

WELLBEING: Spain

Definition of wellbeing

Creating the necessary conditions so that children's wellbeing can be guaranteed is the axis around which the main aims of Early Childhood Education (0-3) revolve. Wellbeing is the physical and emotional state that lets the child fully develop his/her autonomy according to his/her possibilities, individually or in relation with others, in a specific context and through different languages, considering each and every need they have, every instinct and ability.

Theoretical background to children's wellbeing

The term **Wellbeing** (*bienestar* in Spanish/*benestar* in Catalan) is not frequently used in official documents. It is a concept that stays implicit in the main goals Early Childhood Education in Spain focuses on. Few books include the word wellbeing as a key word. Instead, there are other terms or expressions that could be considered synonyms as their definitions may include similar conceptual content. Examples of such words are emotional experience (*vivencia emocional*), emotional education (*educación emocional*), catering for children's needs and interests (*dar respuesta a las necesidades e intereses de los niños y niñas*), happiness (*felicidad*), self-esteem (*autoestima*), affective safety/confidence (*seguridad afectiva*), everyday activities (*actividades cotidianas*) and autonomy learning (*aprendizaje de la autonomía*), among others.

In Spain there exists a main Educational law (LOMCE, 2013), which establishes the guidelines and framework for the development of the different core curricula that each autonomous community must elaborate. The LOMCE includes the term **wellbeing** only three times and it is never directly linked to Early Childhood Education, but rather it is related to social welfare:

a. Section: *Preámbulo*

*La educación es el motor que promueve el **bienestar** de un país. El nivel educativo de los ciudadanos determina su capacidad de competir con éxito en el ámbito del panorama internacional y de afrontar los desafíos que se planteen en el futuro. Mejorar el nivel de los ciudadanos en el ámbito educativo supone abrirles las puertas a puestos de trabajo de alta cualificación, lo que representa una apuesta por el crecimiento económico y por un futuro mejor.*

*Nunca como ahora hemos tenido la oportunidad de disponer de una educación personalizada y universal. Como nunca hasta ahora la educación ha tenido la posibilidad de ser un elemento tan determinante de la equidad y del **bienestar** social.*

*La escuela, y en especial la escuela pública, han encontrado su principal razón de ser en la lucha contra la inevitabilidad de las situaciones de injusticia o de degradación que han ido acaeciendo en cada momento de su historia. La escuela moderna es la valedora de la educación como utopía de justicia social y **bienestar**.*

In the Catalan Educational Law (LEC, 2009) the term **wellbeing** is used three times (the third relates to working conditions and is not included below):

Section: *Preàmbul*

*L'escola ha estat vista com una oportunitat per a oferir a les noves generacions de ciutadans uns nivells més elevats de cultura i de **benestar** individual i col·lectiu.*

School is taken as an opportunity to offer new generations higher levels of culture and of individual and collective wellbeing.

Section: Article 56, Early Childhood Education

*6. El Govern ha de determinar el currículum del segon cicle de l'educació infantil de manera que permeti al centre educatiu un ampli marge d'autonomia pedagògica per fer possible que el primer ensenyament s'acordi amb el projecte educatiu del centre i s'adapti a l'entorn. El currículum ha d'ajudar els alumnes a desenvolupar les capacitats que els permetin identificar-se com a persones amb seguretat i **benestar** emocional, viure unes relacions afectives amb si mateixos i amb els altres, conèixer i interpretar l'entorn, desenvolupar habilitats de comunicació, expressió i comprensió per mitjà dels llenguatges, adquirir instruments d'aprenentatge i desenvolupar progressivament l'autonomia personal, i també tenir una primera aproximació a una llengua estrangera.*

The Government should determine the curriculum of the second cycle of early childhood education to allow the setting a wide margin of pedagogical autonomy to make early years teaching coherent with the school's educational project and well adapted to the environment. The curriculum should help students develop the skills that enable them to identify themselves with self-confidence and emotional wellbeing, to experience affective relationships with themselves and with others, to know and interpret the environment, to develop communication skills, expression and understanding through the language, acquire learning tools and develop progressively their personal autonomy, and to have a first approach a foreign language.

Literature review

Curriculum Documents

Catalan Core Curriculum (first key-stage: 0-3)

http://phobos.xtec.cat/edubib/intranet/file.php?file=docs/infantil/decret_ed_infantil.pdf

(p.61481)

In the Catalan Curriculum, the term 'wellbeing' is only mentioned once. As a content, however, it is implicitly included in the main goals of Early Childhood Education.

The structure of the educational system defines Early Childhood Education as an educational stage, divided into two key-stages, with its own identity, and must contribute on the children's emotional and effective development, physical, motor, social and cognitive development, in collaboration with the families and providing them with a confident context and environment.

(...) the moment the child steps into the school world, this educational responsibility is shared. The institution is a privileged setting which provides acquisition of knowledge, of emotional and social experiences. After the family, the school is the first social place for cohesion, integration and participation. The school must offer the child full support and a coherent and efficient company in his/her personal and social development.

The educational institution should welcome children and integrally accept them with love, should know and understand them well through respect and affectivity, consolidating confidence towards adults and towards the rest of the children.

(...)and establish the necessary means so that every child can feel catered for, oriented and valued, without being conditioned by cultural and genre stereotypes, when he/she needs it and without any kind of discrimination...

The aim of Early Childhood Education is to contribute to children's emotional and affective development, physical and motor development and social and cognitive development, providing them with a confident context and environment, where they can feel welcomed and with learning expectations. The educational act/practice should lead to affective development, to children's personal growth, to the building of a positive and balanced self-image, to discovery and awareness of one's context, of one's possibilities concerning body, movement and body control, so that children can progress more autonomously.

(To) Progressively acquire affective and emotional safety/confidence and (to) build a positive self-image and of others. (aim)

Progression in the acquisition of habits related to one's physical wellbeing and personal confidence, to hygiene and health and to order, perseverance and organization in the participating activities.

In a new document published in 2012, in which guidelines to be followed in the first cycle of ECE (0-3) are described in detail, includes a number of requirements that must be met in order to ensure children's wellbeing (http://ensenyament.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/departament/publicacions/colleccions/curriculum/curriculum_infantil.pdf).

Specifically, it says that, to ensure children's wellbeing, good relations between different members of the educational community must be fostered, highlighting here the fundamental importance of families. It also emphasizes that daily life activities must be organized so that children experience them as a time to look after themselves and as a source of wellbeing. A further aspect regarding wellbeing is related to providing the presence and possibilities for children to play in school, that is, understanding play as an activity that is basic and essential to ensure learning and foster wellbeing.

National Research

L'Estat de l'Educació a Catalunya. Anuari 2013.

Fundació Jaume Bofill.

Directors: Miquel Martínez Martín and Bernat Albaigés Blas.

Available at: <http://www.fbofill.cat/publicacions/lestat-de-leducacio-catalunya-anuari-2013>

(Our translation of the relevant parts follows here)

In this book, chapter 3 is devoted to "System conditions for educational success: the management of education systems and equal opportunities". Several conditions are described and, among them, precompulsory schooling. In the Catalan education system, schooling prior to Primary Education (6-year-olds) is not compulsory, yet the number of children who attend schools in the second cycle of Early Childhood Education (3-6) is extremely high, and it is also very high in the first cycle of Early Childhood Education (0-3). This is valued as an aspect that can be meaningful when analyzing educational success.

The Yearbook 2011 showed good comparative position occupied by Catalonia regarding admission to precompulsory schooling at both national and European levels. Catalonia is one of the regions and European countries with higher rates for 0 to 2 years of schooling, and also one of the European countries that has already achieved the target of 95% set in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy for the education of children aged between 4 and the age of compulsory school.

The table below shows that the 2012/2013 academic year enrollment rate from 0 to 2 years stood at 34.9%, above the national average (32,1%) and the rate of schooling from 3 to 5 years, at 97.0%, above the European average (91.8%). In the field of early childhood education, this good position has been achieved thanks to investments made in the provision of public settings since 2004. The system conditions for educational success, which provided for the creation of 30,000 new nursery places in Catalonia, allowed the public education rate (0 to 2) to more than double from the last decade, an increase of more than 10 percentage points. While from the year 2005/2006 the private sector gradually loses students from 0 to 2 years, the public sector shows a trend of sustained growth up the 2011/2012 academic year.

Taxa d'escolarització 0-2 anys	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Catalunya	27,9	27,6	28,3	29,3	29,8	30,6	31,1	32,5	33,1	33,4	34,5	37,0	34,9
n	47.914	51.014	56.092	60.429	65.636	70.791	73.814	80.065	84.331	86.215	88.697	92.003	84.244
Espanya	8,9	10,6	11,5	13,2	15,1	16,6	18,2	20,0	24,6	26,9	29,4	31,2	32,1
Taxa d'escolarització pública 0-2 anys	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Catalunya	9,8	9,6	10,7	11,6	12,6	13,6	14,6	16,5	17,8	19,1	20,5	22,8	22,0
n	16.847	17.746	21.247	23.838	27.699	31.445	34.740	40.529	45.182	49.350	52.882	56.765	53.064
Espanya	4,4	5,1	5,2	6,0	6,8	7,4	8,1	8,9	11,7	13,3	14,8	16,1	16,9
Taxa d'escolarització 3-5 anys	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Catalunya	100,4	100,1	98,7	98,6	96,9	96,6	97,1	97,5	97,8	97,1	95,3	95,2	97,0
Espanya	97,9	99,8	99,9	99,9	98,4	98,1	98,2	98,0	97,9	97,1	96,9	96,5	96,6
UE-27 (i)	82,7	84,5	86,3	84,5	84,7	85,7	86,8	88,5	90	90,5	90,8	91,8	:

Nota 1: Dades de taxa d'escolarització als 4 anys.
Font: elaboració a partir de dades del MEC, d'Eurostat i del Padró d'habitants a 1 de gener de cada any.

From this evolutionary perspective, however, one of the main changes detected from 2012/2013 is that, after years of sustained growth, a decrease began. This is mainly due to the demographic decline and the economic crisis.

Indeed, the Yearbook since 2011 demonstrated that, despite the positive levels of schooling, the first cycle of Early Childhood Education is an area affected by major inequalities in access. Socially disadvantaged groups with more limited economic and educational conditions, as well as municipalities with more disadvantaged social composition are those that have lower levels of education. The table below shows access inequalities, where a comparison is made between percentage of foreign students (*alumnat estranger*) and foreign children (*infants estrangers*), that is, percentage of foreign children attending school:

Curs 2011-2012	
% d'alumnat estranger	4,5
% d'infants estrangers	20,2
Índex de normalització en l'accés dels infants estrangers a l'educació infantil (de primer i segon cicle) (1)	0,22
% d'alumnat estranger públic	72,9
% d'alumnat públic	61,7
Taxa d'escolarització infants 0-2 anys	37,0
Taxa d'escolarització infants estrangers 0-2 anys	8,2

We should remember, as stated in Yearbook 2011 and based on the analysis of the PISA results tests based on pre-primary years of schooling, as well as data regarding 0-2 schooling and data from 17 Catalan municipalities, that 0-2 schooling has a **positive impact on academic result, and that this impact is particularly significant among socially disadvantaged students**. From this point of view, our high levels of precompulsory puts our education system in a privileged position to promote processes to improve school success. However, social inequalities in access to this supply can contribute and accentuate social inequalities already present in later stages of education.

Recommended Reading

Anton, M. (coord) (2007): Planificar la etapa 0-6. Compromiso de sus agentes y práctica cotidiana. Graó (Book written in Spanish)

Comments, Summary and translation (into English) of key sections relating to wellbeing:

Title of the book: PLANNING THE 0-6 STAGE. Commitment and daily practice of agents involved. Montserrat Antón (coord.)

Biblioteca de Infantil

Publishing house: Graó

The book contains a series of chapters written by professionals and experts in the 0-6 age group who put forward a methodological perspective that takes into account daily practice and the commitment of all agents involved in the education process of children from 0 to 6. They are the true protagonists of their own learning, which takes place in daily life contexts with the participation of the education professionals, families and other adults that children interact with.

The book includes the following chapters:

1. The school at childhood
2. Families also count
3. Emotional experience at childhood
4. Young and competent: from daily activities to autonomous learning
5. Playing to live, living to play: playing as driving force of learning
6. Together but not mixed up: different groupings as learning strategies
7. Looking inside the school: the organization of space and materials
8. Looking outside the school: sharing education

We believe it is interesting to focus primarily on the third and the fourth chapters to address the issue of wellbeing. However, it is also necessary to take into account most of the aspects dealt with in all the chapters to address children's wellbeing fully. Implicitly, the issue of wellbeing needs to be present in all the methodological and organizational proposals made by early childhood educational and non-educational centers.

Emotional experience at childhood

Individual upbringing places the person in a particular surrounding, a context, a culture. The relationships that each person establishes with this culture shape his/her emotional world, a world of beliefs and values, a world of emotions that need to be shown or repressed. Emotional experience is developed in a reality bound to a certain space and time. The experience is always shared and feelings are either sought or avoided depending on:

The context that requires developing a certain role within the group, our culture, the needs and wishes that shape our interests, our aesthetic models, models of environmental sensitivity provided by the context and which help us feel and live, and the communication tools that we are equipped with (languages, technologies...).

The first and most important affective and emotional context is the family. As established by systemic pedagogy, children are given life by their parents and the strength of this bond cannot be substituted by anyone. Feeling that we belong to a bigger system makes us feel humble for not being able to change what we dislike and also powerful for being able to modify the structure of relationships thanks to small changes.

Our emotional life feeds from daily routines, since these provide us with affective security and pass on values and beliefs that shape our emotional state and give us stability. However, potential changes stimulate the imagination and make self-confidence and autonomy develop. For changes to occur, basic abilities such as personal effort and willingness are required.

From an educational viewpoint, family, school and the society at large should take these aspects into account and time should be given to children for developing them. Children should experience the pleasure, the happiness or the contentment derived from a wish come true, but also the consequences of failure. However, children are often motivated externally instead of focusing on the internal motivation generated by one's acts.

When they are babies, children already have the ability to interact that allows them to build their own learning from the start, a learning process focused primarily on the acquisition of autonomy: autonomy to move, to decide, to think... which makes their abilities grow and thus their self-confidence. The promotion of autonomy is the fundamental aim of the preschool, as it is necessary for developing children's feeling of responsibility, freedom and personal identity, their way of thinking and independence.

During the early years, children's lives develop around playing and around the routines aiming at satisfying their basic needs. The repetition and ritualization these activities entail, the relationship with adults they promote, the exercise of their autonomy are key aspects that make these activities essential in the development of their abilities, as well as essential for their wellbeing.

Daily activities share the following characteristics:

- They are all a reminder of the family context. They are activities that children experience as part of their relationship with parents and it is often difficult for them to carry them out with other people. It is therefore convenient to understand rejection as a symptom of this difficulty.
- They are activities carried out at home and at school. Eating, sleeping, hygiene habits and resting are activities that are done both at home and at school. There may be differences in the way they are carried out that could give rise to conflicts with families. An effort needs to be made to get closer to families, understand and help each other and avoid hasty judgments.
- They are activities seldom valued professionally. It is as if the distinction between school and family lies on professional attitudes and, yet, the closer children's school life is to their home life, the better for their development and their learning process. This is so because it is not only about changing a nappy or feeding, it is about everything a child can learn while eating or being changed. It is about doing these activities so that they are positively educational. It is this educational aim that is at the basis of the infant education profession.
- They are routines. As they are activities that can be a great source of pleasure for children – due to the wellbeing resulting from a need being satisfied-, they are also a great source of affective bonds and thus they may become highly rewarding moments.

These activities need to be valued regarding all their aspects, they need to be planned and carried out professionally and seeking explicit educational goals.

All methodologies that favour an atmosphere of emotional education make it possible for children to be actively engaged in their learning, to relate to each other and to create shared meanings based on dialogue and the confrontation of different opinions, ideas, feelings and proposals. The key aspect is to have time to do what we aim to, time for getting ready, for acting and for reflecting, time for oneself and time for the group.

From two and a half years onwards, primary emotions (such as love, rage, fear...) can be shared in a group. Giving and receiving, feeling that we all have the same needs.

Personal symbols and common beliefs can also be used to communicate with others and with ourselves. Symbolic game and stories help us define ourselves.

We should also use all the languages we have available in order to put into words and express what we feel. Body language is the first that we use to express and shelter our emotional experiences. Verbal language is what receives more attention at school. It allows us to organise thought, but as it is very basic at early ages, it cannot be the most important nor can it be representative of what we feel. We should focus instead on creative languages, such as music and arts.

It is necessary to search for ways of communicating emotionally with families. When we enter a school, we should see the children with their families behind them. Some proposals may be: meetings to promote reflection and interaction; travelling materials to share experiences; and creating spaces for families within the school area where they may find bibliography and an opportunity to meet each other.

Young and competent: from daily activities to autonomous learning

- Daily arrival and exit from the school: The main content of this activity is greeting and meeting the children. The main aim will be to try to make children experience pleasure when meeting the teacher and the classmates and, when going home, their families. They should

also notice how happy the others are when meeting them. It is important to keep in mind the following:

- Individual greeting: greeting every child by their name, with warmth and affection, using the communicative expressions they like the most (looks, hugs, intonation...).
- Pointing out the changes that can be observed in the child and which may be meaningful for him/her (new clothes, new haircut...); showing interest in what he/she has done outside the school, in the person taking him... these aspects personalise the arrival.
- Make everyone aware of each child's arrival and welcome, make sure that they are interested in each other and that they show or tell each other their news... these aspects help create an affective atmosphere.
- Organise the space so that everyone has available the space to leave their coats, their bags; a place to play, a place to rest...
- Plan the exit and prepare the children for leaving, make them feel eager to meet the people that will come pick them up.
- Greet the relatives as they arrive.
- Succeed in making children happy to be at school and eager to come back.
- Bring to the school children's affective world: talk about the family, the mother, the father, what they do at home; bring to the school things from home and home things from school. These are ways to bring the two worlds closer and to help children integrate them in a natural way.

Early years eating habit: It is important to see eating time from two viewpoints: as a physiological need for health and body growth, and as an activity or situation where relationships and personality are shaped, abilities are developed; and attitudes, knowledge and basic abilities are learnt. Learning contents at eating times cover almost all contents in the curriculum of infant education, so their assessment can be a great indicator of children's development of abilities, learning processes and acquisition of basic knowledge.

Hygiene habits at school: Activities involving hygiene habits allow children to become self-aware. Feelings of wellbeing, feeling cold, feeling hot, feeling humidity, touching each other make children become self-aware. These situations create excellent occasions for knowing and learning about themselves, about their possibilities and limitations, about the adults that care for them and about how important they are.

Daily tasks and group awareness: More and more often daily time is devoted to checking attendance, organising the calendar, calling the dining-room register, etc. in the infant education classrooms. These tasks favour, among other things, cohesion and group awareness. These are moments to speak, listen, express emotions, experiences, discoveries, tell stories, read, write... without needing to resort to fictional stories, as taking advantage of and valuing what happens daily offers topics that are more than enough to keep on a conversation and get to know each other.