



Intercultural curriculum design in early childhood education

Bajzáth, Angéla – Bereczkiné Záluszi, Anna
– Darvay, Sarolta – Lehmann, Miklós

The IECEC+ Project 2018-1-HU01-KA201-047763 (2018-2021) aims at strengthening collaboration among different European institutions working within (or in relation to) early childhood education (ECEC) settings. The general objectives of the project are to contribute to the integration of disadvantaged children and improve the quality of institutional education and care in early childhood. The immediate goal of the project was to learn about the intercultural competencies of professionals working in the field and to assess their training needs in the areas of early childhood education. The Italian, Spanish, Belgian, and Hungarian early childhood educators involved in the projects have gained experiences that can be incorporated into an inclusive early childhood education environment. Based on these experiences, a pilot training was designed and tested for improving early childhood educators' attitudes towards intercultural and inclusive practices. The effect of the pilot training was monitored by means of observational data. The IECEC project also aimed to study and make available successful experiences, good practices and innovative solutions.

Keywords: interculturalism, inclusion, ECEC, nursery

Introduction

This article is intended to present the research and work of researchers from Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (ELTE TÓK) and early childhood education professionals at the Józsefváros Joint Nurseries (JEB) in the 8th district of Budapest. Within the framework of European Union-funded, Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnerships, the authors joined forces as a part of the project entitled, 'IECEC - Intercultural Early Childhood Education and Care: Curriculum Design for Professionals'. This initiative contributes toward ameliorating and broadening quality services and developing the knowledge and competency of early childhood educators while focusing on children with disadvantaged background and the fight against exclusion.

The project created a professional joint think tank with the aim of sharing practical experience that helps make the work of early childhood teachers both multidimensional and individual. The partners in the project are ELTE TÓK,

Galileo Progetti Nonprofit Kft. (Hungary), Józsefvárosi Egyesített Bölcsődék (Hungary), Università di Firenze (Italy), Arca Cooperative Sociale (Italy), Erasmus Hogeschool (Belgium). The participants prepared a comparative analysis of early childhood education in four countries: Hungary, Italy, Belgium, and Spain. In this article, we present some of the stages of this exciting and uplifting work that was conducted in a spirit of unifying both theory and practice. Deployed as part of a team effort in collaboration with the academic world, these efforts targeted problem analysis, multiculturalism, organisational development, and the establishment of professional communities oriented towards practice on the one hand, and the renewal of educational work in nurseries on the other.

Intercultural approaches are complex and multidimensional given that they not only involve a dynamic and interactive understanding of cultures and societies but also demand the processes of critical self-reflection regarding the concepts, beliefs, and practices related to cultural values and cultural diversity. The multifaceted dimensions of pluricultural societies and inter- and intracultural interactions requires developing a progressive, in-depth awareness of these interlinking and complex realities. Designing an intercultural curriculum for ECEC professionals requires different dimensions (both theoretical and practical in nature) and also requires provision of a sufficiently solid approach to the various aspects that are involved in intercultural theory and practice (Wagner et al., 2017).

In addition to this, educators need self-reflective and self-critical practices and a comprehension of the structural aspects that affect the biographical and everydayness dimension of the cultural subjectivities, including those of the educators themselves. It is important to avoid reducing interculturalism into a purely technical and abstract dimension¹. To achieve these goals, we planned and tested a pilot training for ECEC professionals who are in contact with children under the age of three. Our partner in testing was The Józsefváros Joint Nurseries (Józsefvárosi Egyesített Bölcsődék, JEB) in Budapest's 8th district (known as Józsefváros) which operates under the auspices of the Local Government. The social composition of the population residing within the 8th district is rather heterogeneous and contains a mixture of highly skilled professionals and socio-cultural disadvantaged. The district is divided into eleven quarters. The architecture of the quarters is significantly different in that it features both modern and historic architecture, but also has slum of socially degraded housing stock. Neighbourhood population is a separate indicator in terms of housing status, educational attainment, and income.

In Hungary, parents can send their children to the nursery closest to their place of residence, a factor that allows researchers to view nurseries as a kind of 'cross-section' of a given quarter. In Józsefváros, the social situation of the families who send their children to the nurseries is different. JEB operates

¹ The IECEC+ Project 2018-1-HU01-KA201-047763 aims at strengthening collaboration among different European institutions working within (or in relation to) ECEC settings. It has the objective of developing a new intercultural curricular program targeting ECEC practitioners and learners working at pluricultural contexts.

seven member nurseries, all found in different geographical locations in the district. These early childhood services can accommodate children who are from 20 weeks to three years in age. The environment is familiar and suitable for current professional requirements. As regards the characteristics of the care area, JEB provides professionally thoughtful, high-quality obligatory and voluntary services that focus not only on children under the age of three but also on their surrounding families through various programs. JEB also runs the Sure Start Children Centre (Józsefvárosi Biztos Kezdet Gyerekház). The Sure Start Children Centre's network strives for the social integration of children under the age of five who display sociocultural disadvantages and their families.

During our pilot training conducted within the framework of the 'IECEC Erasmus+ project', early childhood educators gained insights into the theory and practice of holistic thinking that emphasises the goals of environmental and social sustainability, the recognition and appreciation of aspects of environmental education in nursery schools, inclusion, child diversity, and freedom from exclusion.

Institutional provision of early childhood education and care is characterised by diversity, which includes the need for adaptable and flexible practices that reflect the needs and interests of children and families. An important institutional challenge is to create pedagogically 'rich' spaces that address the differences, similarities, and diversity of children and families (Silva et al, 2020).

From time to time, flexible and reflective practice requires a rethinking of the institution's built and natural environment (including spaces and materials) in a variety of ways that are flexible yet also reflect the value system of sustainability. In this paper, we will describe four of our project's main aims in examining: (1) early childhood spaces for intercultural education, their needs and requirements; (2) the role of literature in both caring for disadvantaged children and practicing intercultural education; (3) the design of a sustainable and green environment for inclusive education; and (4) art activities in support of the formation of cultural identity.

Nursery spaces – supporting intercultural education

The project's theoretical background is based on the recognition that early childhood education makes the greatest contribution to later education and good learning outcomes, thereby helping children to achieve success in learning and social adaptation later in life. The American economist James Heckman won the Nobel Prize for his research showing that early support makes a significant contribution to children and young people's success in coping with the challenges they face in school and later in life. In other words, the development that occurs in a child's early years delivers the greatest return on investment. Other research confirms that children learn most between the ages of 20 months and three years. This is also an important finding in helping vulnerable and disadvantaged families (Silva et al., 2020).

Research is needed to identify and clarify which early interventions strengthen children's cognitive and affective skills. Children's language or

mathematical competences, their interactions with children and adults, their social relationships (social competences) as well as the ability to acquire and develop creative and artistic competences (for example through play) are all equally important areas. Children's learning and development must therefore be understood and supported from a broader perspective. Both the 2009 Eurydice report and the 2014 Eurydice/Eurostat Key Data report have shown that the quality of early institutional education has a positive impact on children's later school performance, social adaptation, and skills acquisition. Research clearly shows that high-quality early childhood education and care leads to significantly better performance that can translate into up to a one- or two-year advantage based on international tests of basic skills such as PISA and PIRLS.

Early childhood education's positive effects are particularly apparent among disadvantaged groups, including migrant and low-income families, for whom access to quality care can make a big difference in helping children lift themselves out of poverty and family dysfunction. Supporting children from different socio-cultural backgrounds in early childhood education is crucial for later learning outcomes. Early childhood education and care that complements the central role of the family has a deeper and more lasting impact than any subsequent intervention. A child's earliest experiences form the basis of all later learning; when a solid foundation is laid in the early years, later learning is more effective and more likely to continue throughout the child's life.

Early childhood is the period of life when education has the greatest impact on development and is most effective in reversing the effects of disadvantage. Research shows that poverty and family dysfunction are most closely associated with poor educational outcomes. By the age of three, large differences in cognitive, social, and emotional development can already be observed between children from affluent versus poor families; if not addressed separately, the differences tend to widen by the age of five (Bereczkiné Záluszi, 2017).

Learning environments have an impact on different learning experiences. The appropriate design of learning environments in early childhood education institutions influences children's later social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes. Together with the design of spaces in the nursery, the usage of appropriate colours and objects also influences children's learning and the processes of establishing and maintaining relationships with parents.

Any environment cannot be viewed as fixed, given that our circumstances are shaped by our social activities. The spaces we use have a significant impact on our quality of life, our behaviour, and our social relationships. Appropriate design of the built environment can also serve educational purposes by bringing people closer to their own living space and helping them better navigate their surroundings, for example. The aim of environmental education is to develop complex, creative learning based on action and experience.

As was mentioned previously, supporting children from different socio-cultural backgrounds in early childhood education is crucial for later learning outcomes. Early childhood education and care that complements the central role of the family has a deeper and more lasting impact than any subsequent intervention. A child's earliest experiences form the basis of all later learning.

If a solid foundation is laid in the early years, later learning is more effective and more likely to continue throughout an individual's lifetime. The design of learning environments in early childhood also influences later socialisation outcomes. The design of the spaces in the nursery determines both the learning of children and the way they interact and relate to their parents (Bereczkiné Záluski, 2018).

To study the optimal design for learning environments, we have created a joint course for Bachelor and Master students at the Faculty of Teacher Education and Early Childhood Education at ELTE and the Moholy-Nagy University of Arts and Design to create supportive nursery spaces². We started from the belief that students in education would share what they know about early childhood learning with the arts and design students while future designers would gain and insight into designing spaces and objects geared toward weighing and meeting users' existing needs. In the long term, the course also aims to reduce the risk of early school leaving. We based this collaboration on the premise that, if our environments reflect the interaction of different cultures, then our environments also affect the way communities live together (Keszei et al., 2019; Kovács et al., 2019). Within the course, we identified four themes to be addressed: arrival, eating, hygiene-related tasks, and free play. For each of the four topics, we created small groups that were divided to include a mixture of student teachers and student designers working on a given topic. The course is led by one lecturer each from ELTE-TOK and MOME while a colleague from a nursery school provides professional, practical support.

The aim of the course is to support early childhood experience in the context of institutional education. The basic principle of the course is that later learning and creativity can only be effectively supported if the foundations for this are already established in early childhood education. The course aims to develop an innovative approach. During the course, teacher and design students will jointly design nursery spaces based on age-appropriate learning and experiential learning while using inter-professional learning methods to help students experience interdisciplinary learning and consciously design integration. In early childhood learning, it is important to design the classroom, including the equipment to be used, a consciously chosen selection of toys, and a deliberate array of colours and shapes. Providing optimal conditions for the external learning environment can contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation that meets personal needs. Through its exploration of early childhood learning and the design of learning environments, the course will allow students to gain experience in innovative learning environments and navigate their own research with confidence.

By working as a team, sharing their experience in design and pedagogy, and understanding and supporting each other, students will create learning environments that are inspiring to explore and safe to experience for young

² The instructors of the course are Ákos Levente Lipóczy DLA Head of the Design Institute, Associate Professor, researcher, and creative learning expert; Angela Bajzáth PhD, Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education; our professional consultant, Erika Báder, Sure Start Children Center (Biztos Kezdet Gyerekház).

children. The results of the course will be shared with students from both universities and practitioner colleagues with whom the students have worked and consulted during the course of examining problematic issues.

Literature project in The Józsefváros Joint Nurseries in Budapest

In Hungary, regulatory mechanisms support inclusion at the level of documents, but it is up to each institution to devise the way in which it is the most capable of implementing inclusion (Bajzáth, 2018, p. 35). The high quality and receptive early childhood education, covering everyone and available to anyone, obviously can only partly compensate for the disadvantages suffered in a family. For disadvantaged children it is only possible to achieve long-term, positive effects with a comprehensive strategy, working together with other initiatives of other policies (healthcare, housing, employment, etc.) (Darvay, 2018, p. 14). What sort of education arriving child receive at the institution is mainly up to the educator's level of motivation (Bajzáth, 2018, p. 28). It is very important that the professional staff at the nurseries keep abreast of the latest phenomena in children's culture, including paradigm shifts in children's literature and new experience techniques in methodology. When adequately prepared, staff can then create spontaneous situations that serve as a fertile ground for children's aesthetic receptivity. The way children relate to books and literature depends to a great extent on the experience-centeredness of literary education in educational institutions, the loving atmosphere they experience there, and the professional knowledge of early childhood educators. Naturally, the role of parents and the home environment is paramount in conveying the first literary experience, but for children attending nursery it is the early childhood educators' and caregivers' responsibility to select the best gems of literary culture for the nursery's daily program and present these in an emotionally rich manner, thereby allowing the aesthetic experience to unfold during daily activities.

Creating early literacy experience in response to children's needs and supporting literacy skills in a multi-faceted fashion as part of the daily routine requires an appropriate level of professional knowledge among educators who furthermore embrace new information. Young children's interest in algorithms in the internal and external world expressed in short rhythmic texts is conspicuous at an early age: they perceive and enjoy the cadence of lines in traditional nursery rhymes, songs and games, and verses that also stimulate them to move. Beyond poetic genres, the frequency of storytelling and the aesthetic quality of tales determine the intensity of interest in literature evolving in early childhood. Out of the many approaches to examining the genre of children's tales, it is mainly psychological studies that points to the fact that the symbolism of fairy tales and the attitudes of heroes coincide with children's view of the world. It can therefore be said that the motifs of fairy tales are in harmony with the process of children's psychological growth.

Educational research addresses the linguistic and cognitive development related to fairy tales and the role of fairy stories in developing social

competences. Psychologists, literacy researchers, and education professionals have paid increasing attention to the specific issue of how to counterbalance young children's time spent by visually centred acquisition of information by emotions-dominated, intimate literary experiences in institutional education. Thanks to the work of publishers and many dedicated editors, new children's books have been published in recent years. In the spirit of effectively supporting emerging literacy, the availability of new children's books and high-quality publications provide an impetus to literacy processes in early childhood. To support childhood emotions, it would be desirable to make these good publications available to the largest number of children.

There is a consensus in that appropriate literacy skills development and speech support in early childhood should use anthologies of children's literature that provide aesthetically rich material for a modern approach as well as for developing targeted motivations and experience techniques. In the Erasmus I.ECEC project, the staff of Józsefváros Joint Nurseries in Budapest collaborated with the lecturers at ELTE TÓK to focus on exploring the relationship of the family environment to culture while exploiting the multitudinous opportunities inherent to education arts. In the framework of ongoing self-training, early childhood educators contribute to enriching the literacy habits of families by offering a wide range of valuable pieces of literature and serving as positive examples. By involving parents in literary education, the loving atmosphere of active quality time spent with their children and the intimate moments shared at this time is further enhanced by the experience of absorbing the power of art.

As a further element in promoting literacy habits, the concept of the 'notebook project' was presented in workshops organised by the institutions. Early childhood educators and parents were invited to familiarise themselves with a set of nursery rhymes and poems that had been chosen based on professional recommendation. Participants then expressed their emotions in connection with the works in point intuitively, in a creative process. The steps of the creative process were the following: 1) Selection of favourite excerpts; 2) Justifying the choice; 3) Discussing different possible interpretations of the pieces; 4) Activation of the selected work's vocabulary by sharing impressions and experience; 5) Expressing the emotional imprint of the work using visual techniques. Not only did participants experience the strength of literature, they also received a model for creative self-expression and the realisation of art as a personal experience (Bereczkiné Záluszi, 2018, p. 89).

The next stage in the progression of the literature project was 'Literature notice boards to guide parents'. By recommending the best quality anthologies, children's periodicals, and websites for children's literature, nursery educators brought outstanding Hungarian and foreign books in the children's books market as well as experience-based methods of processing literature, and contemporary children's culture closer to families. Hand-made by the working groups, notice boards were mounted on the walls of the institutions for the information of parents. They contained specially labelled pockets with the printed words of the pieces spontaneously recited in the course of daily work.

In this way, traditional and contemporary nursery rhymes, children's poems written by classic and modern poets, the best pieces of Hungarian folk stories, and tales by contemporary authors were brought within easy reach of parents. The recommended excerpts represent the multifaceted nature of children's literature in our days and draw from a wide choice of works published by illustrious old as well as recently established publishers. The educators' choice contains an abundance of contemporary texts that are suitable for deepening the emotional relations forged between the adult and the child due to their aesthetic value and diversity (Bereczkiné Záluszi, 2018, p. 87). The message of the JEB project is that professional preparation and expertise in children's literature coupled with appropriate motivating techniques can multiply the literary experience of children aged 0-3.

The importance of the nursery environment in the process of intercultural education

Education for sustainability should start in early childhood. Thus, nurseries for young children play a key role in shaping values, attitudes, skills, and behaviour. This formative experience in turn supports the achievement of social and environmental sustainability goals, such as interculturality, equity, compensation for social and health inequalities, and the use of natural resources (Davis & Gibson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Institutional services for early childhood education and care are characterised by diversity, which includes the need for flexible practices ready for transformation that reflect the needs and interests of children and families. It is necessary for institutions to change with children and families, while exploiting the guiding principles and educational tasks that determine the identity of each service (Urban et al., 2012).

The institution is open to the diversity demanded by children and families, which is more important than ever for ECEC services in Europe (EU COM, 2019, C189/11.). It is the responsibility of the early childhood educator to evaluate and redesign the program of the institution, considering the needs of the children and families. An important institutional task is to create pedagogically 'rich' spaces that can deal with the differences, similarities, and diversity of children and families. Due to the age and psychological characteristics of young children, it is necessary to create safe spaces suitable for meeting the educational needs of children, e.g., offering 'stimulating action' versus 'no action' places where children can alternately play, relax or hide. Within a group room, thought must be given to designating 'we' and 'I' spaces, such as places where they can meet or gather in a small group, as well as individual spaces/places (table space, personalised bed, wardrobe, etc.). It is also necessary to create safe and hygienic spaces for care, e.g., the creation of 'care' spaces for bathing, eating, sleeping, relaxing (a place that is neither too noisy nor overly crowded, etc.). With their furniture, materials and colours, interior and exterior spaces become a learning tool that is useful for exploring the world and gaining experience. It is essential to design the service pedagogically, which includes care of the objects, the decoration of areas and

the choice of materials, thus creating coherence in the internal dimension of education (Silva, 2018).

Based upon needs and possibilities, it is necessary to create spaces for families, e.g. a sofa, corner, or even a separate room, where parents can sit and meet. From time to time, flexible and reflective practice necessitates a rethinking of the institution's built and natural environment, including spaces and materials that should be used in multiple, flexible ways while reflecting the values of sustainability. The Important basic values of education for environmental sustainability include a respect for life, care for and sense of community, harmony with living beings and the environment, creating harmony, protecting our environment, and our sense of responsibility for the future (which is already present in childhood). An important model comprises the formation of the nursery environment's ecological culture, a factor that must be established according to the principles of the entire institutional approach. The issue of environmental and social sustainability and its function in early childhood education is an important part of the basic program that must be incorporated into the institution's own professional protocol, including each element of the service, from the built and natural environment to all areas of institutional education work. While doing so, the physiological characteristics of early childhood must be taken into account. The defining task of early childhood education is to shape emotional attitudes, according to which children can be most encouraged primarily through adult models and through tales and games (Bereczkiné Záluszkai, 2017).

Education for sustainability enables educators and children to promote responsibility, respect the natural environment, and be active participants in the opportunities offered by everyday life. Educators and children work together to learn about the environment, promote the sustainable use of resources, and develop and implement sustainable practices. The role of the educator is crucial in this process. Regular training should be provided to all employees (Salonen et al., 2018; Varga & Havas, 2018, Varga & Könczey, 2019).

It is the responsibility of educators to make sustainability education a part of everyday practice. For young children, education for sustainability ideally begins by learning about inanimate and living nature. However, in parallel with the growth of urbanisation and the development of technology, people have tended to lose their personal connection with nature. The relationship of nature in early childhood has changed, resulting in a change that means a lack of nature in most cases. Fewer and fewer children experience the phenomena and wonders of nature in their immediate vicinity. Education for environmental sustainability for young children ideally begins with learning about inanimate and living nature (Darvay et al., 2020).

Studies show that children who play in nature in their early childhood years are more likely to grow up environmentally conscious compared to other children. Further research suggests that children who meet the natural environment with family members and teachers are more likely to become nature-conserving, nature-respecting adults (Chawla, 2020). Out of curiosity comes learning, out of learning respect, and out of respect comes a commitment to nature and advocacy. In the formation and understanding of the human-nature relationship,

the direct experience of nature is crucial. Nature is important in all aspects for the development of children, whether intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually or physically. In recent decades, there has been a growing scientific interest in the impact of outdoor play and learning on a childhood development and the evolution of their relationship with nature. Especially in early childhood, playing in nature is important in developing creativity, problem solving, and the ability to develop emotionally and intellectually. The natural environment provides optimal learning opportunities for the development of age-appropriate cognitive processes. This realisation has encouraged designers, developers, and educators to change their modern built environment so that children can make a positive connection with nature. Unstructured, free play brings cognitive, social and health benefits to children. Numerous studies confirm the importance and positive impact of outdoor play and learning for all ages, but especially among young children (Dowdell et al., 2011; Lundy & Trawick-Smith, 2021).

The basic tenet of environmental psychology is the approach with which one views man and his environment in a system. The child's actions and behaviour take place in a physical environment that influences the events unfolding there and subsequently cannot be interpreted without one another (Düll, 2015). The nursery building and garden, as well as the spaces outside the institution, provide many opportunities for children to get closer to nature. Creating a natural environment and using natural materials is one way to create sustainability. Gardening in the herb or vegetable garden and composting provides an opportunity to involve children successfully. However, this is just one of many options in teaching sustainability.

For many years, the 'Green Nursery' program has been present in the daily environment of many Hungarian nurseries. By devoting special attention to environmental protection and environmental education, the aim of the program is to establish an environmentally conscious approach and forms of behaviour. Nursery professionals take significant steps to ensure that Hungary's extant, high-quality, recognised environmental education not only adheres to international standards but also forms one of the cornerstones of early childhood education.

The EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care is structured around five broad areas: access, staff, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding. One of the basic principles of quality is to provide care that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion, and accepts diversity (EU COM, 2019, C189 / 11). Nor can it be forgotten that, in the institutional system of early childhood education, i.e., the nursery, the priority is that the parents know their children to be as safe as possible in the institution, and that the parents have an equal partnership with the nursery.

Establishing cultural identity through art education

It is commonly known that art is present in the environment of children from the earliest period. Rhymes and songs, for example, play an important role even in the period before language acquisition while pictorial representations shape the child's visual environment, first as still, then later moving images.

However, these elements are not only important for artistic inclusion or cognitive development (in terms of linguistic and visual cognition), but also determine the child's cultural environment while simultaneously contributing to the development of a central component of identity. In this regard the role of music as a joint activity is obvious (c.f. Frith, 1996) but other art forms have the same effect through their cultural and artistic tradition.

Stuart Hall (1997) describes this issue well when he examines how the process of cultural identity formation can be characterised and what kind of difficulties can appear. According to his theory, the cultural aspects of the emerging personality provide a connection between the inner world of the growing child and the external environment around him or her, and these traits are created because of cultural influences. Culture provides a wide range of symbolic tools (including tools related to language, communication through language, and other channels such as images, films or a wide variety of cultural products) that help the child develop his or her own identity. Such tools can be discovered everywhere in today's world and are present in the environment of young people, whether at home or in institutional education: children interact with these cultural products from an early age, and institutions and families seek to adapt them, according to the child's cognitive and affective development. Hall (1997) emphasises the concept of identity in sociological sense, which explains why culture and social practice play a prominent role in his theory. Based upon this perspective, identity unfolds during the interaction that occurs between the individual and society. As a result, identity has some internal centre, but the socio-cultural elements in the child's environment with which (s)he comes into contact have a decisive influence. Undoubtedly, childhood is the most sensitive period in this respect, therefore institutions involved in early childhood education have a definite impact in this process; it is also worth bearing in mind that the evolution of identity may continue throughout one lifetime as a result of subsequent new influences (Hall, 1997).

However, Hall (1997) also describes another interesting problem in his theory. In his view, the cultural diversity of present societies may be an obstacle to the formation of identity because the definite points of reference disappear to a large extent. Similarly, the effects of globalisation prevail against the socio-cultural attachments defined by tradition, both in the individual's micro and macro environment (Hall, 1997). With regard to young children, it seems possible that the diversity and complexity of the effects of the cultural environment make the initial formation of cultural identity uncertain in the early years. It is easy to see that in today's environment, symbolic tools and symbol sets are in constant motion, change, multiply significantly, and depend on the preferences of those involved in upbringing and education. However, it is useless to have a multitude of cultural products even if children are not yet able to choose from them properly – it can therefore be stated that the responsibility of educators increases greatly in this area. Thus, the flexibility that is ubiquitous in culture nowadays (both in offline and online environment, c.f. Goldman et al., 2008), is both an advantage and a disadvantage for education: it is an advantage for the educator to manage diversity and strengthen a sense of tolerance, but it is a disadvantage for children who are striving to construct their own cultural identity.

Without establishing a cultural identity, a significant factor in children's personality development becomes precarious. This uncertainty is indicated by Vivero and Jenkins (1999; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011) in the notion of 'cultural homeless', meaning children and young people who feel they do not have cultural identity and group attachment, yet would lay claim to both. The phenomenon occurs both among families who move frequently and children living in a multicultural community but can also be observed as a specific impact of the digital environment. Szabo and Ward (2015) write directly about an identity crisis at later ages, when cultural diversity constantly questions the system of beliefs, convictions, and commitments that are essential to fixing identity. It would be a mistake to condemn multicultural environment as an obstacle to personality development; the error is rather in its handling and in an excessive ethnocentric viewpoint. Regarding early childhood education, this problem may draw attention primarily to the special tasks of the educator – among other things, to the tasks that can be related to certain elements of art education.

The observations of the IECEC research made it possible to create accurate descriptions of the cultural-artistic aspects of the activities conducted by early childhood educators. The cultural elements used in some games and activities contribute to the strengthening of the children's cultural identity by means of art. In a community with several children from different cultural backgrounds, specific needs can be articulated in the field of cultural education. The results of the research highlight that joint art activities offer an opportunity for the emergence and strengthening of the individual cultural background, insofar as the educator has an encouraging effect on the acceptance of differences. It also applies that art education has a dual task: it needs to respect and strengthen individual cultural traits in personality, and at the same time facilitate the formation of common cultural traits through the group and community.

Summary

The IECEC+ Project 2018-1-HU01-KA201-047763 aims at strengthening collaboration among different European institutions working within (or in relation to) ECEC settings and reaching the objective of developing a new intercultural curricular program addressed to ECEC practitioners and learners working at pluricultural contexts. The IECEC+ project attempts to provide an adequate basis for educators and other professionals working at ECEC institutions in the context of pluriculturalism. In highly diverse European societies, early schooling is crucial for the children and their families. This project not only aims at achieving a better understanding of intercultural needs at the ECEC level but also hopes to discover good practices to implement them in the IECEC curriculum addressed to education professionals and BA students from three European countries (Hungary, Italy & Belgium). The project has developed the Pedagogical Framework to have a more grounded basis in designing the curriculum³.

³ This project emerged out of the results obtained in our previous project (Erasmus KA2 Strategic Partnership MECEC+, 2016-1-HU01-KA201-022945) in cooperation with the Leadership of

Especially important for the rationale of this project is the social and economic contexts that some children and their families, due to their conditions as migrants or members of other cultural minorities, face in their daily lives. Such conditions often have future implications for their lives, and include for example early school leaving, poor working conditions, difficulties in residence or economic conditions, linguistic or administrative barriers, etc. (Council Recommendations C189/4, 2019; European Commission, 2014). Upon analysing the data presented in the Eurydice Report 2009 and Eurydice/Eurostat Key Data Report 2014 (European Commission, 2014), it becomes clear that having an appropriate early childhood education and care education is vital for future social and cognitive development in later years and that inadequate early childhood education has negative consequences for children (European Commission, 2014). As a result of our project, we were able to outline a complex framework within which ECEC services can (1) design proper environments that are inspiring to explore and safe to experience for young children; (2) introduce motivating and inclusive tasks by means of children's literature; (3) shape a sustainable and green environment for inclusive education; and (4) shape and strengthen children's cultural identity through inclusive art activities.

References

- Bajzáth, A. (2018). Firm steps towards developing a multicultural organization. In Bajzáth, A. & Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (Eds.), *Beyond Inclusion – Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary, Budapest-Józsefváros* (pp. 35–40). ELTE TÓK – JEB.
- Bajzáth, A. (2018). Intercultural practices in early childhood teacher training. In Bajzáth, A. & Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (Eds.), *Beyond Inclusion – Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary, Budapest-Józsefváros* (pp. 25–34). ELTE TÓK – JEB.
- Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (2017). Esztétikai érzelmek támogatása irodalommal. In Bajzáth, A. & Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (Eds.), *Paragon – Újítások a nevelés-gondozás bölcsőjében, Józsefvárosban* (pp. 26–37). Józsefváros – ELTE TÓK.
- Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (2018). Supporting aesthetic emotions development by literature in nursery. In Bajzáth, A. & Bereczkiné Záluszkai, A. (Eds.), *Beyond Inclusion – Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary, Budapest-Józsefváros* (pp. 80–92). ELTE TÓK – JEB.
- Chawla, L. (2020). Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss. *People and Nature*, 2(3), 612–649. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10128>

Galileo Progetti Nonprofit Kft., and the participation of Arca Cooperative Sociale, Università di Firenze, Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (ELTE TÓK), Józsefvárosi Egyesített Bölcsődék (JEB) and Encís Cooperativa de Servei a les Persones, with the support of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Manresa (UVic-UCC). As part of this project MECEC+ project, a need-analysis was conducted to detect the current context, knowledge, and expectations of professionals working at ECEC level in three European regions (Budapest, Hungary, Toscana, Italy, and Catalonia, Spain) through a questionnaire developed by the Università di Firenze (UNIFI) and validated by the other project partners in a joint research process. The results and analysis of the MECEC+ project is the main base upon which the I.ECEC+ activities are to be constructed and developed.

- Darvay, S., Hill, K., Fülöp, V. & Venyngi, B. (2020). A környezeti fenntarthatóságra nevelés a bölcsődében. *Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat*, 8(3), 131–144. <https://doi.org/10.31074/gyntf.2020.3.131.144>
- Darvay, S. (2018). History of the Hungarian nursery and the education of nursery professionals. In Bajzáth, A. & Bereczkiné Záluszi, A. (Eds.), *Beyond Inclusion - Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary, Budapest-Józsefváros* (pp. 10–25). ELTE TÓK – JEB.
- Davis, J. M. & Gibson, M. L. (2006). Embracing Complexity: Creating Cultural Change through Education for Sustainability. *International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, 6(2), 92–102. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9524/CGP/v06i02/49932>
- Dowdell, K., Gray, T. & Malone, K. (2011). Nature and its Influence on Children's Outdoor Play. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 15(2), 24–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03400925>
- Dúll, A. (2015). A bölcsőde környezetpszichológiája. In Gyöngy, K. (Ed.), *Első lépések a művészetek felé. A vizuális nevelés és az anyanyelvi-irodalmi nevelés lehetőségei kisgyermekkorban* (pp. 265–297). DialógCampus Kiadó.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019). *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition. Eurydice Report*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Frith, S. (1996). Music and Identity. In Hall, S. & du Gay, P (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 108–127). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n7>
- Goldman, S., Booker, A. & McDermott, M. (2008). Mixing the Digital, Social, and Cultural: Learning, Identity, and Agency in Youth Participation. In Buckingham, D. (Ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media* (pp. 185–206). The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. MIT Press., <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/26085/1004001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Hall, S. (1992). The question of cultural identity. In Hall, S., Held, D. & McGrew, A. (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures* (pp. 274–316). Polity Press.
- Hoersting, R. C. & Jenkins, S. R. (2011). No place to call home: Cultural homelessness, self-esteem and cross-cultural identities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(1), 17–30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.005>
- Keszei, B., Böddi, Zs. & Dúll, A. (2019). Óvodásgyermekek csoportszobai térhasználatának vizsgálata a térszintaxis módszerével. *Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat*, 7(2–3), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.31074/2019234563>
- Kovács, P., Kósa, B. & Molnár, T. (2019). Special requirements of educational buildings. In Molnár, T., Krstic-Furundzic, A., Vanista Lazarevic, E., Djukic, A., Medvegy, G., Bachmann, B. & Vukmirovic, M. (Eds.), *Places and Technologies 2019: The 6th International Academic Conference on Places and Technologies* (p. 101). Pécsi Tudományegyetem Műszaki és Informatikai Kar.
- Lundy, A. & Trawick-Smith, J. (2021). Effects of Active Outdoor Play on Preschool Children's on-Task Classroom Behavior. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(2), 463–471. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01086-w>

- Salonen, A. O., Tast, S. & Hakari, S. (2018). Early Childhood Educators and Sustainability: Sustainable Living and Its Materialising in Everyday Life. *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 27(2), 81–102.
- Silva, C. (2018, Ed.). *Guidelines for the education and the care of the young children*. Arca Cooperativa Sociale, <https://www.arcacoop.org/finenze/la-cooperativa-arca/2-coop/67-la-cooperativa-arca-eng.html>
- Silva, C., Bajzáth, A., Lemkow-Tovias, G. & Wastijn, B. (2020). Encouraging intercultural attitudes and practices in contemporary ECEC services. Insights from A research conducted in Italy, Spain, and Hungary. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(1), 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1707365>
- Szabo, A. & Ward, C. (2015). Identity development during cultural transition: The role of social-cognitive identity processes. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 46, 13–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.019>
- Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A. & Peeters, J. (2012). Towards Competent Systems in Early Childhood Education and Care. Implications for Policy and Practice. *European Journal of Education*, 47(4), 508–526. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12010>
- Varga, A. & Havas, P. (2018). ENSI and its impact on the Hungarian educational system. In Affolter, C. & Varga, A. (Eds.), *Environment and school initiatives lessons from the ENSI network – Past, present and future* (pp. 142–148). ENSI/EKE-OFI.
- Varga, A. & Könczey, R. (2019). Which ways of evaluation of education for sustainability is acceptable for Hungarian teachers? *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 9(4), 654–667. <https://doi.org/10.1556/063.9.2019.4.54>
- Vivero, V. N. & Jenkins, S. R. (1999). Existential hazards of the multicultural individual: Defining and understanding “cultural homelessness”. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 5, 6–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.5.1.6> (26.03.2021)
- Wagner, M., Conlon Perugini, D. & Byram, M. (2017, Eds.). *Teaching intercultural competence across the age range: From theory to practice*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783098910>
- Wells, N. M. & Lekies, K. S. (2006). Nature and Life Course: Pathways from Childhood Nature Experiences to Adult Environmentalism. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 16(1), 1–25.