



Co-constructing Professional Learning:

Pathways towards Quality, Equity, and Respect for Diversity in ECEC

15-17 October, 2012, Opatija, Croatia

Today, systems of early childhood education and care (ECEC) are acknowledged by both policy makers and educational researchers to be crucial in bringing more social justice into the education and upbringing of children who come from diverse family backgrounds. Research also shows that the **competences of the workforce are salient predictors of ECEC quality**, and they can encourage children's learning and development to their full potential. At the same time, ECEC of low or mediocre quality may actually harm children, especially those who live in poverty.

But still, even though it is clear that the professionalization of early care and education personnel is paramount for the provision of high quality ECEC, such professionalization appears to be a constant deficiency in many countries throughout the world.

Therefore, rethinking the initial training and the continuous professional development of ECEC professionals working in services for children from birth to 8 years of age is a must. Reports from international organizations argue for sufficient initial trainings at

the bachelor level, and recent research (CoRe, 2011) pleads for initial trainings that are built on a **reciprocal interaction between theory and practice which support the development of critical reflection as a core competence**. There is also substantial scientific evidence that coherent and comprehensive policies aimed at continuous professional development at the institutional or team level over long periods of time can yield beneficial effects equal to those of initial preparation.

How can this be done and who should participate in the process? How can competent educators develop to their full potential in competent systems? Which are the critical systemic conditions for improving professional practice and for developing and supporting multiple pathways towards professionalization of the entire workforce, including the non-qualified workers? What are the roles of **children, parents, and communities** in this process of professionalization? How does the broader political and economic context influence ECEC practice and the work of practitioners?

ISSA and DECET invite practitioners in early years services and primary schools, policymakers and researchers to take part in an international conference to look for answers to these questions through **dialogue and a joint professional learning process**.

The conference will explore in an interactive manner innovative ways of professional learning that can empower ECEC workers in their search for quality, equity, and respect for diversity. In this context we will look at examples of interesting practices that illustrate innovative approaches to professional learning that empowers ECEC practitioners working with children in increasingly challenging, diverse, and uncertain contexts.



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CO-ORGANIZERS:



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Strands:

1. Pathways for positioning the ECEC profession in increasingly challenging contexts.

We are witnessing growing demands on the ECEC professionals working with young children and their families: from dealing with increasing diversity to facing the consequences of families living in poverty, from expanding their competences beyond teaching to reaching communities and building professional networks, from investing in their professional growth to advocating for the reputation of their profession. What is really expected from ECEC professionals to know and be ready to do in a changing world that re-defines childhood and puts increasing pressure on professionals' roles?

2. Systemic approaches to professional learning as a pathway to quality, equity, and respect for diversity

Recent studies are demonstrating that 'competence' in the ECEC context has to be understood as a characteristic of the entire early childhood system, rather than as an individual practitioner's set of skills, knowledge,

and attitudes. A key factor of such a systemic approach to professional learning is how such a competent system supports individuals in realizing their capabilities for developing responsible and responsive practices that meet the needs of children and parents, especially those who live in difficult circumstances.

3. Pathways for co-constructing early childhood theory and practice - empowering learning communities

Learning communities can play a key role in increasing the competences of professionals, parents, and children on different levels. They can be places where pedagogical theory and practice are critically analyzed and where new pedagogical knowledge and practice are constructed by empowering different voices and views to contribute to the dialogue. Learning communities can be the open learning space where governmental and non-governmental agencies can work together, where practitioners, parents, experts, policymakers, and researchers can build on their specific expertise to create better chances for young children and their families to access and benefit from high quality ECEC.

The Call for Proposals and information about registering will be posted in early 2012 on the websites of the co-organizers.

The language of the conference will be English with translation into Russian and Croatian.

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