

The Early Childhood Workforce: Continuing Education and Professional Development

Although differences still exist between and within countries, overall levels of initial education for work in early childhood services are improving with an increasing number of graduate workers (see Brief 27). This reflects the policy priority given to children's care and education today by national governments and international organisations. At the same time, there is growing awareness of the need for improved education and professional development after initial education, especially in the context of discourses on lifelong learning and changing demands on workforces. Continuing education and professional development are seen as necessary to keep up with new skills and understandings, to meet changing job requirements and to support career mobility.

In this brief, I will consider some forms of continuing education and professional development and some of the conditions needed to enable workers to participate. As in the previous brief, the focus is on centre-based workers; family day care, an important early childhood service in many countries, deserves separate attention.

Some forms of continuing education

The most basic form is what might be termed *in-service training*. This entails attending short courses and other events, organised either in the workplace or outside, intended to impart specific information or particular skills (e.g. first aid, hygiene, child protection procedures).

A second form of continuing education provides opportunities for professionals to *study further for a higher level of academic qualification*. For example, after their initial education Danish pedagogues have a range of opportunities for further education. In-service training is arranged by individual centres and local authorities and pedagogues can attend short courses at local colleges. But there are also longer-term diploma courses provided by Centres for Further Education or universities, which can pave the way to university studies at a Masters level. These Masters courses have become quite popular, enabling pedagogues to take forward particular interests. For example, as a result of observational work pedagogues have become increasingly interested in recent years in anthropological methods, and they now make up more than half the students in the Department of Educational Anthropology at the Danish University of Education. Such developments enable the professional voice to be better heard within the academic world and to participate in

discussions about theory and method (Korintus and Moss, 2004)¹.

A third form of professional development provides established staff with education *for new roles and jobs* in early childhood services. An interesting example comes from England. Recent policy emphasis on integrated services for children has led to the emergence of courses for advanced professional development in leadership and management of these services. This has culminated in a course leading to a National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership, piloted in September 2004 and to be extended nationwide in 2005. Initially, this will focus on senior staff from a new generation of government-funded early childhood services - Children's Centres that integrate a wide range of services for young children and their families. Staff taking this new course will receive credits that will count towards a Masters degree in leadership - thus connecting professional development for new forms of work with a higher academic qualification (Jensen, Hansen and Moss, 2004)².

A fourth type of continuing education provides a workplace context that supports *continuing learning and research* by early childhood workers. In this approach professional development is seen as a continuous process of co-constructing new understandings and meanings. It is particularly associated with the pedagogical work developed over the last 40 years in the municipal early childhood services in Reggio Emilia and with particular methods to which I will return below. Rinaldi (in press)³, formerly director of the services in Reggio, captures the idea of continuing learning and learning as research: "Personal and professional development, like education, should not be seen as static or unchangeable qualities, achieved once and for all, but rather as a process, an ongoing path that we follow from birth throughout our lives, now more than ever. Personal and professional development and education are something we construct ourselves in relation with others, based on values that are chosen, shared, and constructed together. It means living in a permanent state of research."

¹ Korintus, M. and Moss, P. (2004) Work with Young Children: A Case Study of Denmark, Hungary and Spain: Consolidate Report, at www.ioe.ac.uk/tcru/carework.htm

² Jensen, J.J., Hansen, H.K. and Moss, P. (2004) Innovative developments in care work: Consolidated Report, at www.ioe.ac.uk/tcru/carework.htm

³ Rinaldi, C. (in press) In dialogue with Reggio. London: Routledge.

Conditions favouring continuing education

While there is no shortage of good examples and ideas about how early childhood workers can take forward their education and professional development, certain conditions are necessary for widespread and regular participation.

These activities need time and funding. Left to individual employers, both may be inadequate. But there are various means to ensure workers get some access to further education, either as an entitlement or requirement. In a number of countries (e.g. Germany, Italy, Spain), 'non contact' time (i.e. time apart from children to be used for a variety of purposes, including continuing education) is stipulated in collective agreements for certain groups of workers – although how much 'non contact' time is needed is often contentious. Further education is included as part of pedagogues' working time in Denmark.

Hungary is tackling this issue in another way, requiring 'care workers' (which, in a split early childhood system, includes workers in nurseries for children under 3 years but not kindergarten teachers working with 3 to 6 year olds) to be registered on a National Register of Careworkers. A condition of registration is that workers must participate in continuing education, gaining a certain number of credits over a five year period. Such compulsion is unusual. More common is the building up over time of an expectation of professional development as part of professional identity (Korintus and Moss, 2004).

Funding may come from the budget of institutions or agencies responsible for services, such as local authorities. Or it may come from regional or national governments as part of programmes to implement policy. In the case of the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership outlined above, the English government is paying for senior staff from Children's Centres to take courses leading to this qualification. Developing leadership is seen as an essential part of a new policy agenda on integrated services.

Continuing education may also require the development of methods adapted to particular contexts and purposes. What I have referred to above as "a workplace context to improve practice through continuing learning and research" has been created in Reggio Emilia (and followed in many other places) through the development of the tool of pedagogical documentation and a particular group of staff. *Pedagogistas* are experienced educators, each working with a small number of early childhood centres to help develop understanding of learning processes and pedagogical work, for example, through pedagogical documentation. Pedagogical documentation involves the creation of diverse documents - written notes, observation charts, diaries, and other narrative forms, but also recordings, photographs, slides, and video - which are able to make visible the children's learning processes so that they can be shared, discussed, reflected upon and

interpreted. Using these methods, early childhood workers become learners and researchers, breaking down traditional boundaries between theory and practice; they deepen their understanding and evaluate the work (cf. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999⁴; Rinaldi, 2001⁵, in press).

Another example of context-relevant methods comes from the developing region: the virtual training and generative curriculum work in Africa undertaken by the Early Childhood Development Virtual University, which uses innovative approaches including web-based learning (<http://www.ecdvu.org/home.asp>).

Implications

Continuing education and professional development are essential complements to basic education: they need to be seen as part of a whole system that enables workers to improve their practice, deepen their understanding and explore new perspectives. There are many forms that such education and development can take, and there is a case for saying that all should be available; but in particular the concept of the worker as co-constructing learner and researcher opens up new, complex and exciting possibilities. However, to be accessible and widely used, certain conditions need to be in place including resources, motivation and methods. Lifelong learning comes neither easy nor cheap.

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⁴ Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (1999) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

⁵ Rinaldi, C. (2001) 'Documentation and assessment: What is the relationship?' in C. Giudici, C. Rinaldi and M. Krechevsky (eds.) *Making Learning Visible: Children as Individual and Group Learners*. Cambridge, MA: Project Zero and Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children.