

ANNUAL REPORT 2012

Innovations in preschool and early childhood education in 2012

Introduction

In 2012 in the NETQ6 partner countries a couple of innovations for early childhood and preschool education were planned and implemented. The range goes from laws over intuitional changes until practical methods. The ideas for those innovations came from scientific researches, are overtaken from other countries or are developed specifically for a region or a state.

Although the innovations are developed in the different partner countries they pursue nearly the same aims. Education should be offered to each child as soon as possible. Children should get support for their individual development, especially those with physical and mental disabilities and/or social disadvantages to assure their successful participation in school and social life. Furthermore a common aim is to support the development of social skills and non-formal learning. An extra priority and challenge is the education of children from 0-3 years. The methods to pursue those aims are different but useful where they happen.

In Spain innovation bases on information technology, communication, biomedical technology and health and rehabilitation with regards to inclusive education.

In Turkey a strengthening preschool education project gives priority to qualified preschool education considering the local needs.

In Germany a new law of child care facilities will ensure child care for each child from the age of 1 year. New kindergartens will be built and child-minders will be more supported in their qualification and work to assure the integration of each child and to support the compatibility of family and work. On the other hand a contra productive law to the law of child care facilities should come into force. Parents who take care for their children until the age of 3 at home and don't give them to a child care facility will get 100 - 150 € per month. This law is passionately discussed for several reasons.

Poland for example introduced the Dog Therapy and the Dalton Plan Education. The Dog Therapy works with dogs in kindergartens to support children with special needs to develop sensual social skills and linguistic skills. The Dalton Plan Education also has the aim to help children to develop social skills.

In Romania a different kind of school offers non-formal, extra-curricular educational workshops and activities for children, their parents and teachers considering talents and competencies in different areas like arts, cooking and movies to support the development of social skills and to build and use knowledge instead of just learning in a traditional way.

The several innovations with aims, methods and results will be introduced in detail in the following

Spain

There is no question our quality of life is largely due to investment in and funding of science and technology, in the same way that there is little doubt that the future quality of life is partly due to the improvement in early childhood education which is also due, partly, to the setting up of innovations.

We think it is important to point out the different kinds of innovations in early childhood and preschool education at a local and regional level in 2012, as we have already stated within the consortium we are not going to concentrate so much on innovations at a national level.

In order to aid the understanding of the innovations we could group them into the following main areas: innovations which are connected to the area of information technology and communication, linked with the aspect of biomedical technology and health, linked with the area of rehabilitation, related to the accomplishment of objectives with regards to the Inclusive education within the sphere of Include-ED education and those directly related to communication systems.

The contents of these innovations are as varied as the different areas they cover. With regards to the area of information technology and communication we are referring in particular to the use of tablets in the age group of 3-6 years old. The tablets are being used with different apps which are grouped into different areas of interest and knowledge: knowledge of oneself, knowledge of the environment and languages communication and representation. The apps have also been organized within the structure of the basic skills and according to contents and activities and allows for the creation of apps by the teachers who are working with the children. Within this area of interest we also find the use of interactive whiteboards.

The aspect of biomedical technology and health concentrates on the use of cochlear implants in children at a very early age and on the use of multisensory classrooms and the infrastructure included within, the rehabilitation work sees a valuable way of working combining a re-training of the necessary skills that children need and therapy to be able to provide them with a link between skills and physical conditions. The contents referring specifically to the Include-ED sphere work around areas of integration. The different communication systems included within these innovation areas vary from school magazines through to the use of augmentative systems of pictograms created by Arasaac passing through a common work methodology relating to the correction of speech and language dysfunctions and graphic codes for children.

We can detect two main causes for the innovations. One cause is the necessity to work towards the solutions in the aspects that have been identified as specific areas of working, as predominant strategic lines of innovations within the Department. These predominant strategic lines are innovations which are connected to the area of information technology and communication, linked with the aspect of biomedical technology and health, linked with the area of rehabilitation, related to the accomplishment of objectives with regards to the inclusive education within the sphere of Include-ED education and those directly related to communication systems. Another cause for the innovations is the desire to find solutions for the children who are at risk of exclusion.

And the third cause is the need for immersion in the era of knowledge within education to assure the continual improvement and steps forward necessary for any educative system.

We can say that some of the strategically important lines within the Department, and therefore within the Directorate, are the following: basic skills and competences, the advancement of linguistic competence, inclusive education and information technology and communication development. So along these lines, wherever possible, the innovations are aligned. Therefore, the aims and objectives covered by the innovations can also be grouped into large areas of interest. Within the strategic framework of the Department each innovation responds to general objectives and specific objectives that have been set up and agreed on. So to sum up, we can see the aim of inclusion, the aim of improvement in general terms



and with regards to results and the aim of adequately adapting the educational methods to new technologies and integration methods.

The main target group that will benefit from the innovations are the children at risk of exclusion with regards to the content areas linked with the aspect of biomedical technology and health, linked with the area of re-habilitation, related to the accomplishment of objectives with regards to the inclusive education within the sphere of Include-ED education and directly related to communication systems. However, with regards to the content area of information technology and communication the main target group is the group of children within the age range of 3-6 years old at mainstream schools.

Amongst the different groups which derive benefit from the innovation are the families of the children in question, the teams of teachers directly involved with these children, other staff of the schools and lastly the society in general.

Linked with the aspect of biomedical technology and health are the direct positive effects produced on the physical capabilities of the children who, thanks to the cochlear implant and the re habilitation work along with the methodology used by the school La Purísima, help the children be more self-sufficient and have a higher self-esteem of the children who receive the cochlear implants.

Linked with the area of re-habilitation all the effects are directly related to the accomplishment of objectives related to the inclusive education within the sphere of Include-ED education. The main effects are that we achieve the integration of children who have certain difficulties. Their self-sufficiency and independence are improved in a similar way to the children who enjoy the multisensory classrooms such as the one in the Special School Gloria Fuertes in Andorra and the others multisensory classrooms located in other special schools of Aragón.

Directly related to the innovations which refer to the specialized use of distinctive and specific communication systems have the effect of improving the communicative skills of those involved.

Cochlear implants are taken from the developments and investigations made around the world by scientists. Volta, an Italian physicist who developed the electric battery, connected batteries to two metal rods that he inserted in his ears. According to the Association of Cochlear Implants of Spain in Aragón, up to the year 2011 in the age range 0-3 years old there are 63 children who have a cochlear implant and in the age range 4-7 years old 44 children.

The idea to create multisensory classrooms within a theoretical framework was created in Holland, in the nineteen seventies, in the center of Hardenberg, by the engineer Ad Verheul and other work colleagues.

The conceptual idea of Inclusive education has its origins in the United States of America with the program TEACH. Perhaps what can be considered as a possible differentiating factor for Aragón is in the setting up of preferential schools which aim to pursue a more complete inclusive education , making it extensive to the philosophy of the Autistic disorders there are 10 centers which cater in a preferential way to children who have Autistic disorders.

Interactive whiteboards, also known as SMART Boards, are tools that have made their way into classrooms around the world. These boards allow teachers to integrate the traditional chalkboard with modern technologies including computers, overheads, projectors and televisions.

PIT1 the project of innovation using tablets known as PIT1 is a venture which has been established here in Aragón. The investigation began at the beginning of the school year 2012 and is still in process. The main objective being to demonstrate the link between the cognitive development and an interactive methodology which promotes the interaction between the children

General suggestions for transference of some or all of the innovations mentioned within this report may appear to be slightly out of place. However, the importance of the following issues may be pertinent: There must be the need for the innovation with regards to requiring an improvement. The next issue is whether the innovation is culturally appropriate. A third point is that an analysis of the costs that would be incurred in setting up the innovation in other areas. Lastly, a mechanism for achieving sustainable development is required.

Turkey

With the technical support of UNICEF and EU funding, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) has started to manage the “Strengthening Preschool Education” project for early childhood and preschool education. The project has a considerable improving impact in practice.

It has the ambition to develop and build qualified child daycare and preschool education services by the cooperation and partnership capacity of MONE institutions, public organizations, municipalities and NGOs in order to encourage the parents for the registration and attendance of socially, economically or physically disadvantaged children.

It is the first time that free (no payment), flexible (considering local characteristics) and applicable “Society-based Early Childhood Service Models” have been developed. The Project is also

innovative in the sense that it has an institution-based view with the cooperation of local authorities and actors. The dissemination applications of society-based early childhood education have been continued.

In addition to innovative features, the project offers a system compatible with the local characteristics of the regions, especially those where disadvantaged children live. The project also aims at the disadvantaged children who need to attend early childhood services easily in an economic sense and transportation.

All pupils in early childhood period will benefit from the innovations offered by the project.

The results are the following:

Result 1: Piloting in 10 cities in order to develop the capacity and programs in society-based daycare and preschool institutions under MONE

Result 2: Developing and institutionalizing a qualified society-based child daycare and preschool education service model.

Result 3: Increasing the number of families who wants to register their child for a preschool and then primary school by promoting the importance of preschool education in a national base.

Result 4: Providing equipment, educational material and furniture for the preschool classes in primary schools in 32 pilot cities.

Result 5: Preparing and managing a funding program and its call for proposal by the aim of cooperation and partnership among local public institutions, municipalities and NGOs.

In 10 pilot cities, the number of institutions that offer society-based early childhood education has been increasing. The statistics also proves the increase in the number of registration and attendance to preschool institutions.

As an alternative to institution-based school models, it is also aimed to spread the understanding of society-based model which can meet the local needs and to increase the number of quality and quantity of rate of schooling in early childhood period.

qualified-child-daycare

partnership
strengthening-preschool-education-project

pilot
society-based
registered-children

local-needs

The model developed within the project has similarities with the applications in EU countries. However, it has unique features as the models are developed considering local characteristics and necessities.

The partner countries can also analyze their local characteristics and needs and adapt their preschool program considering these facts. The local actors such as public authorities and NGOs can also be considered as a great potential to see the general picture of needs and to develop solutions with cooperation.

“Strengthening Preschool Education Project” applied by MONE has been a source of inspiration for many projects with its management and success. Moreover, the idea of society-based early childhood education and the idea of promoting social conscious towards early childhood education will be a contribution to this network project.

Germany

Law of child-care-facilities

The new law of child care facilities will ensure child care for each child from the age of 1 year in a nursery or at a child-minder by legal right without any precondition from the 1st of August 2013. The National Ministry of family passed that bill because there are too little child care facilities in Germany. In Germany are actually 180.000 missing places. The situation of child care has to be improved for children and families. And the occupational status and the qualification of child-minders have to be improved, too. Therefore the aims and ambitions of that law are to assure well child care, education and early support for all children less than 3 years old, especially for those with special needs because of physical and mental disabilities or social disadvantages. Furthermore more child-minders should be qualified and employed. New kindergartens will be built and existing ones will be enlarged and specialized. New educators will be won and qualified. And companies will be encouraged to offer child-care facilities at the working place.

180.000 new child-care places should arise not at least to assure the compatibility of family and employment especially for women. Another reason is the awareness of the importance of early childhood education and the support of the development of children from the first year of age. Therefore the quality of child care facilities will be improved and scientifically founded qualitative standards will be implemented until 2020 in each German federal state. Aims are a law of quality and a framing educational plan for whole Germany as it already exist in Thuringia for children from 0 – 10 years old. Furthermore Germany plans more international cooperation to the point of the development of international quality standards. For that reason Germany will participate actively on studies.

The main emphasis is put on linguistic support. Each child should get all possibilities and chances as soon as possible. Approximately 4.000 Kindergartens will be developed to institutions with the main emphasis on linguistic and integration, especially those kindergartens with children with those special needs over average.

On the local and regional level positive effects are expected. In the city of Jena for example 7 new kindergartens will be built. That leads to the consequence that more educators will be



qualified and employed. Educators will also get further education especially in the field of education of little children between 0 and 3 years old and for children with special needs.

The qualification and further education of child-minders on a high standard is still in progress. The qualification standards for child-minders have improved on a national level. Only Institutions with a special seal of quality like the LEB are allowed to qualify and educate child-minders. The regional youth welfare offices support child-minders by their work. And the profession child-minder gains a growing recognition. Child-minders are seen as educators and not just as carers. Since 2012 the employment of child-minders including wage costs subsidy is supported throughout Germany.

Further possible effects on a regional and national level are that more women will be able to get back into job earlier if they want to and will be supported to combine family and job in a better way. And of course children will benefit from that law, because more children can receive education from their 1st birthday on. That also means that disabilities can be recognized earlier and children can receive individual assistance for their development.

Referring to our project the law stands for the ambition to offer education to each child as soon as possible on a high qualitative standard. Furthermore the network can offer a stimulus and inputs as well as receive some.

But there is actually another law that works against the law of child care facility but will although be mentioned here because it is discussed very passionately. This law will provide money for parents who will take care for their children at home.

Law of care-money

The CDU, the German Party of Christian Democrats, introduced the idea to pay parents for taking care for their children until their 3rd living year the first time in 2007. It was introduced by the Thuringian minister-president and it was taken over by the CSU, another German party (Christian Socials of Bavaria). The draft legislation was introduced in 2012. The resolution of the law was attended by numerous protests by the population and political opponents.

The main idea is that parents who take care for their children until the age of 3 at home and don't give them to a child care facility will get 100 - 150 € per month from the 1st of August 2013. It is justified with the possibility and freedom for parents to choose where their children spent their first living years. Another reason are too little child care facilities, especially in rural areas. The feared effect on a local, regional and national level is that poor, uneducated and migration families will prefer the money instead of bringing their children to a childhood facility. That will be problematic especially for children with disabilities and special needs.

The expected costs for the state Germany will be approximately 1,2 billion Euros provided that it will be paid for 900.000 children all over Germany.

Although it is expected that less families will take the advantage of the care money the law is discussed controversial. Opponents say – and this is the view that we share - it works against early childhood education and the employment of women. They call it “cooker award”. One main opponent is the German Secretary of Labor underlining the position that the law would be the wrong incentive against childhood education by professional educators within childhood facilities and against employment of women. Furthermore it is said that the law jeopardizes the aims and ambitions of labour-market-policy, education policy and family policy. Opponents also think it would be better to finance childhood facilities with the money planned for the care-money. The nominated person for Chancellor by the SPD, Social Democratic Party, announced that he will repeal the law immediately if the SPD will win the election in September 2013. Currently the Bundesrat (the upper house of the German parliament) plans to vote down the law.

Poland

The question of children from disadvantaged groups reminds us that preschool and kindergarten structures should enable children of mixed development and needs to live together, should foster exchanges between different children, and ensure that the institution truly caters to the respective capacities of each child. It is easy to make these imperatives sound compatible in theory, but for them to be so in practice, the institution must decide on its priorities, which means deciding on its values.

Two practical implemented innovations are the Dog Therapy and the Dalton Plan Pedagogy which will be introduced.

Dog Therapy

It affects the children become more open and more likely to work with them when in their environment is a friendly animal. This innovation is based on multiple sensitivity. It is a good way to improve disturbed or delayed functions. Through the use of various forms of activities that allow for making friends and for acquiring a companion, which accepts us unconditionally, children learn and gain new experiences, improve their acquired skills.

The Dog Therapy was introduced in order to improve speaking skills by multiple sensitivity in children with this kind of problems for children aged 2 years of age and more. There is a possibility of using dog therapy method in every age group of children bearing in mind also those with special needs.

In addition to the emotional, logical and social aspects, the Dog Therapy is especially important in speech therapy. Exercises practicing breathing help develop auditory sensitivity, phonemic hearing, auditory analysis and synthesis

During the classes, children learn and play in a spontaneous manner. Through touch and other senses and the experience of the world around them, they learn empathy, a sense of personal power and control over it, care for other beings, and build self-esteem. This kind of speech therapy games are more appealing to children, their form is very attractive and extremely motivating.

Dalton Plan Pedagogy

Dalton Plan Pedagogy provides students with ample opportunities of being able to deal responsible, work independently and work with others. According to the concept of Dalton Plan Method teachers should go beyond their habits, and the dominant role should be left to students. Thanks to entrusting students with responsibility for the learning process, the emphasis moves from the exercise of command, often very time-consuming, in the direction of a true mastery of the material.

The main purpose of Dalton innovation was to make children more independent, self-confident, well-organized, and cooperative. Self-reliance, responsibility and cooperation – those are the main pillars of this method. Children of 3-6 years learn autonomy through the accomplishment of their duties. The tasks are in fact designed so that children can manage to complete them by themselves without further explanation. Children learn to work independently, and trying to deal with their problems by themselves. They learn to work in different groups, whose main goal is to complete the task by all members of the group. Children participating in the educational process can decide by themselves about the time and the type of task they are dealing with. The concept



A word cloud of educational terms including: groupwork, flexibility, dog-therapy, responsibility, emotional, dalton-plan-education, autonomy, linguistic-skills, independence, cooperation, speech-therapy, experiences, learn-to-learn, social-skills, and multiple-sensitivity.

of Dalton Plan Pedagogy also has continuity in the older age groups. There are secondary schools, high schools and even universities working this way. This state of affairs shows patency of the method.

The most noticeable effect of Dalton Plan Education is that children learn to learn. They know how to collaborate in learning.

This method enables children to flexibility in carrying out the activities. They plan the number and type of tasks within a specified time, so they will be well organized. While learning autonomy in carrying out their tasks, children they will become more empowered and more confident. Children gain the ability to engage in various activities at the same time and learn the skills of assessment of their work and the cooperation with others. Furthermore they learn responsibility for themselves and others. They are willing to work in different groups, the composition of which constantly changes, so they will be more tolerant and open to new friendships. Furthermore children are integrated as a team and willing to work together – the stronger students help the weaker ones, so in the future they will be willing to act together and to learn from another.

Dalton Plan educational concept was developed by Helen Parkhurst. It was established nearly 100 years ago (in 1926) in the United States. Since 1985 has been successfully implemented in the Netherlands. Worldwide it can be found in Japan, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, the USA, Spain and Senegal. Idea of Dalton Plan is spreading worldwide.

In Poland, this trend has been developing since 2008. The first kindergartens and schools have been already established and this method is already appreciated by the educational environment
When there is a need there is a will.

If one of the project partner countries will require innovation that will improve children self-reliance, cooperation and self-organization skills, they can use elements of the Dalton Plan.

The Dalton Plan Pedagogy is a very practical method so that you do not need to make many changes in education and kindergarten organization. It can be taken over and only bridge effective ideas of it can be used. It is not a restrictive method, just an idea, but an idea that works and has a beneficial effect on children's development.

Romania

A different kind of school

The main reason for a different kind of school is the need to change the way in which children are educated, to develop some values that traditional learning cannot induce: self-esteem, respect for the environment, tolerance, teamwork, intergenerational learning and harmonious development. We are not any more interested in acquiring knowledge but also in knowledge building.



A different kind of school is an initiative of Ministry of Education and offers the possibility to organize a week of different activities in kindergartens and schools. The aim of this project is to involve parents, children from 3-6, and teachers in non-formal activities, which will emphasize the extra-curricular interests, talents, and competencies in different areas. A number of NGO's are involved in developing this project, bringing their expertise in non-formal education.

The activities are organized by teachers with the help of NGO's which propose different activities. Some examples are: arts and crafts, discovering talents, cooking lessons, traditional values, educational movies, visits to museums, excursions.

Children are placed in a non-formal environment, and they have the opportunity to participate in activities with their parents, which will foster the parent – children relationship

Each activity was planned by the teacher, executed with the aid of NGO's and finally evaluated by the ministry. Parents are also involved, being encouraged to participate with their children and to help in improving activities.

The community derives benefit, too. Children will be more adaptable to change, involved in the local community and social responsibility.

Adding crèches to the education system

Adding crèches to education system is a legal measure taken by Ministry of Education that will allow introducing the educational component in this area which was mainly focused on care component. At this point, the focus is on infrastructural development and teacher training.

Two main activities are involved: curriculum development and training the teaching staff. The next step is to develop new specialization in teacher training at the university.

In crèches, only care component was taken into consideration caused by the lack of specialized personnel and faulty infrastructure. The educational component was neglected and because of the previous hierarchy, which putted the crèches under the social protection programs.

Children from 0 to 3 years old and teachers will derive benefit and parents will be encouraged to bring their babies in crèches at an earlier age.

Both of initiatives are specific to our country, and are applied all over the country.

Expected positive effects on a local, regional and national level in the future are increasing teachers' creativity in designing activities, more involved parents and an intergenerational learning development.

Furthermore a larger number of NGO's are currently involved in educational projects. An increasing number of teachers is seeking for specialized training.

The two projects have response to the specific country's needs and implementing this in other country depends on the educational system.