

Education from the earliest age

All children have the right to education, a right that is defended by EI within the framework of its global action campaign for "quality public education for all". Early childhood education should be seen as an integral part of this right.

Everyone recognises today that early childhood education provides a solid base for all types of learning. It helps young children develop, first of all, their capacities and knowledge, followed by their skills and self-confidence, and lastly, it helps them to acquire a sense of social responsibility. Children in early childhood education acquire these attributes sooner and in a more structured manner than children who do not have the possibility of attending such forms of education.

The debate, which has historically divided those who favour the provision of early childhood education in the family home from those who believe that it should be delivered in specialised educational establishments, now seems to have taken a back seat in many countries. Relations between family units and the labour market have been deeply altered and have created a situation characterised by the ever-growing demand of families for the provision of early childhood education in specialised establishments.

Obviously, not all countries have reached the same level of development in this regard. In developing countries, where education for all is still far from becoming a reality, the provision of early childhood education is still very limited and, more often than not, organised on a private basis, and therefore only available to children from the wealthiest of families. In other words, flagrant inequality which is, once more, detrimental to those who are most disadvantaged.

In industrialised countries, where demand for such education services is on the increase, two different concepts continue to exist side-by-side: on the one hand, structures which are mainly social in character, and whose main objective remains the provision of child-care services for the parents of young children, thereby

enabling them to hold down employment; at the other extreme, we find structures with a more educational focus, also offering a social service but whose primary vocation is the promotion of a child's development. The educational nature of these establishments is currently being intensified, responding as it does to children's needs, needs which are now recognised by teachers, families and society in general.

Early Childhood Education, in order to be accessible to the largest possible number of children, needs to be organised within the framework of a free public education service. This dual objective is far from a reality in many countries. The examples of national experience featured in this dossier confirm this observation.

Early childhood education cannot remain a service which is only available to the most fortunate. It must be opened up to as wide an audience as possible. This dossier aims to raise the awareness of both education personnel and decision-makers to the importance of early childhood education. Education from the youngest age is also one of our priorities. ♦

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What is early childhood education?

Globally, 95.3 million children were enrolled in early childhood education in 1995 compared with 72.5 million in 1985, and the numbers keep growing. Today, approximately 30.1% of all children in the world are enrolled in some type of early childhood education. Yet what is meant by early childhood education, what purpose it serves, and how it is perceived is, as will be discussed in this article, a culturally linked notion and thus varies from country to country.

In Ireland, one can find "Early Start" classes, Junior Infants and Senior Infants within the national school system. In addition to that, there are pre-school playgroups, nursery schools, Naíonraí, crèches and day care services outside the school system.

In the Netherlands, early childhood institutions are part of the primary schools. Children start in these schools at the age of 4. After one year, compulsory education starts. It is very common for children from compulsory and non-compulsory education to sit together in the same classroom, ranging from 4 to 6 years old.

In France, a distinction is made between the day care service ("systèmes de garde pour enfants"), which is organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and pre-school education ("école maternelle"), which is an integrated part of the education system and organised by the Ministry of Education.

In Denmark, there is kindergarten/ day care provision for children aged 0-5 years. For the children of 6-7 years, there are pre-school classes/ leisure time centres.

In the Czech Republic, early childhood education is part of the education system and provided for children from the age of 3 to the start of compulsory education at the age of 6. Exceptionally, younger children can participate when nursery places are not available. The early childhood institu-

Essentially, early childhood education might be considered to be education which takes place before compulsory education, whether it is an integrated part of the education system or wholly independent of it. This includes kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, child-care centres and other similar institutions. It goes beyond what some refer to as pre-school education as it is an education in its own right, having not only the purpose of preparing children for school, but for life in the same way as all other parts of the education systems contribute to this process.

There are other ways to describe early childhood education. In the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) of 1976, used by all major providers of international educational statistics, it is referred to as ISCED 0 and primary education as ISCED 1. UNESCO mentions pre-school education in various reports. OECD, however, has begun using the term early childhood education in recent publications and defines it as covering all forms of organised and sustained centre-based activities, i.e. in institutional settings, designed to foster learning as well as emotional and social development in children. The standard starting age in this interpretation is age 3, yet children over 2 years are included in the statistics when enrolled in programmes considered educational by the country concerned¹.

Reasons for early childhood education

Another way of defining early childhood education would be to link it to a certain philosophy or methodology that underpins it. As important advocates for such methodological approaches, German teacher Friedrich Fröbel, Italian medical doctor Maria Montessori and Belgian doctor Ovide Decroly are worthy of note. Is early childhood education based on practical, skills-oriented teaching, or is the importance of something such as games playing stressed? In other words, is care a focal point or is rudimentary education the bottom line? Some see early childhood education's main con-



A pre-school day-care centre in the community of Pate Bana, Bombali District of Sierra Leone in 1990. © UNICEF/Carolyn Watson

cern as taking care of children, while others see it as educating and socialising children.

Still others see it as a synthesis, wherein the task is not to provide education or care, but to provide education and care. This is often referred to as educate. As the OECD states: "...early childhood education serves a dual purpose of giving the child care while the parents are at work and contributing to the child's social and intellectual development in keeping with rules and guidelines of the pre-primary curriculum. With such a synthesis, there is an emphasis on learning and playing, and the possibility of using play and games to support the learning process.

Variations in theme

The balance between formal learning, learning through play and games and through free play differs from country to country. In some countries there is a formal curriculum for early childhood education with objectives and orientations indicated. In other countries, there seems to be more of a general informal understanding of what is supposed to be done.

Since country-to-country differences exist regarding when a child enters compulsory education, so do they exist regarding the age at which a child becomes a par-

A VARIETY OF MODELS

A report from the European Union describes nine varied types of programmes of early childhood education:

NURSERY. Group care for children under the age of 2 years, and usually under 12 months, until the age of 3 or 4.

MIXED AGE GROUP. Group care which takes children under 3 and from 3 to compulsory school age; or provides for children under school age as well as outside school hours care for children at pre-primary or primary school.

FAMILY DAY CARE. Care provided for a single child or a small group of children in the carer's own home. The carer may be part of an organised scheme or operate independently.

ORGANISED FAMILY DAY CARE. A service where family day care is provided by carers who are recruited, paid and supported by a publicly funded organisation.

OWN HOME CARE. Care provided in a child's home by a paid carer, who may live in the child's home or come daily.

PLAYGROUPS. Group care for children from 2 to compulsory school age, outside the education system, where children generally attend for less than 10 hours a week.

KINDERGARTEN. Group care for children between 2 and compulsory school age, outside the education system. Children usually attend for more than 20 hours a week, and parents usually contribute to the costs.

PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLING. Schooling specifically organised for children from 3 to compulsory school age, though in some cases 2 year olds are admitted. Part of the education system and free to parents.

OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE. Care provided before or after school or during school holidays for children attending pre-primary or primary schooling. The service can be based in schools or in centres separate from schools.

Source: "Childcare in the European Communities 1985 - 1990", Brussels, Commission of the European Communities, 1990



Young children need good care and quality education, referred to these days as educate. © Photonews/Opgenhaffen

ticipant in early childhood education. In some countries it is possible to talk about educate-oriented institutions that accept children younger than 1 year of age. If we define early childhood education in more traditional terms, the children are aged between 2 and 5 years. The gross enrolment ratio also varies considerably between countries. In Europe, 77.3% of all children are in early childhood education while the same figure for Sub-Saharan Africa is 9.2%. In the more industrialised regions, 69.9% of all children are in early childhood education, while in the least industrialised countries it is 10.8%².

Some see early childhood education's main concern as taking care of children, while others see it as educating children.

It can be concluded that early childhood education looks very different from country to country, and again, it can be described as the education of young children which takes place before compulsory schooling starts. Debates abound as to what its "raison d'être" is and therefore what form it should take. Is its main purpose care or education? We feel the answer is both; young children need good care and quality education, referred to these days as educate. ♦

Inner-city day-care centre for working mothers in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The children range in age from infants to pre-school age. © UNICEF/Teixeir



tions are established by the local authorities and the staff are employed by the regional school authorities. Nurseries are not part of the educational system and are organised by the Ministry of Health Care.

In Bulgaria, several types of early childhood education institutions exist. There are those which provide a whole day programme or half-day programme, crèches, and programmes for special groups of children.

In Sweden, early childhood education is provided for children from the age of 1 to 6 years. Care before and after school is provided for children aged 6-12.

In Iceland, early childhood education is provided from the age of 6 months (when maternity leave ends) to the age of 6 years.

In Germany, children between 3 and 6 years of age have the right to attend early childhood education. The early childhood institutions (Kindergarten/Kindergartenstaette) are run by local authorities or by private authorities (churches or others) following federal law. Family day care is provided by local authorities for children and families in difficult situations.

In Latvia, children from the age 1 up to 6 or 7 years attend the early childhood education institutions.

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1 OECD, "Education at a Glance", Paris, OECD, 1998, p. 424
2 UNESCO, "World Education Report", Paris, UNESCO, 1998

Is early childhood education really good for children?

The number of children enrolled in early childhood education is on the increase in most parts of the world. This development is a direct result of the changes which have taken place within family structures due to women's increased participation in the labour market outside the home. Recent research on the importance of quality in early childhood education confirms that this is a positive trend in the child's development.

Between 1985 and 1995, the average rate of enrolment in early childhood education rose from 26.3% to 30.1% throughout the world¹. The fact that a growing number of mothers now continue to work following the birth of their children means that families are faced with having to find adequate solutions to the problems of childcare. In addition to private solutions - grandparents, the hiring of an "au pair" or a nanny, for example - a growing number of parents are having recourse to institutional programmes of pre-primary education.

The role of early childhood education

The debate surrounding the role of women in the labour market, traditional family values and child care methods has been a heated one. For a long time, it was felt that education in the home, as advocated by traditionalists, should be favoured. Many of the parents 'forced' to place their children in pre-school programmes therefore sometimes felt anxious or guilty.

Today, there is a growing awareness that the first years of a child's life are crucial to his/her development and there is substantial proof of the importance of quality education from a young age. In certain countries, Belgium, Italy and Hong Kong to name but a few, some parents, without actually having the need to do so, enrol their children in early childhood education in order to encourage their development.

Several longitudinal studies have monitored, over a number of years, the development of children who have and have not received early childhood education. Studies undertaken prior to the 1980s highlighted the neutrality of education in early childhood, such education producing neither positive nor negative effects on the children concerned.

The results of studies performed over the last twenty years, however, have produced different conclusions. Already in 1977, an American study of children from disadvantaged backgrounds² revealed that early childhood education programmes had noticeable effects, in the sense that they reduced the number of pupils who had to be placed in special schools and the number of pupils who had to repeat a year in school.

In 1987, two British researchers, Osborn and Milbank³, showed that children who attended some form of early childhood education programme had better cognitive skills, were more successful at school and had fewer behavioural problems than those who did not attend any form of early childhood education establishment.

Several studies have also shown that children who spend several years in early childhood education have an advantage over those who spend a shorter period of time in such education. A Swedish study by Andersson⁴ demonstrated that children who, from the age of one, received child-care facilities, either within a family environment or in a centre, had higher levels of verbal and non-verbal skills at age 8 than children who were integrated into childcare facilities at a later age. These differences were still apparent at age 13.

A French study⁵ covering some 20,000 children shows a clear correlation between the length of time spent in nursery education and the acquisition of skills necessary for academic achievement, particularly in mathematics and the mother tongue. Another French study⁶ confirms these results. Each of these studies took socio-economic factors into account.

In 1995, a report from the European Commission⁷ focused on the impact of early childhood education on academic achievement by analysing the previous research undertaken in this field. The report concluded by saying that "pre-school education has a positive effect on children's intellectual and social skills independent of their background, when centres really provide quality, in terms of both physical surroundings and adult/child interaction". The same report also notes that: "The important thing is the conditions under which action is implemented rather than the model, this is to say, the physical environment, size of the groups, stability of the teaching team and the quality of the interactions between adult and the children".



Early childhood education plays a positive, determining role in the all-round development of a child
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ings. Today, we know that this is not the case. Already in its foetal state, a baby is able to sense certain 'impressions'. It is therefore obvious that contacts between children and people other than their parents act as extremely important stimuli for a child's development¹¹.

Vital weapon against child labour

Early childhood education also plays a vital role in combating child labour which, throughout the world, affects some 250 million children, according to statistics published by the International Labour Organisation.

One conclusion resulting from the projects established to fight this scourge is that one of the most effective measures for eradicating child labour at its base is the provision of high quality early childhood education. Indeed, children enrolled from the earliest age in an educational establishment run little or no risk of being forced into the vicious circle of child labour later on.

It can be concluded that early childhood education plays a positive, determining role in the all-round development of a child. Parents therefore should have no fears about placing their children in institutions that provide quality early childhood education. But here also, there is good cause for being cautious as, for all levels of education, it is essential that criteria of high quality be respected. ♦

How can we explain this positive effect?

Bengt-Erik Andersson, professor at the Stockholm Institute of Education, is the author of a number of studies on the effects of early childhood education. He has provided, in one of his works¹⁰, an outline of the reasons behind this positive effect, in which he highlights the fact that very young children are specially receptive to different types of stimuli. Their participation in early childhood education programmes gives them the opportunity of experiencing these stimuli through contacts with other children and staff.

The perception that we have of infants and young children has been fundamentally altered over the last half-century. Previously, young children were seen as being relatively passive beings, unaware of their surround-



Basic education centres in Adela, a village near La Paz in Bolivia.
© UNICEF/Graciano

A Significant Expansion

Early childhood development (ECD) is a fast-growing component of basic education, although considerable variations prevail between countries. Since 1990, reported enrolments in ECD programmes in developing countries have grown by some 20%, now reaching 56 million young children. This represents about one out of five children in the 3-6 age-group, and girls make up nearly half of the enrolment. The number of pre-primary institutions expanded by some 30% since 1990, and the number of caregivers employed in this field increased by 12% to 2.1 million. Government resources for pre-primary programmes now represent an estimated 4% of national education budgets. Besides this quantitative expansion, new qualitative trends in ECD are evident since 1990. There have been efforts to broaden the outreach and focus of pre-school programmes, which have tended to cater to children from the more privileged families in urban areas. ECD programmes increasingly go beyond the notion of simply preparing children for primary school, with more emphasis being given to provide a range of community-based services to young children in line with their basic needs. More attention is also being given to children at risk, who are reached more effectively through integrated programmes combining education, health and nutrition components. These are generally managed at the local level and rely on the active involvement of parents, communities, NGOs and other partners.

from: "Education for All. Achieving the Goal. Working Document. Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All. 16 - 19 June 1995, Amman, Jordan" p. 17 - 18

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2 Lazar, I. 1977. The Persistence of Preschool Effects, Summary Report (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University, Community Service Laboratory).
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7 European Commission. 1995. Pre-school Education in the European Union. Current thinking and provision, Education, Training, Youth: Studies No. 6., (Brussels).
8 ibid. p. 39.
9 ibid. p. 39.
10 Andersson, B.E. 1990. Hur bra är egentligen dagis? (Stockholm, Utbildningsförlaget).
11 ibid. p. 82.

UNITED KINGDOM

Defending high quality provisions



In the United Kingdom, the challenge for the National Union of Teachers was to convince politicians in England and Wales that spending money on nursery education constitutes an investment in the future, which will bring handsome returns.

That campaign has largely been won and all political parties accept that nursery education can make a significant contribution towards raising achievement and delivering social inclusion for all.

The National Union of Teachers' campaign must now focus on the quality of provision. This is in line with conclusions reached at the EI Round Table on Early Childhood Education (Copenhagen, November 1998): *"Children have a right to receive high quality early childhood education based on their needs. It is not enough only to expand the number of children in early childhood education. Any expansion and development of early childhood education must be based on the concept of high quality"*.

If the current Government wants its "Education, Education, Education" policy to be a lasting legacy, it too must prioritise high quality nursery education.

The NUT believes the Government has taken some welcome steps towards the expansion of early years education and also welcomes the Government's intention to improve provision of care for young children. However, it is true to say that education and care have their own traditions and strengths. If the integration of the two is to fit seamlessly together, these traditions and strengths must be built upon and not blurred.

What is needed now is a commitment from the Government to improving the quality of educational provision for three, four and five year olds. Its guidance to local education authorities (bodies - cities, counties - controlling the schools) and Early years development

and Childcare partnerships should require that, by a certain date, all educational provision will match the standards equated with high quality nursery education.

In the union's view, high quality provision means a qualified teacher supported by a qualified nursery nurse teaching an appropriate curriculum to groups of no more than 20 three and four year olds, with appropriate indoor and outdoor facilities.

At present, the standards required for education by the Government and the level of investment it has made in nursery education are too low.

High quality education means full-time teaching by a qualified teacher.

Qualified teachers bring:

- a unique set of skills, knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning;
- the ability to manage, motivate and co-ordinate groups of children; a range of teaching methods and assessment skills that can be applied to the varying needs of young children;
- a knowledge of the school system into which nursery age children will pass.

The proposed introduction of a foundation stage curriculum covering three, four and five year olds could be a positive step. However, it is crucial that a foundation curriculum would not encourage too formal an approach to early years education.

The NUT, whilst welcoming progress made, will continue to press the Government for higher standards and greater investment, so that all three and four year olds can have part-time and then full-time high quality education. ♦

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INITIATIVES

Preventing child labour through early childhood education

Children who enter early childhood education do not drop out as often and many even carry on their education well into secondary school. Those who do not run a higher risk of getting trapped into the world of work prematurely.

Tanzania faces the problem of a high school drop-out rate. Children are being trapped in child labour (notably in the agricultural and pastoral sector) before even having begun their schooling. An ILO/IPEC programme¹, initiated at the Tanzanian ministerial level, was conceived to "prevent dropping out by absorbing children from poor families into pre-primary schooling before they could get caught up in child labour".

In Tanzania, children between 7 and 12 are eligible for enrolment in primary schools and are expected to stay in school for seven years. The government is also committed to equal opportunity in education to all its citizens². During the 70s and the 80s, Tanzania had one of the highest literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the economic crisis and the implementation of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have led to poorer educational facilities resulting in poor quality education. Many schools have no desks, no textbooks and inadequately trained teachers. The gross enrolment rate in primary school fell from 93% in the 1980s to 73.5% in the early 1990s, and it was estimated to be 63% in 1995.

In Tanzania, the aim of the ILO/IPEC programme, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, was to promote pre-school education in five regions:

Mara, Coast, Tanga, Mtwara and Shinyanga. These five regions have high levels of drop-outs and truancy and are representative of a situation where pre-school child labour – due to cultural practices and poverty – in the fields is one of the factors preventing children from attending school. In total about 100 primary schools were targeted with 750 ward education co-ordinators. Teachers responded positively and attended the preparatory seminars.

"Sensitising the ward education co-ordinators on child labour would increase the enrolment in pre-primary education institutions and hence reduce primary school drop-outs," suggests Professor C. K. Omari³. *"People at the grassroots level would understand the value of school and education at large. This would lead to the reduction of the considerably high number of children getting into child labour due to the fact of not having developed classroom education culture during their childhood at the village level"*.

The Ministry of Education conducted training sessions for pre-primary school teachers, ward co-ordinators and school committee members, through a series of seminars and workshops. The main substance of the training included the child labour problem, health hazards relating to child labour and the need to attract children into pre-school education.

A training manual based on the training programme was developed for primary schools, which outlines the need to encourage children to stay on in school in order to prevent child labour. All those who took part in the training got involved in active campaigns against child labour.

At the end of the project, there will be 11,000 pre-school institutions established near the existing primary schools. ♦

It is crucial to educate parents about the importance of schooling as a right for their children.

Giving a fresh boost to state supply in Brazil

Since 1996, the new Finance Act has caused municipal budgets to contract; in 1997-1998, this culminated in a reduction of 130,000 in the number of school enrolments.

"The pre-school sector in Brazil is dominated by a form of state supply over which there are no controls: for example, there are no standards with regard to equipment, and no staff training. In fact," explains Carlos Abicalil, President of the Brazilian teachers' trade union centre, the CNTE, *"children are often looked after by 14-year-old girls."*

Private-sector schools are mostly denominational, and are managed by the community.

The state "pre-school" structure consists of creches for children up to the age of 3, and of "pre-school educational institutions" for those aged 4-6. National figures

show that no more than 10% of babies go to creches (and only 14% of those go to creches run by the state), and 15% of children aged 4-6 go to pre-school educational institutions (of which 26% are state-run).

One of the CNTE's key demands is that enrolments into state institutions should double within the next 10 years. *"This is a 'social' demand because our policy is to incorporate the children of ordinary people into a comprehensive system of pre-school education,"* says Carlos Abicalil. The CNTE is also calling for appropriate training for teaching and support staff. ♦

¹ International Labour Organisation (ILO) / International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

² ILO/IPEC An Information Kit for Teachers, Educators and their Organizations, Book 2 Combating Child Labour, Action by Teachers, Educators and their Organizations, 1998, ISBN 92-2-111040-0, page 5

³ Article XI of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania

⁴ Quoted from Professor Omari's consultancy report to the IPEC programme "Mobilising teachers, educators and their organisations in combatting child labour".

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NORWAY

Kindergartens in Norway

In Norway, all approved kindergartens are under the auspices of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. Kindergartens are for children under six years of age. All approved kindergartens receive financial support from the central government. Kindergartens serve a dual function: education as part of the broader education system and providing care during the parents' working hours.

It is the goal of the Norwegian government that all children whose parents wish should have a place in a kindergarten, full time or part time, by the year 2000. The municipalities (local authorities) are responsible for reaching that goal, whenever feasible in co-operation with the private sector.

Norway has 6,260 kindergartens; of these 3,289 are privately owned and run. About 51% of all children 0 - 5 years old have access to kindergartens; 55.9% of the children in kindergartens attend public institutions. There is a great variation in coverage between the municipalities, from below 30 up to 90%.

NORSK LÆRERLAG

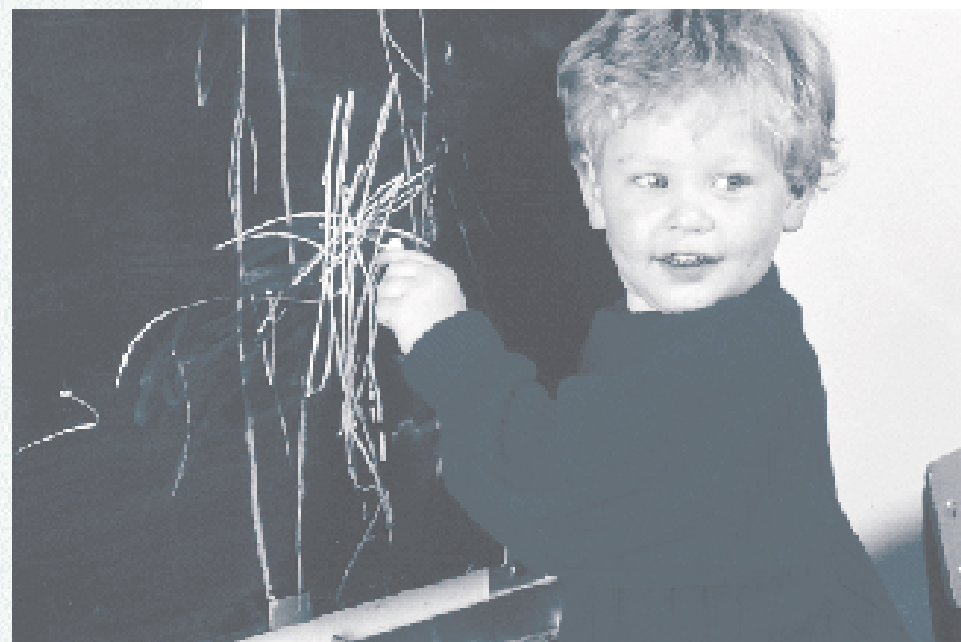
In January 1996, a legislation on a total new Framework Plan for kindergartens was adopted. This Framework Plan ("Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines") is in the Nordic tradition, and is based on a holistic view, which means that play, learning and care are regarded as inseparable. The Framework Plan emphasises the importance of everyday life experiences for children. According to the Framework Plan the children should get wide experience with language activities and socialisation and they should take part in activities within five different subject areas. All kindergartens throughout the country are committed to these guidelines, and the plan also gives guidance regarding working methods and evaluation. Norsk Laererlag, the Norwegian Union of Teachers, has been working hard during the process of establishing the Framework Plan and has had a major impact on the final result.

The main challenge in the field is how to reach the goal of enough places by the year 2000. Public discussion centres around resource issues and

whether the government should finance kindergartens or support "paycheques".

NL has tried to start a debate on quality in early childhood education, as part of the entire education system, and early childhood education for all children. Our main point of view is that every child should have the legal right to early childhood education. That is also why the union strongly opposed the Cash Benefit Act.

The government has announced a White Paper on kindergartens this year, in which issues such as quality, accessibility and funding will be discussed. ♦



Gjertrud Eggen
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Vice president of EI Europe



INDIA

Launchpad towards the universalisation of basic education

Officially, early childhood care in India is considered to be part of elementary education. The Education Commission 1964-66 and the National Policy of Education of 1986, have explicitly accepted the links between child care and pre-primary education. However, the programme has been implemented in a more or less haphazard, unsystematic and unplanned manner.

It is estimated that 140 million children in India (17% of the total population) are under the age of 6. Of them, 40% are living below the poverty line. This means that their development is in danger due to neglect and a lack of compulsory child care services.

Fifteen per cent of children in the 3-6 year age group receive pre-school education. Despite the target which was set for establishing a minimum of 250,000 centres by 1990, there is still a big gap between childrens' needs and provision.

Figures available for early childhood education schemes for 1989-90 are as follows :

- 4,366 Early Childhood Care and Education program (ECCE) centres
- 12,230 crèches and day care centres (for 0-5 age group)
- 5,641 Balwadies (3-6 age group)
- 203,386 Integrated Child Development Services or ICDS (for 3-6 yrs)
- 14,765 Pre-primary schools

According to article 45 of the Indian Constitution every child up to the age of 14 shall receive free and compulsory education, irrespective of the social and economic status of their parents.

The 1986 National Policy on Education (which was reviewed in 1992) placed special emphasis on child care and education and outlined a double objective of achieving the universalisation of elementary education and the equalization of education opportunities for women. However, despite this, the Early Childhood Care and Education program (ECCE) has not been fully implemented, not because of financial constraints, but as a result of fragmented and divided responsibility between two government departments. Responsibility of the implementation of the ECCE at the national level currently resides with the Department of Women and

Child Development and the Department of Social Welfare.

The Department of Women and Child Development plays a vital role with regard to ECCE, coordinating the overall programme by networking with other departments and agencies, and stimulating and monitoring their efforts.

Given the positive impact which the ECCE has had on the learning environment in primary schools, the Department of Education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has a primary role to play in determining the content of the programme. It is also responsible for teacher education and the training for ECCE workers.

The content of such training is strongly related to real-life situations. The comprehensive course includes training modules focusing on development of the child according to the socio-economic and cultural environment in which they live.

Strategy

Several ECCE models and strategies have been developed to suit the vast diversity and complexity of Indian society. ECCE for infants (under the age of 3) must therefore meet the following criteria:

- Be home-based
- Be small-scale, based on specific socio-cultural or geographical settings and
- Correlate to women's work-styles and timetables.

Most ECCE centres are run by private agencies and the rapid growth in the number of ECCE centres has been conducted primarily on a commercial, profit-related basis. The curriculum delivered by such centres is not suited to the needs and aspirations of the children, their parents, or the wider community. The methodology being used still focuses largely on reading, writing and arithmetic. Greater emphasis should be placed on the physical, mental, emotional and sensory development of the children.

A systematic and comprehensive plan of action therefore needs to be implemented in order to improve the results achieved by these centres. The ECCE programme, which constitutes a priority within national education policy, should be effectively implemented by each and every section of the community in order to transform it into a universal program for child development and elementary education. ♦

It is essential that a child be prepared, from an early age, to face the challenges of individual, social and cultural development and learn the basic rules of health and hygiene.

Informal early childhood education in a slum in Bombay.
© Samuel Grumiau



S. Eswaran
AIPTF General Secretary
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Increased privatisation?

The last issue of the EI Magazine showed that early childhood education is one of the primary targets for initiatives aimed at the privatisation of education. This trend is confirmed by the answers received from EI European member organisations to a questionnaire on early childhood education¹.

As with other education sectors, it is not always easy to establish a clear boundary between the public and private management of early childhood education. Let us take, for instance, the example of public playgrounds which are run by the community, but not entirely funded by the State - are these public? Should we only consider as public those nursery schools which are entirely funded by the State? In several countries, early childhood education establishments, although regarded as public, are in fact financed through the payment of fees by parents. In **Iceland**, for example, parents pay a monthly tuition fee for their child. In the **Czech Republic**, parental contributions cover up to 30% of the operational costs of early childhood establishments.

The **Dutch** educational system makes no distinction between public and private. If a group of parents wishes to open a school which offers education along the lines of a specific religious or pedagogical philosophy, they have the right to do so, provided that the number of children likely to be enrolled does exceed the minimum requirement. All educational establishments receive the same grant (calculated according to the number of children enrolled in the school) and must submit to the same rights and obligations.

UNESCO, in its system of classification, considers that a school (the same definition being applied to all levels from early childhood to secondary education) is private when it is privately managed, even if it receives subsidies from the public sector.

Distribution between public and private establishments

Statistics published by UNESCO, and which cover all the countries of the world for which figures were available, indicate that in 1995, 41% of children receiving early childhood education were enrolled in private establishments. For the European region, the same figure stands at 16.8%.

While the situation varies from country to country, the information gathered from European countries shows that public establishments are used by the majority of children enrolled in early childhood education. In **Finland**, there are 2,500 public early childhood education establishments and only 370 private ones. In **Iceland**, 6.6% of all early childhood education establishments are private. In **Bulgaria**, there is a total of

3,400 early childhood education establishments, representing an enrolment of 233,000 children, of which only 9 (with a student population of around one hundred children) are private. In the **Czech Republic**, 1.5% of early childhood establishments are private and another 0.3% are run by the Church. Most of the private establishments are to be found in Prague.

In **Norway**, 55.9% of children enrolled in early childhood education are to be found in public establishments. In **France**, 8,500 public establishments take care of 215,000 children, compared with 300 private establishments which cater for 30,000 children. In **Sweden**, private establishments are responsible for the education of 12% of all children of pre-school age. In Italy, state-run early childhood education establishments take care of 56.3% of all children attending such schools, compared with 15% attending establishments run by the municipalities and 29% attending privately-run establishments.

In **Northern Ireland**, the majority of children attend community or privately-run early childhood education establishments, but this trend is beginning to be reversed. In **Germany**, most early childhood education establishments are run by municipalities and public welfare organisations. Some are run by parents, by firms or commercial organisations. In **Ireland**, no early childhood establishment is regulated by the state, with the exception of infant classes in national schools, even though certain establishments also receive public funding.

What trends can be observed?

A comparison of UNESCO figures for 1980 and 1995 reveals a growing trend towards private establishments. Figures for the average enrolment of children in early childhood education throughout the world show that, in 1995, 41% of enrolment was in private establishments, compared with 36% in 1980. The trend is even stronger in **Africa**, where the same figure increased from 37% in 1980 to 50% in 1995. In **Europe**, enrolment in private establishments increased from 14.3% in 1980 to 16.8% in 1995.

It should also be noted that the proportion of children enrolled in private establishments is higher in early childhood education than in primary education.

Teacher unions have also reported on this growing trend towards private establishments, particularly in larger urban areas. In **Denmark** and **Sweden**, the number of privately-run early childhood establishments has increased. Parental co-operatives are the most common form of private early childhood education establishment. In **Norway**, the number of private establishments has increased by 4-5% annually in

recent years. The government has encouraged the development of private establishments in order to reach its goal of providing access to early childhood education for every child before the year 2000. Each establishment is entitled to financial support from the government, but the local municipalities are free to decide whether they wish to do so or not. There is also a growing number of private early childhood establishments in larger urban areas in **Latvia**. At present, the terms and conditions for financing such private establishments are under discussion, notably the question of whether these establishments should be required to obtain a licence from the Ministry of Education in order to operate.

Other countries are experiencing a reversal of this trend which would seem to show dissatisfaction with private early childhood education establishments. This is the case notably in **Iceland**, where municipalities are building new public establishments. In **Northern Ireland**, it is expected that, in the next few years, half of all the children in early childhood education will be enrolled in establishments run by the community or voluntary organisations, with the other half being enrolled in establishments attached to public schools, proportions which would imply an increase in public sector establishments. In **Italy**, competition appears to have favoured the public sector, as private establishments are not seen to offer an up-to-date education, and are often too expensive for the majority of parents.

In the **Czech Republic**, the number of private establishments is also in decline, as parents believe that public establishments offer an education of higher quality. In addition to this quality criterion, there are financial reasons. Given that the level of public financing offered to private establishments only covers 40% of their operating costs, they are obliged to demand high tuition fees, which many families cannot afford. The higher geographical coverage of public establishments also works in their favour.

The position in several countries however, is the public/private nature of early childhood education establishments is not seen as a problem. In **France**, for example, the proportion has remained stable in recent years. In **Germany**, where childcare is primarily organised within the family home, there is no obvious trend towards privatisation. In **Finland**, even if the number of privately-run establishments has slightly increased in recent years, this is not seen as a threat by the teacher union OAJ. Many of these establishments offer education based on specific pedagogical methodologies, such as Steiner and Montessori, or offer methodologies based on linguistic immersion.

Education vouchers

Following the example of Norway or Finland, certain governments are experimenting with the introduction of education 'vouchers' (see article by NL on page 18).

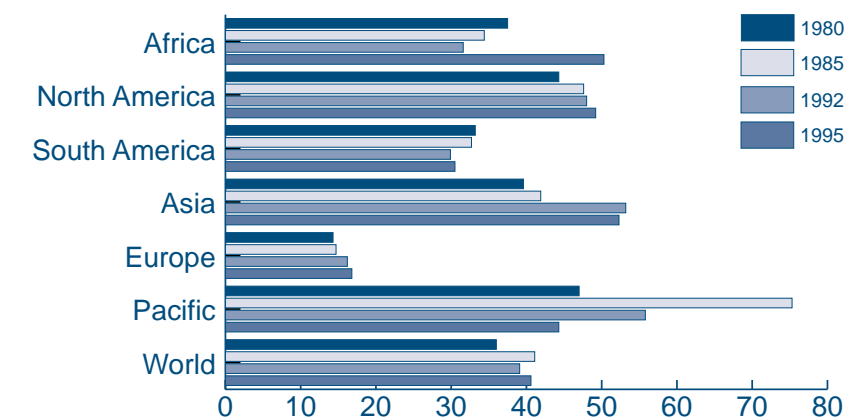
The **Norwegian** government intends, therefore, to distribute vouchers to the parents of all 1 year-old children. The programme will then be extended to 2 year-olds. The objective behind this distribution of vouchers is to encourage parents to enrol their children in private establishments. If a child is enrolled in a public establishment, the government believes that it is already benefiting from state financing, and the value of the voucher given to the child's parents is therefore reduced. By creating a new market for private establishments, education vouchers have created a climate of competition which existing private establishments often have difficulty in sustaining. At the same time, the new private establishments which are being created are more profit-oriented.

In **Finland**, the idea of education vouchers, launched in order to reduce pressure on public establishments by giving parents the opportunity to entrust their children to other types of establishment, has not achieved its objective, as parents have remained faithful to publicly-run establishments.

In **Northern Ireland**, the teachers' union was able to delay a proposal for education vouchers, and it now seems unlikely that the new Government will pursue such a proposal. In the **United Kingdom**, the Education Secretary announced in 1997 that the use of vouchers for nursery education, introduced by the previous conservative government, would be stopped.

In conclusion, therefore, it is difficult to identify the main trends with regard to the privatisation of early childhood education, given that there are great variations in the situation affecting different countries, at least in Europe. We can however, conclude from the UNESCO figures that a slight trend towards privatisation is under way in the early childhood education sector. ♦

Average enrolment in private early childhood education establishments expressed as a percentage of the total enrolment



Source: World Education Report 1995, UNESCO 1995; World Education Report 1998, UNESCO 1998

¹ This questionnaire was part of the preparatory work for the Round Table on early childhood education organised by EI Europe and held in Copenhagen, Denmark on 9-10 November 1998.



GHANA

World bank policy on early childhood education and practice



Following advice from the World Bank, the government in Ghana has reduced its commitment to early childhood education.

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Early childhood education is rarely discussed in World Bank policy papers. The World Bank does, however, have a policy on this issue, a policy which Education

International feels will widen the gap between rich and poor. Let's consider the World Bank experience in Ghana.

The World Bank has published special reports on primary education, higher education and vocational education and training, but not on early childhood education. The World Bank's main policy document on education *"Priorities and Strategies in Education"*, makes no mention of early childhood education, either as a priority or as a part of any strategic measure in the education sector.

The World Bank's policy in relation to early childhood education is that overall resources are so limited that it is simply not possible to expand public responsibilities. Priority is to be given to basic education and early childhood education is not seen as a part of this.

This policy is contradictory in many ways. Given the knowledge that we now have about a child's development, it appears natural to believe that investment in early childhood education will lead to better school achievements and contribute to build a solid foundation for the development of the child. The same arguments which are being used today by the World Bank to give priority to basic education could also be used to give priority to early childhood education.

Early childhood education in Ghana

In Ghana, early childhood education is facing several problems, including:

- ✓ Poor infrastructure;
- ✓ Lack of furniture, pedagogical and play equipment;
- ✓ Lack of instructional materials;
- ✓ Unqualified staff;
- ✓ Poor nutrition;
- ✓ Inadequate finance; and
- ✓ Absence of a national policy

There seems to be a growing number of private early childhood institutions. When early childhood education is organised by public schools, these are mainly funded by the payment of fees by parents. The fees in early childhood education establishments are generally higher than those in primary schools.

Following advice from the World Bank, the Government in Ghana has reduced its commitment to early child-

hood education. There are 18,000 teachers in early childhood establishments whose salaries are paid by the government. Some pressure has probably been put on the government to abandon this commitment. The districts have been told that they should withdraw trained teachers from early childhood institutions.

In the Yendi district (Northern region), for example, there are very few trained teachers in early childhood establishments and a further withdrawal of teachers would make it very difficult to maintain these establishments. The Hohoe district (Volta region) has faced several practical problems as a result of the withdrawal of teachers and most districts are not sending newly trained teachers to kindergartens.

Widening the gap

This policy will most likely lead to a situation where only those who can afford it will place their children in early childhood education structures, thereby giving an advantage to those children who do attend when compulsory schooling begins.

Furthermore, schools usually give priority to the children who have attended their early childhood programmes. Parents who wish to enrol their children into particular primary schools are usually forced to try to first get their children into an early childhood establishment which is related to the school. The children will then continue in these schools and have much better chances than other children for continuing on to secondary education and even on to higher education. Children whose parents cannot afford early childhood education will therefore be placed in lower quality schools and their chances for continuing their education will be limited. A 'two-track' education system will result, one which already begins in early childhood education. The criteria which will decide the track in which a child finds him/herself will depend on the resources available to his/her parents.

Time to rethink the policy!

The fact that an essential part of the educational system is based on fees and privately-run establishments favours those who can pay. Even if basic education is to be free and universal, children will start compulsory schooling with different levels of knowledge and experience. The World Bank should reconsider its policy on early childhood education, which should be seen as an integral part of the education system. Children should have access to this education on equal terms. ♦

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