



# **BE-CHILD**

**Build a more inclusive society supporting ECEC  
educators for the development of socio  
emotional competences in pre-school children**

## **IO1**

**Compendium of good practices in teaching  
socio emotional competences in early  
childhood education and care – ECEC**

November 2022



## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology of action research	3
Process of action research	4
Major challenges in action research	5
Results from Interviews/questionnaires	6
References	10



## Introduction

The aim of the BE-CHILD project is to identify and select good practices in teaching socio-emotional competences from an early age. To that purpose, the following steps were taken:

- 1) Documentation of both how the preschools currently promote socio-emotional competences and the participants' perspectives on children's socio-emotional competences. Preschool teachers reflected on how they work with socio-emotional development in their preschools. This step was realised by conducting interviews and questionnaires in each country and by using template for the selection and collection of good practices.

Interviews/questionnaires were developed to gather information on the following:

- Identification of the main socio emotional competences to develop in children.
- Identification of the most relevant skills and competences educators need to develop socio-emotional competences in children.

Afterwards, the findings from the interviews/questionnaires were analysed and documented including and highlighting important socio emotional competences to develop in ECEC.

- 2) In the BE-CHILD project the participants also reflected upon good practices for promoting children's socio-emotional competences by using a template for the selection and collection of good practices.
- 3) After that, ways to implement good practices were developed, to improve the preschool's practice in relation to the project's aim. Action research were conducted in the preschools to implement the good practices.

## Methodology of action research

Educational action research involves participants conducting inquiry into their own practices to improve teaching and learning, practices and programs (Hines et al. 2020). In action research, the participants are also researchers as they study and reflect upon their profession and practice. One aim of action research is to make changes that improve practice; another is



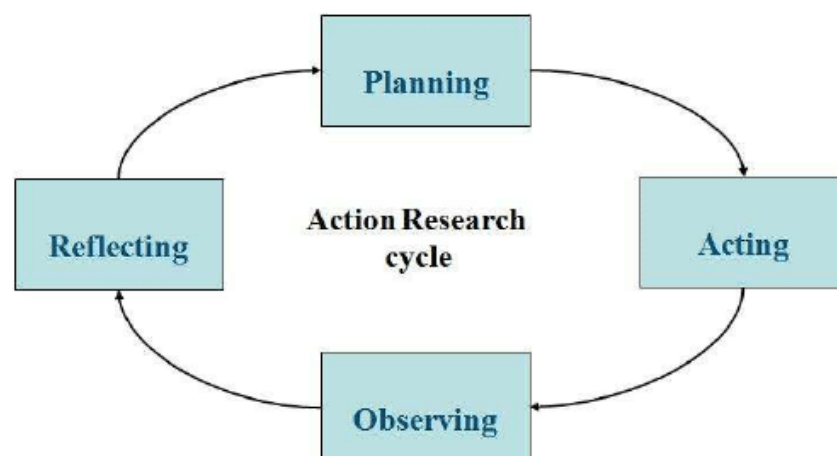
to generate knowledge and present it to a wider community (Gordon, 2008; Koshy, 2010; McNiff, 2010).

The many researchers who have written about the methodology of action research agree that the principal advantages of the approach are better understanding, the empowerment of participants, improvement and changes to practice, problem-solving and professional development (Koshy, 2010).

Even though approaches and types of action research differ, their chief characteristics and aims are the same. One type is called *collaborative action research* (CAR), in which researchers from outside schools, often from universities, work in close collaboration with participating teachers in schools. The expertise of each party is equally important, and their collaboration promotes the creation of knowledge in the field being studied. In CAR, the aim of collaboration is to cultivate a learning community, that is, a group of people who learn together and from each other. Mutual understanding and professional language concerning the field are other important factors in CAR (Thornberg, 2016). This is the type of action research that will be used in the BE-CHILD project.

#### Process of action research

Although there is no one right way to conduct action research, participants often find it useful to view the process as a circle or spiral, as shown in the figure below, which helps them to understand the research process as they progress through it. In reality, however, the process is neither a circle nor a spiral but instead a zig-zagging journey in which participants move between stages throughout the research (McNiff, 2010).



Action research usually begins with the question *how do I improve my practice?* In response, participants reflect on their practice to identify what they want to improve. Once they have



found their focus, they start to consider ways of improving their practice. At that stage, known as *planning* or *preparation*, the fundamental question is *where are we now, and where do we want to go?* The stage prioritises taking time to reflect upon one's current and desired practice, and every participant has the opportunity to have impact on the research process. It is at that stage when mutual understanding and professional language are created. In the BE-CHILD project participants will start by identification of the main socio emotional competences to develop in children and the most relevant competences needed to develop socio-emotional competences in children.

The next stage is trying out new ways of practice and implementing changes. Participants try out the ideas that they have developed to improve their practice, and if their ideas succeed, then they continue to develop them. If their ideas are unsuccessful, then they try out new ones. In the BE-CHILD project, good practices for promoting children's socio-emotional competences will be identified through interviews/questionnaire and a template for the selection and collection of good practices.

Throughout the research process, before, during and after the changes, data are gathered. Different methods for collecting data can be used to suit the study's aim and research questions. Keeping journals is an important source of data in action research, for the method is highly personal and allows each participant to record his or her process of change. In their journals, participants articulate their reflections on the research process and how they are experiencing the changes being made. Interviews, observations, video-recordings and photography are other methods often used in action research. No matter the method, reflection and evaluation are significant activities throughout the process of action research.

Last, it is important to present the research process and its outcomes to the wider school community. Presenting findings is integral to the potential of action research to empower participants. Moreover, through presentation, new knowledge can be extended to other educators.

### Major challenges in action research

Studies have shown that the top challenge of conducting action research is simply finding time for it. Beyond that, participants are often unsure about the research process, because they have little experience with the approach (Sigurdardottir & Einarsdottir, 2018).

To make action research successful, it is important to integrate it into the educators' daily routine and not view it as simply extra work. Participants should be given the time and space



to reflect upon the issues being studied, both individually and together. In providing opportunities for reflection, the role and beliefs of school leaders are important, for they are responsible for reserving time in the participants' daily schedules for reflection (Sigurdardottir & Einarsdottir, 2018).

## Results from Interviews/questionnaires

The aim of the interviews/questionnaires was to identify the main socio emotional competences to develop in children (0-6 years). Further, to identify the most relevant skills and competences educators need in order to provide socio emotional competences for early childhood education

- **Why do you think it is important to support the social and emotional competences of young children?**

In all countries, participants agree that supporting young children's social and emotional competences is important for their welfare here and now and in the future. It is also critical for the development of communication skills. In addition, such support has been shown to facilitate young children's adaptation to school and to learning. Some respondents also stated that this support plays a highly significant role in reducing the likelihood of conflicts in communications and anxiety.

- **How would you define social and emotional competencies?**

In the reports from Iceland and Romania, it was revealed that participants found it difficult to define social and emotional competencies. A common understanding of these skills includes children's ability to understand and control their emotions, to understand how others feel and to manage relationships with others. Therefore, social and emotional competencies are about self-awareness and communications skills.

- **What socioemotional competencies do you find most important for young children (0–6 years)? Why?**

Many competencies were mentioned in each country and were similar across countries. They can be categorized on an individual level or a social level. Competencies that participants found important for young children on an individual level were independence,



self-confidence, self-awareness, creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to understand their own emotions.

On a social level, competencies that participants identified as important for young children were communication skills, friendship, empathy, solidarity, trust, respect, kindness, collaboration, understanding, active listening, care, and support.

- **During your professional career, what strategies have you encountered for supporting preschool children's social and emotional competences?**

Play is considered a beneficial activity by which children can learn and develop their social and emotional competences. Through play, they learn to communicate and respect others.

Participants mentioned different strategies; some used commercial materials focussing on social skills and friendship. It was common for participants to use stories or photos that describe some kind of conflict and different emotions. These were used for discussion in the children's group. Freedom to express oneself was emphasized as well as the importance of offering space where children could share their feelings and experiences. Several mentioned the importance of having rules and routines and of teaching values. Finally, collaboration with parents and other educators was also noted.

- **What is your experience with methods to support the development of social and emotional competences? Which have proven most effective?**

The participants reported positive experiences with the methods they described. Some said that different methods were better for different ages. For example, talking to older preschool children about their emotions and the conflicts they faced was effective, but with the youngest children, using teddy bears, puppets, and similar artefacts was more successful for approaching these topics.

- **Can you give examples of activities/methods that have worked well for you?**

Participants from all countries offered examples of methods that they felt worked well for them. Common to all countries was listening to the children and giving them opportunities to express themselves and their feelings. Participants also described different activities they used successfully, for example, using care stones, stories, a bullying-prevention program, a



problem-solving wheel, role-playing, songs, photos showing different emotions, circle time and yoga.

- **Have you been able to assess the success of these methods? If so, in which way(s)?**

Most participants from all countries said they used observation to assess the methods and reported that they could see improvements in various areas of activities in daily practice and reflect on these together. Several had also used more-formal tools, lists or questionnaires to evaluate the outcome.

In Romania, 93% of the participants answered that they had assessed success but did not explain how. Finally, some mentioned positive feedback from parents as a measurement of success.

- **What are the main challenges educators face when supporting children's socioemotional competences?**

Most participants mentioned that having too many children in each group was the main challenge. Difficulties collaborating with families were also mentioned number of times, and it was reported that the main reason for these was parents' lack of interest. Some said that different values at home and at school create challenges since parents focus more on individualism, while the preschool focusses on social factors. In two countries, participants said that the parents put too much responsibility on the preschool. In addition, many mentioned a lack of support and a lack of teachers for children with special needs and to work with the increasing numbers of children with foreign backgrounds as particular challenges.

- **How can these challenges be addressed?**

Participants from Estonia mentioned the need to have fewer children in each group. Many said that good collaboration between teachers is highly important, and others noted that good communication and collaboration with parents is helpful for meeting challenges. Teachers' abilities to be aware of their own emotions and able to express them and reflect on them were also seen as important.





- **What are the most important attributes that educators must have to help children develop their socioemotional competences?**

Participants from all countries mentioned similar attributes. Among these were empathy, patience, tolerance, warmth, understanding, joy, calmness, communications skills, willingness to listen to a child and understand their reasoning and having a passion for the practice.

- **What would help you in your work supporting social and emotional competences of preschool children?**

Many participants said that they wanted more training, seminars, or courses on how to support social and emotional competencies. Some mentioned that they would like to have more games or programs to use for supporting these competencies. Better staffing situations and better financial resources were also mentioned, in addition to access to outside experts such as psychologists or speech therapists.



## References

- Gordon, S. P. (2008). The power of collaborative action research. In S. P. Gordon (Ed.), *Collaborative action research: developing professional learning communities* (pp. 1–12). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hines, M.B. Armbruster, K. Henze, A Lisak, M. Romero-Ivanova, C. Rowland, Waggoner, L. (2020) Action research in education . In Oxford Bibliographies. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0140.xml>
- Koshy, V. (2010). *Action research for improving educational practice: A step by step guide* (2. ed.). London: Sage.
- McNiff, J. (2010). *Action research for professional development. Concise advice for new (and experienced) action researchers*. Dorset: September Books.
- Sandberg, F. & Wallo, A. (2013). The interactive researcher as a virtual participant: A Habermasian interpretation. *Action research*, 11(2), 194–212.
- Sigurdardottir, I. & Einarsdottir, J. (2018). Challenges and advantages of collaborative action research in preschools. In E. Johansson, A. Emilson & A.–M. Puroila (Eds.), *Values education in early childhood settings. Concepts, approaches and practices* (pp. 109–127). Cham: Springer.
- Thornberg, R. (2016). Values education in Nordic preschools: A commentary. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 48(2), 241–257.