Early Change Project:

Promoting the professional development of early childhood educators

Middle evaluation report of the project

The middle evaluation report is actually the evaluation of the training seminars that were held in the six partner countries. The training seminars were held first in Denmark, then in Finland, in Portugal, in Greece, in Romania, and finally in Cyprus. In the evaluation procedure data were collected from multiple sources. Qualitative and quantitative methods were combined in order to enhance the validity of the results.

The participants for the evaluation of the training seminars were the educators that participated in the seminars, the training lecturers, and an external evaluator in each seminar. 108 educators (14 from Denmark, 18 from Finland, 21 from Portugal, 19 from Greece, 16 from Romania, and 20 from Cyprus) out of 122 from six different countries completed the questionnaire (…). The lecturers of the seminars commented about the *weakness*, *strengths*, *opportunities* and *threats* of the training seminars. This is a procedure with similarities with the SWOT method and has been already used in other occasions with success (training evaluation in the "Early Steps" project: 118192-CP-1-2004-1-GR-COMENIUS-C21). Finally, an external evaluator (member of the municipality or educational district) attended the training seminar and reported filling in an open-ended questionnaire regarding aspects of the training seminar.

Participants for the evaluation of the training seminars

1. 108 educators (out of 122) from the six partner countries who participated in the trainings. From the educators six were men and 102 women. Their mean age was 41.55 yrs. (range 22 to 58) and their professional experience was 18.52yrs. (range 2 to 38).

2. Six external observers who attended the training seminar in their country. The observers were executives from the municipalities or educational districts from each country partner.

3. Six key staff members of the project who were responsible for the design, implementation and successful execution of the six training seminars.

Evaluation procedures

I. *Early Educators*

The early educators completed after the training seminar an adaptation of the Professional Development Evaluation Form (PDEF, appendix I) (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2004a; 2004b). The PDEF was used as a primary evaluation tool in several trainings and was also used successfully in another EC funded project in the past (Early Steps: 118192-CP-1-2004-1-GR-COMENIUS-C21) (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2008). The results of the training evaluation are presented in Table 1. The participants' answers were about what they learned during the training, their reactions against the training, and about the possibility to use the acquired knowledge in their work in schools.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the PDEF in six countries (means & standard deviations)

Country		Reactions	Learning	Use in schools
Denmark	Mean	4,34	4,76	4,08
	Std. Deviation	,27	,44	,76
Finland	Mean	4,50	4,88	4,65
	Std. Deviation	,34	,34	,49
Portugal	Mean	4,53	4,86	4,86
	Std. Deviation	,30	,36	,36
Greece	Mean	4,80	4,50	4,56
	Std. Deviation	,26	,70	,61
Romania	Mean	4,61	4,64	4,79

	Std. Deviation	,32	,60	,57
Cyprus	Mean	4,78	4,55	4,70
	Std. Deviation	,25	,51	,47
Total	*Mean*	*4,60*	*4,69*	*4,61*
	Std. Deviation	*,33*	*,52*	*,58*

The results of the training evaluation revealed that the educators were very satisfied from their participation in the training seminars, as they reported very high scores in all training parts.

II. External observers

The observers were executives from the municipalities or educational districts from each country partner. They attended the training seminars in their country and after the completion of the training they were asked to report their estimation about specifics parts of the training (including the preparation phase) and their overall impression. Their report based on open ended questions who developed for the contents of the training they observed (appendix II). The reports from the six countries were collected, examined thoroughly qualitatively, and indicated that the training provided reached its goals and had a high value for the educators who participated.

The external observers reported that their impression was that indeed the training provided brought a lot of valuable knowledge to the educators. They indicated that all actions undertaken during the preparation phase run smoothly without any problems. Everything during the preparation of the training phase was implemented as planned. They also pointed out that the training succeeded to improve the educators' skills as evaluators and researchers and that it may have a positive effect on their teaching skills and strategies. About the latter argument, all six external observers reported that they would prefer to wait for the second phase of the project to be implemented before they draw firm conclusions. Conclusively, all of them argued that the educators gained a lot of valuable and supporting things for their work at schools.

The external observers from Romania, Denmark, and Finland reported that there was a tight schedule as the training was held in two days in their countries, and the educators were a little tired at the end of the second day. Yet, they didn't believe that this had any negative effect on the training's implementation. Besides, the total duration in hours of the trainings was the same in all six countries.

III. Lecturers /trainers

The trainers were three from Portugal and three from Greece. They were authorized trainers something that it is required by the developers of the original scale (ECERS-R), in order to run a training of how to use the ECER scales. They indicated the *strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats* that training had for the project's success (Appendix III). They were also asked to value the quality of the material provided to participants and specifically the "Seminar workbook" and the "Observation tool" for the good practices. This procedure was based on the SWOT method that is used extensively in the organizational sector in order to be revealed a clear picture about a procedure that is under evaluation.

The reports were collected and examined thoroughly qualitatively. The most important topics that indicated are presented in Table 2. The total conclusion that can be derived is that the training provided can be considered a very valuable mean for the educators participated in order to improve their strategies, and develop new skills. The shortcomings that inevitably were appeared were not considered that can influence negatively the main purposes and outcomes of the project.

Table 2. Evaluation Report II results based on the SWOT method

| *Strengths* | Social relationships, Eager educators, Seminar workbook, Observation tool, Organization, Seminars' structure (mixture of lectures & field practice, |

	theoreticians & practicians, interaction), Knowledge that educators gained, Material provided, Venues of the seminars, Good practices
Weakness	Busy schedule, Not so good English language skills of some participants, Cultural differences in some occasions regarding the function of the scale, Not so good preparation of some participants
Opportunities	The use of what the educators learned in the field practice, Pre-seminar social activities, Work to be done from the educators before meeting, More discussion time, Develop an addendum for each country regarding the function of the scales, Looking for alternative motivations and incentives for the educators
Threats	Deadlines, Reliability among the assessors, Big burden for the educators, Multicultural adjustments for the scales, Requirement lots of support by the partners at schools for successful implementation of the scale

Conclusions

Based on the above reported, it can be concluded that the evaluation of the (a) preparation of the training phase, (b) project's training seminars, and (c) material provided (seminar workbook, observation tool), which were the subjects of the middle evaluation, reached its goals without any deviations in its outcomes. Yet, even if the results so far supported a faultless operation, the training phase II of the project has to be completed first in order to be drawn firm conclusions.

Appendix I

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from 1 to 5. The collected data will be used strictly for research purposes and no personal information will be published in any case.

Evaluate the following parts of the training	very good	good	average	poor	very poor
Seminar organization	5	4	3	2	1
Distributed educational material	5	4	3	2	1
Seminar's lectures	5	4	3	2	1
Seminar's field practice	5	4	3	2	1
Hospitality and Events	5	4	3	2	1
Evaluate the content of the lectures of the training	very good	good	average	poor	very poor
Good Practices	5	4	3	2	1
Theoretical issues concerning the philosophy of the instrument	5	4	3	2	1
Getting familiar with the items & scoring system	5	4	3	2	1
Video part I	5	4	3	2	1
Video part II	5	4	3	2	1
Evaluate the persons who presented the lectures	always	a lot of times	some times	few times	never
They were well prepared and educated	5	4	3	2	1
They communicated enthusiasm for our work	5	4	3	2	1
They encouraged creative thinking	5	4	3	2	1
They presented the material in clear and comprehensive ways	5	4	3	2	1
They used time effectively	5	4	3	2	1
Evaluate the leaders during the field practice & debriefing	always	a lot of times	some times	few times	never
They were well prepared and educated	5	4	3	2	1
They communicated enthusiasm for our work	5	4	3	2	1
They encouraged creative thinking	5	4	3	2	1
They presented the material in clear and comprehensive ways	5	4	3	2	1
They used time effectively	5	4	3	2	1
	Strongly agree	agree		disagree	Strongly disagree
I learn a lot of valuable things during this seminar	5	4	3	2	1
The acquired knowledge will help my work at school	5	4	3	2	1
My total impression of the seminar was very good	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix II

Directions: Based on your knowledge derived from personal observation, private discussions etc. please report/comment on the following

Do you believe that the training provided to educators of your municipal/educational district had any value? Did they learn anything valuable? Please elaborate briefly your answer.
Do you believe that the educators improved their skills as evaluators and researchers by participating in the project's training? Please elaborate briefly your answer.
Do you believe that the educators are going to improve their teaching skills or strategies due to their participation in the training? Please elaborate briefly your answer.
Provide any information regarding the preparation of the training phase, and report anything else you believe that it is worthwhile.

Appendix III

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the following themes based on your knowledge derived from your personal knowledge, experience, etc.

Strengths: (What was going well, which parts were the bests, etc.)
Weakness: (Report the weakest parts of the procedure. What was going bad, which parts were the worst, etc.)
Opportunities: (Report the necessary changes in future efforts)
Threats: (Report the outcomes of the procedure, by emphasizing the negative points)