

Conference

Diversity and Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care

Luxembourg, 10 and 11 September 2015

Summaries



INTRODUCTION

The early childhood education and care sector in Europe is currently in transition. Not only are European countries expanding the number of places available (increasing access) in order to allow parents to better combine private and family life, but they are also paying greater attention to the quality of ECEC. The importance of the early years for further learning processes, as well as for educational and social inclusion, is more and more widely recognised, thus strengthening the importance of good quality services.

This is demonstrated by developments at both national level – such as the implementation of new frameworks or standards – and European level, through cooperation aimed at supporting Member States in this area: within the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework, a Thematic Working Group under the auspices of the European Commission has worked to produce a proposal for a "Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care". The document was presented and broadly welcomed during a conference in Athens in 2014.

The understanding of each child as a unique and competent learner, who needs to be encouraged, supported and actively involved in his/her own learning process, is now widely shared.

Especially at a time when countries face important challenges relating to the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of their populations, quality in this respect also means taking into consideration the individual starting points and situations of all children in order to provide them with the best possible support in realising their potential.

The daily reality in ECEC settings shows that the efforts to meet these challenges require specific knowledge as well as the questioning of established perception and practices, and that they pose pedagogic and organisational challenges to structures and authorities in this field.

Against this backdrop, one aim of the conference "Diversity and Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care" is to consider the various aspects of the proposal for a Quality Framework with a particular emphasis on the possible ways to support the language development of children in multilingual contexts and to value and respect the diversity of children and their families.

The conference will start with a session of introductory key-note speeches. During the first afternoon, participants will be divided into five working groups covering the different dimensions of the quality framework:

- Curriculum
- Access
- Workforce
- Governance and funding
- Monitoring and evaluation

On the second day, the main messages arising from these working groups will be presented to all participants and the way forward will be discussed by European experts and researchers.

The conclusions of the conference will be presented to the Education Ministers during the Council meeting in November.

1. KEYNOTE-SPEECHES

Keynote-Speech 1 Learning through Participation (*Bildung durch Beteiligung*)

Abstract
English translation

This speech aims to confront the traditional understanding of learning through instruction – represented by certain international currents of early education – with an understanding of learning through participation. The main focus of this approach is on relationships between children and adults within a certain social and cultural context. Education is understood as building relationships that allow children to create their own image of the world they live in (*Weltwerkstatt*). The understanding of learning through participation is based on a concept of learning through experience, which starts from birth (at the latest). This idea will be explained using an example and its main theoretical points of reference will be touched upon. Its implementation builds on participatory didactics, following the Reggio Approach (Carla Rinaldi), and on the concept of learning through stories (*Lernen durch Geschichten*). The latter however interprets the concepts of learning stories (*Lerngeschichten*) in a different way than the German Youth Institute. Learning through participation is based neither on a pre-defined image of the child nor on socio-cultural norms, which would only need to be translated into pedagogical norms or standards. It is child-oriented inasmuch as it gives children a voice of their own and moves the communication with them to the centre of education.

In this way, the concept responds to the social claim for considering the various forms of difference (individual, social, cultural, ...). Moreover it represents the scientific perspective of a cultural relativist view of the child. It is best expressed through the German term of “Bildung”, rather than by any understanding of learning or education.

Speaker

Prof. Dr. Gerd Schäfer was professor of early childhood education at the University of Cologne until 2009. Since 2011, he has been professor in the field of ECEC („Bildung und Erziehung in der frühen Kindheit“) at the University of the Arts (« Hochschule für Künste ») in Bremen. His working field is educational research in early childhood, in particular in the fields of natural science and aesthetics (design, music). He has initiated and scientifically accompanied several scientific projects for quality development in ECEC settings. He has founded the association “WeltWerkstatt” for continuous professional training for pedagogues. In Mühlheim Ruhr, he was the scientific leader (2007-2011) of the development of the “Lernwerkstatt Natur”, a cooperation project between the University and the City of Cologne. Currently two new projects on the qualification of professionals in the field of musical education in the early years are being launched at the University of the Arts.

Keynote-Speech 1 Bildung durch Beteiligung

Abstract
German version

Dem traditionellen Verständnis von Lernen durch Unterweisung/*instruction* - wie es bestimmte Strömungen der internationalen Frühpädagogik vertreten - möchte ich ein Verständnis von Lernen durch Beteiligung/*participation* gegenüber stellen. Im seinem Mittelpunkt stehen die Beziehungen zwischen Kindern und Erwachsenen in einem sozialen und kulturellen Kontext. Pädagogik/*education* wird verstanden als Gestaltung von Beziehungen, die es Kindern ermöglichen, sich ein Bild von der Welt zu erzeugen, in der sie leben (*Weltwerkstatt*). Das Lernen durch Beteiligung geht von einem Konzept des Erfahrungslernens (*learning through experience*) aus, das spätestens mit der Geburt beginnt. Ich werde dieses Konzept an einem Beispiel vorstellen und wichtige theoretische Bezugspunkte kurz ansprechen. Seine Umsetzung erfolgt in einer partizipatorischen Didaktik im Ausgang von Reggio (Carla Rinaldi) und in einem Lernen durch Geschichten, welches das Konzept der Lerngeschichten interpretiert, jedoch in anderer Weise als das DJI. Diese Konzept des Lernens durch Beteiligung geht weder von einem definierten Kinderbild, noch von soziokulturellen Normvorstellungen aus, die pädagogische umzusetzen wären. Es ist insofern kindorientiert, als es Kindern eine eigene Stimme gibt und die Verständigung mit ihnen ins pädagogische Zentrum rückt.

Dadurch antwortet es gleichzeitig auf die gesellschaftliche Forderung nach Berücksichtigung von unterschiedlichen Weisen der Differenz (individuell, sozial, kulturell etc.). Darüber hinaus erfüllt es die wissenschaftliche Position eines kulturellen Bildes vom Kind. Es wird durch den deutschen Begriff der Bildung angemessener ausgedrückt, als durch ein Lern- oder Erziehungsverständnis.

Speaker

Prof. Dr. Gerd E. Schäfer war bis 2009 Professor der Pädagogik der frühen Kindheit an der Universität Köln. Seit 2011 ist er als Professor im Bereich „Bildung und Erziehung in der frühen Kindheit“ an der Hochschule für Künste in Bremen tätig. Sein Arbeitsbereich ist die frühkindliche Bildungsforschung insbesondere in den Bereichen Naturwissen und Ästhetik (Gestaltung, Musik). Er initiierte und begleitete wissenschaftlich mehrere Projekte zur Qualitätsentwicklung in Kindertagesstätten (NRW, Thüringen und - zusammen mit dem Sozial Alternativen Wohlfahrtsverband SOAL - in Hamburg). Er gründete den Verein WeltWerkstatt für die Fortbildungen von Pädagogen/innen. In Mülheim Ruhr entstand unter seiner wissenschaftlichen Leitung - von 2007 bis 2011 - die Lernwerkstatt Natur, als Kooperationsprojekt der Universität zu Köln und der Stadt. Aktuell beginnen an der Hochschule für Künste in Bremen zwei Projekte zur Qualifikation von Fachpersonen im Bereich der musikalischen Bildung in der Frühen Kindheit.

Keynote-Speech 2 Embracing Linguistic Diversity: Linguistic and Pedagogical Perspectives for Early Childhood Education in Luxembourg

Abstract

In an increasing number of families and communities, young children grow up in multilingual and multicultural environments. The challenge for educational systems is to adapt to the complex cultural and linguistic backgrounds of multilingual children, families and communities, and to provide an education that is responsive to the children's needs. At the same time, individual needs have to be balanced with the family's goals for their child's development, as well as economic and political demands (UNESCO 2011, 45).

As research has shown, the basis for positive and identity-strengthening language development is laid during the early years. Early Childhood Education therefore plays an especially important role and asks for innovative approaches and practices that build on children's language repertoires and cultural backgrounds, always taking into account the specificities of the children's cognitive, emotional and physical development in the early years.

In multilingual countries like Luxembourg with its three official languages, Luxembourgish, French and German, and with almost 50 % of the population made up of migrants from many different countries, the issue of language education in general but especially during early childhood becomes crucial, and many questions are raised: What should an early childhood educator know about multilingual development and multiple language acquisition in young children? What about the danger of cognitive/linguistic overload? Which role does and should the "mother tongue" play in the children's development? What about the relationship between family language policies and policies in care institutions? Should code-switching be encouraged or avoided? What about the transition into primary education?

In my presentation I will give an overview of recent findings on these questions that might help early childhood educators to better understand their children's language practices and support them in finding encouraging methods to prepare the children for a happy and successful multilingual life.

Speaker

Prof. Dr. Adelheid Hu has been Professor of Education at the University of Luxembourg since October 2011. Her research interests include Language Education and Identity in Multilingual Societies, Language Policies and Intercultural Studies. Before coming to Luxembourg she worked at Hamburg University, Université de Franche-Comté in Besançon and at Tunghai-University, Taiwan.

Keynote-Speech 3 Quality in contexts of diversity: issues of identity, equality, difference and social cohesion

Abstract

The 'Education and Training 2020' strategic framework has rightly stressed the importance of the educational system for the construction of inclusive societies that foster social cohesion and values of equal opportunities. In that perspective, there are good reasons to focus on ECEC. Never before have so many children spent so much of their time before compulsory school in institutional care, be it centre-based or home-based. For these children, ECEC serves as a societal mirror that reflects images of them and therefore provides answers to the fundamental questions of “who am I?” and “Is it ok to be who I am?”. Unfortunately, research has shown that children are hurt in their self-esteem and that children are developing prejudice way before compulsory school age. It is therefore necessary to develop a pedagogy of diversity that includes respect for multilingualism. Central pillars of such a pedagogy include a focus on difference and similarities, a concept of multiple identities and the inclusion of parents.

Recent (and still on-going research) shows that young children can be breakers as well as brokers of relations among adults, but may also facilitate relations across cultural, language and socio-economic barriers. As such, ECEC settings can be places that foster social cohesion, yet this calls for renewed perspectives on the identities of early years professionals.

Speaker

Prof. Dr. Michel Vandebroeck is professor in family pedagogy at the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy of the Ghent University (Belgium). His research and teaching interests focus on Early Childhood Care and Education and parental support, with a special focus on in- and exclusion mechanisms in contexts of diversity. He is president of the Board of the VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years); Trustee of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association; and member of the advisory board of Kind en Gezin (the Governmental organisation responsible for child care and preventive family support in the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium).

Keynote-Speech 4 The proposal for a quality framework on ECEC as a practical tool to develop high-quality ECEC systems

Abstract

The presentation will demonstrate how the proposal for a quality framework prepared by the Thematic Working Group on ECEC can be used in policy practice. It will show how it can guide policy development and policy implementation in the Member States. In addition, based on recent analysis of the current state of play of the quality of ECEC systems across the Member States, it will present possible paths for further policy development at EU level in the field of ECEC.

Speaker

Mrs. Nora Milotay is a Policy officer at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. After having worked on several aspects of school policy in the past few years, Nora has been instrumental in fostering European policy cooperation within the field of early childhood education and care that has gained an increasingly important role within the Europe 2020 Strategy. She has led and managed the Thematic Working Group of Member States' policy-makers, researchers, and practitioners on early childhood education and care under the Open Method of Coordination. This group prepared a proposal for a Quality Framework in ECEC in 2014.

2. WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1 **Curriculum – Embracing linguistic, cultural and social diversity by means of a curriculum framework.**

Abstract

As a key element of high quality ECEC, an early childhood curriculum should have a transversal, multidimensional and cooperative character. Its objectives and values, its didactical and pedagogical approach should focus on the child's global development (including well-being, as well as social-emotional, motor, cognitive and linguistic development). Education should be understood as a process of cooperation and reflection that includes all partners (children, parents and professionals from different sectors).

This workshop proposes to analyse and discuss the aspect "Curriculum" of the proposed quality framework in order to identify key elements that help promote early language learning in multilingual, multicultural and socially diverse contexts. The issue of the workshop will be to make policy recommendations and to draw options based on the preceding discussion.

Speakers

Paul Leseman, Prof. Dr., Coordinator of Utrecht University's research impulse area Educational and Learning Sciences, Netherlands.

Ingelore Oomen-Welke, Dr. phil., until 2008 professor of German Studies and Language Teaching at the University of Education Freiburg, Germany.

Moderation

Flore Schank, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg.

Workshop 2

Access – Involving parents, respecting cultures

Abstract

For some families, access to ECEC settings can be limited due to social and cultural constraints, particularly if the language used in these structures differs from the home language.

A partnership with parents is essential to create reassuring learning environments for children and allow them to develop secure emotional relationships, in which they can express themselves, make themselves understood and develop their competences. It is important to ensure continuity in children's language development and to take into account the gains achieved within their families. The ECEC setting cannot alone meet all the needs. For children who speak a minority language, which is neither taught at school nor spoken at ECEC settings, responsibility for the development of that language lies primarily with the parents. Families should therefore be made aware of their unique role and of possible ways of supporting their child. When needed, they should be supported and assisted in their efforts. Regular exchanges of information reinforce parents' understanding of their child's development and individual needs.

In order to make such partnerships work, ECEC settings benefit from fostering a positive climate of confidence and from creating welcoming and attractive spaces for all parents, irrespective of their culture, language, gender, ethnic group, socio-economic background or special needs. In this regard, ECEC settings benefit from becoming genuine meeting points.

The workshop will invite participants to discuss questions relating to the effective implementation of such partnerships and cooperation models with parents.

Speakers

Michel Vandebroeck, Prof. Dr., Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University, Belgium.

Expert panel:

Julia Berkic, Dr., Research associate at the Bavarian State Institute for Pre-School Education (IFP) and lecturer at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich.

Målfrid Bleka, Adviser, National Centre for Multicultural Education (NAFO).

Jutta Lux-Hennecke, President of the Federation of Parents' Associations Luxembourg (FAPEL).

Muriel May, Manager of the crèche "Babbeltiermchen", Luxembourg.

Claudia Seele, PhD student in Education at the Integrative Research Unit on Social and Individual Development (INSIDE), University of Luxembourg.

Moderation

Marguerite Krier, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg.

Workshop 3

Workforce – Preparing staff to fulfil their professional role in multilingual and multicultural contexts

Abstract

The workshop on “Workforce” will invite participants to look at qualifications, skills, competences and working conditions that allow professionals to successfully deal with a multilingual environment and the children’s diverse backgrounds, and which will allow them to consider these as resources rather than as obstacles.

To launch the discussions, Pamela Oberhuemer will provide an input on changes, chances and challenges relating to the education, the disciplinary profiles and the professional development of ECEC staff across Europe. Her presentation will also reflect on the attitudes and competences needed to foster children’s development in a multilingual and diverse context.

Mr. Stig Lund will talk about the working conditions of ECEC professionals, pointing out the importance of allowing space for observation, reflection, preparation, group work and cooperation with parents.

The discussion will focus on initial education, attitudes and the professional development of ECEC professionals, as well as the type of working conditions which enable professionals to support the development of all children.

Speakers

Pamela Oberhuemer, Associate Researcher at the State Institute of Early Childhood Research (IFP), Munich; International Early Years Specialist.

Stig Lund, Senior Advisor on School Policy, Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators, Denmark.

Moderation

Patrick Hierthes, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg

Workshop 4 **Governance and funding – Rethinking ECEC structures and services in order to ensure equal opportunities**

Abstract

Providing equal access to ECEC for children with migrant backgrounds and promoting social and cultural diversity as a resource are crucial issues. In order to ensure equal opportunities for all children beginning in their earliest years, innovative policies in ECEC are required.

The framework developed by the Thematic Working Group on ECEC states that: “Findings from research in EU Member States conclude that it is necessary to rethink traditional structures and remits of services from the perspective of the/all children and their families in order to bring together traditionally divided notions of child (care) and (early) education.”

Fully integrated systems seem to offer more coherence across ECEC policy (e.g. in terms of regulation and funding, curriculum, workforce education/training and working conditions, monitoring and evaluation systems), as well as more resources allocated to younger children and their families.

There is also an increasing consensus among researchers and policy-makers that developing and implementing public policies that progressively move towards universal provision of publicly subsidised ECEC is both a priority and a necessity, if the goal of reducing the attainment gap is to be met.

Even if national governments are making efforts to support the structures via funding and are trying to enhance quality through legislation and regulation, the risk of unequal access and social stratification in attendance remains. The risk of a quality gap between private for-profit arrangements and public structures is high, and this might exacerbate inequalities among children from disadvantaged and migrant groups and their more privileged peers.

Speakers

Nora Milotay, Policy Officer at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture

Sascha Neumann, Prof. Dr., Associate Professor for educational research; scientific direction of the University of Fribourg's Centre for Early Childhood Education (ZeFF).

Moderation

Manuel Achten, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg

Workshop 5

Monitoring and Evaluation – Assessment of impact and the impact of assessment

Abstract

Monitoring and evaluation are critical aspects for the development of a high quality ECEC sector. The document « Key principles of a Quality Framework » notes that procedures undertaken by countries for monitoring and evaluation quality can address four dimensions of ECEC provision: service quality, staff quality, curriculum implementation, and finally child development and outcomes.

Monitoring child development and outcomes is a very sensitive issue. As research from the OECD literature review points out, the formal assessment of child outcomes, which aim to define school readiness – and with the purpose of postponing or denying kindergarten entry to school – can have negative impacts on children’s cognitive as well as socio-emotional development. It has also been highlighted by research findings that as soon as a formal assessment is anticipated, structures tend to adopt a formal approach to learning and development and chances are that children are under pressure to achieve certain standards.

The literature also indicates that the use of non-formal monitoring procedures such as ongoing observation, the documentation of children’s learning and socialising experiences, as well as the narrative assessment of children’s competences (e.g. portfolios) can have a positive impact on children’s outcomes. Practices of this kind contribute to deepening practitioners’ understanding of children’s learning processes in the everyday life of ECEC settings and will most likely also lead to improvement of their teaching practices.

They allow for the individual monitoring of each child, taking account of his or her personality and personal skills, and enable each child’s unique abilities to be valued, provided that the adults have the necessary skills and competences for this kind of observation and monitoring.

It is crucial that decision-makers are clear about the purpose and intended aim of their monitoring and evaluation procedures, whether these are chosen for reasons of accountability or the auditing of public funds, or with the aim of improving performance, identifying staff learning needs, supporting policy-makers or informing the public.

Speakers

Catalina Lomos, Dr., Researcher at the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER)

Martine Wiltzius, PhD in educational sciences, expertise in diversity and organizational development, Luxembourg.

Moderation

Claude Sevenig, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, Luxembourg

Tove Mogstad Slinde, Senior Advisor in the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care at the Ministry of Education and Research, Norway