

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

**Network on Early Childhood Education and Care**

**Summary Record of the 3rd workshop: 'Bridges in Pre-school Education: Parental Involvement and Curriculum Development'**

The meeting was held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 2-3 April 2008.

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## **SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MEETING OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE NETWORK**

### **1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

EDU/EDPC/ECEC/A(2008)1/REV1

1. The Group **ADOPTED** the agenda with a change of the order of item 2 and 3.

### **2. ORAL STATEMENTS**

2. Ms. Joana Brocardo, Directorate for Innovation and Curriculum Development, Portugal, welcomed participants. She stressed that early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a priority in education policy in Portugal. She highlighted the need for 'building bridges' and provided some examples in the Portuguese contexts: e.g. bridges between families and school; between ECEC and lifelong learning; between ECEC provision and curriculum reform; between quality ECEC teachers and corresponding qualifications, etc.

3. Ms. Bea Buysse, Network Co-ordinator, also welcomed the participants and presented the report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Network. She announced that Kind en Gezin has taken a decision to resign from being the host country of the Network for its remaining term in 2008. She explained that it has been a difficult time period for Kind en Gezin to adapt itself to follow the mandate given to the Network concerning the membership and the rules and procedures of the OECD as a subsidiary body of the Education Policy Committee.

4. Ms. Deborah Roseveare, Head of the Education and Training Policy Division, Directorate for Education, also welcomed the participants and expressed, on behalf of the OECD, the appreciation to the Kind en Gezin for their contributions and commitment to the work of the Network, especially the launch of the Network. She invited delegates to join her in expressing their appreciation to Kind en Gezin and to Bea Buysse, which they did in a round of applause. She highlighted the value of the work of the Network and expressed her support for the Network to continue. She stressed that early childhood education and care needs to explore effective policies and practices that can give all children a strong start so that they may change, adopt and innovate in this more rapidly changing society.

### **3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

5. The Network elected Mr. Karl Le Quesne (New Zealand) as Chair and Ms. Kari Jacobsen (Norway) as Vice-Chair.

### **4. EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRIMARY EDUCATION – TRANSITIONS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN**

6. Mr. Martin Woodhead, the Open University (United Kingdom) presented his publication: *Early Childhood and Primary Education – Transitions in the Lives of Young Children*. He set out the wider socio-economic contexts both from developed and developing countries. He emphasised the importance of interactions between policy, research and practice, especially with a child-focused approach. He stressed that these interactions should form the integrative concept in early childhood

education. More concretely, he stressed that policy makers would need to shift their focus from *children's readiness* for schools to *schools' readiness* for children.

## **5. OUTCOMES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN TRANSITION PROCESSES FOR CHILDREN ENTERING PRIMARY SCHOOL**

7. Ms. Aline-Wendy Dunlop, University of Strathclyde (United Kingdom) introduced her publication: *Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school*. She emphasised the importance of the links between primary schools, children's home environments and early childhood education provision. She further stated that close collaboration among the stakeholders who are in these links will be one of the key solutions to ensure effective transitions. She illustrated some successful examples. Examples include activities that support learning across the transition and socio-emotional well-being during the transition, and effective communication between school and parents.

## **6. DISCUSSION ON THE PREVIOUS TWO AGENDA ITEMS**

8. This session was facilitated by Mr. Jan Peeters, Director of VBJK (Resource Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education), University of Ghent (Belgium). The discussions focused on the need for a change of institutional arrangements. A Swedish delegate raised a question whether transitions are better facilitated if teachers are trained to cover 0-12 years (from early childhood care to primary education), pointing to the recent change of the government's approach. Some delegates stressed the need to tackle the institutional barriers created by the different arrangements and practices between childhood care services and schooling (pre-school and primary education). The barriers include both visible (administrative remits and auspices) and invisible (mission, values and cultures) between the two.

## **7. TRANSITION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO PRIMARY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

9. This item was introduced by Ms. Teresa Vasconcelos, Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa (Portugal). Drawing on research literature, she presented five different semantic levels of reflection on transitions. She introduced case studies on children who made successful transitions, coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. She highlighted the need for a new vision to understand the roles of children and adults, i.e. children are *co-constructors* and *authors* of transitions and adults are *provokers*, taking *ethical* stands. She argued that the new vision would lead to promoting self-control, resilience, empowerment and cooperation during the transition phase.

## **8. SETTING THE SCENE FOR DEVELOPING POLICY PRINCIPLES**

10. This session aimed to set the scene for developing policy principles, by examining and learning from concrete country experience from Portugal. Ms. Júlia Formosinho, University of Minho, introduced the pedagogical documentation as an effective means to engage children, teachers and families. She argued that the method is effective in documenting children's interests, motivation, and learning process/outcomes, while helping teachers to plan facilitate their children's learning processes. The challenge is up-scaling its uptake as it requires a high level of professional understanding of its use both for its theoretical background and its technical operations.

11. The government recently introduced an initiative in developing booklets for pre-school teachers for mathematics and language. The primary goals of the booklets are: to ensure continuity of practice between pre-school education and primary education; and to help teachers to better understand curricular guidelines and successfully implement them. Ms. Maria de Lurdes Serrazina,

Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa, presented the booklets for mathematics. She highlighted the pertinence between basic counting skills that children develop during pre-school and a variety of numerical skills, data analysis, and geometry that they learn in primary school. Ms. Inês Sim-Sim, Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa, presented the booklets for language development. She pointed out that one big challenge faced by all children is how to learn the written language and she stressed the importance of the link between reading capacities and oral proficiencies (*e.g.* semantic, phonological, syntactic and pragmatic knowledge).

12. A number of delegates found the Portuguese Booklets Initiative innovative. One major issue pointed out by several delegates was the question whether such inter-disciplinary approach was do-able and effective. The speakers acknowledged that collaboration was not automatic and required the full commitment both from academics and policy makers. Scaling-up good initiatives remains as a common challenge to any good emerging practice.

**9. DISCUSSION ON PRINCIPLES TO UNDERPIN A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS** EDU/EDPC/ECEC/RD(2008)1

13. Mr. Karl Le Quesne introduced this item. He initiated a discussion on the principles to underpin a policy framework to promote transition. However, some delegates asked if the Network would continue to exist, since they felt it would be irrelevant to discuss such principles if the Network ceased. Ms Miho Taguma referred to the mandate of the Network given by the OECD Council (2007-2011) and explained that the details of the future of the Network would be discussed in Item 11. She stressed that the OECD is an inter-governmental organisation and the Secretariat cannot decide to continue/discontinue the work of the Network; such decisions rest with the Education Policy Committee and the Council.

14. Mr. Le Quesne re-directed the discussion and asked the delegates to share their expectations of the Network. A majority of delegates responded that they would expect the Network to deliver outputs that would serve to inform policies, influence policies (in a compelling way, as much as possible), and/or inform the general public. Some expressed their interest in policy dialogue and exchange of country experience rather than learning about academic research or technical information. Some showed interest in receiving policy recommendations from the Network while others expressed their reservations about the Network delivering policy recommendations or guidelines. One delegate called for a better way of online communication among members and a more active use of the website.

15. Ms. Taguma thanked the delegates for their inputs. Referring again to the mandate of the Network, she confirmed that the objectives include sharing and disseminating information on country experience but they did not include delivering policy recommendations to countries. She explained that the Education Policy Committee typically undertook a considerable amount of work, often including a rigorous process for data collection and field visits, to ensure that any policy recommendations it makes are feasible and research-based. Such work would be beyond the scope and the means of the Network.

**10. POLICY AND GOOD PRACTICES ON TRANSITIONS**

16. For this item, delegates were divided into two small discussion groups. Ms. Julie Mathien, Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Ontario, Canada), presented the Canadian experience to one group. She first provided a brief overview of ECEC in Canada and then focused on some transition issues and challenges specific to Ontario. In Ontario, students' academic success is a policy priority for ECEC. There is a need for a better integrated transition between family and various parts of ECEC

and creating a universal full-day learning programmes for 4 and 5-year olds puts pressure on the integration of child care and kindergarten. Effective management and sequencing of change is seen as a risk-management tool and research and evaluation are being carried out to monitor and inform policy making.

17. Ms. Nary Shin, Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (Korea), shared the Korean experience with another group. She started with the demographic change (aging and low birth rates) to explain the recent government's strong support for ECEC in Korea. Targeted good practice policies include improving access, subsidies for low income families, and enhancing quality. She illustrated some major policy challenges for Korea: *i.e.* the merger of the dual system (childcare and education); the curriculum alignment between public kindergartens and public primary education; and the promotion of parental understanding to avoid excessive pre-academic ECEC learning, especially in private kindergartens.

## 11. WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE NETWORK

18. Ms. Deborah Roseveare presented this item. First she explained how the Network fits within the OECD's overall structure, rules and procedures, work programme, and financing. Then she set out some possible ways of taking the Network forward. She also put forward some questions regarding the work programme of the Network. She emphasised that the Network would be able to focus on the issues that it wishes to address within its mandate while needing to work within the OECD's rules of procedures.

19. The delegates welcomed the presentation, which they felt helped them understand better the background to the current situation. Some delegates expressed their concerns about the financial situation of the Network. Some questioned whether the Network could be sustainable without voluntary contributions and some concerns were expressed about the 'free rider' problem associated with relying on voluntary contributions. It was also suggested that Kind en Gezin could transfer the unspent funds it had collected from countries to the OECD instead of sending refunds to countries. Some delegates suggested that the Secretariat seek voluntary contributions to continue the substantive work such as updating the country profiles for the Network undertaken by Kind & Gezin.

20. Ms. Roseveare thanked the delegates for their feedback. She noted that a substantial part of the activities of the Education Policy Committee were funded by voluntary contributions and she pointed out the relatively high administrative and management costs associated with collecting voluntary contributions from countries to finance small-scale projects. She did not consider it realistic for the Network to expect the Secretariat to undertake any substantive work (such as updating country profiles) on its behalf. Instead, the main question for the Network was whether it could be sustainable as a pure "peer learning" exchange, with the OECD Secretariat providing only "no-frills" organisational support.

21. Ms Roseveare noted that the future direction of the Network would be considered at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Education Policy Committee (24-25 April) in the context of wider discussions on the Programme of Work and Budget 2009-10. She confirmed that she would communicate the situation the Network was now facing as a result of Kind and Gezin's decision to the Committee and ask the Committee to provide guidance on how to move forward.

## 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

22. Mr. John Bennett presented some information on the country profiles. The Chair announced that the next meeting is scheduled to place in the second half of this year in Paris.

**ANNEX 1: LIST OF DELEGATES**

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