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SEEDs of Change: Supporting social and emotional well-being of children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) through team reflection

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SEEDS OF CHANGE:

Supporting social and emotional well-being of children
in Early Childhood Education and Care
through team reflection



Guidelines for coaches and mentors

October 2019

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The SEED Project Consortium:



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Introduction

If only he/she would at least know how to...

- not get angry so easily,
- stop hurting others,
- express his (or her) feelings,
- play as others do,
- not stay alone and make friends instead.

These are thoughts Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practitioners often have when thinking about the children they work with every day. Behind these simple “If onlys...” is a genuine and sincere wish for children to be happy, and be able to relate to others in a positive way. But there is also a huge educational challenge to deal with. Here starts the story of socio-emotional learning and the process through which ECEC practitioners can support children to acquire skills and competencies to help them navigate school and life in general. This is also the story of SEED.

‘SEED: Social and Emotional Education and Development’ (2017-2019) was a European project that was designed to draw attention to the importance of social and emotional well-being for children’s learning and development, by supporting the continuing professional development of practitioners working with 2.5 to 6-year-olds in this area. SEED partners conducted action oriented research with the view to improve ECEC practice in Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Norway and the Netherlands. The findings of the first part of the research, which focused on understandings of social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings, and which was based on interviews with 140 ECEC practitioners and 44 principals about social well-being of 1195 five-year-old children in these countries can be found here [<https://icdi.nl/media/uploads/downloads/seed-research-report-21dec18-final.pdf>]. Summary reports of this part of the research in all five project languages are also available [<https://icdi.nl/projects/social-and-emotional-education-and-development-seed>].

These Guidelines are the outcome of the second part of the project, during which we piloted a group reflection pathway, called WANDA¹, with 80 ECEC practitioners with the aim to help them to deal with daily challenges in their practice so they could better support the socio-emotional well-being of children in their care.

The Guidelines include a mix of insights from research and i.e. practitioners’ reflections, as well as practical tools that coaches, mentors and facilitators can use to guide and support ECEC practitioners to reflect on their practice.

These Guidelines are meant to be an inspiration for ECEC pedagogical coaches, mentors and trainers who want to invest in reflecting on practice with teams or groups of practitioners, in order to support the socio-emotional well-being of children.

Part 1 provides the rationale from research and policy explaining why attention to social and emotional well-being is critical in professional development in ECEC in Europe. Drawing on insights from ECEC practitioners and coaches, we illustrate the power of group reflection to bring about positive change with respect to children’s well-being in ECEC settings.

Part 2 contains four Principles of Social and Emotional Well-being in ECEC and accompanying questions for reflection. These can be used as a stand-alone tool to support practitioners reflect on their practice individually, or as part of a group. They can also be used as framework within the WANDA group reflection pathway.

Part 3 explains the five-phase process at the heart of the WANDA pathway, as well as how WANDA reflection group are organised to provide the necessary structure and continuity.

Part 4 titled ‘Success factors’ summarises what we learnt about promoting reflection on practice to enhance social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings and outline the specific conditions to be taken into account at practice and policy level to make this possible.

¹Inspired by Analyse de pratiques (France) and Appreciative Inquiry (US), in 2010, Artevelde University College (www.arteveldehogeschool.be) and VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years: www.vbjk.be) started a transnational ESF (European Social Fund) project to develop a new method for the childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium, starting with 12 organisations and 7 training centres. The method, called WANDA (which is a Dutch acronym for Appreciate, Analyse and Deeds), has been then further adapted also to the contexts of other countries (Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia) within the ISSA (International Step by Step Association) network (www.issa.nl). A manual and toolbox for facilitators is available, together with extra materials, videos, exercises on www.wanda.community. In recent years, the method has been further adapted also to other countries.

Acronyms and terminology

Amongst the participating countries in SEED a wide range of terms are used to describe settings, which are attended by young children. These include: day/child care centres, kindergartens, preschools, preschool institutions, general education institutions and primary schools.

Similarly, a variety of terms are used to describe adults working in a professional capacity with young children in education and care settings, which often depends on which type of setting they are working in and/or their level of responsibility or qualifications e.g. kindergarten teacher, class teacher, assistant teacher, nurse.

For the sake of clarity and consistency in these Guidelines, in most instances, we use the umbrella term **ECEC setting** or just **setting**, to capture all education and care settings. We also use the term **ECEC practitioner** or just **practitioner** to describe the adult working directly with the children in the classroom. The term **principal** is used to describe the person in a management role at the setting level.

PART 1: WHY attention to social and emotional well-being is important

Everything that happens in ECEC settings has to do with socio-emotional well-being. But practitioners are not always aware of its crucial interconnection with all aspects of young children's lives. And because of this, it is not always easy for them to value and support socio-emotional well-being on a daily basis. There has also been widespread concern internationally that young children in ECEC settings are being treated as 'academic learners' at ever younger ages and that there is not enough attention to their social and emotional well-being. Thankfully this is beginning to change and policy makers at European and national level are recognizing the crucial role social and emotional learning in ECEC plays in the well-being of young children and in their capacity to learn and thrive at school and in life (Kostelnik et al. 2015). Many recent research studies and reports underline how quality in ECEC should encompass a broad, holistic view of learning, caring, upbringing and social support for children. Specific attention is given to the fact that the concept of 'care' and 'education' are inter-twined: it is not possible to divide them or to see one as superior to the other (European Commission, 2011; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014).

In 2018 and 2019 the European Council in Brussels adopted significant recommendations about ECEC and Lifelong Learning, which reflect this change of focus. One such recommendation states, 'through social-emotional learning, early childhood education and care experiences can enable children to learn how to be empathic as well as learn about their rights, equality, tolerance and diversity' (European Commission, 2019). Recommendations such as this are intended to support European Member States to reform their education service provision. But this is easier said than done, and requires taking action at governance, training and practice levels.

Furthermore, ECEC settings in Europe are more diverse than ever before. Part of this diversity is also enriched by the growing percentage of children with migrant background, as well as those with a vulnerable background. The socio-emotional needs of children might also differ according to this growing diversity. This can be an opportunity for practitioners to work on the awareness of their attitudes, ideas and emotions and to de-construct their stereotypes. At the same time it is also an opportunity for children to develop empathy and learn to value diversity. If we work at different levels, i.e. practice, research, policy, to support ECEC practitioners to respect diversity, support inclusion and social-emotional well-being, we can support ECEC services to better meet the needs of all children and families.

HOW to support children's social and emotional well-being in ECEC

Children's well-being is a combination of several aspects that influence each other and that cannot be divided. Cognitive development is influenced by social and emotional development and vice versa. Besides, in order to take care of the social and emotional development well-being of children, a partnership with families needs to be created, and parents' socio-emotional well-being needs to be taken into account too. As pointed out also by the European Quality Framework (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014), the task of ECEC practitioners, whatever their profile, should be oriented towards this holistic approach, which connects 'education' and 'care' within an 'educare' approach. This means that ECEC staff needs to have complex competences, especially considering the diverse society we live in.

Accordingly, relational and reflective competences are crucial and the ECEC workforce needs to be able to negotiate, to deal with uncertainty (Urban, 2008), to reflect on the meanings of what they think and do and to question itself. This requires a 'competent ECEC system' (Urban et al., 2011; Vandenbroeck et al., 2016; Moser et al., 2017) that offers a good initial qualification in combination with opportunities for continuous professional development.

In contexts in which pedagogical guidance is provided, childfree hours are scheduled and reflection paths are supported, the quality of the services increases with a direct effect for children and families. These activities seem to be most effective when they are continuous and of a certain length (Peeters et al., 2015).

The SEED research has shown that practitioners have knowledge about social and emotional well-being and learning and are aware of the factors in an ECEC setting that promote it, such as respectful relationships, working with families and provision of indoor and outdoor play opportunities.

However, many have a tough time in implementing this knowledge in practice. On the one hand, they identify organizational and structural issues such as large group size or high staff turnover; on the other hand they mention their difficulty in, for example, creating and supporting cooperation with families, or in dealing with the increasing 'diversity' (e.g. cultural/linguistic/ethnic) of children and families. See [SEED research report](#) for lengthier discussion on this issue (SEED Project Consortium, 2018).

The practitioners interviewed as part of SEED felt a lack of support in dealing with the complex challenges they had to face every day, and perceived the issues mentioned above as something that can hinder children's social and emotional well-being. It is within this framework that the SEED project developed a continuous professional path for practitioners, most of whom had participated in the first phase of the SEED research. The path was based on an existing method called WANDA, which had been developed

by Artevelde University College and VBJK in Belgium (FL).

The main goal of WANDA is to improve the well-being of children and families through a group reflection process that involves ECEC staff. WANDA shares the philosophy of other reflective methods, with the strength of bringing reflection into practice through specific phases that give to the process a clear structure.

Through the sessions, participants analyze specific situations, explore different perspectives and in doing so, learn to value the points of views, feelings and the thoughts of all actors involved. This supports the growth of the group towards appreciation of and capability in dealing with diversity. This ultimately influences the way staff supports the social and emotional well-being of children, which was the goal in SEED (see Part 3 for a more detailed explanation of the WANDA path).

In SEED, the 5 countries that implemented pilots in the project (Latvia, Croatia, Hungary, The Netherlands, Norway) created a 'WANDA path' involving one or two 'WANDA groups' in each country. The path lasted one school year. Within this period, WANDA facilitators in each country organized regular WANDA sessions with ECEC staff. After a first training provided by the sixth partner (VBJK, Belgium), facilitators were supported by online supervision moments with the VBJK team through the whole path.

WHAT practitioners and facilitators say about the power of reflecting on practice

At the end of the pilot period, we interviewed the participating practitioners and facilitators about their experience of group reflection and about what impact it had on their practice. What they told us can be summarized as follows:

Group reflection had the effect of: 1) strengthening their awareness, 2) changing their perspectives (rather than looking for the 'right' solution; 3) providing them with a concrete method to apply theory to practice; 4) providing a growth pathway for them as individuals and as a group; and finally it was 5) caring for the carers, including opportunities to share questions, worries and successes.

These findings are explained in more detail below.

1) Reflecting on practice **strengthens practitioners' awareness** of their professional role, of what is important in their job, of where their attention should be oriented in order to support the social and emotional well-being of children.

I learned to look at the situation from different perspectives – for example, about the involvement of Roma children in pre-school life – I never before thought how a Roma mother could feel about it. (Practitioner, Latvia)

Practitioners were surprised when they became aware of their high expectations towards the children when it comes to socio-emotional development. [...] One of the participants started questioning if her expectations regarding children's development were realistic because she noticed that her assessment of the children's socio-emotional development was stricter than the ones of her colleagues. This provided her with a more balanced view on that matter. (Facilitator, Croatia)

We are more focused on each child's well-being in the daily practice. It is easy to think only about the group, and now I focus more on the individual child and on the fact that everyone should have a high well-being all the time. (Practitioner, Norway)

2) Reflecting on practice supports practitioners in giving themselves time needed to 'stay in their questions' before thinking about possible answers. This helps **in changing their own perspective on daily situations**, instead of aiming at changing others.

If you want to change your practice, you have to change yourself. It is all about you, how you change. (Practitioner, The Netherlands)

The misfortune of us as educators is that we want to skip all the phases and, from our own point of view and own experience, immediately give advice without going deeply into the situation. Reflecting on practice teaches us to go into the problem without hurry, to look for different possibilities and only then decide what to do. (Practitioner, Latvia)

Reflecting on what you do - it's not easy at the beginning. You want to hold on to what you know and you easily jump to conclusions. At the beginning it was like this for me. But now I learned that having doubts is not bad, actually it's an important part of our job. Now I see myself as a reflective practitioner and I am enjoying using the 'space' between having a question and making a decision. I try to see the situation from different perspectives, and sometimes even recalling my colleagues' voices while doing it. This has led to the fact that now I see parents, children and the challenging situation in a whole different way. I try to include their different needs, wills and feelings. (Practitioner, Croatia)

3) Reflecting helps in **concretely transforming and improving daily practice** and in continuously working on the **link between theory and practice**.

One case was about a boy that often behaved in an aggressive way. He wasn't accepted by children and parents, he was often the one to blame. Through the questions and points of view of the colleagues, the perspective of the practitioner changed. Instead of looking at the child as someone who is aggressive and not capable of solving his problems, she started communicating with him in a gentle way, discussing, negotiating, focusing on his strengths and looking for situations to praise him just as every other child. The behavior of the child changed as a consequence, he is now more willing to interact and play with the others. (Facilitator, Croatia)

In one case the contributor (practitioner who brought a case to the group reflection session) had very strong feelings about the choices some parents made about their child's life. During the first part of the session participants made judgmental comments. It started to change during phase four (collecting perspectives). By the end of the session, the contributor reported that maybe the biggest change she needs to make is to let go her own emotional tension and accept the viewpoints and decisions of the parents concerning their child. During the next session, the contributor looked back on her case and reported that she had found new ways for connecting with the parents in a constructive way: she smiled, said hello, asked some casual questions, which made the parents feel more at ease. Since then, the child stopped having tantrums when arriving to the kindergarten (which was an issue before), and she started eating in school (which she didn't want to do before). (Facilitator, Hungary)

4) Reflecting together on practice is a **growing process for the individuals and for the group**. That is why it needs to happen on a regular and continuous basis. Only in this way can reflection become part of daily practice, and not just an appendix to it.

Reflecting on practice is a real path of development and growth both for the participants as well as for the facilitators. Teachers report a higher sense of personal awareness and responsibility for their job. Participating in this co-reflective path has changed the way they look at children and families. (Facilitator, Croatia)

Practitioners feel a change in their practice: when something difficult happens they take a step back and have a small WANDA session on their own, trying to figure out and take into account different perspectives and hypothesis. (Facilitator, the Netherlands)

I am surprised that the thoughts about the process and each meeting continues so long after the session, and the self-reflection is so strong. (Facilitator, Norway)

5) Group reflection on practice is a way to **share questions, worries, successes and doubts**. It helps practitioners feel less lonely in their job and value each other's support. In other words, it's **a way to 'take care' of those that 'take care'**.

I think reflecting on practice can prevent burn-out. It gives us the opportunity to 'let out' our everyday challenges, and you also feel less lonely. (Practitioner, Croatia)

I felt very good in this path. At the beginning I didn't want to come, it felt like an extra task in the little time we have. But coming here gave me new energy, even when I was tired at the beginning of the session, at the end I was re-energized. (Practitioner, the Netherlands)

We enjoyed the reflection path very much. Reflecting was deep but at the same time also light and enjoyable. [...] It's a great community we created here, trustful and family-like. We laughed so much. (Practitioner, Hungary)

I learned that no one should be left alone with difficult situations. There are many knowledgeable colleagues around who can help, and whom I can help. That way helping the child feels better. (Practitioner, Latvia)

These insights from practitioners and facilitators demonstrate the power of making time and space for group reflection to support children's, families' and practitioners' well-being in ECEC settings. In Part 2 of the Guidelines you will find four principles of social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings and accompanying questions for reflection.

PART 2: Principles of social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings

The SEED Principles of Social and Emotional Well-being in ECEC settings were developed based on the findings of the SEED research (SEED Consortium, 2018) and also inspired by the DECET publication, 'Diversity & Equity: Making Sense of Good Practice' (DECET, 2007) and ISSA's 'Principles of Quality Pedagogy' (ISSA, 2010). The SEED Principles and the accompanying questions for reflection were further refined during the piloting of the WANDA pathway in SEED. They provide a useful framework in any continuous professional development trajectory focusing on social and emotional well-being for ECEC practitioners.

Specifically they are intended to:

- stimulate reflection amongst teams of practitioners and those who mentor them about promoting social and emotional well-being
- inspire good practice in social and emotional well-being and development of children in ECEC settings.

In the Table below, insights from practitioners who participated in SEED are included to illustrate the Principles in practice.

Principle	Questions for reflection for practitioners	Insights from practitioners
<p>1. Practitioners support young children's social and emotional well-being and pay attention to their individual desires, needs and potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are you supported to regularly reflect on your own experiences, feelings and attitudes? How do you respond to signals of discomfort or stress of young children? How do you offer activities that help children learn to distinguish feelings, to recognize them in themselves and their peers and to communicate about them? How do you respond to each child's emotional, physical, social and cognitive strengths and needs? How do you communicate with children (which tone, position, valuing and caring interactions etc.)? 	<p><i>Attention is drawn to the fact that every child is important, that everyone gets a hug, can say what he or she feels or wants; we try to solve problems by talking. Children address the teacher when a problem arises. The verbalization of emotions is encouraged.</i> (Practitioner, Croatia)</p> <p><i>The staff must be skilled and have knowledge about children and their well-being. And they must be interested and available to the children. We talk to the children about feelings and friendship; that is important.</i> (Practitioner, Norway)</p> <p><i>For us, the most important part is the harmonious development of the child emotionally, spiritually and physically. We put a great emphasis on emotional development; everyone pays a lot of attention and holds the children's interest in the first place.</i> (Practitioner, Hungary)</p>
<p>2. Partnership amongst practitioners, families and other community members are essential for children's social and emotional well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you communicate with families? Are there spaces for families in the setting (chairs, sofas...)? Are there welcoming elements for families? How do you create continuity between setting and home (pictures of families on the wall etc.)? How is parental involvement supported? How do you build bridges between the ECEC setting and the families and community? 	<p><i>What is important is a supportive environment; teachers, family and wider social community cooperating.</i> (Practitioner, Croatia)</p>

<p>3. Learning environments are physically and emotionally safe, and offer a stimulating and welcoming experience for all children, indoors and outdoors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do toys, materials and equipment meet safety standards and allow children's exploration of their environment? How do you encourage children to explore, play and access diverse resources and interact with other children and adults? Is there a variety of materials and toys that reflect the diversity of the children in the setting (gender, age, ethnic/cultural background, languages...)? Are there places 'to do' but also 'to rest' for children? How do you adapt the space, materials and activities so that children with different capabilities, educational needs and social backgrounds can participate? Do the proposed activities meet the needs of children? How? 	<p><i>Every part of the environment affects them. We need to help them to have good relations in the kindergarten. To have friends is very important, to socialize. To make the children feel safe. It's difficult to make and to have good relations if you don't feel safe. The children must have teachers that can guide them in their play.</i> (Practitioner, Norway)</p>
<p>4. Inclusivity, respect for diversity and open communication are the guiding principles for the provision of all services and in all interactions with colleagues, children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you facilitate peer interaction among children to promote shared understanding, mutual support and sense of community? Are you aware of your beliefs, attitudes and experiences and how they affect your communication with children, families as well as your practice? How is this reflected in your practice? How do you treat every family with dignity, respect and consideration and find ways to involve them in their child's education? How do you understand, accept and appreciate diversity and how do you help children to do the same? 	<p><i>We need a general positive microclimate in the preschool, with positive communication with parents, positive cooperation among staff, with children and among children themselves.</i> (Practitioner, Latvia)</p> <p><i>Everyone is accepted as he/she is. This is what we stand for as a school. New children are immediately included. We take care of children when they show emotional needs. We teach children to play together and to talk to each other about difficulties.</i> (Practitioner, the Netherlands)</p>

In Part 3 of the Guidelines to follow, we will describe how these Principles can be integrated into a group reflection process in order to guide practitioners to think about their practice in relation to social and emotional well-being of children.

PART 3: Improving practice through group reflection: the example of WANDA in SEED

The main goal of WANDA² is to improve the well-being of children and families through a facilitated group reflection process that involves ECEC practitioners in critically thinking about their practice. WANDA follows a clear structure. This helps in making co-reflection on practice concrete and useful.

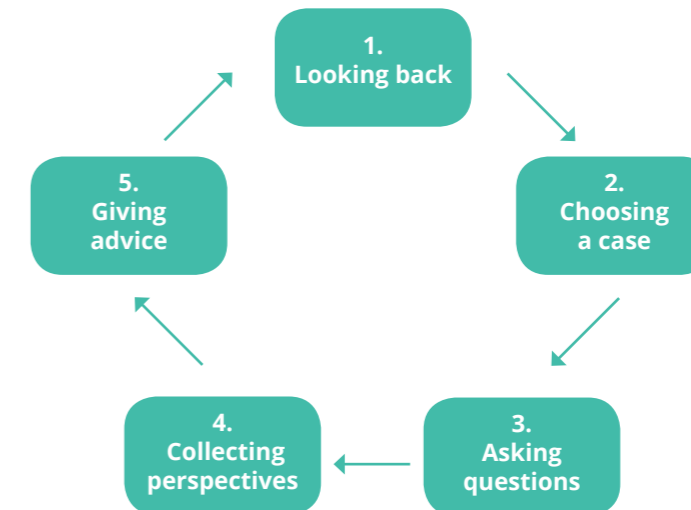
WANDA can be organized within a team of practitioners that work together, or by creating a group made by people that work in different institutions, have the same role or function and want to reflect on their practice. It's important to have a quite stable frequency and group composition rather than fragmented meetings in order to focus on the process (De Schepper et al, 2015).

Each group gets together once every 4 to 6 weeks to have a WANDA session. This takes more or less two hours and is guided by someone who is referred to as a 'facilitator'. He/She can be a pedagogical coordinator, a supervisor or a mentor.

² In this section we give a short overview on WANDA and its phases. For a better understanding, please refer to the WANDA manual for facilitators (De Schepper et al. 2015), and to www.wanda.community. See Additional Resources section at the end of these Guidelines for more details.

The 5-phases of WANDA

After introducing WANDA to the group, discussing the aims and finding agreements on how to create a safe climate to reflect together, the WANDA path can begin. During each session, the group starts from a specific situation brought by one of the participants (the 'contributor'). The group analyzes the situation, deconstructs it, and finds possible ways to re-construct it. This happens by going through 5 different phases, which are now explained.



1. Looking back

Once the Wanda path started, each session begins by looking back to the last meeting (this can of course happen just starting from the second Wanda session, when the group has something to 'look back' at). The facilitator asks the contributor of the previous case what happened during these weeks referring to the discussed situation and to the advice given by the group. Here the SEED Principles (see PART 2 and below) can be used to 'frame' the discussed case i.e. the facilitator and participants can discuss how the case is linked to the different SEED Principles.

2. Selecting a case

After looking back, each participant who feels like it, can bring a case, a situation that touched or surprised him/her in a positive or negative way, something that left open questions inside him/her. The situation is described in a concrete way by the participant, without interpretations. The person who brings the case is the 'owner of the case', he/she has to be involved in it, he/she cannot bring a case heard from someone else. After listening to all the cases, the group decides which one will be the subject of this specific WANDA session. In this way we underline that the group is responsible for the session and for its own learning path. The person who brings the case that is selected is the 'contributor'.

3. Asking questions

Once the case to discuss is decided, the group asks open, non-interpretative questions (what, who, where, when), in order to clarify the context. An effort is made to map out the whole scene to obtain more insight into what exactly is happening. This is a phase that requires the most time: the more information about the context the group has, the more they can search for possible meanings and, ultimately, develop possible actions. Sometimes, the clarifying questions already changes the point of view of the contributor about the case. At the end of this phase the facilitator supports the contributor in making clear his/her 'positive learning question', what the contributor wants to learn from the group during the session, what is it that moves him/her in the case, and the direction the support should be oriented. The learning question cannot be about 'changing the others', it has to be about changing our perspective on the situation.

4. Collecting perspectives

At this point, the situation is analyzed from different perspectives, giving voice to all the people involved and to what they could think, feel, want. The case is explored through different 'glasses' (perspectives) - the glasses of the child, of the parents, of society etc. Theoretical knowledge can also be called upon, and the link between theory and practice becomes clearer. What significance could this situation have for the parties involved? What could the various parties possibly be thinking, feeling, and wanting? The basis of an appreciative perspective is that behind every behaviour a positive intent is hiding and that everyone's perspective is respectfully taken into account. In the SEED project, the Principles of Social and Emotional Well-being were sometimes used as a 'glass' (perspective) in this phase.

5. Giving advice

Starting from what has emerged from the session up to this point, the group identifies possible advice for the contributor, the team, the organization, or the society where relevant. It is important to underline that it is not about finding 'the' solution, but about suggesting 'possible routes'. The contributor is never obliged to use the advice, he/she will decide for him/herself what to do with them. In some cases in the SEED project, the facilitator made explicit for the group the link between the given advice and the SEED Principles.

Reflecting within a framework

When coordinating group reflection sessions, it's important to **be aware of the theoretical framework** we are working in/with, and to promote critical reflection on it, in a bottom-up way. Frameworks need to be open enough, they need to give an orientation, but at the same time let the groups find their own interpretations of the principles, in a contextualized way. In the SEED project, the SEED Principles of Social and Emotional Well-being in ECEC settings (see Part 2) provided such a framework. They can be used through all phases to make the group more aware of the connection between their practice and socio-emotional well-being of children, of how they can support it and promote it. This is how one of the facilitators used the Principles with the practitioners she was working with:

I had the SEED Principles in my head, and I would show to participants the link between the case and the Principles. I didn't ask them to link the case to the Principles because it felt a bit artificial. I think participants should be free to express themselves, and it's the facilitator that has to show the link to the Principles, at least at the beginning (Facilitator, the Netherlands).

PART 4:

Success factors: What we learnt about promoting reflection on practice to enhance social and emotional well-being

The ultimate aim of co-reflecting on practice in an appreciative way is to improve the quality of the services for children and families, with an eye towards society as a whole. Reflective moments help individuals and groups to learn how to negotiate, to increase their empathetic competences, to regain motivation in their job, to look at their practices with a 'discovery attitude', to value diversity. All this is particularly important when thinking about socio-emotional well-being of children.

In order to make this possible, we need to create 'competent systems' in which individual competences can be oriented within a greater system capable of creating quality on different levels. A competent system supports high quality initial training and continuous professional development paths for ECEC staff. For this to happen, certain criteria need to be met.

The SEED pilots suggest the following elements to be crucial to guarantee the creation of continuous professional development paths that support group reflection on practice. These aspects should be taken into account not only at the level of the services, but also on a policy level, in order to create the conditions to make reflection on practice possible.

Time

In order to improve quality it is important to have time to reflect together on practice. Child-free hours (paid hours without children) are needed for ECEC staff to meet, plan, reflect on a regular and continuous basis.

It's important to have enough child-free hours to meet, reflect, plan. We had to meet in extra hours, and this was a problem. (Facilitator, The Netherlands)

Collaboration with directors/principals

In order to be effective, group reflection paths need to be built with the engagement and collaboration of the directors/principals of the ECEC settings.

For us it has been very important to have the support of the directors. They helped us with the logistics, but especially they motivated practitioners to participate. (Facilitator, Latvia)

A process oriented method

Group reflection is "process oriented", which means that the meaning of it cannot be revealed in one or two sessions. Each session is related to the others, and individuals and groups will grow during the process.

This process needs time. Time for growing. After 4 to 5 sessions we saw a change in the group: going deeper, more challenging cases, feeling more at ease to share. (Facilitator, Croatia)

The crucial role of the facilitator

In the group reflection path, the role of the facilitator is crucial. He/she creates a safe and challenging climate of dialogue and participation. Facilitators need to be trained in order to be able to coordinate group reflection paths.

This atmosphere that the facilitators created was crucial: that we are listened to – I learned that listening has a huge power in resolving difficult situations. I do not feel the urge any more to offer a solution, sometimes we don't need a solution, we just need someone to care and listen. (Practitioner, Hungary)

Supporting facilitators within a network

Facilitators have a delicate role which needs to be supported. Supervision moments or other kinds of support that bring facilitators together in a critical learning group, help them learn from each other and share doubts and questions.

Online supervision moments for facilitators were very useful. They gave facilitators opportunities for shared learning and overall it increased our confidence as WANDA facilitators. (Facilitator, Croatia)

Promoting a bottom-up approach

When reflecting on practice, bottom-up approaches are effective because they start from what participants themselves find important, from their concrete experiences.

What I liked is the fact that we started from us, from our practice. It was not abstract, it was very concrete. (Practitioner, Norway)

In conclusion, policy and ECEC services should be committed in ensuring that staff has opportunities to question, enrich and innovate their pedagogical practice. It is the responsibility of policy makers and services to provide the conditions for staff to meet and reflect together regularly. This is crucial especially when thinking about the social and emotional well-being of children. As the SEED practitioners demonstrated by reflecting together on practice ECEC staff become more aware of their professional role towards children and families, develop empathy, and value the points of views and the feelings of others. These are the 'seeds of change' that can have a powerful impact on young children's social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings across Europe.

Additional Resources

WANDA Manual – a detailed guide for WANDA facilitators:

De Schepper B., Peleman B., Sharmahd N., Vastmans S. (2015), *WANDA: Group reflection for professional development in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care). Manual for facilitators*, Artevelde University College and VBJK, Ghent – to be ordered on www.blurb.com

WANDA Toolbox – with materials to be used during the WANDA sessions (glasses, quicksheet for facilitators etc.):

to be ordered through liesbeth.kersjes@arteveldehs.be or info@vbjk.be

WANDA Website – with extra materials, exercises, videos:

www.wanda.community

Leading Circles of Learning for Educators Engaged in Study

This resource was developed to assist pedagogical leaders support educators in their service who are undertaking study. The resource was funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education and developed by the Child and Family Studies team at Griffith University, Australia led by Dr Jennifer Cartmel. Publication available for free here:

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/learning_circles_resource_0.pdf

ECEC Child Monitor

The ECEC Child Well-Being monitor is an electronic tool for Norwegian kindergartens to be used for free. The aim is to increase knowledge about 4 – 6 year old children's well-being and participation by having conversations between child and practitioner. At this time the monitor exists only in Norwegian: <https://barnehagetrivsel.no/>

Sustainable Learning: from Self-reflection to Team Reflection

The model Permanent Learning in Teams emphasizes the educators' reflection process, a shift from individual learning to collective learning and the necessity to involve all levels at early childhood organizations. The model was developed during a two-year action-training-research project conducted by Bureau MUTANT (2007-2008), a small Dutch independent agency that supports professionals and institutions in early childhood, welfare and healthcare with innovative methods,

training and consulting. Respect for diversity is a key issue in all actions.

An article about Permanent Learning in Teams is available here:

<http://heimatkunde.boell.de/2012/08/01/permanent-learning-teams-professional-requirement>

The book about the model is available in Dutch:

Keulen, A. van & Barrio Saiz, A. del (2010) *Permanent leren. Van zelfreflectie naar teamreflectie* (Sustainable learning. From self reflection towards team reflection). Amsterdam: SWP.

<https://www.swpbook.com/boeken/105/management/1267/permanent-leren>

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Guidelines for coaches and mentors

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