool. In this model, investors 'loan' money for programme expansion (up to 7 million \$) and when the targets are achieved, they are repaid with interest by the state, as costs have been avoided. This is a win-win situation for all parties involved with the added value that multiple stakeholders from the community are brought together to work in collaboration toward a shared effort. Whenever the targets are not met, the loss is for the investors, not for the state. The hope is that - as has been in the case of Utah - policymakers will themselves demonstrate more of a readiness to invest public funds in the effort once success has been proven.

Up until now, some 1800 children, 3 and 4 y olds, have received high quality preschool through this model and school readiness has in fact increased.

Introducing the importance of ECEC on the business table is also the message of Ready Nation. Sara Watson is advocating for ECEC and trying to convince the business community to invest in young children by using a language attractive to business leaders. Coming to terms with the fact that neither charity organisations nor NGO advocacy alone will lead to the required results, Ready Nation's message is that it is time that business leaders strengthen the call towards policymakers. Possible actions by business leaders are e.g. contributing money or volunteers to organisations, setting up family friendly policies for employees, educate customers... Several multinationals, as well as the World Bank, Federal Reserve and OECD have been supporting this approach.

In order to reach policymakers, the business community and 'public opinion' (being mostly middle class), we need sustained and need-driven campaigning and advocacy, as stated by Delia Pompa. Moreover, the populations who are the target beneficiaries of these services—namely, low-income and immigrant families—must be included and empowered as agents of this advocacy. In the case of the US, immigrant groups, and in particular the Hispanic community, have become increasingly politically engaged and have played a critical role in campaigning for increased access to high-quality early childhood services. This strategy of including target populations as agents for change rather than passive recipients of services designed by others goes to the heart of issues of inclusion and empowerment that have been recurring themes throughout the Forum meetings. Facts and figures may be quite convincing in this context. Some examples: 44% of foreign born citizens between 25 and 44y old (the parents of today), 31% of children under 9 are Dual Language Learners, most of the being from racial and ethnic minorities of immigrant background, 25% of children up to 8 have at least one immigrant parent, only 54% of 3 and 4 y olds in the US are enrolled in some kind of preschool (most not even full time). Strong



advocacy also needs to aim at a defined target audience, carefully determination of the message, use credible messengers and use the right vehicles.

Campaigning for more and more accessible ECEC has resulted in some success in terms of significant childcare legislation, increased preschool spending on state level and higher budgets for preschool on the federal level.

Still, a lot more needs to be done in order to get the same level of quality throughout the US, to deliver more services for the youngest children and to make existing programmes more accessible.

Besides working towards policymakers, the more vulnerable groups themselves need to be involved and empowered as well in order to really get to know what their needs and priorities are and what the main obstacles are from their perspective.

Policy debate and takeaways

In the policy debate 3 models are illustrated.

Italy is currently in a transition phase, moving from a split system to a more integrated 0-6 ECEC policy. Even though it is quite a complex exercise, there is strong public and political support for several reasons: filling the gaps in the ECEC system, increase of female employment, less school dropout and equal opportunities for all children throughout the country. Facilitating factors for the cultural transition for 0-3 y olds from a welfare context to education are among others: ensuring systemic quality levels, qualified staff, equitable funding across the different regions, central leadership combined with strong local players (dialogue between state, communities and private partners)... ECEC is changing into an education issue rather than a women's issue and education is considered to be a major resource in need of serious investment.

In the US, the federal government has no authority on the ECEC issue, as most decision-making power is devolved to state and local levels, but has been designing funding schemes for the early learning challenge ('Race to the top'). Supporting the ECEC is critical here (decent wages, ongoing professional development) as this is a salient factor for rendering the required quality. It is important to get all the existing programs on the same line: no matter where a child spends the day, they should all get the same high quality learning opportunities.

In Ireland, more coordinated policy work has been facilitated by major strategic planning, reviewing all scattered policy initiatives under the coordination by one single Department for Children. Early years policies are still mainly focused on care and the education focus is only for the 3+ but steps forward have been taken and even in times of austerity the Children's Department saw its budget increased. Some of the successful actions have been: the extension of one free preschool year (starting at 3y), childcare subsidies for vulnerable families (25.000 children benefitting), move towards a focus on quality (instead of only on cost and mere availability), strengthening the workforce and enriching the curriculum. ECEC is now being considered to be an investment rather than a cost.



Rounding up

Throughout the TFIEY meetings, the case has been made of how high quality ECEC matters for all young children, and especially for children with a disadvantaged background, such as poverty and migration. Most relevant topics have been covered from different angles: research, practice and policy. Some elements were stressed over and over again: the overwhelming evidence on the impact of high quality ECEC on the holistic development of young children, the need for progressive universalism in ECEC, the importance of engaging in a dialogue with parents and the wider community, the need for monitoring processes to guarantee quality maintenance and continuous improvement, and the need for strong leadership both within the ECEC services and on the policy level. While the consensus was clear on all these elements, some different opinions remain on how such an ECEC system should and can be financed. In any case, the plea for ECEC as a universally accessible basic provision calls upon governmental responsibility, regulations and funding, either with or without private support.

It is clear that all the issues covered are highly interrelated and responsibilities are shared between governments, providers and parents. For the detailed recommendations.



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<http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years>