



CYPRUS PRESIDENCY
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OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Cyprus Presidency Conference "Literacy for All"

Nicosia, 5-6 September 2012

Description of Workshop 2

Workshop 2 – Young children

Children's early years provide the foundation of literacy development, and have a profound effect on literacy skills later in childhood and in adulthood. Parents and institutions providing early childhood education and care are the two most important actors in providing children with a literacy-nurturing environment.

Parents and the family environment have a crucial role in the development of their children's literacy skills. Having books at home, reading aloud for children, reading frequently and for pleasure are all important factors not only to develop young children's vocabulary and proficiency in the spoken language, but also to improve their motivation to engage in literacy-related activities. Because parents with poor literacy skills are less likely to engage in these activities, it is important to provide them with the support, guidance and advice they need. Indeed, family literacy programmes that focus on parents and their children are highly cost-effective.

In addition, providing high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for young children, especially for socio-economic disadvantaged children is also crucial to develop cognitive and emotional skills that lead towards literacy. Participation in high quality ECEC may also allow for the early detection of problems that can hinder the later development of literacy, and consequently, to resolving them through early intervention. Providing targeted support for young children with emerging literacy problems can help prevent much more serious educational obstacles later on.

Questions

a) How to raise awareness among parents of the importance of creating a literate environment at home? How to reach disadvantaged parents? Any examples of good practices at the national level (eg family literacy programmes)? How to help support parents to create a literate environment at home? What about parents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds? What are their special needs and what specific measures should be taken at the European and national levels to support these parents?

b) Concerning ECEC: What kind of programmes (playful learning vs. direct instruction of precursors of reading and writing) do you suggest? Do you know of any empirical studies and/or good practices in ECEC to promote literacy at an early age?

c) What about specific programmes to detect and/or prevent early literacy problems? What factors contributed to the success of those projects?