
18 & 19 June 2019, Leiden, the Netherlands

Nurturing Environments

For the Wellbeing of Young Children and their Families



Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework has been extensively used in many contexts as a roadmap for understanding the complexity and systemic dimension of all protective and risk factors that impact an individual's development. We live in times when climate change and environmental degradation undermine the rights of every child, especially of the most disadvantaged; when poverty, social and political polarization, wars and migration limit the extent to which the youngest citizens of the world are at the core of the public policies and discourse.

Children's wellbeing in their early years is crucial and it depends tremendously on the physical, mental, social-emotional, cultural, economic, and political conditions of the environment where they live or where they were born.

The conference aims to bring this systemic and dynamic approach to building and ensuring environments where all children live, develop and learn, especially the most vulnerable and at risk:

- from the design of public spaces to value-driven services open to communities;
- from competent and diverse support to families, to services and programs rooted in children's rights, in their diversity and the specific needs these children and their families have;
- from quality physical conditions provided in the surroundings to meaningful, responsive and warm interactions with and for children, with and for families.

Thematic Strands:

1. Nurturing home environments for young children

The home environment is pivotal to a child's development and wellbeing. This is the first place where children start learning about feeling safe and loved, about themselves, the (significant) others and the world around them. How can we best support families to provide their children with nurturing interactions, care and space in the early years? Which family policies are most needed and most responsive to the social, cultural and economic changes and challenges families face today, while also ensuring the child's healthy development and well-being? What programs have competently addressed the increasing demand for support from parents, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized? What are the major challenges in working with parents and how can they be addressed?

ISSA Conference 2019

18 & 19 June 2019, Leiden, the Netherlands

2. Nurturing environments in services for all young children

Through their daily operations, all services for young children and their families express the values and beliefs they embrace, their understanding of the growing demands and needs of children and their families, as well as their capacity and commitment to meet these needs. This can be seen from the extent to which the physical environment serves a purposeful pedagogical function, to the way children and families are experiencing warm and competent interactions, activities and support that celebrate their diversity. Are early childhood services today providing nurturing environments for all children and families? Are they open and flexible enough to attune their daily routines, norms and (un)structured activities to children's diverse needs and interests? How can the environments in services contribute to modelling inclusive, respectful and nurturing relationships among children, families, professionals and the community? To what extent the environment of these services is flexible, capable and ready to ensure the wellbeing of the most vulnerable and at-risk families and children? What are the key priorities, who shares the leadership and to what extent children and families are involved in creating such nurturing environments? In what way services should collaborate to create a nurturing environment for children? To what extent is there an equal concern for the wellbeing of professionals working in these services?

3. Nurturing environments for young children and families in their communities

The way in which environments look and feel like in communities and cities represents a local political and policy choice for the wellbeing of all young children and their families. They are not neutral places, they are integral parts of the everyday life of children and families. How safe, respectful and nurturing are they for all young children's healthy development and wellbeing? How mindful are they of children's and families' needs to safely explore, interact, communicate, build supportive relationships and play, especially of the most disadvantaged and marginalized ones? What opportunities do families and children have to participate in shaping these environments? To what extent do community environments foster social cohesion, intra- and intergenerational learning, and safe networks of support for children and families?

