



# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY LEARNING

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The same questions are being asked  
in every country

*What do we hope for children?*

*What do we expect from children and why?*

*How can we ensure that we nurture the unique capacities of each and every child?*

*Are we helping them to grow into happy, fulfilled adults?*

We know that early years education matters

## EPPE RESULTS

All children benefit from high quality group experience  
before school

Poor children gain disproportionate benefit

The key to high quality is the training of staff

We know that the transition from early years settings to school settings is a critical period of time for children's emotional well-being

And that the impact of our learning experiences in the early years stays with us for life

The period of birth to six year olds is the critically important phase for establishing learning attitudes. Gender and race studies (Siraj-Blatchford 1996) show that life long attitudes are set early. Attitudes to "self as a learner" follow the same pattern. Goleman (1996) talks of a "window of opportunity"

These studies show that there is a biologically determined period **when it is crucial to establish certain semi-permanent attitudes about learning.** The stronger these are embedded, the greater their resilience to inevitable, climatic periods of poor stimulation, and the more likely that they will persist.

What is recognized as the 'Early Years' is different depending on where we live though. Some children start compulsory school at five, some not until they are seven.

**Compulsory age of starting school in European countries, 2007**  
**NFER, 2007** This table includes information on school starting ages in the 34 countries participating in Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe.

**Four:** Northern Ireland

**Five:** England, Malta, Netherlands, Scotland

**Six :** Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg , Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey

**Seven:** Bulgaria, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Wales



In Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the authorities have put into place a special preparatory year, or pre-school class, for 6- to 7-year-old children in the year before they enter compulsory school. **This class prolongs the learning approaches of the kindergarten into the first years of the primary school.**

In Denmark, the pre-school class, which takes place in the local primary school, **is led by a pedagogue from the originating kindergarten centre.** He or she works alongside the primary teacher who is responsible for the class in the coming year. This bridging period is followed up by a curriculum for first and second grades of primary school that is designed to incorporate active learning and child initiative, as found in the pre-school learning environment.

The UK is seen as investing heavily  
in Early Years

But the English approach differs substantially from that of  
the Nordic countries and now to that of Wales.

In Wales, a new Scandinavian-style Learn through Play nursery and infant curriculum is being introduced for three to seven-year-olds which moves away from the more formal classroom based lessons.

*'Having drawn on best international practice from countries such as Denmark, New Zealand and Italy in introducing the Foundation Phase we believe that the pay-off of this radical new way of learning will be long-term and its impact will be felt for many years to come.'*

**Jane Hutt, 2007**

## **The Scottish Herald, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

Scottish ministers are looking to Norway to learn lessons about how to improve the education system for the nation's youngest children.

Adam Ingram, the Children's Minister, who has just returned from a fact- finding trip to the Scandinavian country, said there was much Scotland could learn from Norway.

A strong social pedagogy tradition exists in  
Nordic and Central Europe

*‘Countries coming from the social pedagogy tradition  
pursue societal aims in their early childhood programmes  
that go beyond preparation for school’*

OECD

The social pedagogy tradition place trust in young children as agents of their own learning, as competent persons who desire to engage with the world.



and sees the learning of children as not only about the development of individual potential, but also how children successfully express themselves and interact with others

# NEW ZEALAND WOVEN CURRICULUM

## Four broad principles

Empowerment

Holistic Development

Family and Community

Relationships

## Five strands

Well-being

Belonging

Contribution

Communication

Exploration



# Reggio Emilia

Child in relationship with others

Child as empowered learner

Environment as teacher

Children's multiple symbolic languages

Teachers as learners

Dynamic documentation

# Ferre Laevers - Experiential Learning

(informed the UK EEL Project)

Emotional health and wellbeing

Curiosity and the exploratory drive

Expressive and communicative skills

Imagination and Creativity

The competence of self-organisation

Understanding the world of objects and people

Values Education

The Nordic countries are very concerned about what they call the dangers of 'schoolification'

i.e. seeing early learning as a preparation for school rather than a phase in its own right.

They think children should be experiencing systems as:

*who am I, how do I belong, and what am I interested in?*  
(intrinsic valuing)

instead of

*what are they looking for and am I good enough?*  
(external valuing)

The UK, France and USA are criticised for continuing to see education as 'learning development' and as 'utilitarian'

*i.e we need education so that we can enter the workforce*

In the Nordic countries, Russia, Japan and Asia it is instead seen as a means of 'self-development' within the context of the larger community, and as having intrinsic value in its own right

*i.e we study in order to belong  
and to understand and perfect ourselves*

*‘The Nordic approach is very different to seeing ECEC as primarily an investment in the future, strongly linked to utilitarian ends, e.g. preparation for school (and later work), in which the child is considered as a person to be formed rather than as a citizen who actively participates in the life of the ECEC centre.*

*In the utilitarian perspective, state purposes are strongly fore-grounded, and the actual desires and natural learning strategies of the child may be overshadowed.’*

OECD

A strong Reggio movement informs pre-school practice in Sweden, a country that in recent years has laid greater emphasis on learning and education, while retaining the social pedagogic emphasis on social competence and the holistic development and well-being of children.

Unlike the English or French systems, children are not graded or assessed in Swedish pre-schools or early primary.

Last week's results on children ending their  
time in reception:

*'Less than half of children nationally achieve a point  
score of 6 in Personal, Social and Emotional  
Development and Communication, Language and  
Literacy by the end of the reception year'*



*and '1 in 7 children are struggling  
to write their own name'*



Cambridge University's Primary Review concluded that children *"are under intense and perhaps excessive pressure from the policy-driven demands of their schools and the commercially-driven values of the wider society."*



## **BBC News at the NUT conference, Manchester**

*Tests and league tables have made England's children the unhappiest in the western world, teachers have said.*

*Even nursery-age children were being taught to spell and write in readiness for the tests waiting for them at primary school.*

*Very young children knew exactly what educational levels they had reached, and many stopped trying because they believed they were "dumb", they said.*

Tuesday March 18th, 2008

Self-harm, anorexia, aggression and bullying are the results of increasing childhood stress, according to a survey published today by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

*"We believe that young people face intolerable strain from an education system which cannot stand failure. From an early age, children face the pressure to perform in tests to boost their schools' league tables."*

The Guardian, Thursday September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008

**Pupils to get lessons in fighting depression**

*Around one in 10 children have symptoms that place them at high risk of becoming seriously depressed*

## July 2002- Early Years Education: An International Perspective - Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal

Less than a quarter of the 21 countries had a national system of assessment used across all forms of funded early educational provision. This usually took the form of a developmental checklist, which was generally used to identify children with special needs who might need additional support or to stay back in early years provision. **Only in England was this assessment also used as an evaluative baseline measure for subsequent school performance.** In most cases the assessment was achieved through the use of systematic teacher observation and scrutiny of the child's portfolio of activity.

The prescription of detailed learning goals linked to formal teaching may place children in a situation where they experience prolonged feelings of inadequacy, and may impact negatively on their self-esteem and motivation to learn

(Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997; Sharp, 2002; Skolverket, 2004).

In principle, the issue of disturbing transitions from child care to early education does not arise in countries with integrated administration of early childhood services, where a common curriculum across the age range 1-6 years is generally employed, *e.g.* as in Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Starting Strong 2



What constitutes an "appropriate" curriculum for young children is still hotly disputed but it is increasingly apparent that simplistic outcome measures which only look to knowledge and skill competence in the short term are seriously underestimating the issue

Further memorandum from the Effective Early Learning Project (EEL) (EY82)

## **UK schools slip down global table**

**UK secondary school students have slipped down an international league table of reading and maths standards.**

Based on test results in 2006, the UK has lost the top 10 positions it held for both subjects seven years ago.

The most successful countries in reading are South Korea and Finland and teenagers in Taiwan and Finland are the highest achievers in maths.

**BBC News , Dec 2007 (PISA Results)**

The Guardian, Tuesday September 9 2008

The OECD international rankings place the UK 13th in reading this year - down from seventh in 2000 - and 18th in maths. Despite increased spending, the UK hovers around the OECD average for both reading and maths.

The OECD data shows that the most successful countries operate liberal curriculum models that recognise the needs of the individual over blanket national testing

"The health of a national educational system can't be fully captured by the term 'standards', critically important though standards are...Standards may have been too readily equated with quality." ...

Robin Alexander- The Cambridge-based Primary Review

THE TREASURE WITHIN  
UNESCO TASKFORCE FOR EDUCATION  
FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

THE FOUR PILLARS

Learning to know

Learning to do

Learning to live together

Learning to be

The understanding of documentation may be narrowed in many centres to the simple tracking of children's activities and progress...understood in this way, documentation may remain superficial.

Seen in this fashion, documentation may be used to provide only products, a visible trace for parents of what children have been doing, or more disquietingly, as an instrument to evaluate children's acquisition of various skills.

The emotional development of young children is a “critical aspect of the development of overall brain architecture that has enormous consequences over the course of a lifetime”.

*From Neurons to Neighbourhoods* (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000)



# Early Childhood Education and Care

We cannot afford to get it wrong



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for the **OpenEYE** Campaign, October 2008