

Parenting for a healthy life – The role of education in adopting a healthy lifestyle EPA GA and conference in Vienna 7-9 November 2019



According to the overarching topic of the year “Parenting for a healthy life” EPA’s autumn conference was dedicated to “The role of education in adopting a healthy lifestyle”. The rationale behind the choice of this theme were different studies and observations that all come to the conclusion that there is an increase in childhood obesity¹, mental health problems², suicide rates among students³ and addiction⁴ in many countries.

The conference aimed at offering parents and other interested participants some general information but also hands-on examples of measures that can be easily taken by parents and families at home and in cooperation with teachers, educators, principals and other stakeholders at school, kindergarten and in the community. The keynotes and workshops were chosen according to the three main topics of the Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle⁵ launched by the European Commission in 2017:

- Healthy nutrition
- Movement and exercise
- Prevention of diseases and addictive behaviors

¹ Cf. <https://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/facts/en/>

² Cf. https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/adolescent_mental_health/en/

³ Cf. https://www.who.int/mental_health/resources/suicide/en/

⁴ Cf. https://www.who.int/health-topics/addictive-behaviours#tab=tab_1

⁵ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_3028

The event was organized together with UNICEF, VEV (Verband der Elternvereine an den Höheren und Mittleren Schulen Wien) and PEKG (Plattform Eltern für Kindergesundheit, a former Alcuin Award Winner).



We started with a pre-conference on Thursday, Nov. 7th, co-organized with UNICEF on the *The role of parents in the health and wellbeing of children across the life cycle*. Aleksandra Jovic gave an overview on the latest findings in research on early childhood stressing the importance of responsive caregiving, healthy and sufficient nutrition and a secure and safe environment for a positive future development of every child. Here is her [presentation](#). Ilaria Favero then continued with the presentation ([here](#)) of a study on puberty as the second important period in the development of a human being which presents a new window of opportunity. The study “Parenting adolescents” has been conducted in six different countries in the ECA region (Eastern and Central Europe) but all the parents of adolescents could identify with the main findings:



- Parents remain the **most important figure** in adolescents’ live
- Parents are seen as **role models**
- **More trust in parents than peers**
- **Adolescents** want parents to demonstrate love by giving them time and attention – at least one caring adult in the family to strengthen resilience of adolescents
- **Non-judgmental communication** is highly valued/no scare tactics
- While they want to be connected to their parents, they also want more **freedom, privacy** and **trust**. This creates intergenerational tensions.

The keynotes were followed by a round of guided group work around four main questions that were discussed and whose outcome was then presented in plenary.



Q1: What enables optimal parenting?

The top factors: Love, Time, Presence (Engagement and Responsibility)

Q2: Based on the three factors identified, what are the interventions/programmes that can support parents in their role?

Intergenerational, peer, community support (Model by Joyce Epstein);
Working time directive,
Family centres, Parenting School



Q3: What is the role of parents’ associations to ensuring that these interventions/programmes are implemented so that parents are supported in their childrearing role?

Reaching out, encouragement, informal engagement
PA convinces policy makers and schools to involve parents,
PA listens to parents and conveys their needs to providers of programmes,
PA create networks for peer support
PA provide information – digital and booklets

Q4: How can EPA and UNICEF join forces to support parents across Europe and Central Asia?

- Power of numbers for lobbying on European level
- Sharing of best practice and research information
- Build a campaign for co-construction of education



On Friday morning participants were taken to visit two Viennese schools. The first one an Austrian “Gymnasium” – lower and upper secondary general academic education – close to the main railway station. There we were received by two teachers who explained a specific strand within the school, the “Sir-Karl-Popper Schule”, named after a famous Jewish-Austrian philosopher who had to flee the country in 1938 and then settled in London. The founding fathers of this school for highly gifted children between the age of 14 – 18 had asked him for permission to use his name for the school which he was happy to do under the condition that “children would not be obliged to listen to answers to unasked questions”. The school stays true to this motto and students have a lot of autonomy in their learning but also need to take the responsibility for it. They’re not only accepted according to their IQ but have to bring and further develop different person-related factors of giftedness like their will to achieve, subject-related interests, discipline at work, self-confidence and self-regulatory abilities. They’re offered courses in a modular format which allows for collaboration of students independent of age. Some subjects are combined (e.g. biology, physics and chemistry are taught in one = Science) and students can choose three out of six different languages.

The group then moved by underground tram – a new experience for many participants – to a vocational school offering different types of training mainly in the commercial sector one of them specializing in health management but also offering a strand for (future) professional sportsmen/sportswomen. You can find the presentation at this [link](#). After that participants were able to engage with some of the students who had prepared info-points where you could calculate your body-mass-index, measure your bodyfat, participate in a calorie-guessing-contest, try out different types of healthy food and drinks created by students, talk about the nutritional pyramid and visit the exercise equipment in the courtyard. The remarkable level of English of the students was noted by EPA parents as well as the high degree of diversity among the student population from various backgrounds and with many different home languages.



well as the high degree of diversity among the student population from various backgrounds and with many different home languages.



A further tram ride brought the group – which had grown to 60+ people in the meantime – to the canteen of the Technical University where everyone received a voucher for lunch and had some rest before heading on foot to the venue of the conference in the afternoon. Along the way some explanations were given about the buildings which included famous monuments as the two art-deco pavilions by the famous Austrian architect Otto Wagner for the first subway at the end of the 19th century, Saint Charles Church and the Musikverein with its Golden Hall

(well-known thanks to the New Year's Concert which takes place in it every year on January 1st and is broadcasted to 96 countries in the world) to name but just a few.



The conference venue – the Festsaal (banquet hall) of the Akademisches Gymnasium, one of the most renowned schools in Vienna built in the late 19th century – reminded some participants of Harry Potter and the hall at Hogwarts but already the first speaker, Ingrid Keller from DG SANTE of the European Commission brought the audience back to reality explaining first the work of her unit in the field of vaccines to prevent the spreading of infectious diseases like measles or rubella that are on the rise again as skepticism and misinformation increase. In the second part of her presentation Ms Keller spoke about the importance of promoting a healthy lifestyle already with children as once adopted unhealthy habits are difficult to change during the later course of life. The European Commission has therefore established the EU wide School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme supporting initiatives to educate children on:

- ✓ Agriculture
- ✓ Healthy eating habits
- ✓ Environmental matters

Projects to improve the quality of school meals are also supported as well as the European Week of Sport to promote physical activity. There are several awards to encourage schools, NGOs and civil society in general to engage in projects and initiatives that lead to a healthier lifestyle and improve quality of life for children and adults. You can read her presentation [here](#) and please also consider the following links which Ms Keller kindly provided for further information:



The EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/eu-school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme-2019-mar-27_en

National contacts for the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme/country_en

EU Sports Award 2019

https://ec.europa.eu/sport/be-inclusive_en

How to apply to the ERASMUS+ Programme

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/how-to-apply_en

EU Health Award 2019

https://ec.europa.eu/health/ngo_award/home_en

In 2018 the Health Award went to different NGOs that work on smoking / tobacco use prevention, many of them work with young people, also in schools, so if someone is looking for “what works” or a good examples, here are the 3 winners and the 7 short listed projects:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/ngo_award/previous_editions/2018/preventing_tobacco_use_en

This is the **State of Confidence in Vaccines in the EU – study**, from which she showed a few data:

https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/vaccination/docs/2018_vaccine_confidence_en.pdf

The “**European Pillar of Social Rights**” has a special section on work-life balance of parents: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?videosId=2799&furtherVideos=yes&langId=en&catId=1226&>



Our second speaker, Mag.ªDr.ª Maria Paulke-Korinek from the Austrian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs brought the focus back to the prevention of communicable diseases and the situation of vaccination in different countries in Europe. You can find the report as well as the factsheets for your country at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/special/surveyky/2223> She also talked about the recent measles outbreaks and the importance of herd protection for those who cannot (yet) be vaccinated.

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/measles>

The third presentation was done by Dr. Manuel Schätzer, an Austrian nutritionist who works extensively with schools, parents and the wider community to raise awareness on the importance of healthy nutrition and to improve eating and drinking habits in a creative way. SIPCAN develops projects engaging the students in developing guidelines for vending machines, checklists for healthy snacks and labels. You can find his presentation [here](#).



After the coffee break two interactive workshops were held. One was dedicated to enhancing concentration, readiness for learning, mindfulness and mental strength. Mag. Dr. Werner Schwarz, renowned sportsman and trainer and principal of the Gymnasium BG Zehnergasse in Wiener Neustadt, showed participants examples from the programs implemented at his school. All were invited to take part in the exercises which in a number of cases proved more difficult than many had expected but also led to a lot of fun. The short units can be easily implemented in class everywhere by teachers but also by peers. In his school there is an established timetable for these peer interventions in classrooms but teachers are free to add additional exercises whenever they feel the need. You can find the inspiring videos at: <https://www.simplystrong.at/vital4brain/> and <https://www.simplystrong.at/vital4heart/>



The topic of the second workshop was addiction and Mag. Nadja Springer from Verein Dialog explained different ways of preventing and dealing with dependencies. In her presentation she focused on the role of parents, family and the close surroundings (including school and peers) to identify possible risks, recognize signs and develop some adequate reactions. She underlined the importance of preventive measures, the cooperation of all stakeholders, the inclusion of external experts and early intervention.

The day concluded with a conference dinner at one of Vienna’s typical “Cave-restaurants” and traditional Austrian dishes.





During the Saturday morning session our partners from the Learning for Well-being Foundation (L4WB-F), Shanti George, Camee Comperen and Daniel Kropf, introduced their plans for a new initiative to create competent learning systems by fostering a holistic image of children as competent partners in decision making and agents for change in society as well as developing intergenerational learning. You can find

out more about the three parts of Act2Gether: 2GetherLand, 2getherLearn, 2GetherLink

at: <https://www.learningforwellbeing.org/activity/act2gether/> ,

on fb: <https://www.facebook.com/weact2gether/>

or insta: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/act2gether/?hl=es>



The second presentation by dealt with an initiative by the Viennese municipality: “Werkstadt Junges Wien”: 1.300 workshops with more than 22.000 attendees were held between February and April 2019 to find out what children were satisfied with in their city, what they thought didn’t work so well and needed improvement, their approaches to solve these problems and their visions for the future. Nine main topics were identified and you can read the main findings [here](#).



After a light lunch taken at the beautiful venue the EPA General Assembly took place in the afternoon starting with the launch of the revised website www.euparents.eu and a presentation of the on-going and finished projects as well as a new proposal by the Federation of Parents’ Associations from Palma.

The meeting continued with the statutory procedures among them the acceptance of a new member – the Pancyprian Confederation of Parents’ Associations in Public And Communal Kindergardens (PCPAPCK) and as another important element the election of a new president and a new board member: Víctor Petuya and Elena Iosif Odysseos. Arja Krauchenberg was thanked for her work as president and the date and place of the next GA were announced:

26-28 April 2020 in Chania on the Island of Crete.



The evening was spent at a Viennese “Heuriger” – a wine-grower who has the right to sell his own wine during a certain period of the year and today also serve traditional dishes with it. For those who still stayed on during Sunday there was the option of a guided tour through town or a tour of the Caravaggio-Bernini exhibition at the museum of fine arts (Kunsthistorisches Museum) that both met with great interest.