

Playing-2-gether: Teacher Sensitivity as a Basis for Inclusion in Preschool (P2G)

Is the title of the project, that Department of Pedagogy at Faculty of Education, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, applied successfully and got the grant in Erasmus+ programme, KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. The most impacted field is (KA201) Strategic partnerships for school education. The other participating institutions are UC Leuven-Limburg, Belgium, Hogeschool iPabo Amsterdam, Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands and the School of Education of the IPP (ESE-IPP) Porto, Portugal.

High level of teacher training, as well as well-designed career development and long-life learning of teachers are considered to be very important standpoints for education from preschool to university settings. It is no doubt, that without professional competences of teachers, quality education of preschool children cannot be secured.

In this project we will develop and disseminate a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for pre-service and in-service teachers, focused on improving teacher sensitivity as a basis for inclusion in preschool.

European organizations explicitly argue for providing and securing high-quality early childhood education (e.g., European Commission, 2013; European Council, 2011). Several studies have provided compelling evidence that an investment in education and training benefiting young children produces the largest gains in terms of human capital, for both children (e.g., better job, higher income, better quality of life) and society (e.g., less crime, less unemployment) (e.g., Heckman, 2006). Following the refugee crisis and an increasing super diverse society (Geldof, 2015), our project will explicitly focus on enhancing the quality of early childhood education for all children in general and for at risk children in particular, as was highlighted in the Paris declaration on education (2015). In this way, our project focuses on two Erasmus KA2+ Horizontal priorities: Enhancing the quality of early childhood education and Inclusive education, training, and youth.

Recent research has shown the importance of teacher sensitivity for young children's recent and later academic, behavioural and socio-emotional development (e.g., Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). Moreover, teacher sensitivity has been found to have compensatory effects for the development of at-risk children (e.g., Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Therefore, the Playing-2-gether project aims to improve teacher sensitivity for both pre-service and in-service teachers when playing with pre-schoolers in the classroom. By training both non-verbal and verbal teacher sensitivity skills, teachers are supported in dealing with diversified groups of learners (such as refugee children, migrants,

socially disadvantaged etc.) and to adopt innovative practices from the start of their careers and during their careers. Doing so, our project is consistent with both the Erasmus KA2+ School education priority for high quality early childhood education and the Erasmus KA2+ Horizontal priority for social inclusion. More specific, the present project focuses on the youngest group (i.e., pre-schoolers of 2.5 to 6 years old) and on their teachers. Building on an evidence-based framework, this project aims to develop, and disseminate a massive open online course (MOOC). This MOOC will offer teachers tools and skills to build teacher sensitivity while playing with these pre-schoolers. Teachers will make good practice videos on teacher sensitivity and they will discuss their findings in professional learning communities. Based on the principle of co-teaching and video feedback (ref), teachers will act as Playing-2-together coaches for other teachers. This is consistent with the Erasmus KA2+ School education priority to strengthen the profiles of the teaching profession for preservice teachers, in-service teachers and teacher trainers.

Building a MOOC is also in line with recommendations in several Horizon 2020 reports to tackle current educational challenges. More specifically, in these reports, it is recommended that education, in general, should focus more on open educational resources and on the integration of hybrid learning. Teacher training, in particular, should integrate ICT more often and look for teaching methods that make a blend of formal and informal learning (Horizon Report 2014 Global K-12 Edition; Horizon Report Europe 2014 Schools Edition; NMC Horizon Report 2014 Global Higher ED Edition). Following the horizontal Erasmus KA2+ priority of Open and innovative practices in a digital area, a MOOC creates place and time-independent learning opportunities.

The MOOC in this project will be used by pre- and in-service teachers throughout Europe. As such, this project also contributes to the priority of the European Commission to enhance adult participation in lifelong learning (DG Education and Culture, 2014). Through a close collaboration between several teacher training institutes and participating preschools spread over four European countries, this project ensures that the benefits of early childhood education are carried through to other educational levels. Also, they will help to create a unifying framework for improving teacher sensitivity as a basis for inclusion in preschool, which is beneficial in the light of European societal changes (refugee crisis, super diversity).

The project itself is broken down into 4 outputs. Each output is assigned a lead partner. By delegating authority to run activities for this output to each partner is ensured the inclusiveness of most of the partners in the project management and therefore ownership for the outputs. In doing so the special consideration of the profile of the institution was taken as well as, the qualifications and experience of people involved.

The responsibility on the different intellectual outputs and multiplier events is taken by different partners, based on their specific expertise in this output.

Output 1: Animated videos on teacher sensitivity and inclusion in preschool : Partner iPABO (the Netherlands)) will take the lead in creating these informative videos explaining the state-of-the art on teacher sensitivity and inclusion in preschool, because of their extensive expertise on teacher sensitivity, play-based learning and special educational needs, both in academic and in practice-based research

Output 2: Good practice videos on teacher sensitivity in inclusive preschools: Partner UCLL (Belgium) already made good practice videos on teacher sensitivity (cfr. the original Flemish Playing-2-gether online course; Vancraeyveldt et al., 2015). Therefore, UCLL will take the lead in selecting, labelling a disseminating the good practice videos of the other countries. UCLL will work in close collaboration with the quality control section of Stenden University. This partner will help take the differences between educational systems in the different countries into account.

Output 3: Playing-2-gether MOOC: Slovakia will be responsible for building the MOOC and adding content to it. Slovakia will build the MOOC, as this partner knows the pitfalls of working with online and digital courses and they can build ways around it (for example: free software).

Output 4: Playing-2-gether coaching manual: Portugal will be responsible for the coaching manual, as this partner has large expertise in stimulating reflection and coaching skills for preservice and in-service teachers in providing inclusive education.

The five partners are responsible for the multiplier events in their own country. For the Netherlands, iPABO will take the lead; Stenden will assist.

The international multiplier event will be led by UAIE (Portugal), as this partner has close connections with the EECERA network. The international multiplier will be held in the place and around the date of the EECERA conference.

The project will answer the challenge in supporting attractiveness of teacher profession: all categories of teachers involved in the project (in-service preschool teachers, university teachers/teacher trainers and pre-service preschool teachers) will get opportunity to enhance their skills in innovative methods of education, to use ICT in education, to present their creativity, sense of human understanding and believes that teacher profession is a way how to help in developing child individuality and personality as well as in supporting social/mankind development. On the other hand, besides teachers' competences enrichment, international cooperation will enhance the individual pedagogical thinking of teachers and their educational ethos.

The project will face to the issues of at-risk pre-schoolers in kindergartens and inclusive early childhood education. Conference presentations and peer reviewed journal articles will support the discussions on preschool education in international environment.

The project represents very fruitful ground for international cooperation and internationalization of universities. There will be a platform for acquiring new theoretical knowledge and sharing good educational practices/experiences. International dimension of university colleges involved in the project will be enhanced by common meetings and video debates. An increase of teacher staff mobility and broadening of teachers' international network is expected.

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