Chapter 5

Early Teacher Training Across European Countries: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity – A Challenge for Early Childhood Education Today

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the evolution of Early Childhood Education in Spain from different educational laws. The progression of these is confirmed as a stage of custody and care until its consideration as an educational stage, which has its own signs of identity and even a curriculum. Likewise, it is shown that the learning of other languages and the development of technological competences has made Pre-School Education an effective tool for linguistic and cultural diversity. This matter is caused by the social and political changes, which have had a great influence on education. Research and experience confirm that Early Childhood Education is a substantial stage in support of the integral development of children at these ages, in which their benefits are extrapolated and remain over a lifetime.

INTRODUCTION

We all agree on the importance of early childhood education (Prats, 2004) as a foundation and platform for subsequent stages of education. However, recognition and appreciation of its importance has taken much longer to achieve than we all wanted, even though the different theories and extensive research in this field have continuously shown that childhood is a crucial stage in which children’s development will determine, in many respects, progress and advancement in later stages (Aseroy & Gil, 2009; Banks,
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2016). Therefore, the return on investment in Pre-Primary Education is greater than that of any other stage of education.

In recent decades, Education in Spain has undergone numerous changes and been influenced by the evolution of society and, in particular, families. Political changes and their implications for law, changes in family structures, technological developments and closer relations with other countries and cultural diversity, have contributed enormously to shaping Pre-Primary Education today (Sanchidrián & Ruiz, 2010).

Through Education, attempts are made to respond to this social transformation. Thus, according with Garcia and Wei (2014), in Pre-Primary Education knowledge of a second language is considered essential to equip our students from an early age with the skills they need to navigate effectively in today’s multilingual and multicultural society.

The paper therefore analyses the legal bases and social context that serve to structure the treatment the language receives at school. The actions undertaken up to the present are evaluated and some future challenges are put forth.

Moreover, in this stage students are encouraged to start using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in order to develop a core competency for their training and learning.

**PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN SPAIN**

Expectations regarding education have increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. As a result, the educational reforms introduced in recent decades have tried to adapt education systems to meet the needs of society. One of the goals of these reforms has been to achieve good education for all (Zabalza, 2012).

As from the twentieth century, all countries have paid increasing attention to their educational systems in order to ensure they evolve and adapt to the circumstances. The main developments in this respect have allowed the period of compulsory education to be increased, extending its benefits to a growing number of people and, above all, improving the quality of teaching (Monclús, 2005; Casanova, 2006; Esteve, 2007).

The General Education Act (Ley General de Educación - LGE) of 1970 marked the beginning of the renewal of the Spanish education system and the Organic Law on the Right to Education (Ley Orgánica del Derecho a la Educación - LODE) of 1985 provided a great boost to the process of modernisation of education, although it took many years to fully achieve this objective (Monclús, 2005; MEC, 2013). As a result of this evolutionary process, the current Spanish education system, like education systems in other neighbouring countries, has developed a structure based on a series of stages ranging from pre-primary to university education passing through intermediate levels such as primary education or secondary education.

This study analyses the characteristics of Pre-Primary Education as a separate stage of education from Primary Education, Compulsory Secondary Education or Higher Education and examines the specific features of this stage. We will also briefly analyze the historical evolution of Pre-Primary Education in Spain and conclude by examining some of the main trends in education.
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