

Editorial, Special edition 'Early Childhood Education and Care' ^[1]

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EXCERPT

Without an understanding of history as possibility, tomorrow is problematic. In order for it to come, it is necessary that we build it through transforming today. Different tomorrows are possible. The struggle is no longer reduced to either delaying what is to come or ensuring its arrival; it is necessary to reinvent the future. Education is indispensable for this reinvention. By accepting ourselves as active subjects and objects of history, we become beings who make division. It makes us ethical beings (Paulo Freire, 1997, p. 55).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been, since the 1992 Council recommendations on child care (Council of the European Communities, 1992), a recurring topic on European policy agendas. The importance of high quality services for young children, families and communities has recently been further emphasized. From a European perspective, investing in accessible early childhood education and care of the highest quality is crucial to realise wide ranging strategies and goals. These goals, laid out in the Europe 2020 strategy, are based on a bleak analysis of the current situation:

Europe faces a moment of transformation. The crisis has wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy. In the meantime, the world is moving fast and long-term challenges – globalisation, pressure on resources, ageing – intensify. The EU must now take charge of its future (European Commission, 2010, p. 3).

Europe 2020 is an acknowledgement that yesterday's solutions will not suffice to 'put Europe back on track'. Europe and its Member States will have to implement policies that ensure that economic growth is smart, sustainable and inclusive. Knowledge base and innovation, sustainability and social cohesion cannot be developed in isolation. Against this background, coherent approaches to education, training and lifelong learning are seen as of particular importance for 'improving citizens' employability, social inclusion and personal fulfilment' (Council of the European Union, 2010). These analyses, conclusions, goals and strategies provide the context and arguments for the attention paid to early childhood services. They do so from at least two interconnected perspectives: First, early childhood education and care for all children is a cornerstone of lifelong learning:

'[...] there is an urgent need to reduce the current number of low achievers in basic skills – particularly reading (for which current data indicate that an average of one in four pupils is unable to read and write properly) – and to further reduce the number of early leavers from education and training, as well as a need to increase participation in early childhood education and care, to raise the number of young people with a tertiary-level qualification, and to increase adult participation in lifelong learning. Such needs are particularly acute in the case of those from disadvantaged background, who statistically tend to perform significantly less well against each of the benchmarks. Only by addressing the needs of those at risk of social exclusion can the objectives of the Strategic Framework be properly met.' (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 6, emphasis added)

Region: Europe ^[3]

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