



TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS

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

Addendum to 'A meeting place for policy-makers and researchers: the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years' (article by Jan Peeters and Ankie Vandekerckhove, in *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 2015, Vol. 23, no. 3, 329-337)

Fifth forum – Integrated systems for children and families – continuity and alignment of services (Dublin)

Poverty and social vulnerability are multifaceted, persistent and intergenerational problems in our current society. Several basic provision and family supporting services do exist but are not always easy to find by those who may need them the most. Many of these existing services, such as e.g. ECEC, health and social support services, could be a lot more accessible and meaningful for low-income and migrant families if they would work in a more coordinated and aligned way. Not only would a more integrated approach make these services more accessible for families, existing practices in the Scandinavian countries also prove that better integrated services are also financially sound.

Integration of and cooperation among services can be shaped in many different ways, but in order to be successful, some conditions need to be met. Working towards integration requires careful consideration and co-construction of common values, goals and approaches as well as willingness to share expertise and knowledge. This is often easier said than done.

The cooperation can happen both horizontally and vertically and needs to be planned and monitored carefully to stay on the right track. Strong leadership is vital as well as coherent and facilitating policies.

Other key points for successful integration are: clear planning and division of responsibilities, multidisciplinary work, aiming at structural change, qualified staff, consideration for local context and community needs and approaching families as partners instead of customers.

A more integrated and aligned approach can also offer better support for children and families who go through certain transitions that can be quite disturbing and difficult, such as going from home to childcare or from childcare to preschool. Allowing time to get to know one another and facilitating warm transitions improves the well being of the child and builds trustful relationships with the families.

Integration of services and smoother transitions between services is not only an issue of closing the gaps or increasing efficiency, but just as much an issue of universal access and equal rights to enjoy different types basic supportive provisions for young children and their families.

Sixth forum - multilingualism, identity and diversity in the early years (Washington DC)

Finding the right answers to the challenges of our multidiverse and multilingual societies is not at all easy. Especially since research and experiences have shown that there is no one fast track recipe. The TFIEY made a clear statement though, that multilingualism and superdiversity should not be considered to be a problem but rather a richness and a source of new strengths.



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Research has led to the conclusion that children are more able to learn other languages if they are also allowed to develop their mother tongue. The home language, along with the child's cultural and linguistic background is a strong basis, rather than a hindrance, for other language acquisition as well as a support for the child's well being and feeling of belonging. Bringing in the different languages within educational settings also strengthens the links between ECEC, schools, communities and the home and stimulates mutual respect and tolerance.

As there is no overwhelming evidence for the success of immersion education, a strong case was made for the approach of functional multilingual learning: developing both the home language and the common, dominant, language. It respects the child's home background and culture, it can ease the transition to ECEC and uses the home language as a basis for further learning. It is vital that enough time and space is given to children to develop different languages and they shouldn't be assessed on their language acquisition too quickly. Assessment methods should also be adapted to the diverse and multilingual backgrounds of children.

Separation of groups of children, according to language, has not worked that well: including the multilingual reality into the pedagogical practice has much more positive effects on the socio-affective development of children and did not create major difficulties in learning the dominant language. Carefully designed programs, as well as committed and open minded staff are needed. The overall cost may in the end be rather limited as the main investment seems to be needed in the mindset of teachers. They do not necessarily have to be bi- or multilingual themselves, but they do need to be tolerant and respectful towards multilingualism. Continuous coaching, team support and committed leadership can be very helpful for this.