

INTEGRATED POLICIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: CHALLENGES, PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

INTEGRATED POLICIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE: CHALLENGES, PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES. The present article is a synthesis of a research project commissioned by OECD and UNESCO in 2001, on the development and implementation of integrated and coordinated services for early childhood education and care – ECEC – in a systemic perspective. The project underlined issues related to both developed and developing countries, and proposed a new approach for an integrated system of ECEC. This model resulted in a paradigm shift related to responsibility for the care and education of the young children, which shifted from an exclusive attribution of the family to a task to be shared with society at large. This model was built on the legitimation of out-of-home child socialization, making the upbringing process to become both a public and a private concern. The research pointed out the implications of this model for policy and program implementation and identified convergent and divergent tendencies among the countries analyzed. It also called attention to the main challenges and pitfalls that emerge in the path towards the elaboration of a coherent and consistent integrated policy.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – CHILD CARE – PUBLIC POLICIES – EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

In June 2001, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), together with the Swedish Ministry of Science and Education, announced at the International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Care, held in Stockholm, the findings of the

research carried out by the OECD, which title was Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care (OECD, 2001). This is the most comprehensive study ever carried out by this organization in the area of early childhood education and care, involving twelve countries: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, the United States, Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and Sweden¹. The document highlights original strategies to promote the well-being of children and their families and it points out eight key elements for a successful early childhood education and care policy:

- systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
- strong and equal partnership with the education system;
- universal access to early childhood education and care, with particular attention to children with special needs;
- substantial public investments in services and infrastructure;
- participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
- appropriate training and work conditions for staff in all forms of provision;
- systematic attention to monitoring and data collection;
- stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation” (OECD, 2001, p. 11)

As result of the partnership between OECD and UNESCO-Paris, experts from developing countries were asked to appreciate the two key-aspects - “a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation” and “systematic attention to monitoring and data collection”. I was invited to work on the first topic. The first findings were presented in the 2001 Stockholm International Conference (Haddad, 2002) and the final results were published by UNESCO in 2002 (Haddad, 2002a).

In order to assess developed countries, the main references used were the documents produced by the Thematic Review on Early Childhood Education and Care carried out by OECD between 1998 and 2001 in the aforementioned countries, which include the reports of domestic teams in each country (*Country Background reports*) and comparative analysis of external experts (*Country notes*). For the eight developing countries selected (Brazil,

¹ The second stage of the study includes Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea and Mexico.

Cambodia, China, Vietnam, the Gambia, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda), interviews with the respective delegates were conducted during the Stockholm Conference through a previously presented script developed in association with UNESCO.

Other significant sources for the development of the research have been documents related to Education for All organized by UNESCO (EFA 2000); papers produced by both the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development and the European Community Childcare Network (EC Network, 1998, 1992, 1996) as well as those related to comparative cross-national research projects on early childhood education and care systems (Olmsted and Weikart, 1989; Lamb *et al.*, 1992; Cochran 1993).

The present article is a synthesis of this research and is focused on the definition of an integrated approach to early childhood education and care and its implications in the development and implementation of policies and practices.

THE STARTING POINT

The existing picture of inconsistencies, incoherence, parallelisms and discontinuity in early childhood education and care services in most of the developed and developing countries studied, and the need for a pro-integration approach to achieve coherence, consistency and coordination in policies and practices are the starting point of this research.

The parallelism in ECEC services is characterized by a system of provision traditionally distributed in two great blocks: a set of services which offer a framework of full-time daily operation, often as day-care centres or family day-care, devoted to at-risk segments of the population, and another set of full-time and part-time early childhood education programs (kindergarten, nursery schools etc.), usually intended to promote the child development and learning processes. The fact that the first set of services is bound to the social sector (welfare, family affairs, health, labour, etc.) and the second set to the educational sector leads to polarization of both areas of service, strongly influencing the structure of the institutions with respect to objectives, target population, regulations, funding, provision, staff, type of operation etc. Services linked to social welfare tend to have more limited provision and often call for parents' financial contributions, whereas services subordinated to the educational system are usually free of charge and more accessible, but not always available full time, all over the year. The adult-child ratio is typically higher in the social welfare sector,

but the working conditions and level of staff education are better in the educational sector, although the hours of operating do not always meet parents' needs.

Despite this picture of overlapped administrative responsibilities, some indications of change in most OECD member-countries are observed. Due to both the high rate of mothers with young children in the labour market, and a higher demand for quality, the social sector is forced to strengthen the pedagogical dimension and the educational system is compelled to consider family needs. A growing trend towards administrative integration in the educational sector services seems to signalize point out a transition into a new form of organization. However, the OECD report warns that these mechanisms are not enough sufficient to ensure integration and affirms that the development of a coherent and integrated system depends on how society sees these services.

The report recommends an approach to the development and implementation of early childhood education and care – ECEC – policies with the following characteristics:

- careful attention dedicated to the structural requirements: clear policy frameworks, effective governance and monitoring processes, supporting and training professional staff, and adequate funding and financing mechanisms;
- a clear vision of childhood from 0 to 8 years old, which underlies policy development for ECEC;
- a coordinated and integrated policy making for children from birth to compulsory school age, with special attention to its links with the school system and related sectors, such as employment, family, health, social welfare etc.;
- development of a common policy framework with coherent objectives across the system (concerning staffing, financing, programming etc.), with clearly-defined roles and responsibilities at both central and decentralized levels of governance;
- integrated administrative responsibilities at both national and local levels, in which preferably all services for young children be subordinated to one ministry;
- a collaborative and participatory approach to reform, involving a number of actors (in addition to government, local and regional authorities, companies, organized civil society, community groups and parents) in the formulation and implementation of a strong and comprehensive ECEC policy agenda and in the decision-making process;

- a solid partnership between modalities of services available to families who have young children and services destined to young children (schools, health and special education) as well as the strengthening of the link between preschool programs, school and out-of-school provision, in order to smooth the transitions experienced by the children (OECD, 2001, p. 127-8).

However, the integrated approach proposed to the developing countries seems to take on different characteristics. "Integration" is usually viewed as a way of improving effectiveness while reducing public costs. In the ECEC arena, the term refers to coordinated policies for children through which related sectors, such as social welfare, school system, the family, employment and health care services, work together in networks (OCDE, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Evans, 1997, 2000; Young, 1996). But the definition loses accuracy and takes on different meanings when it is associated to the concern of alleviating poverty and improving conditions for the early childhood development.

The Object of the Research and the Sense of Integration Proposed

Prior to suggesting actions aimed at the integration of ECEC services, we deem necessary to question the determinants of disintegration and, for that reason, the research's chief concern was to restore the history of early childhood education in the perspective of integration. We start from the premise that the parallelism observed in the ECEC systems is not necessarily a result of the dual origin of early childhood education institutions, and that the integration of services, in the sense of unifying objectives and practices, is not a static, linear concept and does not bear an evolutionist undertone. A pro-integration approach is a cyclical phenomenon which is to some extent convergent, depending on the performance of social, political and cultural factors that models and regulated beliefs and attitudes concerning the responsibility for the care, socialization and education of young children in each historical moment. The ECEC integrated system model we have outlined takes this premise into account and is based on a previous study (Haddad, 1997) which explains the implications of an integrated approach for the development of early childhood education practices and policies. This model has enabled the identification of converging and diverging trends within

the analysed countries, as well as the main challenges and pitfalls to be faced in the path that leads to consistent and coherent service integration policy.

Thus, the vision of integration in this article goes beyond the local and administrative dimensions and highlights the changes of attitude concerning the role of government and society regarding child education, care and socialization. These changes lead to a broader definition of early childhood education institutions in terms of age, range of functions and diversity, and widens the concept of education and care including a contextualized view of child development and call attention to the transitional periods (not only in relation to the school system, but also to the period from birth to ECE). Under this perspective, the development of related sectors networks (ministries, departments, secretariats) should not be the objective to be pursued, but the natural consequence of an ever growing awareness of the profound interdependence between family life and early childhood educational services.

THE CYCLIC DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION

When analyzed through an integrated approach of care and education, the history of early childhood education around the world is permeated by two phenomena. The first is the parallel development of institutions for young children. The second, which is less apparent, concerns the cultural, political and economic events that were significant for world history in particular periods and strongly influenced the adoption of relatively integrated approaches to early childhood education and care. These events are, namely, the Cold War, the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in the West and globalization.

The Emergence of New Services

Institutions designed for the care and education of young children dual origin and were created almost simultaneously to meet different needs and aspirations, as indicated in the OCDE Thematic Review reports and other sources. On one hand, they appear in the realm of social and philanthropic programs for protection and prevention of child abandonment and delinquency aimed at assisting vulnerable children and families in situations of poverty, sickness, disability or low performance.

On the other hand, these institutions are developed towards the implementation of education models conceived by prominent educators, such as Oberlin (salles d'asile), Robert Owen (infant school), Froebel (kindergarten) and Montessori (casa dei bambini) that were disseminated around the world. Despite the differences among their philosophies, which will not be discussed in this article, they were all concerned about individual needs, the concept of community, reduction of poverty and world citizenship (Bruce, 1987).

The dichotomy care/education is often associated to the shape acquired by both kinds of institutions throughout history, due to their roles and objectives. There are, however, evidences which show the inexistence of this split in early stages of child education and that it was a result of political-ideological factors that followed this period.

From the analysis of international exhibitions between 1850 and 1920, Kuhlmann (1998) found that day-care centres, salles d'asile, infant school, kindergarten and nursery schools were institutions invariably connected to education, health and well-being, and were seen as symbols of progress and modernity. Caldwell (1989) stresses that an integrated view of child education lays at the heart of the early traditions. The original project of Montessori in Rome, the plans of Robert Owen in Scotland and the ideas of the MacMillan sisters are all perfect examples of the integration of social and educational objectives and models.

Caldwell (1989) argues that the clear distinction between child care provision and early childhood education derived from ideological conflicts of the cold war. The definition of day care mentioned in Standards for Day-Care Service, from the Child Welfare League of America is quite illustrative:

Day-care service has to be differentiated from nursery schools or kindergarten, and from extended school services and other programs for school-age children offered as part of elementary education systems. These have education of young children as their main purpose. The primary purpose of a day-care service is the care and protection of children. This purpose, the reasons for which a child and family may need it, and the responsibility shared with parents distinguish a day-care service from educational programs. (p.70-71)

The Cold War and the Split between “Care” and “Education”

The split between child care and early childhood education services was exacerbated in capitalist-oriented countries during the period of cold war as a movement away from the

principles underlying the “collective care” of communist countries, as the expansion of this type of early collective education was seen as a threat to the capitalist political system, which was grounded on the primacy of the family. In communist societies, services for young children were seen as an important component for revolution strategies, since it reduced the burden of work in the home and child-care responsibilities and enhanced their political and social status.

By 1945 in China, a complex system of public early childhood education and care was implemented, creating a network of nursery schools, public crèches and kindergartens with different operating models (boarding programs, day nurseries running by children’s mother; breast-feeding rooms and preschool classes attached to primary schools). The system expanded greatly thanks to the victorious struggle of the Women’s Federation and trade unions for the establishment of day-care centres for its workers (Zhengao, 1993). According to Lee (1992), child care in China was important because it permitted mothers to participate in political, cultural and technical studies related to the building of the new China, which produced great changes in traditional family life.

The 1945 Revolution in Vietnam, which put an end to the French colonial regime, introduced deep changes in family life, the status of women, and child care and education practices. The Constitution of 1946 gave women the same rights as men in political, economic, cultural and social matters and in family life. The Vietnam Women’s Union, founded in the same year, contributed greatly to enhance the political status of women. The Vietnamese national policy supporting the development of day-care centres and nursery schools was clearly built on the principle of joint responsibility, shared by the family, state and society (Trong et al., 1993, p. 587). In former Czechoslovakia, the official ideology of the state supported the equality of genders roles and making it possible for mothers to work outside of home, and the goals for the preschool system included the interests of ideologically influencing new generations.

In contrast, the West favoured mechanisms underlining the importance of the family and the ideals of maternity as the only way to guarantee the child’s mental and psychological health. Resulting from this period are the well-known studies that found that maternal separation and the institutionalization of the young child caused profound and irreversible harm to early development, particularly in children under three.

The United States and Britain were in the forefront of the campaign which advocated that child care is a private matter. In addition to refusing to adopt measures to support families with young children, these countries also influenced the direction of early childhood policies in developing countries. For example, the American program War on Poverty, launched in the 1960s, aimed at improving the condition of culturally deprived and disadvantaged children through compensatory education programs, had a tremendous impact on Brazilian educational policies. The expansion of preschool education during the military dictatorship was fostered from a low-cost model aimed at preventing later school failure.

The Cultural Revolution in the West and the Expansion of Childcare Policies

New trends in early childhood education and care arose from the controversies created by the feminist, black power, student, and the hippie movements, among others, in the 1960s and 1970s. Indignation over social inequality, prejudice, imperialism, the Vietnam War, the consolidation of culture and science as a means of domination, social repression and violence against women called for new order of power and cultural relationships. Morin (1986) refers to these movements as a “Western cultural revolution”, as they raised problems to a society model that implied the supremacy of the Western white race, of the adults and of the men.

In many countries, this period is marked by greater governmental activity in terms of service subsidies and offers, especially day-care centres, and by the revision of its psychological, sociological, economic and political meanings. The feminist movement that spread throughout the world at this time played a unique role in this revision of the meaning of childcare by associating it with issues such as maternity, paternity and changed domestic roles, and challenged the idea that child care services should be restricted to disadvantaged families or poor working mothers. In Scandinavian countries, there was a complete reorientation of early childhood care and education in the mid-1960s which was characterized by a revision of out-of-home socialization and care, and by a significant public investment in this area.

The increasing number of women entering the workforce partially explains this reorientation, but the most important determining factor was the pressure from feminist organizations struggling for gender equality. Sweden was a pioneer when established a gender equality policy in 1968. No other government has gone so far as to stipulate that men and

women are equally responsible for economic support, care and supervision of children (Haas, 1993).

By the end of the 1970s, in the midst of the military dictatorship, Brazil saw several social movements that resulted in a political opening. The Movement of Fight for Crèches (MFC) defended a new concept of day-care services as a matter of legal right, as opposed to the custodial, charitable tradition. In Sao Paulo, where the movement began, the state's response was highly significant. A program to expand public crèches was set up then and still is the largest in Latin America. Two aspects deserve special consideration. One is that the expansion of child care services during this period stems in part from an endogenous and spontaneous social demand in most Western countries. The second is that the claims emerged from the movements were incorporated to social policies more than to educational policies.

In many countries, the women's movement had an important role in unveiling new possibilities of extraparental child socialization, which opened up a new concept of child-care – as an educational, non-philanthropic service seen as a right of children, women and families – to meet the far-reaching transformations of values, attitudes, practices and roles that permeated the following decades. Possibly, this new conceptual framework was the embryo of what is now called “early childhood education and care”, the precursor to the modern model of out-of-home socialization with professional and educational components, capable of meeting both the child's needs for care and education as well as the social, occupational and family needs of women. With different degrees of success, the social sector has sought solutions to the crucial questions of modern life that the educational system did not or could not answer, such as attention to the under-threes, the need of full-time services and family involvement.

The creation of the European Commission Network on Childcare in 1986 reflects the great importance given to childcare in all that relates to work, gender equality and the family responsibilities of men and women (EC Childcare Network, 1992). The qualitative leap in this period was the recognition of the functions of ECEC, making it possible to emerge its multifunctional character and, consequently, other dimensions of human existence not always taken into account such as: the promotion of child's development in all aspects – physical, affective, moral, spiritual and intellectual; the well-being of children and their right to a safe, pleasant, joyful and stimulating atmosphere, as well as to new opportunities for relationships with other children and adults; the possibility for parents to combine professional and family

activities, the promotion of equality between men and women, and the optimization of the parents' ability to fulfil their parental roles.

Globalization and the Return to Compensatory Programs

World events during the late 1980s and early 1990s triggered rapid political and economic changes that have had a great impact on policies concerning the care and education for children. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe; the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of the socialist model which placed emphasis on providing an institutionalized childcare system; and the shift towards open market economies, imposing neo-liberal rules on developing and former communist countries (privatization of public companies, emphasis on consumption, cuts in spending on education and social programs) – all this has led to a complete reorientation of early childhood education and care services and to an overturn in many achievements in the welfare area including women's rights.

The social impact of globalization has been more severe in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, with an increase in poverty, social and economic inequality, social exclusion, employment in the informal sector and a reduced ability of low-income people to pay for services. In socialist or former communist countries, such as China, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Czech Republic, where childcare was basically the state's responsibility, the shift to an open market economy has led to a dramatic reduction in services for children under three. Early childhood education is no longer seen as a context for the child's out-of-home socialization towards women liberation and the creation of a more egalitarian society. Its importance now is increasingly related to the first stage of basic education and long life learning process.

To lessen the impact of globalization in developing countries, governments and international organizations have begun to support "compensatory" programs designed for the care, education and development of small children (Myers, 2000). Two kinds of policies for the early years for developing countries are proposed: the first promotes the universalization of services for older children (older than three years of age) in preschools or classes attached to primary school, mainly on part-time base, focused on future educational success; and the second promotes alternative programs for children under three organized by mothers and community agents. In many countries today, it is possible to see a growing tendency to insure

the admission of six-year-old children in primary school and remove the zero-to-three age group from the funding system.

While the Cold War ideologies have caused a split in care and education, and the “Western cultural revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s created a momentum towards integration, unifying educational and social objectives, globalization forces have restrained the move toward unified services, by tending to minimise government’s participation.

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

An Integrated Approach to ECEC Systems

The integrated approach to ECEC systems proposed in this research is based on a *third model*², built by removing the inconsistencies of previous models of “child care services” and “preschool education”, recognizing their qualities and adding a new element that lends a dynamic and evolutionary meaning to the whole. This new element – the legitimation of out-of-home child socialization – serves as a bond between care and education and, at the same time, changes their meaning. The idea, based on a previous study (Haddad, 1997), is that the absence of this legitimation causes a rupture to the whole, resulting in parallel systems and discontinuity among services. This rupture brings about changes in the meaning of care and education by linking education to schooling (favouring older children) and care to custody, focusing on at-risk children or families or children with special needs. The consequence is the obfuscation of the broader concept of education.

The integrated approach to ECEC systems stems from a paradigm shift, in which the responsibility for the care and socialization of young child is no longer the family alone, but of society as a whole, shifting from a deficit model to a model based on human rights. It results that a significant portion of the upbringing process has become a public matter, therefore falling within the realm of human rights arena, with enormous implications for the development of ECEC policies and programs. The paradigm shift requires:

² Here, the word “model” does not mean a method to be followed, but a series of interconnected dynamic elements with their own cause and effect logic.

- a redefinition of public (state) and private (family) relationships concerning children's affairs;
- the recognition of the rights of the child to be cared and socialized in a wider social context than that of the family;
- the recognition of the family's right to share the care and education of the child with society;
- the recognition that childcare is a professional task which, along with education in a broader sense, constitutes a new way of promoting the child's full development.

All this calls for a definition of state responsibility; administrative link; target-population and age groups; funding policies; types of provision; professional profile and training; physical environment; pedagogical guidelines; and parental involvement.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

There is a correlation between concepts of childhood, responsibility for the education and care of young children, the objectives of ECEC institutions, and political and practical aspects related to the supply, management, financing, and distribution of services, starting age of compulsory school, age groups, annual school calendar, length of operation during the day and year, types of services, flexibility and accessibility to different groups, staffing (profile and conditions), and parental involvement. Some basic system characteristics have been selected to discuss major challenges and pitfalls facing government spheres (municipalities, states and ministries) in charge of the ECEC system, as they go about integrating care and education within a wider perspective.

Policy Implementation

State responsibility

An integrated approach presupposes a more active role of the state in providing services for the 0-to-6 age group and focusing on the whole development of the child. However, in many countries, the government still hesitates in intervening in the family

domain, particularly when it means investing in children under 3 and providing full-time programs.

Among the countries covered in this study, a more effective participation of the public sector is generally observed in terms of supply, expansion, monitoring, control and evaluation of services, as well as a growing recognition of ECEC as part of basic education. Paradoxically, as a reflection of globalization, a tendency for privatization and/or cooperation with the private sector has also been observed among former communist countries, such as the Czech Republic and Cambodia, and countries that have retained a socialist orientation, such as China and Vietnam. In Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, changes in policies affecting early years involve longer parental leaves and offer or increase of benefits for families with young children. In African countries, attention to childhood includes parental education, and a strong emphasis on informal approaches.

The challenge is to attain greater state participation, including provision for all child development stages from birth to entry into formal schooling, to avoid the tendency to revive the idea of family primacy over early childhood.

Administrative realm

An integrated approach requires a unified model and a coordinated or single management of services, as well as coherence in terms of objectives, operations, regulation, funding, admission criteria, hours of functioning and so on, moving away from fragmented models, in which overlapping responsibilities have traditionally led to inconsistencies among services.

The traditional division between education sectors on one side, and social or health sectors on the other still prevails in most OECD countries (Australia, Belgium, the United States, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, and the Czech Republic), and developing countries researched (Cambodia, China, the Gambia, and Senegal).

However, a single management structure can boost service efficiency but will not necessarily ensure service integration. Some countries that have integrated ECEC services into the educational system, such as the United Kingdom and Brazil, have not managed to eliminate inconsistencies between the social and educational sectors. In some Brazilian municipalities, the shift of day-care centres to the educational system resulted in dramatic

reduction in full-time programs, particularly for 4-to-6-year-old children, who previously attended the day-care centres.

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) have the oldest tradition of unified services for young children, and more coherence. In Sweden, early childhood care and education services were fully integrated into the educational system in 1996, when the Ministry of Education formally took over all its early childhood services for one-to-six-year-old children, as well as the leisure-time centres (complementary to schools for 7-to-12-year olds). The great challenge of most countries is to ensure the dual ECEC function – social and educational – in the process of defining a unified policy.

Target Population

An integrated approach to ECEC recognizes the needs of all children and families and seeks universal provision as opposed to a selective approach, which is characterized by the traditional polarization between an age group – of older children – and a segment of families deemed “at-risk”.

Most countries seek to universalize services for preschoolers, but usually only in part-time basis, while the access to full-time programs continues to be restricted to low-income families or “at-risk” children.

The goal for full coverage - to provide equal educational opportunities, focusing solely on children’s rights and not on families’ rights – may indicate inequality in the service provision and distortion of the meaning of universal offer.

Full-time programs for a wider age range can only be proposed on solid basis where ECEC has the dual purpose of supporting child development and promoting equal opportunities for men and women. This is the case of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and also of China, Czech Republic and Vietnam, despite significant changes in the last three countries due to reduced service for younger children.

The challenge for all countries is to strengthen the early childhood education field by seeking unified objectives and universal provision for all age groups paying attention to the needs of the child and those of their families.

Age Group

An integrated ECEC policy takes into account the entire period during which the children need adults' protection and guidance. However, in most countries coverage is much greater for the oldest age group than for youngsters. The growing trend to make services for children over 3 a statutory right contrasts with the limited offer of public services for children under 3. The general justification for such a limitation would be the high cost of services at institutions, which require a high adult-child ratio, equipment, and a different environmental organization than those required for older children.

The offer of publicly-subsidized services for children under 3 is larger in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden where the public ECEC system is part of a wider policy of family support and gender equality. These countries, as well as Norway, have the highest rates of social expenditure, reaching 3.5 percent of GDP in family benefits, which is well above the OECD countries average of about 2 percent. By contrast, in developing countries the responsibility for early years still falls heavily on the families and, particularly, on the women. As Myers observes (2000), government support for families with young children by means of parental leaves, healthcare services, child allowance systems and subsidies for home ownership is scarce in these countries.

The challenge is to achieve a unified ECEC view and full cooperation among related sectors (labour, health, welfare, and educational system) to ensure coherence and continuity of provision throughout the period ranging from pregnancy to far after the child starts primary school.

Funding

A strong public commitment is required to make ECEC provision available and accessible to all. Among the OECD countries, data indicate that public investment is higher in Nordic countries and lower in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. At the time the research was carried out (2001), some countries, such as the United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United Kingdom had expanded investment in this area. However, public investment in ECEC is particularly unequal across age groups. In addition, there is a strong tendency to devolve public responsibility upon private enterprise in countries where education and care of young children are considered a parents' task. It is not surprising that in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, where there are mixed public-

private systems, profit-based services for children under five years old prevail, with parents covering most of the costs by paying fees.

In developing countries, there is evidence that the ECEC system competes in unequal terms with other levels of education when it is linked to the educational system. Since 1998, the Brazilian government has allotted 60 percent of the Education budget to the constitution of the Fund for Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education and Teachers' Valorisation (FUNDEF). ECE is forced to compete with other educational expenses for municipal resources not assigned to this fund. The situation can be improved with the passage in the National Congress of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Teachers' Valorisation (FUNDEB), which includes early childhood education and secondary school. In Kenya, the government allocates less than 1 percent of Ministry of Education funds to preschool. In this country, most of ECEC cost is covered by parents.

Since 1990, there is an increasing investment in early childhood programs by organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, institutions such as Bernard van Leer, Aga Khan and Soros Foundation, international NGOs, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Such an increase in funding is mainly due to two reasons: the Jomtien Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which required signatories to adopt a more comprehensive definition of attention to children (Myers, 2000); and the many arguments in favour of long-term funding of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs, persuasively combined with the belief in the desirable benefits of the low-cost models produced by these programs (Evans, 2000). The World Bank is the main funder, with \$1 billion granted to informal Early Childhood Development (ECD) projects in the 1990s.

Program Implementation

An integrated ECEC approach has implications for program implementation, which affect, for example, the types of services offered, staffing, pedagogical approach and parental involvement.

Types of Services

The natural result of an integrated approach that is committed to meet the diversity of needs and interests of both children and families would be a "cliente-oriented" model, which would include a wide range in types of provision, opening hours, fees etc.

However, the services linked to the school system services are predominately uniform and limited in terms of objectives, once they follow the model of formal schools, which close during summer holidays and other periods when parents are working. The resistance within the educational system to recognize ECEC services as a support for working parents indicates a narrow concept of early childhood education and care.

Family day-care can be useful for the process of expansion of ECEC system towards universal provision for children and families. But if such arrangements are considered a substitute for centre-based services, this may indicate a return to an ideology that favours family care.

The challenge is to find diversified forms of services with unified philosophy and objectives. A more universal approach that allows for choices among a large variety of high-quality flexible provisions – full-time or part-time programs that can be either centre-based or family-based, play groups, or open preschools for children under or over 3 or, even for mixed-age groups, as well as leisure-time centres (complementary to school) – can be more effective to support parents, whether they work outside home or not.

The Educational Context

An integrated approach conceives and plans ECEC services as an integral part of family and community life, in tune with new realities: families with a smaller number of children; more working couples; increased number of lone-parent families, generally headed by mothers; greater insertion of mothers with young children into the informal and formal labour markets; immigration, and cultural pluralism.

Even if ECEC contexts have as a long-term goal preparing children for school and for the future, they should be above all spaces for socialization that stimulate children to live the here and now.

Instead of uniform and rigid institutional structures, the early childhood education and care environment must help young children to grow and develop in an atmosphere that is both familial and collective; to interact with other children and other adults and learn through these relationships; to feel good, loved and respected, and develop constructive attitudes and thinking patterns; to make choices, carry out projects, engage in enriching and involving experiences with children in their age group and mix-age groups; to communicate their actions, and participate, to some extent, in decisions that affect their lives; to move around

and play freely; to take a nap when they are tired; to eat when they are hungry, be alone when they want it; to look for support and protection from adults when they feel insecure.

Pedagogical Approach

Programs that aim at compensating for presumed deficiencies of home environments, for fear that unprivileged children will fail at school are just as harmful as those that conform to school agenda pressures by emphasizing the teaching of specific skills to young children. In both cases, something of utmost importance is not taken into account: the individual child, with his/her power, competence, and potential.

Education should not be seen in a fragmented way or in terms of learning only. Educating is far more encompassing and complex activity. It deals with the human being, an integrated whole that is not only cognition, health, and nutrition, but also body, mind, soul, feelings, emotions, religion, art, expression and rite; one that keeps an interdependent relationship with nature, his/her community, city, region, country, and the planet. With all this complexity, education must be awarded its due place, with its greatness and worth. Its role becomes limited and poor when only its mental and rational aspect is revealed. But such comprehensive conception of education will not prevail before adults understand that the inherent eager sensitivity of a child is the basic equipment that connects her/him to the whole; that is through the expression of their body, mind, and feelings that children communicate their needs and express their knowledge; and that there is another sense of time and space in the adult-child relationship.

Adults who cannot perceive such dimensions are unable to reach the essence of education; to understand what learning and teaching mean; to grasp the essential value of childhood, of a child's wisdom. Such people will not be able to go beyond an adult's point of view to perceive the child's point of view.

The great challenge is to create an ECEC pedagogy without fragmentation by age, one that promotes a culture of childhood, protecting and respecting children as individuals who constitute groups and communities with their own rights, skills, forms of expression and participation.

Staff

An integrated approach presupposes well-paid, qualified male and female professional that fulfils both social and educational functions, refusing the idea of early childhood education and care as a female domain where no professional skills are required. One of the greatest barriers to this approach is the diversity of beliefs and expectations about what ECEC professional should offer to children.

The desired profile for the ECEC professional does not correspond to the elementary school teacher model, whose main function is to teach subject matter, nor that of a substitute mother model, who simply takes care of children while the parents are away. The desired profile reflects the multiple ECEC functions.

The training of those who will provide education and care for young children should not aim at accumulating information only. In addition to deep knowledge of pedagogy and child psychology, childhood sociology, and childhood culture associated with a good deal of practical experience, the initial training of ECEC professional must include the education of the body, of feelings, emotions, the speech, the arts, singing, storytelling, and the ability to enchant. A fragmented education does not arouse the child's soul.

Good training is the most important means to create a workforce compatible with the objectives of an integrated approach.

Parental Involvement

The concept of shared responsibility between state and family implies increased recognition of parents as valuable partners, who have the right to actively participate in the whole program. Such a concept, however, is not as simple in practice as it is in theory. Experiences show that the relationships between staff and families are often permeated by conflict, ranging from competition to jealousy, guilt and contempt.

An integrated approach presupposes solid ECEC staff-parents partnerships based on dialogue, trust, respect, sharing of knowledge and cultural traditions, as well as active and systematic participation of the family in the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating programs aimed to their children.

Much more than a system to support parents who need to work, study or engage in social life, ECEC contexts are important meeting places where families and the community

can develop friendship and social protection networks, and where children and adults have interest and voice in decision-making processes.

Deviations from the concept of parents' involvement may include actions such as asking parents to do tasks, or assume ECEC staff's responsibilities; having parents offer regular voluntary help, or considering them a source of financial resources.

THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION: BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

The Benefits of an Integrated Approach

An ECEC system built on assumptions of quality, continuity, flexibility, diversity, and a socially-inclusive approach ensure many benefits to families, children, women, men, the community and society at large. Concerning the children, such a system enhances their experiences and widens up their world of affective references, contributing to the construction of their identity and their understanding of the world while reinforcing their learning and communication skills, and their involvement in meaningful activities and relationships. The system also provides opportunities to socialize with their peers and adults, and learn what means to be a citizen. In addition, the system is an important support for the functioning of the family, increasing the possibilities of socialization and sharing of experiences among family members; helping them to articulate professional activities and family responsibilities and optimizing parents' ability to play their role. It is a mechanism with great potential for promoting social cohesion by providing underprivileged families opportunities to build support networks. It favours gender equality and the struggle against social inequality.

Advantages and Risks of Integration under the Aegis of the Educational System

Consolidating ECEC administration under the aegis of the educational system is a growing trend, which has many advantages: it facilitates the development of a coherent policy for regulation, funding, and training, and consistent service delivery across different levels of the educational system, as well as cooperation among early childhood education and elementary school professionals, and continuity of pedagogical approaches for children in the

transition from one education level to another. Furthermore, it increases the probability of making the access to the public school system a right of all children.

Nevertheless, this approach implies some risks. As ECEC becomes more fully integrated into the compulsory school system, services may become more “school-oriented” in terms of structure (opening hours, staffing, adult-child ratio, physical setting) and pedagogical approach, as well as more isolated from other childhood related areas.

Sweden is the only country participating in the OECD Thematic Review that fully integrated all ECEC services and compulsory education under the Ministry of Education management. Fortunately, the risks mentioned above do not seem to threaten the system, according to the country background report (Gunnarsson et al., 1999): “ECEC continues to be an important part of the family support system alongside parental leave insurance and child allowance systems; the overarching goals remain of fostering democracy, equality, solidarity and responsibility; and the dual focus on education and care set by the 1968 National Commission on Child Care is reinforced by the 1998 National Curriculum. Moreover, this transfer has raised new issues, such as ‘the right for all children from an early age to take part in preschool, irrespective of if parents work or not’” (p. 11).

The ECEC field is relatively new, and the tradition of services for young children is permeated by unresolved inconsistencies, both in developed and developing countries. Despite its unquestionable progress, the integration process has barely started: it is still at an identity-building stage, reviewing conceptions of childhood, care, education, motherhood, fatherhood, and social responsibility shared by families and the state, issues that demand a highly complex redefinition of their functional and structural systems.

The commitment to building and redefinition is the point to where all efforts must converge, once this is a necessary condition to overcome tensions between families and society concerning the responsibility for young children. The key issue is to ensure the specificity of the field and the commitment to its dual (social and educational) role. The practical implication of this process is ensuring an appropriate *locus*, which will not pose a threat to the progress that has already been made.

If it were possible to establish a hierarchy of priorities for the process of integrating ECEC services with the educational ones, the first step should be ensuring and invigorating the conditions for the building of a specific ECEC culture and identity. The next step would be the shift to the educational system. And then face the new challenge, which is establishing

a strong and equal partnership between the two systems: early childhood education and elementary school. Those were the steps taken by the Swedish government.

Conclusion

An effectively integrated ECEC system is a collective building project based on a new concept of extra-familial care and education as a concern that is simultaneously public and private, an expression of responsibility shared between the state and the family. In the realm of policy and program implementation, this project requires careful revision and redefinition of the functions, objectives, and operations of the services that have traditionally provide the care and education of young children.

The central value of this project is a strong commitment to children and childhood. Its success depends on the synergy arising from joint attention to the needs of children and their families, within the perspective of human development.

The 1995 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995), the first on gender and development, declares that human development is a process to enlarge the choices of all persons, not only for one part of society. It argues that gender issues must be understood as human rights issues, and that “development, if not engendered, is endangered” (p. 23).

In today’s world, the care and education of children require shared responsibility between governments and society. Without such commitment, one side of the boat - the family and mainly the mothers - will certainly be overloaded. There are many and intense external world demands on families: rising competition, increased professional instability, reduction in labour rights, the race for technological knowledge and the constant threat of unemployment and poverty. Under these circumstances, will it be possible to prevent the boat from sinking?

An ECEC integrated system requires firm political will, state responsibility, and a clear awareness of the comprehensiveness of the functions involved. Given these conditions, an ECEC policy should, under government leadership, involve all society in a joint and convergent enterprise.

Most countries have not reached this stage yet. Fundamental issues remain unsolved and demand urgent attention from governments, policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, and international organizations. One of the most important issues is our understanding the

concepts of early childhood education and care, responsibility for socialization of young children, diversity and context. The fundamental question remains: what kind of education for young children do we want and imagine?

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