ECEC quality, curriculum, accessibility, and inclusiveness

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Aims of CARE

• Towards an evidence-based and culture-sensitive framework for defining, implementing, and assessing quality and wellbeing in European early childhood education and care - with measurable indicators.

• Approach:
  – Analysis of curriculum guidelines in 12 countries.
  – Research review, meta-analyses.
  – Secondary analyses of large-scale studies in five countries.
  – Stakeholders survey into values, beliefs and experiences.
  – In-depth observations in ECEC centers in nine countries.
  – Professionalization, inclusiveness, costs-benefits.
Culture-sensitive: why?

Different views on interaction (process) quality:

• Preferences for close face-to-face contact, rewarding positive behavior instead of reacting to negative behavior, and a verbal style of behavior regulation reflects the individualistic independence model.

• Preference for bodily contact and bodily stimulation, reacting to negative behavior, and physical regulation of behavior rather than verbal regulation, is associated with the collectivistic model of relatedness and interdependence.

Keller et al., 2006
Views of immigrant parents

- Children Crossing Borders Project: immigrant parents parents in all countries tended to emphasize academic goals more than the ECEC teachers did and they also preferred a more authoritarian and teacher-centered pedagogy.

- Turkish parents in Germany found the play-based social-pedagogical curriculum of German preschools odd and ill-suited to their own preferences and perceptions of children’s educational needs.

- Turkish immigrant parents in France agreed on the structured educational approach of teachers in French preschools.

Tobin et al., 2010
Involving stakeholders: CARE survey

• Personal interviews in deliberate convenience samples (60 per country; main stream, immigrants or rural low-income parents).
• Internet-based survey using the same questionnaire (100 to 1200 per country, 3400 parents, 3200 staff) – several methodological concerns.
• Careful construction, translation, back-translation.
• Qualitative and quantitative methods.
• Control of measurement equivalence across age ranges (0-3, 3-6 years), countries, and stakeholders.
• Are we talking about the same things?
Remarkable first finding

- It is possible to model parents’ answers regarding important developmental and educational goals with (nearly) full measurement equivalence across age-ranges and countries.

- We apparently have a shared language for expressing our views.

Intercepts, variances and factor loadings of items are constrained to be equal across age-ranges and countries in a multi-group comparison. Model fit is evaluated and found satisfactory.
Topics for today with a focus on diversity and inclusiveness

• *Developmental and educational goals* – what is desirable in the curriculum?
• *Structural, professional and pedagogical process quality characteristics* – what is most important?
• *Considerations when choosing for particular ECEC services* – what counts most?
• Are there differences between parents and educators? Between countries? Between social-cultural communities?
Issues

• Universal or targeted policies:
  – Equal opportunities.
  – Equal outcomes.

• Access and inclusiveness:
  – Availability, affordability, admission policy.
  – Curriculum and quality in view of inclusion.
  – Cultural barriers, social exclusion.

• Language policy and multilingual support
  – Parent involvement, new technologies
Pro’s- and con’s of targeted policy

In favor of targeted approaches:

• Effects of ECEC on development and long term educational achievement are strongest (and most costs-effective) for children of disadvantaged backgrounds (from low income, immigrant, linguistic minority families).

• Targeted extra investments for disadvantaged children in ECEC with better qualified staff, smaller groups and the use of education programs, is a fair redistribution of society’s collective wealth.

Akgündüz et al. (2015) – D5.1
Pro’s- and con’s of targeted policy

Against targeted approaches:

• A targeted approach can, especially in the context of a split system, lead to selective use of different types of ECEC provision and reinforce early social and ethnic-cultural segregation.

• A high concentration of children with risks and delays can counter-act potentially positive effects of ECEC and decrease the overall effectiveness.
Do disadvantaged children get quality?

- Comparisons using existing data for quality observations with ECERS-R, ECERS-E and CLASS.
- In Germany (Bavaria, Hessen) and Finland: disadvantaged children get lower quality ECEC ($d = -.20$ to -.50).
- In Portugal and Netherlands: disadvantaged children get higher quality ($d = .30$ to .50).
- Effects of targeted policy and public-private division.

Slot et al. (2015) – D2.2
Observed and reported process and curriculum quality in the Netherlands

Guided play Language Pre-Literacy Pre-Math Group size Child-Staff Ratio Observed emotional quality Observed educational quality Observed literacy

< 30% target children Between 30% and 60% target children > 60% target children
**Selective attention**
‘Find the elephants’

**Working memory**
*updating* – ‘find the hidden toys’

**Inhibition**
‘Make the sound of the other animal’

**Delay of Gratification**
‘You must try not to touch the gift’

**Phoneme perception**
‘Where is “pear”?’

**Nonword repetition**
‘Look, a *loon*!
Say *loon*.’

**Vocabulary**
‘Where is ...“spoon”?’

**Grammar**
‘The cat bites the dog’. Where do you see ‘...’?

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Mulder et al., 2014 (FiP)
Age-two differences in language and EFs by ethnicity and social class (z-scores)

Controlled for age of testing; based on a weighted sample
Development of Dutch receptive vocabulary from 2- to 6-years of age

- Group comparison with two definitions of target group (based on parental education and home language), reveals significant differences in growth – suggesting catch-up effects, strongest for non-Dutch speaking children.
- Cohen’s $d = .45$ and $.71$ (based on average SD).
Vocabulary growth & group composition

- Catch-up effect for disadvantaged children largest in groups with >60% target children.

- Targeted policy leading to concentrated effort, extra investments in quality and curriculum, and good implementation (intensive guidance) is a likely explanation.
Availability of ECEC in Europe and OECD countries:

- Insufficient for the 0- to 3-year-olds in most countries.
- Moderately sufficient for the 3- to 4-year-olds.
- Sufficient for the 5- to 6-year-olds.
- Huge differences between countries, related to national income level.
Effects of national spending on ECEC use for 0- to 3-year-olds
Considerations when choosing ECEC

- Children’s well-being and the center’s support to the child’s holistic development is considered the most important aspect when choosing ECEC.
- Flexibility, structural quality and costs seem less important.
What do parents consider when choosing for a particular ECEC service? – Costs

- Costs, next to availability, nearness and flexibility, is not unimportant for parents.
- The importance of costs when considering use of ECEC differs by country – overall high in England, Greece, Poland, Portugal, low in Germany, Finland, Netherlands and Norway.
- Differences by education level vary between countries.
Does children’s happiness and well-being matter for choosing a particular ECEC service?

- Child well-being and general positive development is for parents in all countries the most important aspect to consider when choosing for a particular ECEC service.
- No differences between countries, no differences between social-cultural communities within countries.
Do parents agree with the view that children can be best cared for at home (by their mother)?

- Parents (in this sample) are not strongly in favor of the idea that upbringing at home is better (reflected in low average scores).
- Parents with an immigrant background and parents who are low to medium educated agree more with the belief that caring for children at home is better than other parents.
Educational goals & the curriculum

• Physical, fine-motor and creative competence:
  – Has physical endurance, motor skills, engages in physical play & dance.

• (Pre-)academic competence:
  – Has basic knowledge of reading, writing, numbers, shapes.

• Learning-related skills:
  – Can express ideas, ask questions, reason about world, make plans.

• Personal openness to (broadly defined learning) experiences:
  – Is open-minded to new things, persistent, enthusiastic, self-confident.

• Emotion-regulation competence:
  – Can express feelings, control emotions, is aware of others’ feelings.

• Interpersonal-relational competence:
  – Is able to interact, show respect, solve conflicts, share, understand rules.

• Positive attitudes towards diversity:
  – Cares for handicapped children, is interested in other cultures.
Educational goals for 0- to 3-year-olds

- Agreement among parents and educators.
- Openess to learning experiences, emotion regulation and interpersonal competence are rated as most important goals to be fostered, academic competence as least.
- Overall, moderate importance attached to all goals.

Still preliminary results
Educational goals for 3- to 6-year-olds

- Agreement among the stakeholders, more importance attached to all goals.
- Most importance still attached to the ‘soft’ competences, least to the ‘hard’ academic skills.
Differences between ages and countries – ‘hard’ academic and ‘soft’ learning skills

- Strong differentiation between age groups.
- Emphasis on academic competence in England, Greece, Poland and Portugal, least in Finland, Germany and the Netherlands.
- Learning-related skills are found more important than academic skills, also for younger ages.
- Low emphasis on learning in Finland and the Netherlands.
Differences between age-groups and countries – ‘soft’ personal skills

- Smaller difference between age-groups.
- Finland and the Netherlands relatively low on emotion-regulation, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Norway relatively high in both age-groups.
- Does importance of emotion-regulation reflect deep cultural values?
Differences regarding interpersonal-relational skills & diversity attitude

- Germany, Finland and the Netherlands relatively low on interpersonal-relational competence, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland and Portugal relatively high in both age-groups.

- Biggest variation between countries regarding diversity.

- Parents in England, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands rate positive attitudes towards diversity rather low.
Differences in views within countries

- Lower-educated and immigrant parents hardly differ from higher-educated and native parents in developmental and educational goals regarded as important for their children, except for pre-academic (and to some extent learning-related) skills, which are valued (much) more.
- Does this reflect a ‘traditional view’ or the reality that their children need extra support in these skills in order to succeed in school and society?
- A dilemma for universal-inclusive ECEC?
Differences in practice – CARE videostudy

NETHERLANDS

POLAND

Play

Learning
Emerging themes

• Dyadic models of sensitivity and affective social relationships (teacher interacting with single child) vs. group-oriented models of sensitivity and group-belongingness (teacher interacting with the group as a whole, children collaborating within the group).

• Explicit instruction of academic ‘hard’ skills in the large group (circle time) and implicit promotion of ‘soft’ skills in (small group, solitary) play time – but alternative (more promising) models are also observed.
  – Teacher guided small group work: inclusive, adapted to children’s needs, showing high involvement, concentration, persistence, collaboration, creativity and language use.
Valued quality aspects

• Structural quality, organization, policy:
  – Building, environment, equipment, safety and health.
  – Group size and staff-child ratio.
  – Center’s communication & involvement policy.
  – Center’s diversity regarding staff and children.

• Process quality and personal competence:
  – Staff and team competences.
  – Pedagogical concept and orientation (norm vs. child).
  – Sensitivity and affectionate classroom climate.
Quality aspects – structure & policy

- High agreement between parents and educators.
- Group size and educator-child ratio (parents), involvement of parents, and in particular the centers’ diversity and inclusiveness policy are rated as less important.
How important is the cultural diversity of staff and children in ECEC?

- Parents rate importance of cultural diversity in ECEC as low in England, Finland, Netherlands, and as high in Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal.
- Educators rate importance of diversity higher, particularly high in Greece, Norway, Portugal.
- Overall low to moderate importance attached to cultural diversity.
Parents rate the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards cultural diversity and disabled children as low in England, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, and as high in Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal.

Educators do not differ much from parents, except in England.
Quality aspects – process & persons

- Again high agreement on the importance of process and relational quality characteristics.
- High importance attached to sensitivity and affectionate classroom, low importance attached to teacher education.
- Lower educated and immigrant parents find school preparation more important than other parents do.
Summary

• We have a common language for addressing important developmental-educational goals.
• Parents and educators emphasize ‘soft skills’, but national curricula are most explicit regarding ‘hard skills’.
• Difference in this regard between low educated and immigrant parents, on the one hand, and other parents, on the other hand – a dilemma for inclusive ECEC which may be solved by innovating curriculum and pedagogy.
• Positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusiveness is a controversial developmental-educational goal, cultural diversity is not considered an important quality aspect.
• No big differences between low- and high-educated, little effect of immigrant status – except regarding costs.
Multilingualism: recent evidence

• Becoming near-native proficient in two or more languages is possible.
• Early onset (before age 5 or earlier) of L2 learning seems critical in this regard.
• **Quantity, quality, variation!**
• Several advantages (but there is some debate):
  - Enhanced language and metalinguistic awareness.
  - Cognitive advantages (control functions, memory).
• Disadvantages?
  - Smaller vocabularies in each language.
  - Slower and less accurate lexical processing.
“Draw a (...) that does not exist”

- Bilingual advantage: *cross-category insertion (creativity)*.
- Monolingual disadvantage: *within category deletion*.

English-Hebrew bilingual 4- to 6-yr-olds

Hebrew monolingual 4- to 6-yr-olds

Adi-Japha et al., 2010 (CD)
What do parents want?

• Many studies across Europe indicate that, if facilitated, parents from language minorities, and also from indigenous heritage languages, want their children to become proficient bilinguals.

• Increasing pressure from main-stream (monolingual) parents to introduce dual language programs in ECEC.

• Paradoxical policy! For example, strong emphasis on learning the main language and little support for immigrant languages, but Western foreign languages... (Helot & Young, 2002).
Views of parents and educators

“How important is it that the ECEC center supports learning of another language than the main language of a country?”

For 0- to 3-year-olds

For 3- to 6-year-olds
What is society’s response?

- European countries vary in diversity policy, from forced assimilation to respectful integration.
- Supporting respectful integration, including first language support, seems most effective.
- The worst thing is not having a clear policy.
Multilingualism in ECEC curricula

- Comparison of official curricula of 12 European countries.
- Child rights and ‘voice’ are mentioned in some curricula, the importance of addressing cultural diversity is mentioned in most curricula.
- Some of curricula specify supporting bilingual development – mostly in view of inclusiveness and related to indigenous language minorities (Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Norway,...).
  - “Show interest in, be respectful to, if possible support…”
  - Bilingualism in a special needs framework.

Sylva et al. (2015)
Traditional bilingual pedagogy

- “Keep the two languages as separate as possible, don’t mix” (e.g. one-parent-one-language strategy; L1 at home, L2 in preschool – “forbid children to use their L1 in preschool”).

- **No support in brain research:** the two languages are represented in the same brain areas and highly interconnected, yet are distinguished from early on – enabling switching and mixing.

- Code-switching is an **ability** that can be deliberately used.
New pedagogy – still experimental

- ‘Trans-languaging’ – using the languages inter-mixed, but drawing attention to structural, semantic and pragmatic characteristics and differences.
  - Use of both L1 and L2 at home is related to cognitive advantages (attention, inhibition, switching), but only L1 at home and only L2 in preschool perhaps not.
  - Language awareness may also depend on being able to compare languages within the same situation.
- ‘Objectifying’ language: possible with young children?
Super-diversity: practical problems

• Can we employ teachers for all desired L1-L2 combinations, who are:
  - Near-native speakers of L1 and L2 (to provide high linguistic quality);
  - And good pedagogues?

• Can we create sufficient time per child for varied dual L1-L2 exposure? How can we organize that in a classroom with several different L1’s?

• Need for creative solutions: involving parents and new educational technology.
Involving parents – feasible?

• Dutch HIPPY ("Opstap"): stimulating language, cognitive and emotional development.
• Mother works with the child 15 minutes per day (30 weeks per year, two years in all) in the first language.
• Two-year program, providing educational materials and activities through worksheets.
• Home-visiting and modelling, parent group meetings.
Results Turkish-Dutch children

Standard Effect Sizes - Experimental vs. Control (=0)

- Vocabulary in Turkish (L1)
- Grammatical skills in Turkish (L1)
- Concepts in Dutch (L2)
- Numeracy in Dutch (L2)

Leseman & Van Tuijl, 2001
L2TOR – a perfectly bilingual robot

- High quality speech in L1 and L2.
- Gesturing, acting.
- Interactive, sensitive, playful.
- Conceptual domains:
  - Spatial language.
  - Mathematical language.
  - Narrative and mental state language.

- University of Plymouth
- Tilburg University
- Utrecht University
- Koç University
- University of Bielefeld
To conclude

• Extend the coverage of ECEC to the 0- to 3-years age range - nearness, flexibility and affordability all matter.

• Combine a universal approach with a targeted curriculum and pedagogy – small groups within the whole group.

• Change the predominant ‘individualist’ pedagogy into a ‘relational group-based’ pedagogy.

• Support children’s first languages.
Further information

www.ecec-care.org
http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/


Further information

- www.ecec-care.org


Mentioned most in EU curricula

Sylva et al., 2015