



# TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

## INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

### Two generation programs: a literature review

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#### 1. Introduction

This paper wants to add to the discussion during the third meeting of the Transatlantic Forum on 'Successful Parent and Family Engagement in the Early Years: Reaching out to Immigrant and Low-Income Families', by providing some information on two-generation programs.

In this paper we will argue that poverty and immigration may have a strong impact on parental functioning and (in)directly on the development of children. Two-generation programs are designed to deal with the multigenerational, multidimensional aspects of poor and migrant families (St. Pierre, Layzer & Barnes, 1995). These two-generation programs seek to cope with the problems of parents and children in two continuous generations by offering services such as early childhood education and parenting education to help young children get a good start in life and, at the same time, by offering services such as job training, literacy training, and vocational education to help their parents become economically independent. In literature we found no or very few of these programs (and not in Western Europe). The programs we found focused mainly on the parents and/or children.

Most programs described in this paper have a strong focus on child outcomes and have less interest in the needs of the family as a whole and of the parents in particular. Other programs (such as Sure Start) have a growing emphasis on childcare provision and employment promotion, at the expense of health promotion and a broader conception of fostering children's intellectual and social development.

#### 2. Impact of poverty and migration on parents and children

If dual generation programs wish to tackle poverty/immigration and their influence on adult functioning (including parenting) and child development, good practices should target influences at all the different levels (societal, neighbourhood, the family and parenting, and the socio-emotional development of the child) described in the model.

The ecological or transactional models – the most comprehensive models so far – stress the interplay of biological, psychological and social factors in the development of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dishion, 1995; Dodge, & Pettit, 2003; Rutter, 2003). For example, poor verbal and executive functioning are considered important biological or neurological factors. Psychological factors connected to development include social-cognitive skills. Social factors include proximal (parenting, relationship factors, social support) and more distal factors (SES, neighbourhood, and minority group status, economical and political situation).

Moreover, state of the art ecological models should embrace the growing complexity in family situations in the western world and beyond. In societies of transformation and diversity, it is not possible anymore to talk about "the family" in singular. Talking about "families" in plural means giving voice to "complex approaches", to contextualization, to diverse models of parenthood (Cambì, 2003; Favaro, Mantovani, Musatti, 2006; Pourtois, Desmet, 2004).

Being born in a poor or migrant family may represent developmental risks in several ways: parents are more likely to live in stressful situations that make it more challenging to take up their parental roles and neighbourhoods are often more harmful and have less high quality provisions, factors that negatively may influence child development. Moreover, educational institutions in poor neighbourhoods are more often of poorer quality than in more affluent neighbourhoods. That is not to say that poor parents equal poor



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parenting. Poor families can also represent a crucial protective factor against negative neighbourhood influences or failing educational systems. Rather it is important to invest in high quality provisions in poorer neighbourhoods, according to a concept of progressive universalism. Two-generation programs, combining interventions with children, parents **and** the socio-economic environment, may play an important role in such policies of investments in the early years.

The relations between poverty, migration and children's development are both direct and indirect. Some examples in literature:

- Poor neighbourhoods have less quality provisions in which teachers more often show inadequate behaviour (such as harsh disciplining) (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001)
- Harsh discipline negatively impacts on child adjustment (Dodge, Petit & Bates, 1994).
- Family income is related to child development (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Epps, Huston & Bobbitt, 2013).
- Poverty negatively impacts parental well-being, marital conflicts and stress (Conger et al., 1992, 1994, 2002)
- Negative living conditions (e.g. job insecurity) impact on parenting coping skills and behaviour (Brotman, Dawson-McClure, Calzada, et al., 2013; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson & Thompson, 1998).
- Low responsiveness of parents also affect later social behaviour of children (Shaw, 2013).
- Parental stress and the home learning environment impact on children's learning competencies (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2011).
- Many ethnic minority families come from rural areas and do not share the same cultural capital and cultural values with schools and preschool provisions (Bourdieu, 1979; Nievar, et al., 2011)
- Academic achievement of immigrant youth is negatively affected by stereotype threat, including increased anxiety, and decreasing students' expectations regarding their likely performance (Blascovitch et al, 2001; Cadinu et al, 2003; Osborne, 2001; Schofield, 2006)

### 3. Two-generation programs

This paper describes parent-child programs that have the intention to promote future well-being and to alleviate the negative effects of poverty on the next generation.

Based on the transactional perspective on development, it is assumed that only multi-component programs that focus on different risk and protective factors have potential success. This means that effective programs, in order to target negative influences on child development and parental functioning, and to stimulate positive development of children and healthy functioning of adults and children, have to focus on multiple factors: work and economic stimulation, attention for the living environment of families (housing, ...), parenting skills and parental self-efficacy, children's socio-emotional and cognitive skills, quality early childhood care and education and quality (pre)schools with well trained teachers, with respect for the cultural backgrounds of families.

#### Pro-active programs

To reduce the effects of poverty in children a proactive two-generation policy is needed (Eeman & Nicaise, 2012). Pro-activity means that prevention and promotion are combined, aimed at not only reducing risk factors, but also at stimulating protective factors. The focus of interventions or policies has to be on both parents and children, because of the intergenerational nature of poverty, and on the school/preschool system and society in general. Eeman and Nicaise (2012) plead for prevention programs that target parents and children, in out-of-home centres as well at home, intervening on several domains of child development (cognitive and social-emotional).



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## Single generation

Over the past decades governments in the United States and Europe have funded hundreds of interventions to address the problems associated with poverty. In most cases, these interventions have focused either on children or on parents alone, but rarely on both simultaneously. Interventions focusing on more contextual and socio-economic factors (besides parents and children) were hardly found at all. Many single-focus programs target on the cognitive and social competence of preschool children living in poverty in order to better prepare them for primary school, compared to other children. These programs mostly include quality early childhood education and care services (part-day, part-year) to three- to five-year-olds.

Other single-focus programs help parents by teaching them ways to effectively promote the development and health of their children. Proponents of this approach believe that parents are (or should be) their children's first and best teachers and that parents must be first-rate teachers so that their children can succeed (Missouri's Parents as Teachers, HIPPPY).

However, such programs also meet criticisms from scholars, arguing that such an approach may be 'blaming the victim' by responsabilizing parents for the negative effects of poverty on children (Georges, 2010; Vandenbroeck et al, 2010). Researchers further argue that parenting programs alone are not sufficient to improve children's outcomes, because at least some important aspects of child development occur on their own timetable (specific sensitive periods), and children therefore cannot wait for the benefits of parenting programs to trickle down on them from the parents. This is also in accordance with transactional models: the influence of children and adults is bidirectional. So changes in child functioning will also affect the parental and family functioning.

## Dual generation

A third program strategy focuses primarily on enhancing the educational level of adults and their labour skills in order to improve their chances finding work and increasing their economic well-being (mostly targeting single-mothers). But no studies have demonstrated that increasing parental job competences and self-esteem are sufficient to enhance short- or long-term outcomes for children.

Two-generation programs are designed to deal with the multigenerational, multidimensional aspects of poverty (St. Pierre, Layzer & Barnes, 1995) (see fig. 1). Two-generation programs seek to cope with the problems of parents and children in two continuous generations by offering services such as early childhood education and parenting education to help young children get a good start in life and, at the same time, by offering services such as job training, literacy training, and vocational education to economically support their parents.

## 4. Description of the programs

### 4.1. Two-generation programs

Most two-generation programs described in the academic literature are to be found and implemented in the U.S., most of them in the 1970's up to the 1990's. Examples of two-generation programs as defined above are Avance, Child Family Resource Program, Comprehensive Child Development Program, Even Start, Head Start Family Service Centres and New Chance (St. Pierre, Layzer & Barnes, 1995).

As an example of these two-generation programs we briefly describe Avance (Johnson, Walker & Rodriguez, 1996). It is a 9-month comprehensive program that is centre-based with an at-home component, for Mexican American families with children between birth and 2 years of age. Parents (mothers) participate in 3-hour classes in which they make educational toys and learn about child growth and development, and learn that mothers are important teachers for their children. These mothers are



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also given information on the social services in their community. During these classes children attend an educational day care provision. Home visits are used to assist and support the mother in her interactions with her child. In a second year mothers can attend language (English) classes and prepare for a General Equivalency Diploma examination.

The research on these two-generation programs in general shows positive effects on parenting: on the home learning environment, child-rearing behaviours and attitudes, parent-child interactions, maternal roles as a teacher and sense of parental efficacy, emotional support on children, and use of community resources (Johnson, Walker & Rodriguez, 1996; St-Pierre, Layzer & Barnes, 1995). Some of these programs led to an increase in the percentage of mothers who attained a General Education Development (GED) certificate. Unfortunately, attainment of a GED was not accompanied by corresponding positive effects on standardized tests of adult literacy. Neither was there found a positive effect on annual household income. The effects found on child development were small or non-significant.

#### **4.2. Early childhood education combined with a parenting program**

Besides these more inclusive two-generation programs some early childhood education programs also target child outcome by combining interventions for both children and their parents. Well-known model programs include: the HighScope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005), the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell, et al., 2012; Ramey & Ramey, 2004), and the Chicago Child-Parent Centres (Reynolds et al., 2001). Most of these programs focus on the situation of mothers during pregnancy and around birth: information on care and development, as well as support and modelling of how to react to babies and toddlers in a positive and sensitive, stimulating way. They were developed to booster school readiness in the short term and reduce the impact of poverty in the long term (into the next generation).

(Early) Head Start (US) programs have several objectives: to enhance children's social, emotional and cognitive development, to improve parenting and to help parents meet their own goals, including economic independence. Services include early education, at home or at a centre; home visits; parent education and health services, both pre and after birth; nutrition; case management and peer support. Head Start explicitly identifies community development as a central component of effective intervention (Gray & Francis, 2007).

Sure Start (UK) (Glass, 1999, Melhuish, Belsky & Barnes, 2010) has a strong emphasis on working through partnership between different agencies (multi-agency service integration), on parental involvement in management and on responsiveness to local priorities. It differs from most other early childhood interventions in two ways: it is area-based, rather than being targeted to specific groups of parents and children (to avoid potential problems of stigma). It gives local programs considerable autonomy with regard to the combination of services they provide and the forms in which they provide them. The more flexible approach of Sure Start makes the program responsive to local needs and priorities, while it also poses challenges for quality control. The longitudinal findings were positive: the evidence at 3 years indicates benefits for all groups in society (Meluish, Belsky & Barnes, 2010).

The effects of these model early education programs are substantial even in the long run – see for example HighScope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Research on other programs such as Head Start showed considerably smaller gains than the model programs. Especially for children in poverty and of African American origin the positive effects were small or non-existent. There are studies showing that they are served with programs of inferior quality (HHS, 1993). Still, most Head Start programs have a significant positive impact on child development, even in the longer run (Ludwig & Philips, 2008). The effect of the program seems to work through parental supportiveness and cognitive stimulation (Harden, Sandstrom & Chazan-Cohen, 2012).



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### 4.3. Parent support programs

In the EU and particularly in the Netherlands several family support programs were developed (e.g. Opstapje, NJI, 2007; Piramide, van Kuyk, 2003) or adapted to the local situation. These programs have the intention to support parents in their parenting role and to help them stimulate the development of their children. These programs often found their origins elsewhere (Home Start in the U.S. and HIPPY in Israel). Most of these programs have a special attention for ethnic minority families by using materials in their mother tongue or by involving volunteers/paraprofessionals from the same ethnic group.

**Piramide** is originally developed for children between 2,5 and 6 years of age. Recently, this age group was extended from 0 to 7. The children are stimulated in their development through a combination of play, work and learning. Children with special needs receive additional attention through tutoring, language stimulation and play. Parents are involved by doing activities with their child at home, linked to the activities the child has done in childcare (speelzaal) or at school ([www.nji.nl](http://www.nji.nl)).

**Opstapje** is a two-year family-centered program, which aims to stimulate child development. This program consists of home visits by paraprofessionals; group meetings for the mothers and child care (peuterspeelzaal) for the children. In the Opstapje program there is a structured play curriculum targeting play and development of the children as well as mother-child interactions ([www.nji.nl](http://www.nji.nl)). It is also implemented on a smaller scale in one province of Flanders (the northern part of Belgium). Research on these family support programs is very scarce and the effects found on child development are mostly small, inconsistent or non-significant (Kohnstamm, Meesters & Simons, 1997; Sann & Thrum, 2005; van Veen, Roeleveld & Leseman, 2000; van Veen, Derriks & Roeleveld, 2002).

In **Home Start** experienced volunteers, coached by a coordinator, visit families at home and help them with support and practical help on those domains of childrearing and family management for which the parents express a need for support ([www.nji.nl](http://www.nji.nl)). Asscher (2005) found that Home Start has positive effects on parental wellbeing: less depression and a higher level of feeling competent in their parenting role. Also the parenting practices changed: more positive and less negative parenting.

**Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters** (HIPPY) is a paraprofessional home visiting program, originally developed in Israel (Lombard, 1981). The home visitors live in the same community as the target families and work directly with the parents by using role-play with weekly activity packets (for usage with children). Additionally, families join group meetings in order to share curriculum information and to learn about community resources (Nievar, et al., 2011). Parents report higher expectations for their children's academic success and a greater involvement in their children's learning (Kagitcibasi et al., 2001). Higher home environment scores (after program completion) positively impacts on parental depression and stress level and parental self-efficacy. Positive child outcomes were also reported: higher reading and math achievement (Nievar, et al., 2011)

A caveat is that a lot of the research is done by scientists on the pay-roll of these organisations (e.g. HIPPY). The program has also been adapted to local situations in various countries. One of the better-known adaptations was realised by the Mother and Child Education Foundation (Açev) in Turkey and later adapted for Turkish migrant parents in several European countries, including Belgium and Germany. While the program showed significant long-term effects on children's development in Turkey, particularly where children were not enrolled in preschool (Kagitcibaci et al, 2001) these effects could not be found in the implementation in Belgium (Ottoy, 2004)



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## 4.4. Group work with parents

Group support can also be important in this context. For example, in Italy, several projects focus on the resources within groups of families, starting from giving value to each parental experience and sharing it with others (Catarsi, 2003; Musatti, Picchio, 2005; Milani, 2003). The aims are 1) supporting parents in gaining confidence in their own competences and self-esteem 2) creating a space-time where parents can reflect on their experiences and beliefs; 3) creating a “community” based on the concept of co-education, where it becomes clear that children’s education is not just a private responsibility, it is a social one (Catarsi, Fortunati, 2005; Jésus, 2010; Rayna, Rubio, 2010).

Parents meet in small groups guided by a facilitator who is not positioned as an expert, knowing the right answers, but who accompanies the dialogue. This approach helps families to feel less alone, to learn from each other, and to build a sense of belonging (Iafrate, Rosnati, 2007). This perspective has a tradition in the Italian context, due to its socio-political history, especially in some Regions, such as Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, where since the 1980’s new types of ECEC initiatives have been created and called “meeting spaces” for children and adults: social microcosms in which the group becomes more than the sum of its parts (Musatti, Picchio, 2005; Catarsi, Fortunati, 2005; Bondioli, Mantovani, 1997; Sharmahd, 2007). In this approach, ECEC initiatives are seen as “transitional spaces between families and society” (Mony, 1993). These meeting places can be found in many countries, including Italy, France, Japan and Belgium (Hoshi-Watanabe et al, 2013). While research on the effects of these initiatives is still scarce, it has been demonstrated that they can yield significant positive effects on mother-child relations (Rullo & Musatti, 2005) and can provide social support in context of ethnic and socio-economic diversity (Geens & Vandenbroeck, 2013).

## 5. Engaging low-income and ethnic minority parents

Family involvement in early childhood education and care or in preschool classroom programs is essential to contribute to improved child outcomes in the long run. The home learning environment and the educational level of parents (mothers) are (very) important factors for later school success. Yet, early childhood provisions and family support programs are not equally effective in engaging parents. The quality of parent-educator/teacher interactions is positively related with the socio-emotional development and adjustment of children (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In this section effective ideas and practices, as well as guidelines of good practice are discussed, most of them not directly found in literature on early interventions.

Ordinary daily inconveniences experienced by socio-economically disadvantaged families, such as inflexible and demanding work schedules, lack of child care coverage and unreliable transportation, are suggested as variables that may be adversely impact participation (Prinz & Miller, 1994). Other obstacles for participation besides these economic and practical reasons are barriers of a more cultural kind: insufficient information, language differences, less social capital, cultural prejudices from services to parents and vice versa, and staff lacking intercultural skills.

### Hard to reach families or hard to reach services

Children from ethnic minority families are less often enrolled in ECEC, for many different reasons, including family characteristics and features of the provision (see Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2012 for an overview). Also the idea that professionals will reject the educational practices and values of minority families, influences the motivation of these families to enter child care (Vollebergh, 2002). Institutions expect a lot of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility from the parents. Parents are expected to be motivated, capable of self-reflection, able to formulate a question for help in ways that the services understand, and willing to cope with their own problems. Many ethnic minority families have little of negative experiences with care institutions and fear that these will ‘take away their children without listening to the parents’ (Bellaart & Azrar, 2003).



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Current research on home visiting programs suggests that programs placed within a framework of linguistic and cultural competence are more likely to engage parents, especially within African American and Latino families (Daro, McCurdy, Falconniet & Stojanovic, 2003; McCurdy, Gannon & Daro, 2003). The success of the HIPPPY program is the use of paraprofessional home visitors from the same community, speaking the same language as the families served.

Services (supported by staff and workers) with an explicit parent engagement and outreach strategy are more successful in engaging parents from poor and ethnic minority families (Nievar, et al, 2011). Outreaching means meeting with parents personally, sending materials so parents can help their child at home, and telephoning routinely as well as when the child is having problems (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Services and programs have to be welcoming for parents and children, and address specific parental needs. It helps if the workers see parents as partners in the educational development of their children.

The same holds for building on the cultural values of the minority groups. If an organization or service wants to involve ethnic minority families it has to embrace a philosophy of diversity: ethnic-cultural diversity then becomes the 'norm' in the management of the organization, in working with families, and this is also reflected in the diversity within the team. It is helpful when staff and teachers have high standards and expectations for improvement of all children and particularly of children from ethnic minority families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Raising expectations needs to be accompanied by extra emotional and academic support (Heckmann, 2008).

Van Tuyt's et al. (2001) research findings highlight the importance of gearing the intervention to the prevailing parental style to obtain change. If the gap is too large between the practice of the parents and what is offered, parents become insecure and the chance that they will actually apply what they have learned is very small. Also adapting the program to the needs of the family enhances the participation and involvement in services (Korfmacher, et al, 2008).

## **Co-construction of educational practices**

A collegial practice in the centre or service can spill over into co-constructing educational practices in dialogue with children and involving parents as equal partners in pedagogical decision-making. A primary duty of the early childhood centre is to create a common culture of acceptance and achievement for all children among educators and parents (ISSA, 2010). Another example of parent involvement is offered by the CERIS project in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (the French speaking Community of Belgium). An action research has been recently carried out by this Centre with the aim of developing children's linguistic competences through a strong collaboration between families, pre-schools and local communities. The project aimed at realizing a model of partnership amongst the municipality of Charleroi, the University of Mons, the community, the media, the pre-school system and the families (Pourtois, Desmet, Lahaye, 2010).

Alignment of early childhood education and care, and (pre)school institutions is also helpful in the experience of ethnic minority parents (Nievar, et al, 2011). This is also the case with the different agencies families have to deal with: effective multi-agency working is required to make it possible that families can access the services they need (Moran et al., 2004).

In order to be effective for as many families as possible – especially for the most problematic families – a balance needs to be struck with the demands of the parents, including a flexible implementation of the program and supply, which implicates standard guidelines and checks on treatment integrity. Moran et al (2004) conclude in their report on parenting programs that it is more effective to make use of effective programs with a clear theory about the mechanisms of change.



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## 6. Discussion and conclusions

### **Real two-generation programs are scarce**

There are very few two-generation programs that not only address educational outcomes but also include structural changes in the living conditions of parents. We need to acknowledge that early childhood programs cannot bulwark against intermittent hunger, dilapidated housing, crime-ridden neighbourhoods, racial and economic segregation, and other chronic stressors associated with poverty. For three decades, wages for low-income Americans have been stagnant or falling' (Hertz, 2007). A continuation of this trend is likely to undermine hope and disincentive participation in many social institutions, especially among the poorest families. Preschool enrichment programs can soften, but do not remove, the debilitating forces of poverty on children's development

Most of the programs described have a strong focus on child outcome and regrettably have less interest, time and funding to spend on the needs of the family as a whole and the parents in particular (vocational skills, work, income). On the other hand, Cohen et al (2004) have raised concerns about the growing emphasis in the Sure Start program on childcare provision and employment promotion, at the expense of health promotion and a broader conception of fostering children's intellectual and social development. Although programs as Sure Start are intended as community-based interventions, in practice the focus is primarily on changing the behaviour of individual families. Although the community is seen as the target of change, the population impact is generally derived from the accumulation of changes in behaviour at the individual level. It is important to remember that creating a healthy community also requires public policies that help to shape life circumstances in the community (Gray and Francis, 2007).

### **Some paradoxes and tensions**

There has been a long lasting tension in programs such as Head Start and all the prevention programs, between the explicit commitment to parental involvement and empowerment and the implicit agenda of remedying 'deficient' parenting.

Another recurrent field of tensions is the need to strike a balance between maintaining fidelity to a program model, on the one hand, and allowing flexibility to adjust to local conditions on the other. Successful programs are associated with fidelity to the underlying model, monitoring of quality and flexibility to become more family-focused, culturally competent and locally integrated. Programs should address the quality of implementation and avoid program drift, that is, watering down of the program elements during expansion; but programs have also to be responsive to changing social, cultural and economic conditions.

### **Poverty remains unaddressed...**

It is to be noticed that only few (if any) programs target poverty itself. Most programs focus on the negative effects of poverty on adult and child well being, and on child development. Most programs described in this paper have the intention to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty by improving the academic, social and cognitive skills of children in poor families and by creating a stimulating home learning environment (such as the HIPPO program). Even programs that do not claim to reduce poverty and rather focus on the prevention of conduct problems such as the Incredible Years series can be seen as good practices for children from poor or ethnic minority families.

### **... yet ECEC can make a contribution**

Early childhood and (pre)school programs that include training for parents to work with their children at home can have significant positive effects. The long-term outcomes tend to improve the longer the children and parents are in the program. The level of involvement of the parents increased achievement. Children of all backgrounds and income groups made gains. In some studies the children with the most negative life conditions made the biggest progress (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Involvement at home remains after program participation, while involvement in school declined over time. Home visits of



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teachers and other forms of parental engagement in preschool seem to support larger gains in children's academic and school readiness skills (Herman-Smith, 2013).

The home environment can be defined as a protective factor in the development of children. The home learning environment is only moderately associated with the mothers educational level. What parents do with their children matters more than who they are (their degree) ([www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org)). When interventions have an effect on the self-efficacy and self-confidence of the parents (Shumow & Lomax, 2001).

Higher levels of investment in preschool programs tend to yield better outcomes for children. Modest investments in preschool programs are not likely to produce a significant change in children's developmental trajectories. Programs should include out-of-home preschool classroom experiences; a requirement that children attend classrooms for at least half days, five days per week for a standard school year; a relatively low staff-to-child ratio; trained and supported (behavioural problems) staff, preferably with college degrees; and home visits or other forms of regular and direct interaction with parents that teach them to engage in developmentally stimulating activities with their children. When preschool programs have access to early childhood mental health consultation, they are much less likely to expel children for behavioural problems (Gilliam, 2008). Enrolment in such programs for more than one school year usually results in better overall outcomes than attending for one year only. The benefits are most evident in the long term. The benefits of preschool intervention programs are not primarily cognitive or academic. The main benefit of preschool programs is the acquisition of social and behavioural skills such as persistence, motivation, self-control and self-efficacy, skills that are often important for success in school as well as upward social and economic mobility. An emphasis on the quality of early relationships and interactions predict children's future academic achievement and pro-social behaviour.

### **Finally**

Despite the lack of consistent and comprehensive two-generation programs, an overview of the scholarly literature clearly shows the potentials of programs that focus both on parents and children and that take into account their living conditions. Considering these potential effects, it becomes increasingly important to underline the necessity of *quality* ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) initiatives, by connecting competences at the individual, group, organization, and policy level. It is not just about having competent teachers or competent parents, it is about building a competent *system* in which reflection has an important role, as stated also by the recent CoRe study (Urban et al, 2012). This asks also for investing in the professionalization of staff through documentation, reflection and supervision (e.g. (Catarsi, 2011; Musatti, Mayer, 2003; ERATO, 2011).



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