



## **INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT**

### **AUSTRIA APPENDIX**

#### **Emergence of the Early Excellence approach**

In 1997 the UK government, under the leadership of the Labour Party, began to pursue the educational concept of EEC (Early Excellence Centres), with guidance from teacher Margy Whalley. Whalley, through her activities in development aid and her international experience linking social issues and education, developed the basic principles of the EEC approach with her team back in the early 1980s, in the Pen Green Centre in Corby, England (Whalley, 2007). The government aimed to improve parental involvement in childhood education processes by creating institutions and increasing educational opportunities. Government programmes such as 'Sure Start' (1999) encouraged its further growth and the Pen Green Centre became the main contact partner in the establishment of so-called 'Education Action Zones' (Kölsch-Bunzen, 2011). In Germany, it started in 2001 in the Pestalozzi-Froebel House in Berlin and with the implementation of the EEC approach in Schillerstraße day-care (Hebenstreit-Müller & Kühnel, 2004, 2005), followed in 2007 by the St Joseph and St Stefan Children and Family Centre in Stuttgart. Now several German cities and federal states follow the EEC approach in their pedagogical work.

#### **Characteristics and guiding principles of Early Excellence Centres**

The focus is on quality monitoring, individual support for children, the empowering of parents and their involvement in their children's education. There are no elite power centres for gifted children from privileged circumstances. Excellence is achieved through quality support, rather than expectations placed on children. The main focuses of the educational work are:

- to provide intensive educational experiences;
- to make the educational work understandable to parents;
- for parents and professionals to create learning steps for children together, sensitively and accurately;
- to enrich children's experiences through appropriate educational opportunities.

The EEC approach goes beyond educational work with parents and children in the local area and instead takes on the role of integrated service centres for families.



The guiding principle of EEC is the integration of various services for children and their families, including:

- early childhood education and care of a high quality standard;
- encouraging parental involvement in their children’s education process;
- family support;
- adult education and work-related training;
- training and research;
- local health services.

The objective of EEC is to provide integrated opportunities for all families in the local area, depending on available resources and the involvement of stakeholders. There are no established standard models, just a process-orientated application of the guiding principle.

### **Basic building blocks of the EEC approach**

The following six basic building blocks are the ethical points of reference for the development and implementation of the EEC approach:

1. Every child is excellent. Every child is given the best possible opportunities for their educational development.
2. Parents are experts on their children. Parents and education professionals meet as equal education partners.
3. The educational institution is community-orientated.
4. Democratic participation encourages employees, parents, relatives and children to learn through education, support and empowerment and thereby concretely influences their world, employment, educational development and health promotion.
5. Diversity is regarded as profit. The internal and external heterogeneity of people from different backgrounds is viewed positively.
6. High demands are placed on the quality of educational work. Continuous training and research contribute to professional development (Kölsch-Bunzen, 2011).

### **Educational tools**

Monitoring and analysis must be:

- resource-orientated;



- practical;
- science-based (Karkov & Kühnel, 2008).

Monitoring tools may include observation sheets following the Berlin model (Karkov & Kühnel, 2008), education and learning progress (Leu et al., 2011).

### **Analysis tools**

The following are used for professional explanations of observations:

- Learning dispositions (Carr, 2005; Leu et al., 2011);
- Leuven Wellbeing and Commitment scale (Vandenbussche et al., 1999);
- Schema analysis tools (Athey, 2007);
- Aspects of the orientation plan.

### **Educational partnerships**

Parents are systematically given the opportunity to exchange opinions with the professionals on their respective observations, improving educational practice and reflecting the parents' influence on their children's educational and learning success (please refer to EPPE Studies, Iram et al., 2010). In addition to active participation in development discussions, the Pen Green Loop method gives parents different opportunities to participate in the educational institution. These vary from facility to facility depending on existing staff resources, the parents and the social space and taking particular account of the children's needs.

### **Implications for practice**

The concept of Early Excellence Centres enables the start of a change process, creating conditions that allow for a steady improvement in the education environment. The implementation of the concept requires all parties to participate as a community of learners, thus ensuring permanent dynamism and debate.