



Report on the 1st OECD Starting Strong Network workshop

Policy on Diversity and Social Inclusion
in Early Childhood Education and Care

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Brussels

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I. About the network and the workshop

The OECD Starting Strong Network was established at the beginning of 2007, following the decision of the OECD Education Policy Committee at its meeting, 12-13 October, 2006. As stipulated in the *Draft Mandate for the Network* agreed by the Committee (EDU/EC (2006)24/Rev1 – see Annexe 1), the Belgian (Flanders) governmental agency, *Kind en Gezin*, was assigned responsibility for the organisation and management of the network until 2009. As agreed in the *Draft Mandate*, the Network programme of work will focus on:

- Developing, sharing and disseminating information on experiences, research and good practice of countries in the field;
- Serving as a clearing house of new policy research in the field and identifying new areas for fruitful policy research and analysis;
- Identifying data development needs and contributing to the development of methodology for developing such data;
- Organising workshops on selected policy themes;
- Facilitating contacts among researchers, policy makers and practitioners, and with international networks in related fields.

In accordance with this mandate, Kind en Gezin organised the present workshop at its headquarters in Brussels, 20-21st June 2007. The workshop theme, agreed after consultation with the Network Advisory Board, was *Policy on Diversity and Social Inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care*. The format of the workshop consisted of presentations and discussions on this theme for one day, followed by site visits to crèches, kindergartens and out-of-school care units on the second. The background paper for the meeting was prepared by **Michel Vandenbroeck**, Department of Social Welfare Studies, University of Ghent. The meeting was chaired by the Network Co-ordinator, **Bea Buysse**, Kind en Gezin.

II. Attendance at the workshop

The following country delegates participated

AUSTRIA : *Ms. Marisa KRENN-WACHE*, Head of Training College, Federal Training College of Kindergarten Pedagogues

BELGIUM FLANDERS: *Ms. Veronique ADRIAENS*, Assistant to the director, Department of Education Flemish Community

BELGIUM FRENCH: *Mr. Michel VANDEKEERE*, Senior Researcher, Observatoire de l'Enfance, de la Jeunesse et de l'Aide à la Jeunesse, Communauté Française de Belgique

CANADA: *Ms. Glennie GRAHAM*, Director, Child and youth policy division, Human resources and social development Canada, Government of Canada and *Ms. Lois ZELMER*, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Learning

FINLAND: *Ms. Tarja KAHILUOTO*, Senior Officer, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

IRELAND: *Mr. Heino SCHONFELD*, Director, Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

KOREA : *Ms. Mugyeong MOON*, Director of Trend Analysis and International Cooperation, KICCE (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education)

THE NETHERLANDS: *Mr. Peter WINIA*, Senior policy advisor, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

NEW ZEALAND: *Ms. Natasha KUKA*, Senior Policy Analyst, Ministry of Education

NORWAY: *Ms. Kari JACOBSEN*, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research

PORTUGAL : *Ms. Liliana MARQUES*, Pre-school teacher, Direcção Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular and *Ms. Luísa UCHA*, Director of School Education Service, Direcção Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular

SLOVENIA: *Ms. Nada POŽAR MATIJAŠIČ*, Undersecretary, Ministry of Education and Sport, Education Development Office

SWEDEN: *Mr. Christer TOFTÉNIUS*, Senior Administrative Officer, Ministry of Education and Research Division for School

UK – ENGLAND: *Ms. Sam MASON*, Head of Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Research Team Department for Education and Skills and *Ms. Valerie WHITE*, Sure Start Policy Team, Department for Education and Skills.

UK - NORTHERN IRELAND: *Ms. Patricia McVeigh*, Head of Early Years Policy, Department of Education

Participation from the OECD: *Ms. Miho TAGUMA*, Policy Officer, Education and Training Policy Division

For Kind en Gezin: *Ms. Bea BUYSSE* (chair); *Ms. Cynthia BETTENS* and *Ms. Kris DANCKAERT* (support team); *Mr. John BENNETT* and *Mr. Will VERNIEST* (experts)

Experts: *Mr. Jan PEETERS* (Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education), *Ms. Myriam SOMMER* (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance)

Special invitee: *Mr. Gaby HOSTENS* (Education Policy Committee)

The following country was excused: AUSTRALIA

III. A presentation of the programme of the workshop (see Annexe 2)

The workshop was opened by *Ms. Bea Buysse*, co-ordinator of the network, who gave a short introduction on the mission and status of the network and the theme of the workshop. *Ms. Miho Taguma*, OECD Policy Officer, situated the background and the mission of the network. *Ms. Taguma* also drew the attention of the meeting to the importance of early services to indigenous children and children with disabilities.

The keynote was presented by *Prof. Michel Vandebroeck* of the Department of Social Welfare Studies of the University of Ghent, who has many years experience on diversity and social inclusion. The keynote was commented by *Ms. Anne Lambrechts*, co-ordinator of several day care centres in Brussels with specific expertise on social inclusion and *Prof. Kris Van den Branden* of the Centre for Language and Education, who presented some material on language acquisition among young children, with special reference to children from low SES backgrounds. The keynote and the comments were followed by a plenary discussion, in which participants had the possibility to make comments or ask questions. The plenary discussion was moderated by *Mr. Jan Peeters*, director of the Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education.

The afternoon began with a presentation of a proposal to establish a specialized website for the network by *Ms. Kris Danckaert*. This was followed by a presentation by *Mr. John Bennett* of a simplified new format for the country profiles, with a time schedule for the data collection and writing. Immediately afterwards, the participants were divided into three groups to discuss the policy implications of the keynote address, to provide information about their own countries, and to put forward policy suggestions to improve social inclusion in early childhood systems and services. After the small group discussion there was a plenary session to provide feedback from the small group discussions to all participants and to put forward some policy options, followed by a presentation of *Ms. Natasha Kuka* on the policy developments on early education in New Zealand and *Mr. Peter Winia* on the policy developments on early education in the Netherlands.

The first day ended with a proposal for the next workshop of the network in November.

The programme of the following day was devoted to site visits. These took place in Ghent, at the invitation of the Child Care Department of the City of Ghent. After a presentation at the City Hall of municipal policies on diversity and social inclusion, the delegates were brought to five different services in deprived areas in the city. These areas were characterized by high numbers of immigrants, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged families.

The workshop ended with some time for conclusions and comments from country delegates.

IV. A summary of the discussions

Discussions were organised both during the plenary sessions and in the organized small group discussions.

The plenary discussions focused on the keynote presentation and the comments made by two experts. A number of important themes and messages emerged:

1. *To avoid negative labelling of children and families from minority backgrounds in terms of race or ethnic characteristics*, or as expressed by Michel Vandebroek: "Do not 'culturalize' structural aspects". If children from minority families underachieve in education, it is generally due to structural issues, including both material and social deprivation. Deprivation is exemplified in families suffering from social exclusion (particularly in the employment field); from low parental levels of education; from social discrimination and from weak aspirations or hopes for themselves or for their children's education. Research suggests that when social and educational outcomes are controlled for socio-economic background and access to quality educational services, there is little difference in educational achievement among families from different ethnic groups. At the same time, public authorities need to support the social integration, education and employment of ethnic groups to ensure that children born in these groups do not fall behind because of structural factors. This will entail upstream policies concerning employment, housing, avoiding ghettos... and at early childhood and school levels, enhanced funding of children from deprived backgrounds within more open and comprehensive programmes.
2. *To undertake research both on general (e.g. how children learn) and local issues*. An interesting piece of Flemish research linking children's language acquisition to pedagogical methodology, presented by *Prof. Kris Van den Branden* provoked lively discussion. The research concluded that open, informal learning with many opportunities for children's participation was the most effective environment for language acquisition. The discussion centred around how to organise such environments. The difficulty of ensuring an open, participatory environment in classes with unfavourable child/staff ratios was raised. Local research is also necessary, not least on parental choices and preferences. Again, these choices are often culturalised, but in fact, they are largely determined by the current offer of services and the environment, both to particular families and/or to the neighbourhood at large. Exhorting parents from minority groups to use services is a waste of time. What is important for these parents is the availability and affordability of quality services in their neighbourhood... and their relationships with institutions of the state. There is always the need to 'contextualize' ECEC services.
3. *To promote the role of parents in supporting the learning of their children*. Reference was made to the important British EPPE study showing that *what parents do* can offset *what parents are*. Whatever the socio-economic background, simple but regular support by parents to their children's learning, - such as reading aloud to children every day and

supporting the kindergarten program at home – can greatly help language and literacy acquisition. An important aim of early childhood services must be outreach to parents, to encourage their involvement in their children's development and learning.

4. *To move toward a 'pedagogy of diversity' that combines social and educational approaches toward socially excluded families and children.* To ensure readiness for school is a central aim of ECEC, particularly as children approach compulsory school age, but 'readiness' must be seen in broad terms. 'Preparing children for school' should include a gradual and respectful induction of parents into mainstream childrearing practices, social values, and educational expectations... We need to move away from the position: "There is no problem with the ECEC system... we only need to 'adapt' parents to the ECEC practices in place." Simply following an educational programme is not enough: the beliefs and needs of local families must be taken into account.

The insights of health and social workers are needed within early childhood services, in particular in deprived neighbourhoods. Comprehensive services go beyond curriculum and activities for children and focus also on the home and community environments. Typically, a comprehensive services centre works in co-operation with other community services and pays particular attention to families and communities. The centre will provide, when necessary, health and social support, courses and advice on parenting (in particular, how to support child development), employment and job training, and leisure activities. In addition, the composition of staff should reflect the public that is served: not only qualified staff but also diversity of staff. Recent research shows that *greater financing* per child, *greater duration of access* (starting at an early age, using long-day services, that cover also school holidays...) and *greater intensity of programming* (programs focussed on learning, both social and educational ... using the child's natural learning strategies: play, collaborative interaction, active learning... Pre-defined, academic standards and approaches can lead to a wrong emphasis in ECEC) is needed for children 'at-risk'.

In addition, governments and municipalities need to attend to family and social policies linked to education. Some cities consciously influence housing policy, transport systems and enrolment procedures in order to maintain mixed neighbourhoods and mixed groups in ECEC centres and schools. Research shows that mixed groups are favourable to learning and language acquisition than ethnic schools. Developments in Ghent show that policy can change neighbourhoods and move them toward more mixed populations. In parallel, very good services in poor neighbourhoods can attract a diverse public.

5. *To provide adequate initial and in-service training to staff:* It is important that early childhood teachers should be certified in early learning theory and early childhood pedagogy. Teachers trained predominantly in primary school methodologies may put an excessive emphasis on instructional methods or on reaching academic standards. In addition, student teachers may not receive supervised practica or may be assigned to 'easy' schools', avoiding schools in 'problem' areas. In consequence, they do not get

experience in working with minority families. Training must be continued during the professional career, as social contexts and learning goals change so rapidly in contemporary societies. The need for better school leadership was also put forward.

The co-operation between professionals and non-professionals was also examined in a presentation by *Ms. Anne Lambrechts*, who is co-ordinator of several day care centers in Brussels with specific expertise on social inclusion. In her services, many professionals began their career as non-professionals, but reached professional status through following formal training during their employment. Job descriptions differ between professionals and non-professionals, although work takes place always in teams: professionals are responsible for the observations of the children while non-professionals take on more technical tasks. In other services, without specific training, professionals often find it difficult to work in teams with non-professionals.

In the afternoon of the first day, the participants were divided into three small groups to discuss the policy implications of the keynote address, to provide information about their own countries, and to put forward policy suggestions to improve social inclusion in early childhood systems and services. A preparatory document (see Annexe 3) based on Michel Vandebroeck's paper and conclusions from Starting Strong II had been prepared to provide information for the discussions.

- **Group 1:**

Group 1 focussed on ECEC programming on ECEC for children at-risk, defined at first as children from low income families but then more widely as all vulnerable children. The group found it important to put forward concrete targets for access, based on reliable statistics on the levels of access reached in different countries. Several discussants felt that there is a need for curricula in the day care sector in order to improve quality. However, an early childhood curriculum should not be like a traditional school curriculum, but is more open and focuses on approaches and activities similar to the ECEC curricula used in the Nordic countries.

- **Group 2:**

Group 2 began with a short overview of recent evolutions in the different countries. All countries represented in the group are confronted with mobility and migration, although in different ways. The question concerning: in which language ECEC ought to be offered, was a point of discussion. Countries differ on that point. The enrolment of minority groups in ECEC also received attention. How can participation be increased? Many programmes are available but they are not always used. Migration is a challenge for the quality of ECEC – a challenge that is often combined with other challenges.

- **Group 3:**

Group 3 discussed some points of special interest for social inclusion in the domain of ECEC. The best guarantee of inclusion in ECEC for children from minority groups and children with special needs are publicly funded universal services of high quality. Free early childhood

education has a positive effect on access, but it is important that these services should be non-compulsory.

A diverse workforce is also important, but gender diversity is hampered by the status of the workforce. Status has to be increased. Instruments for increasing status: career progression and equal pay linked to salaries in the schools should be pursued. Diversity in staffing is necessary to change cultural perceptions. Teacher training should be more sensitive to diversity. The content of teacher training is often insufficient with regard to diversity and special needs. Teachers need to be able to recognize special needs. There is a need also to increase monitoring and self evaluation of the services. ECEC should be seen as the foundation stage of life long learning.

V. The decisions taken

The following decisions were adopted by the workshop participants:

• November workshop, 2007

In the course of May, countries were invited to make their choice from a list of possible themes. Delegates endorsed the theme with the highest score and chose the topic: ***Beyond regulation: effective quality initiatives in ECEC*** as the theme for the November 2007 workshop. Kind en Gezin invites the delegates to make proposals in the coming weeks concerning:

- The treatment of the topic and the format of the meeting
- Whether one or two countries would like to volunteer to present successful initiatives they have employed, and the obstacles to quality that they encountered;
- An expert or experts for a background paper and keynote presentation
- Documents and reports on the topic, useful for all countries to read

• Proposal from the Portuguese delegation

Ms. Luisa Ucha, (Director of School Education Services, Ministry of Education, Portugal), proposed to host, in March/April 2008, a workshop in Lisbon on the theme: *Transition from kindergarten to school*. The proposal was warmly received by the delegates and accepted. Kind en Gezin will engage discussions with the Portuguese delegates as soon as possible, concerning the organization, content and format of this workshop. Kind en Gezin welcomes further comments and advice from other national delegates concerning the initiative (see November workshop above).

- **A specialized website for the Network**

On behalf of Kind en Gezin, Ms. Kris Danckaert proposed to set up a specialised policy website for the Starting Strong Network. The delegates welcomed and accepted the proposal with enthusiasm. In summary, the website will have two levels: a general access level containing policy documents and links to relevant policy websites, including a selection of national websites from each participating country. The second level, with an access code provided only to delegates from participating countries, will include more confidential information, such as the Network programme, workshops, reports, country data, documents sent out for discussion and other confidential materials. The first part will be ready for use in September 2007. The second part will be ready for use by the end of the year, after further consultations with the ICT department concerning the technological aspects.

- **The schedule and format for revising the Country Profiles**

The proposed schedule and format for revising the Country Profiles was also adopted unanimously, namely,

- January-February, 2008: draft profiles will be sent to the member countries.
- Return of corrected and complete profiles before 30th March 2008
- Complete mailing of reformatted, revised profiles to ministries for final checking before 4th June 2008
- Ministries return each profile before 30th June 2008
- Submission to website by 1st August 2008 for publication in September 2008

The format for each country profile will include sections on: *Social and family contexts*, *System organisation*; *System funding*; *Access*; *Quality indicators*; and *Policy issues and developments*

VI. The site visits

The site visits took place in Ghent, at the invitation of the Child Care Department, City of Ghent. The visits were organised and commented by Mr. Jan Peeters (Director VBJK, the Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education, University of Ghent). After a presentation at the City Hall of municipal policies on diversity and social inclusion (speakers: Mr. Danny Verdonck (Child Care department of the city of Ghent); Ms. Chris De Kimpe and Ms. Marleen Vermassen (Early Childhood Advisory Service), the delegates were brought to five different services in deprived areas in the city. These areas were characterised by high numbers of immigrants, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged families.

➤ *'t Kriebelhuis and Pereboompje*

This facility includes:

- ◆ A day care centre (0-3 years) with two mixed-age groups. The children attending come from a low socio-economic and ethnically diverse background;
- ◆ A school-age child care centre for 30 children up to 7 years of age;
- ◆ A preschool (kleuterschool, école maternelle) for 45 children from 2.5 to 6 years. The children, largely of Turkish descent, are divided into two classes (2.5 to 4 and 4 to 6 years).

The provision focuses on accessibility for children, on parents and staff from disadvantaged groups, on parents' participation, on enhancing children's opportunities through community work and on respect for diversity.

➤ *De Palmboom*

The facility includes

- ◆ A day care centre for 42 children from 0 to 3 years in mixed-age groups. It is located in new premises, opened in March 2007.
- ◆ A school age child care centre for 60 toddlers up to 7 years, mainly from Turkish descent. This centre serves an adjacent school in which 90% of the children enrolled have been categorised as the target group of affirmative action plans.

The provision focuses on accessibility for children, on parents and staff from disadvantaged groups, on parents' participation, on enhancing children's opportunities through community work and on respect for diversity.

➤ *'t Sleepken and De Triangel*

The facility includes:

- ◆ A day care centre for 42 children from 0 to 3 years in three mixed-age groups;
- ◆ A school age child care centre for 30 children from 2.5 to 6 years from the adjacent school;
- ◆ A preschool (kleuterschool, école maternelle) for 66 children from 2.5 to 6 years, in three classes (from 2.5 to 4 and from 4 to 6 years).
- ◆ A primary school with 85 children, composed of 15 different nationalities. It also welcomes children of illegal immigrants. The school has 100% children who have been categorised as the target group of affirmative action plans,.

The provision focuses on accessibility for children, on parents and staff from disadvantaged groups, on parents' participation, on community work and respect for diversity, on the right to develop ones full potential at ones own rhythm and pace and on multiple language development.

➤ *Sloeberken/Trappenhuis*

The facility includes:

- ◆ A day care centre for 28 children from 0 to 3 years in two mixed-age groups
- ◆ A school age child care centre for 50 children from 2.5 to 6 years from the adjacent school
- ◆ A primary school

The provision focuses on an enrolment policy that reflects the diversity of the neighbourhood, on collaboration with parents and the local community, on the pedagogical ideas of Freinet and on 'experiential learning' with ethnic minority children.

➤ *Mandala*

The facility includes:

- ◆ a school age child care for 22 children from the adjacent school
- ◆ a preschool (kleuterschool, école maternelle) for 40 children in two classes (2.5 to 4 and 4 to 6 years)
- ◆ a primary school with 29 children from 6 to 10 years in two classes. The school has 90% children who have been categorised as the target group of affirmative action plans, from a variety of origins.

The provision focuses on the pedagogical ideas of Freinet and 'experiential learning', on functionality and systematic learning, on respect for diversity, on parents' participation in communication, working groups and curriculum planning, on cooperation with the local community and on support of multilingualism.

VII. A summary of the country reports on ECEC policy approaches to diversity and social inclusion

Eight countries replied to the Kind en Gezin's request for information about social exclusion and diversity, viz. Belgium – Flanders; Finland; Ireland; New Zealand; Norway, Slovenia; Sweden and UK-England. Rather than treat each country in turn – which will be the format of the Country Profiles – we provide a brief summary of positive developments in this field, mentioned by countries in their reports. All available country reports can be downloaded at the website of the network (www.startingstrong.net).

1. Definitions of social exclusion and legislation: Both Flanders and Slovenia provide definitions of social exclusion, in the former based on six selection criteria (the family's monthly income; the parents' educational level; children's physical development, the parent's employment situation, and housing and health) and in the latter, as certification by the local social work centre of the precarious social status of the family. If stigmatisation can be avoided, such definitions are helpful as they allow statistical treatment of child deprivation and provide clear access criteria to ECEC services, e.g. in Slovenia, children whose parents submit a certificate, issued by the centre of social work, have priority in enrolment in a pre-school institution. Special needs children also have priority in enrolment.

Several other countries have legislation or regulations to protect children from deprived and/or second language backgrounds. The three Nordic countries mentioned above have clauses in their curricula giving special treatment in kindergartens to these children, e.g. the Swedish curriculum states: *The pre-school should try to ensure that children, whose first language is not Swedish, should develop their cultural identity as well as their ability to communicate in both Swedish and their first language.* Finland provides day care in both Finnish and Swedish (the national languages of Finland) and in the Sámi language in Lapland. Day care centres are also directed to support the development of the language and culture of Romany speakers and the children of various immigrant groups. New Zealand likewise takes cultural diversity seriously and encourages services to be responsive to the communities they work with. Māori language and Pasifika language services are an important part of the early childhood network. The national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is a bicultural document that includes both English and components.

2. Financing : The contribution from the UK-England provides much financing information: *The Government has invested over £21 billion on early years and childcare services since 1997 as part of an unprecedented expansion of provision for young children and families. In addition, we are providing substantial help (£3 million a day) to lower and middle income families with their childcare costs through the tax credit system.*¹ Several other instances of government support to expanding provision in the most disadvantaged areas are provided, e.g. day care places through

¹ A difficulty with presenting figures in this way is their lack of comparability with what pertained beforehand or with current GNP, with the numbers of children to be served or with educational expenditure in general. However, there is little doubt that the trend is in the right direction.

Neighbourhood Nurseries; integrated early learning, health and family services through Sure Start Local programmes... with a future move to universal Sure Start Children's Centres for all children under five and their families (2,500 centres) by 2008. Working families are also helped by the Working Tax Credit and there are further moves to make child care more affordable for families in London and other local authorities. Other countries did not provide information about providing services to children at risk (understandable in Norway which through active redistribution, social and family policies has brought child poverty to around 2%).

3. The state of deprivation and child poverty: Many countries provided figures on second-language children, but only Belgium-Flanders gave exact figures on the state of child poverty and on the access of children from under-privileged backgrounds to ECEC services. The section merits citation and reflection:

Use of child care by ethnic minority children and children from underprivileged families younger than three years is much lower than in the population as a whole (2004). Only 23.7% of ethnic minority children and 21.7% of children in underprivileged families use child care on a regular basis. The lowest rate of use is noted for ethnic minority children who also belong to underprivileged families (12.7%). Children in one-parent families also make less use of child care than the general population: 48% of these children were making regular use of child care.

The cost of childcare plays a part. In subsidized child care, the price is dependent on income. Child care is reasonably cheap for people with a low income. However the cost of child care is not legally regulated in independent/private (non funded) child care, which makes this form of child care less accessible for these parents.

<u>Use of child care by disadvantaged groups</u>			
	Regular use	Limited use	No use
Ethnic minority children	23.7	6.7	69.5
Children in underprivileged families	21.7	5.9	72.4
of which			
Children in underprivileged Belgian families	29.7	3.4	66.9
Children in underprivileged ethnic minority families	12.7	7.9	79.4
Children in one-parent families	48.0	11.4	40.6
All children	55.7	10.1	34.2

Such figures provides policy-makers in Flanders with a strong statistical and research base on which to base early childhood and family policy.

Other countries provided examples of programmes for socially excluded children and families (see Section 5 below). They also cited key legislation or their curricula in this regard, e.g. the new Norwegian curriculum notes that: *Kindergartens have a particular responsibility for preventing*

social problems and for discovering children with special needs. However, the Norwegian Ministry of Education takes the view that future efforts to level out social differences should focus attention on factors within the education system, which can promote better learning for everyone, rather than on external circumstances that the education system can do little about.

4. Second language children: Most countries provided valuable information about second-language children. Again, the Nordic curricula are the most forthright about the supports to be given to these children. The Finnish National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (given in 2003) provides guidelines in operating multicultural ECEC services:

Children belonging to cultural minorities should be provided with opportunities to grow up in a multicultural society as members of both their own cultural communities and Finnish society. Early education and care for these children is provided within mainstream ECEC services, each child belonging to a group of children and receiving support for social interactions.

Publicly operated ECEC services in Finland will be based on general ECEC goals, paying attention to child's cultural background and mother tongue... The primary responsibility for retaining and developing the child's own language and culture rests with the family. In ECEC, children are encouraged to use their own language. As far as possible, the development of the children's mother tongue is also supported in ECEC activities by making use of the knowledge and competence of their and their parents' own language environment.

Through participation in ECEC, children with different language and culture backgrounds have possibilities to learn Finnish or Swedish as their second language in natural situations with other children and educators. In addition, children need guidance in adopting and using the language. The ways in which the child's language and culture are to be supported are specified in the individual ECEC plan drawn up jointly with parents.

In ECEC, the child's own culture, customs and history are studied and appreciated, and they form a visible part of the daily activities. In co-operation with parents and different cultural communities, efforts are made to maintain children's cultural traditions and to support their possibilities to express their own cultural background in ECEC.

In addition, an Advisory Board on ECEC was established in February 2005 by the Government to support and promote the broad-based development of ECEC. It consists of representatives from administration, research, education, organizations and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. Since multicultural issues are now current in many municipalities cross Finland, the Advisory Board established a division for multicultural ECEC issues in 2007 to make suggestions concerning how to develop multiculturalism in ECEC services.

5. Recent developments and promising policies: All countries report new developments in their policies to support social inclusion and diversity.

- *Flanders*: a new recognition is growing in all circles that the three societal functions of child care (economic, social and education)² are of equal value. In the Flanders context, particular attention is now being paid to the social function. 16 pilot projects are being established, which will be evaluated by September next year. The results of this evaluation will be the basis for new legislation. The plan also foresees the coordination and cooperation of several sectors. Kind en Gezin, which has contact with a high number of families in the context of preventive medical care, will play a greater role in stimulating vulnerable families to send their children to the kindergarten on a more regular base.

- *Finland*: The Day Care Act stipulates that all children have equal access to day care and that each municipality should make available the services of special kindergarten teachers according to need. The National Curriculum Guidelines lay out the principles governing services for children with special needs. They stress co-operation with parents and the staff in assessing the need of support. Measures to support the child through ECEC activities are to be initiated immediately after becoming aware of the need of support. The aim is to prevent the child's need for support from accumulating and becoming prolonged. As far as possible, support should be provided in the context of general ECEC services so that the child acts as a member of the group with other children. In addition, attention is being given to the child's individual ECEC plan. According to the Law on the Position and Rights of Clients in Social Welfare, each client must have a service plan unless it is not seen necessary. This service plan applies also to children in day care. A government bill is now in preparation to reform the Day Care Act to develop this service plan. The aim is to replace the former rehabilitation plan for children with special needs by an individual ECEC plan made for all children. The plan should describe how the child's individual guidance and ECEC activities are combined, and what changes are to be made in the educational activities and the physical environment.

- *Ireland*: Ireland has experienced an unprecedented increase of immigration from many parts of the world over the past 10 years. The Office of the Minister for Children is funding the *Éist* (Listen!) programme, an anti-bias training project to support work with immigrant and native minority language and cultural groups.

- *New Zealand*: From 1 July government will be fully funding the cost of ECE for three and four year olds for up to 20 hours per week. This initiative is designed to increase participation in ECE by removing a major barrier – cost. ECE services will not be able to charge parents fees for the Free ECE hours their child receives. On 31 December 2007, 50% of staff in teacher-led services will need to be early childhood qualified. The Ministry of Education has a range of initiatives to increase the supply of qualified ECE teachers.³ These

² A fourth function is to ensure the health and development of children (a responsibility ensured in several European countries by free child health clinics). Within the social and educational functions, the aim of promoting participation and democracy should not be overlooked – JB.

initiatives include Study Grants, TeachNZ Scholarships, and the ECE Incentive Grant which is paid to services supporting a teacher to gain a first ECE teaching qualification.

- *Norway*: The Ministry of Education and Research presented a White Paper 'Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning' (Report No 16 2006-2007) earlier this year. Its goals are to diminish class distinctions, reduce economic inequity and combat poverty and other forms of marginalisation. Society must develop in a way which power, benefits and obligations are distributed in the fairest possible way. The Government has decided that 2008 will be 'The Year of Diversity'.
- *Slovenia*: The principles in the Preschool Institution Act are: democracy, pluralism, staff's autonomy, professionalism and responsibility, equal opportunity for children and parents, taking into account differences among children, choice and the right to be different. The Act provides the possibility of establishing groups of children with a more favorable staff to child ratio, e.g. for children with special needs in the group or in the case of Roma children.
- *Sweden*: The multicultural role of pre-school has been made clearer in the curriculum (2005). Bilingual, mother tongue and cultural support staff should give important extra support to young children. Production support for educational materials in languages other than Swedish has been increased. The National Agency for School Improvement has also developed a *Mother Tongue* theme site on the web (<http://modersmal.skolutveckling.se>). The aim is to provide information and an opportunity for discussion, for everyone who is interested in Mother Tongue Support (as tuition in mother tongue to pre-school children is called in Sweden), the teaching of Mother Tongue Studies, and study guidance provided in students' mother tongue. The different mother tongue rooms in the site contain information and tools for communicating in different languages. These rooms are run by active mother tongue teachers at both pre-school and school level. At the moment 29 languages are presented and an additional six new mother tongue language rooms will be set up.
- *UK – England*: Section 2 above on financing outlines the many initiatives for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The basis of progress was a government commitment in 1998 to halve child poverty by 2010 and eliminate it by 2020. Improving access to ECEC, especially in deprived areas, has been a major strategy in this policy.

VIII. A summary of the evaluations submitted by the delegates after the meeting

Participants had the possibility to submit an evaluation form at the end of the workshop. The evaluation focussed on the items below and included a section for 'any other remarks'. In summary, the overall evaluation is as follows:

³ More than 57% of all teachers are qualified in New Zealand (this does not include parent-run services). However, these teachers are not spread evenly across services.

	1 = Not pleased to 4=Very pleased			
	1	2	3	4
The content of the workshop				
The main presentation and comments	0	0	3	10
The plenary discussion	0	2	7	4
The small group discussions	0	5	3	3
<i>Some confusion around the objectives and expected outcomes of the small group discussions. More clarity would help to focus the discussion more consistently across the groups.</i>				
<i>Better to indicate a chairperson and a rapporteur in advance.</i>				
The presentation of selected country policy evolutions	1	3	5	3
<i>The countries selected may need to receive more guidance on what information to provide. There was a considerable level of inconsistency between the provided information by the two countries.</i>				
The site visits	2	1	4	5
<i>It was great to visit an early childhood service, but it was unfortunate that it took nearly a whole day to visit only one service.</i>				
<i>Visit was not well prepared by the co-ordinator of the early childhood service.</i>				
The organisation of the workshop				
The accommodation	0	3	5	4
<i>Acoustics: difficult to hear what was said during the plenary sessions.</i>				
The accessibility	0	1	2	10
The food and beverages	0	0	3	10
The information in advance	0	1	4	7

In general

The usefulness of the information and contacts	0	0	5	8
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The efforts and hospitality of our Belgium hosts was wonderful and it was very interesting to talk to representatives of other countries about their experiences and practices.

General impression	0	0	8	5
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In summary then, the practical logistics of the workshop received praise, except for the distance travelled to Ghent to visit (for some participants) only one site. The participants were less satisfied with the workshop discussions. They expressed the wish to have them more focussed, and for the participants to be better prepared. For this reason, as one participant suggested, it may be helpful to request a short paper - at least 2 or 3 weeks in advance – from the participating countries on the workshop theme. Likewise, the country interventions (which most participants welcomed, as it gives an opportunity to learn quickly about policies in a particular field) need to be better formatted.

Kind en Gezin will work on both these aspect so that discussions can be more focussed and effective, and that a better level of comparability can emerge from the country descriptions. A reflection on the first (plenary session) day is also needed. With several interventions in one morning, there is the danger of information overload. Suggestions about simplifying the format or lengthening the workshop to three days also need to be discussed.

IX. Annexes

Annexe 1. The mandate of the Network

Mission

The Network supports the mandate of the Education Policy Committee to assist countries to develop effective and efficient policies for education and learning to meet individual, social, cultural and economic objectives. The Network aims to support the development of effective and efficient approaches and good practice in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy in participating countries by:

- Developing, sharing and disseminating information on experience, research and good practice of country experiences in the field.
- Serving as a clearing house of new policy research in the field and identifying new areas for fruitful policy research and analysis.
- Identifying data development needs and contributing to the development of methodology for developing such data.
- Organising workshops on selected policy themes.
- Facilitating contacts among researchers, policy-makers and practitioners and among other international networks in related fields.

Membership

The Network is open to OECD member countries, observers to the Education Policy Committee and other non-member economies in line with the global relations strategy of the Committee as approved by the Council.

Working Methods

The Network will be hosted by a member country who will appoint an international co-ordinator to actively engage, sustain and develop communication among a network of national co-ordinators. The Network shall provide regular reports to the Education Policy Committee for monitoring the progress, quality and timeliness of outputs.

Evaluation

An evaluation exercise will be conducted prior to the end of the mandate period by the Education Policy Committee. The extent and format of the evaluation will be decided by the Education Policy Committee. The evaluation will be conducted within the framework of the recommendations of the Council Evaluation Sub-Group.

Duration

This mandate shall enter into force on 1 January 2007 and shall expire on 31 December 2011, unless the Education Policy Committee decides to terminate it earlier.

Annexe 2. Programme of the workshop

Wednesday 20 June 2007

- 9.00 - 9.30 Welcome and coffee
- 9.30 - 9.40 Opening of the workshop by Ms. Bea Buysse, Network Co-ordinator
- 9.40 - 9.50 Background to the OECD Starting Strong Network by the OECD
- 9.50 - 10.30 Main presentation on *Policy on Diversity and Social Inclusion in ECEC* by Mr. Michel Vandebroeck, University of Ghent
- 10.30 - 10.45 Coffee break
- 10.45 - 11.30 Comments by Ms. Anne Lambrechts, coordinator Elmer Brussels, day care centre and Mr. Kris Van Den Branden, University of Louvain, Centre for Language and Education
- 11.30 - 12.15 Plenary discussion, moderated by Mr. Jan Peeters, director of VBJK, the Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education
- 12.15 - 13.30 Lunch
- 13.30 - 14.00 Presentation of the new website of the network by Ms. Kris Danckaert
- 14.00 - 14.30 Presentation and discussion on data collection/country profiles by Mr John Bennett
- 14.30 - 16.00 Small group discussions
- 16.00 - 16.30 Coffee break
- 16.30 - 17.30 Plenary session:
- Feedback from the small group discussions
 - Presentation of selected country policy developments
 - New Zealand
 - The Netherlands
 - Announcements
- 19.30 Dinner at 'Errerahuis' in Brussels

Thursday 21 June 2007

- 8.00 Transfer to Ghent by bus
- 9.15 - 12.30 Welcome to Ghent and site visits
- Presentation of the policy of Ghent on diversity and social inclusion by Ms. Jeanine De Buysscher, Ms. Chris De Kimpe and Ms. Marleen Vermassen

- Site visits
 - *'t Kriebelhuisje* and *'t Pereboompje* (day care centre / school-age child care centre / pre-school)
 - *De Palmboom* (day care centre / school age child care centre)
 - *'t Sleepken* and *De Triangel* (day care centre / school age child care centre / preschool / primary school)
 - *Sloeberken/Trappenhuis* (day care centre / school age child care centre / primary school)
 - *Mandala* (school age child care / preschool / primary school)

12.30 - 14.00 Lunch at 'Het Pand' in Ghent

14.00 - 15.00 Conclusions and comments from country delegates

15.00 – 16.00 Free walk in the city of Ghent

16.00 Transfer to Brussels by bus

Annexe 3. Keynote and presentations

- *Keynote paper of Prof. Michel Vandebroeck*

Abstract

There is growing attention for early childhood education in general and for the issues of diversity and social inclusion in particular. Different perspectives may be adopted to analyse this issue. From an economic perspective, the educational divide in post-industrial societies is worrying and this reframes early childhood education as an investment in later society. However, a closer analysis not only reveals that early childhood education matters, but that not all early childhood education matters in the same way. Respect for diversity seems to be central in this discussion. It implies a child-centred curriculum that fosters multiple belongings as well as the agency of children to shape their own identities. In order to do so, curricula will take into account parents' perspectives. They will also challenge existing inequities. These may be situated on the macro level of accessibility and affordability but also on the micro level of the ongoing co-construction and reconstruction of daily practice.

ECCE as a Place for Early Learning

ECCE has received growing attention in recent years through evolving policies concerning academic achievements in many countries. This evolution is contingent with the transformation of late industrial societies into knowledge societies and the growing focus on education as a condition of employability (i.e. The Lisbon strategy). In different countries (including Flanders) the PISA studies have profoundly shocked the educational communities as well as policy makers, not only in case results were disappointing, but also where they were showing a societal gap in educational achievements. This gap seems to run along socio-economic and ethnic-cultural lines: children from ethnic minorities and children from poor families (and these are often – but not always – overlapping categories) perform less well at school and this is a major threat to social cohesion. According to Leseman (2002), in all OECD countries some 10% to 20% of the children belong to category C: children with presumably normal potential, but who show developmental delays or are at risk for educational failure due to socio-economic, cultural and/or socio-linguistic factors. Yet, research also shows that early childhood care and education can make a difference (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Leseman, 2002; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). In short: early childhood education matters, but not every early childhood education matters in the same way.

Since the famous works of scholars including Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky, but also thanks to recent work of Barbara Rogoff and colleagues (Rogoff et al., 2007, in press) we know that

cultural context plays a major role and that the learning context of ECCE may be less well adapted to children from ethnic minorities and/or to children with lower SES. The ongoing EPPE study in England shows that academic achievement runs along ethnic-cultural lines as well as SES-lines. However, according to Iram Siraj-Blatchford (2006), one of the researchers involved in this study, the variation according to ethnicity seems to be very limited, when controlled on SES. Additionally, the EPPE study clearly shows that ECCE experiences may make a substantial difference provided the ECCE environment is of high quality. The study gives some indications on what is meant by high quality. The rating scale that has the most power in predicting early learning experiences and later school achievement is: respect for diversity (Siraj-Blatchford, 2006). Another significant aspect is that the levels of staff qualifications seem to matter. This is consistent with a recent US study, showing that staff qualifications significantly predict quality, also in home based care (family day care providers), whereas number of years experience does not (Doherty, Forer, Lero, Goelman, & LaGrange, 2006).

In conclusion, ECCE may contribute to close the educational gap in our societies, which is an issue of major concern for economic as well as social justice reasons. Yet, it can only do so, with substantial investments in high staff qualifications and with a child centred curriculum that takes into account respect for diversity as a central quality criterion. Let us now further develop what this respect for diversity may mean.

ECCE as a Place of Multiple Belongings

Traditionally, it was generally accepted that children gradually construct their identity by enculturation, or in other words, through socialisation, meaning a unidirectional and gradual adaptation to the prevailing norms and values of their primary educators, i.e. the family and later on their educational environments. Issues of (cultural) identity are at the core of our concerns about quality in ECCE, since they deal with essential and existential questions such as: who am I? And is it OK to be who I am? A positive self-image is closely linked to wellbeing and it is well known that wellbeing and involvement are two essential process variables that mediate educational outcomes (Laevers, 1997). Different scholars have documented that these essential and existential questions regarding identity, may be problematic for children from ethnic minorities and how important it is that ECCE providers take into account family cultures in the curriculum (for an overview, see Vandebroek, 2001 and www.decet.org). Since the turn of the century the traditional views on identity construction and socialisation are profoundly challenged by two important influences: the profound changes in our societies, linked with globalisation, individualisation and detraditionalisation on the one hand and the emergence of the new sociology of childhood on the other hand.

In today's society, marked by globalisation and detraditionalisation, individuals (including children) do not belong to one clearly defined cultural group anymore. Individuals in the post-traditional society have multiple belongings and thus construct their autobiographies themselves (Beck, 1994, 1997; Beck & Beck, 1995). This evolution is sometimes labelled as the dynamics of identity, multiple identities, hyphenated or hybrid identities (Vandenbroeck, 2001, 2006; Vandenbroeck & Bouverne-De Bie, 2006). Today individuals can adhere to many different reference groups, including ethnic and language groups, professional groups, gender, political, religious groups, gay or lesbian groups and many others. This may very well be one of the most important effects of globalisation on the individual's level: that adherence to one reference group (e.g. ethnic or gender) does not automatically entail a belonging to other 'cultural' groups (e.g. language, profession ...). Important decisions in life, such as choosing a specific job, marry or not, stay married or not, live with a person from the same or the opposite sex, have children or not, vote for this or that party at the elections, are far less dominated by the belonging to a specific cultural subgroup in society, but are now perceived as individual decisions, influenced by a personal mix of multiple belongings. It is less the history and the tradition that moulds our decisions – at least in our perception – but rather the present and the personal future in this de-traditionalised society. Consequently this evolution profoundly affects family relationships, since households consist of individuals, making their individual choices and having thus to negotiate continually with other household members and to compromise for instance between their commitment to the family, their duties as parents or children or spouse, their professional ambitions, their personal emotional development, etc. (Beck & Beck, 1995). Some contemporary authors, such as Ulrich Beck seem to welcome this evolution for the degree of individual freedom that it brings, when the old Eriksonian concept of identity is replaced by the concept of "writing one's own autobiography". From the point of view of diversity and equity, this seems however to be a too simple analysis, for the educational issue is to foster multiple belongings and hybrid identity construction in an unequal society.

Yet, ECCE offers unique possibilities to do so. For many children it represents their first transition to society. It presents them with a mirror on how society looks at them and thus how they may be looking at themselves, since it is only in a context of sameness and difference that identity can be constructed. However, many children today still are confronted with images of the average child or of the "good" child and they have difficulties to connect with this image. This may be the case when their origins are ignored (i.e. when the environment, language, the food, the rituals etc do not reflect any of the familiarities of home). But this may also be the case when they are reduced to their origin (i.e. associated with typical and often stereotypical images of their ancestors' culture of origin). The issue

therefore is not that ECCE should be a “home away from home”, or as similar to the home as possible, yet it needs to take the home cultures into account.

Consequently a pedagogy of diversity can not be derived from presumed knowledge of what constitutes “Muslim culture” or “African values”, since this essentialist view on culture would imprison children in an image of their past, without taking into account their present, let alone their future. Therefore a pedagogy of diversity will need to be constructed in a negotiation with the parents, in order to build bridges between the institutional cultures and the parental cultures and beliefs. Only then can ECCE enable children to avoid the dichotomous approach that would force them to choose between either the dominant or the home culture and on the contrary foster the construction of multiple belongings. The European DECET network (Diversity in early Childhood Education and Training) has developed interesting expertise on how such a pedagogy can be shaped in day to day practice as well as in the professionalisation of staff.

Another important evolution is the sociology of childhood movement (Cunningham, 1995; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 2002, 2007, in press; McGurck, Caplan, Henessy, & Moss, 1993) that has forced us to think again about how we see children. It challenges us to leave the image of passive children ‘in need’ behind us and to look at the agency of children, capable of shaping their own identities, in relationship to both peers and adults. Children are no longer perceived as passive recipients of culture, knowledge and identity, but actively involved in reshaping their cultural heritage, as well as their educational environment.

In conclusion, this means that we need child centred curricula and this also implies that curricula need to be family centred: staff will actively involve parents and needs do be trained and supported in negotiating the curriculum with parents from diverse backgrounds. Diverse teams (including staff members from diverse backgrounds as well as gender diversity) are an important asset to achieve these goals. This asks for positive actions in human resources management.

Obviously ECCE as an educational environment cannot suffice with fostering multiple identities in order to enable children to grow up as happy individuals with a sound image of themselves. Educational goals regarding respect for diversity and social inclusion reach far beyond individuality and autonomy, wellbeing and involvement, but also comprise issues of connectedness, solidarity or interdependency. The question is not only: am I OK? But involves also: are you OK? Early socialisation cannot ignore issues of the emergence of prejudice and exclusion within the centres. From a very early age on, children begin to notice differences,

such as gender, family compositions, ability, skin colour, language, dress codes, food habits, etc. Very often these observations challenge their image of the self as well as of the other and they raise implicit or explicit questions about diversity. To a large extent it is the attitude and the response of the educator that will shape their vision of the world on these issues, what the German pedagogues have labelled as "Bildung". One can observe that when adults fail to deal with these emerging questions, children take over societal representations. They begin to associate the observed differences with value laden dominant discourses on what is a "good" child and what is not (for an overview, see Vandebroek, 2001, but also see www.decet.org).

A pedagogy of respect for diversity and social inclusion will therefore also address emerging bias by making diversity visible (i.e. in the, decorations, representations of the families and the local communities within the infrastructure, the curricular activities, including, reading, drama, music, arts, etc) and by interacting with the children about the questions that emerge from this confrontation. Again, this necessitates the involvement of the families and the local community. These issues need to have a central place in the curricula both of ECCE and of the staff training, as well as in quality enhancement programmes.

Structural inequities

All too often, literature on tolerance education or anti-bias education stops here, ignoring structural and more subtle power relations that affect these issues. Structural inequities include issues of affordability and accessibility, while the more subtle power relations include the relationship between parents and staff. I will shortly go into both of these issues.

Accessibility of ECCE services is a growing topic of interest. It is worrying that children from lower-income families receive lower-quality care than those from middle-income and higher-income families (Phillips & Adams, 2001; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999). Some research (e.g. Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001; Vanpée, Sannen, & Hedeboew, 2000) suggests that poor parents attach less importance to quality criteria which explains why poor children receive low-quality care more often. Recently, several authors have criticized the construct of rational choice since it does not take sufficient account of environmental constraints, such as availability and affordability (Henly & Lyons, 2000; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2005; Weinraub, Shlay, Harmon, & Tran, 2005). Perceived differences in preferences in fact reflect restricted child care options or affordability for some groups. These scholars argue that inequalities in the use of quality care cannot be restricted to differences in parental attitudes, linked with demographic variables. On the contrary, environmental constraints, including costs, supply and quality should also be taken into account, as well as

mothers' working conditions (for an overview of this discussion, see Vandebroek, forthcoming).

A first aspect of the analysis of structural exclusion regards affordability and consequently funding policies. In countries that are labelled in political analysis as liberal regimes, such as the US, the UK, Canada or Australia (Avdeyeva, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 2001) states hardly interfere with market operations and funding, when available, is more often directed to the users, while in democratic welfare regimes, funding is directed more often to the providers. As research in the US suggests, funding parents does not necessarily influence the quality of the services they have access to (Weinraub et al., 2005), whereas funding providers – as is the case in Belgium – may have that effect. In the Flemish case, a comparison between the funding of infant care (where parents pay according to their income) and school age child care (where parents pay a flat rate, except when they are labelled as is need) shows that a structural policy (the former) is more efficient than a residual approach (the latter) in reaching poor families (Roelandt, 2006).

A second aspect of the analysis regards the availability of services. Studies in the three major cities in Flanders, Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, have shown for instance that quality infant care is unequally distributed and that poor families have less quality provisions in their neighbourhood than parents who are better off (Rotthier, 2007; Vandebroek, forthcoming). These studies also show that centre directors tend to give priority to parents at work and to those who subscribe first. The effect of these access policies is a structural discrimination of lower educated parents, ethnic minority parents and single-parent families, who tend to start their search later and for other reasons than reconciliation of work and family life (e.g. to follow training, to apply for a job or to socialise their young children in an educational environment of the dominant language). A study by Wall and José (2004) shows that this is particularly salient for immigrants in low paid jobs in different European countries, such as Finland, France, Italy and Portugal.

These analyses of the still weak regulatory function of different welfare states in the protection of families who have low-paid, often atypical jobs, and care responsibilities for young children, may have consequences for policy.

In defining and supervising quality, policy-makers might wish not only to consider structural criteria, such as group size, adult-child ratio and staff qualifications, or process variables, such as adult-child interaction and language used. In addition, they should also acknowledge accessibility for mixed groups as a central quality criterion. Assuming that parent education

could solve the problem that low-income children are found in low-quality care would underestimate the complexity of parental choice and the bidirectionality of the paths through which the choice is made. As Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) found, enabling policies that lift existing constraints and enable choices are more likely to have long-term effects than coercive policies that impose new behaviour, since the use of child care also influences maternal beliefs. In order to achieve these goals, structural policies, funding provisions seems to be most effective.

Subtle inequities

Social inclusion is not only a matter of affordability and accessibility, but also a matter of subtle power relations, that can hardly be reduced to the dichotomous opposition between dominator and dominated (Vandenbroeck, 2007). Democratic participation is an important criterion of citizenship: it is a means by which children and adults can participate with others in shaping decisions affecting themselves, groups of which they are member and the wider society (Moss, 2007). This implies that neither children nor parents can be constructed as clients of ECCE or that quality can be assessed by consumer satisfaction procedures (Vandenbroeck, 2004). It implies on the contrary a continual co-construction and reconstruction of the daily practice in an endless negotiation procedure with all that are involved (children, families, local communities and policy makers). According to Moss (2007) this includes respect for diversity; the recognition of multiple perspectives and diverse paradigms; welcoming curiosity, uncertainty and subjectivity; and critical thinking. According to our experiences, one of the main challenges in this domain is to redefine what "expertise" in ECCE may look like, in order to avoid the subtle inequities and exclusion mechanisms between "expert knowledge" of the staff and "lay knowledge" of the parents. Adopting multiple perspectives may help to overcome these inequities, without necessarily having to dismiss expert knowledge. In her masters' study on evolving parental ideas on the "good life" for their children, Aisha Snoeck (2007) interviewed newly arrived immigrant mothers with young children attending day care centres. She analysed the narratives both with a constructivist (Super & Harkness, 1996) and a postconstructivist (Foucault, 1990) framework. One of the mothers, from Lebanese origin, looks back at the first months in the nursery, when her daughter was almost one year old. She had repeatedly asked the staff to put her daughter on a potty after her nap. After many discussions, the staff accepted to partially do what the mother was asking for:

In the day care centre they are against it, because she's very young and ... they don't train the baby's until they are two. Sometimes in the day care centre when she wakes up, they put her in the potty, but it's always too late. Because the moment the child has to wake up, you have to take him, take his diaper and put it on the potty, you see. But in the day care centre for example a child... many children would

wake up at the same time, so you have to deal with one child at the time. And until now she don't know that she has to control her muscles, maybe she, I think that she can do it now. So she has to learn how to do it. So most of the time it's too late, but they try to... I think even though they don't agree with me, but they do it. And I think it's amazing you know, because for them, err..., when you put a child of two years on a potty, there's not a lot of responsibility. Because you don't have to watch him. You don't have to sit, and he has to finish and he will call you when he's done. But with X [names her daughter], she's very young so someone has to keep an eye on her. And it is not really logic when you have 21 children. You see, so I think it's amazing even if they don't do it every day. The fact that they do it from time to time. I think it's amazing, yeah.

A developmental perspective may have focused on "developmentally appropriate practice" and this may lead to ongoing explanations to the mother about why it is wrong to pottytrain a one year old girl. Without devaluating this "knowledge", a social constructivist perspective wishes to look at what the meaning of potty training may be for this mother. Is it about the potty, or rather about individual attention, or something else? Is it connected to beliefs this mother shares with her Lebanese peers or is it ridiculous to search for cultural associations in this matter? A post-structural perspective on diversity brings in yet another perspective, that of power relations, acknowledging that maybe the issue is that we can never entirely grasp the meaning of this scene, but that we ask ourselves the questions how we can welcome this perspective without fully understanding it and that we look at the effects our attitude and behaviour has on the relationship with this mother and her daughter.

Taking into account these subtleties of the daily encounters in ECCE asks for new professionalisms, that do not only focus on technical knowledge of the development and developmentally appropriate practices, but rather support staff in uncovering the meaning parents and the local community's make of ECCE. Policies that frame ECCE professionals both within educational and social work (e.g. the Educateur Jeunes Enfants in France) are interesting examples of this new emerging professionalism.

Conclusion: ECCE as a Transitional Space

Respect for diversity and social inclusion are matters of policy on macro, meso as well as micro levels. They may be regarded as economic or educational necessities, as well as ethical and political questions. It is obvious that curricula that respect diversity and social inclusion cherish a child centred approach, and that this includes both a family centred approach and a

community centred approach. A good summary of the guiding principles of such a curriculum is given by the DECET network (www.decet.org). They are based on the following principles:

- Every child, parent and staff member should feel that he/she belongs. This implies an active policy to take into account home cultures when constructing the curriculum.
- Every child, parent and staff member is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identities. This implies that the curriculum fosters multiple identity building and multilingualism by building bridges between the home and the institutional environment as well as with the local community.
- Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries
- Everyone can participate as active citizens. This implies that staff develops an explicit anti-bias approach and takes appropriate action to involve all parents.
- Staff, parents and children work together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination. This includes a critical study of access policies and structural inequities.

Two antagonist pitfalls seem to occur when implementing policies on diversity and social inclusion: the deculturalisation of education and the culturalisation of inequalities. The former refers to the risks associated with the formulation of quality criteria or educational outcomes that deny cultural diversities. Describing what good ECCE is, without analysing “whom it serves” and whom it does not serve (as well) may contribute to perpetuate existing inequalities in the educational system. It is beneficial to impose minimal quality standards to all services, in order to monitor the best use of public funds and to avoid the documented problem that poor families tend to make use of child care of poorer quality. Setting minimal quality standards is also in line with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, these general quality criteria should also include criteria on accessibility and affordability for diverse populations as well as the possibilities for local meaning making in a dialogical process with children, families and local communities.

The latter (culturalising inequities) refers to the pitfall that structural inequalities that are linked with socio-economic variables may be reframed as cultural issues and consequently individualised as parents’ responsibilities. In the past the underrepresentation of ethnic minority families in ECCE or the underachievement of ethnic minority children in the educational system have been attributed to cultural values, masking structural inequities in the accessibility of services or in the curricula. We continuously need to balance in a precarious equilibrium between the denial of cultural differences and the narrow focus on these differences.

The examples during the study visits in Ghent show that significant changes in practice towards respect for diversity and social inclusion can be achieved in a relatively short time of a few years. These changes have been made possible by the combination of a clear local policy, the continuous guidance of pedagogical coordinators, and the commitment of staff members in ECCE provisions.

A comprehensive approach of human resources policies, building diverse teams (including gender diversity as well as cultural diversity and multidisciplinary) seems to facilitate this continuous reflection. At different times I have stressed the necessity of raising ECCE staff qualifications. A possible problem is that this may exactly exclude staff members from ethnic minority origins. The experiences in Brussels, as well as in other places, show that it is feasible to combine a human resources policy that is both based on positive action towards these groups and a concern for high qualifications.

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- *Some points for discussion introduced by John Bennett*
 - Some 10% to 20% of children in OECD countries are at risk of educational failure due to socio-economic, cultural and/or socio-linguistic factors. The percentage has grown significantly because of the increase in the number of immigrant children – not because they are immigrant but because of their low SES status (many immigrant parents are unable to find work), second language difficulties and societal attitudes toward immigration and diversity.
 - Research shows that early childhood care and education can make a significant difference to these children. However, it is often the case that the learning contexts of ECCE programmes are less well adapted to children from ethnic minorities and/or to children with lower SES (socio-economic status).
 - Evaluations in several countries (e.g. the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the US) suggest that when disadvantaged children participate in ECEC, they often do not receive the full range of child development, health and family services that are needed to optimise their learning (Starting Strong, 2001). The evidence that these children need not only equal access to services but that services catering for large numbers of disadvantaged children need enhanced funding, better child:staff ratios, innovative and adapted pedagogies, is not always acknowledged.
 - Care should also be taken to respond positively to the multiple identities of children and families in keeping with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Supporting the personal and family/community identity of each child is an important aim of early childhood services (Murray, 2006). Public provision will also address issues of prejudice and discrimination, which children from low-income and/or ethnic families can encounter both within and outside schools (Derman-Sparks, 1989).
 - The following, based essentially on Michel Vandebroek's paper and on *Starting Strong II*, outlines some of the policy implications of diversity and social inclusion in early childhood education and care

Structural issues at the level of access (see also Starting Strong II, pages 74-77)

- Structural inequities play an important role in the access of low-income and immigrant families to services. These include not only issues of affordability and accessibility but also more subtle power relations, including the relationships between parents and staff. Environmental constraints, including costs, supply and quality need to be taken into account, as well as mothers' working conditions.

- Access is often inappropriate for children with special needs or from diverse backgrounds. Where children with special needs are concerned, directors of centres may not allow them to enrol, or parents – seeing the difficulties involved for their children – simply desist. If access is achieved, groups may be far too large for these children, and appropriately trained staff may not be available. In early education systems established along school lines, group sizes, care and pedagogical approaches are often unsuitable for very young children with special or additional learning needs.
- In addition, junior classes often do not meet the needs of working parents, e.g. when the traditional junior school attached to primary school opens on a half-day basis and only during term-time. Services may be closed for summer, winter and spring breaks, and for teacher professional development days. Unless this service is augmented by after-school care or another wrap-around service, the situation forces many mothers of young children either to reduce their work to part-time or to drop out of employment for a number of years.

Funding modalities and the achievement of quality (see also Starting Strong II, pages 114-118)

- In liberal regimes with residual approaches to social policy, the state interferes little with market operations. These regimes speak much of regulatory functions, but often allow derogations for private providers or fail to enforce basic service requirements. In general, available funding is directed to consumers, that is, employed parents. In democratic welfare regimes, funding is directed more often to universal services that are open to all children.
- In both regimes, quality infant care is often unequally distributed and poor families have less quality provisions in their neighbourhood than more affluent parents. Centres in poor neighbourhoods need enhanced funding and supplementary staff to provide young children with the full range of child development, health and family services that are needed to optimise their learning. Equal funding is not enough! Accessibility for disadvantaged groups needs to become a central quality criterion of ECEC systems.

Child poverty and exclusion- the need for both upstream anti-poverty policies and action at community level (Starting Strong II, pages 213-4)

- Although providing care and education to children from 'at-risk' backgrounds, early childhood programmes cannot substantially address issues of structural poverty and institutional discrimination (Zigler et al., 1996, Dearing, et al 2006). The challenge of reducing child poverty needs also to be tackled upstream by

governments through energetic social, housing and labour policies, including income transfers to low-income groups, comprehensive social and family policies, and supportive employment schemes and work training. Preventive, anti-poverty measures can significantly reduce the numbers of children arriving to early childhood centres with additional learning needs.

- Measures of child poverty by UNICEF are based on the income level of parents. Awareness of other factors of poverty is important: unemployment, lone parent families, low education and poor parental skills, discrimination, poor housing, ill health and family breakdown, living in anti-social and delinquent neighbourhoods... As the causes of poverty are multiple, multiple solutions need to be sought. Programmes for children from disadvantaged background seem to be more effective when they are expanded: to co-operate with other community services such as primary health nurses and social workers; provide health screening; to ensure a warm meal and snacks for children; to work with parents and women's groups... A strong concept of pedagogy, that embraces care and nurturing as well as education needs to be adopted.
- Community involvement in the pre-school is growing in importance, not only for providing expanded services and referrals where necessary, but also as a space for partnership and the democratic participation of parents. When opportune, communities and education authorities will also provide or support adult education, information, services and social activities for parents.

Greater outreach to families (see Starting Strong II, pages 215-6)

- The continuity of children's experience across environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff-members exchange information regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning. Some early childhood staff may need training in listening to parents and working co-operatively with them. They will encourage parents to support the learning of young children, and will share with families the values on which early childhood services are based, including participation and respect for diversity. Staff will engage parents in centre activities. They will promote positive attitudes toward children's learning, provide parents with information and referrals to other services, and include parents in centre committees and management. Efforts will be made to ensure equitable representation and participation of families from diverse backgrounds.
- The large Head Start project in the US stresses the importance of parental involvement. Performance standards for the project require parent involvement in programme making and curriculum development. Frequent parent-staff meetings

must be held, and parents regularly participate in programmes and home-visiting. In addition, Head Start programmes must offer parents educational programmes in health, nutrition and child development; provide information about community resources and encourage parents to participate in community activities;

- In speaking with parents from ethnic backgrounds and/or with low educational levels, an awareness of power relations is necessary. Despite the unique interest and knowledge of parents concerning their children, the tendency to know better than parents is difficult to overcome. Sensitivity to socio-cultural difference is also needed: many families maintain cultural beliefs and behaviours that do not necessarily match the expectations of centres (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). To avoid prejudice, gender assumptions, class attitudes or ethnocentrism, more analyses of child-rearing and early childhood practice are needed (Tobin 1989, Vandebroek, 2006), and in addition, intensive training of educators in anti-bias attitudes (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Designing a pedagogy of diversity (see Michel Vandebroek's background paper)

- To tackle the weak adaptation of early childhood programming to children from diverse and low income backgrounds – which results in many children reaching primary school already lagging behind in self-confidence, language and cognitive development – *curricula need to take into account respect for diversity as a central quality criterion*. Issues of (cultural) identity are at the heart of programmes for young children from diversity backgrounds: questions such as: who am I? And is it OK to be who I am? A positive self-image is closely linked to well-being and involvement in kindergarten programmes - two process variables that strongly mediate educational outcomes (Laevers, 1997).
- In addition, kindergarten programmes comprise issues of connectedness and relationships to the dominant culture. From an early age on, children begin to notice differences, such as gender, family compositions, ability, skin colour, language, dress codes, food habits, etc. Often, these observations challenge their image of the self as well as of the other, and they raise implicit or explicit questions about diversity. To a large extent, the attitudes and the responses of educators shape their vision of the world on these issues. In addition, when adults fail to deal with these emerging questions, children take over societal representations, which are often negative and aggressive.
- This implies that neither children nor parents can be constructed simply as clients of ECCE or that quality can be assessed by consumer satisfaction only. It implies a continual co-construction and reconstruction of the daily practice of kindergartens

in an endless negotiation procedure with all the stakeholders involved (children, families, local communities and policy makers).

- In our diverse societies, many young children have difficulties in connecting with images of the average child or of the “good” child. This may be the case when their origins are ignored, e.g. when the environment, language, the food, the rituals etc do not reflect any of the familiarities of home. This may also be the case when children are reduced to their origin, i.e. associated with stereotypical images of their ancestors’ culture of origin. A pedagogy of diversity cannot be derived from presumed knowledge of what constitutes “Muslim culture” or “African values”. Such an essentialist view of culture imprisons children in an image of their past, without taking into account their present, let alone their future. A pedagogy of diversity needs to be constructed in a negotiation with the parents, in order to build bridges between institutional cultures and parental cultures and beliefs. The issue is not that ECCE should be a “home away from home”, or as similar to the home as possible, but that it takes into account the home cultures.
- New thinking about diversity refuses to diagnose young children in terms of what they lack, or on the grounds of race, religion, second language, etc. All individuals have multiple identities and qualities that cannot be captured by broad labels. Each child is talented and competent in his or her own way, and when born into adverse backgrounds can show extraordinary inner strength and resilience. Successful programmes do not categorise young children as having developmental or language needs, but believe that these children will learn and develop quickly if given a supportive, pedagogical environment. The child's achievement is measured against her particular capacities, and against the goals agreed between the child, parents and educator together.

- PowerPoint presentation of Ms. Bea Buysse
- PowerPoint presentation of Ms. Miho Taguma
- PowerPoint presentation of Mr. Michel Vandenbroeck
- Presentation of Ms. Anne Lambrechts
- PowerPoint presentation of Mr. Kris Van den Branden
- PowerPoint presentation of Mr. John Bennett
- PowerPoint presentation of Ms. Natasha Kuka
- Presentation of Mr. Peter Winia
- PowerPoint presentations of Ms. Chris De Kimpe, Mr. Danny Verdonck and Ms. Marleen Vermassen (city of Ghent)

These presentations can be downloaded at the website of the network (www.startingstrong.net).

Annexe 4. Further references to OECD work

www.oecd.org/edu/startingstrong2

The Starting Strong website, papers, country reviews, ...

http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_34531_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

OECD work in Social Cohesion and Education

http://www.oecd.org/document/3/0,3343,en_2649_34531_36296195_1_1_1_1,00.html

Reports of the thematic reviews of Equity in Education

www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/update

Newsletter from CERI (the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation)

www.oecd.org/edu/equity/senddd

Special Education Needs in OECD countries

www.oecd.org/edu/equity/partnershipsforinclusion

Promoting Partnerships for Inclusion