



Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on the Early childhood Road

Report

Promoting the Wellbeing of Toddlers within Europe

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Introduction to the Report

The TODDLER Project focuses on one of the EU Commission's priority themes for 2009-2010 identified in EURYDICE (2009), by supporting early years' practitioners, teachers and students in their understanding of how to promote development of toddlers (aged 18 to 36 months) from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

“The policy challenge, therefore, is to (re)build (current) systems of early childhood care and education that meet crucial design features as outlined above, that provide high quality care and education for all children, that are integrated, attractive and affordable to all families regardless social class or minority status, yet that is sensitive to differing educational needs and to compensate early educational disadvantages” (EURYDICE, 2009:39)

The aim of the TODDLER Project is to develop reflective practitioners who can promote and improve practice to provide effective early years care and education for diverse and disadvantaged toddlers in reaching their full potential.

This report has been compiled using experiences and expertise from each partner country exploring the different contexts and perspectives of wellbeing that influences practice. These materials have been left verbatim, as far as possible, to maintain the context and originality of each country.

Each partner has been asked to provide a definition of wellbeing and to identify their country's underpinning legislation and research on wellbeing. This information has been compiled into a report/handbook which can be used as teaching materials in conjunction with the PowerPoint.

Contents include:

- Definitions of wellbeing
- Theoretical backgrounds
- Literature Reviews
 - Curriculum documents
 - Piece of National Research
 - Recommended Reading

These materials are photocopiable for teaching purposes.



Spain

Definitions of wellbeing

Creating the necessary conditions so that children's wellbeing can be guaranteed is the axis around which the main aims of Infant Education 0-3 (Early childhood education) revolve. Wellbeing is the physical and emotional state that lets the child fully develop his/her autonomy according to his/her possibilities, individually or in relation with others, in a specific context and through different languages, considering each and every need they have, every instinct and ability.



Spain

Theoretical background to children's wellbeing

The term Wellbeing (*bienestar* in Spanish/*benestar* in Catalan) is not frequently used in official documents. It is a concept implicitly included in the main goals of Early Childhood Education in Spain. Few books include the word *wellbeing* as a key word. Instead, there are other terms or expressions that could be considered synonyms as their definitions may include similar conceptual content. Examples of such words are emotional experience (*vivencia emocional*), emotional education (*educación emocional*), catering for children's needs and interests (*dar respuesta a las necesidades e intereses de los niños y niñas*), happiness (*felicidad*), self-esteem (*autoestima*), affective safety/confidence (*seguridad afectiva*), everyday activities (*actividades cotidianas*) and autonomy learning (*aprendizaje de la autonomía*), among others.

In Spain there exists a main Educational law (LOE), which establishes the guidelines and framework for the development of the different core curricula that each autonomous community must elaborate. The LOE includes the term wellbeing only twice and none of the two terms is directly linked to Infant Education:

a. *Section: Introduction*

Las sociedades actuales conceden gran importancia a la educación que reciben sus jóvenes, en la convicción de que de ella dependen tanto el bienestar individual como el colectivo. La educación es el medio más adecuado para construir su personalidad ordinariamente entre los seis y los doce años de edad...

b. *Section: Primary Education*

La finalidad de la educación primaria es proporcionar a todos los niños y niñas una educación que permita afianzar su desarrollo personal y su propio bienestar, adquirir las habilidades culturales básicas relativas a la expresión y comprensión oral, a la lectura, a la escritura y al cálculo, así como desarrollar las habilidades sociales, los hábitos de trabajo y estudio, el sentido artístico, la creatividad y la afectividad.

In the Catalan core Curriculum the term wellbeing appears only once. It is one of the contents to be developed that belong to the first curricular area (*Self-awareness and awareness of others*). The two other areas are *Awareness of context* and *Communication and languages*. Here the concept wellbeing relates explicitly to physical wellbeing, but not emotional.

- a. *Progrés en l'adquisició d'hàbits relacionats amb el benestar corporal i la seguretat personal, la higiene i la salut, així com en l'inici d'hàbits d'ordre, constància i organització en les activitats en què participa.*

http://phobos.xtec.cat/edubib/intranet/file.php?file=docs/infantil/decret_ed_infantil.pdf

Unfortunately, the official documents, books and research on early childhood education and wellbeing published or implemented in the Spanish and Catalan contexts are only written in the official languages of the country. This means that the bibliography provided will be mainly in Spanish or Catalan. We have made the effort of translating and summarizing some parts, but it is impossible to translate all the work being done. We think that the possible use of some translators from the internet could be very useful for the PDF versions we provide in the bibliography on page 57.



Spain

Literature Review

Curriculum Documents

Catalan Core Curriculum (first key-stage: 0-3)

http://phobos.xtec.cat/edubib/intranet/file.php?file=docs/infantil/decret_ed_infantil.pdf

(p.61481)

From the Catalan Core Curriculum, we have selected several sections that can relate to the concept of wellbeing in a more direct way:

*En l'estructura del sistema educatiu es defineix l'educació infantil com una etapa educativa única, organitzada en dos cicles, amb identitat pròpia, que ha de contribuir al desenvolupament emocional i afectiu, físic i motor, social i cognitiu dels infants en col·laboració amb les seves famílies, proporcionant-los un **clima i un entorn de confiança**.*

The structure of the educational system defines Infant Education (Early Childhood Education) as an educational stage, divided into two key-stages, with its own identity, and which must contribute to the children's emotional, affective, physical, motor, social and cognitive development, in collaboration with the families and providing them with a confident context and environment.

(...)en el moment en què l'infant entra en el món escolar aquesta responsabilitat educativa es comparteix. El centre és un espai privilegiat que permet l'adquisició de coneixements, de vivències emocionals i socials. És, després de la família, el primer espai social de cohesió, integració i participació. El centre ha d'oferir als infants ple suport i un acompanyament coherent i eficaç en el seu desenvolupament personal i social.

(...)the moment the child steps into the school world, this educational responsibility is shared. The institution is a privileged setting which allows for and promotes the acquisition of knowledge, of emotional and social experiences. After the family, the school is the first social place for cohesion, integration and participation. The school must offer the child full support and a coherent and efficient company in his/her personal and social development.

El centre educatiu ha d'acollir els infants i acceptar-los íntegrament amb estima, conèixer-los i comprendre'ls des del respecte i l'afectivitat, i assegurar les relacions de confiança amb les persones adultes i amb la resta dels infants propers.

The educational institution should welcome children and accept them integrally with love, it should get to know and understand them well through respect and affectivity, consolidating confidence towards adults and towards the rest of the children.

(...)així com establir els mitjans necessaris perquè cada infant se senti atès, orientat i valorat, sense veure's condicionat per estereotips culturals i de gènere, quan ho necessiti i sense cap tipus de discriminació...

(...)and establish the necessary means so that every child can feel catered for, oriented and valued, without being conditioned by cultural and genre stereotypes, when he/she needs it and without any kind of discrimination...

La finalitat de l'educació infantil és contribuir al desenvolupament emocional i afectiu, físic i motor, social i cognitiu dels infants, proporcionant-los un clima i entorn de confiança on se sentin acollits i amb expectatives d'aprenentatge. L'acció educativa ha de permetre el desenvolupament afectiu, el creixement personal dels infants, la formació d'una imatge positiva i equilibrada d'ells mateixos, el descobriment de l'entorn, de les possibilitats del seu propi cos, del moviment i dels hàbits de control corporal, perquè actuïn cada vegada d'una manera més autònoma.

The aim of Infant Education is to contribute to children's emotional and affective development, physical and motor development and social and cognitive development, providing them with a confident context and environment, where they can feel welcome and develop learning expectations. The educational act/practice should lead to affective development, to children's personal growth, to the building of a positive and balanced self-image, to discovery and awareness of one's context, of one's possibilities concerning body, movement and body control, so that children can progress more autonomously.

Assolir progressivament seguretat afectiva i emocional i anar-se formant una imatge positiva de si mateixos i de les altres persones. (objectiu)

(To) Progressively acquire affective and emotional safety/confidence and (to) build a positive image of oneself and of others. *(aim)*

Progrés en l'adquisició d'hàbits relacionats amb el benestar corporal i la seguretat personal, la higiene i la salut, així com en l'inici d'hàbits d'ordre, constància i organització en les activitats en què participa.

Progression in the acquisition of habits related to one's physical wellbeing and personal confidence, to hygiene and health and, also, to habits related to order, perseverance and organization in the activities one is involved in.

National Research

L'Estat de l'Educació a Catalunya. Anuari (2008)

Fundació Jaume Bofill. December 2009

IP Research: Ferran Ferrer

<http://www.fbofill.cat/intra/fbofill/documents/publicacions/509.pdf>

Translation: Education in Catalonia. Year 2008

The chapter focusing on 0-3 is particularly interesting. It starts on page 233 (see page 238), and the conclusions on page 257 also develop the idea of wellbeing. However, there are moments in which wellbeing refers to the Welfare State (*l'Estat del Benestar*), a different concept that relates to a more sociological perspective.

D'aquí se'n dedueix que en pro del benestar del conjunt de la societat hem de proveir els millors recursos i facilitats per als menors per tal que desenvolupin al màxim les seves potencialitats. Això també es tradueix en vetllar perquè els infants rebin una bona atenció de ben petits tant a l'entorn familiar com a l'entorn educatiu.

For maintaining the Welfare State, we need to provide the resources for the very young so that they can fully develop their potential. It also implies that we need to cater for the children from the very beginning, providing them with good care at home and in their educational environment.

Els estudis semblen avalar la importància de l'entorn familiar i escolar en el benestar de la infància.

The studies seem to confirm the importance of the home environment and the school for the wellbeing of children.

Recommended Reading

Anton, M. (coord) (2007): *Planificar la etapa 0-6. Compromiso de sus agentes y práctica cotidiana*. Graó (Book written in Spanish)

Comments, Summary and translation (into English) of key sections relating to wellbeing:

Title of the book: PLANNING THE 0-6 STAGE. Commitment and daily practice of agents involved

Montserrat Antón (coord.)

Biblioteca de Infantil Publishing house: Graó

The book contains a series of chapters written by professionals and experts in the 0-6 age group who put forward a methodological perspective that takes into account daily practice and the commitment of all agents involved in the education process of children from 0 to 6. They are the true protagonists of their own learning, which takes place in daily life contexts with the participation of the education professionals, families and other adults that children interact with.

The book includes the following chapters:

1. The school at childhood
2. Families also count
3. Emotional experience at childhood
4. Young and competent: from daily activities to autonomy learning
5. Playing to live, living to play: playing as driving force of learning
6. Together but not mixed up: different groupings as learning strategies

7. Looking inside the school: the organization of space and materials
8. Looking outside the school: sharing education

We believe it is interesting to focus primarily on the third and the fourth chapters to address the issue of wellbeing. However, it is also necessary to take into account most of the aspects dealt with in all the chapters to address children's wellbeing fully. Implicitly, the issue of wellbeing needs to be present in all the methodological and organizational proposals made by early childhood educational and non-educational centres.

Emotional experience at childhood:

Individual upbringing places the person in a particular surrounding, a context, a culture. The relationships that each person establishes with this culture shape his/her emotional world, a world of beliefs and values, a world of emotions that need to be shown or repressed. Emotional experience is developed in a reality bound to a certain space and time. The experience is always shared and feelings are either sought or avoided depending on:

The context that requires developing a certain role within the group, our culture, the needs and wishes that shape our interests, our aesthetic models, models of environmental sensitivity provided by the context and which help us feel and live, and the communication tools that we are equipped with (languages, technologies...).

The first and most important affective and emotional context is the family. As established by systemic pedagogy, children are given life by their parents and the strength of this bond cannot be substituted by anyone. Feeling that we belong to a bigger system makes us feel humble for not being able to change what we dislike and also powerful for being able to modify the structure of relationships thanks to small changes.

Our emotional life feeds from daily routines, since these provide us with affective security and pass on values and beliefs that shape our emotional state and give us stability. However, potential changes stimulate the imagination and make self-confidence and autonomy develop. For changes to occur, basic abilities such as personal effort and willingness are required.

From an educational viewpoint, family, school and the society at large should take these aspects into account and time should be given to children for developing them. Children should experience the pleasure, the happiness or the contentment derived from a wish come true, but also the consequences of failure. However, children are often motivated externally instead of focusing on the internal motivation generated by one's acts.

When they are babies, children already have the ability to interact that allows them to build their own learning from the start, a learning process focused primarily on the acquisition of autonomy: autonomy to move, to decide, to think... which makes their abilities grow and thus their self-confidence. The promotion of autonomy is the fundamental aim of the preschool, as it is necessary for developing children's feeling of responsibility, freedom and personal identity, their way of thinking and independence.

During the early years, children's lives develop around playing and around the routines aiming at satisfying their basic needs. The repetition and ritualisation these activities entail, the relationship with adults they promote, the exercise of their autonomy are key aspects that make these activities essential in the development of their abilities, as well as essential for their wellbeing.

Daily activities share the following characteristics:

- ✓ They are all a reminder of the family context. They are activities that children experience as part of their relationship with parents and it is often difficult for them to carry them out with other people. It is therefore convenient to understand rejection as a symptom of this difficulty.
- ✓ They are activities carried out at home and at school. Eating, sleeping, hygiene habits and resting are activities that are done both at home and at school. There may be differences in the way they are carried out that could give rise to conflicts with families. An effort needs to be made to get closer to families, understand and help each other and avoid hasty judgments.
- ✓ They are activities seldom valued professionally. It is as if the distinction between school and family lies on professional attitudes and, yet, the closer children's school life is to their home life, the better for their development and their learning process. This is so because it is not only about changing a nappy or feeding, it is about everything a child can learn while eating or being changed. It is about doing these activities so that they are positively educational. It is this educational aim that is at the basis of the infant education profession.
- ✓ They are routines. As they are activities that can be a great source of pleasure for children –due to the wellbeing resulting from a need being satisfied-, they are also a great source of affective bonds and thus they may become highly rewarding moments.

These activities need to be valued regarding all their aspects, they need to be planned and carried out professionally and seeking explicit educational goals.

All methodologies that favour an atmosphere of emotional education make it possible for children to be actively engaged in their learning, to relate to each other and to create shared meanings based on dialogue and the confrontation of different opinions, ideas, feelings and proposals. The key aspect is to have time to do what we aim to, time for getting ready, for acting and for reflecting, time for oneself and time for the group.

From two and a half years onwards, primary emotions (such as love, rage, fear...) can be shared in a group. Giving and receiving, feeling that we all have the same needs.

Personal symbols and common beliefs can also be used to communicate with others and with ourselves. Symbolic game and stories help us define ourselves.

We should also use all the languages we have available in order to put into words and express what we feel. Body language is the first that we use to express and shelter our emotional experiences. Verbal language is what receives more attention at school. It allows us to organise thought, but as it is very basic at early ages, it

cannot be the most important nor can it be representative of what we feel. We should focus instead on creative languages, such as music and arts.

It is necessary to search for ways of communicating emotionally with families. When we enter a school, we should see the children with their families behind them. Some proposals may be: meetings to promote reflection and interaction; travelling materials to share experiences; and creating spaces for families within the school area where they may find bibliography and an opportunity to meet each other.

Young and competent: from daily activities to autonomy learning

Daily arrival and exit from the school: The main content of this activity is greeting and meeting the children. The main aim will be to try to make children experience pleasure when meeting the teacher and the classmates and, when going home, their families. They should also notice how happy the others are when meeting them. It is important to keep in mind the following:

- ✓ Individual greeting: greeting every child by their name, with warmth and affection, using the communicative expressions they like the most (looks, hugs, intonation...).
- ✓ Pointing out the changes that can be observed in the child and which may be meaningful for him/her (new clothes, new haircut...); showing interest in what he/she has done outside the school, in the person taking him... these aspects personalise the arrival.
- ✓ Make everyone aware of each child's arrival and welcome, make sure that they are interested in each other and that they show or tell each other their news... these aspects help create an affective atmosphere.
- ✓ Organise the space so that everyone has available the space to leave their coats, their bags; a place to play, a place to rest...
- ✓ Plan the farewell and prepare the children for leaving, make them feel eager to meet the people that will come pick them up.
- ✓ Greet the relatives as they arrive.
- ✓ Succeed in making children happy to be at school and eager to come back.
- ✓ Bring to the school children's affective world: talk about the family, the mother, the father, what they do at home; bring to the school things from home and home things from school. These are ways to bring the two worlds closer and to help children integrate them in a natural way.

Early years eating habit: It is important to see eating time from two viewpoints: as a physiological need for health and body growth, and as an activity or situation where relationships and personality are shaped, abilities are developed; and attitudes, knowledge and basic abilities are learnt. Learning contents at eating times cover almost all contents in the curriculum of infant education, so their assessment can be a great indicator of children's development of abilities, learning processes and acquisition of basic knowledge.

Hygiene habits at school: Activities involving hygiene habits allow children to become self-aware. Feelings of wellbeing, feeling cold, feeling hot, feeling wet, touching each other make children become self-aware. These situations create excellent occasions for knowing and learning about themselves, about their possibilities and limitations, about the adults that care for them and about how important they are.

Daily tasks and group awareness: More and more often daily time is devoted to checking attendance, organising the calendar, calling the dining-room register, etc. in the infant education classrooms. These tasks favour, among other things, cohesion and group awareness. These are moments to speak, listen, express emotions, experiences, discoveries, tell stories, read, write... without needing to resort to fictional stories, as taking advantage of and valuing what happens daily offers topics that are more than enough to keep on a conversation and get to know each other.