Key Message: As Early as Possible
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As early as possible

- The sooner special needs are detected and tended to, the greater the impact of services
  - Quality of care
  - Return on investment

- Timely action hinges on early:
  - Detection and assessment
  - Intervention
  - Support
Early detection and assessment

• Means: identifying and understanding special needs
• Helps caregivers
  • Describing and explaining
  • Validation
  • Raise awareness
• Provides formal identification to open pathways to
  • Direct services (e.g. learning resources) and/or
  • Indirect services (e.g. parental support)
• Serves formative goals
  • e.g. shaping learning trajectories
  • e.g. setting priorities in therapies.
Early detection and assessment

**Barriers**
- Risk factors easier to identify than at-risk children
- High quality screening tools not available for all areas requiring treatment
- Subtle problems difficult to detect

**Enablers**
- Routine surveillance has been shown to work
- Parent knowledge is very helpful and could be used more in many cases
Early intervention

• Means: rapidly responding to developing special needs of children at any age,
• Especially relevant: Early Childhood Intervention includes (European Agency 2010):
  • ensure and enhance personal development;
  • strengthen the family’s own competences, an/or
  • promote the social inclusion of the family and the child’
• Key considerations
  • availability, quality and quantity of services
  • across circumstances (e.g. urban/rural regions, high/low income)
Early intervention

Barriers

- Availability of services
- Awareness of services
- Human condition (e.g. emotion, inertia, insecurity)
- Time
- Language
- Culture

Enablers

- Multilingual, low-threshold contact (e.g. attentive live person in phone call)
- Swift initiation of action (e.g. obtaining appointment by end of phone call)
Early support

• Means: Human/material resources provided to caregivers
• Wields powerful influence on if, how and when detection, assessment and intervention actions are taken.

• Examples:
  • Family support - information and exchange, with peers or professionals; sibling coaching
  • teacher support - cooperation with professionals in or outside of the school; inter-agency agreements

• Can focus on:
  • immediate concerns (e.g. competencies to be developed this week or this year),
  • anticipating and enabling appropriate and smooth transitions (e.g. into formal schooling, from one school to another, from schooling to employment).
Early support

Barriers
• Establishing clear, measurable objectives is more common in programs focusing in at-risk children than in those focusing on support
• Historical lack of tools-culture to measure support outcomes

Enablers
• Outcomes and accountability levels becoming understood
• Tools are being developed
• Teachers want support
• Families want support
• Communities want to see people using the services they provide
Bringing it together
These factors...

- Are all related
- Include sub-components
- Form an ongoing cycle, not always in the ideal sequence
- Are shaped by (interactions between) policy, practice and research
Typically: interacting, but separate worlds
Toward mutually beneficial policy, practice & research interactions

RDD – DR – CoP
(Research, Development, Diffusion – Design Research – Communities of Practice)
Cross-cutting interaction requires change

- **Policies** that fund connected work (not separate funding for intervention in practice vs research work)

- **Practitioners** that want to engage, often beyond their own day-to-day

- **Researchers** who value changes in practice and practical and usable knowledge alongside or as part of the quest for theoretical understanding

- More **examples** of the added-value such approaches have to offer to inform policy, shape practice and deepen research-based understandings
**Discussion:**

- **Reflecting on the main issues addressed:**
  - Early monitoring, detection; assessment, planning
  - Early intervention, observation, evaluation, reflection
  - Early support mechanisms during all processes and for varied stakeholders

- **What policies, practices and research:**
  - Currently facilitate appropriate action? Across Europe?
  - Are needed to engender positive change? Across Europe?
  - Can we influence? Directly? Indirectly? (How?)
  - Should be highest on our agenda? (Why?)
Thank you!
For discussion beyond today…

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## Discussion: A task for us?

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Seeing systems, one example