

MINUTES OF THE WORKSHOP IN BARCELONA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EDUFIRST PROJECT 'IMPROVEMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES'.

Barcelona, Milano, Tampere and UVIC.

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GROUP 1: UNIVERSALISATION OF ECEC SERVICES

The discussion in this group was very much influenced by the fact that in Finland they already have guaranteed universalisation, which led to the search for 'solutions' and soon we were talking about this difference and, especially, about the reality in Finland, from where we are looking towards a hypothetical ideal future, in order to question it.

Apart from this fact, important linguistic limitations on the part of the Barcelona group also prevented them from being able to deepen or structure the debate a little...

In this sense, I will list the key ideas by themes that emerged:

- As has been said, on the part of Finland, there is not much debate, because they already have the universalisation of services. Barcelona reiterates the strategy of prioritising children at risk of social exclusion, while Milano proposes strengthening the ECEC system to include third sector organisations in order to strengthen the network and increase the number of places. However, they recognise that in this sense the challenge would be to achieve an integrated system that guarantees quality based on similar training for all professionals and to build continuity into the system for all the children and families who receive services.

- In Finland, the problem mentioned is that the citizens do not seem to value this privilege and instead complaints arrive because there are families who cannot choose the centre of their choice. Milano complements this contribution with the idea that it is very different to deal with 'individualistic' families vs. families who have a 'community perspective', with whom it is easier to deal with and involve in ECEC services.

- One issue we are dealing with is questioning whether universalisation is the solution to all problems. For example, from Milano it is said that we must not confuse the needs of children with the needs of families - a bit like what was said from Finland, about families demanding 'too much' from the ECEC system. We also talk about how ECEC services have to take into account, but not only, family conciliation. We commented, in a somewhat disorganised way, that in this issue of conciliation it is not enough just to talk about timetables and that it is necessary to frame it in the broader issue of relations between professionals and families □. From Barcelona, emphasis is placed on the need to create more spaces where families - among them - and professionals can meet and talk to each other.

- A second issue is to take into account the diversity of the population. Not all families have the same needs: there are families who will never want to go to the public school and look for

private services; others who have a large family to support their children's upbringing; and a third group who organise themselves in their own way and can make occasional use of ECEC services - especially those that are not nursery schools.

- From Finland it is stated that the universalisation of services has led to a proliferation of many very specific laws and that this generates a very complex bureaucracy and accountability.

- The third issue we deal with on the universalisation of services refers to how to guarantee a sufficient number of well-trained and motivated professionals, in other words, the quality of the system. Some comments are made, but no conclusion is reached beyond what Milà commented in the previous section on the training of professionals and continuity in the system.

- Within this topic, it is commented that the lack of relationship between the public and private system (in Barcelona, Tampere, perhaps to a lesser extent in Milan) generates problems and is a challenge to be taken into account when talking about a universal system - the place of the private sector in this system.

GROUP 2: EDUCATIONAL MODEL AND PROFESSIONALS

1- Links, barriers and (in)coherence between the two cycles of early childhood education, the training of professionals, their professional recognition, their professional identity, etc.

Challenge

- How to professionally recognise professionals with different initial training (vocational training and university degree).
- University degree that does not meet the professional needs of 0-6 educators.
- Incorporation and maintenance of professionals in the 0-3 (and 0-6) stage in a context in which they do not want to come so much ('vocation'?) and leave after a while (to 3-6 or other professional fields).
- Constant changes in the families/children to be cared for and their needs.
- Working conditions still clearly below those of the 3-6 professionals (Catalonia)
- Transition from 0-3 to 3-6 for infants and families

Proposals

- Make ECEC centres (Kindergartens, family spaces...) smaller and less EB for a single director.
- More support for EB directors and area directors and their team.
- Eliminate the figure of the TEI (all teachers), introduce smaller ratios, and promote co-teaching. All of this to contribute to providing a better service and improving the social value of the infant stage and the work of teachers.
- Work more on professional commitment to early childhood and the school project.

2. Tensions between a global model of ECEC services for the whole city and the specific needs of each territory and centre. Tensions between homogeneity and heterogeneity in approaches and practices, between equality and equity.

Challenge

- How to convert homogeneous global models with heterogeneous concrete realities.
- How to manage educational areas with 4-5 schools, 400/500 families and 60 educators and

generate cohesion and networking

- How to approach working for equality from an equal model.
- How to work in contexts that are highly diverse and unequal and with changing needs.
- How to address the challenge of children/families with special needs and the needs and expectations of families in this respect.

Proposals

- Establish a general model for all the city's services with common minimum requirements (training, forms of intervention) and that each service should ground and specify them according to its own reality and context.
- More links, contact and knowledge with families, especially in the most diverse and unequal contexts. More role within the schools.
- Establish collaborations with universities so that pupils in education 0-6 have first-hand knowledge of the reality of ECEC services (mentoring, longer internships, etc.).
- Incorporate more SEN and diversity-related content into university curricula.
- New initial and ongoing training on multiculturalism, diversity, multilingualism, SEN.
- Promote a major political agreement to prioritise and finance the 0-6 age group
- Bureaucratic simplification so that teachers and families can devote themselves to education.
- Greater 'open-mindedness' of teachers to new realities
- ECEC services that are more contextualised, related and diverse according to the needs of the territory. Take into account the difficulties of privacy and anonymity, etc.
- Ensure 0-3-0-6 coordination in each territory.

GROUP 3: NETWORK, COMMUNITY AND FAMILIES

Mapping of services and facilities in the neighbourhood aimed at young children, with pilot projects to incorporate a community perspective, extension of evening hours and information for families.

Difficulties:

- Difficulty to recognise the opportunities of the cities and to have an updated map of these resources
- Tensioned services and little time for community action
- Difficulty in understanding nursery schools as public buildings open to the public
- Little look beyond the school
- Management of resources: cleaning, caretaker, responsibilities

Proposals for improvement:

- Everyone needs to know what the neighbourhood is like and who works there (I map and I connect)
- Mapping of services and equipment in a unified way, not sectorised by areas.
- Pilot projects with services that already have a community outlook and are implementing it.
- Stability of teams, projects and services
- Extending the timetable to the afternoon (school, professionals)
- Charter for families with young children with information on services and resources in the neighbourhood.
- Commitment to public services and community buildings (service model)

Improve the coordination of services through networks and meetings of the different professionals that bring together all the areas aimed at young children.

Difficulties:

- The “need” of control from professionals that, sometimes, is a barrier to trust and cooperation.
- Judgements of value in relation to the families, by the professionals of different services.
- Difficulties of coordination with other municipal services (e.g. health care).
- Saturation of health services
- Creation of many services: dispersion

Proposals for improvement:

- Creation and coordination of networks in all areas and services aimed at young children.
- Meetings with professionals from other services to carry out more coordinated actions.
- Thinking about the needs of the first year of life.

Have time and space dedicated to the relationship and support of families in early childhood services, with the inclusion of experts and the need to link multicultural families.

Difficulties:

- Mistrust of multicultural families towards early childhood services.
- Difficulty in getting parents to participate in afternoon activities.

Proposals for improvement:

- Have time and space dedicated to the relationship and listening of families
- Experts who can explain in the services where the families are located issues related to the development of the children (who can go to where the families are).

Facilitate a versatile training of professionals, with a single training area for teachers from 0 to 6 years old and multidisciplinary teams at the school.

Difficulties:

- Professional profiles in schools: often only specialised in early childhood education.
- Access to university/training: professional profile of educators/students and social and pedagogical awareness.

Proposals for improvement:

- Sufficiently versatile training of professionals (for the whole team).
- A single cost in the training of teachers from 0 to 6 years old and multidisciplinary teams at school.
- Not losing sight of the educational function of the nursery school.

GROUP 4: DIVERSITY SOCIETY AND CHILDREN

A first element shared by the countries was the increase of children with special educational needs, specifically the autistic spectrum disorder. This is an educational and social challenge that has to be faced from Finland, Milan and Catalonia. However, from this point onwards, the debate and discussion we had was that the contexts of each country are very different and, consequently, the actions that are taken to address this increase in diversity and to move towards a more inclusive system are diverse. The main difficulties that emerged from the discussions were as follows:

a. Common legal framework

Catalonia

- Catalonia does not have shared legislation, but rather the legal framework and subsequent actions to be developed in the 0-3 cycle depend on each municipality.
- In the Catalan context, there is a decree on inclusion that does not include the 0-3 cycle.
- The educational service in the first cycle of EI (0-3) is neither compulsory, nor free, nor universal. Therefore, not all children have access to nursery schools. Therefore, the system itself cannot be considered inclusive.

Milano

- Milano considers that they have an inclusive educational model. They affirm that in the first cycle 0-3 there are already diagnoses that favour the existence of support educators in the schools. Without the diagnosis it is more complex to look for other resources to support the needs detected. Therefore, they affirm that it is essential to have the diagnosis in order to be able to manage future support and accompaniment actions.

Finland

- In Finland, there are national and local guidelines, shared laws that guide the action to be developed. These are common to all, which they value as a very positive element.

b. Public services to cater for diversity

Catalonia

- Each municipality makes decisions on what public services, resources, staff, etc., are available to the nursery schools to deal with diversity. Therefore, there are many differences within the same local context.

Milano

- They feel that there is more and more ‘family poverty’ and that the public services in Milano are unable to provide a response. They have the feeling of being ‘overwhelmed’. This means that those families who have more economic resources can look for private alternatives, while those who have more difficulties have to wait a long time to receive attention from the public service. This can limit possible diagnoses and, therefore, additional resources.

Finland

- They affirm that at the level of resources there are regional differences according to the socio-economic situation of the families.
- As a strong point, they identify that special education teachers are not professionals external to mainstream schools, but that there are special education teachers within the same teaching staff. This makes it possible to share knowledge between educators, so they talk about the ongoing training they give each other to deal with specific cases and share the same line as a school in order to respond to diversity.

As far as proposals for improvement are concerned, the following ideas appear:

Catalonia

- Reducing ratios; the reality of the situation in Finland is very positively valued, although the complexity of our context is evident. Milan and Barcelona share a similar starting point, which is far from the Finnish context.
- Create common legislation for Catalonia as a whole to manage resources in order to deal with this diversity, which is constantly growing.
- Permanent training of teachers within the same team. Therefore, to include within the teaching teams themselves professionals with expertise in the field of inclusion and attention to diversity in order to respond to the needs of the schools.

Milano

- The education system already promotes personalised attention for each child. Therefore, we already have an individual vision of each particular case (PEI - Individual Educational Plan). However, in order to continue developing this task, more public resources are needed. They also highlight the need to simplify diagnostic procedures.
- They claim the possibility of receiving generalised training for all educators and educators, as the current situation is that they receive training according to the needs of each school. They state that it would be interesting to identify training areas shared by all professionals.
- In Milano they have a service that is a ‘disability office’, which is in charge of training all the educators and educators in the schools.

- Improve the ECEC specific services for children. They share with us that there are few external specialists in schools, and that there is a lack of a network to accompany, train and support educational centres. Improve the network of this specialist.

Finland

- There is a lack of reflection and discussion on what are the objectives of inclusion in ECEC services. And also, how they want to put them into practice.
- To further promote social services in order to promote equality in terms of training and knowledge among professionals. Therefore, they call for continuous training on special educational needs and inclusion.
- They also call for greater social equity, as they talk about Town Planning / Urban Planning, and for greater equity in rental flats. We were unable to go into this in depth.

As a conclusion to the debate, a final shared idea emerged, and that is that we need to transform the way we look at special educational needs, diversity and inclusion, and understand this context as an opportunity and not as a barrier or a barrier. Therefore, we share the need for a new paradigm at a social level.

‘We need a paradigm change at a social level that understands inclusion as an opportunity, not as a burden’.