Early childhood: From education to schooling

Abstract:

The reception and education of children aged zero to six has been one of the major concerns of OECD countries for the last twenty years. It is widely believed that an early start to formal education is beneficial for a child’s development and future school career and the notion that “everything must be educational” is increasingly prevalent within the preschool education facilities of OECD countries: the very young spend more time being taught and assessed on their skills than on playing, exploring and imagining. But several studies have questioned the validity of these trends. France’s nurseries are becoming more like primary schools while knowledge is "educationalised". Open to all with no conditions other than age, nursery schools are responsible for the learning associated with motor and emotional development in line with programmes set by the French Ministry of Education. But today the subject of strong criticism, they are blamed for failing to benefit all children fairly and for contributing to the widening gap between children of higher and lower socioeconomic status. In view of the gaps acknowledged to initially exist between pupils primarily due to their social background, basing the nursery school education model on pupils’ supposed autonomy and reflexivity risks further compounding inequalities. Our aim in this study is to put the child at the heart of these concerns to better understand the social, educational and policy-related issues. We will consider the place of young children aged from zero to six in the period that precedes compulsory education in most OECD countries, and the benefits they can derive from this. We are also interested in conditions conducive to learning and the child's all round development.