

Recent international discussions on terms and concepts of pedagogy

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In 2001 eight publishers of magazines for early childhood educators of eight different European countries got the idea to make a common European Magazine for ECEC workers. They were convinced that the diversity inside Europe towards policy and practice in early childhood care and education was so interesting and rich that Europe needed a magazine in different European languages so that the workers could communicate about their views and meanings about ECEC. In September 2001 the first issue of Children in Europe was published in seven languages: Italian: Bambini in Europa, Catalan: Infancia a Europa, Spanish Castilliana, Infancia en Europa, Dutch, Kinderen in Europa, Danish Born I Europa, French: Enfants d' Europe, German: Kinder in Europa and English Children in Europe.

I am since the start of the magazine Children in Europe responsible for the Dutch edition. In this function I am since 5 years confronted with the problems of translating from one of the eight languages to another. In the work we do in Children in Europe, the biblical Tower of Babel appeared to us so many times. Sometimes it was difficult to understand each other, we needed much time to listen to each other and try to understand the context in which words get their meaning. Indeed translation is not a question of taking a dictionary and write down the translated word, no each definition in a language is a cultural construction that integrates a historical process of how inside a region or a country the upbringing of children is perceived.

On a meeting like this where so many countries are represented it will not be different. Each of us will need to develop that attitude of trying to understand the context and the meaning of the other, who do not speak your language. For the most of us English and French will be the two lingua franca; the languages in which we communicate with each other. French and English are both languages with a large vocabulary. Some say that the English language has the richest vocabulary of all languages. But in the field of ECEC we see that English as being the main languages in which most of us communicate with each other has a limited vocabulary in the field of early childhood education and care.

For instance the word pedagogy. I quote now an article of Children in Europe so that most of you can follow. In Denmark, Germany, Belgium and many continental European countries 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogue' are very important words. But in the English-speaking world they are not commonly known or understood. The Danish researcher Jytte Jensen and Helle Krogh remark that in English translations we often see the Danish word 'pedagogik' translated as 'science of education' and 'pedagogue' as teacher or social educator. The choice of the English words is interesting but not very suitable. Interesting because the chosen term in English connects pedagogy with education. Unsuitable because this association with education gives an inaccurate understanding of the meaning of pedagogy in Denmark and other parts of continental Europe. In these parts of Europe 'pedagogy' refers to a complex and holistic relationship between people and between man and society.

As a discipline pedagogy is closely linked related to philosophy. The ideal is a free and competent individual. Values and opportunities are discussed in relation to this ideal and connected to issues relating man's individual needs and requirements (psychology and biology) and to questions of social conditions and opportunities (sociology).

Pedagogical work cannot be defined as carrying out particular actions or methods as in for example teaching. Rather it involves the establishment of different types of social life and educational and



developmental environments , based on and supported by specific norms and values. All pedagogical work is characterised by the pedagogue- by means of his or her personality, authority and professionalism- entering into interpersonal relationships so as to help individuals to develop, maintain or re-establish various resources such as identity, solidarity and the ability to comprehend the cultural context.

Pedagogical work adopts a holistic approach to children, starting from the whole child- the child with body, mind, emotions, creativity, history and social identity. It also transcends the division found in many countries between 'childcare' and 'education'. For while it acknowledges the importance of care, pedagogy regards care as inseparably linked with learning, health and other practices.

John Bennett a well known consultant for the Directorate of Education at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who has led the thematic Review of ECEC and who is present at this meeting was guest editor for the Curriculum issue of Children in Europe. In his article he points out that in countries like Germany and Denmark with a tradition of pedagogy that refers to a holistic approach to children encompassing care , learning and upbringing the content of a curriculum is much broader than in countries where this tradition does not exist. For Bennett's 'pedagogy' in English has a far narrower meaning , normally referring to teaching methods- just what the approach that Danish pedagogues want to avoid. .

In Germany (Oberhuemer) the new curriculum documents share a number of common features. Their statements of basic principles refer to a concept of children as agents of their own learning and to that holistic approach. For Pamela Oberhuemer the Erzieherinnen (the pedagogues) need to be encouraged to see themselves as interpreters, not as implementers of pre-specified curricular goals. The German practitioners which have a secondary degree (compare to the Danish pedagogues who have a bachelor degree need to be supported. There is a need to develop targeted professional development strategies, to introduce practical and effective forms of self-assessment and centre-based evaluation and to improve working conditions.

