



Early Change Project:

Promoting the professional development of early childhood educators

Initial evaluation report of the project

For the initial phase of the project the action that has to be evaluated was the first phase program planning of the project which can be divided to: (a) the organization and implementation of the first two meetings of the project, (b) the between actions of the translation of the scales, manuals in five languages (Greek, Portuguese, Danish, Finnish, and Romanian), and (c) the preparation of the website/web-platform of the project. The partners had also to select and provide the educators who finally participated in the training seminars. Finally, the classrooms where the second phase of the training will be implemented had to be chosen. External academics from each country partner, key staff members of the project and early educators participated in this evaluation procedure by observing, reporting and being interviewed during this phase of the project. Their comments/opinions were collected, and analyzed thoroughly by the evaluation expert of the project (P03, University of Crete) and resulted to the following report.

Project meetings

The project meetings were implemented in Thessaloniki (kick-off meeting) and in Porto (2nd meeting). Everything run smoothly in the first meeting and implemented as planned. During the meeting the social system of the project, time planning, deadlines, allocation of tasks, financial issues were clarified and discussed. The Romanian partners didn't manage to travel due to severe

weather conditions in Bucharest and the coordinator scheduled an extra meeting only for them that took place in Thessaloniki two weeks after the kick-off meeting.

In Porto, at the beginning of September 2012 the second meeting of the project was held. In this meeting the partners were concerning with the future use of the web-platform for communication, the use of the website and the organization of the training seminars. All partners participated as scheduled and the meeting agenda was implemented as planned. The coordinator provided an overview of what was happened and was to be expected in the future regarding the project's activities. The presentation was clear and thoughtful and all future actions were clearly described.

The overall impression of the implementation of the two first meetings of the project was that everything was delivered as designed and all partner members were well aware about their obligations and tasks. Moreover, there were no deviations reported regarding the outcomes of the project so far. This is something very important for the project success, as all of the parts of a project (design, implementation, & outcomes) have to be successfully completed in order for the project to reach its goals (Chen, 2005).

Originally, the 1st meeting was designed to be held in Porto and the 2nd in Thessaloniki. Yet, due to internal issues the project coordinator informed us that she decided to change the places and the kick-off meeting was held in Thessaloniki (February 2012) and the 2nd in Porto (September 2012). This decision had multiple benefits as the project members had the opportunity to attend the EECERA 2012 conference held in Porto and disseminate the project's actions and purposes. The symposium in the EECERA 2012 conference with the title "Early Change: A cross-national project of early childhood education quality" introduced the theoretical and methodological framework of the project "Early Change." Three papers were presented in the symposium by the project members: a) Early Change project: Promoting the professional development of early childhood educators, b) Quality assessment of early childhood education: A cross-national

approach, and c) Comparing early childhood education systems in six European countries. The symposium was attended by a large number of academic scholars, early childhood education stakeholders, students, and practitioners.

Finally, a change was also decided for the meetings' duration. Each meeting was planned to last three days. Yet, the two meetings were held in a two day-period. The project coordinator decided to reduce the meeting's duration due to the work done before the meetings with the partners and because all partners were clearly informed about the themes of each meeting. This decision was made by the project coordinator after the unanimous agreement of all partners. The reduction in the duration of the meetings does not mean at all that there was any declination in the quality of the meeting's outcomes, a conclusion that is supported by the fact that no deviation detected in project's outcomes so far.

ICT development

The website and web-platform of the project have developed on schedule as designed and are used for the purposes that are indicated in the project.

Translation phase

All documents that were to be translated were delivered as scheduled by each country partner. This stuff is essential for the implementation of later phases of the project and the successful execution of this work package is considered that will play a vital role in the successful implementation of the project. All partners corresponded efficiently and on-time and no delays or discrepancies were detected. Moreover, the partners provided the list of the educators who will participate in the training seminars and the classrooms that are going to be evaluated.

Conclusions

The initial evaluation can ensure that the project during its opening phase was implemented as it was planned, without any shortcomings or drawbacks. The work packages and their deliverables were provided on-time and the overall estimation was that the project has

started and continued as planned without any serious problems. Some shortcomings that inevitably appeared cannot be considered that can threaten the smooth operation of the project's activities.