



Parental involvement in toddler education Guidelines for teachers



Maria João Cardona (coordinated by)
Isabel Piscalho
Marta Uva
Helena Luís
Teresa Cláudia Tavares

Prefaces by:
Monika Röthle &
Elisabeth Ianke
Mørkeseth





European Project:

**Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on
The Early-childhood Road.**

Parental involvement in toddler's education. Guidelines for teachers.

TODDLER European Project: Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on The Early-childhood Road

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Maria João Cardona (coord.)

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Santarém's team authors:

Maria João Cardona (coordination)
Isabel Piscalho
Marta Uva
Helena Luís
Teresa Cláudia Tavares
Polytechnic Institute of Santarém,
Portugal

**With the collaboration
of the teacher: Isabel Correia
and the students:**

Soraia Cardoso
Susana Godinho
Elódia Oliveira
Marta Calheiros
Cláudia Rosa
Ana Catarina Glória
Filipa Correia
Daniela Aperta
Joana Loureiro
Joana Évora
Liliana Dinis

Text revision: Elsa Uva

Coordination of the Project in general: Monika Röthle and Elisabeth Lanke Morkeseth, University of Stavanger, Norway – Coordination of the Toddler Project

Consultant: Paul Leseman

Other Partners of the Project:

Helen Sutherland and Jan Styman, Kingston University, England
Annelies Depuydt and Veerle Martens, University College Arteveldehogeschool, Belgium
Julie David and Haute Ecole Libre Mosane, Belgium
Ove Steiner Rasmussen and team, University College South Denmark, Denmark
Alexandra Hackel and team, University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany
Mona Vintila and team, West University of Timisoara, Romania
Carmen del Flores Muxi and team, Universitat Ramon Lull, Spain



Table of Contents

	Preface of Monika Röthle and Elisabeth Lanke Morkeseth	3
1.	Introduction.....	7
2.	Theoretical assumptions.....	11
3.	Trying to define what we understand by parental involvement: factors that facilitate, difficulties, examples.....	15
4.	The study/ work done by the Portuguese team: the families opinion and the presentation of good exemples.....	27
5.	How to evaluate parental involvement. Some final considerations	43
6.	Bibliographic references and Webgraphy.....	47
7.	Other reading suggestions	51

Index of charts and figures

Chart 1	- Phases of reflexive methodology used in workshops.....	9
Chart 2	- Epstein's Model for Parental Involvement.....	12
Chart 3	- Parental involvement programme.....	17
Chart 4	- Results of the workshops held in Portugal.....	27
Chart 5	- Example of self-evaluation grid for teachers.....	43
Chart 6	- Example of a self- evaluation grid to write parents/families.....	44
Figure 1	- Goals.....	8
Figure 2	- A Parental involvement program proposal.....	20

Preface

This book is based on the European funded project *Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on the Early childhood Road* (TODDLER)¹. This project brought together professionals from nine universities across eight countries; Belgium, Denmark, England, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Spain to collaboratively work on the education and care of very young children. The project's acronym TODDLER indicates that we are dealing with one to two years olds, as the English term *toddler* denotes “the young child that has recently learned to walk”.

Throughout Europe there seems to be an agreement that early childhood education and care (ECEC) for 3-6 year olds constitutes the first rung on the educational ladder and should be supported by public resources. The professional training for working with this age group is on tertiary level in nearly all European countries, designed to meet children's educational and developmental needs. There is also a relative high enrolment rate of 3-6 year old children. Relying on ECEC-provision to combat social inequality and school failure, many countries therefore have increased their support to settings for 3-6 year old children.

This positive development in ECEC-provision might be challenged by questioning whether learning actually starts at the age of three. Is there scientific evidence for starting education at this age? A large body of research contradicts this, underlining the importance of development and learning in the very first years of life. These early years are often described as an especially sensitive period for further development, which is a challenge to educators, parents and society². A poor home environment - constituted by a combination of factors like poverty, belonging to a disadvantaged social class, low educational attainment of parents and religious traditions in which literacy is not highly appreciated – may have significant negative impact on children's psychological development and their chances for success at school. However, the provision for children under 3 has been, and in many European countries still is, more linked to child minding and health care than education. In most European countries ECEC-settings for the youngest are not recognized as a fully-fledged level of education. This attitude is also expressed in the fact, that in almost half of the European countries the training of staff is rooted in a tradition of health care and social welfare, and provided at upper secondary school level. Furthermore the volume of provisions for children under 3 is insufficient in most countries. However, many countries offer some financial assistance to low income families to en-

¹ www.toddlerineurope.eu The multilateral TODDLER-project (2010- 2013) is the collaborative work of nine institutions: University of Stavanger, Norway (project leader); University College South Denmark, Denmark; West University of Timisoara, Romania; University College Artevelde, Belgium; Kingston University, United Kingdom; University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany; Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, Portugal; Universitat Ramon Lull, Spain; Haute Ecole Libre Mosane, Belgium. This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

² www.uis.no/toddler-paper P.P.M. Leseman *Quality of the early years provisions: An European perspective*. Working paper, 2013.

courage children's participation in ECEC-settings. Toddlers' enrolment rates differ largely from country to country, and there is a strong possibility that the once not attending, are the children from disadvantaged families.

These issues are discussed in the Eurydice report 2009 *Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities through Early Childhood education and Care in Europe*, which has inspired the TODDLER-project. The project's goal is to raise awareness towards the educational benefits of high quality ECEC for toddlers at risk and to improve curriculum and teaching strategies of pre-service teacher education and in-service training of staff. This book about *Parental Involvement* is one of the texts produced in the TODDLER-project, based on the contributions from university partners in eight countries and elaborated by the Portuguese team at Escola Superior de Educação Santarém. Thus, this book is on the one hand rooted in the experiences collected in workshops with parents and professionals working with children under 3 in Portugal, on the other hand it presents definitions and examples of good practice from a wider European context. Furthermore the book provides a state of the art report on the co-operation between parents and staff in ECEC-settings, but most of all a wide range of questions to reflect upon personal attitudes and the institution's way of interacting with parents.

The engagement of parents in early education and care is crucial for toddler's development in general and especially for children at risk. ECEC can contribute importantly to combating educational disadvantages, if certain conditions are met, according to the Eurydice report 2009. A basic condition is that education programs for very young children should work in a child-centered, developmental way. Furthermore effective intervention programs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds should "involve intensive, early starting, child focused, centre-based education together with strong parent involvement, parent education, programmed educational home activities and measures of family support" (Eurydice, 2009 p. 11³). This is a science-based recommendation for providing toddlers access to high quality ECEC-institutions (day care centers or crèches), combined with emphasis on the collaboration with parents. This implies that it is insufficient to concentrate the educational work solely on the child itself, teachers also have to support parents in the upbringing of their children. Most teachers have experienced challenging encounters with the diversity represented in the parent group and they are also familiar with the complexity of these relationships. The authors of this book do not present solutions to difficult situations or provide easy methods for teachers to implement. Neither does the book show parent education programs or programmed educational home activities. What this book offers, is "food for thought" for those students or practitioners, who want to extend their professional discussions on parental involvement in ECEC-settings.

During the three years of collaborative work in the TODDLER-project, we learned a lot about toddlers' education and care by listening to colleagues from different contexts. A special and striking experience was the encounter with a dedicated Portuguese pre-school teacher, who told us that she had to close one of her groups due to the increasing unemployment amongst parents. She was the owner of a recognized ECEC-setting that now was in danger, as parents could no longer afford the payment. This is one of the cases that illustrates how the ongoing economic crisis is a threat to young children's access to ECEC-settings. The actual question in several European countries is; how can we support children from families who are affected by unemployment? As we have mentioned above, there seems to be a shift in the way ECEC for toddlers is perceived; from a focus on child minding whilst parents are at work towards a stronger emphasis on the educational benefits of ECEC. But is this trend strong enough to promote the establishment of new kinds of educational setting for unemployed parents and toddlers? Maybe the video

³ The report *Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities through Early Childhood education and Care in Europe*, is available in at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_reports_en.php in 13 languages.

Parental Involvement ⁴ from a supervised play group for toddlers and their caretakers can inspire policy makers and professionals to create alternative educational meeting places to support parents in the upbringing of the next generation.

This book emphasizes the importance of teachers'/practitioners' dialogues with parents. The text constantly invites the readers to reflect upon and share their ideas with colleagues and parents, which might be a good tool for community learning.

University of Stavanger 9. 4. 2013

Monika Röhle and Elisabeth Ianke Mørkeseth.

⁴ This video is another material developed in The TODDLER-project www.uis.no/toddler-video

1. Introduction¹

This Teachers's Guideline book is a result of the European TODDLER's Project - "Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on The Early-childhood Road". The team from Santarém, Portugal, was responsible for the subject: Parental engagement and involvement. The outcome of this part of the TODDLER project was:

- to identify "good working practices" with families and, support strategies and parental involvement in formal and informal childcare;
- to create a Teacher's guideline book to be used in the initial and continuing training of early childhood educators.

A review of research and development was carried out in all partner countries. Interviews with parents were conducted, a liaison with local health centres in Portugal was established and workshops were organized. The Teacher's guideline book for reflexive practitioners is based on analysis of this material.

We began our endeavour by framing the justifications (basis) and purposes of the project in order to introduce the work and some results obtained concerning the task assigned by the Portuguese team (High School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Santarém – ESE/IPS).

We immediately realised the difficulty to reach a satisfactory definition of what a "good practice" is, in Portugal as well as in other countries, considering its subjective nature and the need for contextualization underlying this conceptualisation. Moreover, it is difficult to work with several countries, each with its own specificity. In Portugal, for example, the sparse existing institutions which work with children under 3 years old and the scarce support given to families raise a few questions: would it make sense to limit the interviews to families who have children in institutions or family day care? And how do we compare countries with so diverse policies in what concerns child support, paternity and maternity?

This Guideline is organised so that it can be used in the initial and continuing training of professionals who work with children under 3 years old to enable an inquisitive attitude and to look for new ideas that can support the training of educators, technicians and future educators in what concerns the issue of parental involvement in contexts of reception. It is intended that this document will also be of use to parents and families of children.

To promote an inquisitive attitude and approach, all situations presented throughout the document should be read as work "clues" and should be consulted solely as references, as starting points for an operation suitable to each specific reality. There are no two equal contexts, nor two equal children or two equal families. The situations shown are only examples which should be reviewed taking into account the needs and unique characteristics of each context.

This Guide was conceived so that it could be worked in training courses or freely

1. Throughout the text the translation of the presented citations are from the authors' responsibility.

by students and professionals in order to have a reflexive evaluation of their practises.

The main goals of these guide/course will motivate the students and teachers to reflect on:

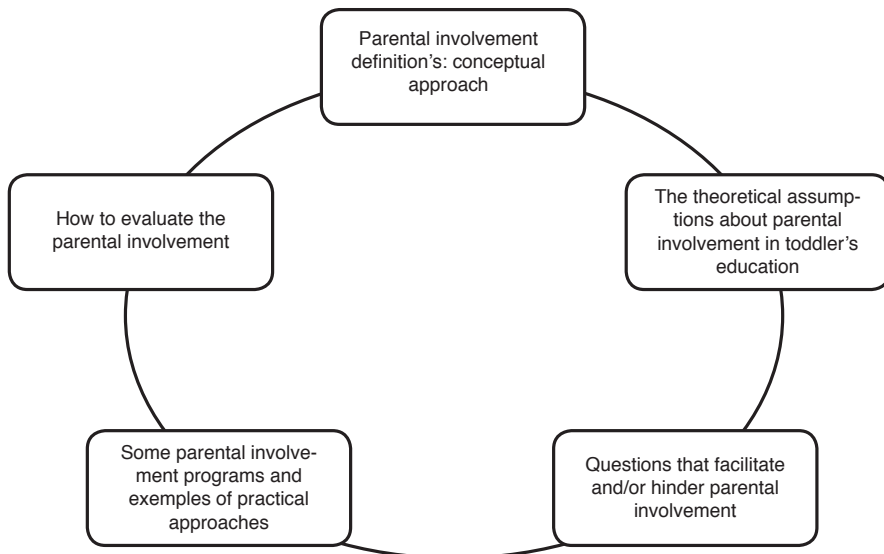


Figure 1 – Goals

The contents of this guide/course have the following items:

- Parental involvement in toddler's education.
- Factors that facilitate and/or hinder parental involvement in the education of young children.
- Parental involvement programmes and examples of practical approaches.
- Evaluation of the parental involvement.

The key element is to get students and teachers to analyse and criticise these contents and to notice their implications in the educational practice.

Teachers, teacher-trainers, trainers can use the materials that were developed for these courses using participants knowledge of the situation in their own country:

- Previous knowledge and previous experiences.
- Theoretical approach to the introduction of the topic, asking for a group reflection on the importance of parental involvement for a higher quality of educational practices.
- Reflective sessions about the issues that facilitate and/or hinder parental involvement in the education of young children.
- Reflective sessions to reach a possible agreement on parental involvement.
- Implementation of 'good practices'.
- Construction of (self) evaluation instruments.
- Construction of an intervention project to promote the parental involvement in toddler's education.

It is suggested that the next workshops should be conducted using a method-

ology adapted from dynamics sessions presented in The Guidebook for reflective sessions².

The methodology used in the workshops correspond to specific steps previously defined so as to encourage the participation and to develop practical situations that could be analysed and discussed.

Chart 1 - Phases of reflective methodology used in workshops³

1	Participants are divided into groups of 4-5 elements.
2	The parental involvement concept is given to the groups and they are asked to link it to a specific situation, marking the preponderance of praxis i.e. each group should identify/select an experience which is an example that can illustrate and enrich the concept.
3	Sharing situations with the group.
4	The trainers summarise the cases/situations and identify common characteristics. Afterwards they try to define the concept in question, in order to broaden and deepen the concept comprehension in relation to concrete practices.
5	The groups get together again and discuss the situations of the other groups in relation to their own, putting their own situation into perspective, challenging or confirming it. The aim is to identify different perspectives/opinions in regard to the practice.
6	At this point the trainers introduce new perspectives on the chosen subject, combining theoretical knowledge with the shared ideas and perspectives. These perspectives are used as tools in the process of analysing the concept into analysis.
7	The last part is a final series of reflections in plenary session, trying to reach a set of essential assumptions and considerations in regard to the analysed concept.

The materials to support training are presented throughout the Script by the presented theoretical basis and by several practical explanations and examples. To use these materials in the initial training we suggest it can be done in a 45 hours of work (incorporating 15 hours of a free work whose total is similar to a 1,5 ECTS) that can be organized in week modules according to the following suggestions:

Contact: 30 hours / Autonomous work: 15 hours

1st Module (5h)

- Theoretical approach to the introduction of the topic, asking for a group reflection on the importance of parental involvement for a higher quality of educational practices;

2nd Module (5h)

- Reflection on the issues that facilitate and / or hinder parental involvement

2. www.toddlerineurope.eu

3. Adapted from the methodology proposed by the Danish team (University College South Denmark).

ment in the education of young children;

3rd Module (5h)

- Group works to get to a possible definition on parental involvement;

4th Module (5h)

- Analysis of projects and some dilemmas;

5th Module (5h)

- Construction of (self) evaluation instruments;

6th Module (5h)

- Construction of an intervention project.

Total – 30h

For the evaluation it can be used grids of analysis/ evaluation built by the trainees so they can reflect on the acquired knowledge. Some examples of self evaluation grids are presented at the end of the Script as well as some bibliographic references and reading suggestions.

2. Theoretical assumptions

The educational institutions of childhood were created primarily to address the social needs of families and children, and it took many years to begin to value their educational potential. Thus, unlike school, these institutions emerge as a natural extension of family life. The engagement of families and the community in the education of young children is regarded as essential and its relevance has been enhanced in several studies, many of which were developed based on works of Bronfenbrenner (1979) about *the ecology of human development*.

“The ecological model of early childhood development emphasised that child-rearing is a joint endeavour between the family and the early childhood centre, local school and community surrounding the family” ideas that came to be reinforced more recently in studies in different countries (OECD, 2006, p. 152). “The continuity of children’s experience across environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff-members exchange regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning” (OECD, 2006, p. 152).

The benefits of having a cooperation between the family and the institution appear as evident in most of the existing research and in the legislation that fits the educational policies for children in most European countries. However, the way these ideas are materialised vary from country to country and sometimes even within countries, depending on how the institutions and professionals understand this relationship, and how families construe it. This interactive project can take many different forms, and many variables are at play. Some studies have shown, for example, that the benefits of this relationship are more obvious in the middle class families, and also that not all children and families obtain the same benefits out of this relationship (Pedro Silva, 2003).

In regard to the family’s relations with the institution, there are several expressions that can be found in the pedagogical literature referring to parental involvement:

“family-school partnership”, “parental involvement”, “family involvement” and “parental engagement”.

Parental engagement refers to the formal and informal relations that parents have with the early childhood institutions (OECD, 2011, p. 220). Epstein (2001) defines several categories of parental involvement:

Chart 2 - Epstein's Model for Parental Involvement⁴

- **Parenting.** Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.
- **Communicating.** Communicate with families about school programmes and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between the school and home.
- **Volunteering.** Improve recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.
- **Learning at Home.** Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.
- **Decision-Making.** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.
- **Collaborating with the Community.** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. Enable all to contribute service to the community.

Going beyond Epstein, Don Davies (1993) reinforces the potential of involving parents and families in all aspects of the institution's life, namely their wider involvement in the planning of educational contents. Researchers also point out that not doing so may have negative effects, as the projects we carry out with children may not be appropriate to the educational needs of all children.

"The most usual form of contact between parents and educators is that of provision of information to parents, for example in the form of parent meetings or through giving them guidance and advice. Working with parents in other ways and creating a partnership approach is a systematic feature of early childhood provision in only a few countries." (Eurydice, 2009, p. 106).

The importance of having an effective participation with families is underlined in international reports (Eurydice, 2009; OECD, 2006; 2011). Several intervention programmes consider parental involvement very important to the learning and well being of all children, including those of disadvantaged families (ibid).

In Portugal, legislation and official guidance regarding the organization of work both in daycare (0-3 years) and kindergarten (3-6 years) highlight the importance of establishing a strong parental involvement in the educational process of children. The Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education (Ministério da Educação, 1997) states that parents are encouraged to participate in the educational planning. The context is the democratic experience constituted by the cooperation and partnership with families. The ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is the basis for the official guidelines for the education of children. It is argued that all the children's experiences contribute to their learning. Parents involvement must therefore be emphasised in the educational contexts that the toddler attends. To involve the parents is an indispensable obligation for

4. In Joyce L. Epstein, M.G. Sanders, B.S. Simon, K.C. Salinas, N.R. Jansorn, and F.L. Voorhis, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA (2002).

parents and staff.

In addition to official guidance, research on the practices of parental involvement in contexts for children in middle school in Portugal provides us with more information about the educational reality and it also points to the need for greater efficiency in promoting this involvement. A literature review on parental involvement conducted by Sara Ferreira (2011), refers to the first studies in Portugal on the subject of school-family relationship that was done in the 1980's by Don Davies (Davies, Marques & Silva, 1993). These studies highlight the benefits of parental involvement for all partners in the educational process, a larger academic success of students, more support and social recognition from teachers and better understanding of the educational process in the families.

Sociological studies carried out in Portugal since the 1990's emphasize, however, that the potential benefits from parental involvement is higher for the middle and upper-middle class families. This would explain the lower involvement from disadvantaged families (Silva, 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2003 cited by Ferreira, 2011). An important question is if parental involvement in early childhood settings may lead to greater social inequality and discrimination for children. It is important to reflect on the way to promote parent involvement and to combat its negative effects.

In a survey focused on cooperation between the kindergarten and the family Luísa Homem (2002), describes the concept of participation as broader and more incisive than that of parental involvement. It may also include collaboration, cooperation and partnership. According to this author, any of these links between the educational establishment and the family ultimately influence and interfere in decision making within the school, but the schools often resist this link with families. Being often dominated by the school teachers perspectives on parent involvement, there is no room for divergence (Afonso, 1993 in Homem, 2002).

Luísa Homem (2002) concluded, in a case study conducted in an Institution of Social Solidarity, that the household's confidence in the institution and its staff are the foundation for building the participation of parents. The shallowness of the relationships between parents and professionals, the marginalisation of the parents, the pursuit of support by the professionals and also the devaluation of parents as educational partners, these are all aspects that may lead to a limited parental involvement.

To a more active participation and decision-making by all parents, found eventually be it is necessary for the kindergarten teachers, in their relationship with parents, to find a balance between formal and informal. It is also advisable to diversify the parental involvement strategies, to mobilise professionally (and in the process, mobilise parents) to discuss, on order to achieve an acceptance of difference, and thus a true partnership and citizenship (Homem, 2002, p. 269).

Teresa Sarmiento e Joaquim Marques says (2006, p.61) that:

"The school-family relationship is a reality that exists in all schools, although their effectiveness in terms of involvement or collaboration is found only in a small percentage of them. Studies have known about this area, both nationally and internationally, are grouped into categories such as associations of parents, parental expectations given the frequency of formal educational settings, involving parents as citizenship practices, expectations of teachers on involvement, parental involvement in school decision-making bodies, the structures of school-family mediation."

Built upon a multidisciplinary perspective on childhood, Sarmiento and Marques (2006, p.61) emphasize the invisibility of the role of the child in these investigations on the school-family relationship:

"... mainly representations and practices adults between the elements of each of these systems, ignoring the most part, the part of children. The invisibility of these in the process of relationship might lead to unconsciousness or difficulty accepting that many adults face to keep active and respon-

sible role in the cases of children who take part.”

Sarmento and Marques (2006) show that the emphasis is mainly on the adult's practices and representations are emphasised and that children are generally overlooked. The invisibility of the children in the process of the relationship might lead to unconsciousness or difficulty in accepting that many adults show in opposition to the children's active and responsible role in the processes in which they take part.

In this sense educational centres for children, and particularly in the daycare contexts where the issue of parental involvement becomes even more obvious, the staff should be able to adopt a perspective in which all participants (families, children, educators) are effectively involved and equally valued in a constructive dialogue leading to the genuine emancipation of the child. Our approach mirrors our belief that the prospects of all families should be valued equally, we seek a methodology that will give voice to different participants - families with different educational options, different cultural and social backgrounds (educational, health and social workers). We also seek to make visible the participation of children in the different educational contexts in which they find themselves.

3. Trying to define what we understand by parental involvement: factors that facilitate; difficulties; examples

- **Questions that simplify parental involvement**

The variables that simplify parental involvement - beyond their dependence on the existing educational policies and existing institutional network – the professionals are dependent on an institutional dynamics and also on the families participation and (un) availability. Luísa Homem (2002), based on a research made in Lisbon, emphasises that trust is the main basis for parental involvement. However, sometimes there is superficiality in the relations and resistance against parents/families as actors in the educational process. According to the author, parents appear as “support”, but often there is a devaluation of their role as educational partners.

As a basis for the creation of a trustful relationship Luisa Homem refers to informality as an instrument for the families’ participation. She highlights that formal relationships are not promoters of communication. A basis for a good relationship between parents and staff lies in the development of strategies for a better understanding of the way the individual families live their life. Professionals need to be open to suggestions from parents, and also be willing to involve them in the work planning.

“Studies examining patterns of informal education in the family, such as parental teaching strategies in everyday play and problem-solving situations with children or parents’ talking styles in conversations with children, have consistently revealed big differences (...) A particularly important aspect of informal education at home is home literacy, or more specifically, shared reading and writing practices in the family. Differences between families in home literacy, depending on parents’ education and own literacy skills, strongly influence children’s language and literacy development (...)”
(Eurydice, 2009, p. 21)

To support parents/families in strengthening their capacities as educators is an important role that early childhood education can have. Such a role can emerge from parents participation in the life of the institution, in particular by supporting the organisation of partnerships and forms of cooperation among the children’s families.

• Issues that make parental involvement difficult

Like the variables that facilitate parental involvement, variables that make it difficult are also dependent on the dynamic of the institutions, as well as the dynamic of the interaction between professionals and families. Following the data gathered by Luisa Homem's study (2002) there are several issues that make parents/families' participation in daycare institutions difficult. This encompasses issues of power, political and cultural values which leads to different opportunities. Parents do not even share the same conceptions of what their role may be, or their possibility of acting.

These different conceptions are connected to previous experiences, affecting both families and professionals. A Norwegian research has shown that formal daycare mirrors middle-class culture and seems to clash with traditional working-class conceptions about young children's needs (Stefansen & Skogen, 2010). Middle-class parents participate and identify themselves with the content of the daycare setting, whilst working-class parents respond to daycare in a mixed way. They use daycare for their children, but identify themselves only with some aspects of the upbringing in daycare.

"(...) the value of formal daycare is understood differently by parents in different classes; while working-class parents see daycare as an essentially informal space that shelters children from unnecessary demands, middle-class parents value the ideal of stretching around which daycare, as a pedagogical project. For both groups, however, the response to daycare originates from understandings of what it means to grant children autonomy and a degree of control. For working-class parents, children's autonomy appears to unfold in peer groups and other unorganized spaces, where the uncontrolled interaction fosters important social skills and helps to develop a necessary 'shell'. In contrast, middle-class parents seem to regard children as empowered when their initiatives to explore and interact are seen and actively taken up by adults"

(Stefansen & Skogen, 2010, p.600).

As we have already mentioned the families from unfavourable socio-cultural spaces are those who participate less often.

"Parental involvement in educational institutions can cause harmful effects if, in its implementation, the institutions do not concern in answering to the educational needs of the lower classes. If there isn't care in conceiving solutions so that children from families with lower incomes can also have profits, the institution may be limiting the differences and instabilities, instead of promoting the educational success of the attended children."

(Sara Ferreira & Marcia Triches, 2001, p. 40)

Some issues regarding the professionals are also to be mentioned, specially the fear to put in risk their professional autonomy, considering that the pedagogic area should be exclusively technical. Another type of variables are placed on the level of the existing institutional dynamics. Nonetheless, sometimes educators point out that it is difficult to organise an active parent involvement. Some questions should be considered in the beginning of the school year so as to surpass many of the difficulties that affect the parents and family members' participation.



REFLECTIVE TOPIC (you can make a selection of the topics to reflect on)

What are the variables that may hinder the families' participation?

How do families understand their participation in the life of the institution where their children are?

How do professionals understand parents/families' participation?

How does the institution encourage (or not) this participation?

What strategies can be created to surpass the existing difficulties?

What means can professionals use to encourage all families' participation in the life of the institution?

Are there families with a better participation? Why?

Are there families who have never participated? Why?

To what extent are these differences related to their socio-cultural diversity?

How do educators plan strategies to surpass these difficulties?

There are many programmes to encourage parental involvement in childhood education. At school, some of these programmes are even integrated into the educational policies of countries, aiming to guarantee a better support to children from minority groups or needy families. So, in *Starting Strong II* report from OECD (2006), it is underlined the NAYEC proposal of parental involvement programmes which are considered essential to a quality childhood education.

Chart 3 – Parental involvement programme

“ The new NAEYC accreditation standards propose, for example, about 30 standards that centres should fulfill *vis-à-vis* parents, e.g.:

- Staff's program establishes intentional practices from the first contact with families designed to foster strong reciprocal relationships and maintain them over time.
- Staff's program engages with families to learn from their knowledge of their child's interests, approaches to learning, and the child's developmental needs, and to learn about their concerns and goals for their children. This information is incorporated into ongoing classroom planning.
- Staff's program uses a variety of formal and informal methods to communicate with families about the philosophy program and curriculum objectives, including educational goals and effective strategies that can be used by families to promote their children's learning. They implement a variety of methods, such as new family orientations, small group meetings, individual conversations, and written questionnaires for getting input from families about curriculum activities throughout the year.

- Families may visit any area of the facility at any time during the program's regular hours of operation as specified by the procedures of the facility.
- The Government program or advisory groups include families as members and active participants. Family members are mentored into leadership roles by staff or other families in the program.
- Staff's program provides families with information about programs and services from other organizations. Staff supports and encourages families' efforts to negotiate health, mental health, assessment, and educational services for their children (NAEYC, 2005)."

Source: OCDE, 2006., pp.152-153

Based on these proposals we suggest analysing the following matters:



REFLECTIVE TOPIC

(you can make a selection of the topics to reflect on)

What is the relevance of developing these programmes that you already know in educational contexts? Why?

Which aspects could benefit its applicability? Why?

Which aspects could make its applicability difficult? Why?

Give examples of strategies liable to surpass these difficulties.

What are the institutional norms that needed to be checked? Why?

As educator what are the training gaps/difficulties felt in the execution of this programme?



A LEARNING TASK...

If we had to organise a pedagogic training for everyone who works with children in childhood educational institutions (nannies, assistants, pre-school teachers, other technicians) and keeping in mind the programs we have already listed above, what are the main aspects that this action should have: what subjects? How can we include the needs that naturally happen daily and that involve children and families? Summarise your ideas thinking about examples which you consider that should be addressed.



A LEARNING TASK...

Read and analyse the text reminding of the childhood educational reality where you work, trying to evaluate the most positive aspects that you can take out of the text.

“The importance of the environmental home, and in particular the vulnerability of children from dysfunctional homes, has led some countries to invest in home visiting and parental education programs. If the mother’s role is crucial in determining a child’s initial progress and subsequent readiness for school, so it makes sense to focus on the home environment and home-school relationships in the early years. The literature on parental involvement however tends not to disaggregate gender, and makes assumptions about the availability of mother’s time and willingness to engage in such programs. In addition, recent evidence suggests that home visiting and parent education do not significantly affect children’s outcomes, although they may in some cases alter parental behaviour although there are many ongoing studies which may provide new information on this point.”

(Waldfogel, 2004; Blok et al, 2005)

“But it is also a global experience that families are more diverse. (...) So it is sensible to explore and make explicit the assumptions about family life that are being used as a basis for early childhood intervention.”

(European Comission/ NESSE, 2009, p. 46)



A LEARNING TASK...

Read and analyse the text reminding the childhood educational reality where you work trying to evaluate the most positive aspects you can take out of the text.

“Programme guiding parents and providing materials

Reviews by Deforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Harris and Goodall (2006) indicate that the most effective approach to boost children’s later achievement and adjustment is parents ‘support to actively engage in children’s learning activities at home. The HLE is one of the most powerful influences upon children’s development (Belsky et al., 2007; Melhuish, 2010). It includes such activities as reading to children, singing songs and nursery rhymes, going to the library and playing with numbers.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study of England (United Kingdom) has shown the importance of parent-child activities in contributing to the quality of children’s HLE. The research results indicate that programs which directly promote activities for parents and children to engage in together are likely to be most beneficial for young children (Sylva et al., 2004).

The quality of the HLE is also found to be strongly associated with the child’s “at risk” status. A poorer quality HLE in the early years has been put forward as one of the possible reasons for the lower attainment levels observed at the start of compulsory education in “at risk” children. There are several ways in which ECEC services can help enhance the HLE, including providing activities and materials for parents and children to do together, offering parents tips on reading aloud to children and offering literacy learning kits. ECEC staff can also encourage parental engagement in early learning by providing them with resources and activities that further the work that is being addressed within the classroom. This helps families feel more connected to their child as well as to the program.” (Halgunseth and Peterson, 2009).

Source: OCDE, 2011, p. 225

Next we'll present The Wheel, a proposal for a parental involvement programme developed by Wolfendale (1987). This wheel wasn't designed specifically for children education, but it gives the possibility to be adapted to the institutions of different educational levels.

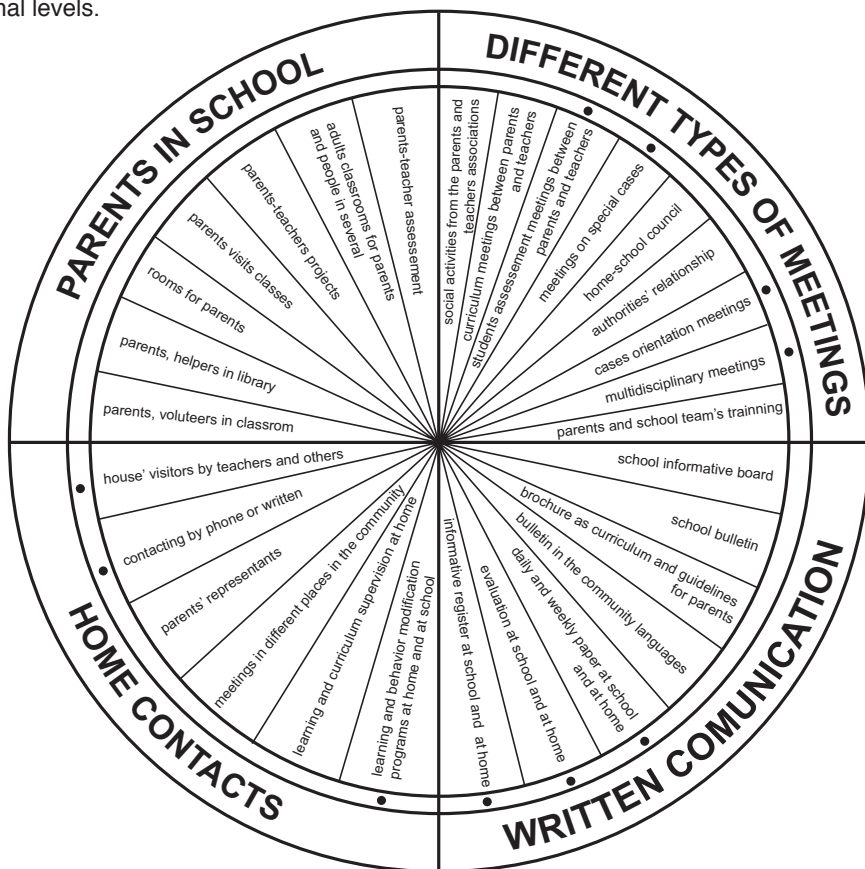


Figure 2 – A Parental involvement programme proposal (Wolfendale, 1987)

The different proposals for the suggested activities provide a greater or lesser possibility of active participation of parents/families and can be divided into 4 categories: meetings, written communications, contacts with the house and intervention of parents in school. This wheel has the peculiarity that is, besides providing a programme of activities it can also function as a benchmark for evaluating the work done with families. Given these proposals, we ask you to analyse each group for each of the four categories:



REFLECTIVE TOPICS (you can make a selection of the topics to reflect on)

What are the best activities for the early childhood educational contexts? Why?

What are the less suited activities for the early childhood educational contexts? Why?

What are the aspects that facilitate its execution? Why?

What are the aspects that prevent its realisation? Why?

What strategies could be developed to overcome these difficulties? Why?

What institutional rules should be changed to achieve these programmes?

What training gaps/problems do you have to overcome to implement these programs?

- **Parental involvement: conceptual approach comparing different countries**

As we have already mentioned, the partners were asked to send some data concerning the following aspects: a definition of “parental involvement”, a description of what they consider to be an example of “good” practice on working with families and reference bibliography on the theme (which is presented at the end of this script).



**Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, Escola Superior de Educação
Portugal**

Teresa Sarmento (1992) defines parental involvement as being “all forms of parents’ activities in their children education – at home, in the community or at school”.



**Kingston University
United Kingdom**

“Early years practitioners have a key role to play in working with parents to support their young children. This should include identifying learning needs and responding quickly to any difficulties. Wherever it is appropriated, practitioners should work together with professionals from other agencies, such as local and community health and social services, to identify needs and provide the best learning opportunities for children. Partnership working may be required in particular for a child with disabilities or a child who is looked after in care. Regular information should be provided to parents about activities undertaken by the children; for example, through wall displays, photographs and examples of children’s work.” (GB. DCSF, 2008, p. 6)



**Artevelde University College
Belgium**

A. Parental engagement in daycare (0-3 years)

‘The parent as the first educator of the child’. Each parent has a dream for his child and has vague, unsaid pedagogical values and habits. To know these in creches, to acknowledge them and to take them into account guarantees safety and continuity for the child and the parent. For both the transition to creche is a big step: other habits, other people, sometimes even a different language.

We work towards an accessible creche, where we use the questions and needs from children and parents as a starting point. We assess our way of working through tree principles: easy implementation, respect for diversity, reciprocity and equality.

B. Parental engagement in school settings (3-6 years)

Parental engagement can be defined as *'all efforts undertaken by the school to engage parents to participate more in school life'*. One can also look at parental engagement from the sight of the parents and then we describe parental engagement as *'each form of parental engagement in actions by professionals, related to their children'*. Parental engagement is important because:

- Being aware reduces the possibility to misunderstandings
- PE has a positive effect on wellbeing of the child
- PE has a positive effect on the development of the child
- PE and c-operation raise wellbeing of parents and teachers
- Co-operation between school and parents refers to their natural right to be engaged in the education of their child.

Kinderopvang met sociale functie, Een plaats waar kinderen, ouders, medewerkers en buurt elkaar ontmoeten, 2008, SWP.

Poppe, K., Gobyn. R., Van de Vijver, E., Soenen, C., Vanhoo, Y. Samen school maken, 2011-2012, Arteveldehogeschool, Gent.



**Haute Ecole Libre Mosane
Belgium**

Understanding of parental engagement/involvement (in context of your country)

The link between a child and his parents is the most important relationship in life. Showing respect to a child implies showing respect to his parents.

If the parents trust the childcare, the children will also feel safe and at ease. For the parents, it means they will leave their child in the staff's care more easily and will get involve more. (Doeleman, 2012 – free translation).

To do so, it's important to establish a trusting relationship with the parents and maintain it that way, using the follows guidelines:

- Make sure the conditions will benefit the relationship between the professionals and the parents as soon as the first meeting and keep it going as long as the child is there.
- Engage in a positive dialogue with the families, showing respect towards their private lives.
- Clarify everybody's role and responsibilities by explaining their specificity and how family and childcare interact with each other.
- Explain and discuss both parties' choices as far as upbringing is concerned without presenting them as recommendations. The childcare facility should present its vision by explaining its project and clarify its foundation when the parents ask for it or when the situation requires it (a document is to be given when parents sign up).
- The rules are established according to the needs of the children and to the educational objectives (governmental decrees for schools). These rules can also involve parents. They are presented and explained.
- The institution provides families with the possibility of having a meeting if need be.
- The institution organizes meetings between the staff and the families, focusing on the child's well-being (childcare) and the development of skills.
- This means that the parent should feel welcome, important and respected as soon as s/he arrives in the institution. Recommendations : think of the quality of your welcoming in the morning or at the moment of departure / try to exchange a few words every day when the parent brings or takes back his child / organize evenings with the parents (in group or individually, with a theme or not).



**West University of Timisoara
Romania**

The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth has developed a curriculum for pre-scholar children's early education (0-3 years), that targets a new perspective in education and refers to a parental involvement in an active partnership between them and kindergartens. Unfortunately the reality that can be found in kindergartens does not reflect the governmental recommendations. The parental involvement is limited to biannual parent-educator meetings, where administrative and behavioural problems of the children are discussed. A relationship between parents and the educator is maintained through daily meetings (when the parents bring ore pick up their child from kindergarten) with the purpose of information and keeping in touch; on the occasion of various celebrations. There are major discrepancies between state owned kindergartens and private ones regarding this subject. In the private ones, parental involvement means a permanent connection of parents with all that happens in the kindergarten and it entails a proper development for the pre-scholar children (1-3 years).



**University of Stavanger
Norway**

Parental involvement in daycare can be seen as covering three areas of work

1. Mutual support – to parents (and parenting) from teachers – and from parents to teachers
2. Communication about programs and child
3. Parental participation in daycare or school (in daily activities, planning, decision making, evaluation, collaboration with community)

The parties are interdependent. Two-ways communication is needed. The notion of 'shared competence' is useful: Both parents and professionals are experts, but experts in different ways. Each has only part of the competence needed to create a good program for the child. Together they have the necessary competence – the whole.

Across different activities/practices we need to meet fundamental parental needs for a sense of meaning, a sense of agency and a sense of support

A sense of meaning:

To have a sense of meaning is to have consciousness about the parent role, for instance thoughts about what you want to accomplish, about what you can do to get there, and about whether you are getting there. Understanding what school is aiming for and why, and why your participation as a parent is wanted, is an important part of this. When teachers communicate their reasons for what they do, this serves to motivate parents.

A sense of agency:

To have a sense of agency is to have a sense that you can influence your own and the child's situation, that it matters what you yourself do and that you have a certain amount of independence and control. It is to believe in your own ability to handle the situation. This sense is supported when you feel that the teachers listen to you and consider your wishes.

A sense of support:

You need to feel you have influence, but you also need to feel you are not alone in the task of rearing your child. You need to know there are people who will support you when

needed. Your trust in help from others is built when you feel recognized by the teachers and experience that you actually receive help in a situation of need. These are also fundamental needs in other kinds of work. Therefore: When parents contribute to the staff's sense of meaning, agency and support, they contribute to the child's life.

Source: Bø, Ingerid (2011) Foreldre og fagfolk [Parents and professionals]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget



**University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd
Germany**

Crèches have the duty to work together with the parents to assure a well going development. They have to advise them in their educational questions and inform them about their rights.

They document the development of the children and speak with the parents about their observations – this could be in a Portfolio or a group diary (in terms of children group of about 12 in a German crèche). Some states – Bavaria for example – also have judicial mandatory observation programmes (like 'seldak' for language. *) Next to this all states have their own kinder garden curriculum. Some also have additional work papers for the crèche-sector. In most of these writings the parental engagement is seen as an important field of the pedagogical work. Especially in the crèche where a very sensible range of topics is dealt with, (since) the relationship between the parents and the children should be very close during this period and many sensitive issues may arise. This means that EYP play a very important role in dealing with these issues together with the parents, leading to the so-called co-education.



**Universitat Ramon Lull
Spain**

The idea that home and school should work with practically identical educational criteria is practically impossible. Some discontinuity, diversity or even disagreement is unavoidable and may even be healthy/positive. Even though it is true that school-family relationships are based on trust and respect, it is also true that conflicts may arise. These may be due to:

The emotional impact generated by leaving the child at school.

Learning to trust the teacher is a long-term process which requires a relationship as direct and frequent as possible.

There may be some rivalry or jealousy. We must strengthen the mother and father's role in order to avoid comments that may seem innocent but that may not be well received by the families.

These different contributions give us suggestions and guidelines (examples of practices) on parental involvement in the various partner countries. The diversity of these references leads us to think about the difficulty of being able to reach a single definition or to outline a unique way to approach this problem, which can be the target of various ideas according to the diversity of contexts and situations. Taking into account the diversity of contexts and situations, this multitude of ideas is a benefit. We think it would be

both difficult and undesirable to opt for a single definition or way to approach this problem. consistent with your own opinion.

In your own words try to outline a definition of parental involvement.



A LEARNING TASK...

After reading the texts presented by the several partner countries identify the aspects that are most consistent with your own opinion.

In your own words try to outline a definition of parental involvement.

What are the implications of its definition in terms of work practices used with children and families?

4. The study done by the Portuguese team: the families' opinion and the presentation of some good examples.

• Listening to the parents and the care helpers in the Portuguese study

Two workshops were conducted based on a methodology, adapted from reflective dynamics proposed by the Danish group. These workshops had the participation of fathers, mothers, grandparents, teachers, nurses and technicians in special education/early intervention, from the district of Santarém. The chief purpose of the workshops was to cross-reference needs, concerns, disabilities and potentials, reflecting on the concept of parental involvement, in order to reach a broader definition based on praxis. They were also based on the assumption that: *“Pragmatic results are often sought from Parental Involvement, such as, to ensure home support for the child’s learning. The democratic dimension is also important, that is, the exercise by parents of their basic right to be involved in the education of their children.”* (OECD, 2006, p. 219)

It was evident that the participants’ dedication and motivation were increasing as the session went by and the initial concerns were fading. Most participants had not met before and the formation of groups benefitted from this diversity, however many situations were shared, many ideas were discussed and many concerns were voiced.

In the workshops, many extremely rich and exciting moments were shared, not only due to the experiences of each participant - each with their own perspective and analysis - , but also because they made a genuine reflection together and developed the concept of parental involvement which allowed the construction of a truly shared knowledge essential to the project and its purpose.

Next we will present the main ideas reached by the participants in the two workshops on the parental involvement concept.

Chart 4 - Results of the workshops held in Portugal

“The cooperation and the coordinated work among daycares and other educational partners are extremely important.”

“Those who have more educational responsibility are the parents.”

“Parents are the centre, but on a reciprocal basis.”

“The children are the great purpose of parental involvement.”

“Parents with their children are the first instance of parental involvement.”

“The involvement helps to improve some parents’ capacity.”

“It is necessary to work with parents in other ways and create a partnership approach.”

“Parents are active partners and it is important to be open to them and to be partners on the basis of respect for each individual situation.”
 “Communication is crucial for parental involvement, but it has to be bilateral.”
 “We must work on the basis of common goals.”
 “We must create conditions to make that involvement possible.”
 “The centre is always the child!”
 “Motivation and availability are important for all parts (to work together).”
 “Empathy and trust are really important.”
 “The times ... they are important to consider and conciliate not only with family life and work but also with the institution timetables... There is always a ‘common sense’.”
 “The educational helpers are also important.”
 “The educative intention should be valued as pedagogical work.”
 “It is important to” involve “families from the beginning.”



A LEARNING TASK...

Having in mind what you have read, try to explain the main similarities and differences according to your way of defining parental involvement.

We suggest that you ask friends, parents or relatives of the children about the way they understand parental involvement and the way they analyse their definition.

The comparative analyses of these points of view can give them a more realistic vision of their educational practice.

• Examples of Good practices presented by the different partners

We will present examples of some projects and situations whose analysis could give some ideas and different perspectives on how parents and families’ participation occurs in the institutions’ routine. These examples were collected by the partners using bibliographic research to support their definition of parental involvement.



Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, Escola Superior de Educação Portugal

The «Incredible Years» – parenting programs

Carolyn Webster-Stratton developed the Incredible Years Series, this is a parenting programme which include separate training programs, intervention manuals and DVDs for use by trained therapists, teachers and group leaders to promote children’s social competence, emotional regulation and problem solving skills and to reduce their behaviour problems. The aims of these interventions are to help parents and teachers provide young children (0-12 years) with a strong emotional, social and academic foundation so as to achieve the longer term goal of reducing the development of depression, school drop out, violence, drug abuse and delinquency in later years.

The **Incredible Years** intervention, especially the parental training programmes, are a series of programmes focused on strengthening parenting competencies (monitoring,

positive discipline, confidence) and fostering parents' involvement in children's school experiences in order to promote children's academic, social and emotional competencies and reduce conduct problems. The Parent programs are grouped according to age:

a) Parents and Babies Programme: (Ages 0-12 months) The Incredible Years Parents and Babies programme support parents and their babies. The Parents & Babies programme consists of a 6-part program focused on helping parents learn to observe and read their babies' cues and learning ways to provide nurturing and responsive care including physical, tactile, and visual stimulation as well as verbal communication. The basic babies programme is completed in a minimum 8-9 weekly/2hours with the parents and their babies.

The series includes:

- Part 1 - Getting to Know Your Baby (0-3 months);
- Part 2 - Babies as Intelligent Learners (3-6 months);
- Part 3 - Providing Physical, Tactile and Visual Stimulation;
- Part 4 - Parents Learning to Read Babies' Minds;
- Part 5 - Gaining Support;
- Part 6 - Babies' Emerging Sense of Self (6-12 months)

b) Parents and Toddlers Programme: (Ages 1-3) The Incredible Years Parents and Toddlers Programme supports parents and builds optimal parenting skills. The Parents & Toddlers programme consists of an 8-part program focused on strengthening positive and nurturing parenting skills. Each program builds on the previous. The basic toddler programme is completed in a minimum 12 weekly/2hours session and includes an Incredible toddlers book.

The series includes:

- Part 1 - Child-Directed Play Promotes Positive Relationships;
- Part 2 - Promoting Toddler's Language with Child-Directed Coaching;
- Part 3 - Social and Emotion Coaching;
- Part 4 - The Art of Praise and Encouragement;
- Part 5 - Spontaneous Incentives for Toddlers;
- Part 6 - Handling Separations and Reunions;
- Part 7 - Positive Discipline-Effective Limit Setting;
- Part 8 - Positive Discipline-Handling Misbehavior

Source: www.incredibleyears.com

A PAR Project

The **A PAR** Project had its beginnings in May 2006, before the constitution of the Legal Association Coaching - The PAR (January 2007). Inspired by the Project PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership), founded in England in 1995 in the city of Oxford, with the aim of improving the life chances of young children living in areas of priority intervention. It is an educational project of a partnership with parents and/or caregivers and their children. It aims to promote the creation of stable affective bonds between parents and children as promoting vehicles to create positive dispositions to learning.

This project was structured to be offered to families or other caregivers who have dependent children aged zero to five years old.

By involving parents very early in the education of their children, the idea that they are the crucial primary educators of their children is strengthened. This is why a Draft Childhood Education as well as a Family Empowerment Project were outlined.

The **A PAR** has been giving priority to populations in need, since they have less ease in accessing this type of educational opportunities.

The Empowerment Project Family and education of young children hopes to contribute to the health, well-being, creativity and overall development of communities as well as to improving the education of children since birth.

A PAR Goals: Promote the holistic development of children and their families; Prevent and fight social and educational problems, since birth.

Implementation - **A PAR Groups:** free weekly sessions (1hour) for children from zero to six and their families. Activities include songs, rhymes, games, paired reading, story

telling, talk time with parents about the education and development of their children and suggestion of activities to do at home; the group sessions are delivered by one **A PAR** Leader and one **A PAR** Assistant and take place in venues of Local Institutions, like Kindergartens, Community Centres, and others.

The assessment of the impact of the **A PAR** Program from 2008/2010, financed by FCT Portugal and conducted by researchers from Lisbon School of Education, Lisbon School of Psychology, and School of Education, University of Oxford, proved that 220 children who attended the **A PAR** when compared to the 212 who had not attended, benefitted in: self-esteem (the cognitive component), the development of literacy (verbal comprehension, vocabulary development, phonological awareness related to the concept of rhyme, writing of own name) in cognitive development (visual perception, spatial orientation, early number concepts and non-verbal reasoning). The parents of the 220 children of the **A PAR** compared to the 212 who had not attended, felt it was more gratifying to care for their children and saw themselves as models. The following benefits were also found: improvement of the ability to interact with children and the ability to observe their progress.

Source: www.peep.org.uk / www.a-par.pt/



Kingston University
United Kingdom

Parents, **Early Years and Learning (PEAL)** has been funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for two years (April 2005–April 2007) and is a consortium project run by the National Children's Bureau (NCB), Coram Family and the London Borough of Camden. **PEAL** set out to develop a model – a best practice framework – for working in partnership with parents living in disadvantaged areas in order to support the development of parental involvement in their children's early learning.

The **PEAL** team would like to acknowledge all those who contributed to this program.

The aim of this program is to support practitioners in developing work to engage parents in their children's learning. The program has been organized into preparatory activities to reflect on practice and look at what is already happening in settings, followed by a training day. In both the activities and training parts of the program, key elements of the **PEAL** model – authentic relationships, communication and partnership – are examined, and related to current research into what works best and why. The activities contained in this book are carried out in the practitioners' own settings, in advance of the training day. Practitioners need to decide when and how to find time and support to do the activities. The illustration on page 8 shows how long each activity should take. This should be referred to while looking through the activities to see what they involve. Not everything in this book needs to be done before the training day – but it is important to plan what to complete in advance of it. In tackling this program, practitioners will be working with issues such as how discrimination and prejudice affect young children and their families, and examining how they can offer inclusive practice. Also raised are the issues of the diversity of family lives and experiences. Wherever possible these issues have been integrated into the training activities, and research and practice examples. A more in-depth discussion and examination will be carried out on the training day, and is referred to in the **PEAL Reader** in the pack which supports the training events. The term working with parents, as used in this training program, acknowledges the wide range of people who might be in a parental role in children's lives. The terms mothers and fathers and parents when used here mean all the male and female adults who play a primary care role in a child's life. This is explored more in the **PEAL Reader**. The objectives of these activities are: to enable practitioners to identify why engaging parents is important and who benefits; to help practitioners start to identify their own skills and knowledge and build on their own practice; to provide knowledge of the policy context and research that underpins parental involvement in the early years; to identify some of the barriers that stop parents from being involved; to identify opportunities for, and barriers to, further work in the practitioners' own settings.

Practitioners need to decide when and how to find time and support to do the activities. The illustration on page 8 shows how long each activity should take. This should be referred to. The activities are designed to take place in your own setting and to fit in with your own requirements. They should take approximately seven hours in total.

The aim is to have some time to reflect on how you currently involve parents in their children's learning and to look at any issues this raises – both for building on current practice within your childminding setting and for yourself as a learner. The activities are also designed to help you to reflect on what you might want to get from the training, for example what information you might want about how other childminders are working to involve parents in their children's learning.

Although the activities are designed to link to the training, you will not be asked to share the results (such as audits and the feedback from parents and colleagues) in detail. Reflecting on practice in this way promotes autonomous learning and aims to develop understanding and critical thinking skills.

If you are a new childminder and would like to involve another practitioner to aid discussion and find support for the activities, you may be able to use the services of a support childminder. Any practitioner may be able to obtain help from a local development or support worker. In the first instance, please contact your local authority children's services department or information service who will provide details of any help available in your area. Plan what time you will set aside to tackle the activities. Some of these, for example the parent interviews in Activity 6, are optional at this stage but you could start to make plans for them. As the activities are designed to prepare you for some of the areas that will be looked at on the training day, make a note of any ideas or questions you want to take to this. You will not be asked to talk about any of your findings in detail, but you will be asked to think back to what you have found out.

Source: National Children's Bureau (2008) - <http://www.peal.org.uk>

An example of Story Board from English Partners (Work Package 4.2)

First Steps - Programme to support Parents at Norbiton Children's Centre

Context of the strategy

The First Steps programme was set up when Early Years practitioners observed that the parents attending the Stay and Play session were not really engaging or interacting with their children. First Steps is a six week programme for parents and carers to learn more about how young children learn and develop through their play. The session starts with input where handouts and pictures are used to introduce the concept. Then the session moves onto experiential learning where the parents and carers experience and explore the activities themselves with their children. The six week programme consists of: 1. What is Play? 2. Treasure Baskets, 3. Messy Play, 4. Books and Young Children, 5. Making it all happen, 6. Making it all happen.

The session starts with the Early Year's practitioners introducing the concept of messy play and how it can support their child's wellbeing referring to the Early Year's Foundation Stage – Personal, Social and Emotional Development and the SICS scales.



Specific play activities are set up for the children and their parents to engage and interact with.



Children have the opportunity to explore the materials and activities.

The Early Years practitioners and the parents have the opportunity to discuss and explore what they have observed during the session.



Parents are encouraged to be involved with the activities and engage and interact with their children.

Further description / explanation:

The Early Year's practitioners link the session to the Early Years Foundation Stage and the different areas within the framework, such as, developing self-confidence, self-control, making relationships, level of involvement and approaching new experiences. Using the SICS wellbeing scales (Laevers F.) the Early Years practitioners support parents in interacting with their children and understanding what they are observing. Parents are encouraged to look for the WOW! moments that their children have and what their children have achieved through play and learning. These are all recorded in a Learning Journey Profile which the parents keep as a record of what they and their child has achieved.



**Artevelde University College
Belgium**

Best practices in day-care

*Elmer (partner in TODDLER):

Strong investment in parental engagement through intense daily contact, listening to needs and ideas of the parents, inviting the parents to be with their child in day-care, regular meeting with the EYP of their children, parents activities (f.e. having breakfast together, going to the beach,...)

Best practices in school

*Sint-Salvator (partner in TODDLER):

- Strong investment in daily contact with the parents:
- teacher who speaks first language of the parents is at the school gate
- visiting the homes of the children with the whole class group
- parents can assist in the classes or lead on activity of their own (f.e. cooking)
- family wall: pictures of all families are put at the wall in the classroom. This reflects diversity and gives safety feeling to toddlers.
- parent group for potty training (if needed)
- in the morning parents are welcomed in the class; children get the opportunity for free play; parents can talk to the teachers.
- there is a big attendance/engagement of parents in special school activities
- there is a formal group called 'Schoolraad' in which parents participate. This group is involved in school policy.

Sources: www.decet.org ; www.elmer.be; www.sintsalvator-basisschool.be



**Haute Ecole Libre Mosane
Belgium**

Maximize the likelihood that the first contact in the childcare will be a success. As soon as he arrives in the childcare or the school, the child should feel he is being paid

attention to by the adults he has been entrusted to.

The child is discovering a new place and needs to find his way around, build landmarks and part from his family.

The familiarization of the child with the school and the meeting with the family are two necessary preconditions (Gillet MF, Delsarte S., 1997 – free translation)

1. Familiarizing of the child with the school

This familiarization should be done between the day the parents signed up and the first day the child enters the childcare. Its goal is to enable each child and his parents to discover the place, the people and the life within the institution.

The child and his family (parents/grandparents/other members the child is close to) are to be welcomed in the school during daily activities such as playtime, mealtime, naptime or when workshops are organized.

A planning can be established so that these visits can be programmed and spaced out. Each teacher and each parent should determine which moment is the best, make appointments, decide on the number and frequency of the visits as well as their duration which can vary according to their possibilities and the needs of the child.

Indeed, some children will be sufficiently reassured after a couple of visits, some will need up to five or six to feel at ease.

During that time, the parent is invited to accompany the child in the activity, to observe with him the other children playing, progressively take part in the activity through mimicking... (Symbolically playing aside in the corner or in the sand, listening to the story, taking part in the “good-morning-song”)

By visiting the school that way, the toddler will progressively build himself a mental image of the place, building landmarks, go near the adults he will be staying with and thus start to mentally and affectively belong to this new way of life.

The parents discover the activities their child will take part in, the way the child will be taken care of. For some parents who dread leaving their child in childcare or nursery school, it's a soothing way to get in contact with the school, which can answer some of their questions.

2. Discussing with the family

This can be done in two ways:

- Giving them a brochure in which the caregivers and their roles are described and illustrated, also giving practical information such as how to register, the moments and habits of the institution – naptime, break time, mealtime, etc.

Offering a simple and concrete document is the first step. Parents can then prepare questions and a dialogue can be created. This brochure should be translated into the family language as a sign of welcoming and recognition.

Observation: we have technically never encountered this kind of translation – for the exception of a couple of schools – and certainly not in all languages. This mainly depends on a specific action initiated by a particular community or project. Example: collaboration between a communal social service and the immigrant community where a representative translates the brochure or acts as an interpreter for non-native families. Translations are not available in every language.

Source: Gillet MF, Delsarte S., 1997



West University of Timisoara
Romania

“*The five love languages of children*” is one of the projects implemented by the Pygmalion kindergarten, intended to cultivate love in pre-scholar children’s education coming from parents.

Each child, as well as adult, expresses his/her love by using his/her own language. Love is not something automatically transmitted, so it needs to be expressed permanently towards the beloved ones.

The five love languages are: physical comfort, encouraging words, time, gifts and services.

The physical comfort means the love language through which children feel loved when they are hugged and caressed.

Encouraging words refer to the love language that helps children feel loved through appreciation and when they are positively praised for what they are and for the beautiful things they do.

Time refers to the love language through which children feel loved when they are given unconditional attention and time becomes qualitative rather than quantitative.

Services represent the love language that transmits love to children when parents do things that help children and that they could not do by themselves.

The project aimed at a commitment of parents to dedicate 5 days to show their unconditional love through various activities full of love-showing tasks, at the kindergarten and at home: expressing love towards their children through caress, services, time, gifts and encouraging words.

This is a part of the parents' feedback:

M.I., mother of a 2 and a half years old girl: "I want you to know that we liked this project a lot. The services part was the most interesting to explain S that what we are doing for her is out of love and not obligation or routine. Of course that she believes that she is entitled to all these. The allocation of time was a bit more difficult. We realized we are too busy and do not spend enough time with our daughter. Nevertheless, we tried to change this and we really had a lot of fun together."

M.M., mother of a 2-years old girl: "I liked that my husband was very involved in the project as well and that we all took it very seriously. We are waiting for further tasks."

C.U., mother of a 3-years old boy: "I will remember for the future how to use encouragement. I admit that I was praising him without him doing anything."



**University of Stavanger
Norway**

The Great World of Books

Førresfjorden barnehage is a municipal early childhood education center for children living in the neighborhood and for children of refugee families from a refugee center in the small city of Tysvær.

Every child attends the early childhood center for at least one year in order to get a flying start for their language learning. We have employed specific language educators responsible for the language teaching and they work together with many multilingual assistants in our ordinary staff.

Even though our staff represents several cultures and languages, we are not able to cover all the children's languages. The key question is:



*How can we offer every child good reading experiences according to their age level?
How can we promote and stimulate the children's mother tongue without a personnel that speaks their languages?*

Our answer to this question is:

We have to use the parents. This idea got elaborated into the project "The great world of books".

We created book boxes. A book box contains a picture book with props related to the story of this specific book. When these objects/props are used together with the reading of the text, the children can get some extra support to understand the story. The children can watch the figures enacting the story alongside with the story reading. We use these book boxes for several purposes:

- We use them to teach Norwegian for children with another mother tongue
 - We use them in circle time for all children
 - We use them in reading groups for all children regardless of mother tongue
- Our point of departure is that every child, regardless of age and mother tongue, shall have the possibility of good literacy experiences in accordance to their age in our kindergarten.

We have now created 15 different book boxes. We have translated the books to all the languages represented in our kindergarten.

The parents are crucial collaborators when we introduce new books. We copy the book, get the text translated in the family language (we use professional translators), fill in the translated text, laminate the pages and tie them with metal rings. The parents are crucial collaborators when we introduce new books. We hand out the book translated in their own language and ask them to read this book for their child at home. And they do so! Thus we ensure that all children get the books we are concentrating on in their mother tongue. Furthermore the children have listened to the story in their mother tongue before we read the same book in Norwegian in the reading group.



When children understand the stories, the book becomes meaningful and children get interested in the realms of books.

We arrange regular reading groups for children from the same age group in which we use these book boxes in Norwegian. In addition the book boxes are also used in reading groups led by language assistants or bilingual staff in the different family languages. This means that children may listen to the same book in a reading group in Norwegian, a reading group in their first language and at home with parents.

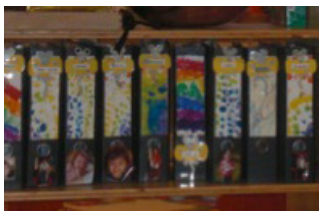
Our goal is to offer each child positive reading experiences and to promote a bilingual language development. We cannot reach these goals without involving the parents. By asking for the parent's assistance, we encourage not only the reading activities but also the parents' sense of agency. The parents experience that it matters what they do at home. Parents get the sense that they can influence and improve their child's situation.



**University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd
Germany**

These are best practice examples which were taken in a Bavarian house for children. This is a 'seldak' observation sheet. Because of the fact that it is a very extensive work, it takes a long time to fulfil the whole observation sheet. It is the basis for upcoming

development interview with the parents. In this kindergarten these interviews begin with a technique called ‘Ressourcensonne’ (sun of resources) which collects all topics related to what the toddler is already able to do. Parents and EYPs complete it together.



This shows some portfolios of the children. They show artworks of the children and things the EYP collected while observing the development. These portfolios could be taken by the

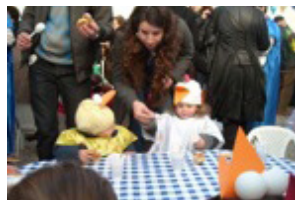
children themselves so that they can get an awareness of their own development. It can also be taken by the parents to get a summary of the steps their child does in the crèche and helps them to prepare for the development interview.

Here is the group diary of the children crèche group. Here it is written what the group has done, for example: to celebrate the birthday of a toddler. There are pictures of the activities included in the diary. Also song sheets or nursery rhymes are noted down in this diary. This is placed in the entrance of the rooms used by the crèche - so that all parents can have a look at the things which have been done in the last days or the last year.



Universitat Ramon Lull
Spain

- The **research centre INNOCENTI (UNICEF)** presented a report (report card number 8, 2008) where it was argued that one of the benefits resulting from services devoted to early age education is related to, first, the improvement of social cohesion and, second, the avoidance of inequalities that can be found in terms of educational level when comparing different social groups.
- Institutions that cater for very young children can and should work towards these aims, which should include:
 - Allowing families to participate in school life.
 - Promoting those activities that make it possible for families to meet.
 - Informing about school life but also sharing worries concerning child care.



Sharing daily life in kindergarden allows for cobuilding the culture of childhood. Sharing worries following the user model. Meeting other families, organising celebrations and participating in school life.



Allowing all generations to find their place at school (grandparents). Creating the opportunity for families to offer culture. Benefiting from intergenerational richness.



And benefiting from traditions. Encouraging dialogue and understanding different needs.

FAMILIES AND SCHOOL

Relationship with families can be established or predetermined in the educational project of the school, but several factors come into play:

Although we know that family-school relationships are more common in early childhood education than in later stages of education, we are not so sure about the quality and optimal frequency of such relationships. What factors may influence such reality?

- It is a generalized perception in school that relationships with families are complicated
- Many highly competent teachers, competent with children, experience such relationship (parents-school) with families as something problematic.
- Establishing a relationship with families may be considered as something secondary
- Family and school relationships are complex, with emotional factors involved, with little or no expectations shared by both agents.
- Teacher's social skills.

Considerations

Variety of family structures.

Educational styles. The diversity among families and within families... we must become aware that there is more than one way to do things or act with a child, and ours is not necessarily the best option.

Cultural background. We should not only consider cultural differences in terms of background (immigration). We must be aware of other aspects such as the different ways of understanding the world, beliefs, social, economic and cultural contexts.

Expectations

Families bring their children to school with certain expectations (what their child will learn, how the school will take care of him/her, how they will feel...). It is essential to explain and justify the educational project of the school to the families.

Teachers may often have false expectations and expect too much from families. They may think that all families can and must collaborate and participate equally; they may also expect families to become teachers at home, to "work" with their child, etc.

The "Teacher/Parent relationship" should be professional - There are three models of prototypical relationships with families, according to Cunningham and Davis (1998) :

- EXPERT MODEL. The professional is the one who knows about the child and who

makes the decisions. This may lead to think that there is no need to give too many explanations to families because the professional is the expert. The contacts are scarce and highly technical language is used (difficult for the families to understand). The teacher is usually placed at a higher level. The point of view of the family is not taken into account and the professional feels he/she should tell the families how to relate to children and how to organise family life.

- **TRANSPLANT MODEL.** There is an attempt to share professional knowledge, disseminating experience, sharing materials and guides. It is the dominant model in education. Families are expected to help their children read and do their homework, or do puzzles or spend the summer doing homework or playing XX minutes a day... One advantage is that some learning is reinforced at home, but the major drawback is that parents are expected to act as teachers at home and this may be a distortion of the mother's role or parents' role. Some families can play this "role" well, but for many it may be too demanding, stressful and can cause fights with their children. It can also make parents feel helpless

- **USER MODEL.** This model is based on the conviction that everyone brings necessary knowledge. The relationship is based on equality, as each is an expert on either knowing the child or on educational opportunities and alternatives. There is dialogue with the aim of reaching understanding and finding solutions.

The boundaries of the professional role: Maternal or paternal role: teachers may get too emotionally involved. It is important that they empathize with parents, but professional expertise must always prevail; the wish to become friends with the families may lead to confusion; the teachers takes the role of a psychologist or of a counselor or even of a pediatrician; teachers must listen, but then they should advise parents to see a specialist.

The optimal professional distance

Activites with the families

- *Daily contact.* In early childhood education, particularly in the first cycle, the school must exchange information with families every day. Some strategies (notice board, home-school notebook/diary) facilitate the exchange when the teacher cannot speak to all families. The use of blogs and other ICT systems should be put into question for this type of contact.

- *Interviews.* We should avoid interviews done only in case of conflict or at the end of the school year to say that there is something wrong. The interviews are used to share information about the child.

- *Meetings.* We should avoid the one-way model, where the teacher is the only one who talks, where highly technical language is used so that families cannot follow and where the teacher presents him/herself as a distant expert.

- *Involvement in classroom activities.* It is very rewarding to have the participation of the families in the school, during the adaptation process, in workshops, school outings, talks...



Lunch at school



Storytelling and music



Daily contacts, morning transitions

Sources:

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A LEARNING TASK...

After reading the given examples we ask you to analyse each one emphasizing the positive and negative aspects according to your opinion and the reason why and single out one of the examples, the one that in your opinion corresponds to a better practice of work with families. Why did you choose it? Is it the example where parents and families have a bigger participation? Why?

- **Other examples and situations**

We will now present some dilemmas (in daycare and kindergarden) which stemmed from the workshops conducted in Portugal as part of this project.



A LEARNING TASK...

We ask you to read and analyse different situations. Choose four from the shown situations - the most problematic - and define your intervention if you were the teacher.



A LEARNING TASK

Read and give your opinion:

Situation 1: At 4 months the child began attending daycare. When she was 18 months old

the first warning signs emerged: the little girl couldn't walk but remained standing. With the support of the early intervention team they did the following:

- They have scheduled a meeting with the child's parents
- The parents came to the institution and participated in the preparation of the activities' calendar
- The parents' meetings were prepared in advance so that other parents can be involved and participate more in order to support the integration of the child. Having proceeded to the referral of the child for the appropriated technician and the necessary mechanisms were activated. This case had successfully outcome as the child started walking shortly after. Strategies were given to parents in order to advice them on how to act at home. Other families were involved and the integration of the child in the group was positive. For this it was very important to involve the parents of the other children in the group.

Situation 2: The institution is in the process of building new facilities. Due to lack of resources it was requested the cooperation of the families to conduct fundraising activities.

Situation 3: Parents and family are interested in knowing what is happening in the daycare. They are motivated in learning more about the daily life of children by talking with the teacher. They think these informal contacts are more important

than the meetings.

Situation 4: At school there was a red flag relating to some different behaviours of the child. Parents did not accept this situation immediately. After insistence from school and the use of technical support it was diagnosed that the child had autism.

Situation 5: The educator seeks to understand the values and routines of the children at home to better know how to handle them. With this aim in mind, parents/families are regularly called to the school to describe how the child behaves at home in face of certain situations.

Situation 6: A mother was called to school to see with the teacher how they could solve a certain child's behaviour at home, in order to find a solution together.

Situation 7: The child comes from a socially disadvantaged family and has a problem of selective mutism. Parents withdrew their child from the institution.

Situation 8: Parents and family are invited regularly to parties and to some projects organised by the institution.

Situation 9: A mother was called to the institution to draw attention to her child who has damaged about a toy from a colleague in daycare.

Situation 10: The institution has decided to organise activities on Saturdays for parents. One couple refused to go, saying that the weekend is not the time to go to school.

Situation 11: The daycare organised a lunch for the socialisation among parents and educators. In this lunch some parents were asked to talk about their profession.

Situation 12: A father took his son out of daycare because they let the child play with dolls.

Situation 13: A blog and thematic workshops were created so that parents could participate.

Situation 14: A child referenced by a Commission who protects children and young people: the educators were trying to avoid removing the child from the parents. The grandfather assaulted the teacher and the child did not come back to school, and a process in court was opened. The teacher tried to contact the family but without success.

We will then present some more examples and situations regarding parental involvement.



A LEARNING TASK

Read and write your opinion:

The Han-Mi “Reggio Emilia” centre in Korea

The Han-Mi Kindergarten caters for 275 children aged between 3 and 5 years, in a suburban setting outside Seoul. The families are from middle- and lower-middle income bands. Parents fund the program entirely through fees, as no government subsidy is available for a private kindergarten. A feature of this centre is that it applies the Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach. The director assured the OECD team that the goal was not to adopt a foreign program. The centre follows the National Curriculum and uses the Reggio Emilia principles of constructive education, staff reflection and documentation, to provide a program of high quality. In the kindergarten, children are at work in voluntary groups supported by trained adults. The majority of staff (16/22) has a four-year university qualification.*

The school also engages teachers trained in science/computing as well as a gymnastics specialist. The staff work as a team, and continually reflect together about what they do and why. The work of the children and the centre is continually documented, with a strong emphasis on using the artifacts that the children produce. Documentation indicates not just what happened but focuses on the value and meaning to the children of what was said and done. “We are showing a philosophy”, the staff informed us, “of making children’s intellectual work visible, not just keeping records of what happened”. In this way, the centre has been able to move beyond a dominant paradigm in Korean education, explained to us as “giving recipe type lessons to passive children based on set topics”. A visit to the classroom found children absorbed in activities, with a high level of social and language interaction. Children were free to form their own small groups, which decide on a particular centre of interest and then seek teacher direction or support to achieve their plan. They were also free to spend time alone in thought or in concentration on a personal task or one engaged with a friend.

Although this was a Reggio Emilia style program, the team noticed in the classrooms more artifacts and symbols of Korean culture than in many other centers. As well as the customary Reggio Emilia artistic and communication equipment, the environment was rich in natural materials that were available for selection by the children. In the classrooms, laughter and physical movement were evident.

Recognizing that parents want the best for their children, staff emphasize parent participation and continually explain to parents what is being attempted and why. Monthly parent meetings are held in all classes to show specifically the educational value of the work in progress and to illustrate the children’s ways of thinking. This has paid off handsomely in the past few years with parents becoming convinced of the benefits of learning through relationships and working with other children. In a country focused on academic attainment, this has been no small achievement. The teachers of this centre have become a real resource for the district. They organize mini-conferences for other teachers, showing how they develop programs and quality assessment in this kindergarten. A collaborative of 65 teachers now takes part and visits each other’s centers. It is acknowledged that the children in this centre have become active participants in their own learning and are warmly welcomed by the local primary schools. The director commented: “It takes two months to change children’s attitudes from passive observer to active participant, and two years to change the teachers’.” With public funding, the centre could become an important in-service training centre for the district.

* As is well known, Reggio Emilia schools do not follow an external curriculum. The curriculum, or content of the work, is said to be “emergent”, that is, it is chosen primarily by the children and is negotiated with their teacher, whose main task is to support the children in realising and reflecting on their project.

Source: Country Note of Korea, 2003 in OCDE, 2006, p. 51



A LEARNING TASK

Read and write your opinion:

Experience from the OECD reviews in regard to parental involvement

Experience from the OECD reviews suggests that appreciations of parent-staff collaboration (see Box 6.4) change from country to country and across different institutions, unless ministries and research give a strong lead in the field. Educational institutions seem to have greater difficulties in involving parents in child care

centers or centers in the social pedagogy tradition. This may be due to the age of the children involved, but also to the formality, structures and daily routines of education services compared to the flexibility of drop-off and pick-up times practised in child care centers. Schools still struggle to engage families on a large scale, while parents express their desire for greater participation in their children's learning. More research is needed on the issue, and perhaps, more professional development of teachers to undertake parent involvement effectively. Likewise, more socio historical analysis is needed in this field. Certainly, 19th century attitudes to social child care (that is, child care for children of working-class women or from families considered "at-risk") were shot through with class and gender assumptions about the "ignorance" and "neglectful practices" of working-class mothers. Rather than seeing the need to change the deplorable economic situation and harsh working conditions of the poor, societies tended to undertake educational and moral crusades to change the child-rearing practices of working-class mothers

(Hobsbawm, 1975, 2000). In OECD, 2006, p. 153



A LEARNING TASK...

Read and write your opinion:

A popular form of parental engagement seems to be helping with children's reading development: this has been well researched, and clear benefits have been found (Keating and Taylorson, 1996). Research undertaken in the United States with three and four-year-olds has shown that early learning activities at home make a difference: children who are frequently read to and told stories are more likely to recognize all letters of the alphabet, count to 20 or higher, write their own names and read. In addition, children who are taught letters, words or numbers and are taken to the library regularly are more likely to show signs of emerging literacy (Nord et al., 1999).

The PIRLS study², undertaken across 40 countries, has also shown a positive relationship between engaging in early literacy activities at home prior to compulsory education and reading performance at the age of ten. The study recorded the following parent-child activities: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys (e.g., blocks with letters of the alphabet), playing word games and reading aloud signs and labels. Findings show that the reading performance of children in the highest frequency of parent-child activities (i.e., on a daily regular basis) is well ahead of that of their peers with lower frequencies of parent-child activities (Mullis et al., 2003; 2007).

Volunteering and participating in decision In OECD, 2011, p. 226

Coming to the end of this chapter, we ask you to write an example from your own practice or your colleague's that shows the families' participation in the work done in daycare or in Kindergarten.



A LEARNING TASK...

- Why do you consider the chosen situation as a good example?
- Factors that make the situation easier?
- Difficulties? items to be changed? Why?

5. How to evaluate the parental involvement. Some final considerations.

“Review of the literature clearly shows that the most effective intervention programmes ‘involve intensive, early starting, child-focused, centre-based education together with strong parent involvement, parent education, programmed educational home activities and measures of family support’.” (Eurydice, 2009, p. 140)

In the daily work there are some routines that are invariably repeated without following an adequate planning and previous reflection. According to the work done with the parents and relatives of children, this issue often causes the potential of established relationships to have no profit. Often, as reflected above, to the contrary to what the teachers ask in their speeches, the participation of parents/relatives is small, summing up informal contacts everyday or occasional meetings and parties, where they merely respond to requests.

To better understand what happens, it is essential to make a more attentive self-evaluation that gives the teacher the possibility to see what can be changed so that a more effective involvement of parents or relatives could exist in the work practices already in use. We present two evaluation grids with several questions, one for educators and another for parents/relatives. These grids are just an example that may serve as a starting point for building others, more adequate to the characteristics of each specific reality.

Chart 5 – Example of self-evaluation grid for teachers

1) Beginning of the school year

- What knowledge was available for children and their families?
- How was this information gathered?
- How was this knowledge incorporated in the project definition work?
- Did parents give any contribution for the definition of this project? How? Examples?
- Were all parents informed / or had access to project work?

2) Throughout all school year

- Is it usual for parents to participate in activities/small projects that are being carried out? How? Examples?
- Are they all aware of the work that is being done?
- How are parents informed of this work?
- How are their suggestions heard/recorded?
- Are these suggestions integrated into the work done? How?

What are the criteria?

- Are parents/families heard in relation to the work carried out and the assessment of what children are learning? How?
- Do parents/relatives cooperate at parties? How?

3) End of the school year

- How many events were organized in which parents/families could participate ?
- How many meetings were held during the year? What were the aims?
- How many families/parents' suggestions were integrated in the project work?
- There are parents / families to whom I've never spoken or just spoke a few times. Why?
- Was the final evaluation informed or accessible to all parents/families?
- What issues do I have to work on to get all parents /families involved?
- What can I do to promote a bigger participation?

A similar evaluative exercise can be done focused on the parents/families:

Chart 6 – Example of a self- evaluation grid to write parents/families' opinion

1) Beginning of school year

- What knowledge did they ask about your son / daughter?
- How was this information gathered?
- Do you think the information provided was enough? Why?
- Did you get any information regarding the pedagogical project? How?
- Did you have the opportunity to make suggestions to enrich this project?
- Are the objectives of this project clear to you? Do they correspond to what you thought your son/daughter should learn?

2) Throughout the school year

- Do you participate in activities / small projects that are being carried out? How? Examples?
- Are you aware of the work that is being done?
- How do they inform you on this job?
- Are your suggestions heard by the teacher?
- Have you ever had your suggestions integrated into the work done? How? Examples?
- Are parents/families heard in relation to the work children do and to the evaluation of what they are learning? How?
- Do parents/relatives collaborate at parties? How?

3) End of the school year

- How many events were organized in which parents/families could participate?
- How many meetings were held during the year? With what aims?
- Examples of parents 'suggestions that have been integrated into the project work?
- Do you know the other parents? Or are there any with whom you have never had contact?
- Was the final evaluation of the work reported to you?
- What suggestions do you have for a better participation of parents/family?



A LEARNING TASK...

Based on these examples, we ask you to build your own grid of (self) evaluation in order to use it. From the analysis of the answers what do you have to change? How can these changes be made?

The conception on children and their education are changing.

The children's education in early ages redefines itself towards more integrated and wider models, that should be developed in a sustainable way, rather than just a subject of some but of all agents that are involved (Teresa Vasconcelos, 2000; Ana Coelho, 2007).

The work performed in relation to the characteristics of educational policies, in particular in the Portuguese reality, it is evident the urgency in defining pedagogical guidelines for institutions, ensuring the primacy of their educational function. It is essential to ensure the right to a creche of superior quality, specially for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (CNE / Teresa Vasconcelos, 2011).

And in a higher educational quality it is required to exist a greater involvement of parents and family, preparing the educators to the importance of this work. The child is the center and the concept of parental involvement is also at the center of a series of relationships and reciprocities that have to be considered (and known), towards the effectiveness of a true ethic care which is connected with the reflective capacity of adults in a basis of "infinite attention to another," to take decisions in specific situations (Peter Moss, 2001).

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Santarém's team:

Maria João Cardona (coord.)

Isabel Piscalho

Marta Uva

Helena Luís

Teresa Cláudia Tavares

Escola Superior de

Educação / Instituto

Politécnico de Santarém

**With the collaboration
of the students:**

Soraia Cardoso

Susana Godinho

Elódia Oliveira

Marta Calheiros

Cláudia Rosa

Ana Catarina Glória

Filipa Correia

Daniela Aperta

Joana Loureiro

Joana Évora

Liliana Dinis

and the collaboration

of the teacher:

Isabel Correia

toddler

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