

Parental involvement in toddler's education

Content

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Goals.....	3
3. Content, activities and teaching materials.....	4
3.1 Content.....	4
3.2 Activities	5
3.3. Teaching materials	6
3.4. Student Materials.....	8
6. References.....	9

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1. Introduction

This Teachers` s Guideline book (reader) is a result of the European *TODDLER` s Project* - “Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on The Early childhood Road”. The team from Santarém, Portugal was responsible for the subject: Parental engagement and involvement. The outcome of this part of the TODDLER project was

1. to identify "best practices" for working with families and support strategies and parental involvement in formal and informal childcare;
2. to create a Teacher`s Guidelines book to be used in the initial and continuing training of early childhood educators.

A review of research and development was done in all partner countries. Interviews with parents were carried out, a relationship with local health centers in Portugal was established and workshops were organized. The Teacher`s Guidelines book for reflective practitioners is based on analyzes of this material.

We start by framing the justifications (basis) and purposes of the project, in order to introduce the work and some results obtained with the task assigned by the Portuguese team (ESES-IPS).

Initially we are confronted with the difficulty of defining what is meant by "good practice", either in Portugal or in other countries, taking into account the “subjective meaning” and the need for contextualization behind this conceptualisation. Moreover, it is difficult to work with various countries, each with its own specificity. In Portugal, for example, the existing institutions who work with children under 3 years are reduced , the few existing supports for families. When we conducted interviews with parents, some important issues arise: would it make sense to limit the interviews to families who have children in institutions or family day care? How to compare policies with countries as diverse in child support and paternity and maternity?

This TGB is organized so that it can be used in initial and continuing training of professionals who work with children under 3 years to enable a questioning attitude and looking for new ideas that can support the training of educators, technicians, future

educators regarding the issue of parental involvement in contexts of reception they receive children under 3 years. This document will also be a support for parents and families of children.

To promote a questioning attitude and approach, all situations presented throughout the document should be read as "clues" work and should be consulted as references, as starting points for a proper operation to specific reality. Two contexts are not equal, two children are not alike, not two families either. The situations shown are only examples which shall be reviewed, taking into account the needs and unique characteristics of each context.

2. Goals

The principal goals of this course will motivate the students to reflect about:

- Parental involvement definition's: conceptual approach
- The theoretical assumptions about parental involvement in toddler's education
- Questions that facilitate and/or hinder parental involvement
- Some parental involvement programs and examples of practical approaches

3. Content, activities and teaching materials

3.1 Content

This course module is based on the work that was developed in the “Parental involvement” component of the TODDLER project, which focused *on training of educators, technicians, future educators regarding the issue of parental involvement in contexts of reception they receive children under 3 years*. Data have been collected in early childhood settings in the eight European countries that participated in the project. The main research goal of this work package was identify "best practices" for working with families and support strategies and parental involvement in formal and informal childcare. A review of research and development was done in all partner countries. Interviews with parents were carried out, a relationship with local health centres in Portugal was established and workshops were organized. The research findings were used for the design of this course module.

One of key aims of this course is to support the development of the “reflective practitioner”, so the idea is to encourage the participation and to develop practical situations that could be analysed and discussed among participants. To promote a questioning attitude and approach, all situations presented throughout the document should be read as "clues" work and should be consulted as references, as starting points for a proper operation to specific reality. Two contexts are not equal, two children are not alike, not two families either. The situations shown are only examples that shall be reviewed, taking into account the needs and unique characteristics of each context.

The contents of this course are the following items:

- Parental involvement in toddler’s education.
- Factors that facilitate and/or hinder parental involvement in the education of young children.
- Parental involvement programs and examples of practical approaches.
- Evaluation of the parental involvement.

3.2 Activities

3.2.1. Reflexive workshop

Type of Activity: Group Work and Whole Class Discussion

In the first part of the course the students are going to be introduced to the concept of “Parental involvement”. In this phase they will be conducted based in a methodology, adapted from reflexive dynamics sessions presented in The Guidebook for reflective sessions¹. The methodology used in the workshops, correspond with specific steps previously defined. The idea was to encourage the participation and to develop practical situations that could be analyzed and discussed among participants.

Chart 1 - Phases of reflexive methodology used in workshops

- 1 Participants are divided into groups of 4-5 elements.
- 2 The parental involvement concept is given to the groups and they are asked for comparing a given situation, marking the preponderance of praxis. That is, each group should identify / select an experienced practical situation, which is an example that can illuminate and enrich the concept.
- 3 Sharing situations with the group.
- 4 Trainers summarize the cases / situations and identify common characteristics. Then try to define the concept in question, in order to enlarge and deepen the concept comprehension in relation to concrete practices.
- 5 The groups are together now and compare the other groups situations, in relation to their own, debating the other cases, putting the situation of the group itself into perspective, contesting or confirming it. The objective is to identify different perspectives/opinions on the practice.
- 6 Now the trainers introduce new perspectives on the chosen subject, combining theoretical knowledge with the ideas and the shared perspectives. These perspectives are used as tools in the process of putting the concept into analysis.
- 7 The last part of the session is a final set of reflections in assembly, where they try to reach a set of assumptions and essential considerations around the concept analyzed.

¹ www.toddlerineurope.eu

3.2.2 Theoretical assumptions

Type of Activity: Short Interactive Lecture and learning tasks

After having gained theoretical knowledge and reflected on it, the participants will examine 8 “Parental involvement” definitions from different European countries. The teaching materials for this module will include PPT presentations on theories and research findings in this area. These slides will include theoretical input and “learning tasks”. This way, the participants will not simply consume knowledge, but also be encouraged to reflect critically on the theory and on the research findings.

3.2.3 Analysis of “Best Practice” Examples

Type of Activity: Group Work

In small groups, the participants should analyse “best practice” examples (using teaching and learning material / visualization of the DVD “Open Kindergarten) – which have been provided by partners from different EU countries – and share their ideas with the whole group, orientated by previous “reflective topics” in order to find evaluation criteria for parental involvement.

3.2.4 Participants’ Reflection: How to evaluate the parental involvement

Type of Activity: Presentations and Whole Class Discussion

Based on some examples, the participants must build a (self) evaluation grid to parental involvement practices and an intervention project. In the final phase of the course the students will be asked to compare their points of view and understandings of the topic before and after the course, as a “Reflective Practitioner”.

3.3. Teaching materials

3.3.1. The teacher can use the methodology, adapted from reflexive dynamics sessions presented in The Guidebook for reflective sessions.

3.3.2. The teacher can use a Power Point presentation containing theoretical input and respective learning tasks, in order to define and problematize the “parental involvement” concept.

3.3.3. The teacher can use summaries of the partners definition of “parental involvement” to facilitate the comprehension of the concept and the identification of the best practices. The “reflective topics” will guide the critical examination and the evaluation of the best practices.

3.3.4. The teacher can use a short video clip featuring child-practitioner interaction in a pre-school setting (the DVD “Open Kindergarten) to prepare the students for their final task.

3.3.5. The teacher can use descriptions of “best practice” examples from various EU countries and examples of criteria for evaluation to help students refine the criteria developed in the previous phase in order to develop an intervention project.

3.3.6. The teacher provides a list of references and links to web-resources

3.4. Student Materials

3.4.1. Participants should follow the reflective phases that support the methodology.

3.4.2. Participants should use the content of the PPT presentation and the “learning tasks” to deepen their understanding of the course’s objectives.

3.4.3. Participants should use the partner’s definition to learn about different approaches of parental involvement.

3.4.4. Participants can use the best practice examples as starting points for reflection or as models for future initiatives in their own contexts.

3.4.5 Participants should use the “reflection topics” to critically examine the best practice examples.

3.4.6 Participants should use all the previous inputs to create a (self) evaluation grid to parental involvement practices and an intervention project.

3.4.6. Participants can use the literature list to read articles from the literature review.

4. Timing

For using this course materials (1,5 ECTS) we propose the following timeline (a module per week):

Contact: 30 hours / Autonomous work: 15 hours

1st Module (5h)

- Theoretical approach to the introduction of the topic, asking for a group reflection on the importance of parental involvement for a higher quality of educational practices

2nd Module (5h)

- Reflection on the issues that facilitate and / or hinder parental involvement in the education of young children

3rd Module (5h)

- Group works to get to a possible definition on parental involvement

4th Module (5h)

- Analysis of projects and some dilemmas

5th Module (5h)

- Construction of (self) evaluation instruments

6th Module (5h)

- Construction of an intervention project

Total – 30h

5. Assessment requirements

As assessment students will be able to set an example with the respective (self) evaluation grid that reflects what they learned about parental involvement.

6. References

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