

Building a strong and equal partnership between early childhood services and schools



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Contents of this presentation

1. **A very brief mention of the OECD *Starting Strong* reviews**
2. **Building strong and equal partnerships between ECS and schools**
 - **What is the general picture?**
 - **At central policy level, partnership takes place around two issues: transitions, continuity of curriculum –**
 - **What are countries doing?**
 - **Some explanations for the different approaches, with reference to two strong traditions: **pre-primary education and the Nordic social approach****

Part 1

What are the Starting Strong country reviews?

The OECD *Starting Strong* evaluations

From 1998-2004, twenty countries invited OECD teams to review their services

- Australia 
- Austria 
- Belgium F 
- Belgium F 
- Canada 
- Czech Rep 
- Denmark 
- Finland 
- France 
- Germany 
- Hungary 
- Ireland 
- Italy 
- Korea 
- Mexico 
- Netherlands 
- Norway 
- Portugal 
- Sweden 
- United Kingdom 
- United States 

Starting Strong I and II



- Vol. I put forward 8 key elements of ECEC policy
- Vol. II examines how countries have implemented these elements since 2001. Includes also several annexes:
 - Profiles of 20 countries
 - Research summaries showing positive socio-economic or educational effects from ECEC programmes

Part II

Building strong and equal partnerships between ECS and schools

A brief overview of the international situation

Building partnerships - where are we at the moment?

- **In integrated systems (Nordics, Slovenia, NZ, UK...), the partnership works if**
 - **If there is an organised childcare system**
 - **The specificity of early childhood pedagogy is recognised**
 - **If there is parity – more or less – between the professional staff in each sector, with respect to qualifications, pay and working conditions**

- **In split systems, partnerships are very weak and, in general, the responsibility for partnership is left to the good will of individual centres and educators**

A strong and equal partnership is demanding...

It means:

- **Reconceptualising the early childhood sector** (from pre-natal to 8 years) as the foundation stage of lifelong development and learning. It is in this period that the bases of our personal health, well-being, language and cognitive development are laid
- **Qualifying the people working in the sector as certified educators of young children**, with decent pay, promotion prospects and good working conditions
- **Look at the alternatives...** are they coherent with equality of opportunity for women or with quality in services?
- Efforts are being made, as governments recognise that the present situation does not serve the public interest. Today, at central policy level, partnerships tend to take place around two issues: **transitions** and **curriculum**

Part III

A look at transitions and curricula

What are countries doing to ease transitions for young children?

Many types of transition, but let's choose 5 common types:

1. Transitions for 0-3s from home to a childcare service

2. Transitions from childcare to kindergarten

3. Transitions for 3-6s to school

4. Direct transitions from home to school (a predictor of poor outcomes – educators are not in favour)

5. Daily transitions of children in childcare (wrap-around services)

Daily transitions may be necessary owing to parental schedules and obligations; to the absence of appropriate daycare services; to affordability reasons: to slot' services'... but essentially, psychologists are not much in favour...

Transitions for 0-3 – from home to childcare

- **In terms of public policy, most countries do not regulate this transition. The responsibility is left to centres and parents to provide a welcoming ambiance for newly enrolled children**
- **Promising public initiatives exist. Some countries**
 - **Prolong parental leave to at least one year – no infants in centres**
 - **Encourage centres to consult with parents about the preferences and needs of their child**
 - **Encourage all centres to allow a parental presence for some hours daily until the child settles**
 - **Have favourable staff ratios and training**
 - **Preserve a home-like and stimulating atmosphere in centres**

Transitions from childcare to kindergarten (European sense – early education)

- **Most European countries split childcare from early education, which generally extends from 3 to 6 years**
- **To some extent, countries may squeeze out pre-school services and replace them by an early start to school... Belgium, France, Britain... but a trade-off between numbers/finances (teacher qualifications and salaries) takes place - economically efficient but tough on children**
- **More appropriately (in terms of program), other countries integrate childcare and kindergarten into one pre-school service for 1-6 years – Nordics and increasingly Germany, Hungary... with reasonable child:staff ratios and open curricula**

Transitions from pre-school to school

Countries face this transition in different ways:

- **Most countries have no policy: they rely on centres and pedagogical initiatives by staff:** preparing children in advance; briefing the primary school, organising common training, consulting the expectations of parents and children
- **Through governance or regulation, many countries merge pre-school into school at a certain age (5 in Canada, but 2.5 years in Belgium). They impose a common concept of education – generally as preparation or readiness - ensuring continuity in subject fields and pedagogical methods. 4-7 or 5-8 becomes a common cycle with agreed learning areas (pre-lit), more effective instruction**

*But one may ask: in the preparation model, can the specificities of ECE (open curriculum, respect for child's interests and learning strategies, active, participative....) be respected?... (Child-rearing as **raising or supporting growth**).*

- **Some few countries aim for an integrated early childhood cycle from 1-6 years, with continuity of environment and method. They establish a half-way house – a pre-school class from 6-7 years: shared between the children's pedagogue and a teacher, a modified curriculum, furniture and materials familiar to the young children, active curriculum**

Curriculum

- **Already mentioned:** Some countries seek to ensure continuity by making EC a junior school . They have a common ‘junior’ cycle, agreed learning areas...
- Generally, they tend to carry down the primary school curriculum into the early childhood field, e.g. preparing children how to read.
 - Recent research from the American National Literacy Panel showing that basic alphabet skills, phonemic awareness ... support early literacy. .. Tempting practitioners to focus on skills-based instruction in a particular field (the ‘instrumental’ approach)
- Other countries see the purpose of early childhood services to widen children’s experiences and incite social interactions (the ‘experiential’ approach) , **a preparation for life**. In some cases, they purposefully seek to bring early childhood goals and pedagogies upward into primary education.

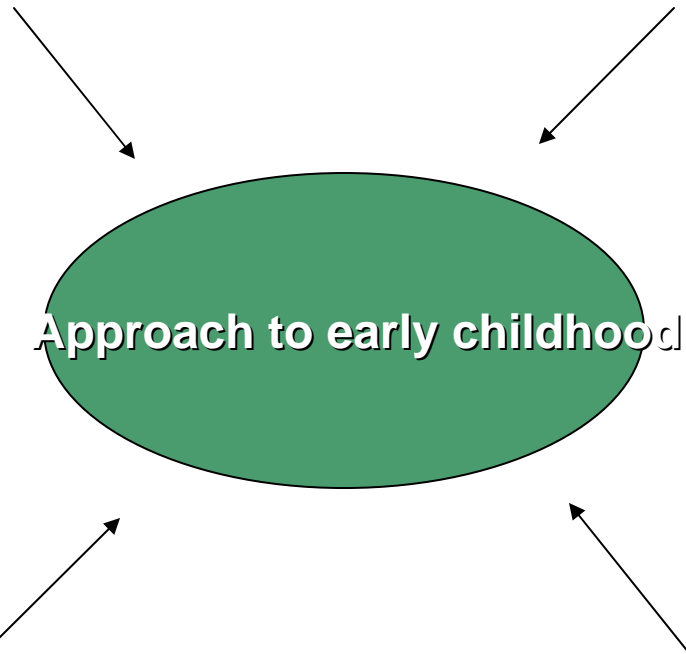
Part IV

Some explanations for the different approaches

Why do these different approaches exist? A balance of different elements

Theories of child-rearing,
pedagogy etc.

History of ECS in a country
Froebelian or instruction



Existing institutional
arrangements

Interests of professional
bodies and of social groups

The (19th century) instruction model

- **Child-rearing is a family matter... (later, the need for childcare grudgingly admitted - low funding and standards in the CC sector) ...a split system model**
- **'Infant' schools should be established to prepare children for school, esp. second language children – (“I will not speak Eskimo”). Education is induction into the majority language and government-decided skills**

The model is found today in: Australia, Belgium, France, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, UK (reception classes but not in the nursery school)

...a modified version in Canada & USA

■ Features

- **In childcare**, a focus on 'childcare' for children, keeping children safe while parents work;
- **In early education**, readiness for school predominates. Strong link with the primary school system... Attention is given to achieving curricular aims and to measuring individual performance. The parent and community dimensions are underplayed... except in at-risk situations (extended or comprehensive services); a readiness curriculum prepared by

The Nordic understanding

- **Child-rearing is a shared responsibility** between families and the state
- **The early childhood centre** is a social and educational service provided to all families. As a social institution, it is closely linked to social and gender equality issues, such as the elimination of poverty, equality of opportunity, universal services, parental leave... advanced training and reasonable salaries for the women employed in services
- **As an educational service**, preschool respects the natural interests and learning strategies of the child, but within a socialising (learning to live together) and rich learning environment (learning to learn). Educators support rather than teach.
- **Features:**
 - A focus on the whole child, on education in the broad sense.
 - A focus on quality... a play-based, active and experiential pedagogy... with an emphasis on the outdoors
 - Strong system and center monitoring (local authorities) but little desire to measure of individual child outcomes.
 - Strong parental and community outreach
 - A short core curriculum to guide early education practice, local interpretation is encouraged

Pedagogical goals

➤ The direct instruction tradition

1. **The early childhood centre:** Often seen as a junior school, a place of instruction, socialisation and preparation for school
2. **Approach to curriculum:** Centralised development of curriculum - stressing autonomy and competition
3. **Organisation of curriculum:** Often prescriptive: clear targets and outcomes, detailed competencies... Learning is stepped (sequential) – see first draft EYFS curriculum
4. **Focus of work:** A focus on learning standards, teachers, classroom environment, preparation for school, on literacy... Children can or cannot read... Teaching subjects privileged
5. **Approach to outputs:** It is necessary to reach government standards. High stakes assessments and sometimes testing required
6. **A focus on competence in the national language,** is sought. Technical approach and assessment: oral, phonemic... with some formal skills in writing and reading from an early age

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➤ The Swedish constructivist tradition

1. **The early childhood centre:** viewed as a life space, a place in which children and pedagogues “learn to be, learn to do, learn to learn, learn to live together”
2. **Approach to curriculum.** Conceived as a broad central guideline stressing fundamental aims and values - with local development of curriculum
3. **Organisation of curriculum:** Broad orientations rather than prescribed outcomes: play, music, arts, project work, interaction with peers and nature – the natural learning strategies of the child. Learning occurs informally (and in many places) and especially within the planned holistic experience (rich project work)
4. **Focus of work:** on a range of developmental goals and living together in a learning community of educators and peers... the competent child. Focus on communication, literacies... Culturally valued ‘topics of learning’ privileged... child interest
5. **Approach to outputs:** Parental and child satisfaction predominate. Holistic goals for each child to aspire to are set with unobtrusive, developmental assessment
6. **A growing focus on individual language and**

Many exceptions...

Many exceptions within the typologies, e.g.

- **The Broad School – Netherlands – English nursery school**
- **Concern of the Nordic countries to elaborate individual learning plans, and to assess child development and learning**



Broad developmental goals

Focussed cognitive goals

On the continuum, where does the focus fall ?

Depends on

- o **The age of the child**
- o **The tradition of early education in the country**
- o **The present curricular emphasis**
- o **The materials and resources available ... esp. child:staff ratios**
- o **The training of teachers and the conditions in which they**

To recapitulate :

The partnership between ECS and schools can work successfully for children if

- ❖ **The specificity and value of early childhood pedagogy is recognised**
- ❖ **If there is parity – more or less – between the professional staff in each sector, with respect to qualifications, pay and working conditions**

For this to happen, government intervention is needed

Thank you