

Towards competent systems in early childhood education and care. Implications for policy and practice ^[1]

Author: Urban, Mathias; Vandebroek, Michel; Van Laere, Katrien; Lazzari, Arianna & Peeters, Jan

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Introduction

There is a broad consensus among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers that the quality of early childhood services depend on well-educated, experienced and 'competent' staff. But what exactly makes a competent early childhood practitioner? How can competence be understood, and its development supported, in the highly complex and demanding field of working with young children, families and communities? What approaches do different countries take, and what lessons can be learnt from practices developed by practitioners, training institutions and policymakers across Europe? This article presents the findings of a European research project conducted by the University of East London (UEL) and the University of Ghent (UGent). The study on 'competence requirements in early childhood education and care' (CoRe) explored conceptualisations of 'competence' and professionalism in early childhood practice and identified systemic conditions for developing, supporting and maintaining competence at all layers of the early childhood system. The European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture commissioned the research conducted between January 2010 and May 2011. In the light of the findings and intensive consultation with key stakeholders in ECEC in Europe, CoRe developed policy recommendations. The CoRe research team was supported by an international expert advisory team and collaborated with three European and international professional networks (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET), International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and Children in Europe (CiE)) which represent the field of ECEC in all EU27 Member States and candidate countries. In addition, a fourth international network (Education International) brought its strong workforce and teaching unions' perspective. Locally-based but internationally renowned researchers provided critical insights into the policies of their countries and case studies of practices in different European locations. The aim of CoRe was to provide policy-relevant information, advice and case studies with regard to the competences required for the ECEC workforce and support competence development from a systemic perspective. In this article, we present the findings of the different but interrelated strands of the research process which underpin the policy recommendations regarding systemic competence development and professionalisation in early childhood education and care in Europe. By providing informed views on the questions at stake we hope to initiate discussion, provoke new thinking, and encourage asking new and critical questions.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: quality ^[4]

professional development ^[5]

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