



Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review
of European Early Childhood Education and Care



613318

CARE

Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC

Instrument: Collaborative project

Call Identifier: FP7-SSH-2013-2

Early childhood education and care: promoting quality for individual, social and economic benefits

D2.4:

Integrative Report on a culture-sensitive quality & curriculum framework

DUE DATE OF DELIVERABLE: 31 SEPTEMBER 2016

SUBMISSION DATE: 31 SEPTEMBER 2016

FINAL VERSION: 31 OCTOBER 2016

Start date of project: 01-01-2014

Duration: 36 Months

CARE contractor: Utrecht University

Title: D2.4: Integrative Report on a culture-sensitive quality & curriculum framework
Organisation: WP2, University of Jyväskylä, Finland (Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, coordinator)

Authors (main authors in bold):

Kathy Sylva (England)
Giulia Pastori (Italy)
Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen (Finland)
Katharina Ereky-Stevens (England)
Pauline Slot (the Netherlands)

Main contribution of each Report:

D2.1: Kathy Sylva, Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Ana Maria Aricescu
D2.2: Pauline Slot, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, Paul Leseman
D2.3: Pauline Slot, Joana Cadima, Jenni Salminen, Giulia Pastori, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen
D2.4: Together with WP7 (D7.4 Educational Kit): Video Library by Joana Cadima, Jenni Salminen, Giulia Pastori, Pauline Slot, M. Clara Barata, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen

Contributing researchers:

England: Kathy Sylva; Katharina Ereky-Stevens; Alice Tawell, Ana Maria Aricescu
Finland: Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen; Maritta Hännikäinen; Jenni Salminen; Anna-Maija Poikkeus
Germany: Yvonne Anders; Franziska Wilke
Italy: Giulia Pastori; Susanna Mantovani; Piera Braga; Valentina Pagani
Netherlands: Pauline Slot; Paul Leseman
Poland: Małgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk; Olga Wysłowska
Portugal: Joana Cadima; Clara Barata; Cecilia Aguiar

E-mail: kathy.sylva@education.ox.ac.uk; giulia.pastori@unimib.it; marja-kristiina.lerkkanen@jyu.fi; katharina.ereky@education.ox.ac.uk; p.l.slot@uu.nl

Number of PM: 14
Dissemination Level:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the European Commission for funding the project CARE (Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC) and to our colleagues in the CARE project, especially the partners in the seven countries (England, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal), who have collected and prepared the data for the present study and participated in validating the analysis process and results. We are also grateful to the CARE partners that have provided us with valuable contributions at the meetings in Oxford (England) 24-26 March, 2014, Jyväskylä (Finland), August 24, 2014, Berlin (Germany), November 29-December 1, 2014, Lisbon (Portugal), April 16-18, 2015, Tønsberg (Norway), June 15-16, 2015, Limassol (Cyprus) August 24, 2015, Reggio Emilia (Italy), December 8-11, 2015, Oxford (England), April 14-16, 2016, Porto (Portugal), June 28, 2016, and Lisbon (Portugal), October 4, 2016. We would also like to thank the members of the Advisory Committee for their valuable comments.

Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme (2014-2017)		
Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	X
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

Executive summary

This report draws together research findings that inform the development of a comprehensive, culture-sensitive European framework for evaluating and monitoring ECEC quality and child wellbeing. WP2 specifically focuses on micro- and meso-level characteristics of ECEC that constitute quality *in practice* and that directly affect children's wellbeing, learning and development. The present integrative report describes effective approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, based on (1) survey in eleven countries, on (2) secondary data analysis from existing datasets from five countries, and on (3) video observations of good practices in seven countries.

What clearly emerged from the CARE surveys and interviews is an emerging consensus on the importance of a need for a balanced curriculum ***combining aims for socio-emotional development with intellectual ones***. There was also consensus on the ***gradual shift*** in these aims as the child develops, with more challenging aims for intellectual development, including 'emerging' academic skills, as the child nears school entry. Yet, there was a lack of clarity (and possibly more differences in views) on the way ***learning*** is conceptualized. Taken together, this report identifies key features of high quality practice in ECEC along with the institutional supports that underpin it.

While there was agreement across countries in this European survey concerning the need of integration of play and learning in ECEC, we found some ***tensions*** with respect to the role placed on play, creativity, child-initiated activities, and material resources as opportunities for learning. Thus, despite the broad agreement on viewing the child as a competent learner in ECEC, the video observations of good practices revealed some challenges in facilitating children's learning across different activities and with differing structural constraints. We found that tensions do inevitably emerge in ECEC by the simultaneous need to combine socio-emotional and intellectual aims, and to nurture the individual child for the 'here and now' while also preparing children for the future. Finding the right balance in the curriculum means going beyond those tensions to achieve a dynamic and shifting pedagogy where the balance changes in line with children's needs, interests and the aspirations of the community. There is no perfect ***balance***; skilled educators must make informed decisions as needs and priorities shift across the group and across the day. For this reason the quality of the ECEC workforce is the most essential element in ensuring quality.

The ***observational assessment of classroom quality*** revealed coding agreement across observers from different countries on what constitutes high quality support for children's emotional and intellectual development. Discussions amongst educators about the rich video data led to suggestions for modifying and extending the current (international) quality assessments to reflect what we defined to be an European focus on the social group in addition to the individual child. Such a focus would include explicit attention to facilitation of group processes, peer collaboration, inter-personal skills and group-belongingness. A strong focus on the 'social child' is in accordance with the general trend in European curriculum documents and also with surveys of parents from many countries in the CARE project (see WP6 reports) on their goals for their children's development. Finally, ***secondary data analysis*** of large datasets from five countries revealed the complex relations between structural characteristics of ECEC settings and process quality across Europe. However, educators' work experience and opportunities for on-going professional development appeared to moderate less favorable structural features in several countries.

Table of Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction.....	6
D2.1 Overview of European ECEC curricula and curriculum template	8
D2.2 Secondary analyses of large scale studies: The relations between structural quality and process quality in European ECEC provisions	9
D2.3 Multiple case study regarding culture-sensitive classroom quality assessment	9
Integrating the Findings: Balance and Tension	12
1. Emerging agreement on curriculum across Europe.....	12
2. An European view of pedagogy	14
3. High process quality.....	15
4. Pedagogical tensions revealed through focus group discussions on practices	16
5. How curriculum and pedagogy interact in practice?	18
6. Factors that shape the implemented curriculum	19
7. Instruments and professional views on quality assessments.....	21
Conclusions and Recommendations	23
Glossary.....	24
References.....	26

Introduction

This report synthesizes the findings that inform the development of a comprehensive culture-sensitive European curriculum and quality assessment framework for practice, teacher education and policy. The report is part of the project *Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (CARE)*, funded by the European Union's 7th Framework program (THEME [SSH.2013.3.2-2] Early childhood education and care: promoting quality for individual, social and economic benefits).

The particular part of the CARE project reported here is included to WP2 focusing on *Curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom quality: promoting effectiveness of ECEC*. WP2 specifically focuses on micro- and meso-level characteristics of ECEC that constitute quality *in practice* and that directly affect children's wellbeing, learning and development. The task of WP2 includes the following already completed studies:

- (1) a comparative analysis of European curricula (Sylva, Ereky-Stevens, & Aricescu, 2015; deliverable D2.1),
- (2) the relations between structural quality and process quality (Slot, Lerkkanen, & Leseman, 2015; deliverable D2.2),
- (3) the multiple case study regarding culture-sensitive classroom quality assessment (Slot, Cadima, Salminen, Pastori, & Lerkkanen, 2016; deliverable D2.3), and
- (4) together with WP7 teacher training material consisting of annotated video clips of good practices collected in the case study (Cadima, Salminen, Pastori, Slot, Barata, & Lerkkanen. 2016; deliverable D2.4 Video Library).

This Integrative report concerns effective approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, and essential structural, organizational context and system level features that shape classroom quality in ECEC in Europe.

Quality, curriculum and pedagogy. In the field of ECEC, the term quality is often used as an overarching multidimensional construct, referring to the extent to which what is 'on offer' to children in ECEC provides an environment that enhances child development and wellbeing. Two aspects, process quality and structural quality, are usually distinguished. **Process quality** focuses on the daily experiences children have in their classrooms (e.g. adult-child interaction, emotional climate, opportunities to explore, and support for learning) prescribed in the curriculum as ways to reach the intended developmental goals. **Structural quality**, on the other hand, refers to characteristics of the setting that are more stable from day to day and provide the contextual framework within which process quality operates (e.g. adult-child ratio, group size, play and learning materials, space, and professional qualifications of educators) (e.g. Howes et al., 2008; Lerkkanen et al., 2012; Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011; Sylva et al., 2006).

Deliberate specification of the experiences offered to children and outlining of the competences and skills they can develop, is referred to as the **curriculum** (Oberhuemer, 2005; Pianta et al., 2005; Sylva et al., 2007). An important function of the curriculum is to coordinate the different aspects of practice in order to provide consistent, progressive and holistic support to children's development across contexts and over time, while striking a balance between the interests of children, the values of families, the requirements for school, as well as the interests of the wider society. The content and emotional tone of children's experiences in ECEC are important for supporting particular developmental and educational goals. National steering documents describe a basic curriculum framework that guides ECEC staff in planning and implementing their practices. A national ECEC curriculum framework has recently been defined as 'a set of values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the objectives, content and pedagogical approach to children's care and learning' (European Commission Working Group, 2014, 69). An **'implemented' ECEC curriculum** (which includes those aspects which are implicit rather than explicit) includes developmental care, interactions, children's learning experiences and supportive assessment.

The implemented curriculum is rarely set out in formal documentation. However, it is the implemented curriculum that children experience in real-life settings; it is the implemented curriculum that has the potential to advance young children's personal and social development, their learning, and preparation for life and citizenship in their society (European Commission Working Group, 2014). What children should learn and the kind of persons they should become are enshrined in the aims of the curriculum of each country.

The term *pedagogy* has often been defined differently across Europe. At times, this leads to accounts where pedagogy and curriculum appear indistinguishable. However, pedagogy can also be defined and understood as analytically distinct and complementary to the term curriculum. Whereas curriculum may be understood as denoting all the knowledge, skills and values that children are meant to acquire in early education, pedagogy can be defined as the *practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching* (see also Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002). Thus, using a definition tied to the concrete practices in ECEC, the term pedagogy can be seen to refer to all intentional techniques and strategies that enable learning to take place, including interactive processes between educators and learners, as well as the provision of a rich physical and social environment. However, in a broader sense the term pedagogy also denotes the theoretical foundation of an approach and set of principles and values for defining specific methods (e.g. Montessori). In this deeper sense, pedagogy contains a reflection on the nature of childhood, on the values and aims of early childhood education and care. It specifies the educational goals which are implemented in the teaching approach through planned actions (teaching actions or didactics). In this broader definition of pedagogy, it may be seen to inspire rather than support curriculum.

Pedagogy, in both the broad and the narrower sense, is sometimes spelled out in the curricular goals of national frameworks, such as guidance on ways ECEC can support the development of autonomy, identity, and citizenship. Many curriculum frameworks specify *experiences* children should have alongside *developmental goals* that are the aims of ECEC. Within the CARE project this broader concept of pedagogy is integrated with the more narrow, practice-based perspective of implemented pedagogy.

What constitutes an appropriate curriculum and pedagogy for children in ECEC is an issue of intense debate, centred around the developmental and educational goals of ECEC, the role of play and academic content, and the best ways of interacting with young children. In Europe, tensions between early childhood curricula have often been described in a way that contrasts the 'traditional' and play-based social pedagogy with a more 'academically-oriented' pedagogy and aims. However, there are also sophisticated innovations that integrate play and learning through an investigative pedagogy, for example Reggio Emilia (e.g. Bennett, 2005; Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2009). Social pedagogical approaches have profoundly influenced ECEC practice in Europe. However, they have also been adapted to local circumstances, cultural values and policy priorities, and they have often been combined with other approaches (e.g., academic curricula) into eclectic and conventional programs (Kammerman, 2006; Lillard, 2012).

The level of investments in ECEC is a central issue for most European countries (OECD, 2006). This relates to the supply of ECEC provision, and within these provisions, regulation of those aspects that are a major factor in costs: structural quality aspects such as group size, children-to-staff ratio, staff salaries, staff education level, and possibilities for continuous professional development in the centers. How strongly structural quality relates to process quality and to child outcomes is another matter. Inconclusive evidence suggests that the effects of structural quality on process quality and child outcomes are complex. Relationships might differ between age of the children enrolled, types of ECEC provision and particular countries. Another issue is that, due to quality regulations, the range of structural and process quality can be restricted, leading to small and inconsistent effects (Love et al., 2003).

As part of WP2 tasks, CARE

(1) reviewed the main European approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in 11 countries (see D2.1 by Sylva, Ereky-Stevens, & Aricescu, 2015).

(2) examined the complex relationships between structural and process quality observed in ECEC classrooms, using quantitative data from five existing and on-going European studies (see D2.2 by Slot, Lerkkanen, & Leseman, 2015)

(3) conducted a multiple case study of ECEC pedagogy in seven European countries, observing play, educational/emerging academic activities, creative activities, and care routines to identify good practices in classrooms with and analyze commonalities and differences across ECEC in Europe (see D2.3 by Slot, Cadima, Salminen, Pastori, & Lerkkanen, 2016).

(4) collected discussions by educators of video-taped classroom activities which raised questions about cross-cultural validity of classroom quality assessment, and the importance of cultural sensitivity in quality issues in the European context (see D2.3 by Slot et al., 2016).

The following section summarizes and integrates the main findings from the three reports of WP2.

D2.1 Overview of European ECEC curricula and curriculum template

Procedure and aims. This substudy (D2.1) explored the *official ECEC curriculum*, specified by national or regional governments, in the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Portugal. It studied European curriculum in three ways:

(1) by developing a template according to which the 11 partners in the CARE consortium described the curriculum in their own countries;

(2) by analysing the responses of the 11 partners with the aim of identifying commonalities and differences in the broadly representative sample that comprises the CARE consortium; and

(3) by considering information from the templates in light of selected research literature on effectiveness - and by comparing the template findings with widely cited, key studies.

Findings. First, we found that curricular guidelines for ECEC exist in all of our 11 sample countries although there are divergences when it comes to the age range addressed. The current trend in Europe however is to move away from the traditional split between children under three and those between three and school entry. The new integrated ECEC system recognizes the importance of care and education aims of ECEC to be consistent for all age groups from infants up to preschoolers and kindergarteners. This leads to alignment between frameworks across Europe.

Second, curricular frameworks in Europe share some main principles and approaches to pedagogy. Those are not based on a single theoretical model, but are eclectic and influenced by a number of pedagogical and psychological theories. We found a relatively high agreement across the domains of development, and a shared holistic pedagogical philosophy aimed at development of body, mind, emotions, creativity, and social identity. The recommended approach to pedagogy across Europe is strongly child-centred. Play, social interaction and educational dialogue are widely promoted, along with exploration and project-based activities. The main role of educators is providing a safe, positive and supportive environment and opportunities for building strong relationships.

Finally, in terms of curriculum implementation the move towards a more balanced approach requires integrating social-emotional aims with those related to learning. The new 'integrated' curriculum regards social and cognitive development as complementary and equally important for child's development, learning and wellbeing.

D2.2 Secondary analyses of large scale studies: The relations between structural quality and process quality in European ECEC provisions

Procedure and aims. This substudy (D2.2) addresses the quality of ECEC provisions through secondary data analyses of the relations between structural and process quality in ECEC provisions. Using data from longitudinal datasets of ongoing studies in five European countries, comparative analyses were conducted on a comprehensive set of structural variables to investigate their associations with observed process quality measured by the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-R or ECERS-E) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). In addition, to the commonly investigated *main* effects, the current study also specifically explored *interaction* effects for different combinations of educator, classroom and system characteristics. Finally, we investigated whether children from socioeconomically disadvantaged background experienced equal process quality as non-disadvantaged children. The research questions were:

- (1) What are the relations between structural quality characteristics and observed process quality? To what extent do structural quality characteristics interact in predicting process quality? Are there differences in the main and interaction effects between the five countries?

- (2) What is the process quality of classrooms attended by socioeconomically disadvantaged children and by children from language minorities? Are there differences between the participating countries in the quality of the ECEC services they provide to disadvantaged children?

Findings. The findings revealed several structural characteristics (educator's qualifications, work experience, professional development opportunities, group size, and children-to-staff ratio) to be related to process and curriculum quality. More importantly, country specific moderators were evident in all countries, pointing to a complex interplay of factors, mostly related to country specific aspects of the ECEC system. For example, work experience and professional development opportunities, appeared important moderators in several countries to reach the higher process quality. However, the findings pointed out that a relatively high number of classrooms were characterized by a combination of unfavourable structural aspects leading to the lowest process and curriculum quality. Generally, this applied to 20% to 50% of the classrooms in the five studies. These findings are reason for concern, because the potential benefits for children depend critically on the quality. This holds especially for the most vulnerable children for whom quality matters the most. Overall, the findings from the secondary data analyses showed less than optimal structural and process quality, which may limit the potential benefits for children and society, particularly for disadvantaged children. The results revealed that relations between structural and process quality are complex, interactive and seldom straightforward and somewhat different in each country.

D2.3 Multiple case study regarding culture-sensitive classroom quality assessment

Procedure and aims. Curriculum framework documents often make explicit references to pedagogy, i.e. the means by which the curriculum should be offered to the children or how curriculum should be experienced by them, thus addressing important issues of process quality – the physical, social, emotional, and instructional aspects of children's interactions with educators, peers, and materials in ECEC. To look deeply into pedagogical practice, WP2 carried out a multiple case study of practices in seven European countries (D2.3). The aim was to examine common and culturally differing aspects of curriculum, pedagogy, and quality as implemented in ECEC provisions in Europe.

The multiple case study involved intensive data collection on structural characteristics, process quality, implemented curricula and pedagogical approaches in four ECEC centers in each of the seven countries (total of 28 centers). These centers were each considered examples of 'good practice' by national

experts. A multi-method approach was used to analyze aspects of quality in classrooms for 0-3 and 3-6-years-old children. Video recordings (total of 124 videos) were made of four common situations in ECEC centers, i.e. play, routine (mealtime), creative activities and educational/emerging academic activities in order (a) to evaluate *process quality* with a standard observational tool (CLASS Toddler or CLASS Pre-K; Classroom Assessment Scoring System; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), and (b) to analyze occurring *educational dialogues* in-depth. In addition, educator reports were collected to gain information on structural educator, classroom and center characteristics as well as information on bearing of the curriculum of the provision of different types of activities (e.g., play, self-regulation and pre-academic activities such as language, literacy, math, and science activities). Finally, information on *educator's beliefs and perspectives* on classroom process quality was collected through personal interviews and focus group discussions with professionals in all participating countries. The research questions were:

- (1) How does process quality in selected ECEC classrooms with 'good practices' vary according to the curriculum activities, and what kind of pedagogical practices can be identified? (Study 1)
- (2) How do the types of curriculum activities differ depending on the age of children and what are the relations with curriculum activities and observed process quality? (Study 2)
- (3) How do educator characteristics, structural quality and organizational characteristics of the ECEC centers relate to observed and reported quality and practices? (Study 3)
- (4) What kind of patterns of educational dialogues can be identified in the 3–6-years-old classrooms during educational/emerging academic activities and free play? How do educators' pedagogical practices support and enhance educational dialogues? How does observed classroom quality match up with quality characteristics revealed through educational dialogues? (Study 4)
- (5) How can we enhance ecological validity when conducting cross-national case studies that use international observational tools such as the CLASS? This involves (a) addressing cultural points of view in order to identify (emerging) aspects of process quality which standardized tools are not able to capture without the involvement of the perspectives of the "insiders", (b) identifying similarities and differences in the ways in which each country interprets ECEC quality and curriculum, and (c) introducing qualitative (ethnographic) approaches and tools particularly suited for case studies in cross-cultural contexts. (Study 5)

Findings on process quality. The results based on video data showed that the emotional support and classroom organization was in the high range (dimension scores 6 or 7 by CLASS), whereas the instructional support was in the midrange (range 3 through 5 by CLASS) in this selective sample of good centers. This pattern reflects the general pattern found in the literature across diverse ECEC classrooms. The somewhat high CLASS scores observed in the case studies indicates that 'good practice' examples had been selected by the country experts. The overall high level of observed process quality scores suggests that what was selected as 'good practice' in one country was by-and-large also considered good practice in another country.

Findings on process quality by activities. However, there was also considerable variation in process quality related to the type of activity or group size and arrangements of activities, and age of the children. For example, process quality was higher during small group activities compared to whole group activities, and during science activities compared to pre-academic activities. Moreover, in 0-3 classrooms play and educational/emerging academic activities provided the best opportunities for

children to be engaged in higher quality processes whereas in 3-6 classrooms educational/pre-academic academic activities continued to show high quality, but play situations showed somewhat lower instructional quality. Based on how frequent educators reported carrying out activities addressing different areas of development, we distinguished between different types of curricula. It appeared that a *balanced curriculum* with roughly equal emphasis on play, self-regulation and pre-academic activities was related to the highest observed process quality. The videos in which *educational dialogues* were independently identified from 3-6 classrooms were given high scores on the CLASS, demonstrating high process quality.

Findings on educators' views. There appeared to be a high level of agreement among educators across countries about what constitutes high process quality. Among the main goals of ECEC they mentioned the following: (a) supporting children's autonomy, (b) creating a sense of belonging, and (c) fostering children's learning. There was also consensus about the importance of a warm, positive classroom with sensitive educators adopting a child-centered approach to supporting children's learning. The educators strongly valued promoting children's sense of belonging to a group and being part of a community, their possibilities to establish and develop peer relations, and a focus on broad developmental goals by striking a balance between 'soft' and 'hard' skills. Some, but not all, of the aspects thought to be important to capture quality were found to be included in the CLASS tool. The identification of aspects of quality not well tapped by the existing observational dimensions on the CLASS calls for extension of existing tools or for development of new tools that can capture the European perspective.

Integrating the Findings: Balance and Tension

The curriculum across Europe, the pedagogies that support it, and the enabling or constraining factors that shape the structural and process quality in ECEC was studied in WP2. The three reports described briefly above used mixed methods to identify the indicators of process and structural quality that nurture and challenge children's development across the early childhood education. The present summary report draws together some common themes and points of agreement across these reports, and also discusses potential tensions concerning the ways in which perceive pedagogy and ways in which we observe and understand quality of ECEC and build communities of practice.

1. Emerging agreement on curriculum across Europe

Divergence or convergence of ECEC aims. At the turn of this century, European reports tended to describe a strong dichotomy between countries that espoused a more holistic, child-centered curriculum and those that based their national curricular documents on preparing the child for school through a strong emphasis on pre-academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. In practice, however, most countries are likely to use approaches that blend elements of both goals, although most lean towards either one or the other. What clearly emerged in the CARE surveys and interviews is the contemporary balance between both approaches, suggesting a gradual movement towards goals for ECEC that are *both* nurturing and (cognitively) stimulating. All countries stress the importance of ECEC providing safe, caring and socially 'alive' environments that welcome children's voices, parents' involvement, and respectful engagement with the communities they serve. It is recognized that a strong social and emotional focus, although very important, is not sufficient. Its single-minded implementation can deprive the child of intellectual challenges and opportunities for learning that will excites children's curiosity and offers them skills to unlock the intellectual worlds of literature, science and mathematics. The present findings did not suggest a strong divergence between the academic approach, on the one hand, and the social pedagogy approach on the other hand. This emerging balanced view is in line with the OECD (2006) report that pointed out a trend of 'unifying social and educational targets of early childhood care and education systems' (p. 24). The 11 countries participating in the CARE research differed in the relative balance between social-emotional goals and intellectual ones, but most agreed that both are important. Studies such as CARE offer analytic frameworks and terminology that can assist national reviews and international discussions.

Debate around the contrast and the efficacy of academic-instructivist vs constructivist approaches is well-known, as Katz (1999) highlighted almost twenty years ago:

'One of the major concerns about this historical squabbling over goals and methods is that both sides in the struggle may overlook curriculum and teaching methods beyond the traditional dichotomy. Years of experience of observing early childhood classrooms suggest that both sides under emphasize and undervalue a third option - namely curriculum and teaching methods that address children's *intellectual* development as distinct from instructivist emphasis on *academic* learning and the *constructivist* emphasis on children's play and self-initiated learning.'

In CARE a strong socio-emotional orientation of ECEC in European curriculum frameworks was identified with the aims of ECEC referring to children's confidence, resilience, sense of identity, and sense of belonging, often *in combination* with a weaker emphasis on learning-related skills (Sylva et al., 2015). The last decade has witnessed a more integrated view that acknowledges connections between children's competencies and emphasizes processes and skill development related to self-regulation, problem-solving, creativity and collaboration. Group discussions with educators taking part in the multiple case study (Slot et al., 2016), confirmed a high level of agreement on the goals of ECEC, independent of the age of the children. In all countries, educators valued the goals of children's

autonomy and independence, their sense of belonging and interdependence, but also learning processes - not 'just' learning outcomes.

The goals of ECEC reflect an image of children as curious, active and competent learners. They also reflect a view of provision that supports and strengthens those competencies. Yet, conceptualization of learning and clear definitions of the key competencies are lacking, and so are clear statements on their connections with the content of the curriculum. Thus, despite an emerging consensus on combining aims for social-emotional development with more cognitive ones, there is a lack of clarity (and possibly more differences in views) on the way learning is conceptualized. The systematic observations and detailed analysis of classroom practices and institutional policies in CARE lead to a view of learning in ECEC that goes beyond the opposition of cognitive 'attainments' with socio-emotional development. Although this issue is not new, CARE attempted the *empirical linking* of these aspirational learning aims with systematic observations and detailed analysis of classroom practices and institutional policies that support them.

Tensions in drawing and implementing a balanced curriculum. Despite agreement on combining social-emotional with cognitive aims, creating a coherent curriculum is not a straightforward task. Furthermore, decisions in everyday practice require choices as to which goals or experiences to prioritize, and these priorities will change according to the characteristics of the children and the resources of the center. Tensions in this curricular balancing act can be seen to emerge along the following continua:

1. Fostering **emotional** vs. **cognitive development**
2. Nurturing the child for life in the '**here and now**' vs. preparing the child for '**becoming**' (e.g., preparing the child for future education or employment)
3. Providing support for learning **dispositions** (e.g., curiosity, motivation) vs. **specific academic skills** (e.g., pre-literacy skills)
4. Promoting and paying attention to '**soft**' skills (e.g., self-regulation and collaboration) vs. '**hard**' skills (e.g., academic pre-literacy and math skills).

There are additional tensions that relate less to the curriculum emphases and more to the ***implementation of pedagogical practices in the social group*** consisting of learners and ECEC professionals. These oppositional tensions include:

5. Fostering **interdependence** vs. **autonomy** among learners
6. Valuing **relational skills** vs. **individual achievement**
7. Promoting a **community of learners** vs. the development of **individual children**.

Integrative view. Discussions with practitioners revealed that the seemingly opposing goals along the continua may create tensions but are not as black-or-white as they first appear; they can and do live alongside each other. However, this balancing requires frequent, reflective discussion amongst practitioners. Prioritizing one end of the continuum does not preclude the other. The strands of research in WP2 all led to a single, powerful conclusion about the workforce. Implementing a complex and rich curriculum depends on well-trained and qualified staff members who have opportunities for professional development. A curriculum that integrates intellectual and social goals supports the whole child who craves autonomy but who flourishes in the group, and manages the tension between aims for today and those for tomorrow - can only be realized by well-educated and imaginative adults working in strong collaboration. The day to day implemented curriculum is not 'delivered'; it is '*co-constructed*' through discussions amongst educators but also with children. Finding a culturally and contextually

balanced curriculum means going beyond the oppositional tensions described here to achieve a dynamic and shifting pedagogy where the balance changes in line with children's needs, interests and the aspirations of the community.

2. An European view of pedagogy

While the CARE project's analysis indicates a pronounced overall agreement on the multi-faceted goals of ECEC across the participant European countries, there appears to be more variability on the views on the optimal nature and aims of pedagogy (see the Glossary for an outline of differing concepts of pedagogy). Before turning to some differences amongst countries, it will be useful to describe broad *European agreements* on pedagogy.

The sub-study CARE report on ECEC curricula (Sylva et al., 2015) showed that most countries in the present survey were influenced by the powerful writings of Froebel and Montessori, who viewed children as active constructors of their own development. It was therefore not surprising that the multiple-case study including in-depth video observations of ECEC practices and interviews with educators and pedagogical coordinators, revealed a high level of agreement regarding pedagogical goals, values and quality perceptions, and a consensus on child-centered and holistic pedagogical approaches. There was also an emphasis on pedagogy for young children that focuses strongly on relationships and emotional aspects of interactional quality.

Findings also showed that the classrooms selected for video observation scored high in emotional support (Slot et al., 2016). This was reflected by our curriculum framework reports which endorsed notions of emotional security, warmth or familiarity (Sylva et al., 2015), and the fact that educators, in discussions of their classroom practices, assessed situations in terms of how well they supported children 'feeling good about themselves' (Slot et al., 2015). The shared approach to pedagogy found across curricula in Europe is strongly child-centered (Sylva et al., 2015). The agreement across countries is that daily ECEC practices should be responsive to children's unique needs, abilities, interests, and ways of learning. The CARE survey of researchers and educators showed a shared image of children with a unique personality which develops through pedagogy which fosters active exploration, play, interaction, and educational dialogue.

Practitioners of the qualitative case study provided metaphors describing children as '*strategic and critical thinkers*', '*researchers*', '*explorers*', '*sponges*', and '*protagonists of their own learning*'. They described their own educational role in ways which affords children's agentic learning roles (not denying the difference of power and responsibilities between the adult and the child). Thus, educators described their roles as '*film directors*' (organizers), '*scaffolders*', '*enablers*', '*sources*', '*providers of security when is needed, but no more*', '*providers of adequate inputs, balancing child's initiative and direction*', '*specialists in knowing individual children*', and '*mediators in fostering peer interactions and children's community*'. These shared interpretations and images of the adult role are consistent with the key principle of a quality framework (European Commission Working Group, 2014: 7 'A clear image and voice of the child and childhood should be valued').

How does this strong socio-pedagogical tradition sit alongside the demands for learning and cognitive development specified by more recent curricular documents? In the CARE curriculum report (Sylva et al.,

2015) and case study (Slot et al., 2016) an emphasis on a *balanced approach* was found: educators should offer experiences in all learning areas while giving enough room for the child's choice and interest; they should find the right balance between adult-led and child-led activities. The adult role is viewed as providing a safe and positive environment and opportunities for building strong relationships, but also in providing adult guidance and support to facilitate development and learning in all areas. Still, defining the role of the adult in supporting learning was described by educators as challenging with respect to the position on the continuum of child-centered to adult-centered. The case study confirmed this challenge; compared to emotional support and classroom organization (where classrooms scored high overall), there was more variation in the level of instructional support educators provided and therefore more variation in children's opportunities to learn in classrooms (Slot et al., 2016). Examples of good practice could be found across countries and providers, but at the same time we observed challenges in promoting the active participation of learners while at the same time supporting and extending learners' thinking. It is not impossible to 'square this circle', but it takes outstanding pedagogical skill to do it.

The examples of pedagogy described above show play situations where educators expand and maintain educational dialogue; engaged children in exploration, problem solving, and analyzing (especially science activities and small group activities), and adults support children's participation through open-ended questions, asking children's opinions, validating children's comments and following their lead.

3. High process quality

In the multiple observational study, process quality, in particular the level of instructional support, varied depending on children's ages, type of activity, and the structure of the group (Slot et al., 2016). There was more variation across types of activities in 3–6 classrooms for the instructional domain, suggesting that the type of activity may be particularly important in 3–6 classrooms in what regards the opportunities for deepening learning and understanding. In 3-6 classrooms, educational/emerging academic activities and creative activities rather than play seemed to be the activities through which educators facilitated children's broader conceptual understanding of concepts, and deepened learning. In 3-6 classrooms, type of activity (educational/emerging academic activities), group size (small group) and content (science) were associated with high support for learning and educational dialogue¹. For younger children in 0-3 classrooms high support for learning was found also in play activities.

In terms of instructional grouping, ECEC curricula were found to emphasize activities in small groups which enable children to take part more actively in discussions and interactions (D2.1). The multiple case study showed that overall, process quality was higher during small group activities compared to whole group activities; this was particularly evident with respect to dimensions such as regard for children's perspectives, quality of feedback and language modelling (D2.3). In addition, analysis of educational dialogues¹ showed that at age 3-6 the proportion of actively involved children was higher in small groups compared to larger groups. However, some examples of high process quality were also observed during whole group activities. Importantly, this seemed to be related to children's own role in supporting, motivating, and stimulating each other in the group, and the ways in which the educators fostered peer interactions and group dynamics to support group learning. The phenomenon of using

¹ Collective, reciprocal, and purposeful interactions in which there are extended verbal exchanges between teachers and children involving questioning, listening to each other and sharing of different ideas and points of view (Alexander, 2008).

children as resources for collegial learning was also apparent (D2.3; Study 4) regarding the educational dialogues in 3–6-year-olds classrooms. During activities that included educational dialogues, children had an active role constructing knowledge also together and not only in interaction with the teacher.

Finally, in the case studies (D2.3; Study 2), the highest process quality was observed in centres where educators reported more balance between activities aimed at different domains of development – pretend play, self-regulation, and pre-academics. Importantly, a *balanced curriculum* here was not about the frequency of the provision of certain activities per se, but the relative balance across these three areas: (1) activities that encourage children’s cognitive distancing, symbolizing and pretend play; (2) those that stimulate children’s behavioural self-regulation, such as talking about emotions and feelings; and (3) those that focus on language, literacy, math and science.

Despite the broad agreement on the child as a competent learner and the value of learning in ECEC, and despite the fact that observations were carried out in classrooms with overall high classroom quality, CARE observed challenges relating to facilitating learning across types of activities. While there is agreement across Europe of integrating play and learning in ECEC (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008), we found some ‘tensions’ in valuing *play, creativity, and child-initiated activities vs. valuing the acquisition of knowledge and skills.*

Thus what we have learned is that while there seems to be general agreement that children learn through play, and that the role of adults is to foster learning in tune with the ways in which children learn, there are tensions in practice, some of them relating to the level of involvement of adults during play and the activities in which they chose to facilitate learning-related to curricular goals.

The discussions with educators showed that the old dichotomies are still alive (play vs. work; child-centered vs. teacher-directed practices; unstructured vs. structured activities). In the multiple case study, we observed the highest process quality in classrooms providing a *balanced curriculum*; and where the pedagogical approach offered a harmonious solution to the oppositions. Nevertheless, we also observed that those ‘harmonious solutions’ through an integrated-balanced approach were not the norm. Differences across centers and sometimes within the center (between practices and ideals) suggested *tensions* that pull in opposite directions. Articulating these tensions is a powerful aid to professional development. Paying attention these tensions (such as non-directive vs. directive; non-structured vs. structured; child-centred vs. teacher-centred etc.) is fruitful in the analysis of the complexity of pedagogy and classroom practices, and they can be a stimulus to educational reflection of educators as long as juxtaposing or oversimplifying the approaches does not hamper the sharing and learning from each other. Creating a balance is not about placing oneself permanently along a continuum, but integrating different elements in a culturally and contextually meaningful way. Rosenthal (2003) suggests that conceptualizing cultural variations in educational goals and practices along those continua between dichotomous extremes has value in clarifying our thinking about "quality" in ECEC in different cultural contexts.

4. Pedagogical tensions revealed through focus group discussions on practices

CARE researchers showed practitioners video clips of practices in their own and other countries (D2.3; Study 5). These led to in-depth *focus group* discussions of pedagogical tensions and choices. Implementation in the classroom varies according to how educators resolve pedagogical tensions arising from their conception of content, goals, and the complexity of ECEC classrooms. Pedagogical

oppositions were most evident in contexts with contrasting pedagogical traditions. Some examples follow of identified *pedagogical tensions*:

1. Universal/inclusive provision vs. part-time targeted provision can lead to contrast between **'daily life in the centre' vs. concentrated program**. For example in Italy 0-6 services are universal provisions and offer a full-day program, where children (and families) are involved in an intense social life along the whole day. In these contexts, a strongly holistic approach is mainly focused on social competences and emotional development, omitting, it seems, a grained attention to learning achievements. On the other hand countries such as the Netherlands offer mainly part-time services where learning activities are very concentrated and targeted on specific cognitive/developmental areas or needs. In these part-time contexts activities are very structured, less attentive to the socio-emotional dimensions and offering separated programs to disadvantaged groups. These different models lead to other poles.
2. **Productive-slow time for learning vs. productive-concentrated learning**: a different concept on the *time* of learning, a *'slow and diffuse'* learning, occurring within whole day, during routines, play-time, more or less structured activities vs. in association with specifically organized activities.
3. **The 'child being here and now' vs. the 'child becoming'**: while strongly holistic approaches concentrate on the here-and-now experience provided to the child (child being), programs concentrated on cognitive learning and pre-academic skills emphasize *school readiness* through offering a more structured learning to children, especially important for children at-risk of being left behind and excluded in future school pathways (child-becoming).

Conclusion: A consensus on pedagogy will abandon both the idea that children have to be 'protected' against learning, and that academic skills can only be acquired through structured and adult-led activity. Pedagogical oppositions were also evident in relation to beliefs and norms regarding the *balance* along the continuum between an individualist and collectivist approach. Below an example is given on these tensions:

4. **The individual child vs. the group of children**: The teachers' interviews revealed an emphasis on the crucial role of the group, of peer interactions (practices related to the community of learners/the group; to learning from adults and from peers) and on fostering the group of peers with the aim to sustain: (a) a sense of belonging to a community, (b) a sense of identity (the others as part of own identity), (c) self-regulation, autonomy and social skills, and (d) learning as a co-construction and a social enterprise that takes into account the different and sometimes divergent views of the others (and considers differences as resource).

In countries such as Italy and Germany learning is not viewed as an individual activity, but a group activity in ECEC centers. In other countries a tension was found between the focus on the individual child as opposed to the group of children. Thus, we learned from our observations and discussions with educators that some goals and strategies that are very important for curriculum implementation seem less well articulated in curriculum documents. This particularly concerns the pedagogy of the group, and goals referring to the group of children. The video observations revealed strategies that can support interactions with peers. Throughout the videos, it was possible to observe teachers supporting children to cooperate, to help each other out, or to recognize each other's' feelings or ideas. Yet, sociality showed different nuances across centers and countries - from an emphasis on the promotion of group life, and the regulation of behavior to the pleasure of being together and the atmosphere of conviviality. Moreover, the focus on the group to promote social skills appeared to be well established in all the countries, while the focus on the group to support intellectual development revealed more tensions and disagreement.

Thus, while there is a large degree of consensus on the developmental domains that need to be addressed in ECEC, within the same domains pedagogical strategies will vary. The same or similar goals can be pursued through different educational strategies. This documentation of multiple strategies can inform educational practices and offer a wider spectrum of strategies to educators, promoting a profitable ‘contamination’ aimed at fostering reflexivity, deeper pedagogical awareness and intentionality.

5. How curriculum and pedagogy interact in practice?

Disputes concerning curriculum and pedagogy go back a long way in early childhood education and care. They often capture opposing positions between an *academic or instructivist perspective* that contrast with a *constructivist approach* (see Katz, 1999). The latter is characterized by a strong child-centred approach in which educators respond to the individual child’s interests and activities, and there is a weak curriculum classification. The aim is to provide opportunities for the child to actively create knowledge. Curriculum emphasis is on encouraging children’s independence, their social and emotional growth, creativity and self-expression. The former is more teacher directed and structured, providing little initiative on the part of the child, and curriculum objectives are clearly classified. In practice, most classrooms offer and mix of those two positions. Both approaches may be insufficient or less than optimal in their own right – the one because of its emphasis on play and self-initiated learning with too little intentional involvement from the side of the educator; the other because of its emphasis on formal instruction that may not match the ways in which young children learn best (see Katz, 1999).

Other options have been described (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford, 2008; Weikart, 2000) which lead to models with curriculum and pedagogy on two separate axes. This matches the complexity of the early childhood classroom better. Here, we suggest two axes: curriculum and pedagogy. If we conceive of curriculum as focusing on the aims and content of ECEC, we can consider pedagogy to be concerned with the practices and intentions that realize those curriculum aims. In Figure 1 the vertical dimension relates to the curriculum; extending from formal ‘academic’ goals to more informal ‘social-emotional’ goals for children’s development. The horizontal dimension relates to pedagogy. This dimension describes the initiators of activities, with *adult-led* (adult initiated activity) at one end and *child-led* at the other end of the dimensions. Academic learning can occur as easily in child-led play (discovery of which objects float and which sink in water) as in adult-led discussion (e.g., on words we use when describing the shape of jugs).

The four activities in Figure 1 (boxes) represents different real-world activities and were taken from authentic classroom observations. In the ‘**free play**’ episode a few children were playing a game of chase outdoors but also stopped occasionally to explore some newly planted flowers. This particular play episode has been characterized on the curriculum dimension as promoting social development, but also intellectual development related to science. This particular activity has been located mostly in the ‘social development’ part of the curricular dimension, but extends a bit into the ‘academic’ part because the children spoke with one another about the season when budding flowers would open. On the same morning, another group of children participated in ‘**guided learning**’ outdoors with the teacher; in this episode children and the adult discussed the planting, watering and general care for plants. Young and old contributed equally to the discussion, with teacher often following the children’s lead while sometimes taking the initiative. For this particular activity, the Guided Learning appears in Figure 1 mid-way on the pedagogical initiation dimension because children shared the lead with adults; this guided

conversation has been located on the 'academic' (science) end of the curriculum dimension because the conversation was about nature.

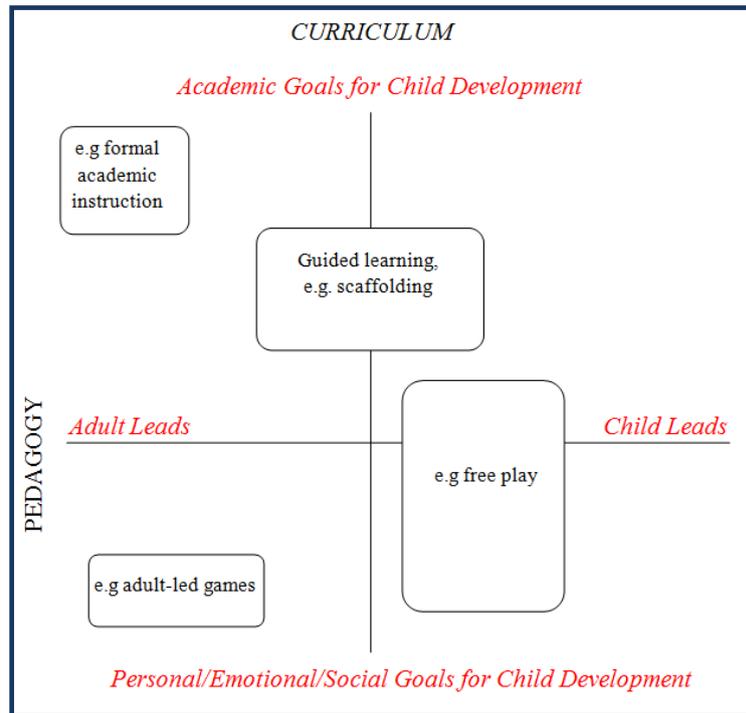


Figure 1. Four 'real life' activities plotted on curriculum and pedagogy axes

Diagramming in this way makes clear that the curricular benefits of free play can be personal/social or academic, while academic learning activities can feature either adults or children taking the lead. Figure 1 is schematic and leaves out nuanced, important complexities. It does however show that curriculum and pedagogy can be disentangled and considered separately. Not all adult-led activities are 'instruction' or even academic. Importantly the case study observations showed clearly that powerful academic learning can take place in situations led by or co-led by children. Moreover, guided learning, especially scaffolding children's activities, respects the child's initiation while guiding the learning towards clear curricular objectives. However, when guided learning becomes heavily dominated by adults, it becomes adult-led instruction.

An annotated video library of good practices in Europe (See CARE website), based on the multiple case study, is available for the public. This valuable resource documents good practices in ECEC across Europe and show that rich interactions are possible within many different group sizes and with staff trained in different ways.

6. Factors that shape the implemented curriculum

So far this discussion has focused on activities inside the ECEC settings. However, centers do not operate in isolation; there are many institutional influences on the way the curriculum and pedagogical intentions are 'realized' through implementation. Implementation is always shaped by 'enabling' or

‘constraining’ institutional influences, such as training of the staff, governmental regulation and group size.

Figure 2 summarizes some enabling or constraining factors and points to their influence on implementation. Study of official documents cannot, on its own, provide an accurate picture of the experiences of children and educators on the ground. Implementation is also shaped by families, community preferences and important historical and traditional values. ECEC settings represent a specific arena where children are supposed to learn and develop within certain frames (Pramling, Samuelsson & Carlson, 2008). Figure 2 illustrates a direct link between curriculum implementation and children’s learning. Implementation will be ‘effective’ when the aims of the curriculum are achieved through children developing in positive ways that are in accordance with the aspirations of educators, families and society.



Figure 2. Link between curriculum implementation and children’s learning

An important component of CARE was secondary analyses performed on datasets from ongoing longitudinal studies that studied the relationship between structural aspects of ECEC settings and observed process quality (D2.2). Overall, the findings revealed several structural characteristics to be related to process and curriculum quality. However, some institutional factors were country specific, for example the state sector showed higher quality in Portugal. Likewise, in England, settings with a predominant ‘education’ focus (such as schools) showed higher quality related to academics but also higher quality related to social development. The enabling factors often worked together in their influence on quality. In some countries work experience and professional development opportunities

appeared to moderate the effect of group size or ratio, with professional development in the Netherlands appearing to compensate when there were unfavorable ratios. In Portugal, England, and Finland, type of provider and structural quality aspects (group-size, children-to-staff ratio or educators' qualification) interacted in relating to process quality. Distinctions between types of providers were country specific, and so were interaction effects, pointing to the complexity of the issue, and the importance to take account of the local/national context of ECEC provision. Moreover, interaction plots showed that across all countries in the study, a relatively high number of classrooms were characterized by the most unfavorable combination of structural aspects, leading to the lowest process and curriculum quality.

In multiple-case studies (D2.3) there was also considerable variation in structural quality (groups size, ratio) across centers, but different *combinations* of characteristics together with children's age range, rather than single aspects, appeared to be related to higher observed process quality and to the implementation of a balanced curriculum. The findings indicated also that a smaller group size with fewer educators or a larger group size with more educators were both related to higher quality and a more balanced curriculum. Moreover, opportunities for additional *in-service training* and *professional development* activities provided at the center and the overall *organizational climate* (collegiality, supportive supervision, joint decision-making and clearly defined goals based on a shared mission and orientation) in the center were all found to be important for process quality and curriculum emphasis.

An important theme in all the CARE research has been the impact of ECEC on children who are disadvantaged, as for example, from migration backgrounds or children whose parents have low levels of education. For example, in secondary analysis in Finland and Germany disadvantaged children experienced lower quality ECEC than their more privileged peers while in Portugal and the Netherlands the situation was reversed with disadvantaged children experiencing higher quality. In Germany, the data showed a significant main effect on the proportion of children with migration background in a classroom, with poorer quality in classrooms with more children with migration background. However, more work experience seemed to mitigate those negative effects.

These findings show the complexity of structural/institutional influences, with some aspects of structure working jointly with others to influence quality. The findings need to be interpreted while considering the ECEC systems and policy contexts in different countries. Policies aimed at equal outcomes for children appear to be falling short. Although most countries have specific policies for ensuring that vulnerable children have access to high quality provision, CARE found that not all disadvantaged children are accessing high quality provision, despite official policies. Moreover, it is these vulnerable children who have the most to gain from high quality provision.

7. Instruments and professional views on quality assessments

Several observational measures have been developed for measuring the process quality in classrooms. Both global rating scales, such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998; ECERS-E; Sylva et al., 2006), and direct observation of classroom interactions, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008). In secondary analysis (D2.2) observed data rated by ECERS-R/ECERS-E or CLASS was used. In the multiple-case study (D2.3), the CLASS tool was applied for measuring the process quality in ECEC classrooms. The CLASS was chosen

because it provides a standardized and validated way of assessing quality across age groups and across activities (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) and it has been recently used in several European countries (Cadima, Enrico, Ferreira, Verschueren, Leal, & Matos, 2016; Pakarinen et al., 2010; Slot, Leseman, Verhagen, & Mulder, 2015; von Suchodoletz, Fäsche, Gunzenhauser, & Hamre, 2014). Although the CLASS framework shares many features with other approaches, it is unique in its strong theoretical basis, the Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) framework, its empirical validation, and applicability to a range of early childhood settings (Hamre & Pianta, 2007).

The CARE researchers found the CLASS useful in allowing cross country comparison through a common vocabulary and common aspects of practice in secondary analysis (D2.2) and case study (D2.3). The analytic scoring system also allowed comparisons within specific types of activity (i.e. was instructional quality higher in adult-led activity compared to free play). It was these assessments providing quantitative scores that allowed the team to conclude that science activities were a rich source of intellectual challenges and episodes of educational dialogue, and that play activities showed, in general, high levels of regard for the child's own perspective.

The CLASS observation instrument proved useful also in another way; when it was introduced to practitioners it provided them with a common analytic framework for discussing variations in practice in different countries. Through focus group discussion practitioners expressed their views as to whether the categories of the CLASS encompassed 'most' or 'just some' of what they considered high quality practice (D2.3; Study 5). The main limitations they identified in the CLASS instrument were: (a) the dominant focus on the adult behavior, at the expense of focusing on the child's own active role in learning; (b) a low value acknowledged to the capacity of a teacher to observe, to *stay back*, and to *be silent*; (c) the low relevance attributed to peer group in learning and (d) to learning prompted by the physical environment without adult; (e) an overarching conceptualization of learning focused on the cognitive and language dimension, with much lesser attention to socio-emotional achievements and skills or daily life competences; (f) the absence of a reference to inclusive competences of the teacher; and (g) a concept of 'productivity' focused exclusively on *doing*.

These focus group discussions led to a proposal to extend and modify the CLASS observation instrument, fitting European traditions and developmental goals better, with more explicit attention to educators' facilitation of group processes, peer collaboration, inter-personal skills, social learning, shared affects, and group-belongingness. At a methodological level, the focus group study warns against an uncritical use of standardized tools when applied internationally. On the more positive side, the focus group discussions demonstrated how standardized observation tools can provide a common language and a point of reference that enables international dialogue about what constitutes high process quality. The focus group study provides a rich example of ways that using a standardized tool, combined with teachers' reflexivity on practices, can become a powerful means of professional development. Thus a 'reflective' use of the standardized tools can foster professional development and pedagogical awareness amongst educators and thereby increase the quality of practice. Therefore, despite the limitations, international tool such as the CLASS gives us a language and a point of reference that enable international dialogue with researchers, practitioners and stakeholders to facilitate discussions which allow us to learn from one another (Limlingan, 2011).

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. A *balanced curriculum* which strikes a balance between dichotomies in the aims of ECEC (e.g. emotional vs. cognitive development, individual vs. collective) is the basis for a high process quality in classroom practices, leading to children's holistic development and also their learning.
2. Successful implementation of the curriculum requires articulation of a broad range of pedagogical strategies that include *play, exploration, and interactions and dialogue between adults and children and between peers*.
3. Successful pedagogical practice requires educators to be sensitive not only to the *individual child* but also the needs of *groups of children*. This will require strategies to strengthen group-belongingness, peer-interaction and social learning.
4. Across a range of different activities in classrooms, adults can successfully *use modelling, questioning, identifying/solving problems, feedback and extension, and educational dialogue to support the children's cognitive and social development*. This holds for children's play (especially when guided by teachers), as well as for planned activities that promote academic learning (e.g. science activities). Both child-centered and adult-initiated activities can stimulate exploration and discovery, and provide opportunities for reflection, eliciting complex language use while encouraging children's initiative.
5. *Group activities* are an effective way to combine a child-centered approach with stimulation and scaffolding of children's deeper learning. Where overall group size is not favourable, educators can support process quality by ensuring opportunities for the provision of activities in smaller groups during the day.
6. Successful implementation of the ECEC curriculum depends on highly qualified practitioners, trained especially with regard to pedagogical practices across the age range. Embedding this in a context of continuous professional development, including time for observation, reflection and feedback on practices, will strengthen the knowledge and skills of educators and led to higher classroom quality.
7. ECEC curriculum and implementation vary across different sectors of society. Working with disadvantaged or vulnerable populations is challenging but recruiting well qualified staff will help meet this challenge, along with professional development. It is essential to attract sufficiently qualified staff who can provide higher process and curriculum quality, which may require additional (financial) incentives.
8. In order to increase process and curriculum quality, policy makers should not focus on regulating single structural aspects, but rather take into account the combined, interactive and systemic effects of many structural characteristics that operate within a cultural context.
9. Widely-used standard observation instruments to assess quality, such as the CLASS, provide a framework for international dialogue about practice. However, these need to be complemented by observation tools that (a) address educators' strategies that strengthen group-belongingness and peer-learning, (b) assess the flexible use of small group work, (c) focus specifically on educational dialogues in groups, (d) place particular value on social learning, and (e) describe the extent to which inclusiveness and positive attitudes towards diversity are promoted. It is recommended to initiate the development of observation and self-evaluation tools to extend the outlined dimensions to serve the goals of European ECEC.

10. External evaluation and internal self-evaluation should be complementary, with the use of standard observation instruments providing an opportunity for educators to reflect on the instruments (dimensions and indicators) and on their own practice. This will foster a culture of evaluation and of professional development that can integrate reflexivity and pedagogical awareness with standardized quality measures.

Glossary

Curriculum: A national ECEC curriculum describes the aspirations of a country for services that will enhance children's development and support families and communities. An 'implemented' ECEC curriculum (which includes those aspects which are implicit rather than explicit) also covers developmental care, interactions, children's learning experiences and supportive assessment. The implemented curriculum is rarely set out in formal documentation. However, it is the implemented curriculum that describes the ECEC provision that advances all young children's personal and social development, their learning and prepares them for life and citizenship in their society (European Commission Working Group, 2014).

Curriculum framework: A set of steering documents contributes to establishing a basic curriculum framework in which ECEC staff is required to develop their practice. A curriculum framework has recently been defined as 'a set of values, principles, guidelines or standards which guides the objectives, content and pedagogical approach to children's care and learning' (European Commission Working Group, 2014, 69). It can be a national, regional or local arrangement.

Pedagogy: Whereas curriculum may be understood as denoting all of the knowledge, skills and values that children are meant to acquire in educational establishments, pedagogy can be defined in the narrow sense as the practice (or the art, the science or the craft) of teaching (see also Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Here the term pedagogy refers to all intentional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place, including interactive processes between educators and learners, as well as the provision of a rich physical and social environment.

In a broader sense, pedagogy is the theoretical foundation of an approach and set principles and values for defining specific methods (e.g. Montessori), that it is the reflection on the nature of childhood (on the values and aims of early childhood education and care), define educational goals which are implemented in the teaching approach, through planned actions (teaching actions or didactics). Therefore pedagogy inspires rather than supports curriculum and is spelled out in the general objectives (e.g., the pedagogy can be made explicit in defining goals - autonomy, strengthening of identity, development of competences and citizenship – and in the choice of terms like 'field of experience' rather than 'developmental goal'. We have tried to combine both the definitions, declaring explicitly that the integration of the two definitions can be achieved through careful delineation of the two approaches.

Pedagogy, as a concept, lies linguistically and culturally on shifting sands. In the Anglo-American tradition, pedagogy is subsidiary to curriculum, sometimes inferring little more than 'teaching method'. *Curriculum* itself has both a broad sense (everything that a center/school does) and a narrow one (what is formally required to be taught) which comes closer to continental European 'didactics' without capturing the sense in *la didactique* or *die Didaktik* of a quasi-science comprising subject knowledge and the principles by which it is imparted. Curriculum is more prominent in educational discourse where it is contested, less where it is imposed or accepted as a given. In the central European tradition, it is the

other way round: pedagogy moves centre stage and frames everything else, including curriculum - in so far as that word is used - and didactics (Alexander, 2001; Moon, 1998).

Quality: In many cases the highest quality ECEC settings combine the best of structural and process quality, such as well-trained staff, favorable ratios, effective pedagogical practices, and ongoing professional development for positive adult-child interactions. Structural quality of the classroom includes aspects such as group size, children-to-staff ratio, and educators' professional competences, and it is relatively stable from day to day. Process quality refers to children's actual daily experiences in their programs while involved in activities and interactions and, as such, encompasses the physical, emotional, social, and instructional aspects of children's interactions with educators, peers, and materials (Howes et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2005; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). It focuses on how curriculum is applied in practice and what happens within a classroom. Accordingly the pedagogical practices educators use in daily activities are an important aspect of process quality. Therefore, increasing attention has been recently paid to process quality in ECEC from research to governments at policy level (OECD, 2014) and to training and professional development programs and interventions (Pianta et al., 2008).

Observational Instruments for assessing process quality: Two main instruments have been used in the CARE measurement of the quality: the CLASS and the ECERS-R/E. Both have been shown to be reliable and to predict children's developmental outcomes in European context (Cadima et al., 2016; Pakarinen et al., 2010; Slot, Leseman et al., 2015; Suchodoletz et al., 2014; Sylva et al., 2006). The secondary analysis reported here was based on datasets using both instruments. Although only the CLASS was used in stimulating discussion and critique amongst educators (D2.3; Study 5), the ECERS will be subject to much of the same critique as made for the CLASS.

References

- Alexander, R. J. (2001). Border crossings: Towards a comparative pedagogy. *Comparative Education, 37*, 507-523.
- Alexander, R. J. (2008). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk* (4th Ed.). York: Dialogos.
- Bennet, J. (2005). Curriculum issues in national policymaking. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 13*, 5-23.
- Cadima, J., Enrico, M., Ferreira, T., Verschueren, K., Leal, T. & Matos, P. M. (2016). Self-regulation in early childhood: The interplay between family risk, temperament and teacher–child interactions. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 13*, 341–360.
- Cadima, J., Salminen, J., Pastori, G., Slot, P., Barata, M. C., & Lerkkanen, M.-K. (2016). Video Library of good practices. [online]. Retrieved from <http://ecec-care.org/resources/video/>
- European Commission Working Group. (2014). *Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care. Report of the working group on early childhood education and care under the auspices of the European Commission*. [online]. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2007). Learning opportunities in preschool and early elementary classrooms. In R. Pianta, M. Cox, & K. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness & the transition to kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 49-84). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (1998). *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Revised*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R. C., Bryant, D., Early, D., Clifford, R., & Barbarin, O. (2008). Ready to learn? Children's pre-academic achievement in pre-Kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*, 27–50.
- Kammerman, S. B. (2006). *A global history of early childhood education and care*. Background paper for the Education for all global monitoring report 2007: strong foundations: early childhood care and education. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001474/147470e.pdf>
- Katz, L. G. (1999). Curriculum disputes in Early Childhood Education. ERIC digest, *ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education*, retrieved from: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED436298>
- Lerkkanen, M.-K., Kikas, E., Pakarinen, E., Trossmann, K., Poikkeus, A. M., Rasku-Puttonen, H., Siekkinen, M., & Nurmi, J. E. (2012). A validation of the early childhood classroom observation measure in Finnish and Estonian kindergartens. *Early Education & Development, 23*, 323-350.
- Lillard, A. S. (2012). Preschool children's development in classic Montessori supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 379-401.
- Limlingan, M. C. (2011). On the right track: Measuring early childhood development program quality internationally. *Current Issues in Comparative Education, 14*, 38-47.
- Love, J. M., Harrison, L., Sagi-Schwartz, A., van IJzendoorn, M.H., Ross, C., Ungerer, J. A., et al. (2003). Child care quality matters: How conclusions may vary with context, *Child Development, 74*, 1021-1033.
- Moon, R. (1998). *Fixed expressions and idioms in English: A corpus-based approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oberhuemer, P. (2005). International perspectives on early childhood curricula. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 37*, 27-37.
- OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: OECD.
- Pakarinen, E., Lerkkanen, M.-K., Poikkeus, A. M., Kiuru, N., Siekkinen, M., Rasku-Puttonen, H., & Nurmi, J. E. (2010). A validation of the classroom assessment scoring system in Finnish kindergartens. *Early Education and Development, 21*, 95-124.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I. & Fler, M. (Eds.) (2009). *Play and learning in early childhood settings: International perspectives, Vol. 1*. New York: Springer.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I., & Carlsson, A. M. (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 52*, 623-641.

- Pianta, R. C., & Hamre, B. K. (2009). Conceptualization, measurement, and improvement of classroom processes: Standardized observation can leverage capacity. *Educational Researcher*, 38, 109–119.
- Pianta, R., Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Bryant, D., Clifford, R. Early, D., & Barbarin, O. (2005). Features of Pre-Kindergarten programs, classrooms, and teachers: Do they predict observed classroom quality and child-teacher interactions? *Applied Developmental Science*, 9, 144-159.
- Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System manual, Pre-K*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Phillips, D. A., & Lowenstein, A. E. (2011). Early care, education, and child development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 483-500.
- Rosenthal, M. K. (2003). Quality in early childhood education and care: A cultural context. *European Early Childhood Education. Research Journal*, 11, 101–116.
- Slot, P., Cadima, J., Salminen, J., Pastori, G., & Lerkkanen, M.-K. (2016) *Multiple case study in seven European countries regarding culture-sensitive classroom quality assessment*. CARE Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC. [online]. Retrieved from http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE_WP2_D2_3_Multiple_Case_study_FINAL_REPORT.pdf
- Slot, P., Lerkkanen, M.-K., & Leseman, P. (2015). *The relations between structural quality and process quality in European early childhood education and care provisions: secondary analyses of large scales studies in five countries*. CARE Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC. [online]. Retrieved from http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE_WP2_D2__2_Secondary_data_analyses.pdf
- Slot, P. L., Leseman, P. P., Verhagen, J., & Mulder, H. (2015). Associations between structural quality aspects and process quality in Dutch early childhood education and care settings. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 33, 64-76.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008). Understanding the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and progression in learning in early childhood. *Hong Kong Journal of Early Childhood*, 7, 6-13. Retrieved from http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/media/uwtsd-website/content-assets/documents/equity-in-education/hkjec_v7n2_p6-13.pdf
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years (REPEY)*. London: Department for Education and Skills, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Sylva, K., Ereky-Stevens, K., & Aricescu, A. (2015). *Overview of European ECEC curriculum and curriculum template*. CARE Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC. [online]. Retrieved from http://ecec-care.org/fileadmin/careproject/Publications/reports/CARE_WP2_D2_1_European_ECEC_Curricula_and_Curriculum_Template.pdf
- Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E., Elliot, K., & Totsika, V. (2006). Capturing quality in early childhood through environmental scales. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 76-92.
- Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Totsika, V., Ereky-Stevens, K., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2007). Curricular quality and day-to-day learning activities in pre-school. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 15, 49-65.
- Thomason, A. C., & La Paro, K. M. (2009). Measuring the quality of teacher–child interactions in toddler child care. *Early Education and Development*, 20, 285-304.
- von Suchodoletz, A., Fäsche, A., Gunzenhauser, C., & Hamre, B. K. (2014). A typical morning in preschool: Observations of teacher–child interactions in German preschools. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, 509-519.
- Weikart, D. (2000). *Early childhood education: Needs and opportunity*. Paris, UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.