

Curriculum issues in national policy-making ^[1]

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Summary

This discussion of curriculum issues in national policy making is based on the findings of thematic reviews of early childhood education and care, carried out by expert teams in twenty OECD countries. Much consensus is found across the countries reviewed in terms of curricular principles and aspirations, and with regard to official content. Differences emerge, however, in the practice of curriculum, especially with respect to the emphasis placed on broad developmental goals or on focused cognitive skills. From this and other characteristic differences, two broad approaches to curriculum and pedagogy can be discerned: the approach adopted in the social pedagogy tradition and the traditional pre-primary school approach. The broad features of each system are described, but a caveat is raised about excessive contrasts being drawn as exceptions to the rule are found in each tradition. Major obstacles to curriculum quality and implementation met commonly across countries are structural failings (lack of financing, unfavourable child/staff ratios, poorly qualified and poorly remunerated staff...) and inadequate pedagogical theory and practice. Against this background, three emerging issues are discussed: accountability and the new learning standards; the expansion of literacy practices and the re-positioning of educators in the early childhood field. Some options for progress are proposed for consideration.

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