



Early Childhood Education and Care - A strong engine for societal change and...a political choice

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*Rethinking the role of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH): towards a reflective and generative perspective
February 26th 2015, Brussels*





ISSA: who are we and what we do?

Early childhood development association of professionals, NGOs and universities. Established in The Netherlands in 1999. Now over 50 members in 35 countries primarily in Europe and Central Asia. More than 5000 Friends of ISSA. (www.issa.nl)

- Capacity Building
- Convening and Community Building
- Amplifying through advocacy

Three programmatic pillars:

- Access and equity of care and education for each young child
- High quality and professionalism in providing care and education for young children
- Empower parents and communities to participate in and support children's well-being, development and learning





Positioning Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Positive early childhood for every child is in the public interest and is a collective responsibility of all members of society.

As no policy is child neutral, public decision-making must take account of the impact on young children, their families and communities.

Quality early childhood education and care services must be a priority for the allocation of public resources.

*(Manifesto of the **Early Years Regional Alliance - EYRA***

<http://www.earlyyearsregionalalliance.nl>

Early childhood education and care is a political matter and decision!





Why?

What research says:

- The stage of life from conception to age 5 is conceptualized as a period of experience-based brain development and as a critical stage for the programming of neurobiological pathways that can affect health, learning and behaviour during the entire life cycle (Tinajero and Mustard, 2011).
- The early years of life are also seen as one of the world's most significant social determinants of health (WHO, 2008) and as a time when social environments and experiences get under the skin (Hertzman and Boyce, 2010).
- The development of the brain and the biological pathways can be influenced by biological risk factors (e.g. malnutrition, infectious diseases and, teratogens), social risk factors (e.g. caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness) and contextual risk factors (e.g. maternal depression) (Walker et al., 2007).





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What research says – few examples:

- The development of the brain and the biological pathways can be influenced by biological risk factors (e.g. malnutrition, infectious diseases and, teratogens), social risk factors (e.g. caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness) and contextual risk factors (e.g. maternal depression) (Walker et al., 2007).
- Well-designed and holistic programmes focusing on the care, health, cognitive and socio-emotional components of early childhood prepare children for lifelong learning and can help to mitigate the effects of deprivation, marginalization and intergenerational disadvantage (SOFRECO, 2012; EACEA, 2009).

But....





“Early childhood education and care needs to be of sufficient quality to achieve beneficial child-outcomes and yield long term social and economic gains. Research show that poor quality ECEC provision can have lasting detrimental effects on children development.”

(Investing in high-quality early childhood education and care. 2011. Education and Training Policy, OECD; Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. 2011. Communication from the European Commission - COM(2011) 66 final)





How we contribute to assuring Quality?

**ISSA's Framework for Quality Early
Childhood Practices from Children under
Three Years of age**





What we intended?

- Bridging research (education, health, social protection), practice and policy
- Bridging experts from different areas (education, health, social protection)
- Bridging services across sectors (promoting an integrated approach) – focusing on the child as an individual with multiple needs and on the family, not on institutions!





What we intended?

- Developing a culture of quality that is shared and promoted across levels of governance, workforce and experts – building a strong foundation in ECEC systems.
- Assuring inclusion and respect for diversity, as well as inter-sectoral cooperation are part of the Quality practices in all services
- Assuring smooth transitions across ages between services
- Bringing a broader understanding of ECEC as a “project” of a society, that requires a greater attention from policy makers.





How is it structured?

Putting the **Child's Rights Convention** as the foundation of providing quality ECEC services

9 Focus Areas:

Focus Area 1: **Relationships** (5 principles, 22 indicators)

Focus Area 2: **Family and Community** (4 principles, 16 indicators)

Focus Area 3: **Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy** (4 principles, 16 indicators)

Focus Area 4: **Health, Well-Being and Nutrition** (4 principles, 19 indicators)

Focus Area 5: **Development and Learning** (4 principles, 16 indicators)

Focus Area 6: **Observation, Documentation, Reflection and Planning** (4 principles, 17 indicators)

Focus Area 7: **Enabling Environments** (4 principles, 21 indicators)

Focus Area 8: **Professional Development** (2 principles, 11 indicators)

Focus Area 9: **Intersectoral Cooperation** (2 principles, 11 indicators)





What we plan to do?

International consultation – dialogue, reflection and generative actions -, agreement and endorsement

Piloting on the country level

- Nurture democratic policy dialogue among different stakeholders (policy makers, research, academia, practitioners, parents) for moving towards alignment of policies and practices
- Providing a platform for building a shared understanding of quality while keeping the child and family in focus
- Encourage innovative initiatives promoting integration in ECEC systems, including research
- Stressing the importance of responsive, respectful and reflective practices in the today's dynamic and unpredictable social and economic context
- Hear the voices of parents, practitioners and policy makers - learn about barriers and ways to overcome
- Opening opportunities for nurturing **professionalism** – seen as the THE way to meet child's and family needs!





What we plan to do?

In a nutshell:

Influence practice and policy

in a bottom-up (supporting professionals and leadership)

and

top down (influencing policy makers)

approach





ECEC and society

- No building can last without a solid foundation, and a solid foundation can allow many opportunities for building. However, the still low profile of ECEC in today's policy agenda of governments indicates that this long term investment is not a priority, even if it is proven that affects the human capital of the society.
- ECEC is not just a social service, it's a barometer for social inclusion, social cohesion, for democracy, for strategic planning in public policy, with implications in many sectors of the society.
- Although substantial evidence exists in favour of investments in high quality ECEC, strong policy advocacy is still needed.





Thank you!

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