

# Promoting the Professional Development of Early Childhood Educators: preliminary results



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## Introduction

In the last decades, research has been showing positive associations between the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care and child development. Furthermore, evidences of short and long-term effects of quality on child development were found (e.g., Hall et al., 2009; Howes et al., 2008).

The international educational community have been highlighting the demand to develop learning environments that meet children's needs in the most effective way (Gettinger, 2003). In fact, early childhood education constitutes the foundation of child academic development and the quality of preschool education is considered a major point for the development of national, social, educational and family policies (OECD, 2001). The improvement of the quality of early childhood education and care across Europe assumes (a) the enhancement of early educators' professional development and (b) the systematic and multidimensional assessment of structural and process quality of the provided education.

## The Early-C Project

The Project "Promoting the Professional Development of Early Childhood Educators" (Early-C Project) attempts to combine the widely accepted need for lifelong training and professional development of the early childhood educators with the implementation of Information & Communication Technologies (ICT).

### Partners

6 countries:

Greece (Project leader), Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Portugal, & Romania

19 Partner Organizations:

- 9 Universities
- 10 Municipalities & Educational Districts

### Aims

The enhancement of the professional development of early educators.

The implementation of ICTs in the training of early educators from six E.U. countries.

The evaluation of the early childhood education environments of these countries.

### Objectives

#### Professional development

(a) The acquisition of skills to work as trained assessors of Early Childhood Education Environments through the participation in the training phases of the project.

(b) The development of self-assessment skills through the implementation of the ECERS-R scale in their own classrooms.

#### Implementation of ICTs in the training of early educators

The effective communication, support and feedback of early educators by the academic staff through the synchronous and asynchronous use of the website and the web-based platform.

#### Evaluation of early childhood education environments

(a) The collection of empirical data for the assessment of the structural quality and process quality of early childhood education environments

(b) The comparison of the quality of early childhood education environments across six different educational systems

(c) The recording of a wide range of 'good practices' implemented in early childhood classrooms in the participating countries.

<http://earlychange.teithe.gr>

## Professional development Training Phase I

Between October 2012 and January 2013, early educators from the six countries participated in training seminars about ECE Quality and its evaluation using the ECERS-R.

This training was driven by Portuguese and Greek academic staff in all the countries, and involved visits and observations in kindergarten and day-care environments.

### Training Materials

ECERS-R  
(Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998)

- Focuses on the overall quality of preschool programs
- Consists of 7 subscales
- 43 quality indicators

ECERS-R users' manual

- Presentation of the scale
- Training on using the scale
- Training on the sub-scales
- Scoring activity - Score sheets
- Inter-rater reliability sheet

### Participants

PARTICIPANTS  
N = 108 (from a total of 122)

Cyprus → 20 educators  
Denmark → 14 educators  
Finland → 18 educators  
Greece → 19 educators  
Portugal → 21 educators  
Romania → 16 educators

6 men & 102 women  
Mean age was 41.55 yrs. (22 - 58)  
Mean professional experience was 18.52 yrs. (2 - 38)

### Measure

Professional Development Evaluation Form - Adapted (PDEF; Grammatikopoulos, Papacharisis, & Koustelios, 2004; Grammatikopoulos, Papacharisis, Koustelios, Tsigilis, & Theodorakis, 2004)

PDEF was used to assess the educators' perceptions about what they learned during the training, their reactions to the training, and the possibility to use the acquired knowledge in their work in schools.

The PDEF consisted of 21 items that were answered by a 5-point Likert scale. The 21 items measured three factors, Reactions (of the trainees), Knowledge (their perceptions about the knowledge they acquired) and Use of Knowledge. It was used as a primary evaluation tool in several trainings and was also used successfully in another EC funded project (Early Steps: 118192-CP-1-2004-1-GR-COMENIUS-C21) (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2008).

### Results and Conclusions

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

	Reactions		Learning		Use in schools	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Denmark	4.34	0.27	4.76	0.44	4.08	0.76
Finland	4.50	0.34	4.88	0.34	4.65	0.49
Portugal	4.53	0.30	4.86	0.36	4.86	0.36
Greece	4.80	0.26	4.50	0.70	4.56	0.61
Romania	4.61	0.32	4.64	0.60	4.79	0.57
Cyprus	4.78	0.25	4.55	0.51	4.70	0.47
Total	4.60	0.33	4.69	0.52	4.61	0.58

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

Although these preliminary results supported the adequacy of early educators training, the following phases of the project have to be completed in order to be drawn more conclusive data.

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