

## The Nordic Way ECEC: Oslo, 26-27 March 2019:

### **EPEPE's return on the Congress:**

The key takeaway was that YES you can educate and care for young children to create incredible humane societies. How to use ECEC as a meeting point for building sustainable societies? Reground together and meet around the question of the child. What do we hope for the next generation, and how can they learn from our mistakes?

Rise of globalisation and immigration rates render the idea of making ECEC a non-western field, culturally flexible and adaptable to all i.e. the case of Iceland. We need to use all cultural wealth as a benefit for ECEC, and as a way to underline the cultural traits of all children. Preserving culture from the youngest age is essential, a homogenous EC education lacking culture hampers its preservation. From the youngest age children should be the ambassadors of their culture and their environment should encourage them to be that.

Scandinavian children spend on average 70% of their daytime outdoors. The question is thus not only the way we care for, and educate children but also their environment. If children today are the 'product' of the society they are born in, then we need to question ourselves about the environment we are providing to them. We cannot expect from these children as they grow up to value nature and contemporary environmental problematics, to understand the dangers emanating from technological expansion if they are born at the epicentre of these changes. We therefore need to put nature at the centre of their education.

The Nordic Way congress was more of an armchair discussion conference than a debate of ideas. Repetition in the presentation of speakers (OECD congress should make sur that each presentation contributes to a wider whole and is different from each). The NW lacked public participation, questions to presenters, conflicts of views and KNOWLEDGE CREATION. It was more of a presentation of the Nordic way of ECEC and the scientific backing. Only the positive aspects of the Nordic way were underlined, no mention of the 'King Child'.

ECEC benefits from being a relatively new and continually self-creating field. On the other hand, for most more anchored fields (economics, security studies..) there exists a extensive gap between academia/research and policy making. What I have learned while at university is that many fields suffer from the distance of these two group of actors. In many cases, policy-makers do not want to listen to, and work closely with researchers or academics because they accuse them of conducting too much 'arm-chair empiricism'. They claim that the former lacks socio-political awareness of the reality on the ground and the processes of implementation and its subsequent difficulties. Hence, the 2020 OECD congress should accentuate the idea that although ECECE is an ever-growing field and new discoveries and research will keep on emerging, as of now we have a good conception and understanding of the pillars of quality education and care applicable to every country. We should use those pillars (neuroscience, cognitive science, good practices and knowledge) and actively think about HOW to implement them. We need to put knowledge into ACTION. Coherent policymaking is the step for 2020. A place should be given to new research, of course, but we should start thinking of how we can implement what we already know on the largest scale. Otherwise, the gap between research/academia and policymaking will keep extending.

### **Summary of the Congress:**

The Congress was convened by Union of Education Norway (UEN), in partnership with the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The conference was attended by 300 participants from nearly 50 countries, including Education Ministers other policy makers, education union representatives, ECE educators, researchers and academics. It was convened by Union of Education Norway (UEN), in partnership with the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Conference contributed extensive information and an in-depth discussion

concerning the Nordic approach to Early Childhood Education (ECE), highlighting its particular focus on the rights of children, respect, trust and play.

Conference participants were welcomed by the Norwegian Minister of Education, Jan Tore Sanner. He stressed that children should be participants and not observers in their lives. They need to be given both "roots and wings". The leader of the Norwegian Education Union (UEN), Steffen Handal, also focused on the children, their needs, and the ways that they learn. He spoke of the "intrinsic value of childhood" and faulted much of the current discourse on ECE as describing something "to prepare children for school". Handal argued that ECE is important in its own right and should prepare children for life. In addition to respecting the value of childhood, Handal identified "care and friendship as purposes in themselves", recognised "play in its own right" and the importance of "democracy and children's right to participation".

One of the threads running throughout the Conference was the importance of play as being the principal means for small children to learn and develop. The Nordic pedagogical tradition is built around observing and understanding what children are expressing, including with the "language" of play.

Education International General Secretary, David Edwards, contrasted the Nordic approach to listening to children with the practice of putting pressure on them to fit into moulds and patterns determined by others and, in defending a logic based on the reality of early childhood, he said, "Who would have thought we would be defending a child's right to play, to a childhood?" Edwards added, "Young children should have time to play, to learn without stress and to develop into children who can continue along the learning continuum into school. They should be taught by highly-trained and qualified teachers and learn in well-resourced centres and schools". Edwards also stressed the critical role of Education Support Personnel in contributing to the full development of the child. He went on to highlight the numerous challenges related to privatisation in ECE, arguing that inclusive quality ECE for all can only be achieved through strong public education systems.

Susan Flocken, ETUCE director, underlined that the increasing privatisation of the ECE sector in Europe is a major challenge and called for better qualifications, including ensuring that ECE teachers have a masters' level qualification. She also spoke of poor working conditions, gender imbalances and related challenges, and the need for professional autonomy to allow teachers to meet the needs of children. She emphasised that there should be "sustainable public funding for ECE because it is a public good and a basic human right".