



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



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CARE

Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC

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

## **D2.4:**

# **Integrative Report on a culture-sensitive quality & curriculum framework**

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<b>Dissemination Level</b>		
<b>PU</b>	Public	
<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	X
<b>CO</b>	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.