

# **A rich programme for every child (summary)**

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Children are increasingly growing up in diverse environments. They have their family, their school and their peers, but facilities for childcare, education and recreation are playing an increasing role. Many new facilities for children have emerged in recent decades. Childcare facilities in particular have seen enormous growth, and there is no sign that this growth will stop anytime soon. The debate on these developments has up till now been dominated by financial and organisational aspects. The same issues are found at the centre of childcare policy too. The Education Council believes that childcare, education and recreation facilities must explicitly adopt a pedagogical approach. It is of primary importance that the various environments in which children are brought up are united in this approach. Child-raising and education benefit from a certain degree of congruence and connection between the various environments. This increases effectiveness. A connection can be achieved by taking the desired aims as the basic premise. What does society want to achieve with its under-thirteens? And the next question, what type of programme offering would be needed, what facilities would be capable of providing the programme, and what would this mean for staff and staff training? These themes are at the heart of this recommendation.

## **Three pedagogical criteria**

This advisory report affords insight into the pedagogical and the developmental and psychological knowledge available on childcare and the education of under-thirteens. It reveals firstly that the early years of a child's life play a crucial role in its further development. It also emphasises the importance of a broad development: cognitive development is of great importance, as are the development of physical, motor, socio-emotional and moral skills. Based on the literature, the report provides a starting point for the objectives of care and education for this age group. The objectives are formulated as criteria that can be used to test the offering and methods of pedagogical facilities:

- provide security, stability and continuity;
- encourage a broad development, but also provide recreation and relaxation; and
- encourage individual responsibility and give children the chance to actively take part.

The report looks at the extent to which the programmes (in the broadest sense of the word) offered by pedagogical facilities currently meet these criteria. Aspects examined include the family, childcare, 'host parent' childcare, playgroups, junior schools, 'community schools' (*brede scholen*), lunchtime and after-school childcare, leisure time facilities and the neighbourhood. Also examined are obstacles to the provision of these facilities. The programmes score particularly well in meeting the criteria of 'encourage a broad development' and 'encourage individual responsibility'; they perform less well on the criterion of 'provide stability and continuity'. A factor in this is the state of tension that exists between the interests of the parents and the other partners in the provision of education and care. Apart from the interests of the child, economic and practical interests also feature. This was also revealed in a background study conducted for this report. One of the conclusions in the study is that parents and children do not want full-time after-school childcare. Most parents consider childcare on two or three days of the week to be enough. They also believe that after-school childcare should be primarily recreational. At the same time, the parents and children interviewed valued an organised offering.

The objectives set out above for childcare and education for under-thirteens need to be further fleshed out in the coming years. What the Education Council would like to see is a rich programme for all age groups (including the under-sevens), and for all developmental aspects. The facilities needed to achieve this are already available in the form of preschool playgroups and years 1 and 2 of junior school (the 'early years') and the core objectives of primary education. Developing and expanding a programme for under-fives should be given priority.

Inspiration for this can be gained from two traditional schools of thought on the care and education of young children: the social pedagogy tradition and the readiness for school tradition. The

Netherlands has a stronger tradition in readiness for school. The social pedagogy tradition is particularly dominant in the Scandinavian countries. Both traditions offer valuable elements and could complement each other well. An emphasis could be laid on one or the other of these depending on local circumstances.

The report names three conditions that are important in achieving a rich programme for under-thirteens: 1) a stronger pedagogical identity for childcare; 2) a programme to suit local needs; and 3) restraint in the number of facilities offered together. The Education Council in no way wishes to impose a blueprint. The importance of the broad development of the child should always come first. Each neighbourhood or region should make its own (long-term) arrangements about which party will be responsible for which part of the programme. Nor do we want to see the creation of some 'super-institute'. The target groups and the programme offering should be decided together through a cooperative process. Who should lead the initiative and who should be responsible for overarching final control can be decided locally. It is important, however, that childcare attains a stronger pedagogical identity given the increasingly important role that it plays in the lives of children.

### **Specific training programmes for those working with young children**

A call for a rich programme for under-thirteens demands a further examination of the training programmes for all those working with children in this age group. A higher level of education for the entire profession is a widely-held desire. In 1985, it was decided to combine the training of playgroup leaders and junior school teachers in order to create a broad study programme and improve the employability of graduates across the junior school. Whether that reasoning still holds true today is questionable. The Education Council believes that it may be more opportune to focus the training on the various age groups, given the increasing importance of early years education. After a common foundation year, students could choose between a specialisation in young children or a specialisation in older children. The young children option could then focus on the development and learning of young children and the associated scientific disciplines: developmental psychology, family pedagogy, orthopedagogy and teaching theory. It should also extensively address what facilities are available for this age group and what they offer, including early years programmes. To avoid strict divisions between the two specialisations, the Education Council believes that the two age categories focused on should overlap. The young children option should deal with the under-nines, and the older children option should focus on six to twelve year-olds. The Education Council proposes that a 'field tour' of the teacher training institutions is organised to look into these specialisations and the ideal training mix.

### **Educational care as a special form of general childcare**

The Education Council recommends that in the coming years, emphasis is placed on improving programmes for the under-sevens. This age range is crucially important in the further development of the child: its language and cognitive skills, moral development and personal growth. Interventions in this age group, e.g. early years schooling for children from deprived backgrounds, have been shown to have proven and lasting effects on learning at school and on the further life of the children. At the same time, we can observe that not all parents succeed in giving their children a sufficient basis in the early years. Children growing up in these families can benefit from additional, targeted education which is more strongly focused on readiness for school than general childcare. Particularly in view of these children, the Education Council advocates a distinction between general childcare and educational childcare, which provides a programme of learning. We also believe that educational childcare does not need to be restricted to children from deprived backgrounds. Tailored to the target group, the programme used for educational childcare could include valuable elements for every child.

Given the importance of the good, broad development of young children, the Education Council advocates broad access to educational childcare for all two and three year-olds. We believe that an ideal situation would see the provision of four half-days for all two and three year-olds, and not just for children from deprived backgrounds. Four half-days of educational childcare would, just like schooling, meet a basic need for everyone with a programme that is valuable for every child. In this way, educational childcare would also enhance the image of current early years education, especially for ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged groups. The reason for choosing two and

three year-olds is because educational childcare starts around the age of two and because almost all children attend junior school from the age of four. Public funding of educational childcare for all two and three year-olds would require a massive financial investment. The Education Council therefore recommends the full funding of four half-days of educational childcare for all three year-olds.