

**EURONEWS ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION
ISSUE NO. 15**

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Message from the Agency Director

Dear Readers,

Welcome to this special thematic issue of EuroNews focussing upon Early Childhood Intervention. This topic is an extremely important one - what a very young child experiences, feels and lives through from birth and during the very first months and years of life has a crucial impact on the rest of his/her life. Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) aims at supporting and empowering the young child, their family and the services involved during this very important period of the child's life.

ECI has been the subject of a major project for the Agency over the past years. The results of the Agency project as well as work being conducted in our member countries is, we feel, of vital importance for all educators to know about. It is for that reason that we have dedicated this issue solely to the topic.

We sincerely hope you find the information from the Agency and our member countries of interest and of use to your work.

Cor Meijer
Director

1. The Agency Project “Early Childhood Intervention: analysis of situations in Europe”

During 2003-2005, the Agency conducted a project analysing Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) in Europe. ECI is an important area both at policy and professional levels: it relates to the fundamental right of very young children and their families to receive the support they might need.

Experts from Early Childhood Intervention – policy-makers, professionals from health, education, social services as well as academics and families - from 19 European countries were involved in the Agency project.

The project analysis covered four phases. Firstly, collection of country contributions, structured according to a model designed to compare existing provision and services in the countries involved. There were also exchanges between professionals focussing upon a number of agreed issues. Meetings and site visits took place especially in Munich (Germany), Coimbra (Portugal) and Västerås (Sweden): the three locations offered the possibility to analyse how the ecologic-systemic model of ECI is implemented in various ways.

Discussion on the state of the art of ECI lead to the production of a draft document covering the main results of the project and this was followed by a final seminar, where an open discussion with parents, professionals, policy makers and researchers on the main outputs achieved by the group of experts lead to the validation of the project results.

As a major result of the project, a European definition of ECI has been proposed:

Early Childhood Intervention is a composite of services/provision for very young children and their families, provided at their request at a certain time in a child's life, covering any action undertaken when a child needs special support to: ensure and enhance her/his personal development; strengthen the family's own competences; and promote the social inclusion of the family and the child. These actions are to be provided in the child's natural setting, preferably at a local level, with a family-oriented and multi-dimensional teamwork approach.

A project summary report - Early Childhood Intervention: Analysis of Situations in Europe, Key Aspects and Recommendations – is available. This describes the evolution of ideas and theories that has led to a new concept of ECI in which health, education and social sciences are directly involved. The report highlights the shift from a type of intervention mainly focused upon the child to a broader approach, involving the child, their family and the environment and corresponds to the move from a ‘medical’ to a ‘social’ model.

Key elements relevant to this new concept of ECI were identified within the Agency project:

Availability, proximity, affordability and diversity of European ECI services. A variety of accessible services should be offered as early as possible and be free of charge or at

minimal cost to families. Services need to respond to families' needs and provide family-focused intervention at a local level. Health, social and education services should be involved and share responsibility for ECI.

Target groups, teamwork, professionals' training and working tools are key aspects. Professionals from various disciplines are involved in supporting young children and their families. They cannot work in a compartmentalised way; they need to work together in an inter-disciplinary team. In cases where intervention is required, an Individual Plan - also called a Family Plan or Individual Family Service Plan depending on the country - is developed resulting from the co-operation between the family and the team. The plan focuses on needs, strengths, priorities, goals and actions to be undertaken and evaluated.

These elements provided the basis for the formulation of a number of recommendations - mainly addressed towards professionals working in this field - aimed at the improvement and consolidation of existing ECI services and provision. These recommendations are presented in the Agency project report, which is free to download in 18 languages from

<http://www.european-agency.org/site/info/publications/agency/ereports/15.html>

All of the information collected during the project can be accessed from the dedicated ECI web are <http://www.european-agency.org/eci/eci.html>

More information about the project is available from brussels.office@european-agency.org

2. Parental satisfaction with Early Childhood Intervention in Lithuania

Parental satisfaction has been identified as one of the most important indicators of quality in early intervention and the aim of this 2004 research project was to evaluate parental satisfaction regarding various aspects of support provided by ECI services in Lithuania.

'Satisfaction' is a complex concept and is often understood and interpreted differently by parents or professionals and so the following aspects of satisfaction were analysed in the project: the way parents evaluate the model of intervention; the support provided to parents and the child; the relationship between parents and professionals; accessibility of services, the organisation of work, etc.

The *European Parental Satisfaction Scale about Early Intervention* (developed in Siauliai University, in collaboration with the Special Education Institute of Fribourg University, Switzerland) was used. Parents bringing up children with special needs attending seven ECI services in Lithuania took part in the research project; 160 parents were questioned in total.

The results of the investigation showed that, overall, parents attending ECI services with their children positively evaluate the quality of services provided in Lithuania.

The item most positively perceived by parents was **support for their child** (see figure below). Accessibility of ECI services and organisation of the work were perceived as satisfactory. However, parents were mostly dissatisfied with factors involved in the creation of a social environment, the model of intervention and the relationship between professionals and parents.

Figure: Average data on different aspects of parental satisfaction in Lithuania

- Support to a child
- Relations between parents and professionals
- Model of support
- Social environment

Overall, according to the parents involved in this project, ECI support is well appreciated, but a main message focuses upon the perception that professionals still play the role of 'experts' in the ECI process and intervention is oriented towards therapies for the child, rather than towards intervention involving family members and stimulating the social competences of the child and his/her family.

For more information contact Stefanija Alisauskiene, Head of Siauliai University Research Centre on Special Education stefa@su.lt or Regina Labiniene, Agency Representative Board member Lithuania regina.labiniene@smm.lt

3. Changing legislation, guidelines and curriculum. What about changing practices? New challenges for early childhood special education in Finland.

In Finland, every child from the age of 10 months to 7 years, can join the day care system (called ECEC, in Finland). Day care includes both education and care (so called EduCare) and is the most common environment for Early Childhood Education in Finland. Most (85%) children with special needs or at risk are included in this provision.

Day care is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Day care legislation was set up in the 1970's with the *Act on Children's Day Care (36/1973)*: at the time, thinking was quite segregating and medical. New national policies (*Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2002* and the *National Guidelines on ECEC Curriculum (2003)*) first mentioned the principles for inclusion and Early Childhood Intervention. At the beginning of the year 2006, the government prepared changes in the law that will have an impact on day care: it plans new ways of organising inclusive special support for children that has the following characteristics:

- the principle of inclusion requires that early intervention for children is included in everyday educational activities;
- there is an increasing tendency to involve day care staff and parents in assessing the special needs of the child.

Such changes in the law are very important, but what is happening in practice? Professionals from the field have been given a lot of opportunities to take part in meetings and seminars organised within the preparation process of the new curriculum. Within this context, they expressed what they would change in ECI practice. Their voice was heard and professionals have the opinion that the new curriculum really works in practice.

At the community level, many communities have changed the organisation of their services: support is provided earlier and parents are more involved in the support process. There is a new method for staff training – 'Early support for children' - where through dialogue and collective reflection, working groups try to develop alternative working habits and new attitudes for working together with parents. More work on this issue is still needed, but the changes already made are promising.

*For more information about Early Childhood Education changes in Finland, please contact Liisa Heinämäki, researcher in the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health STAKES liisa.heinamaki@stakes.fi or visit the websites <http://varttua.stakes.fi/EN>
www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/eng/index.htm
www.oph.fi/english
Alternatively, contact Pirjo Koivula pirjo.koivula@oph.fi National Co-ordinator for Finland.*

4. ECI in Spain: looking for systematisation

Pioneering ECI programmes were initiated in Spain in the late 1970s along with new ideas about child development and social integration. Before these ECI programmes started, children with different special needs were not usually included into mainstream education. Within this context, despite their experimental character, ECI programmes had a leading role to play in changing prospects and attitudes regarding children with disabilities.

Certainly, a lot of progress has been made in the last three decades in Spain. ECI services are available all over the country and have become a vital source of support for children with special needs and their families. Key aspects from the Spanish 'White Paper on Early Intervention' have been accepted by political authorities as outlining the guiding principles for developing ECI programmes: partnership, family empowerment, decentralised cost-free provision, interdisciplinary teamwork and multidimensional intervention.

Nowadays, almost all children with known disabilities or developmental disorders receive some ECI support in Spain, which gives them the possibility to continue their education in mainstream schools.

European initiatives such as the Helios Programme (1993-1996) or, more recently, the Agency project on Early Intervention (2003-2005) have played and are playing an invaluable role in these processes in Spain. The Helios programme provided a basis for countries to exchange information regarding their pilot and experimental ECI projects. The Agency project has gone several steps forward: in addition to developing a database reflecting the European ECI diversity, some critical ideas and practical aspects of ECI were highlighted. The recommendations essentially indicate the future quality standards and excellence in this field.

In Spain, Early Childhood Intervention is now starting a new stage in its evolution. New basic regulations on ECI may be developed in the near future, under the auspices of the Royal Board on Disability and with the support of the Spanish Federation of Professional Associations (GAT) and the Spanish Confederation of Disabled People (CERMI). In this context, from now on, attention is going to be paid specifically to ECI systematisation issues such as eligibility criteria, funding strategies, the locus of delivery or the type of staff needed.

For more details about ECI in Spain, please contact Jaime Ponte, Rehabilitation specialist 981356754@telefonica.net or Andrés Hernández Zalón, Representative Board Member for Spain andres.hernandez@mec.es

5. 'Networking' as a model for language learning in Norway

Networking as a highly specialised model for language learning was introduced in the Sørlandet Resource Centre (SRC), Norway, in 1999. This model was initiated and presented to families by Professor Irene Johansson (University of Karlstad,

Sweden), supervisor of the SRC, who developed the Karlstad Model for Language Training, used all over Scandinavia.

The model is based on the philosophy of empowerment, where the environment contributes to make parents more competent in decision-making and choosing their child's learning approach and education. The model is also influenced by 'ecological system' theories, which suggest that studying a child's development involves not only observing the child, but also paying attention to their interaction within their wider environment.

Since the introduction of this tool, SRC has developed some experience and now uses this model in the field of ECI with children who have language difficulties or with severe/complex learning needs.

Parents are always very much involved in their child's life and development; however they are also vulnerable. Parents need someone to share both their joys and sorrows with - they also need someone to share responsibility for their child's development with.

In SRC networking groups, professionals, families and other individuals work together in order to support the child's speech and language development. A child's language development is promoted by interacting with people having different roles: the network's function is to create such opportunities. Intervention is given on a daily basis within the child's ordinary routines. All members of the networking group follow the same strategies, but each gives the child opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in different ways and in different places, through his/her daily life. Everybody has the task of being a good 'conversation partner' for the child.

Networking activities start when parents decide who are important people for their child: they can be teachers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbours, support people for leisure activities, or others. Parents ask these identified individuals to participate in the networking group. They all meet on a regular basis, discuss and decide what they find important for the child to learn. They also identify together how the child is going to learn and define ways that this can be brought into daily life. In this way, every networking group is unique for every child.

For more details on this model, please contact, Arlene Temte, Adviser at the Sørlandet Resource Centre in Kristiansand arlene.temte@statped.no or Marit Hognestad marit.hognestad@utdanningsdirektoratet.no Agency National Co-ordinator for Norway.

6. In-service training for ECI professionals in the Netherlands

In Early Childhood Intervention, professionals from different disciplines must work together in order to support the family of a child with special needs. Professional training for ECI is a key issue to be considered.

In the Netherlands, initial training dedicated to ECI is carried out at the University of Groningen www.rug.nl/gmw/index?lang=en and in-service courses focusing on specific

topics are organised for professionals from various disciplines working within ECI. An example of in-service training is organised by the Portage Group Programme at several special day care and rehabilitation centres in the Netherlands, delivered by staff members of the department of Orthopedagogy of the University of Groningen as well as by experts in this area.

The Portage Group Programme is carried out in the group situation and aims at stimulating a child's development within a group of other children by offering them specific activities and games. It explores the possibilities of working on functional, individual targets within the child's daily group activities in order to help the child with special needs, support their family and educators.

The main principle is to connect each child's development level with their usual environment. Individual educational targets define the guidelines to be followed; specific planning and co-ordination are very necessary means to achieve these objectives. The Portage Group Programme is carried out at two levels: the individual child level and the group level.

Training in the Portage Group Programme is delivered to groups of educators and health professionals and includes several topics: theoretical guidelines for the working method, practical tools for formulating measurable and observable behavioural targets, instructions on how to formulate small steps (task analysis), analyses of behavioural problems using the Antecedent, Background and Consequences (ABC) analysis and finally, training on using the materials of the Portage Group Programme itself. Training is completed within six weeks and then trainees are assessed through a case study carried out at their work place.

A 'behavioural specialist' who is simultaneously trained as a Portage Co-ordinator supervises trainees in their workplace. An expert on the implementation of the intervention programme supervises behavioural specialists over a 1-year period. After this period of time, the behavioural specialist is able to train new groups of educators and health professionals in the field of ECI to meet the needs of the child and their family.

For more details on ECI in-service training in the Netherlands, please contact Ineke Oenema-Mostert c.e.oenema-mostert@rug.nl Bieuwe Van der Meulen b.f.van.der.meulen@rug.nl (both from Groningen University) or Sip Jan Pijl s.j.pijl@rug.nl Agency National Co-ordinator for the Netherlands.

7. Policy initiatives in Denmark aim to provide young children with quality education

In December 2005, the Danish Government established a committee of experts and researchers whose main task was to prepare recommendations to underpin the Government's goal of giving all children a good start in school. The Committee's report was published in February 2006.

Approximately 80% of all Danish 1-2 year-old children attend day care services, day nurseries or age-integrated centres. Approximately 95% of all children between 3 and 6 years of age are in kindergarten. For 3-5 year-old immigrant children, figures show that 77% are in day care facilities and for descendants it is 81%. Thus, almost all children between 1 and 6 years of age attend some kind of day care facilities although day care facilities are not compulsory.

The government's 2005 draft document on visions and strategies for *"the world's best Folkeskole"* underlines the importance of creating better coherence between day care services, schools and school based leisure facilities.

The government has planned to spend 270 million Euros during 2005-2009 to improve the quality of day care services with a great deal of the budget for the first year being earmarked for specific activities to benefit socially vulnerable children in day care services.

The terms of reference for the work of the Expert Committee focussed on socially vulnerable children in particular. The Committee found that a focus on these children and their curriculum has been strengthened along with the introduction in 2004 of educational curricula as all goals, methods and activities introduced by each institution for children with special needs must be clearly outlined in the curricula.

The Committee recommended that the educational and social approach of day care facilities should have children's transition to the school system as a main focus. They also suggested that facilities should be evaluated on a regular basis in order to adapt to the demands of the educational curricula and schools.

The committee suggested that counselling services aimed at day care facilities and municipalities within the fields of learning, assessment and evaluation at local premises and transition to school should be established. This will improve the evaluation of daily practice in day care facilities.

The recommendations of the committee will be discussed at the political level during Spring 2006. These will focus on learning and education as an integrated process, including day care facilities, initial schooling and school based leisure facilities. In the 2006/2007 session of the Danish Parliament, legislative proposals will be put forward for the recommendations that are agreed upon.

For further information on these new developments contact Helle Beknes, Advisor in the Danish Ministry of Education helle.beknes@uvm.dk or Preben Siersbaek siersbaek@uvm.dk Agency National Co-ordinator for Denmark.

8. Conceptions of early prevention in nursery schools in France

In France, in the framework of early prevention or of the implementation of prevention policy it is important to make a distinction between two different perspectives: general prevention and specialised prevention, as these two

situations require distinct approaches in terms of conceptions, actions, personnel involved and processes used.

General prevention seeks to prevent possible future development difficulties by providing optimal conditions for the development of the child. This covers different psychological, social and inter-personal factors for learning and for the mutual interactions between the child and his or her school environment.

Specialised prevention aims more at another type of prevention in the sense of anticipating the need for specialised actions when identified or predictable specific needs or difficulties are present in a child's situation.

The point is therefore to keep these two types of prevention distinct, whilst at the same time remembering that they can be complementary to one another. This distinction enables the more clear identification of the partnerships that need to be established to meet children's needs.

The objective of prevention with respect to the personnel of the Specialised Assistance Networks for Pupils in Difficulty - Réseaux d'Aides Spécialisées aux Elèves en Difficulté, RASED - is early primary prevention defined as a set of methods aiming at "avoiding the appearance of a difficulty" with the purpose of minimising risk factors.

The target of the work of RASED is potential learning difficulties that have not yet manifested themselves. The problem of early primary prevention requires defining and creating conditions favourable to making the school more responsive to the needs of the child and parents. These conditions need to account for early schooling with respect to the needs of the young child and employ methods responsive to individual needs.

The objective of early primary prevention is to avoid possible learning difficulties for some pupils - in particular the most vulnerable ones - by organising prevention methods implemented as far as possible within the framework of the usual functioning of the school, or even within the classroom and considering the totality and complexity of the child's functioning and behaviour in school.

Such methods require close collaborative work between the different educational professionals close to the child. This situation of 'co-action' creates conditions favourable to the building of true collaboration between specialized personnel and teachers, based on a diversity of professional skills.

For more information contact Nel Saumont dpri@inshea.fr Agency National Co-ordinator for France, or Brigitte Bayet or Paul Fernandez, Prevention Department INS-HEA www.inshea.fr (where a column devoted to prevention will soon be available).

9. Preschool language-support in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

By law all special schools in Schleswig-Holstein have the task of working as support centres. This means, they are responsible not only for the pupils in their

school, but also for mainstream schools in their surrounding area as well. 10 years ago, Schleswig-Holstein began to see whether it could reduce the numbers of pupils in schools or classes for children with speech impairments, through early intervention and prevention measures.

This started with a pilot project in one district. Within this pilot, the school administration placed the special teacher of the school for speech and language impairments into the classes of nursery schools instead of in the upper classes of the special school for speech impairments. The educators of the nursery schools were trained by these special teachers in general speech and language support and were capable to then recognise whether a child required speech therapies or language support. In this way the language support teacher could become more effective and speech difficulties could be addressed before the child began school.

Alongside this initiative, all language support teachers in the area became active in nursery schools and the school for speech and language impairments supported pupils with serious language problems in integrative settings of mainstream schools.

This system was transferred to all districts of Schleswig-Holstein and in this way it has developed as a useful prevention measure for all pre-school language support. The positive experience of this form of early intervention and prevention has led to a rearrangement of the whole system of the support.

It is seen as an important educational project by the government for the legislative period 2005 to 2010. Educators in all nursery schools will be trained in general language support by language support teachers of the support centres. In addition, children who require preschool support measures in German as a second language will get an intensive course - called SPRINT - either within or outside of the nursery before they enter school. Step-by-step this support will also be provided to all children from poor language environments.

For further information on the work in Schleswig-Holstein, contact Anette Hausotter a.hausotter@t-online.de Agency National Co-ordinator for Germany.

10. The Council of Europe stresses the importance of early intervention for young children with Autism

In 2004 the Council of Europe set up a Committee of Experts on the Education and Integration of Children with Autism. This body has been working closely with Autism-Europe in the wider context of human rights protection in the Organisation's 46 member States.

Chaired by Ms Kari Steindal (Norway), the Committee exchanges information on the definition of autism and the related statistics. It is also responsible for analysing the services provided to the children in question, particularly within the education system, and collecting examples of good practice. It is currently preparing recommendations to

governments with an eye to enhancing the education and integration of children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in Europe.

A questionnaire was circulated to all member States on the services which they provide, particularly in terms of detection and diagnosis of autism, and the replies are currently being analysed. At this stage most of the twenty participating countries (joined by Japan as an observer) appreciate that autism is a spectrum disorder recognised as a distinct category of need, even if that recognition has sometimes been recent. All the countries consider that autism is often diagnosed too late. Earlier diagnosis is possible, and diagnostic assessment must be supplemented by individual assessment of educational needs. Current research shows that early intervention is important in the case of autistic spectrum disorders, particularly in the case of serious communication difficulties.

Furthermore, the Council of Europe has adopted on 5 April 2006 an Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society, covering the period from 2006 to 2015 (Recommendation Rec(2006)5). This Action Plan, which sets out a framework for a pan-European policy on disability, targets both the member States and the Council of Europe itself and covers the main aspects of disabled people's everyday lives. Where healthcare is concerned, it suggests that States acknowledge the need for early intervention and effective measures to detect, diagnose and treat impairments at an early stage. Where rehabilitation is concerned, the Action Plan sets States the objective of providing for high-quality early intervention at birth, using a pluridisciplinary approach, and also stressing the importance of support and advice for parents.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Committee of Experts on the Education and Integration of Children with Autism will be available at the end of 2006.

More information can be provided by Muriel Grimmeissen, Secretary of the Committee of Experts www.coe.int/soc-sp

Source – Council of Europe

11. Recent conferences on Early Childhood Intervention.

During 2005, there were three major conferences – in the Czech Republic, UK and Portugal - examining Early Childhood Intervention work and issues. Each of these involved Agency ECI experts and provided professionals from a number of European and non-European countries with opportunities to discuss their work.

Prague, Czech Republic, May 2005

A conference was organised in Prague in May 2005, around the topic of early prevention, with particular attention dedicated to babies and young children. Ms. Alena Sterbova, Vice-Minister of Education in the Czech republic opened the conference and highlighted the importance of this theme in her country.

For two days, researchers and professionals coming from various European locations and disciplines presented and exchanged information on prevention practice focused on young children. The question of the essential, but sensitive co-operation between parents and professionals addressed throughout the conference, with specific examples from the Czech Republic being considered. The conference gave the opportunity for Czech parents to present parents' opinions, experiences and needs to professionals.

For more information, please contact the organisers of the conference, Zuzana Kaprova, Agency Representative Board member for Czech Republic kaprovaz@msmt.cz and Alain Bony alain.bony@wanadoo.fr

Birmingham, UK, November 2005

The European Early Childhood Intervention conference, organised by the Sunfield Professional Development Centre, was held in Birmingham on the 28th and 29th November 2005. In recent years in the UK, there has been a number of initiatives related to ECI. The aim of this conference was to open a dialogue between early childhood practitioners and researchers in the UK and colleagues working throughout Europe.

The conference was supported by the government (Department for Education and Skills) and leading charities in the UK who are anxious to see ECI services firmly established in the range of responses offered to families (e.g. MENCAP, SCOPE, RNIB, Mental Health Foundation). Over 500 delegates – including Agency ECI project members - attended the conference from throughout the United Kingdom and Europe.

The conference was opened by the Minister for Children and Young People, Maria Eagle. Keynote addresses were given by Michael Guralnick, President of the International Society on Early Intervention, Patricia Champion, from the Christchurch Early Intervention Centre, New Zealand and Philippa Russell, Disability Rights Commissioner in the UK. Many of the European Showcase workshops were delivered by representatives from Eurllyaid – the European Association on Early Intervention. Issues addressed in these workshops were poverty, service development, specific systems in various EU countries, and examples of good practice.

During the conference a new book was launched, 'Early Childhood Intervention; International Perspectives, National Initiatives, and Regional Practice' edited by Barry Carpenter and Jo Egerton. This book reflects the key themes of the conference presenting an overview at UK, European and International levels in relation to the trends that are emerging within the changing population for ECI.

Michael Guralnick gave a plenary lecture to conclude the conference that looked at the agenda for development in early childhood intervention. Further details of his address and others given at the conference can be found on the conference website: <http://www.sunfield-school.org.uk/eci/conference.htm>

For more information, please contact Barry Carpenter, Chief Executive of Sunfield barryc@sunfield.worcs.sch.uk

Lisbon, Portugal, December 2005

A conference on ECI organised by the DGIDC (General Direction for Innovation and Curriculum Development) of the Portuguese Ministry of Education in collaboration with Lisbon CERCI and with the support of the Agency took place in Lisbon on the 5th and 6th December 2005.

The main aims of the Conference were: to identify the key issues and the “state of the art” in ECI in EU members states; to present the report on ECI produced by the Agency; to consider the role of research and training in the development of good quality practice in ECI.

For two days, national and international experts analysed key aspects in this area, in front of an audience of 500 participants. The Portuguese State Secretary for Education, the Joint State Secretary for Education and Rehabilitation and the General Director of DGIDC highlighted the importance of this event in the development of Early Childhood Intervention in Portugal.

For more information, please contact Filomena Pereira, Agency Representative Board member for Portugal filomena.pereira@dgidc.min-edu.pt

12. The Transatlantic Consortium on Early Childhood Intervention

The “Transatlantic Consortium on Early Childhood Intervention” project (2001-2005) has been identified by the European Commission as one of the best practices developed under the EU-USA Co-operation Programme in Higher Education and Vocational Training. Three American and five European universities were partners in this project: www.transatlanticconsortium.org

The project had four primary aims:

- to expand and strengthen policy, practice and research relating to services for young children with disabilities and their families in the countries involved;
- to contribute to the preparation of practitioners for leadership roles through cross-cultural training;
- to establish a mechanism for ongoing transatlantic exchange of information and promotion of collaborative research among universities and students, using technology-based interaction and exchange visits;
- to establish the ground for the development of further long-range collaboration, including the establishment of a joint degree programme.

The main results of the project are in line with the goals. A consortium of EU and USA universities was successfully established, providing current and future leaders in the field of ECI with information for the development and strengthening of practice and policy. Arrangements for long-term collaboration have taken the form of multilateral agreements at policy level.

A total of 65 practitioners and researchers were provided with training opportunities making use of state of the art technology and including exchanges of experience. In total 104 student placements were available in the frame of the consortium. In addition, an international curriculum has been developed for implementation by the participating universities with the overall purpose being to identify and build on national and international perspectives and understandings of Early Childhood Intervention and young children.

In a global perspective, with increased mobility of the population, ECI adapted to the needs and resources of each family and child has long-term humanitarian and economic benefits. Bringing more international investment in the field of ECI and training professionals well suited to work in a multicultural society are both necessary. This will guarantee that the results of the project will enrich the practice in the EU and the USA and may also be used in other countries and cultures.

For more details about the Transatlantic Consortium, please contact Franz Peterander, Professor at Munich University peterander@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

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