BE-CHILD

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

IO1 - A1

Definition of methodology and key criteria to select good practices

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1. Methodology of action research

Educational action research involves participants conducting inquiry into their own practices in order 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.

2. 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).
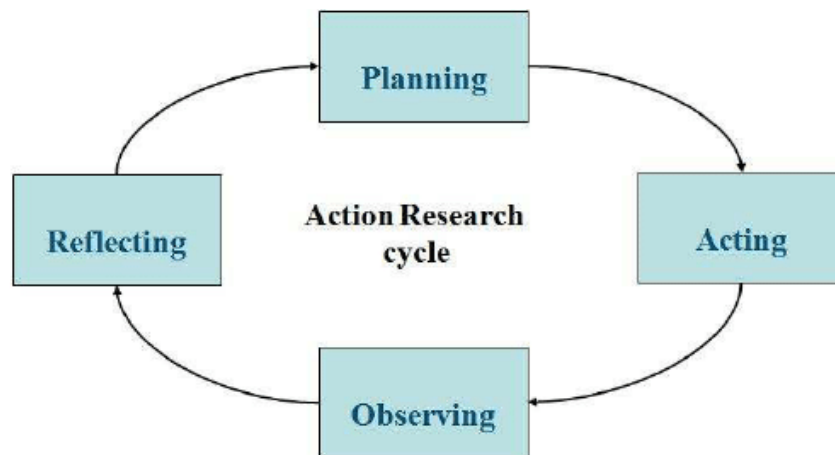
Action research usually begins with the question *how do I improve my practice?* In response, participants reflect on their practice to identify what they want to improve. Once they have found their focus, they start to consider ways of improving their practice. At that stage, known as *planning* or *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.

3. 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).

4. Action research and the BE-CHILD project

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 need to be taken:

1) It is important to begin by documenting both how the preschools currently promote socio-emotional competences and the participants' perspectives on children's socio-emotional competences. The preschool teachers should reflect on how they work with socio-emotional development in their preschools. In the BE-CHILD project, we will realise this step by conducting interviews and questionnaires in each country and by using template for the selection and collection of good practices.
The interviews/questionnaires will be 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 will be analyzed and documented in a national report (one per country) including and highlighting important socio emotional competences to develop in ECEC.

2) In the BE-CHILD project we will also reflect upon good practices for promoting children's socio-emotional competences by using a template for the selection and collection of good practices (see attachment). That process will be a collaborative one in which participants learn from each other.

3) After that, we will find ways to implement good practices in order to improve the preschool's practice in relation to the project's aim. We will collect data through journals and observations.

4) At the end of the project, interviews will again be conducted with the participating educators.

5) Ultimately, a compendium reporting the methodology and important socio-emotional competences for young children will be elaborated at European level.

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