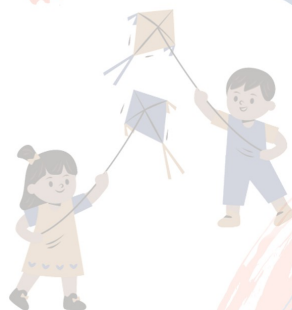


EMBRACE 



FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

HANDBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

This book is a result of an Erasmus KA2 project named “EMBRACE - Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care” running from January 2022 to December 2023. The EMBRACE project emanated from the need for supporting continuous professional development of early childhood education and care (ECEC) staff and leaders in working with children with intellectual disabilities, and in building partnerships and collaborations among themselves and with children, parents and community members.

The following organisations took part in this initiative:

1. Bielskie Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Teatr Grodzki, Bielsko-Biała, Poland
2. A & A Emphasys Interactive Solutions Ltd, Nicosia, Cyprus
3. Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Attica, Athens, Greece
4. Family and Childcare Center - branch in Skopje,
The Republic of North Macedonia
5. KENTRO MERIMNAS OIKOGENEIAS KAI PAIDIOU, Athens, Greece
6. European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities,
Brussels, Belgium

Each partner contributed to the book by presenting best practices from their own countries (local, regional and national organisations), but also from other countries, mostly in the European Union. Our handbook consists of programmes, projects and methodologies fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and describes their transferability and applicability to local and national contexts in a clear and practical way. Many of the good practices presented here have been tested during this project in nursery schools/kindergartens, and the book also contains our opinions, suggestions, and evaluations ([CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT WORKSHOPS](#)) added to the description of selected good practices. While working on the individual chapters, consultations and meetings were held with key stakeholders, organisations and individuals (ECEC staff, ECEC leaders, social policy makers, families/parents with children with intellectual disabilities) and their conclusions have been incorporated in the final version of the Handbook.

The first chapter is devoted to engaging children: providing best strategies, approaches and activities for creating a culture of inclusion in the ECEC classrooms. The activities proposed here, like “The colourful field”, encourage typically developing children in supporting the participation of their peers with intellectual disabilities, help them feel safe and welcome in the class and ECEC setting, develop a sense of belonging and reach their full potential. A simple activity of creating a “family” wall at a kindergarten with photos of the families of the children attending it, directly engages children, and visually shows differences between the families, avoiding any stereotypes and emphasising diversity of all the family members. Reading a fairy tale about a poppy which grows in a field upsetting the surrounding daisies, can lead to students engaging in many artistic and creative tasks exploring diversity and inclusion. There are other interesting examples of therapeutic fairy tales in the book as well as adaptation exercises for the vulnerable children at the start of their nursery school experience, and other interesting initiatives supporting them at the beginning of their educational path.

The second chapter focuses on the parents, including approaches and strategies for connecting with and fully engaging parents of children with and without disabilities. It describes such valuable initiatives as the “Koala project” for parents of vulnerable and underprivileged families, who can join it from pregnancy until their child has reached the age of three. This project offers a complex and integrated family support through the organisation of an accessible contact point for families as well as weekly child and parent activities (through a rich and powerful learning environment). There are many examples in this chapter of actions ensuring the successful inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and helping their parents to cope with the stress of everyday life, to improve their parenting skills and create support networks. One of them is creating an inclusive monthly support group for all the parents at a nursery school. “Time for parents” is a safe space for sharing parenting experiences, including the parenting of a child with disability, with the help of a psychologist, and for engaging with other parents. Also, national counselling centres for children and parents functioning in some countries are described in this handbook, which could be established across the EU.

The third chapter is dedicated to engaging staff, including approaches and strategies for encouraging open debate and discussion about disability inclusion within the workplace. Informal, multidisciplinary and supervision meetings in the school environment are discussed, which enable the ECEC staff to express questions and request help in order to solve challenges and share experiences and skills in relation to working with children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, courses and trainings are presented, which provide educators with a practical understanding of the difficulties and challenges that a child with special needs may have upon entering a classroom.

An interesting example here is a one-week course introducing kindergarten teachers to the 3-staged model that the Finnish kindergartens and primary schools have specifically developed to promote the learning and personal growth of children.

The fourth chapter focuses on engaging the community. It provides strategies and approaches for coordinating information, resources, and services from community-based organisations, businesses, cultural and civic organisations, social service agencies, faith-based organisations, colleges and universities, and other community groups that can support the ECEC inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Many valuable offers have been presented here, such as the “PINKO XL lab”, which aims to expand the number of childcare places for children with heavier care needs through a neighbourhood-oriented offer so that more parents can make use of it. Also, the expertise of the 'reception floor' and a network of external supporters (such as physiotherapists, speech therapists, nurses, etc.) is offered at this lab and matched to individual needs. Different social campaigns for inclusive education are also described in this chapter as well as public seminars, lectures, and celebrations of special needs days. They all raise awareness of various educational needs and integrate the local community.

While our book is mainly tailored to the needs of early childhood education and care staff, it is also useful for parents, community-based organisations and others interested in promoting collaborative practices facilitating inclusive early education and care environment for children with intellectual disabilities. It presents many simple, low-cost, but effective strategies and actions that nurseries and kindergartens can take to increase the engagement of youngsters, parents and communities in supporting children in need. We hope that you find this Handbook inspiring and useful for the development of your own activities and initiatives.

CHAPTER 1

Best strategies, approaches and activities for encouraging children to support the participation of their peers with intellectual disabilities, help them feel safe and welcome at the setting, develop a sense of belonging and reach their full potential.

THE COLOURFUL FLOWER FIELD

Good practice suggested by INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/docs/pdf/odhgos_paramythia_apodoxh_diaforetikothtas/Odigos_Apodoxi_Diaforetikotitas.pdf

AIMS

The main aim of the activity is the interaction of students and the opportunity to get to know the special characteristics that students with disabilities may have. In addition, students will develop an environment of acceptance and cooperation between them, and every child will be able to accept and respect one another. Children with or without disabilities will coexist and have the opportunity to get to know the special characteristics of their peers, to recognize similarities and differences between them and to acquire a comprehensive view free of stereotypical perceptions.

DESCRIPTION

Before the visit of students with disabilities to the general school the teachers from both groups (students with disabilities and students without disabilities) will read a fairy tale to the students, with a story about the topic of diversity, with the focus on a “field with daisies”. A poppy grows in this field, which upsets the daisies, and the story begins. Once the students from both groups analyse the issues raised in the story, they will meet in one school to cooperate. On the day of the visit, many actions can be set up depending on the wishes of the teachers and the children. For example, games, constructions, etc. are suggested (all of them or some of them can be implemented, depending on the time available):

- A construction of a colourful field with flowers, on 2-3 meters of paper, by painting children's palms with gouache and leaving their handprint on the paper. Each child's palm forms a flower and then the children add a stem, leaves and anything else they want.
- They can also create cardboard flowers, which can be placed on the children's hands like bracelets as a souvenir of the visit.

The proposed fairy tale "The happy flower field of Phyllio Nikoloudi" addresses the issues of diversity in a colourful, welcoming and safe way, and can inspire the teachers to try it out or create a different inclusive "field" based on another fairy tale which deals with issues of diversity. The duration will depend on the way the activity is organized and the individual goals that the teachers and the children will set. The indicative duration of the activity is two hours. The duration will depend on the way the activity is organized and the individual goals that the children and the teachers will set. This action is part of a broader initiative from the Institute of Educational Policy (<https://iep.edu.gr/el/>) and its "Educator Guide for raising awareness of inclusion of disabilities and diversity and social inclusion in education."

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

At the end of the activity teachers can discuss with children with or without disabilities how much fun they had, whether they got to know one another and how they felt.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- Easy and creative activity
- Children will interact with one another and have fun
- They will understand the differences but mostly the similarities between them and will acquire a complete view free from stereotypes
- At the end of the activity both groups will have the opportunity to express feelings and thoughts

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was piloted in a public municipal institution for children – a kindergarten 'Nashaidnina' in Prilep, in North Macedonia. The session involved children with disabilities and with a typical range of development. The facilitators reported that this good practice is well structured and provides explanations and guidelines for implementation with children with and without disabilities. The children could easily follow and fully participate in the activity while enhancing their creativity and learning in the group. However, the biggest challenge while implementing the activity was the children's attention. Still, the methods used supported the ECEC staff to keep them engaged throughout the session. The facilitators expressed high satisfaction and involvement with the implementation process. They reported that the activity supported their professional development by equipping them with innovative approaches and techniques to promote social inclusion in the kindergarten. Furthermore, the ECEC staff had an opportunity to empower their capacities to work with the target group and further develop their skills while promoting a socially inclusive learning environment. In conclusion, the activity improved the interaction between the children in the group and supported the process of social inclusion, mutual understanding, and empathy. Moreover, the ECEC staff reported that this activity impacts children's socio-emotional development and their skills by using creativity.

I AM LIKE YOU, AND YOU ARE LIKE ME

Good practice suggested by INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/docs/pdf/odhgos_paramythia_apodoxh_diaforetikotitas/Odigos_Apodoxi_Diaforetikotitas.pdf

AIMS

The main aim of the activity is the cooperation between children and the identification of similarities between themselves, independently from their diversity, and also differences that don't hinder their interaction and smooth coexistence in the group.

DESCRIPTION

The teacher distributes a sheet of newspaper to each child and gives an instruction: "You walk like a spy with the newspaper, hiding your face, aiming not to look at anyone and not to be seen by anyone." It would be good to use some music while the children are moving around the classroom to make them stop and start, or simply use a sound or clapping. When the music stops, the children stop moving and are called to observe "spies". They could look at the person next to them or at as many children as they can. The children are given more instructions during the action and are asked throughout their movement to observe the rest of the group and try to find similarities in their external characteristics. After the process is completed, the newspapers are left on a table and the whole group sits in a circle. Then the group is discussing the children's observations. For example, children are first encouraged to notice whether someone is wearing the same colour blouse, if they have the same colour of hair, eyes, etc. The children are then encouraged to say what they imagine about the people around them or what they imagined while observing them earlier. An interesting element here is for the teacher to ask the children, with the aim of highlighting prejudices, why they may think that they have more similarities or differences with others. The discussion continues based on this philosophy and the teacher should highlight with children the influence that our prejudices have. If the teacher wishes to continue the activity, involving (adding) a visual creation, children could be invited to make a group construction with the newspapers. Each child draws himself on the newspaper: a human figure, as he or she wishes. The whole body should be drawn, and not just the face. After the figures are completed, they are placed in a circle "hand in hand", with the motto that "everyone has a place in this circle".

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

At the end of the activity teachers can discuss with children with or without disabilities how much fun they had and how they felt. Teacher may also evaluate the activity by the ability of children to identify the important similarities or differences between them.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- Easy and creative activity
- Children will interact with each other and have fun
- They will understand the differences but mostly the similarities between them and they will acquire a complete view free from stereotypes
- At the end of the activity both groups will have the opportunity to express feelings and thoughts

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was piloted at the The child's workshop in Nicosia, Cyprus. The selected practice was implemented step-by-step by the teachers and the children. There were no difficulties during the session, and the children did enjoy the whole process. This good practice is very useful and helpful for the target group. The description is clear with an understandable structure. The kindergarten teachers can use it anytime and easily implement it with the children with or without intellectual disabilities. Children truly engaged with the activity since it was fun and also gave them the initiative to identify the similarities and differences dealing with the children with intellectual isabilities. The teachers who implemented the selected practice really enjoyed and highly recommended this activity to be implemented in their school to engage the children. They totally agreed that any activity that motivates the children through a playful methodology is always the best solution to achieve results and be a successful activity. The boys who selected to implement the session mentioned that it really was really fun and a playful method for children with or without disabilities to work together and find their similarities and support each other. They mentioned to their teachers that they would love to show it to other children and to do it again during their lesson.

PEER SUPPORT

GUIDANCE PUBLISHED BY EXTENSION ALLIANCE FOR BETTER
CHILDCARE, USA

<https://childcare.extension.org/peer-support-for-children-with-special-needs/>

AIMS

This guidance aims at providing ECEC professionals with hands-on strategies for fostering interaction among typically developing children and children with special educational needs and help them form genuine friendships.

DESCRIPTION

The guidance encourages ECEC professionals to take an active role in connecting peers in the ECEC settings and employ the following approaches:

- Organize the play area and introduce toys, materials, and playground equipment that require two children working together and communicating with each other
- Set up play situations, assign children who have shown an interest in each other or in similar activities with a small group
- Reinforce positive behaviour and encourage all children who are playing well together
- Be an appropriate role model and join the children in play at key moments to keep the interaction going, or explain a child's actions that the friend might not understand
- Give the child with a special need a leadership role, as peers may be more likely to see that child as an interesting playmate
- Never force friendships between children, as it may actually create negative feelings instead of positive interactions.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The application of the above-mentioned approaches has the potential to strengthen ECEC professionals' efforts in supporting building friendships among typically developing children and children with special needs, which can provide both enjoyment and promote their growth and development in multiple domains. These approaches are suggested by an experienced team of early childhood professionals, part of the Extension Alliance for Better Childcare, in line with their efforts for supporting quality childcare.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

This guidance acknowledges the important role that peers can have in supporting children with special educational needs, including children with intellectual disabilities. It provides general, but practical tips for ECEC professionals, which are applicable in a diversity of ECEC settings, and their application does not require introduction of specialized tools, materials or other resources that might not be readily available to all ECEC settings.

THE WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY (WDSD)

IMPLEMENTED BY THE KINDERGARTEN ORCE NIKOLOV IN SKOPJE,
MACEDONIA

https://gon.mk/sites/default/files/pdf/23.03.2020_dnevni_aktivnosti_za_site_vozrasni_grupi.pdf

AIMS

The activity implemented by the kindergarten Orce Nikolov was aimed at increasing awareness of Down syndrome among typically developing children in the setting, as well as understanding and acceptance of children with Down syndrome.

DESCRIPTION

The kindergarten Orce Nikolov is located in Skopje. On 21st March 2020 the kindergarten implemented an activity to mark the World Down Syndrome Day. The date for World Down Syndrome Day being the 21st day of the 3rd month signifies the uniqueness of the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down syndrome. Within this activity the children were encouraged to wear socks that are going to get noticed, such as their most colourful socks, printed socks, long socks, or simply mismatched socks. This activity facilitated further conversations on Down syndrome and motivated the children to ask questions through which the ECEC staff were able to address common misconceptions or stereotypes.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The activity contributed to the widely disseminated world-wide Lots of Socks campaign for World Down Syndrome Day, which is considered to successfully highlight the importance of raising awareness and showing support for people with Down syndrome.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

This is a simple but impactful activity, engaging children in the early years and without any financial implications for the ECEC settings. It can be combined with other complementary awareness-raising activities aimed at the children themselves, as well as their families and the broader community.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the staff of three schools in Brussels and also by inclusion coaches working in the Flanders region in Belgium. Their feedback was very positive, and the activity was assessed as interesting, creative and effective, very easy to reproduce and adapt to the context of the single school and class. It was suggested to add reference and more information on the WDSD itself: <https://lotsofsocks.worlddownsyndromeday.org/pages/about-world-down-syndrome-day>

and also on different socks campaigns: <https://lotsofsocks.worlddownsyndromeday.org/>

It was mentioned that similar activities were implemented in schools in Belgium in the past and educators declared that they would be happy to add this practice to their activities in the future. Some concerns were raised about the practicality of implementing specific events for each disability. It was noted that in some schools there are no children with Down syndrome, but still there is a need to support and include children with any and all special needs. Moreover, the educators emphasized the importance of viewing Down syndrome as an ability rather than a disability, and they wanted to raise awareness in a general sense. Concrete suggestions included organizing a disability awareness day (grouping IDs all together), integrating discussions about inclusivity during circle time in class, and sharing information about the campaign on social media platforms such as Facebook. Also, the power of involving parents, especially those with children with Down syndrome, in the campaign, as they have been at the heart of this longstanding tradition has been emphasized.

A COLOURFUL WORLD

AIMS

The activity is organized to foster active reflection in the class on recognizing and valuing differences, on discrimination and the value of inclusion in an interactive way. This activity is based on the manual “Impararegiocando” (available in Italian), on Page 21,

https://www.cesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Educare-Giocando_web.pdf.

DESCRIPTION

The workshop is done with children in the class and lasts one and a half hours. The needed materials are:

- A projector and a screen or wall to project the video about “The Patchwork elephant” by David McKee (or simply the book, or prepared animated presentation). An English version of it is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUepS9yGANQ>

- One paper per child with the silhouette of an elephant
- Markers for children to colour the elephants
- Children are sitting in a circle around the teacher

Introduction (15 minutes)

The teacher starts the workshop by asking children some questions on the topic of differences. The teacher may start with sharing something about himself/herself (e.g., I have blond hair, I have a dog, I have three sisters, I like chocolate) and ask the children to raise their hand, if they share the same characteristic. After that, children may be asked to do the same. After this, the teacher asks some questions like “how did you feel when others were raising their hand”, “what is different for you?”, “do you think it is something good or not?”, “how do you feel about your differences?”.

Video – storytelling (10 minutes)

Following this brief discussion, the video "Elmer, the multicoloured elephant" (taken from the book by David McKee, Mondadori, available on YouTube) is shown to indirectly introduce the concept of inclusion. The teacher may also read aloud and/or create some other creative ways to share the story.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Once the video has ended, the children are asked for their opinion on what they have seen (e.g., the reason why the protagonist feels discriminated against).

Drawings (30 minutes)

Afterwards, they are handed out silhouettes of elephants that they are to decorate in order to reflect their personalities, passions and diversities to portray their differences and to compose a class of small elephants who are different, but special because of their particularities.

Presentation (10-15 minutes)

One by one the children will show their elephant to their classmates (or children are asked to walk in the room with their drawing and present their elephant to their classmates when they meet).

Closing (10 minutes)

Closing of the activity in a circle by asking the children if they liked it and what in particular, how they felt about it, and if they would like to have similar activities in the future.

Different steps can be adapted depending on the number of children in the class.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The activity is designed to give a concrete tool for children to reflect on diversity and its value. The workshop has an evaluation at the end of it.

WHY TO CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It is an engaging activity
- It is easy to prepare and reproduce
- It fosters positive collaboration
- It presents diversity as an added value
- It fosters a positive reflection on diversity in the classroom

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This activity was tested by two project partners – in Poland and in Greece.

POLAND

In the public kindergarten in a Polish village (Malopolska Province) 18 children (aged 4-6) participated in the workshop, including 1 boy with a mental disability. The kindergarten staff eagerly reached for the activities and had no objections or doubts to use it for the purpose of raising awareness among children on the importance of valuing the differences between people and promoting open and accepting attitudes. Children were truly engaged in the proposed activities, and their statements during the discussions showed their proper understanding of

the issues raised. A good example of this can be the proposition made by one girl who asked all kids to add the image of a heart on the patchwork elephant pictures they were colouring as their promise to be loving and friendly to everyone. The kindergarten staff members who implemented this good practice highly assessed its usefulness for discussing sensitive issues with children. In their opinion it provides a playful and attractive way of reflecting on otherness. They valued the mixture of different activities (watching the film, discussions and especially drawing and colouring, which is one of the favourite types of play). They suggested that some voice and movement activities could be also introduced, for instance: inventing and shouting together different exclamations (in the film Elmer shouts BOOOOO! to wake up other elephants) or playing different animals that Elmer meets in the jungle. The educators also declared that they will be reaching for the other films from the “Elmer Elephant” series, which they discovered thanks to EMBRACE project. Throughout the whole session children were invited to discuss inclusive values and attitudes. Also, after successive workshop activities, they had a chance to express their feelings and thoughts. They all liked the movie and focused on it. They were able to analyse the behaviour of the elephants together with the teachers. They were making adequate comments (“Elmer was sad to be different, but other elephants liked him just the way he was”). They compared Elmer to their colleague – the boy with mental disability present during the workshop – and said that they always played with him, even though he is different and sometimes it is difficult.

GREECE

The representatives from 17 Greek kindergartens (16 public and 1 private), as well as 2 education stakeholders from the Ministry of Education evaluated this good practice. The professionals who participated in the pilot of the good practice stated that the use of a fairytale allowed them to introduce and explore complex topics in a manner that was relatable and accessible to children. They appreciated how the narrative structure and familiar storytelling elements helped to capture the children's attention and imagination. By weaving important messages and lessons within the fairytale, the professionals noted that the children were more receptive and actively engaged in the discussions. The good practice proved to be engaging, relatable, and conducive to meaningful discussions. By utilizing this creative method, professionals were able to create a safe and inclusive space where children felt comfortable exploring sensitive subjects while developing valuable skills and understanding. Through the

drawings, the children had a starting point to share their thoughts and feelings. The children themselves were excited to watch the story and then draw the elephants making them diverse. They got involved also in the discussion and seemed to understand the differences everyone had with one another and that differences made us special. One kid said that “all children want to play and have fun! It doesn’t matter if you are different, I want to play with you”. In some classrooms, there were children that recently received a diagnosis, and the rest of the class always included them in play time, not caring about the differences. The professionals believe that fairytales have a strong effect on children and make it easier to teach complex topics (like inclusivity and diversity). This good practice will be used as an additional tool to support integration processes.

FAMILY WALL

AIMS

The family wall is a tool to deal with diversity and each child's individual uniqueness. The goals of the practice are, firstly, to support the child's self-image and, secondly, to help children build a positive image of others. The pictures show differences as something 'normal' and provoke many small conversations about them. They make diversity visible and discussable in an ordinary, everyday way. Also, the family wall asks for parents' cooperation and respects them for their input. They are also made symbolically present in the ECEC space group through pictures.

DESCRIPTION

The family wall is a collection of photos of the families of the children that are displayed on one of the walls of the ECEC facility. Children are asked to bring photos of their families and their family members to be displayed on the family wall. The photos should be sufficiently large and are placed together in such a way that the children can easily access them. It is very important for children to be able to recognise them and their family. The family directly engages children, and visually shows differences in each of the families. By hanging different family photos together, you immediately notice the diversity of families and children. You see that there are large and small families, single-parent families, families with pets, families with grandparents living in, families with co-parenting, differences in skin colour are also visible as well as many other variations.

Because the diversity depicted is directly linked to real situations in the group, one avoids falling into stereotypical images. As with most the activities, the family wall is not about a recipe or a technique. Indeed, the essence is not in the pictures themselves (although they are of course important), but in the way the leader deals with the children's reactions to the pictures. The photos are rewarding material because they provoke interaction and reaction, which the facilitator can respond to. She/he can use these reactions to point out differences as well as similarities that children notice and help them put their reactions into words.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

It is very important in what way the teacher should ask the parents for the family photos. If one emphasises the recognition of people important to the child, then one only refers to the first objective (self-image) and argues the importance to the parents with the words: "recognisability", "security for your child". In that case, one often receives a series of portrait photos, each showing one family member. This is of course extremely nice, but we miss the diversity in family compositions. Therefore, it is recommended to underline the first and the second objective. That means emphasising the recognisability of familiar people, but also teaching children to be aware of diversity in families. So, it is not just about the picture the child brings (although that is very important), but also about bringing all those pictures together.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Values and normalises diversity and promotes inclusion.

Deconstructs stereotypes.

Engages both with children and families.

Can be easily reproduced in other contexts.

THE BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY

https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2038&Itemid=124&lang=en

AIMS

- Recognition of obstacles faced by individuals and children with disabilities in terms of accessibility
- Language expression
- Creative expression
- Understanding the value and assistance of wheelchair access in the life of an individual or a child with a disability

DESCRIPTION

This project was implemented by the University of Cyprus and addressed to kindergarten children, ECEC children 4-6 years old throughout the school year. It consisted of:

- Story-telling and analysis of the story “Two shoes and a wheelchair”
- The country of “I care about you” - imagining and discussing a very special country where everyone is socially included
- Writing a letter to the mayor with suggestions for improving the access for people with disabilities
- The children photographing the obstacles within the environment and making cartoons based on the photographs
- Analysing a poem that elaborates on the beauty of individuals with disabilities

The objective of implementing this module into pre-school and primary school is to educate and inform typically developed and non-typically developed children of the importance of acknowledging the needs of individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. Pre-schools and primary schools specializing in inclusive education could especially benefit from these activities. Children might require additional tasks that are practical and actually support the children with disabilities. Different stories could be used to inspire the children.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

This module can be evaluated by the institutions staff, pre-school teachers and any individual collaborating with the target group.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It is easy to implement and inexpensive
- It helps typically developing children to support their peers with learning difficulties, noticing their vulnerabilities and needs
- It encourages children and adults to become socially involved at the level of their community
- It is creative and imaginative

A GREEN PLUG

<https://www.anagnosi.gr/prasini-priza/η-πρασινη-πριζα,-τα-πρώτα-βήματα-detail>

AIMS

The website called a Green Plug (PRASINI PRIZA), created in Greek and English, aims to give educational information and educational material to parents and teachers of young children with or without learning difficulties/dyslexia. It makes it easier for children to learn and interact with one another and offers support to children with disabilities.

DESCRIPTION

The website includes games, colouring pictures, mazes, memory games, matching games, spot the difference games, coordination games, dot to dot printable, colour by number printable, arts and crafts, math worksheets and much more. All of the materials can be printed for free. Using the multisensory method is especially useful for children with learning difficulties. The materials could be used by typically developing children in supporting the participation of their peers with intellectual disabilities. The website is funded by a private body who also sells educational books through the website.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The creator of the website, Athina Kyriakidou Christofidou, who is a mother of a child with learning difficulties, encourages users to send her comments and suggestions about extra materials which could be presented on the website.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It is based on the multisensory method especially useful for children with learning difficulties
- It provides funny, interesting, stimulating and involving educational materials for free

FAIRY TALE THERAPY

<https://www.edukacja.edux.pl/p-40990-program-edukacyjny-z-zakresu-bajkoterapii.php>

The programme 'Exceptional Power of Fairy Tales' by Aleksandra Zmarzły is based on fairy tale therapy, it is intended for working with 5-6 years old children. It was carried out in the integrational group in the nursery school Przedszkole nr 1 in Świerklany.

<https://www.przedszkole1.swierklany.pl/strona-glowna/>

AIMS

The main aim of the programme is supporting the child in their individual development path, in building relationships both with peers and adults, improving the skill of dealing with emotionally difficult situations as well as building positive association between reading and pleasure.

DESCRIPTION

The programme provides texts which promote positive behavioural patterns and attitudes, they teach important things and depict a positive approach to oneself and other people. Reading was the main method of expression. The classes were conducted regularly, once a week. The subject was chosen on the basis of the children's needs and in accordance with the weekly work in the nursery school.

Organisation of classes:

- Welcome play
- Assessing children's moods
- Group integration activity
- Reading the fairy tale out loud by the teacher
- Analysing the fairy tale content together
- Playing related to the topic
- Artistic task or card activities
- A hand puppet Dominik the Elephant was used in the classes

Parents were invited to read and about 20% of them accepted the invitation. At the end of the programme, a literary and art contest, named Our fairy tales, was organised for the parents and children. The task was to create an illustrated fairy tale. The contest followed a workshop for parents 'How to write a therapeutic fairy tale'. The works are accessible for the interested parties in the library of the nursery school. The programme was concluded with an evaluation. It was based on the talks with the children and a survey completed by the parents. Generally, it can be concluded that the children developed maturity and the parents were content. 'We are all different but the same' - it is the final remark of the children.

RESULTS AND ASSESSMENT

The project resulted in the improvement of children's development, integrated the group and strengthened the relationships between the parents, children and the nursery school. It introduced a new method - fairy tale therapy into the classes.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The presented actions can provide an inspiration for the teacher or a template for one-time classes, a short series, or a year-long work. The fairy tale speaks in pictures, so it is accessible for every child, also a disabled one. Fairy tales connected with intellectual disabilities could be used, for example "We are unique" by Paola Viezzer. More examples on specific conditions such as ADHD, Down syndrome, motor disabilities, autism, Asperger syndrome, speech

disorders, epilepsy, hearing loss, blindness or chronic diseases could be found on the website:

<https://pedagogika-specjalna.edu.pl/pedagogika-lecznicza/bajka-terapeutyczna/>

They introduce children to the world of their peers, build acceptance and a desire to help those with difficulties. It is a good idea to introduce a puppet and animate the story. A puppet made by a child with a disability will carry many meanings, especially if animated by healthy children and those with difficulties - everyone will be able to present what is in their hearts. Here is an example of using puppets:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7hoF6BOtaU>

ADAPTATION

Conducted in a non-public nursery school 'Tabaluga' in Kobyłka.

<https://przedszkoletabaluga.pl/adaptacja.html>

AIMS

The adaptation classes aim to facilitate the process of joining a nursery school and a peer group.

DESCRIPTION

The children come to the nursery school with their parents for 2-hour classes. Day one: Let's meet. A tour around the nursery school - we get to know our class, bathroom, locker room, playground. We meet each other - introducing the teacher and nursery school staff to the children. Free play with the parents. Day two: We are playing! Free play with the parents. Orientation and organisation game 'move-freeze'. Making an artwork together. Outside games that include use of balls and ribbons. Movement activities. Going to the playground. Day four: Hand games. Free play with the parents. Listening to the song 'teddy and doll'. We say 'bye-bye' to parents. We are going to the playground. Making an artwork - handprints. Playing with an 'animation scarf'. Going back to the nursery school. Day five: 'A passport to a nursery school adventure'. Integration game. Making an artwork together - a poster of our group. A movement game 'a magic ladder'. Preparations for obtaining the passport - performing the tasks with a teacher. Giving nursery school passports.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Activities make it easier for children to familiarise with a new situation, especially in case of children with special needs. They get to know the nursery school, new classmates, working in a group, their teacher, nursery school staff and the parents of other children. Parents also get to know each other. It results in a reduction of problems at the beginning of the school year.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Besides the efficiency, the children are better prepared to socialise and work in a group, it allows the staff to get to know the children and their needs earlier as well as identify the potential difficulties. It lets the educators better prepare the classes and efficiently individualise them. It is especially important for children with dysfunctions. They require special care, organisation of the education and therapeutic work. Due to the programme the educators can pay more attention to them, examine their documentation and specific needs as well as adapt the nursery school to their needs. It allows the creation and implementation of an individualised action plan.

CHAPTER 2

Approaches and strategies for connecting with and fully engaging parents (of children with and without disabilities) in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

YOUR OWN FOREST

Good practice suggested by INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/docs/pdf/odhgos_paramythia_apodoxh_diaforetikothtas/To_Dasos.pdf

http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/docs/pdf/odhgos_paramythia_apodoxh_diaforetikothtas/Odigos_Apodoxi_Diaforetikothtas.pdf

AIMS

Parents will practice emphasizing with their children and will understand better their feelings and thoughts, and that their child is important and different. Moreover, parents will notice that they want similar things for their children, regardless of their special characteristics, and that it is important for their child to be accepted by everyone and treated with respect.

DESCRIPTION

The teacher will organize a workshop at school, with the purpose to inform the parents about the progress of the entire group or about something that he/she may have on his/her schedule. Afterwards, the teacher will inform the parents that they will work individually with a stimulating fairy tale, but also in groups, and will have the opportunity to interact in an original way with one another. The teacher will read the fairy tale. When the story is completed, the parents will be informed by the teacher about the way they will work. Each parent will have 20 to 30 minutes to work on individually, with two tasks:

1st task: Imagine that this forest is your child. For example, the forest “Maria”. Write a short text, like this particular fairy tale, describing in detail the special features of this forest, its advantages, the difficulties that one may face while traversing it and, finally, why it is important not to be excluded from the “occasional” forest assembly. Also, the parent can write what they would like for this forest and why it’s important not to be excluded.

2nd task: After parents finish the text, the teacher will ask them to draw how they want the forest to look like. When the parents are working, the teacher will place the measuring paper in the centre of the room. After the parents finish their texts, they will go back to their seats and will be encouraged to read their works one by one. If a parent, for any reason, doesn't want to read his or her text, it is suggested for the teacher to read the text. If the parent still doesn't want it, the teacher should respect this and proceed with his or her drawing. When they finish the story, they share with the group of parents their drawing, they talk a little about it and are encouraged to stick it on a single meter of paper. The paper will be filled with the parents' drawings and the visual effect will be very beautiful. After the process is completed, parents are encouraged to name the creation. It would be nice to place the creation of the parents in their children's class. In case a few parents are absent, the teacher will inform them about this activity, so that, if they want, they will give their drawing to their child to take to school.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

At the end of the workshop the parents can express how they felt, what they noticed and what was useful for them. The workshop can be evaluated either by an anonymous questionnaire or in an open discussion.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- The workshops are easy to implement at different levels of the school environment
- Parents will have the opportunity to enter a discussion with other parents
- Parents may acquire knowledge to change their personal attitude in their relationship with their children
- Parents will meet up in the workshop and they may continue their relationship outside of the school environment
- Communication between teachers and parents will improve

THE FAIRY TALE DESCRIPTION

Note: You are welcome to enrich the story with details about the forest, its difficulties and treasures.

Every thousand years there is a “Big Conference of Forests” where all forests gather to present themselves and share their ecosystems to the elders. The elders give a name to the forests to distinguish them from one another (Tropical Forest, Amazon Forest, etc.). During this conference a new forest came and when it was about to present itself, it remained quiet looking in the distance. The elders asked it some questions, but the forest didn’t respond to them, it clapped its branches and became more silent. Sometimes it would repeat the same words: “I’m a forest”. The elders decided to name it “The Forest”. As you understand, The Forest was different from the others, even humans were afraid of it. Even The Forest wouldn’t let anyone explore it. This created an urban myth about The Forest’s mysteries. I decided to travel to The Forest and explore its mysteries. Once I reached The Forest, it closed its branches creating a huge wall. I spent days trying to figure The Forest out. One day I found a secret passage. At its end there was an upside-down world, millions of paths and mazes. Reality was quite different there. The smallest pebble would make the biggest sound, like an explosion. Inside The Forest I discovered so many different details that I needed a magnifying glass to figure them out. I could feel myself go blind from a small firefly far away from me, the nuts smelled so strongly, and the honey was so sweet. Even my feelings seemed different inside The Forest. No matter the feelings, I always felt happy. Since that day we have been best friends with The Forest. It was like no other forest I had visited before. It’s not easy to get to know it and at the beginning it closes up. It lets you get closer only if you are willing to explore it. You mustn’t be afraid of it, and you have to accept its differences. After you accept them, The Forest will open up and share with you its love. And in its centre, you will hear the biggest and warmest heart with millions of colours!

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This activity was tested by two project partners in Poland and Cyprus. Pilot workshops were organised in a public kindergarten in a Polish village (Silesia Province). They were attended by 12 people, all the teaching staff of the kindergarten, whose children have attended or are attending kindergartens. This allowed them to play the role of a parent.

The first task which essentially aims to describe one's own child in the convention of the fairy tale, as an unusual forest, provoked strong resistance from the group. The participants said that they were not ready for this, that it was too intimate and private. They also stated that they did not feel very confident in creating literature and that fairy tales were a difficult genre. The group offered to choose the object of description themselves. It was suggested that everyone chooses a child they work with who was particularly memorable.

Individual people began writing. During the course of it, people asked for help in formulating sentences from their work. At this point, the group realised that they were writing about the same child with an autism spectrum disorder. This is why it was decided to create one tale. Since then, the work continued smoothly. In conclusion of the workshop, a major concern was brought up by the participants: “Conducting such activities at a meeting with parents in our kindergarten is impossible. A parent will not reveal the depth of himself and his child to a group of people who know one another very superficially”. In spite of raising some problematic issues, the group indicated also many positive aspects of the activity. It unleashed inventiveness and allowed participants to delve deeper into the world of the child. The use of metaphor and visual arts resources resulted in more interesting, deeper conversations about the child's needs and the means and methods of educational and therapeutic work. It was emphasized that the practice can be very effective in individual meetings with parents which provide intimacy and give parents a sense of security.

CYPRUS

This activity was also tested at the public kindergarten of Athienou, in Larnaca district by kindergarten staff/teachers and 3 parents who actively participated in the activity and at the end of the session they provided their feedback. One of the main challenges of this session is to convince the parents to join the activity and also to actively participate in the session.

This good practice is very useful and helpful for the target group. The description is clear with an understandable structure. The parents can easily implement this activity and also the teachers can easily organise this kind of short workshop for parents in the kindergarten premises.

The teachers who implemented the selected practice really enjoyed it and they highly recommended this activity to be implemented in their school to engage the parents to work for their children. Teachers mentioned that it is not easy to organise these workshops for parents but is highly recommended for the social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and to help all the children to have a strong relationship between them. The parents really enjoyed the activity and they agreed that it was a really helpful activity. Also, they mentioned that they would recommend this activity and this kind of workshop to more parents to do it with their children in their house and also to invite more parents to the next sessions. However, they mentioned that would be nice to have a visual representation such as photos or graphics for this activity.

SOCIAL SKILLS AND INCLUSION

Good practice suggested by 8th Primary School of Evosmos Thessaloniki
(1st Class)

http://www.specialeducation.gr/files4users/files/pdf/bougioukli_papadopoulou.pdf

AIMS

One of the main goals of the activity is to inform parents about diversity and to create a common language of communication between the school and the families. Furthermore, parents will have the opportunity to meet with one another, and teachers from the general classroom and the inclusion department will have the opportunity to cooperate, too.

Consequently, the most important goal is the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in the general school.

DESCRIPTION

The workshop was conducted in the 1st grade of primary school and can also be implemented in a kindergarten. The educators can facilitate the workshops and moderate the discussion, if needed. The duration of the programme, which included activities for the children as well as specific workshops for the parents, was two years. Workshops for parents can be implemented in 3 meetings with the topics: (1) Cooperation between the school and families (2) Strengthening self-esteem, (3) Please listen to me.

Teachers are the facilitators of the workshops, and they inform the parents about the philosophy and goals of the program, as well as how it is implemented in the school according to the principles of inclusive education. Parents were divided into groups of 2 and 3 individuals for the first introduction and then groups of 5 people. The participants of each group named the group to create a sense of belonging and strengthen the bond between its members.

The groups discussed the topics set by the facilitators and made announcements to the plenary. They interacted with each other in the context of forming a new whole with the main axis of the cooperation goals set by the facilitators. Furthermore, it was attempted to make parents aware of the reductive as well as constructive behaviours of adults as well as their consequences for children. With a discussion first in groups and then in a plenary session, parents' attention was focused on behaviours and situations which increased children's self-esteem and promoted a positive self-image. Parents discussed the areas they would work on in the next period to set their personal goals for strengthening their children's self-esteem. The discussion of

specific scenarios with behaviours/problems and the way of immediate verbal response led the parents to think about the way in which adults respond to what the children tell them. They identified the behaviours and situations which make listening difficult and articulated the components of good listening. Following the workshops, the Head of the Health Education office of the West Thessaloniki Directorate visited the school and discussed the topic “Developing the ability of parents to deal with their children’s difficult behaviours in the family and at school”.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Evaluation of the workshops was recorded by the parents in the “Memory Box”. Parents expressed their opinion at the end of the workshops, and it was positive and encouraging.

Facilitators also observed the following positive results:

- The parents of the student with intellectual disability developed relationships with other parents in their personal life and participated in friendly meetings. The child with intellectual disability has been invited to his classmates’ gatherings and he has also invited the classmates to his house.
- Teachers while working collaboratively expressed that they are able to deal with difficult behaviours and their own attitude served as a role model for students in how they approached the student with intellectual disability.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- The workshops are easy to implement at different levels of the school environment
- Parents will have the opportunity to discuss different issues with other parents
- Parents may acquire knowledge to change their personal attitude in their relationships with children
- Parents will meet up during the workshops and they may continue their relationship outside of the school environment
- Communication between teachers and parents will improve

CHILDREN'S BOOK "IVAN AND ILINA"

WRITTEN BY MIMOZA PETREVSKA-GEORGIEVA AND ILLUSTRATED BY MAJA STEFANOVSKA

https://issuu.com/gjorgjejevanovik/docs/slikovnica_203?ff=true

AIMS

The children's storybook "Ivan and Ilina", written by Mimoza Petrevska-Georgieva – a parent of a child with Down syndrome, is of educational character and aims at encouraging typically developing children and their parents to be open, sensitive, accepting and supportive of children with Down Syndrome and other disabilities.

DESCRIPTION

In the children's storybook "Ivan and Ilina", the author describes in an honest and warm way real-life situations when a child with typical development (Ivan) meets a child with Down syndrome (Ilina). The author herself is a mother of a child with Down syndrome - Ilina who is the main character in the story. Despite the evolving friendship between Ivan and Ilina, the storybook depicts some of the challenges that a family with a member with disability faces every day. The storybook is available in an electronic version, while printed versions of the storybook in Macedonian and Albanian languages have been promoted among children, parents, educators and representatives of local authorities from across the country. The production of the storybook has been supported by the Ministry of Culture and the Blue Bird association. While the storybook is mainly aimed at typically developing children aged 7-12 and their families, children in the early years can also benefit from it.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The storybook has steered great interest among the children, parents and educators who have taken part in its promotional activities, stimulating further discussions and dismantling the existing stereotypes and prejudices towards children with disabilities. As the media reports noticed, the promotional activities have created a safe space for typically developing children and their parents to have open conversations on the topic of disability, which are based on positive curiosity, rather than fear.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The children's storybook "Ivan and Ilina" is an inspirational example of direct involvement of a parent of a child with intellectual disability in awareness raising and promoting supportive environments for children with disabilities. ECEC settings can encourage and support parents of children with intellectual disabilities to share their experiences through storybooks or other forms that are adequate for children in the early years, facilitate their promotion in the ECEC setting and actively engage parents of typically developing children.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was piloted in a public municipal institution for children – kindergarten 'Femo Kulakov' in Negotino, North Macedonia.

The implemented good practice involved 9 children, including children with intellectual disability living in rural areas.

According to the feedback from the kindergarten teachers and the facilitators, the children's book 'Ivan and Ilina' is beneficial for children with typical development and their parents to encourage them to be open, sensitive, accepting, and supportive of children with Down Syndrome and other disabilities. For the facilitator, the challenge was keeping the children's attention while reading the story.

Considering that the children could only focus for a short time, the facilitator stimulated further discussions among the participants by involving a creative activity. The activity aimed to dismantle the existing stereotypes and prejudices towards children with disabilities and promote inclusion and equity among participants. This accompanying activity supported the group process and expressed the participant's thoughts through creativity.

The facilitators reported high satisfaction with the implemented activity and declared that it would be included in their work. Furthermore, the participants said they enjoyed learning with their peers in the group.

Both ECEC staff and the participant were interested in participating in the activity that developed the staff's skills and improved children's social inclusion, motivation, and creativity. The workshop improves the process of raising awareness for the social inclusion of children with disabilities and acceptance in early childhood development as well as creating a safe space for typically developing children to have open conversations on disability, which is based on positive curiosity rather than fear.

COUNSELLING CENTRES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/pravilnik_sovetuvaliste.pdf

AIMS

The counselling centres for children and parents which are established across the public ECEC settings in Macedonia aim to facilitate successful cooperation and involvement of the parents including supportive environments for children with intellectual disabilities.

DESCRIPTION

The Law on Child Protection provides opportunities for establishing counselling centres for children and parents within the public ECEC settings in the country. The scope of work, membership and operation of the counselling centres are regulated within a Rulebook adopted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Each counselling centre should include a multidisciplinary team of staff who work at the ECEC setting, such as a psychologist, pedagogue, social worker, special education teacher/special educator and a rehabilitator, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Dentistry and care staff. Counselling centres mainly provide counselling services to parents, but they are also involved in cooperating with the management of the ECEC setting and other institutions for children in the field of education, health, culture, social work and other. Parental counselling can involve family counselling, pedagogical counselling, psychological counselling, counselling in the fields of social work and preventive healthcare, and importantly – counselling for parents of children with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

As evident from the work programmes and annual reports of multiple ECEC settings, the counselling centres have been extensively utilized for promoting inclusive education. Namely, parental counselling is often focused on ensuring parents that their child with intellectual disabilities is accepted and catered for in the ECEC settings, as well as on promoting acceptance of differences and understanding of the individual needs of children among parents of typically developing children.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Counselling centres for parents can evidently contribute to fostering better communication with parents on issues of relevance in inclusive education and actively engage them in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Such centres can be established in ECEC settings in other national contexts where multidisciplinary staff are employed.

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

AIMS

This meeting represents the first contact between ECEC staff, inclusion coach and parents. The meeting aims to create a space for a first exchange between parents and professionals around the child, to assess if the place is the right one and, if so, to better prepare the start. During the meeting staff will share their working methodology, and their will to fully understand the child needs aiming at building a relationship with parents based on trust.

DESCRIPTION

In Flanders, inclusion coaches are professionals that facilitate the inclusion of children by supporting supports teachers, assistants, families, and the child in ECEC centres to implement best educational practices for children with moderate to significant developmental disabilities. The parents that want to register their child in ECEC are invited for an extra meeting before registration. The person in charge and an inclusion coach discuss the following issues with the parents about the child:

- his or her characteristics
- what does he or she likes
- what are his or her needs
- what is urgent to set up for when he or she starts at the centre

The professionals also present themselves and their centre, who they are, what they can offer, and what they need to fully fulfil their job. After this talk parents can reflect on whether the place suits them and their child. Professionals can discuss what group and which caretaker would be right for this child. Once that has been clarified, they will follow up with an appointment for registration.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

This meeting facilitates a smooth start for the child. The team and parents are prepared and avoid surprises that may jeopardize the process, as expressed in a multilingual note to parents by some nurseries. After one month, there is an evaluation meeting with the parents which engages them even more in the educational process.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- All parties who are involved are better prepared
- Parents have a space to be listened to and can tell the staff everything they want them to know and ask all the questions they want to ask
- They are thus feeling more secure in entering the path of the day-care. Their fears of insecurity and anxiety are diminished

INCLUSION SUPPORT

AIMS

Developing an individualised plan around the child, for his or her better development and to enhance the wellbeing and participation of parents.

DESCRIPTION

In Flanders, inclusion coaches are professionals that facilitate the inclusion of children. The work with the child will be based on a plan for action that the inclusion coach is in charge of developing, through a series of steps:

- The first step is the needs assessment, done through individual talks with the educators, other staff, other caretakers, and parents. The interviews will take place in the day-care centres or in other places where the child goes to and

have the aim to map all needs on different levels (pedagogical - food - sleep - social contacts)

- The second step will be to draft a report about the needs and giving advice on methods or techniques that can be used to interact with and better support the child
- The third step is to define a plan of action for the child that stimulates his or her development and meets his or her needs
- The final step will be the implementation of the plan, done in collaboration between the coach, the caretakers, and parents

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

There are regular meetings, called on when there's a need, to evaluate and adjust the plan of action. The quality of the results will strongly depend on the participation of the parents and the other caretakers around the family.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The wellbeing of the child increases, the team feels supported, and parents feel supported too.

KOALA PROJECT

AIMS

Basic quality services from the first years of life lead to a lasting, positive impact on the child's social, emotional, and physical development and, later, school results. In general, families in deprived areas make less use of childcare. In some neighbourhoods the risk of deprivation regards one in four babies and toddlers that have fewer opportunities since they were born, and this leaves a mark on their lives. The Koala project is about preventing and tackling this through a neighbourhood-based partnership of basic childcare and family support services.

DESCRIPTION

Koala focusses on vulnerable families with children from 9 months to 3 years old that live in certain underprivileged neighbourhoods. The project guidelines (as created by [Kind&Gezin](#)) define a family as vulnerable when it scores inadequate on three (or more) of the deprivation criteria listed below:

- Monthly family income
- Parental level of education
- Development of the children
- Employment situation of the parents
- Housing situation
- Mental and physical health of family members.

Families either find their way to the activities because they know the community centre or are referred to it by social partners such as nurses/doctors at Kind & Gezin, local school, staff in the community centre, community health centres, Caritas international and day-care initiatives.

As mentioned, parents are welcome to join Koala from pregnancy until their child has reached the age of 3 years old. The Koala projects offers an 'integrated family support offer' through the organisation of an accessible contact point for families as well as weekly child and parent activities (rich powerful learning environment). By participating in Koala activities, a relationship of trust can grow, from which a bridge can be made to other areas of life: preventive health care, pre-school education, community work and children's activities, culture, Dutch language practice opportunities, employment, educational opportunities, etc. Families can be warmly guided to these facilities, with special attention to childcare and community work.

Koala project also offer extra activities (not on a weekly basis). This may include visits to the local library, exploring different playgrounds in the area, participating in parent-child sporting events, visits to the local community health centre, participating or facilitating sensory therapy (monthly activity). Every activity is carefully constructed to include the different areas of experience of the [MeMoQ pedagogical framework](#): me and the other, body and movement, communication and expression, and exploration of the world. Activities are

based on the educational philosophy and pedagogy of the *Reggio Emilia approach* using self-directed, experimental learning in relationship-driven environments. Many of the families that visit Koala speak different languages at home and most parents have very little or no knowledge of the Dutch language, and therefore language stimulating elements are always included without ignoring the importance of their parental language(s).

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

At KOALA, the objective is to achieve the following impact:

- Maximise development opportunities for young children through a rich environment and inclusion (MEMOQ)
- Broaden the network of vulnerable families so that they consciously use sources of support and support organisations in their environment
- Increase resilience in parents so that they experience success in various life domains and gain and seize development opportunities for themselves and their children.

As the ultimate goal, Koala provides children (and by extension adults and the whole family) with every opportunity for development so that they can grow into resilient adults. Staff works to empower the whole family and support them in building a broad and strong network they can fall back on.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It works on child rights by supporting parents
- Works with the community
- Offers integrated, holistic, and needs-based services
- Every year, Koala project reaches out to more and more families for both individual support and group activities.
- It continues to follow up vulnerable families until other assistance can continue or an informal network has been created that the family can really fall back on.

Find more:

<https://vbjk.be/nl/projecten/koala-kind-en-ouderactiviteiten-voor-lokale-armoedebestrijding>

Reggio Emilia approach:

<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/valori-en/>

ADHD SUPPORT GROUP

<https://www.eseng.nl/>

AIMS

The ADHD Support Group has been set up to connect international parents living in The Netherlands and carers of children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD or children where ADD/ADHD may be considered, but not yet diagnosed. It is now part of the ESENG - EXPAT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS GROUP.

DESCRIPTION

The ESENG - EXPAT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS GROUP is the result of the collaboration among two Parent Support Groups for expat families, each one operating in the Netherlands for several years now: AAOF - AUTISM ASSOCIATION FOR OVERSEAS FAMILIES and ADHD SUPPORT GROUP. The ADHD Support Group organizes regular coffee mornings, approximately once per month, where parents and carers come together to informally discuss issues relating to ADD/ADHD. The groups are usually small and areas that are often discussed include oppositional behaviour, medication, school issues and family dynamics. Additionally, the organization occasionally arranges for a guest speaker to address the group regarding these issues. These meetings are available for anyone to attend, without any cost involved, however there may sometimes be a small charge when they have a guest speaker.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

This group was established in 2009 and has steadily grown since then. It is increasingly providing a source of great support for families in a similar situation. The aim is to continue to grow and develop this group, reaching out to provide help for those families who are sometimes in complete despair.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- The group connects parents of children with disabilities from different countries and environments
- It is inclusive and available for anyone
- The meetings are held in safe environment and small groups which helps parents to integrate
- The website provides links to educational materials written by specialists

AKTIDA: SUPPORT FOR AUTISM

<https://aktidacy.org/>

AIMS

The ultimate objective of the AKTIDA Centre is to promote a society in which children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are enjoying equal rights and have the necessary support from the state and the welfare state of the country.

Target group:

- Parents or guardians of children diagnosed with ASD from 0 to 5 years of age
- Carers or health workers in case the child is living in any closed facility
- Children diagnosed with ASD up to the age of compulsory education

DESCRIPTION

The AKTIDA Centre offers primary services which include support to the parents, support to the families and support to the child itself. However, in order to be eligible to receive services from the Centre, a person must have a formal clear diagnosis that their child has been diagnosed with ASD or has characteristics suggestive of ASD by a licensed Child Psychiatrist or Paediatric Neurologist in the private or public sector. It is funded by the Government and the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

'The AKTIDA centre offers various services, but there are three principal activities:

- It offers support to the parents in collaboration with the centre's therapists.
- It supports the families and the child's supportive environment, so that they can manage the difficulties that have arisen or may arise, while developing new skills and knowledge about Autism Spectrum conditions.
- It supports children in order to help them develop social and other skills and competences with the aim of successful integration and inclusion in school and society.

EVALUATION AND RESULTS

It is evaluated and monitored by the Department of Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It offers a lot of guidance and support to the families and to the children.
- It provides to the parents extensive knowledge on the Autism Spectrum Disorders.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the representatives of 17 Greek kindergartens (16 public and 1 private), as well as 2 education stakeholders from the Ministry of Education. The fact that the content of AKTIDA was available in Greek, was helpful when implementing the good practice with the participants. The facilitators made an introduction on the importance of the collaboration with the parents/guardians for the wellbeing of the children. Afterwards, the approach and services of AKTIDA were discussed and the participants had a conversation about the importance of supporting the parents/guardians of the children through this difficult journey. Some of the participants were also parents and a couple had a child with ASD, which was helpful on the implementation of this good practice, as they shared the difficulties they faced. The professionals who participated in this good practice highly assessed its usefulness for addressing this difficult topic with the parents/guardians. It's important to have support on the first steps of this process discussing sensitive issues. It's a useful and valuable tool that can support multiple groups, starting with the parents/guardians, and including the children and the educators. They appreciated the seriousness and professional way in which the information was provided, needed by the parents/guardians. It was stated that this good practice can be liberating for parents who have just received a diagnosis of their child and give them some reassurance.

TIME FOR PARENTS - SUPPORT GROUP

The activities were conducted in the nursery school Przedszkole nr 10 in Nysa

<https://p10nysa.szkolnastrona.pl/p.1167.czas-dla-rodzica-grupa-wsparcia>

AIMS

The objective of the actions is to support the parents, providing emotional help in dealing with difficulties as well as developing parenting skills and integration.

DESCRIPTION

The group is open. One can join it at every stage of work. The meetings take place once a month at the same hour in the afternoon and at the same place. Care is provided for the children of the parents who participate in the meeting. It is a formal group, and the nursery school is responsible for running it. The group leaders are the nursery school employees who have appropriate competences. The details of the subjects discussed in the meetings are determined by the group members and the group state. They are confidential - nothing that is said and done in a meeting should be discussed outside. The schedule of the meetings is published on the nursery school website (along with the information about the initiative Time for parents), however, the subjects remain confidential. The meetings were described as a space for sharing parenting experiences, including the parenting of a disabled child, with help of a psychologist, a space for relieving the stress of everyday life, improving one's parenting skills and integration of the parents by forming relationships which can contribute to creating 'a chain of support' and sharing of useful information.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The initiative evidently helped the parents. The nursery school considers the idea as beneficial and effective. It can be stated that organizing meetings for parents of healthy and disabled children is a splendid implementation of integration and inclusion. The group functions well. The number of applications for a nursery school place is greater every year. The parents are content.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Support groups for parents of disabled children are run in many nursery schools. It is obvious that parents are heavily burdened with duties, difficulties and troubles of their parenthood. It has to be stated, however, that creating separate support groups for parents of children in need, contributes to their alienation and withdrawal from interactions with other people. Creating a support group for all the parents enables the development of their community. It also helps to put one's troubles of being a parent of a disabled child in a new perspective. After all, every parent has some trouble with their child. 'We're all different but the same'. Once trust has been created in the group, different topics can be proposed. After they are changed or rejected by the group, an agenda will be obtained. Initial suggestions: crises and dangers in the family, feeling burnout, our fears, how I can relax from the obligation to constantly look after my child, how able-bodied and disabled children learn and experience the world, loneliness.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the staff of three schools in Brussels and also by inclusion coaches working in the Flanders region in Belgium. The activity was assessed as very good for parents who need to exchange and discuss sensitive matters among themselves. It was mentioned that there are currently several moments for interaction with the parents of children attending kindergarten, but they are more child focused. This activity could represent a good space for parents to discuss their own issues and challenge isolation. The importance of finding right moments for such meetings was stressed, as the risk is that parents will not have the time to attend it. Most parents are full time workers and might be too busy to join the activity. Another common worry was about the role of the facilitator. Potentially having someone external - a trained facilitator, preferably a psychologist, to ensure the effectiveness of the support group - would be an element of improvement compared to the original practice. However, some good examples of already existing practices were presented. For instance, the Magenta organization in Flanders, associated with the University of Leuven, which initially started as workshops to help parents face challenges in parenthood, over time evolved into a space for parents to share experiences, provide support, and exchange valuable insights. The support groups were originally intended for parents of children aged 1 to 6, but they have expanded to include parents of teenagers as well. Apart from positive feedback, difficulties to involve parents in general were highlighted. Implementing such a support group might not be easy due to the sensitive and delicate topics involved. Concerns were also raised regarding the difficulty for teachers to set boundaries and determine the extent of their involvement in parents' lives. It was emphasized that some parents may not even openly acknowledge their child's disability, so it may be challenging to hold such discussions. Also, it was stated that monthly meetings might be too frequent for practical implementation.

NURSERY SCHOOL AND FAMILY ARE A TEAM

A family fair organised by Integration Nursery School Przedszkole Integracyjne in Namysłów.

<https://pinamyslow.szkolnastrona.pl/a,669,festyn-rodzinny-2022>

AIMS

The main aim of the fair was to give the whole community of the nursery school an opportunity to spend time actively, creatively and have fun. The detailed aims are cooperation of the nursery school bodies in the educational process, creating proper prosocial attitudes, promoting active forms of spending free time outdoors, integration of the local communities in the actions for children and families spending time together.

DESCRIPTION

Children arrived at the fair with their families (including uncles, aunts, grandparents). A tombola lottery game was very popular. There were many attractions: make-up, live big mascots, bubbles, balloons, exhibition of fire engines and police cars. 'Pouring water' from the fire hose was especially popular (it was supervised by firefighters). Many bikers came to the nursery school yard, one could look at or sit on bikes. There were inflatable slides and face-painting. There were integrational games for parents. A cake stall was popular with some pastries prepared by mums, grand mums, and dads; there was also a culinary booth with fruit salads and grilled sausages served by dads. Coffee, fruit juices and ice cream were also served. In a small gardening shop, one could buy a plant for their garden.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Parents, together with their kids showed that they could have fun together and actively spend their free time. It was documented in pictures.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The activities went well due to good organisation. This sphere, hidden from participants, is a place for creating good relationships in which there is no distinction between parents of healthy children and parents of disabled kids. Sometimes parents of children with disabilities notice that not only do they have many skills and passions, but they are a valuable part of a greater community. Mums of children with and without disabilities were able to do make-up on children very well and all children willingly participated. Preparation of stands was left to parents, but, as in the whole event, care was taken to create mixed groups (parents of healthy and disabled children). The games for adults should be supervised, the teacher should take care of the formation of mixed groups and let them overcome difficulties together. It's easy to create a group for the Gordian knot and a raft. <https://www.spole.pl/7-zabaw-integracyjnych-dla-doroslych/>

CHAPTER 3

Approaches and strategies for encouraging open debate and discussion within the workplace and enabling learning environments in which the ECEC staff will feel free to express questions and request help in order to solve challenges and share experiences and skills in relation to working with children with intellectual disabilities.

THE PYRAMID MODEL

Good practice suggested by IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, USA

<https://www.brandywineschools.org/cms/lib/DE50000195/Centricity/Domain/1672/Best%20Practices%20in%20Preschool%20and%20Kindergarten%20Inclusion.pdf>

AIMS

Provision of inclusive environments for children with disabilities throughout kindergarten programmes. The “IDEA” also provides support for the inclusion of disabilities in K-12 settings through the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement.

DESCRIPTION

The IDEA’s inclusion policies, authorized by the USA Congress, rest on a strong body of research establishing that inclusion supports access to high-quality curriculum and instructions for children with disabilities, leading to improvements in academic achievement and social engagement. Including children with disabilities in ECE improves the development of literacy skills such as print awareness and oral language and provides them with opportunities for social interactions with peers which support the development of both language and social skills. Recommendations for increasing inclusion in ECE settings at the local level include the following:

- Cooperate with families
- Adhere to legal provision of supports and services in inclusive settings
- Assess and improve the quality of inclusion in early childhood programmes
- Review and modify resource allocation
- Enhance professional development
- Establish an appropriate staffing structure and strengthen staff collaboration through team bonding activities or activities which can boost self-confidence
- Ensure access to specialized support
- Develop formal collaborations with community partners

However, ECE programmes can provide interventions within a multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework. Core Principles of MTSS for kindergartens are the following:

- Specification of a multitiered system of supports
- Early provision of support or intentional teaching/caregiving with sufficient intensity to promote positive outcomes and prevent later problems
- Using children's data to inform teaching and responsive caregiving practices
- Using research-based, scientifically validated practices to the maximum extent possible.

Kindergarten programmes increasingly use MTSS models to differentiate support for children's diverse learning needs and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities. The Pyramid Model was designed specifically to provide an MTSS model for behavioural support in kindergartens. Children with disabilities who received behavioural interventions using the Pyramid Model have demonstrated reductions in problem behaviours and improvements in engagement.

Pyramid Model for MTSS in ECE:

- Intensive Interventions
- Targeted Social Emotional Supports
- High-Quality Supportive Environments
- Nurturing and Responsive Caregiving Relationships

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- The practices could be easily implemented at different levels of the school environment
- The importance of caregiving relationships in different contexts is highlighted
- Access to specialized and individualized supports is ensured
- The improvement in the communication between family and school context is promoted

INCLUSION: EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

Good practice suggested by University of Thessaly, Pedagogical Department of Preschool Education:

https://eclass.uth.gr/modules/document/file.php/ECE_U_202/%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%B5%CE%B9%CE%B5%CF%82/%CE%9C%CE%AC%CE%B8%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1%209-%20%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%20%CF%83%CF%85%CE%BD%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B3%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1.pdf

AIMS

The main goal of the practice is the cooperation between teachers and other specialists who work with children with intellectual disability in the school environment so that each member of the staff will respond to the needs of the children. Staff will exchange knowledge and experiences and address common difficulties. In this light, staff will set common educational goals for children and improve children's education and their inclusion in the school environment.

DESCRIPTION

Multidisciplinary meetings in the school environment refer to collaboration of different specialists to improve education, inclusion and care of children with intellectual disabilities. It has been also referred to as “group around the child”. The group around the child is formed based on the needs of each child. In this light, the group can consist of two or more people. Members of the groups can be teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, school nurses, music therapists and the parent(s) of the child. No single professional has the knowledge and resources to educate children with intellectual disabilities. The duration and frequency of the meetings depend on the decision taken by the group of workers in the school environment as a whole.

Hints/examples for the facilitation (they can be adapted to each national context based on different resources/approaches):

- After a teacher-parent meeting, the ECEC professional can propose a schedule of meetings and potential activities which will be implemented
- The professional can suggest topics for discussion with the child to promote their needs
- The meetings can be implemented at the school and in communication with the parents for easier planning
- Other participants than parents/guardians can meet up with professionals who support the child

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The collaboration between educators, and with other specialists can achieve better results for the education and inclusion of children.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- Easy to organize and implement at low cost.
- Global consideration of the child's needs.
- Sharing knowledge, experiences and understanding of each other's work.
- Planning common goals

- Parents can participate but are not the facilitators of the group
- Safer conclusions and more valid results for issues related to optimal cooperation with children and their inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the staff of three schools in Brussels and also by inclusion coaches working in the Flanders region in Belgium. Participants expressed a strong interest in this activity, finding it very appealing and in line with the most advanced practices. However, it was also stated that it requires time, planning and involvement of external stakeholders, thus longer time for its implementation could be considered. Also, the necessity to involve parents as 'experts' was underlined. However, the participants questioned the role of parents in this case, because sometimes they are the ones posing opposition to individualised education plans. In the opinion of the inclusion coach, this activity is a commendable action and a valuable policy. The coach recognized the tradition of implementing similar practices in Flanders and firmly believed that this inclusive approach is the only way forward. The barrier of time constraints and the potential confusion surrounding the roles of different professionals in a child's life was highlighted, and the necessity of collaborative efforts to overcome siloed work was emphasized. It was highlighted that this practice is similar to what in the UK is called TAC, Team Around the Child. It was noticed that this can be quite time consuming, but it is crucial not only for sharing (see <https://www.tacinterconnections.com/index.php/tacmodel>) information and challenges, but mainly to set common goals and targets. It can be very beneficial for children with autism, but also with lower needs. It was suggested that managers should be there to be aware of the needs in terms of time and resources. It was stated that it would be very good for the schools to adopt such a practice, in particular considering that the level of exchange with professionals providing additional support to children is currently very low.

HANDBOOK ON INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY

https://www.eduino.gov.mk/nastava/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/priracnik_mk.pdf

AIMS

This handbook aims at supporting education and care staff from ECEC settings across North Macedonia in addressing the needs of children with developmental difficulties through a collaborative approach.

DESCRIPTION

The Handbook on Advancing Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood, published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2017 is mainly targeted at educational and care staff working at ECEC settings. Its overall purpose is to establish guidelines for the staff to better identify the needs of children with developmental difficulties, including children with intellectual disabilities, as well as design individual plans that would benefit the overall development of the children, their adjustment and active participation in the ECEC setting. The Handbook recommends a strategic planning approach that should be undertaken by a group of professionals working with the child in the ECEC setting and in consultation with the parents of the child, structured in three main phases:

- Phase I: Functional analysis of the developmental difficulties of the child and development of a functional profile of the child based on SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis should cover the “Strengths” of the child, “Weaknesses” that constrain the child’s adjustment or participation in the daily life in the ECEC setting, “Opportunities”, i.e., factors that can positively influence the child’s adjustment and participation, and “Threats”, i.e., factors that could jeopardize them.
- Phase II: Development of a plan including SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goals for supporting the child in three main areas – social interactions, participation in everyday activities in the ECEC setting and fostering independence in everyday life. The formulation of these goals strives to specify the level of support needed from the staff and others, such as peers, parents and other professionals
- Phase III: Continuous monitoring, reporting and adjustment of the plan.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The application of this approach, namely the process of the SWOT analysis and the SMART goals formulation has the potential to create a forum for exchange of experiences, views and perspectives among all relevant professionals in the ECEC setting who are in contact with a child with intellectual disability.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The relevance of this approach contributes to its replicability potential in other contexts, and its user-friendliness increases the chances of successful application.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This activity was tested by three project partners – in Poland, Macedonia and Cyprus.

POLAND

The practice was evaluated by the staff of a Community Kindergarten in a Polish village Jurkow (Malopolska Province). The workshop was attended by 6 people, all the teaching staff of the kindergarten. A group reflection on the discussed practice turned into a discussion. In particular, the demand for measuring, i.e., the principle of measurability of the goal, has been questioned. This seems not only unrealistic in the context of children education and upbringing, but above all, encourages thinking about the child as a physical object that can be expressed in metres, seconds and other SI units. In principle, the participants were pleased to learn about the new idea and to have a chance to discuss it and analyse it in depth. It was clear to the teachers that SWOT and SMART are techniques commonly used in the field of projects. One participant posed a question: “Is the child a project?” The answer from all was simple and emphatic: “No”. It was suggested that the tool is inadequate to the subject, as one should not mechanically transfer techniques that are effective in one field to completely different dissimilar fields. The pilot session clearly showed the need to organize free and open discussions for kindergarten staff to support them in solving problematic issues.

MACEDONIA

The pilot activity involved 10 professionals from the public municipal institution for children, 'Goce Delchev' from Vinica, North Macedonia. According to the feedback from the participants, the activity provided a platform and open space for the ECEC staff to improve their knowledge and get familiar with the strategic documents for promoting the social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities at the national level. Furthermore, it provokes a space for discussion and mapping the main challenges the ECEC staff faces in their everyday work with children with disabilities and typical range of development. The activity widened the participants' perspective and knowledge on early childhood development. Moreover, it allowed the participants to understand better the social care and social protection system and how the systematic approach can improve their service at the kindergarten. The participants reported a high interest in analysing the strategic document and developing their strategic planning and thinking skills to support their professional development. They also understood the reason for improving the system and their involvement in promoting social inclusion.

CYPRUS

This practice was tested at the private kindergarten of The Giving Tree in Nicosia by the kindergarten staff/teachers who actively participated in the activity and at the end of the session they provided their feedback. This activity was helpful for the staff since it's a detailed handbook with guidelines to better recognise the needs of children with developmental difficulties, including children with intellectual disabilities. The description is clear with an understandable structure. A more detailed explanation of the S.W.O.T analysis and SMART goals will be useful since some of the staff members don't know exactly what is the S.W.O.T analysis or SMART goals and how useful is it. The staff/institution leaders provided positive feedback about this practice and it will be useful to implement it with a wider range of staff. It's a useful activity to be included in the Cyprus school curriculum for the ECEC staff and is a beneficial activity to support the teachers without any extra resources/materials. The teachers who implemented the selected practice really enjoyed it and they highly recommended this activity to be implemented in their school with all the staff members.

KINDERGARDEN MOUSE BOX

Good practice implemented by the “FRÖBEL-Muekiste” (Mouse Box) kindergarten located in Leipzig, Germany:

<https://maeusekiste.froebel.info/unser-kindergarten>

<https://maeusekiste.froebel.info/unser-kindergarten/team>

AIMS

The pedagogy in “FRÖBEL-Muekiste” is characterized by openness, participation and has an individualized approach. The educators in the “FRÖBEL-Muekiste” respond to the needs and interest of children by taking them up in everyday pedagogical work.

DESCRIPTION

The main goal of the practice is to offer a loving and competent education by upbringing and care for 74 children from the age of 9 weeks until they start school. The team of “FRÖBEL-Muekiste” enjoys supporting children in their individual education and development processes in a sensitive and respectful manner. The personality of the children, their needs, interests, and abilities are decisive for the organization of the everyday pedagogical life.

The team of the “FRÖBEL-Muekiste” includes:

- 1 leader (educator/graduate social worker)
- Child Protection Specialist
- 9 teachers
- 1 teacher of "musical education"
- 1 teacher of “working with children under three”
- 1 bilingual teacher
- 2 practice instructors
- 1 bilingual educator in training
- 1 service person
- 1 caretaker

The staff regularly participate and get involved in trainings and relevant pedagogical topics and pass knowledge to the team as part of the daily work in the setting.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The daily communication and exchanging experiences among the staff contribute to both better planning to address children's needs, but also to decreasing the stress, challenges and concerns among the staff that are pertinent to working with children.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Informal communication on issues related to the everyday life and work in the setting with children with intellectual disabilities, as well as more structured discussions during trainings can be significantly beneficial for the staff in various ECEC contexts.

INTERVISION – SUPERVISION

AIMS

Building the knowledge and professionalism of the day-care staff.

DESCRIPTION

To monitor the work done with the children, the inclusion coaches and staff conduct a supervision meeting (2 hours long), which is organized every 3-4 months. In Flanders, inclusion coaches are professionals that facilitate the inclusion of children. Supervision is generally asked for by the director of the team. InterVision is voluntary and allows peers to reflect collectively on their professional conduct by sharing the practice of one of the members of the group, their difficulties in dealing with complex situations, or unsatisfactory results in carrying out their tasks. Staff will call for and join these meetings when they feel they need more advice or support in how to handle a specific situation. These meetings are interdisciplinary: all caretakers that look after children with special needs are present, and one (often it is the inclusion coach) will undertake a facilitator's role. The meetings are built around cases that staff provide. Participants will reflect on them, exchange and learn from each other. The methods and approaches of these meetings can vary. The choice of the method

depends on what is the case that will be discussed, and it is up to the inclusion coach to choose what best suits the individual case. These can include positive solutions building, asking questions to understand the case or look into the case through different positions (e.g., caretaker, mother, child or the government). These sessions are always run in a very safe and secure environment by vowing confidentiality.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

In every meeting new supervision staff looks back at the latest meeting and evaluates it. The meetings bring a deeper knowledge and provide solutions and new skills to the day-care staff.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- It is easy to reproduce.
- It empowers the staff.
- Staff feels heard and builds up knowledge.
- It provides tools for the inclusive approach.

IDENTIFYING THE GROUPS YOU BELONG TO

From DECET training pack

AIMS

Increase awareness of inclusion and exclusion

Reinforce the inclusion process at the setting.

DESCRIPTION

The 1h30 training provides a space to staff to reflect on family diversity. The materials include a series of pictures representing different families in terms of composition, sexual orientation, ethnic origins and religions.

1st phase (5 min):

Presentation of the process: procedures, objectives, instructions, including the opening question. This question can vary according to the context and the specific objective.

Each participant is asked to:

- Choose a photograph or two which raises questions for you regarding your concept of "family".
- Choose the picture that most resembles your idea of an ideal family.
- Choose a picture that raises questions for you.
- What family is closest to yours?
- What family would you like to know more about?

2nd phase (15 min):

- Look closely at all the photographs, mentally choose one or two, based on the opening question
- Silently, prepare what will be shared in the group. Save all comments, questions, or impressions for the group time
- Take your time. Even if your choice has been made, wait until everyone has chosen theirs

3d phase (1 hr): Group time.

- Each participant can now take the photograph they had earlier chosen mentally. If two people have selected the same photograph, that is not a problem. Each participant should stick to his/her initial choice and comment on it in turn.
- Present the photograph, or photographs, by clearly and fully expressing the reasons for your choice. Be prepared to respond to questions and reactions from the group
- If necessary, the trainer can help participants at this stage.

4th phase (10 min):

- Trainer's comment and assess what occurred during the session.
- Group discussion on how the session raises and answers questions linked to the diversity issue. New insights are shared.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The pictures are, for many reasons, very good stimuli for talking about families. Because the photographs show only a fragment of life, each participant is tempted to fill in the rest. The pictures allow multiple interpretations, so it often occurs that participants have very different, often opposing, interpretations. These divergent views (when treated by the trainer as different, not as 'good' or 'bad') enhance discussions about where our ideas come from and raise awareness about prejudices. This exercise addresses similarities as well as differences, therefore participants can also easily identify with the families.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- This exercise gives staff the opportunity to reflect on personal experiences to support them in their inclusion work with children
- The training fosters greater understanding and openness among parents and educators and thus allows families to integrate
- It supports children and their parents in developing the diverse aspects of their identities; enables families to learn from one another across cultural and other boundaries.

THE FINNISH APPROACH TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

One week training organized in Oulu, Finland, and in Florence, Italy by the Europass Teacher Academy.

<https://www.teacheracademy.eu/course/special-needs/>

AIMS

The course will help participants to:

- Identify the most common difficulties/challenges that a child with disabilities may have upon entering a classroom
- Reflect on the role of the teacher a part of the system that helps every single child

- Understand the function of social institutions, partners outside the school, and the teacher in working with children with special needs
- Familiarize and master concrete, hands-on methodologies to promote the learning and growth of children with special needs.

DESCRIPTION

Proposed schedule:

Day 1 – Course introduction & identifying disabilities

Day 2 – Identifying difficulties

Day 3 – How to effectively support students

Day 4 – Helping the child

Day 5 – Emotional and behavioural support

Day 6 – Course closure & cultural activities. Course evaluation and excursion and other external cultural activities.

Children with learning difficulties, and mental or neuropsychiatric disorders may pose particular challenges to teachers who are not familiar with their special needs. The course clarifies how the best learning and growth in children with special needs is promoted by the close cooperation among the teacher, the school system and administration, and other partners outside the school (such as parents, and bio-, psycho-, and social institutions).

EVALUATION AND RESULTS

The course evaluation is organized on the last day. It consists of round up of acquired competences, feedback, and discussion. With more than 250 courses available all over Europe and more than 12.000 participants per year, Europass is the largest network of high-quality providers of teacher training courses.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Designed and delivered by a Finnish teacher this course introduces kindergarten teachers to the 3-staged model that the Finnish kindergartens and primary schools have specifically developed to promote the learning and personal growth of children. The course provides educators with a practical understanding of the difficulties and challenges that a child with special needs may have upon entering your classroom. It is tailored to the needs of participants – it is possible to discuss a specific topic (one needs to indicate it 4 weeks in advance).

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the representatives of 17 Greek kindergartens (16 public and 1 private), as well as 2 education stakeholders from the Ministry of Education. The professionals felt this training would be helpful for untrained professionals or educators who are not familiar with the terms and approaches needed for children with special needs and more specifically about intellectual disabilities. They think it is a useful and organized content that can be enriched and adapted to the Greek national context. The education stakeholders provided resources and tools existing in the Greek context in order to plan and organize a similar training and follow the same structure as the good practice. They mentioned that even if they didn't have the national resources, the good practice consists of specific steps and guidelines on how to implement and organize the training, making it a valuable practice.

The professionals who followed the training mentioned that it helped them to understand the process and approach much better and that it reinforced their capabilities and knowledge on the topic of inclusion. The training consists of all the basic components and covers important aspects of inclusivity and how to adapt it in the ECEC environment. The professionals commented that other trainings or theoretical frameworks were more disconnected with the reality and this training covers everything important, making it easy to follow and to use, even if you are not familiar with an approach for children with intellectual disabilities. The professionals used this approach within their classes and saw what difference it made to their students. In classes attended by students with intellectual disabilities, they felt more confident and equipped with more knowledge on how to approach and care for their needs. Although it is an early stage, they think that being more knowledgeable on the topic contributes to their classes being more inclusive and safer for the children.

NETWORK

A network for cooperation and self-education for teachers.

<https://www.ore.edu.pl/2015/04/plany-dzialania-sieci-wspolpracy-i-samokształcenia/>

AIMS

The Centre for Education Development, psychological-educational counselling, libraries and teacher training centres participated in the creation and implementation of a new form of professional development. The aims of cooperation and self-education are as follows: sharing the experiences between participants, analysing the good practices used by participants, obtaining methodological and substantive support, developing participants' competencies, creating new solutions according to the needs of facilities belonging to the network, building relationships and cooperation between teachers.

DESCRIPTION

The actions taken within the network are mostly meetings conducted either face-to-face or on the digital platform. The latter is used between the meetings to share opinions, publish educational materials and work results (created tools, class scenarios). The meetings on the platform make it possible to contact experts regardless of distance and take part in training far from one's place of residence. The list of topics is discussed and created in the first direct meeting.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The number of such networks and their participants increases. Almost every pedagogical library in Poland (7782) or teacher training centre (more than 18 000) has one. The issues relating directly to working with a child with special educational needs are addressed. Some of the topics are: the work plan of the cooperation network and self-education of teachers working with a child with special educational needs, IED in practice - creating Individual Education Plans for intellectually disabled children, IED, and what next. Available at:

<https://odm.pcpppidn.eu/sieci-wspolpracy-i-samokształcenia-archiwum-2021-2022/>

The dynamics of the development suggest that it is a valuable initiative.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The programme, besides being a valuable tool in developing the teacher's working methods in working with a disabled child, gives an opportunity to discuss the issues in a more private and direct manner. It provides support for the teachers and optimises the search for solutions. It lets one express their own standpoint. The network connects people and the institutions they work in. A network participant has remarked: "Thanks to the information and skills acquired through the network, I can bring something new to specialized discussions and I am more confident because I feel the support of people from the network. Some of the problems and issues that arise in our work environment have been discussed and even solved by colleagues from the network. I really benefit from their experience. This air of freshness along with a sense of humour has enlivened our discussions, which are often burdened by routine and old solutions."

LEADERS

The project is implemented by the Regional Teacher Training Centre in Lubelskie Province, Poland, in cooperation with education libraries and a psychological-educational counselling centre. The variety of parties stimulates local cooperation and facilitates sharing of experiences.

<https://lscdn.pl/pl/projekty/12786,Lubelscy-Liderzy-Edukacji-Wlaczajacej.html>

AIMS

Broadening the knowledge about inclusive education among the staff of the education system, especially in regard to realisation, implementation and supervision.

DESCRIPTION

A series of training and counselling sessions is based on training and counselling programmes developed in the project "A student with special educational needs - developing a model of training and counselling" by the Centre for Education Development. <https://www.ore.edu.pl/2018/06/szkolenia-i-doradztwo-dla-poradni-o-projeckie/>

The training framework for educators in schools and nursery schools – a 45-hour course. The training includes Inclusive education as a high-quality education for all students. A functional evaluation in the educational practice: from identification of the resources to the support process. Work with a class with various educational needs. Cooperation of teachers and professionals with other staff members of nursery schools, schools and facilities and teachers. Cooperation of teachers with the community - legal and organisational aspects and good practices. The development of teaching staff of nursery schools, schools and facilities. The training was organised in the form of a workshop, each participant had 3-hour individual consultations, they could choose their subject.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

1920 people were trained. They will promote the knowledge and ideas of inclusive education in their educational facilities. They will act as leaders, followed by their associates. It can be assumed that in every educational facility there will be such a person. It has to be pointed out that the training included only the module referring to nursery schools.

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The tools, resources and ideas created in the project were used in other trainings. The participants and trainers faced, during the training, specific situations and problems which occur in inclusive education, and had to find the appropriate solutions. This practical aspect helped in improving the workshop of teaching staff. The trainees are in contact with the Teacher Training Centre, they can enter discussions with other teaching staff members and participate in them or provide consultations. It definitely helps to overcome the feeling of loneliness and helplessness which affects the inclusive education teachers. It will facilitate a free exchange of opinions on the actions that are necessary in nursery schools. Similar projects are implemented in other provinces in Poland. The incentive to take part in the training is that it is free of charge. The teachers have an opportunity to have an impact on their surroundings, which contributes to increasing one's position in the local environment. Such projects also enable publishing one's own teaching materials and opinions. This has a positive impact on the professional advancement. Higher professional ranks mean higher salaries and job security.

CHAPTER 4

Strategies and approaches for coordinating information, resources, and services from community-based organizations, businesses, cultural and civic organizations, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and other community groups that can support the ECEC inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

PANHELLENIC CONFERENCE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

Good practice suggested by Psychophysiology and Education Study Centre of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens:

<https://eproceedings.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/educ>

<https://spedu.gr/>

AIMS

The main goal of the Panhellenic Conference of Education Sciences is the dissemination of knowledge to professionals, teachers and the general population as well as the quality upgrade of education in Greece.

DESCRIPTION

The conference is held annually and presents recent basic and applied research in education and special education, as well as psychiatry, psychology, linguistics and speech therapy. In addition, during the Conference, the formulation of proposals for the future of education in Greece takes place. Finally, new research and educational experiences from distinguished personalities in the field of education are presented. The presenters' announcements are included in the conference proceedings and published in an issue of the National Documentation Centre, which has an ISSN.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

As the result of the regular organization of the Panhellenic Conference of Education Sciences, the knowledge about special education and intellectual disabilities among the population gradually increases. The number of participants and the resonance of the conference would be a way of assessing its importance, however the impact of this practice has not been measured, yet.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- A conference is a good practice because of the dissemination of knowledge about children with intellectual disability to professionals, teachers and the general population.
- The announcements of the speakers are published, and anyone interested can refer to the information at any time.
- Theoretical and applied research is presented to the general population and professionals.
- Suggestions and new good practices for the future of education in Greece are discussed and formulated.

OUR CITY WITH THE CHILDREN

The programme is an attempt to integrate "Field Pedagogy" into the Teaching Exercises at Pedagogical Department of Kindergarten Education of the University of Crete

AIMS

The programme aimed to promote the sustainability of the people and the field, connecting the university with the school and the local community of Rethymno. It focuses on the needs of society (children, parents, teachers, students), through a spirit of inquiry, active learning and learning outside of schools using different places and community instead of classrooms. It ensures the well-being of people and their 'place'. It connects learning with local history, environment and culture.

More specifically, the project's objectives are:

- To ensure the well-being of people and their 'place'
- To connect learning with local history, environment and culture
- To offer young children authentic contexts for learning and familiarizing them with the concept of "place", "identity" and "community"
- To give meaning to children's experiences in relation to "place", "identity" and "community"

DESCRIPTION

Forty-four university students at the fourth year of their studies, the supervisor of the Didactic Exercise courses as well as instructors of different subjects teaching at the university participated in the programme. Children from 11 kindergartens as well as their 16 kindergarten teachers and children's parents also participated in it. The following institutions, organizations and businesses from the local community took part in the programme: Municipality of Rethymno, the Conservatory of Rethymno, the Youth Centre of the Municipality of Rethymno, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Holy Metropolis of Rethymno, a Traditional Wood Oven, a Traditional Pastry Shop, and a Music Association. The participants had a chance to explore local traditions in their city/country. They could find out about these traditions by doing some research in books, asking elders or other member of the community and visit museums and monuments in their city. After that, the participants shared how this made them feel and what they learnt about their city and how this made them feel a member of the community or what impact it had on them. Data were collected by the supervisor and the university students and analysed using the qualitative approach based on the criterion "how the project was experienced by all participants". Semi-structured mini interviews with teachers, parents and members of the local community before and after the implementation of the project (portfolios of students, children's works, photos, recordings, video recordings, diaries, reflections) were used.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

For young children: they got to know their city and defined their identity in relation to it. They developed strong bonds with the people and culture of the local community. They were involved in authentic learning experiences and through open learning processes. They enriched their academic knowledge.

For university students: they successfully planned and supported child-centred interventions that included actions beyond and outside the school environment. They developed communication and collaboration skills among themselves, with

classroom teachers and with members of the local community. For educators: they recognized the need for schools to become vibrant hubs for their neighbourhood, as well as the importance of including all citizens, young and old, to knowledge, creative expression, dialogue and innovation. They cultivated cohesion and team spirit among themselves. For parents: they shifted their perceptions regarding the presence of university students in kindergartens, as well as the University's contribution to the life of their city. They shifted their perceptions of the kindergarten's core curriculum and their children's different ways of learning and their dynamics. They developed meaningful relationships with those involved in their children's learning and deeper relationships with the parents of children with special educational needs. For the local community: they developed feelings of mutual recognition, mutual respect and shifting perceptions regarding the work of each agency. They had the opportunity of a creative, energetic, participatory and interesting gathering with other residents of all ages. The results highlighted the essential contribution of "Field Pedagogy" to the investigation of the modern changing condition in the field of child's learning and educational spaces, as well as to a new polyphonic view of the relationship with the city. The quality learning experiences obtained by all involved were based on the organized system of relationships and interactions that developed between people (parents, teachers, children, friends, other adults), spaces (home, kindergarten, neighbourhood, museum, etc.) and institutions (family, municipality, community, etc.) and determined the activities in time and place. The well-being of the community and the quality of the environment were enhanced through the active involvement of citizens, local organizations and media in the life of the kindergartens.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- Participation and symmetrical professional relations
- The collaboration and inclusion of all individuals regardless of characteristics
- Authentic practices backed by research
- Reflection and orientation processes
- Active learning and reciprocity
- The utilization of resources and materials from the local community itself
- The possibilities of getting to know the kindergarten's core curriculum
- Formative assessment and critical reflection on practices
- The active participation of citizens/local community

EQUALITY GUIDANCE FOR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

PUBLISHED BY TOWER HAMLETS COUNCIL EARLY YEARS INCLUSION TEAM

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Children-and-families-services/Early-Years/Equality_Guidance.pdf

AIMS

The aim of this guidance is to support ECEC practitioners to continue to develop their inclusive ethos, policies and practices to include all relevant community stakeholders with the aim of meeting children's individual needs, including those of children with intellectual disabilities.

DESCRIPTION

This publication provides advice and support to help ensure equality for all and holistic approaches for active engagement of a wide array of stakeholders in the ECEC settings, such as children, parents and families, staff, the wider community, other services and visitors. It is structured in the following parts:

- Developing anti-discriminatory practice (guidance for recognizing and reporting discriminatory incidents)
- Inclusive policies and practices (guidance for developing inclusive policies, their dissemination in the wider community and ensuring their commitment)
- Inclusive planning for individual needs (guidance for including relevant professionals from other sectors in catering for the individual needs of children and acknowledging their expertise and advice);
- Inclusive relationships and partnerships (guidance for incorporating the unique sets of values, beliefs, attitudes and backgrounds of all community members for the purpose of promoting inclusion for all)
- Inclusive environments and approaches (guidance for developing resources in the ECEC environment that reflect the diversity of the children and those of their families)

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The application of this guidance can lead to the introduction of inclusive policies and practices implemented within the wider community where children with intellectual disabilities live, not only within the ECEC setting they attend. It has been produced by an experienced group of early years professionals from the Tower Hamlets Council Early Years Inclusion Team.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

This guidance recognizes that all ECEC settings and practitioners have a duty to promote understanding and appreciation of difference and diversity, including of children with intellectual disabilities, and the important role that the wider community can play in these efforts.

It provides strategies for actively challenging all forms of discrimination, promoting equality and inclusive practice through building collaborative practices. Moreover, it outlines an approach where this is achieved through an active process of being aware of the situation, considering how to respond and taking time to reflect, in order to continually evaluate and improve the practice. Thus, this guidance is relevant and applicable in all ECEC settings, that can either implement it in their operation or use it as an inspiration for developing their own guiding documents in this field.

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

IMPLEMENTED BY THE KINDERGARTEN BUBA MARA IN SKOPJE, MACEDONIA

<https://gradinkabubamara.org.mk/aktivnosti/1937>

AIMS

The activities implemented by the kindergarten Buba Mara were aimed at increasing the local community's understanding and acceptance of children with autism, as well as sending a message to children, parents and the wider public that children with autism are welcomed in the setting.

DESCRIPTION

The kindergarten Buba Mara is located at the Municipality of Aerodrom in Skopje. On 2nd April 2022 the kindergarten implemented several activities to mark the World Autism Awareness Day. These activities involved preparation of puzzle pieces and blue light bulbs' signs (widely used symbols of autism awareness) by the children and the ECEC practitioners, preparation of a presentation on autism spectrum disorder by one of the staff members of the kindergarten and its dissemination on the kindergarten's website mainly aimed at parents and wider community-members, as well as lighting up the building where the kindergarten is located with blue lights. The lightening was sponsored by a private company that provides such services.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The awareness raising activities were not only noticed in the neighbourhood where the kindergarten is located but they also caught the interest of local and national media that reported them, thus, contributing additionally to their dissemination and raising the public's awareness on the importance of creating ECEC settings where all children with autism can reach their full potential and feel valued. However, a formal evaluation on the effect of the activities has not been undertaken.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

Through the activities implemented, the kindergarten successfully involved children, parents, and a private company, thus, engaged multiple stakeholders in its efforts for raising awareness on autism in the community. It reached the community members in its vicinity, but also the wider local and national public through the dissemination supported by the media. Other key aspects that make these activities a good practice is their relevance in other contexts, replicability potential, and the low costs associated with them.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This activity was tested by three project partners – in Poland, Macedonia and Cyprus.

POLAND

The pilot activities involved the staff of a kindergarten and nursery run by the Association of Independent Social Initiatives in a Polish village (Malopolska Province). The workshop was attended by 4 people, all the teaching staff of the kindergarten. All workshop participants found the proposed activities useful in promoting inclusionary attitudes in the community. The combination of different types of activities was really appreciated. It is very important to involve the children in the preparation of the puzzles and also, through an exhibition in the kindergarten, they can be used to promote the idea of inclusive education in the parents' group. The only reservation raised was about illuminating the kindergarten's building in blue for cost reasons, but it was suggested to look for a private sponsor to do it. Inspired by the idea, participants suggested the following modifications or additions to the good practice presented:

- Placing a slogan on the Facebook page, instead of putting information about autism on the website. An image, a photo, a graphic sign could play an important role: this will be the main signal to attract attention. A link placed on the page will refer to wider news about autism.
- The jigsaw puzzle must be made by the children. The image is a group work by children containing obvious visual cues related to Autism Day (e.g., blue background colour). Shapes of 'puzzle blocks' could also be created by the children - simple forms including equilateral triangles, squares, such as the children could cut out.
- Preparation of blue handprinted shirts and performance in these outfits by the preschool groups on 2nd April in the kindergarten.

The kindergarten staff declared to organize the celebration of the World Autism Awareness Day in the coming year.

MACEDONIA

The activity was implemented in 3 institutions in North Macedonia and aimed to increase the awareness of the parents and the broader community of the social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the cities of Valandovo, Gevgelija, and Negotino. It involved a group of 24 children and the local community in Negotino, 21 children and professionals from the kindergarten in Gevgelija and 26 children and their parents from the kindergarten in Valandovo. Even though the activity was not implemented on the World Autism Day, it has had a broader positive impact on the community in terms of raising awareness for the social inclusion of children with autism and creating a more resilient and inclusive community. The facilitators of the activity developed drawings that were easily understandable and engaging for both the children with a typical range of development and their parents and families, but at the same time, providing food for thought that all children need to develop and thrive in an inclusive and nurturing environment and that the community needs to offer equal opportunities for all. The engaged participants included children with typical development, as well as their parents and the local community who were highly motivated to engage, which led to the creation of a more inclusive and democratic environment for children with autism and, at the same time, supported the awareness of children with typical development to support their peers with autism.

CYPRUS

This activity was also evaluated at the private kindergarten of The Happy World of children in Nicosia. It is a useful and interactive practice to engage the community since autism in Cyprus is one of the most common disabilities. The organisation of this kind of awareness-raising activity is the most interactive way to engage the community members and also to attract organisations, and businesses to work with these children. The community members who implemented the selected practice really enjoyed it and thought it was an excellent idea to organise such awareness campaigns for these children and to motivate the community members be active. They suggested that the ECEC staff/teachers can co-organise awareness campaigns with organisations or associations working with these children such as the Cyprus Autism Association which are active and provides a series of workshops and fundraising events for children.

SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

AIMS

Reaching out to more parents and enhance possibilities for collaboration with existing services.

DESCRIPTION

In Flanders, inclusion coaches are professionals that facilitate the inclusion of children by supporting supports teachers, assistants, families, and the child in ECEC centres to implement best educational practices for children with moderate to significant developmental disabilities. In order to increase the awareness of parents on inclusive ECEC, and the collaboration with the community inclusion coaches and ECEC staff map and reach out to all possible services that come in contact with parents and their special needs children. This generally includes doctors' practices, schools, midwife organisations, playground circles for mothers. After mapping the existing services, the first contact with them involves fixing a meeting to present the day-care centres, their activities and explain the role of an inclusion coach. During these meetings they receive information materials (folders and posters) so they can inform the parents they

work with or can find their way to them. Also, this represents the first contact with the inclusion coach that offers his/her consultation and help and the possibility of developing activities and projects in cooperation with the ECEC

establishment and the services. When the contact is established, meetings may be shorter and just about sharing new materials and activities.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

These meetings enlarge the outreach of the inclusive childcare centres and are evaluated in meetings with all ECEC establishments working inclusively every 3-4 months.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

It is an easy and viable way to spread the knowledge about support centres and other services in the community so that the parents can find their way to them.

PINKO XL LAB

AIMS

The PINKO XL Lab started in the city of Leuven in 2022 to respond to the lack of awareness on the inclusive care offer, both among parents and care providers. The lab aims to expand the number of childcare places for children with heavier care needs through a neighbourhood-oriented offer so that more parents can make use of it. Also, the expertise of the 'reception floor' and of external supporters (such as physiotherapists, speech therapists, nurses, etc.) is matched through in-service training or extra support at work.

DESCRIPTION

Childcare is offered to every child, including children with disabilities. To find the right care tailored to their needs, the Leuven Centre Inclusive Childcare encourages childcare initiatives to cooperate with organisations that offer help, guidance and support to children with or at risk of disabilities. Only in this way can parents of a child with a disability find quality and accessible care 'close to home' and confidently leave their children in professional hands. Yet, the CIK notes that they receive rather few care requests for children with complex care needs. Parents and care providers shared that the inclusive care offer is

insufficiently known, and they are insufficiently aware of the expertise and care quality that characterises the inclusive childcare initiatives in Leuven. To change this, the CIK launched the innovative lab PINKO XL. That abbreviation stands for 'Pioneering IN Childcare' and XL stands for the city-wide cooperation between the CIK, multifunctional centre Ganspoel (together with vzwRede, a partnership between fourteen facilities for the care and guidance of persons with disabilities), the Centre for Developmental Disabilities (COS) and many pioneers in childcare: Zorg Leuven's four day-care centres and service for parents reception, KU Leuven's four day-care centres and the day-care centres Wit Konijntje, De Pagadderkes, Kinderrijk, Het Eekhoortje and Kinderparadijs.

The aim of the PINKO XL lab is threefold:

- Firstly, the lab wants to expand the number of care places for children with more severe care needs through a neighbourhood-oriented offer so that more parents can make use of it. After all, a lot of expertise is already available in various places.
- Secondly, the lab wants to match the expertise of different professionals working with the child such as physiotherapists, speech therapists, nurses and caregivers and create moments of collaboration and exchange between them.
- Third, the lab wants to change the perception around inclusive care for babies and toddlers with complex care needs, both among parents and caregivers. There is a lot of disability-specific expertise in childcare, and children with and without specific care needs can learn a lot of things from each other. All forms of diversity should be present in childcare.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

PINKO XL will be further expanded after evaluation. Sustainable anchoring will be sought. The lab will also examine how great the need is for specialised childcare in Leuven or whether it is appropriate to accommodate children with greater care needs together in a childcare initiative.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

It enables children with more complex care needs to also participate in childcare, so that quality and accessible childcare can be found by all.

Find more: <https://pers.leuven.be/kinderopvang-voor-ieder-kind-via-het-innovatieve-labo-pinko-xl-mqw0i4>

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the representatives of 17 Greek kindergartens (16 public and 1 private), as well as 2 education stakeholders from the Ministry of Education. The good practice is very well elaborated, clear and understandable and provides necessary suggestions and a structure that can be followed and adapted even in small communities. The professionals mentioned that according to their experience, one of the biggest issues is the difficulty which the parents face in terms of understanding their children's diagnosis and knowing whom to trust. A proposal was to use this approach and structure and inform the local bodies, and even the schools to have a list with recommendations, based on their knowledge, to support the parents in their search for the appropriate support close to them. The professionals suggested that each school can create a list of recommendations and even proposed that if they weren't sure, they could ask parents who have already found an institution which they would recommend to give them some advice. It was also mentioned that this practice could be implemented in a small and a wide scale. A small scale could be just a proposal of facilities available near them, while the wider scale would involve contacting the institutions and asking for internal collaboration in the area to provide suggestions for the parents, creating a small version of the Pinko XL Lab in the neighbourhoods.

EARLY INTERVENTION LIAISON SERVICE

AIMS

Aiming to raise awareness, the Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Nicosia, Cyprus, organizes seminars and lectures on a regular basis. When the need arises, specialist professionals are invited for various presentations.

DESCRIPTION

Conduction of seminars, lectures, conferences and Info Days to inform and educate the community as a whole about the benefits that can be received by individuals with intellectual disabilities and educate about the importance of early childhood intervention during ECEC.

These lectures underline the public about the importance of early intervention during childhood, and specifically during kindergarten. The scheduled seminars aim to inform the public about the service's action and promote co-operation between relevant organizations that offer early intervention services or financial

benefits to the children. Many of these lectures have been addressed to paediatricians, health visitors, social workers, special education key workers, but are also accessible to the community.

EVALUATION AND RESULTS

The Committee for the Protection of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities involves a 10-member council that evaluates and assesses the lectures and seminars prior the finalization of the content.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The lectures and seminars are not limited to one target group but inform the general public about the importance of early intervention during childhood. The Early Intervention Liaison Service also offers services to families and to the children with intellectual disabilities.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING

A programme run by Cyprus Pedagogical Institute in collaboration with the British Council, completed in May 2010.

AIMS

To provide comprehensive and accurate information and to update the knowledge of special education teachers and other specialists on basic issues of legislation, philosophy, pedagogy and technologies of special education.

DESCRIPTION

Phase A: Common trainings for all specialists (8 meetings of 3 teaching periods each) Phase B: Trainings per speciality (17 meetings of 3 teaching periods each) During the Special Educator Training Programme seminars and workshops were designed by The Pedagogical Department for special educators and other professionals from the following specialities: Deaf, Blind, Special Learning, Cognitive, Functional and Adaptive Disabilities, and Speech and Language Therapy. The purpose of the Special Education Teacher Training Programme was to provide comprehensive and accurate information and to update the knowledge of special education teachers and different specialists involved in inclusive education on basic issues of legislation, philosophy, pedagogy and

technologies of special education in the context of continuous improvement of the quality of the education provided.

https://www.pi.ac.cy/pi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=268&lang=en

<https://www.britishcouncil.com.cy/about/80-years-cultural-relations-cyprus/training-opportunities-to-teachers>

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The programme was organized in co-operation with the British Council which has been providing training opportunities in Cyprus since 1936. Seminars and workshops were offered not only to SEN and ECEC educators, but also to other professionals, such as psychologists, who are also essential for the integration of children with intellectual disabilities, either in the classroom or in the community. Educators could find all the training materials online.

MARCHING FOR AUTISM

Good practice implemented periodically by two (non-public and public) kindergartens in Dobra (village in Małopolska Province):

<https://przedszkole.gminadobra.pl/>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100055948035888>

AIMS

The main goal of the practice is to raise awareness of the increasing phenomenon of autism, and ultimately to support and protect autistic persons in the local community.

DESCRIPTION

This good practice has been initiated by the local kindergartens in cooperation with a primary school, special school/education centre and a Senior Citizens Club. These five institutions organize jointly a public event every year on the occasion of The World Autism Awareness Day (2nd April). The main part of the celebration is a parade along the main street of the village, ending in the local park. All the participants (mainly children but also some of their parents, teachers, young people with disabilities and senior citizens), dressed in blue and holding blue balloons gather in the morning in the square near the church and start marching slowly to the park at the appointed hour. When they reach the

destination, they crowd in a big group and wait for a beep to release their balloons and let them fly away. Then, outdoor festivities begin. A variety of integration games and exercises are proposed to participants and onlookers. Also, refreshments are served. The celebration can be joined by anyone. Before the event, poster action is always organized. A visually attractive communication appears on advertising poles, in shops and in public institutions.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

As a result of the regular organization of the Blue March, the knowledge about autism as a developmental disorder among villagers gradually increases. The number of the march participants grows. It has been also observed that people who meet the parade in the street usually react in a very positive way and inform each other about the meaning and aim of this event. However, more insightful evaluation practices have not been implemented, so the real impact of this practice has not been measured, yet.

WHY CALL IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

- Easy to organize and implement at low cost
- Involves different social groups of all ages
- It allows for spontaneous interactions with a passer-by who can approach the participants to ask questions
- Its regularity contributes to a long-lasting effect of the action
- Spectacular, joyful and open character of the event makes it an attractive offer for the local community

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PILOT

This good practice was evaluated by the staff of three schools in Brussels and also by inclusion coaches working in the Flanders region in Belgium.

They assessed it as very helpful in creating a network and awareness around Autism. Although it requires time and effort to be implemented, it can be downgraded to a smaller activity. It was suggested to include a reference and link to the World Autism Awareness Day in the description in the handbook:

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/world-autism-awareness-day>

It is appreciated that this activity takes place outdoors and goes beyond the walls of the classroom, thus promoting diversity and togetherness amongst the local community. It is believed that such an event would be highly effective since it can be visible to everyone, prompting curiosity and generating questions from the community. Confidence was expressed that tangible results could be achieved through increased parent engagement and the involvement of individuals from

all segments of the community. The march was seen as an opportunity to send a strong message to society. Participants agreed that involving various stakeholders would give this initiative more impetus and visibility. They considered contacting the mayor, the community, multiple schools, and other partners to prepare the march. They emphasized the significance of building it up together, engaging everyone in the preparations and disseminating information amongst each actor. Still, this multi-stakeholder approach could pose a barrier for the implementation as it might take more time to engage everyone. The inclusion coach mentioned the successful “inclusion week” held in Flanders last year, which could be a basis to launch the Autism march in her region. While no significant barriers were mentioned, participants expressed a need for more information to ensure successful implementation. Concrete steps outlined included initiating discussions within the school, particularly with parents as a first step, followed by seeking support or contribution from the Brussels city administration. Finally, BEPS headmaster suggested that she would mention this at the upcoming meetings with the other heads of international primary schools in Brussels to foster collaboration and collective action. Some educators, who liked the idea, expressed scepticism on the feasibility of doing a march in the streets, due to the coordination effort needed to organise such an event. As an alternative, it was suggested to do an afternoon event in front of the school.

CAMPAIGN

The Special Inclusive Education Support Centre in Bydgoszcz conducted a social campaign for the inclusive education

<http://www.sosw3.bydgoszcz.pl/kampania-spoleczna-scwew/>

AIMS

Raising awareness of various educational needs of people belonging to the local community.

DESCRIPTION

The event was organised on the premises of the Residential School and Vocational Training Centre Nr 3 in Bydgoszcz which provides education for intellectually disabled children. Radio ESKA broadcasted beforehand talks with the members of the Centre, they covered promoting inclusive education and invited people to participate in the campaign. The video coverage was provided by TVP3 and Radio ESKA. Promotional materials (posters, leaflets, stickers, banners) presented the ideas of inclusive education. The participants were given

t-shirts and caps with the logo of the Centre. There were contests in 10 disciplines in which disabled and non-disabled people could compete. Nursery schools and school pupils had to demonstrate their fitness, ingeniousness, and creativity but they also had to perform tasks where their hearing or sight was limited. 13 facilities (2 nursery schools, 5 primary schools, 3 Special School and Education Centres for people with intellectual disabilities, impaired hearing or vision, and 3 post-primary schools) created 10-person teams. Refreshments (water, juice, and fruit) were provided. During the opening ceremony, the teams, participants, and ideas of inclusive education were presented. During the closing ceremony participants were given certificates. The event will be periodic.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The event proceedings and its atmosphere demonstrated participants cooperation and competition as equals. It is a proof of integration of students and teachers from special education and common schools. The ideas of inclusive education were presented in practice to all participants, spectators, and guests (including the representatives of local authorities).

WHY IS IT A GOOD PRACTICE?

The campaign reached about 10,000 TV viewers and a similar number of Radio ESKA listeners. The number of active participants and on-site spectators was around 200. It is a good result. However, the most important thing is that the idea of inclusive education was promoted by creating such an environment in which all participants acted in the spirit of inclusive education and implemented its principles.

SUMMARY

Many of the good practices described in the Handbook were piloted by five project partners in Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia and Poland, in cities, towns and villages, and both public and private early-education settings. Some of the techniques were tested twice in two different national contexts. Most of them can be adapted to local or national requirements. The sessions and activities involved children with disabilities and a typical range of development, as well as kindergarten teachers, parents/guardians and community members. The feedback from the pilots was very positive and showed a lot of appreciation for our Handbook and the EMBRACE project.

The first group of recommended good practices is devoted to engaging children: providing best strategies, approaches and activities for creating a culture of inclusion in ECEC classrooms. The workshop facilitators reported that they are well structured and provide explanations and guidelines for implementation with children with and without disabilities. They declared that they would be happy to add the practices to their activities in the future. In their opinion, they provide playful and attractive ways of reflecting on otherness. During the pilots, the children made significant and appropriate comments: for example, “Elmer, the elephant, was sad to be different, but other elephants liked him just the way he was”, or “All children want to play and have fun! It doesn’t matter if you are different, I want to play with you”. They could easily follow the activities, enhancing their creativity and learning in the group. The challenges reported included a short attention span on the part of children and problems with focusing on some tasks. On the other hand, the children were truly engaged most of the time, and their statements during discussions demonstrated their proper understanding of the issues raised.

The second group of activities focuses on parents and guardians, including approaches and strategies for connecting with and fully engaging parents and guardians of children with or without disabilities. The workshop participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the activities implemented and enjoyed learning in the group. The activities provided the parents and guardians with valuable opportunities to discuss their own issues and challenge isolation. Different tasks and approaches unleashed their inventiveness, allowing them to delve deeper into the child's world. They also appreciated the serious and professional way in which information needed by the parents/guardians was provided. Some good practices can be very reassuring, especially for parents

and guardians who have just received a diagnosis for their child. One or two activities (Your own forest and Time for parents - support group) provoked discussions in the pilot groups, as the participants found them possibly too private or difficult to implement. However, they appreciated the value of such proposals, and suggested their own solutions or accompanying techniques, which are presented in the Handbook. A common worry concerned the role of the facilitator in support groups for parents and guardians. Potentially, having someone external – a trained facilitator, preferably a psychologist, to ensure the effectiveness of support – would be helpful.

The third group of practices is dedicated to engaging staff, including approaches and strategies for encouraging open debate and discussion within the workplace. Participants of pilot workshops expressed a strong interest in the proposed activities, finding them very appealing and in line with the most advanced practices. However, it was also stated that some of them require time, planning and the involvement of external stakeholders, so a longer time frame for their implementation could be considered. Also, some potential confusion surrounding the roles of different professionals in a child's life was highlighted, and the necessity of collaborative efforts to overcome challenges was emphasized. It was stated that it would be very good for nursery schools to adopt such practices, considering that the level of cooperation between professionals providing additional support to children is currently quite low. The workshop participants understood the reasons for improving the system and their involvement in promoting social inclusion.

The fourth group of proposed activities focuses on engaging the community. It provides strategies and approaches for coordinating information, resources, and services that can support ECEC's inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. All workshop participants found the proposed activities useful in promoting inclusionary attitudes in the community. The combination of different types of activities was really appreciated, including outdoor events. It was noted that the proposed good practices are well elaborated, clear and understandable, providing necessary suggestions that can be followed and adapted even in small communities. Some reservations about the cost of different public community events were raised, but it was suggested that private sponsorship could be involved. Inspired by that idea, participants also suggested different modifications of, or additions to, the good practice presented. They considered contacting the mayor, the community, multiple schools, and other partners to prepare different events, for example, marches and awareness days.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that ECEC professionals in partner countries evaluated the entire content of the handbook and that their feedback not only affirms its quality but also underlines its practicality and applicability within real-world ECEC settings. These tried-and-tested practices serve as a valuable resource, providing staff with additional tools and insights to enhance their existing knowledge and expertise in supporting children with intellectual disabilities.

We are very pleased that many professionals have expressed an openness and willingness to continue disseminating the project results and to engage other parents, children, colleagues, and the local community in creating a culture of inclusion.