

## **Introduction to the event**

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In October 2004 I was here in the same building together with the DECET Network and the host organisation Rosa Sensat for a seminar which we had organised together. The issue was Respect for Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood. The purpose was to give an introduction and to start a debate. The participants came from all over Portugal and Spain. Thank you Rosa Sensat for hosting once again in your beautiful building and in your beautiful city of Barcelona a major DECET event. This time you are no longer standing at the sideline, but you decided to join the DECET network and DECET has accepted you as a full member.

I remember also that I spoke about the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the programme strategies related to the theme Respect for Diversity for the European Region. Since then the Foundation has embarked on a process of change and has made some important decisions.

Yet our mandate remains the same. It is to improve opportunities for young children growing up in situations of disadvantage.

We continue to take a holistic view of children's development. Addressing emotional and psychological needs is important alongside health and education. Engaging with families and communities, while respecting culture and promoting ownership, is crucial in creating a safe and supportive environment.

Our vision is of a world that respects the rights, dignity and equality of children, their families and communities. We believe that contextually appropriate interventions in early childhood can be especially effective in helping children to develop their potential, bringing lasting benefits to society.

The BvLF is changing the way it approaches grant making in early childhood. For the coming years the BvLF will focus on three issue areas: strengthening the care environment, successful transitions and social inclusion and respect for diversity.

- *Strengthening the care environment*: helping young children growing up in environments of stress and disadvantage get a fair start, especially within the home;
- *Successful transitions*: helping these children move successfully out of their home environment into their first experiences of life outside the home, such as day care, preschool, primary school ;
- *Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity*: helping children and those who work with them develop attitudes, skills and habits that equip them to deal with growing up in diverse and often conflict-ridden societies.

We are also narrowing our geographical focus, while retaining a presence on all continents. We now have a total of 21 countries eligible for grants.

Europe: Poland, Germany, Greece, Turkey and the Netherlands.

There is scope for a limited number of regional grants.

The BvLF will place more emphasis on advocacy and knowledge generation.



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While we will phasing out in countries that are no longer eligible, the regional network DECET which builds on strong and dynamic partnerships is invited to solicit continued support for another period of three years.

The work of DECET and the partner organisations linked to the network have greatly contributed to the fact that the BvLF has selected Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity as one of the three major issues. The challenge for the BvLF Team attached to this issue is to come up with a programme framework bringing focus and coherence to the Foundation's work and the related grantmaking.

We have started to formulate objectives, questions, outputs and outcomes. I will share with you the key questions on Friday.

One of the outcomes which we have formulated at the BvLF is disseminating evidence about effective and efficient methodologies in social inclusion and respect for diversity to practitioners, researchers and policy makers. This European seminar is exactly doing this.

I am confident that the learning we will get out of this seminar will greatly and positively influence our work with young children.



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