



Initial Literature Review – Interpreting Child-centredness to Support Quality and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care

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Starting from the general question *How might different understandings of child-centred practice promote learning amongst diverse groups within early childhood education and care provision?* the Erasmus+ project *Interpreting Child-centredness to support Quality and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2017-1-UK01-KA201-036798) aims at enhancing and extending understandings of the competences required for working in ECEC in diverse contexts, whilst creating innovative professional development to support the ECEC workforce in developing professional competences with a focus on child-centred practice. Whilst taking into consideration the global discourses about ECEC as well as deliberations within the EU, this literature review will provide an initial analysis of the key terms within the project: quality, diversity and child-centredness. Each term is recognised as complex, multi-faceted and variably interpreted in relation to a range of contextual features, not least national governance and policy objectives for ECEC services. The potential scope of the literature review is therefore wide-ranging and far reaching. The review focusses on key debates in relation to quality and diversity, before concentrating on concepts of child-centredness in order to provide an initial framework of understanding for each term to inform later stages of the project. In particular, the review seeks to provide a framework for observing and analysing examples of child-centred practice.

The review draws upon international literature in relation to quality, diversity and child-centredness alongside considering the policies, research and practice within the six participating countries: England, Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Spain and Croatia. The literature review starts with an overview of policy rationales for ECEC, quality and diversity before considering research about child-centredness. Having established a framework for observing child-centred practice, the contexts of ECEC in the participating countries and the position of child-centredness within them is analysed.

Discourses on quality in ECEC

The main priority of EU policies and agendas is no longer accessibility of ECEC services, but the quality of ECEC, which is gaining more and more prominence (Lindeboom & Buiskool, 2013; World Bank, 2011). Interest in the quality of ECEC has perhaps never been greater due to the growing number of

children spending a rising number of hours a day within ECEC services (OECD, 2015; Janta et al., 2016). Further, the economic and social challenges faced by contemporary European societies has seen ECEC positioned as an increasingly important social welfare tool. '[E]ffective service delivery' and 'child experiences and outcomes for higher return of investment' have become central to conceptions of ECEC services (OECD, 2015, 13; Heckman, 2000; World Bank, 2011).

As stated in numerous publications such as the European Commission (2011a); European Commission, (2014); Janta, Van Belle & Stewart (2016); Moser et al. (2017); OECD (2012 and 2015); O'Connell et al., (2016) and Park & Vandekerckhove (2016), high quality ECEC is something that is generally strived for because of the benefits it has for children, their parents, ECEC educators, the state and society at large. Some of the benefits that are widely emphasised focus on the present for the individual child and/or family and some focus on the future and the development of material, cultural, social and/or other capital. The link between the two is visible in thinking about the development and growth of each individual child in the present as something that has clear benefits for the future of the wider community as well as society.

'[H]igh quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is an essential foundation for all children's successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Improving the quality and effectiveness of ECEC systems across the EU is essential to securing smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Good quality and accessible ECEC systems are equally important for empowering all individuals to have successful lives.' (European Commission, 2014, 3).

Enabling women to enter the labour force, preventing early school leaving, decreasing the level of poverty and social exclusion, providing equal opportunities for all, providing children with competences to live productive and full adult lives as lifelong learners are just some of the examples of the benefits of ECEC found in international policies and agendas (European Commission, 2011a; European Commission, 2014; Lindeboom & Buiskool, 2013; Lynch & Vaghul, 2015; Moser et al., 2017; Payler, Georgeson, Wickett, 2013; Van Belle, 2016; Woodhead, 2006). However, it is evident that the benefits being emphasized in relation to ECEC depend on the "quality" of ECEC (Bartolo et al., 2016; Brennan & Adamson, 2014; OECD, 2012; O'Connell et al., 2016).

Approaches to ECEC quality differ based on different epistemologies, different priorities about what ECEC should be, whom it should 'serve', what it is expected to 'do', what the position of the children within ECEC is, whether the focus is on the 'here-and-now' or on the future. Urban (2005, 31) systematised the different perspectives into three distinct approaches to quality: 'relying on scientific

expertise' approaches, 'recognizing multiple perspectives' approaches and 'recontextualising quality' approaches, each of which leads to 'a distinct practice of defining, assessing and supporting quality'. The 'relying on scientific expertise' approaches are characterized by standards against which quality is measured and rated. Within the 'recognizing multiple perspectives' approaches, quality is seen as a relative construct negotiated between different perspectives. The 'recontextualising quality' approaches reconsider attempts of standardization and decontextualization of quality terminology (Urban, 2005).

Within these approaches, there have been numerous attempts to provide aspects, indicators, and/or elements of quality ECEC in order to make this concept more tangible and measurable. For example, considerations about structural, process and sometimes outcome quality can often be found (Bartolo et al., 2016; European Commission, 2014; Janta, Van Belle & Stewart, 2016; Moser et al., 2014, Moser et al., 2017; OECD, 2012; OECD, 2015; Pelatti et al., 2016). Generally speaking, structural quality encompasses the design and organisation of ECEC (European Commission, 2014). Process quality relates to children's experiences of ECEC (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016), their relationships and interactions. Outcome quality deals with benefits for all involved stakeholders, including children's outcomes (European Commission, 2014). The process of identifying structural, process and outcome quality reflect Urban's (2005) scientification of ECEC and the development of decontextualised standards of quality.

The relationship to 'outcomes' is key to interpreting what has informed the various concepts of quality as the definition of quality will be tied to the socially desired (and constructed) outcomes for ECEC services. Not only does quality become something to be defined, but the outcomes have to be determined in order to assess if 'quality' has been reached (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016). The strong association between quality ECEC and child development risks presenting a universal child, with presumed normative development that is divorced from the cultural context (Dahlberg et al., 2013). The child at the centre of quality ECEC becomes a standard to be met. However, the recognition of multiple perspectives and the movements to recontextualise quality recognise that neither quality, nor the child are standardised.

Moser et al. (2014) and Moser et al. (2017) add to the debates on quality contributing to curriculum quality and participatory and dialogical quality. Curriculum quality is referred to as ensuring that children's experiences within ECEC support their holistic development in relation to the culture and contexts to which they belong. Adults should create optimal conditions for children's wellbeing. Cooperation among families, ECEC professionals, other stakeholders and children should determinate the cultural perspectives and approaches to wellbeing. Through these different elements, participatory

and dialogical quality will also be achieved. Again quality is tied to outcomes (the child's holistic development and well-being) and is arguably also encompassing multiple perspectives in culturally and contextually relevant ways, indicating that these characteristics provide a broad foundation to definitions of quality.

More specifically, in policies supporting EU Member States towards higher quality ECEC, quality ECEC is defined through specific principles grouped into five areas: access to ECEC, ECEC workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding (European Commission, 2014). Similarly, Lindeboom and Buiskool (2013) provide elements of quality acknowledged by the European Commission and Parliament: access/participation, political, legal, and financial structures, staff, curriculum, and involvement of parents. Whilst the European Commission (2014) acknowledge the complexities of defining quality and the different methodological and epistemological approaches to quality, the list of areas indicates a leaning towards structural features of quality. However, despite the Commission advocating and supporting EU Member States towards higher quality ECEC, quality ECEC still remains the responsibility of Member States.

Beyond the structural, process and outcome based interpretations of quality, Leserman (2002, 40) emphasises more micro-oriented characteristics of quality ECEC: 'sensitive responsive care-giving, secure social relationships, stimulating verbal interaction, a favourable staff-child ratio, a small group size, a richly equipped play room, high professionalism of the staff, and a reasonable staff salary level', as well as focusing on 'intersubjective co-operation with peers and teachers in challenging, authentic activities with culturally relevant contents', coherent and continuous in relation to other activities, within a curriculum, which is gradually richer and more complex (Ibid, 40). Analysing the different elements of quality ECEC, therefore, demonstrates its many different layers (the macro to micro). The layers of quality ECEC illustrate how quality can be variably interpreted within different cultural contexts. Even in analysing structural attributes of quality ECEC, Europe can be best described as divergent in its approach, despite the common goal of 'quality' ECEC.

A large corpus of ECEC literature on quality ECEC focuses on rethinking the emphasis put on the high returns or outcomes of high quality ECEC, in terms of focusing mainly on the adults children will become and their future productiveness in terms of profitability of the society and the state. Saeverot (2013) warns against objectifying children in this way indicating that

'[w]hat used to be a venue for play, physical activity and upbringing of the human being – all the way back to Fröbel's idea of *Menschenziehung* – has now become more and more of a venue for learning that prepares for schooling. This is related to the human capital mind-set,

which says that the sooner children learn, the more society will benefit in financial terms. Children and youths are seen as important resources, in the sense that they can increase national wealth. (...) Because of its very strong uniformity, economic and instrumental conditioning, which ultimately treats students as objects, the human capital mind-set contradicts humane existence.' (Ibid, 3).

Within this critical discourses about quality ECEC, researchers question ideas about instruments measuring and rating quality, 'technocratic' practices within which educators 'internalize knowledge about quality' and apply it in their everyday practice (Campbell-Barr & Leeson, 2016, 24) and rethink a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to quality ECEC which disregards specificities of different sociocultural contexts infused with context specific values, knowledge and understandings.

Whilst child-centredness has become associated with quality ECEC (Tobin, 2005), the objectives of the *Interpreting Child-centredness to support Quality and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care* project are not to provide a universal interpretation of either quality or child-centredness. The literature on quality ECEC clearly indicates that quality is variably interpreted and that contextualised responses to the questions of quality ECEC should be embedded within the cultural context and reflective of the diversity of populations within them.

Quality ECEC and diversity

Definitions of diversity in ECEC literature are themselves diverse and influenced by the particular differences which are important in that particular context. For example, discussions of diversity are often more concerned with race in US, and with cultural variation in European contexts. An 'inclusive definition' of diverse learners will

'encompass children from culturally and linguistically diverse or socially marginalised backgrounds, children with diagnosed disabilities and/or gifts and children identified by teachers as having behavioural or learning concerns' Petriwskyj, J. (2010).

Quality is theoretically elaborated, researched and 'practised' differently, and this now includes considerations that high quality ECEC should not only be available to all, but should also be culturally sensitive and socially inclusive. This was not always the case; original formulations of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) were criticised for their cultural insensitivity (New and Mallory, 1994), reflecting normative perspectives of child development. In response, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) revised its description of DAP (Gregg, 2011)

and subsequently other assessment and monitoring tools looking at the quality of practice (e.g. the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, ECERS) have also included a cultural component. It should however be noted that in the UK additional scales were added to make it compatible and useful for the UK context (ECERS-E: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Curricular Extension), and modifications are needed to adapt the scale to the Swedish context (Garvis et al., 2018).

Underpinning these considerations is UNESCO's (1994) Salamanca Statement, which made the inclusion of all children, 'regardless of individual differences or difficulties' a priority. The Salamanca statement was based on the Education for All agenda introduced in 1990 and has at its roots the idea that children with special educational needs should be included as a civil rights issue – responding to the wider disability rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s (UPIAS, 1976). This movement emphasised the ways in which society was itself disabling individuals. Education acts as a gateway to many other aspects of society, and so plays a pivotal role in offering opportunities and access to improve participation for all. Furthermore, children's time in educational settings provides the foundations for later attitudes to who should be able to access these opportunities and how people in society should behave to make this possible (Georgeson et al. 2014; Huckstadt and Shutts, 2014).

The move from integration to inclusion can be interpreted as a way to bring children with special education needs into the centre of school life. The Salamanca Statement put forth 'the principle of inclusive education' enrolling 'all children in regular schools' (Ibid, ix). UNESCO's guidelines for how to enact inclusion (UNESCO 2005) specifically mentioned quality as a key aspect of inclusive education as key to lessening the negative consequences of children's specific disadvantage on their later learning and this message is reinforced in later documents (European Commission, 2011a). It also appears in the most recent formulation of the Code of Practice in the UK (DfE/DoH, 2015), which places high quality teaching as the first and automatic stage of support for children in schools, with responsibility lying with the ordinary class teacher, albeit supported by specialists (DfE/DoH, 2015:99). Similarly in Denmark the curriculum emphasises that Danish ECE workers must work on compensating/neutralising the negative effects of social background. This has been supported by a new political agreement from last year (2017) intended to raise the quality in Danish ECEC settings by increasing funding so centres with high amounts of special needs children can employ more educators. This is in addition to initiating trials of targeted social interventions in day care centres to improve cooperation between day care centres, health care and the parents – as well as social advisers and volunteer actors.

The importance of providing an early start has put ECEC in the spotlight, seeing it as especially beneficial for children coming from disadvantaged groups:

'All studies focusing on sub-samples of vulnerable children report that high quality ECEC benefits especially children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, whose gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development are higher than for middle-class children. The research further suggest that a universal service providing good quality programmes for all, in which special attention is given to disadvantaged children, is preferred over separate provision focussed exclusively on targeted populations.' (Bennett, 2012, 8)

High quality ECEC is here seen as something that could possibly compensate for deprivation previously experienced by children. However, in practice, in order for the compensation to take place, children need to be actively engaged and participate in everyday activities (Bartolo et al., 2016), and not be excluded because of the ascription of 'otherness' (Holt, 2004). In research, Bartolo et al. (2016) warn that when researching quality, indicators pertaining to all children can be missing, despite efforts of thinking about quality ECEC as inclusive.

In some contexts, considerations of diversity in relation to quality can also include recognition of the importance of diversity of provision and/or approach, as well as addressing the range of needs and interests of particular children or groups of children (Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998). This can lead to dilemmas of difference (Norwich, 2008); designing targeted provision to match children's particular needs can offer high quality learning experiences but might also emphasise difference and introduce separations. Universal provision, on the other hand, avoids stigma and segregation but might not meet all the needs of all the children. How providers, and policy-makers resolve this dilemma will depend on broader socio-political considerations of universalism and intervention.

Child-centredness in ECEC

One of the ways of getting on a path towards high quality ECEC is child-centredness (Tobin, 2005), whilst also indicating potential for responding to the individual needs and interests of the child. Review of ECEC literature indicates there are several approaches to child-centredness. Political and educational approaches will be discussed for the purposes of this literature review. Politically, the best interests of the child became important after the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Convention (1989) articulates and elaborates on the uniqueness of the child (Article 2), best interests of the child (Article 3), development of the child (Article 6) and child participation (Article 12). Prominent European documents (Sylva et al., 2015; European Commission, 2017) adopted child-centredness as the foundation of the best interests of the child. Educationally, thoughts about child-

centredness have been in the spotlight for a long time throughout history (Chung & Walsh, 2000; Fung, 2015; Campbell-Barr, 2017b). Although child-centredness is often discussed in relation to children's perspectives, Gillis (according to Hallden, 2005) emphasises that child-centredness represents adult ideas about what the best interests of children are; ideas that are therefore not authentically children's perspectives. Helavaara Robertson et al. (2015) suggest the term 'child-initiated' is clearer than 'child-centred', because child-centred is multidimensional and vague about its exact approach and practice.

Chung and Walsh (2000) see child-centredness as a perception of the child:

- a) in the centre of the world,
- b) in the centre of learning, and
- c) as the leader of his/her own learning.

The perception of the child in the centre of the world is a principle of children's well-being and active participation in the contemporary world, in which the child is an active participant and in which the social environment is organized in a way that fulfils the child's needs, interests and expectations (Toros, Tiko & Saia, 2013). This is based on a re-positioning of children's role in society. Placing the child in the centre of learning refers to organising the child's learning according to his/her interests and needs. However, these approaches start from an adult's perspective in terms of thinking about what the adult could do for the child? Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson and Hundeide (2009) see these approaches as adult constructions of children's perspectives. Contrary to these approaches is the perception of the child as an active participant and leader of his/her own learning. Within this approach the children's perspectives of their needs, interests and understanding of the world are visible. These approaches are not different only in terms of the perspective (adults or children's) of child-centredness, but also in terms of power (Toros, Tiko & Saia, 2013). Within this shift of power relations children might take the lead in organising their own learning.

According to numerous researchers (Chung & Walsh, 2000; D'Cruz & Stagnitti, 2008; Cumming, Sumsion & Wong, 2015; Fung, 2015; Georgeson et al., 2015; Helavaara Robertson et al., 2015; Campbell-Barr, 2017b; Cheung, 2017; Sak, Tantekin-Erden & Morrison, 2017) child-centred practice should be seen as:

- a) focusing on children learning through play,
- b) respecting children's needs, interests, strengths and capacities,
- c) recognising children's learning strategies,
- d) recognising children's uniqueness,

- e) respecting children as capable learners,
- f) respecting children's participation and decision making,
- g) respecting children's diversity and individuality, and
- h) respecting children's family and culture.

The statements encompass ideas about high quality ECEC and its role in providing a foundation to children's lifelong learning through the recognition of children's learning evident within them. Further, concepts of quality ECEC as socially inclusive, supporting children diverse needs and backgrounds, is also evident within each of the statements. However, each of the aforementioned statements about the perception of the child illustrates a variation in different practices within the child-centred approach that questions what 'child-centredness' looks like in practice.

Perren, Herrmann, Iljuschin, Frei, Körner and Sticca (2017) discuss a Swiss example of child-centred practice. They present the document *Orientierungsrahmen* as a guideline for ECEC professionals in different educational settings. According to Perren et al., (2017) child-centred practice is understood as practice that gives children opportunities to be explorers and learners in a stimulating, social and material environment. Murphy (2006) gives examples of child-centred practice in some Irish ECEC settings. According to Murphy (2006) child-centred activities are those that are play-oriented, whereby activities ensure learning through free play and exploration. Mlinarević (2004) stated that Croatian ECEC practice is based on a humanistic and developmental approach that sees the child as capable learner. Early childhood settings should be organised in a way that enables the child to construct new knowledge. The child should have the possibility to choose materials to play and explore, as well as time to be involved in activities.

The examples of child-centred practice illustrate its relationship to concepts of quality, through recognition of the child's development, but also highlight that child-centredness is strongly associated with play and exploration in support of children's capability to learn. However, whilst play-based approaches in support of children's learning and development may provide the foundations to child-centred practice, it is important to recognise that play is an equally variably interpreted term. Whilst the literature offers some examples of what child-centredness might look like in practice, it is also evident that there is a need to further explore the concept in detail.

The various theoretical interpretations of child-centredness have to be mediated by ECEC educators at both an epistemological and practical level. For example, ECEC practice might differ from a described

approach due to different understandings of the term child-centredness and an educator's personal and implicit theories about child-centredness (Campbell-Barr, 2017b). There are recognised contradictions within child-centredness with a tension between a liberating pedagogy that supports children's autonomy and freedom and one that recognises the developmentalism embedded in recognising children's learning within ECEC. On a practical level, the use of 'children' within the statements, as opposed to 'child' (as is evident in *child-centred*) illustrates that educators will be meeting the needs, interests, strengths and capacities, learning strategies, uniqueness, participation and decision making, diversity and individuality, and family and culture of more than a 'child'. As Wood (2007) has raised, how can an educator be 'child'-centred in a group of 20 plus children?

The above statements therefore provide a framework with which to observe and analyse what 'child-centredness' looks like in practice (see Appendix Three). For the purposes of this project, an initial stage of analysis included collating and examining ECEC curricula from the six project participant countries: England¹, Ireland, Italy², Denmark, Spain and Croatia) were compared to find whether these elements could be found in their curricula.

Analysis of Country Documentation

Project partners in each of the countries were asked to identify relevant ECEC policy and curriculum documents (with translations as needed). The documents were then analysed for evidence of the different interpretations of child-centred practice. As such, Table One (Appendix One) presents an analysis of evidence of the following items within each of the national contexts:

- Learning through play
- Children's needs
- Children's interests
- Children's capacities
- Individual learning strategies
- Uniqueness of the child
- Child as a capable learner
- Child participation
- Diversity

¹ The focus on England as oppose to the UK recognises that there is devolved responsibility for ECEC in UK, creating different curricular and policies in its constitute parts.

² Due to great differences between different regions, Italy was exemplified by Emilia Romagna and Tuscany.

- Individuality
- Cooperation with families

The list of items is potentially not exhaustive, but provided a framework with which to consider how different national contexts interpreted child-centredness. Partners were invited to comment on the analysis as well as to more openly comment on their cultural interpretation of child-centred practice to facilitate a process of developing a framework for observation and further analysis.

The analysis of educational policies and curricula of the participating countries demonstrate that the policies of all countries are focused on children learning through play, respect for children's needs, interests, strengths and capacities and recognition of children's learning strategies, uniqueness and competence. All countries emphasise respect for children as capable learners, their diversity, families and culture. All participating countries emphasise respect for children's participation and decision making. However, although most categories were found in all of the different curricula, child-centredness will be enacted and practiced differently in each of them as a result of subtle variations in how the terms are interpreted and as a result of the different structural requirements. For example, the analysis of the ECEC systems within each of the participating countries illustrates that there are a range of variables that will impact on the enactment of child-centredness.

Amongst the countries, differences were found on many different levels, from regulations, types of services, responsibilities for services to ECEC educators' qualifications and professional development requirements. These differences could be used as a foundation for thinking about the far from univocal notions of child-centredness and quality in diverse contexts and about the needs, contents and methods of in-service training on child-centredness. Although elements identified as crucial for the concept of child-centredness were found in acts and regulations of all the project's participating countries, perhaps indicating a similar conceptualisation of child-centredness influenced by global and European agendas, practice may differ significantly. Factors such as the qualification types and professional experience of educators is likely to impact on child-centredness due to both different training curricular and professional development requirements, along with the educator's personal and implicit theories identified earlier. Thus, while the analysis of child-centredness within the educational policies and curricula of the participating countries (Appendix One) presents a number of commonalities in regards to rhetoric of child-centredness, its enactment is not solely prescribed from 'above'.

The role of educators working with children gains prominence here in order for all the ideas and approaches to be enacted in practice. ECEC educators are viewed as key to ECEC quality, and therefore

in providing for diversity and for 'doing' the child-centred approach (Campbell-Barr, 2017a and 2017b; European Commission, 2011b). The question that arises is whether ECEC educators have competence in terms of the child-centred approach; in other words, whether their pre-service and in-service training provides them with the 'knowledges' (Campbell-Barr, 2018) that will enable them to 'do' child-centred practice. Even though research studies that investigated child-centredness in practice can be found (e.g. Campbell-Barr, 2017b; Georgeson et al., 2015; Sak, Tantekin-Erden & Morrison, 2016; Sak, Tantekin-Erden & Morrison, 2017), they are scarce, which calls for further research on child-centred practice.

Being child-centred in practice extends beyond knowing what has been prescribed from 'above' in regards to how child-centred is described within curriculum guidance, as it also requires an enactment of that knowledge. Educators who work in ECEC can identify child-centredness as it is described in policy and curriculum documents, but this does not equate with a linear relationship to their knowing-how to perform child-centred practice. Equally, given the variable interpretations of child-centredness evident in the literature analysed, it is likely that educators will be drawing upon multiple interpretations of child-centredness to inform their practice. The next stage of the *Interpreting Child-centredness to support Quality and Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2017-1-UK01-KA201-036798) project is to explore examples of ECEC practice for the varying interpretations of child-centredness. As such, the framework provided in Appendix Three is drawn from the literature presented and the review of the different national context to provide a tool with which to observe, reflect on and analyse child-centredness in practice.

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Appendix One: Analysis of Policy Context

Table One: Child-centredness in project's participating countries: England, Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Spain and Croatia

	England	Ireland	Italy	Denmark	Spain	Croatia
	Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage	<i>Aistear</i>	Several acts and regulations of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany	<i>The Act on Day-Care Facilities</i>	Several acts and regulations	National Curriculum for ECE
Learning through play	<i>Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults.</i>	<i>In these early years children learn through loving, trusting and respectful relationships, and through discussion, exploration and play.</i>	<i>Different approaches: in the Reggio approach educators design the educational environments in order to promote children's learning through exploration, questioning and play. In other approaches, children select activities based on their interests (learning as a collateral effect of play).</i>	<i>Day care services shall promote children's learning and the development of competences through experiences, play and pedagogically organized activities that allow children to immerse, explore and experience.</i>	<i>The working [teaching-learning] methods in both cycles are based on experiences, activities and play.</i>	<i>It is important to provide learning through play for children.</i>
Children's needs	<i>Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development</i>	<i>Child is unique individual with his/her own strengths, interests, abilities,</i>	<i>Respect and inclusion of diversity and promotion of</i>	<i>Children in day care services must have a physical, mental and aesthetic children's</i>	<i>Educational practice must reflect, as a principle, pupil diversity, thus</i>	<i>Educational practice should satisfy individual needs.</i>

	<i>of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.</i>	<i>needs and experiences.</i>	<i>children's competences</i>	<i>environment that promotes their well-being, health, development and learning.</i>	<i>adapting educational practice to the personal characteristics and needs.</i>	
Children's interests	<i>Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.</i>	<i>Child is unique individual with his/her own strengths, interests, abilities, needs and experiences.</i>	<i>"Guidelines for the Maternal Schools" highlighted the relevance of the child centred approach and the child's interests in well-designed experiences as the first mechanism of learning</i>	<i>The children's environment must be assessed in a children's perspective, and children's experiences of the children's environment should be taken into account, taking into account the age and maturity of the children.</i>	<i>Educational practice must reflect, as a principle, pupil diversity, thus adapting educational practice to children's personal ... interests.</i>	<i>The kindergarten provides conditions for achieving high levels of flexibility of the educational process which enables adaptability to concrete opportunities, needs and interests of children.</i>
Children's capacities	<i>Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning ... and can be capable.</i>	<i>Active learning involves children learning by doing things. They use their senses to explore and work with objects and materials. They interact enthusiastically with adults and other children. Through these experiences, children develop the dispositions, skills, knowledge,</i>	<i>Respect and inclusion of diversity and the promotion of children's competences through active engagement in exploration of the environment, collaborative construction of artefacts</i>	<i>Day care services shall promote children's learning and the development of competences through experiences, play and pedagogically organized activities that allow children to immerse, explore and experience.</i>	<i>Globalization is the capacity that allows each subject to establish his or her own network of intellectual relationships and connections between different fields of knowledge. Article 13 of LOMCE includes objectives focused on ECEC supporting children's holistic development.</i>	<i>Educational practice should respect development of children's potentials in accordance with their personal pace.</i>

		<i>understanding, attitudes, and values that will help them to grow as confident and competent learners.</i>			<i>Decree 330/2009 recognises children as knowledgeable and active explorers.</i>	
Individual learning strategies	<i>Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.</i>	<i>Child ... learn at his/her own rate.</i>	<i>ECEC services are founded on children's rights and they promote their learning potentials.</i>	<i>Day care services, in cooperation with the parents, should provide children with care and support the diverse development and self-esteem of the individual child.</i>	<i>Educational practice must reflect, as a principle, pupil diversity, thus adapting educational practice to the ... cognitive styles of children, given the importance of the rhythm and the process of maturation at these ages</i>	<i>Children should perceive themselves as competent and successful by developing different learning strategies.</i>
Uniqueness of the child	<i>Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.</i>	<i>Child is unique individual with his/her own strengths, interests, abilities, needs and experiences. Recognise and build on these when you are helping them to learn and develop.</i>	<i>All children from 0 to 6 have the right and equal opportunities to develop their potentials of inter-relationship, agency, creativity, learning in a safe and stimulating emotional, playful, cognitive environment.</i>	<i>Day care services, in cooperation with the parents, should provide children with care and support the diverse development and self-esteem of the individual child as well as contribute to the child's well-being</i>	<i>There are no specific quotes about the uniqueness of the child, but the whole curriculum is based on the idea of the uniqueness of each and every child.</i>	<i>The child is a unique individual and has his/her own opinion, culture and rights.</i>
Child as a capable learner	<i>Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning.</i>	<i>Child is a confident and able learner.</i>	<i>All children from 0 to 6 have the right and equal opportunities to develop their potentials of inter-relationship, agency,</i>	<i>Day care services shall promote children's learning and the development of competences through experiences, play and</i>	<i>The areas of the second cycle of Early Childhood Education should be understood as areas of action, as learning spaces of all</i>	<i>Children should perceive themselves as competent and successful learners.</i>

			<i>creativity, learning in a safe and stimulating emotional, playful, cognitive environment.</i>	<i>pedagogically organized activities that allow children to immerse, explore and experience</i>	<i>kinds: attitudes, procedures and concepts, which will contribute to the development of children and promote their approach to the interpretation of the world, giving meaning and facilitating their active participation in it.</i>	
Child participation	<i>Each area of learning and development must be implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity....Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults.</i>	<i>Children are citizens with rights and responsibilities. They have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them.</i>	<i>ECEC services are based on children's rights to play, to be respected and to have their potentials recognised. In the Reggio approach, citizenship is promoted through dialogue, recognition of the point of view of others.</i>	<i>Day care services shall provide children with participation, co-responsibility and understanding of democracy. As a result, day care services should contribute to the development of children's independence, ability to enter into committed communities and cohesion with and integration into Danish society.</i>	<i>The areas of the second cycle of Early Childhood Education should be understood as areas of action, as learning spaces of all kinds: attitudes, procedures and concepts, which will contribute to the development of children and promote their approach to the interpretation of the world, giving meaning and facilitating their active participation in it.</i>	<i>ECE should allow children to choose activities, content, partners for activities, space and ways of designing activities and encourage them to take responsibility for their choices.</i>
Diversity	<i>Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that</i>	<i>Diversity is about welcoming and valuing individual and group differences, and understanding and</i>	<i>Respect and inclusion of all the diversities (cognitive, emotional, social, and special needs).</i>	<i>The guiding principle in Denmark for young children with disabilities and additional educational</i>	<i>Educational practice must reflect, as a principle, pupil diversity.</i>	<i>ECE should avoid any stereotypes and prejudices</i>

	<i>every child is included and supported.</i>	<i>celebrating difference as part of life.</i>		<i>and support is to make it possible for them to attend mainstream ECEC settings. The local authorities are responsible for ensuring that ECEC centres provide the supports necessary for enhancing the children's integration. (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017a, 7)</i>		<i>and ensure the acceptance of each child.</i>
Individuality	<i>Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.</i>	<i>Each child has his/her own set of experiences and a unique life-story.</i>	<i>All children from 0 to 6 have the right and equal opportunities to develop their potentials.</i>	<i>Day care services, in cooperation with the parents, should provide children with care and support the diverse development and self-esteem of the individual child as well as contribute to the child's well-being.</i>	<i>... each child has a different baggage of learning, a rhythm of development, certain interests.</i>	<i>ECE should ensure acceptance of each child and individual approach to every child.</i>
Cooperation with families	<i>Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a</i>	<i>Aistear supports parents as their children's primary educators during early childhood, and promotes effective partnerships between</i>	<i>It supports the educational role of families, by promoting their involvement in the educational community; it supports the working needs of the families,</i>	<i>Parents' board in a day care institution shall establish principles for the work of the day care institution and for the use of a budget framework for the day</i>	<i>In order to respect the fundamental responsibility of parents or guardians at this stage, the schools will cooperate closely with them and establish mechanisms</i>	<i>One of the curriculum's main principles is cooperation with families.</i>

	<i>strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.</i>	<i>parents and practitioners.</i>	<i>with a particular attention to mono-parental families.</i>	<i>care institution within the goals and limits set by the municipal council.</i>	<i>to favour their participation in their children's educational process.</i>	
Respecting children's culture	<i>Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.</i>	<i>Promoting equality is about creating a fairer society in which everyone can participate equally.</i>	<i>It accepts and respects all the diversities should they be of mother tongue, gender, religion and ethnic.</i>	<i>The children's environment must be assessed in a children's perspective, and children's experiences of the children's environment should be taken into account, taking into account the age and maturity of the children.</i>	<i>Activities should be proposed that lay to bare the culture and customs comprising the group of children, and favour their identity with their physical and social environment.</i>	<i>ECE should help children to develop sensitivity to the needs and acceptance of others. The ECE curriculum highlights the pluralism of culture and gender, racial, ethnic, religious, national and social differences.</i>

Appendix Two: Country Contexts

Table Two: Overview of ECEC systems in the project’s participating countries (England, Ireland, Denmark, Spain, Italy and Croatia)

Country	Split or Unitary Governance of ECEC Services	Age Range of ECEC Services	Historical Features of ECEC	ECEC Features of Interest
England	Unitary	0-5	Whilst there are many recognised ECEC pioneers from the UK, policy intervention and support was limited until the 1990s, from which time there has been rapid and continued policy developments (Selbie et al., 2015).	A historical legacy of a split governance models has created many disparities in the provision of ECEC, fuelled by a mixed market model. Training requirements are therefore varied across services (Selbie et al., 2015).
Ireland	Split	0-6	<i>Ireland differs from most European countries in that there has been no long tradition of providing ECEC services. This has been changing significantly over the past decade.</i> (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017c, 2)	<i>Ireland has made major progress in the development of the provision of ECEC services for children aged 0-6 years since 2000. Initially, State investment focused upon building infrastructural capacity for ECEC service delivery. Since 2014, the focus has widened to include issues relating to access to and the quality of ECEC provision and practice.</i> (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017c, 10)
Denmark	Unitary	0-6	<i>Historically, there has long been a holistic approach towards ECEC for children under 6 years of age in Denmark. Today this is reflected in the fact that all ECEC services come under the auspices of one ministry, are regulated by the same law, have the same pedagogical philosophy and the same professional staff</i> (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017a, 10)	<i>There are increasing expectations placed on ECEC staff combined with declining staff-child ratios and a decreasing overall proportion of professionals (pædagoger) qualified at Bachelor level</i> (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017a, 10).
Spain	Mixed ³	0-6		Spain provides full, tuition-free education for children starting at three years of age. But tuition-free provision is rarely

³ Although ECEC is treated as a single stage of education in the State-wide education code (LOE/LOMCE), at the regional administration level, the two cycles within the ECEC stage are treated quite separately, each with its corresponding provision and staff requirements.

			<p>Historically speaking, ECEC was the last stage of educational provision to be contemplated and developed by the Spanish State, and in many ways it remains heavily conditioned by and subordinated to the demands of Primary Education.</p> <p><i>Early childhood education and care in Spain was first recognised in the 1990 Education Act as an integrated, non-compulsory stage of education in its own right. (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017d)</i></p>	<p>available for children from birth to three years of age. This is so even though the full stage of ECEC in Spain is contemplated by law as “educational” and is designed to educate children from birth to six years of age. Moreover, teacher/child ratios are very high. For example, in classrooms with three-year-olds, the ratio is 1:25, and may even be higher if latecomers or children who delay compulsory schooling are present in the classroom.</p>
Italy	Split	0-6	<p>Italy has been the home of many revolutionary ideas and practices of ECEC, like the opening of <i>Casa dei Bambini</i> in 1907 or the Reggio kindergartens during the 1960s. <i>Kindergartens have been recognized as educational institutions since 1928. (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017b, 9)</i></p>	<p>Reform of the ECEC system is in progress in Italy.</p>
Croatia	Unitary	0-6	<p>ECEC in Croatia has a long history. First ECEC regulations existed in the 19th century, as well as first ECEC settings. First settings were in the domain of welfare and care, but since 1950 ECEC has been part of educational system.</p>	<p>ECEC in Croatia is the first stage of the educational system. Although ECEC is not mandatory, it was the very first within the educational system to develop a National Curriculum. There is a present change in education of ECEC educators from only a Bachelor to the possibility of earning a Master degree.</p>

Table Three: Key Data on National Contexts

	Public expenditure on early childhood as % of Gross National Income - 2014	Participation in early education (aged 4 years old and the starting age of compulsory school as % of inhabitants of the corresponding age group - 2012	Population on 1 January 2013 - those less than 5 years
European Union (2018 composition)	:	93.90%	26,580,861
Denmark	1.1	98.00%	312,956
Ireland	0.1	99.10%	354,785
Spain	0.6	97.40%	2,422,765
Croatia	not available	71.70%	213,236
Italy	0.5	99.20%	2,737,141
United Kingdom⁴	0.2	97.30%	573,583
Data from EuroStat	http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uae_fine08&lang=en	http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do	http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do
Source	Title: Total educational expenditure by education level, programme orientation and type of source	Title: Participation/ enrolment in education (ISCED 0-4)	Title: Population on 1 January by age group and sex
	Code: educ_uae_fine01	Code: educ_ipart	Code: demo_pjangroup
	Last update of data: 16/04/2018	Last update of data: 15/09/2015	Last update of data: 27/02/2018

⁴ The UK is a recognised Member State of the European Union up until the agreed date for Brexit. References to England within the report reflect the devolved governance for ECEC in the UK. However, data is recorded at the level of the UK.

Table Four: Key ECEC documents and standards in the project’s participating countries (England, Ireland, Denmark, Spain, Italy and Croatia)

	England	Ireland	Denmark	Spain	Italy	Croatia
Acts and regulations	Childcare Act 2006 - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/pdfs/ukpga_20060021_en.pdf	The Education Act (1998, amended in 2015) and the Child Care Act (1991, amended in 2016) http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/20160510ChildCareActEarlyYrsRegs2016SI221of2016.pdf	The Day-Care Facilities Act (Dagtilbudsloven) https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=18205	Many different documents	http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/1044_71.htm Act 6th december 1971, n. 1044	National curriculum for ECEC The ECEC Act
Are there standards regulating ECEC?	Early Years Foundation Stage - https://www.gov.uk/early-years-foundation-stage	Yes http://siolta.ie/	No specific standards	Yes	For 0-3 Regional standards, not everywhere. For 3-6: State http://www.indicazioni nazionali.it/documenti/Indicazioni_nazionali_in_fanzia_primo_ciclo.pdf	Yes
National Curriculum	Early Years Foundation Stage	Aister	Pedagogical Learning Plans	The base curriculum (also referred to as “minimum teachings”) is laid out in two pieces of State-wide legislation:	There is no national curriculum for children under the age of 3. Each Region can develop its own regulations about the	National curriculum for ECEC

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main educational code: the LOMCE (based on the LOE); and - Royal Decree 1630/2006. <p>But there is no official document referred to as the “National Curriculum” per se.</p>	<p>criteria to follow in order to certificate an ECEC service (nursery, playgroup, childminding) and differences are great.</p> <p><i>Kindergartens are required to work according to “National Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-primary Institutions and the First Cycle of Education” (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017b).</i></p>	
Ministry responsible	Department of Education	Department of Children & Youth Affairs, National Government.	Ministry for Children and Social Affairs	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MECS), and there are 17 regional Education Administrations	Regional for Nurseries; State for Children’s schools (for 3-6)	Ministry of Education and Science
Types of ECEC services	Childminders; children's centres; day nurseries; extended schools; out-of-school services or kids' clubs; holiday play schemes/clubs; preschools/playgroups; nursery schools and classes; and registered or approved nannies (although they are	Early years services	ECE settings; Age – integrated centres; Day nurseries; Kindergartens; Family daycare	0-3 Early Childhood Schools (Escolas Infantís 0-3). Early Childhood Care Points (Puntos de Atención á Infancia). Early Childhood Spaces (Espazos Infantís). Travelling (“Itinerant”) Associations (Asociacións Itinerantes). Nest Homes (Casas Niño).	Nurseries, playgroups; childminding; micro-nurseries, children-families centres	Kindergartens (0-6)

	not legally required to register) some parent/carer and toddler groups (although they are not legally required to register).			Early Childhood Schools (0-6). Primary schools providing the second cycle of ECEC (3-6).		
Who provides the services?	Government Private Voluntary sector Childminders	Child minders (not regulated) Private NGO	Municipality-led Private	Public sources (State, regional and municipal levels); Publicly chartered cooperatives and private schools; Private sources.	Municipality-led Private Cooperative Private-religious	Public Private Religious
Funding	Between 15 and 30 hours for all three and four year olds and disadvantaged two year olds	2 years free preschool Parents	Municipalities, Privately owned (parents, associations or businesses)	Some placements are tuition-free in fully public/State-run schools, although charter schools often request "voluntary" monthly fees	Regions for 0-3 years State funded public	Government - 250 hours of preschool Local authorities Parents
School starting age	Compulsory schooling starts the term after a child's 5 th birthday, but most four year olds access ECEC in the Reception Class of a school	6	6	Admission age: 3 months. The full stage of ECEC (0-6) is considered by law to be part of the education system, but the first cycle (0-3) is mostly governed by non-educational administrations, and full provision is not covered by public administrations.	6	6
Pluralism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Percentage of children enrolled in ECEC services	79%	97%	More than 97%	67%	22,8% for Nurseries (different percentage across Regions); 98% for children's schools	62%
Average time children spend in ECEC	There is funding for the following groups of children: disadvantaged 2 year olds (15 hours), all 3 and 4 year olds (15 hours) and 3 and 4 year olds where both parents are working (30 hours). Children's hours vary considerably according to parental choice. There is a maximum contact time of 10 hours per day for each child using funded hours.	10 hours	7 hours and 4 minutes	A general week is 25 hours. However, the regional educational authorities are responsible for establishing the school day, which may vary according to the ownership of the centre or school. Thus, the schedule of public schools that teach the complete stage is usually 35 hours per week, which translates into a school day of 7 hours a day from Monday to Friday. However, regulations that regulate the requirements of the first cycle of ECEC, in some Autonomous Communities limit a maximum day length to 8 hours a day.	8 hours	10 hours
Child - staff ratio	1:3 age under 2; 1:4 age 2; 1:8 age 3-4 (private sector); 1:13	1:3 age 0-1 years, 1:5 age 1-2; 1:6: age 2-3 Preschool 1:11,	0-2 years: 1:3,5, 3-6 years: 1:6,8	1: 8 under 1 year 1:13 for 1-2 years 1:16 to 20 for 2-3 years 1:25 for 3-6 years	1:5 for children 3-12 months (some Regions 1:6)	1:2 age under 1; 1:6 age 1 - 1,5; 1:6 age 1,5 - 2; 1:7 age 2-3; 1:9

	age 3-4 (maintained sector)	sessional. Full day care 1:8		1:10 for mixed age groups between 0 and 2 years 1:15 for mixed age groups from 0 to 3 years These ratios can rise due to late enrolments or to children who delay compulsory schooling.	1:7 for children 12-36 months (some Regions 1:8, 1:9) 1:10 only for classes exclusively composed of children 24-36 months Generic assistant/children: 1:21 children Children's school (3-6): range 1:26-1:28	age 3-4; 1:10 age 4-5; 1:12 age under 5
Availability	Yes	Yes	Yes	68% of the population between 0-3 years is not schooled or served. However, not all families in this sector seek ECEC services.	Yes	Yes
Qualifications of the educators	In private or voluntary nurseries the manager must hold at least a full and relevant Level 3 qualification and at least half of all other staff must hold a full and relevant level 2 qualification. Childminders complete an introductory course and are accountable	All preschool educators are required to have a minimum level 5 qualification, preschool leaders working in a room offering the free preschool year or ECEC scheme must have a minimum level 6 qualification. Higher capitation applies to educators with a level 7 qualification.	Bachelor in ECE, but there is also a number of assistants in day care and a number of employees with no pedagogical qualifications.	To teach in the first cycle, educators must have one or both of the following degrees: - A four-year University degree in the specialty of ECE - An Advanced Vocational Training degree in the specialty of ECE Technician To teach in the second cycle, educators must hold:	Recently approved State Act for a Bachelor Degree as mandatory for 0-3 year services. 5-year University degree for Children's schools	Bachelor and Master of ECE

	<p>for the work of any assistants.</p> <p>In a maintained class in a school or a maintained nursery there must be a degree level qualified teacher and at least one other level 3 staff member.</p> <p>Reception classes have degree level qualified teachers</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A four-year University degree in the specialty of ECE Teacher. <p>Those holding the earlier three-year University degree in ECE may also gain access by completing additional requirements</p>		
Professional development	Voluntary	Not mandatory	Yes	Mandatory	Regional diversity, but mainly mandatory, usually 20 hours per year	Mandatory

Appendix Three: Framework for Observation, Reflection and Analysis (with annotated instruction)

Type of setting (e.g. school private / public/ maintained/nursery/ child minder/ day nursery)		Locality (e.g.urban /rural/ deprived/ affluent)		Date of observation	
Number of Children (in the setting and in the observation) Age range of the children in setting and the observation		Staffing (e.g. teachers/ assistants/ volunteers/ educators)		Unique Code (to provide an identification number for the observation)	
Time	Narrative		Who is involved Please include details about children and staff, gender, ethnicity, additional needs and location.		Reflection (to be added in conversation with staff after event)
	<p><i>Observation of activity written at the time of observation or following observation.</i></p> <p><i>To include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Description of what happened</i> <i>Children’s Dialogue in quotation marks</i> <i>Photos if necessary/possible</i> 		<p><i>-how many children in the activity in the group gender/age/ethnicity / additional needs</i></p> <p><i>-how many adults, teaching assistants, educators, volunteers</i></p> <p><i>-location where is the observation taking place e.g. outside, lunchtime, at the art area, on a trip, home time.</i></p>		<p><i>possible reference to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>schemas,</i> <i>previous play/learning</i> <i>achievements-/new learning/new play</i> <i>links to curriculum or assessments</i> <i>new friendships/collaborative play</i> <i>social and emotional development</i> <i>future possible opportunities for learning</i>
	Levels of Involvement (Optional) 1 2 3 4 5	Levels of Wellbeing Optional 1 2 3 4 5			

Classification of Child Centred Practice and Why:

Use prompts (opposite) or other possibilities to reflect on how observation shows child centred learning.

Share this with colleague and reflect upon observation.

Focus on what child centeredness means to you and your colleagues and discuss with reference to this observation.

Prompts

- Children learning through play

- Respecting children's needs both physical and emotional interests, strengths, weaknesses and capacities,

- Recognising children's learning strategies,

- Recognising children's uniqueness,

- Respecting children as capable learners,

- Respecting children's participation and decision making,

- Respecting children's diversity and individuality,

- Respecting children's family and culture.

- Children in the centre of the world, in the centre of learning, and as the leader of his/her own learning.

- OTHER

