Early Childhood Development in Terms of Content (Case of Russia)

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Ankara, October 12 - 13, 2010
How the system is organized
Objectives of the early childhood – emphases of the KGs

- Developmental
- Compensatory
- Health improvement
- Family involvement
The age boundaries:

- Children enter kindergarten at the age of 2 months
- Children leave kindergarten at the age of 6.5-8 years (normally from 6.5 to ca. 7)
PEI system divisions:

- Care system – for children of 2 months to 1 year
- Care & education system – for children of 1-3 years (early years)
- Education & care – for children of 3-5 years (preschool education)
- Preparation to school from 5 to 6.5–8 years (pre-primary education: ensuring school readiness)
Flexibility

How? Flexibility of ECCE services (types and forms): formal, non-formal and informal

- Where? Flexibility of places: the ECCE place is not necessarily a kindergarten spot.

- Who? Flexibility of provision: The services may be delivered by different providers – government, non-government, private providers, community and parents... but within a framework provided by gov.

- What? Flexibility of content: Different curricula/programs have the right to exist if they work within government requirements
Public expenditure on childcare and early education services as a per cent of GDP, 2005
### Public expenditure on ECEC in Russia, 2003-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public expenditure on ECEC in Russia as percent of GDP</th>
<th>Public expenditure on ECEC in Russia as percent of total state expenditures</th>
<th>Public expenditure on ECEC in Russia as percent of state expenditures on education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
<td>1.66%</td>
<td>15.31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
<td>15.56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>14.32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
<td>1.79%</td>
<td>14.23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.59%</td>
<td>1.68%</td>
<td>14.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
<td>15.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.76%</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
<td>16.39%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Family expenditure on ECEC in Russia

- 20% of the child’s “cost” in the KG
- The municipality is responsible for reducing this expenditure
- The ordinary charges are ca. 2000 RUR (approximately 70$) per month
Varieties of ECD programs (no difference between Russia and abroad)

Kindergarten can be open full day or half a day (Russia differs from abroad)

Revising the main goals of ECD (Russia differs from abroad)
Revising of the main goals of ECD in Russia and abroad

Abroad (Europe, USA)
From “complementary” to “basic” status of ECD

Russia
From teacher-oriented to child-oriented model of ECD
The question is:

Do the recent evidence mean that any kind of intervention (ECD program) leads to good developmental effect?

Search for quality of ECD in terms of content
Search for quality is of major importance for Russian preschool education

1. Content:
   - ECD program

2. Psychological and pedagogical conditions of program implementation
   - Adults (teachers)
   - Developing environment
Pre-school educational programs

- Include not only the process of education, but also determine the whole child’s life in kindergarten.
- In the centre of the process – interaction between teachers and children.
- Possible without strict division of the curriculum by academic subjects (project, thematic principles).
Pre-school educational programs

Who is the subject of learning activity? (related to Vygotsky)
- Teacher-oriented
- Child-oriented

How the content is presented?
- “Framework”
- “Prescriptive”
Challenges related to the contents of preschool education (six Russian regions, based on World Bank/UNESCO Policy Review)

1. Numerous cases of transition from child-oriented to teacher-oriented programs in kindergartens.
2. Child’s development is artificially accelerated and the preschool education is made more “adult”.
3. Cases of applying education quality assessment mechanisms inappropriate for pre-school age (testing children).
Why are mostly teacher-oriented, prescriptive programs chosen?

- There is an opportunity to provide children with a certain set of knowledge and skills.
  - But: personality development is falling behind (ability to make decisions, independence, etc.).
- Programs are “comfortable” for teachers, everything is known in advance.
  - But: the teacher’s role is reduced to mechanical translation and implementation of prescribed steps.
- There is a tendency “from above” to unify program contents.
Pre-school education quality assessment: focus on child development

- It is essential to evaluate aims and objectives of the program - not merely the declared ones, but those that are actually pursued.

- It is essential to evaluate the conditions and settings of program implementation. The most important conditions are program content and methods.

- The learning outputs in early childhood are taken to be development guidelines.

Children are not subjected to formal testing.
Educational programs assessment criteria in terms of quality (areas)

- Child-oriented / Teacher-oriented
- Framework or prescriptive
- Orientation towards psychological / passport age of children
- Orientation towards individualized education
- Subject-oriented contents / Integration-oriented contents
- Thoroughly developed methodological recommendations targeting various developmental areas
- Thoroughly developed recommendations for interaction between adults and children
- Planning features
- Opportunities for children to choose activities, materials and partners in studying
- Prevailing methods of teaching children
Focus on child development

Focus on the needs of authorities

Objectives of the early childhood
School readiness
Play issues
Objectives of the early childhood

Myths of preschool education – polar positions of the two approaches
Myth #1. Learning should begin as early as possible. That will allow for the early “start” and further successful promotion.

**Latent assumption:**
humans in different ages are generally equal in respect to learning. Age is ignored.

**Solution** – there are strict laws of age (psychological, physiological and other). Peculiarities of early childhood.
Myth #2. It is inappropriate to teach preschool children seriously. They should be simply “brought up”.

- **Latent assumption:** school is the only place where serious education is feasible
- **Solution:** traditional system of preschool education in Russia (serious education)
Myth #3. Serious preschool education means the oppression of children

- **Latent assumption:** learning is associated with strong pressure and annoying hard effort. Also often implies boredom.

- **Solution** – child-centered education (interesting, not boring, but serious).
Thank you for your attention!

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There are two approaches to ECD:

Focus on child development

Child-oriented ECD program

Focus on the needs of authorities

Teacher-oriented ECD program (even if it declares that it operates for the child’s sake)