The inclusiveness of early childhood education and care: some key research questions

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ECEC for disadvantaged groups: the international experience

Head Start (USA)
Early Start (Ireland)
Sure Start, SSLP (UK)
Opstap, Piramide, Kaleïdoscoop (NL)
Head Start (US)

Characteristics

• **Selective** (most deprived neighbourhoods)

• **Holistic** (psychomotor development, health, motivation, cognitive development...)

• **Maximum possible parent participation**
Head Start - evaluation

Effects of Head Start

- ‘IQ-boost’ appeared to be temporary
- Health, self-esteem, motivation
- Less referrals to special education, less grade repetition, later outflow, more diplomas (although gap with average youth was never bridged)
- After school-leaving: more employment, less delinquency, less teenage pregnancy, less dependency on social protection
- Each invested dollar yields a return of $7
An illustration: the Perry Preschool Programme

Returns per US$ invested in Head Start

Based on model pre-primary programmes for low-income children

- High/Scope Perry Pre-school Programme: $8.6
- Chicago Child - Parent Programme: $7.1
- Carolina Abecedarian Programme: $3.7
Question 1: cost-benefit analysis

- Transferability from American to European contexts?
  - Different institutional settings in ECEC
  - Different targeting
  - Even among disadvantaged populations: different patterns of poverty
  - Different patterns of inequality (=> rates of return on education)
  - Different crime rates
  - Different systems of social protection
- Indirect effects (via parental labour supply)
Rates of return by level of education and social background

What about other countries? Evidence from PISA

Note: score point difference of 39 at age 15 ~1 year of education

Source: OECD, PISA in Focus 2011/1
Average gain (at age 15) from ECEC in systems that...

- Spend an extra dollar (PPP) on pre-primary education
- Reduce pupils-to-teacher ratio in pre-primary schools by 1 student
- Increase the duration of pre-primary school by 1 year
- Increase by 1% the proportion of students who attend pre-primary school

Score point difference in PISA

Source: OECD, PISA in Focus 2011/1
Question 2: unequal access to ECEC

The Matthew effect in ECEC: children who would benefit most tend to participate least. Example: probability of use of child care (%) by monthly income (€) in Flanders

Poor families: 30.7% ⇔ non-poor: 73.4%
Non-Belgian mothers: 40.7% ⇔ Belgian 77.9%
Potential explanations for unequal use of ECEC

Unequal opportunities (exogenous influences):
• Material conditions (income, costs, family size, distance, degree of subsidisation, income-related price setting, …)
• Link between use of ECEC and labour market participation
• Human, social and cultural capital: pedagogical skills & awareness of parents, ‘maturity’ of children, sense of belonging, …)

Unequal treatment (endogenous barriers / discrimination):
• Priority rules: dual-earner families, regular attendance conditions…
• De facto discrimination in leave schemes
• Unequal quality: formal vs informal care
• Cultural barriers
• Quasi-market mechanisms
Strategies for more inclusive ECEC

• Equal opportunity strategies
  – Free provision, means-testing
  – Outreaching
  – Compulsory participation (preschool)

• Equal treatment strategies
  – Legal entitlement
  – Legal quality standards
  – Parental involvement
  – Intercultural (training of) staff

• Equal outcomes strategies
  – Targeted programmes
  – Positive action within mainstream provision (single-parent families, low-income families, at-risk children)
  – Additional services (health care, language stimulation)
Quasi-markets in ECEC

Quasi-markets:
- free choice of services
- free provision of services
- govt = 3rd payer
- subsidy / child

Competition based on ‘reputation’
- Quality of services
- Quality of intake
→ quality ↗ ⇔ inequality ↗

Secondary segment:
‘natural’ initial disadvantage
⇒ low demand ⇒ less possibility of selection / poorer funding
⇒ weak quality
⇒ vicious circle

Primary segment:
‘natural’ initial advantage
⇒ high demand ⇒ possibility of selective admission / better funding
⇒ strong reputation
⇒ virtuous circle
Question 3: the role of ECEC in breaking cycles of disadvantage

• E.g. child poverty action plan in Flanders:
  – Objective: halving child poverty by 2020
  – Main focus on ECEC
    ⇔ ECEC does not prevent child poverty: it may at best prevent the persistence of poverty across the life cycle

• Prevention of child poverty necessitates investment in young (and future) parents
  – Prevention of early school leaving: risk of child poverty is 5 times higher when mother has dropped out from secondary education
  – Youth Guarantee Scheme
    ⇔ Belgian government has tightened conditionality of social protection for young people
Conclusion: need for two-generation strategies

Invest in young adults => prevent child poverty

Boost children’s opportunities => prevent adult poverty

Prevent child poverty in next generation