toddler
Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Diverse Learners on the Early Childhood Road

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Executive Summary

The TODDLER project is inspired by the Eurydice report (2009) ECEC in Europe and elaborated knowledge about the ways in which early childhood education and care (ECEC) for toddlers can contribute to a higher degree of equity in education. The consortium is composed by experts from 9 universities in DE, DK, BE (Fr & Fi), NO, PT, RO, ES and UK working in the field of early education. Upon shared knowledge we produced course materials for pre-service and in-service training in ECEC.

Project objectives:
Raise awareness towards the benefits of high quality education for toddlers at risk and improve curriculum and teaching strategies of initial and in-service training. Contribute to a shift in the way provision for children under three is perceived.

The target groups for this project are:
Students and staff in ECEC, teacher educators, policy makers/ECEC authorities

Approaches/ strategies used:
We have analysed national documents, conducted reflective sessions, case studies, language observations and inquiries to parents/staff in all partner countries. This material is transformed into course modules at www.toddlerineurope.eu

Major results:
- Website with free access to course materials & guidelines for instructors
- Course material “Toddlers in a European Context”
- Course material “Promoting the Wellbeing of Toddler’s within Europe”
- Course material “Promoting and Supporting Language Development in Multilingual and Multicultural Early Childhood Settings”
- Course material “Enhancing Parental Involvement” (texts and video)
- Course material “The Early Years’ Practitioner as Reflective Practitioner”
- Local Seminars have been arranged in Portugal, Germany and Romania
- Presentation of the project at local, national and European conferences
- Final conference in Ghent, Belgium 7.-8. 10 .2013 presenting the project theme and findings to 300 participants from 10 European countries.
- Articles about the project content in professional journals & newspapers
- Knowledge of good practice from all countries and awareness of the diverse conditions for ECEC and teacher training for the early years in Europe

Plans for the future:
- Providing a European in-service training for ECEC staff (ERASMUS+)
- Implementing the courses in the curriculum of the local teacher training
- Continuous dissemination of the project results to policy makers, school authorities, parent organizations, practitioners and teacher educators.
- Publishing e-book in Portugal, adding Spanish subtitles to the video

For further information: www.toddlerineurope.eu
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1. Project Objectives

The overall aim is to offer toddlers from disadvantaged backgrounds an enriched learning environment and better support to parents.

1.1. We want to show the educational potential of high quality education and care in centre based settings (crèche, day care centre, nursery school) for toddlers (18-36 months).

1.2. We want to raise awareness towards the educational benefits of high quality education for toddlers at risk and improve curriculum and teaching strategies of teacher education and in-service training.

1.3. We will contribute to a shift in the way provision for children under three is perceived.

We addressed these objectives by sharing educational knowledge from eight countries and developed the course material for the pre-service training of preschool teachers. In some countries the education of children under three is already a part of the preschool teacher training (bachelor degree), in others this training belongs to the health & care section of upper secondary education. This implies that for some partners the TODDLER-project was an in-depth study topic focusing the improvement of learning for children at risk within their existing curriculum in preschool teacher education, for some it was to introduce a new topic in the existing curriculum or it functioned as an input in the development of a new bachelor programme (Flanders). The course material presents some key issues in the education and care of toddlers, based on former research as well as investigations undertaken within this project. As the elaboration of this course material is a joint work of teacher educators in nine countries/regions, we have been able to test and adapt the teaching material and methods to diverse cultural environments. There have been offered seminars and visiting lectures to student teachers (BA) and master students of psychology and education. Practitioners from local preschools as well as school authorities, leaders of health/social care services/ECEC-services have participated in local seminars, regional conferences, focus groups and the Final conference.

Presentations of the projects aims and results have also been presented to the wider professional community at research conferences like European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA 2011 and 2012), The European Conference on Educational Research (ECER 2013) and The Comenius Association, which is a self-organised European network of 32 teacher education institutions.

Several feature articles have been published. In order to convince stake holders and the public of the benefits of combining education with high quality care, we have linked the theoretical educational rationale to selected examples of good practice.
2. Project Approach

The TODDLER project was based on these characteristics:

A focus on user needs: From the very beginning the idea of strengthening the education of reflective practitioners to give toddlers a fair chance for lifelong learning was shared by all partners. From this idea, the needs for the final target group, toddlers, were identified, so that the project could effectively answer those needs (language development, wellbeing, parents’ participation) and a main aim was then put forward: To improve existing methods and develop material for increased awareness of toddler’s educational needs among student teachers/staff and policy makers. This aim was constantly reviewed during the project to ensure that the results remain relevant to the targeted users (early years’ practitioners, teacher educators, student teachers, policy makers and ECEC-authorities). Following this line, all partners have involved student teachers and collaborated with ECEC-settings in their work. This enabled us to reflect the diverse conditions and traditions of ECEC in Europe. Our concern was to avoid the reduction of complexity of praxis that may hinder the implementation of new knowledge and methods within the EU.

Shared responsibility: The plan set out clearly each partner’s specific tasks, according to their expertise. Responsibility for the providing and dissemination of results was located with the whole partnership. According to the application, each partner was responsible for producing the course content and to use the final outcomes in the curricula of their training for early childhood teachers.

Methodology: The construction of the course material is based on several methods of data collection involving all partners. A document analysis of the Eurydice report on ECEC in Europe (2009) constituted the starting point for a more detailed description (text and pictures) of the educational approach from all partner countries. This is compiled in The State of the Art Report followed by a comparative analysis of the strength and weaknesses of the educational systems for toddlers from all nine countries/regions. The latter was also displayed in Posters at the Final Conference 6.-7. 10.2013 in Ghent. Questionnaires to toddlers’ parents have been used to inform the project about the living conditions, cultural habits, learning environment (especially bilingual) and expectations of toddlers’ parents. Questionnaires to practitioners in early years’ settings have been used to get first-hand information about the conditions and educational practices in all the countries involved. Case studies in toddler settings in each country have been conducted in order to provide visualised narratives about different key items in promoting the children’s wellbeing. Three observations have been conducted in a multinational ECEC-setting in each country, using a specific observation form. These data are analysed and discussed in the training module for practitioners’ work in multinational toddler settings. A case study in a Norwegian Parent-child group (“Open Kindergarten”) constituted the basis of the film production on Parental Involvement, identifying ‘good practice’. Furthermore each partner conducted a reflective session, which is a specific teaching approach based on practical examples from practice, dialogic teaching and the intertwining of practice and theory. Based on the reports from all partners and video-
observed sessions in two countries, the concept of reflective session is examined in a guide book and scientific article.

**Evaluation strategy:**
A quality plan has been used to monitor the progress and to evaluate the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness of the project work. We have emphasized continuous internal evaluation by tracking the project activity through the use of *evaluation sheets* during project meetings, *quality monitor reports* based on questionnaires to all partners and the analyses of these reports. By using these evaluation sheets, frustrations which were not spoken out, could be identified and worked on. Thus the use of evaluation sheets helped improving the quality and effectiveness of the meetings. The monitor reports helped mainly identifying problems of organizational aspect: planning activities, time spent, time needed, leadership. Efforts have been made for establishing clear guidelines so that the information between the partners was understandable and comparable.

The sparring partner in each work package functioned as "critical friend" providing suggestions for improvement and feedback on critical incidents to the lead partners. The amount of input from the sparring partner differed from little to extensive use. Most partners communicated frequently by e-mail, facetime meetings, helping each other in solving task-related difficulties. For instance the Spanish partner read all the texts produced by the German team and provided useful comments. As both partners work in the area of applied linguistics their collaboration was very valuable for the development of the course Language support in multicultural settings. Knowing that there might evolve conflicts when you work in a large multicultural team we created an internal conflict solution group during the Kick-off meeting. This group has not been used often, but been successful in coping with arising conflicts and avoided damaging conflicts within the group.

External evaluation has been provided in annual project meetings by Professor Paul Leseman from Utrecht University, who is a recognized expert in ECEC. He has offered analytic and critical questions during the discussions and forced us out of our comfort zones. He contributed to a more clear view of how well we are approaching our tasks in relation to the project goals. Important corrections were also given by anonymous EACEA experts in the assessment of the TODDLER Progress Report.

A lot of external feedback has been received in local seminars, focus groups and other kind of conversations with practitioners, professionals of ECEC and toddler parents. They have asked questions and offered their opinions on many aspects that are decisive to the applicability of our work. The positive response we received from researchers during the poster session at the 21. Conference of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) encouraged the development work. Working with students in reflective sessions and lectures on the topic, we also got valuable feedback that has been taken in account in the production of the course material and teaching strategy.

**Dissemination strategy**
In the dissemination plan we highlighted every partner’s responsibility for transmitting the project within their local networks. The dissemination process was embedded in the project from the very beginning and started with the local seminar at the Kick-off
meeting. Due to the fact that we had partners from eight countries, we could discuss the question of how ECEC can ensure toddlers from disadvantaged background a fair chance for learning, with stakeholders in all these countries. In order to use as many channels as possible to reach potential target groups, the cooperation among the partners was essential and the TODDLER website functions as the primary tool for dissemination after the project’s life time.

Exploitation strategy
An exploitation plan was made to ensure the valorisation of the results and functioned as a guideline throughout the entire life-span of this project. It was an important tool depicting how different target groups could use of the different products. The plan was essential in the process of restructuring the different learning materials into coherent course modules, presented in a user-friendly format on the website. As we defined students and early years practitioners from different countries as target groups, we had to use a straightforward English to describe the theoretical background and discuss the practical implications. To convince ECE-providers and policy makers we also had to address the project’s key questions in a more academic perspective, outlining the principles and challenges in ECEC approaches. Therefore we have produced diverse materials (texts, pictures, film) to cover this wide target group. Additionally we have made links to other EU-project working in the same field, like “Tansitions and Multilinguism” (TRAM).
3. Project Outcomes & Results

The Course Modules, available at www.toddlerineurope.eu are the most important products of the TODDLER-project. These Course Modules are to be used in initial teacher training as part of the Bachelor programmes and the in-service training/continuous training of early years’ practitioners (EYPs). The modules contain these elements:

- **Course Description** of goals, content, methods, assessment and literature
- **Goals for the module** describing the learning outcomes
- **Course Reader** presenting theoretical knowledge, examples of good practices and questions to reflect on
- **Guidelines for instructors**, offering a rationale for the selected content and suggested activities, followed by guidance notes
- **Course Lecture Materials** like Power Point files.
- **Further Reading** providing additional articles from authors within the TODDLER-team

The entire course is divided into five modules: Toddlers in a European context, Promoting the wellbeing of toddlers, Language support in multicultural setting, Enhancing parental involvement and The EYP as a reflective practitioner

The Course materials “Toddlers in a European context” describe the different institutions for toddlers in each country with their strengths and weaknesses, examples of good practices to promote immigrant children’s enculturation and language learning. A synthetic comparative board of ECEC in these eight countries is presented in posters, and a Slide Show gives a glimpse into the diverse settings. The State of the Art Report offers detailed contextual information and insight in some core elements of the educational work. Thus, the report may function as complementary information to the existing Eurydice report on ECEC in Europe. The Course Lecture Materials encourage students/EYPs to identify, analyse and justify examples of good practices to reduce the inequalities in toddlers’ education by using pictures from their own practice.

Course materials “Promoting the Wellbeing of Toddler’s within Europe” have been collated by reports and case studies in toddler settings from all partners in the eight countries. The Course Reader presents the theoretical background to the various ways wellbeing is defined in the different countries and provides a sample of national research in a literature review. To reflect on the diverse definitions of the concept of wellbeing is the principal concern of the Course Lecture Materials. The findings of the conducted case studies are given in an overview of the approaches used in toddler settings in each country. The key elements of these pedagogies are explained in photographs and writings in the ‘Story Boards’. They offer a unique possibility to detect similarities and differences of ‘good practice’ in the ECEC of these eight countries, which may inspire practitioner’s work. They also make visible to parents and policy makers how educators promote the social-emotional care and learning of the very young child. Thus the Story Boards contribute to reach our goal of showing the educational potential of high quality ECEC and contradict the
erroneous belief that caring for toddlers is mainly about safeguarding their health whilst parents are at work.

The Course material “Language support in multicultural settings” has been constructed upon two methods of investigation: questionnaires to parents and EYPs in settings with a large number of toddlers from migrant families, and observations in these settings provided by partners in the eight countries. The Observation Tool, developed in ELIAS (a former EU-project), was translated in nine languages and used for targeted observations of the EYPs’ linguistic and cultural input to toddlers. The restricted number of data did not allow drawing conclusions on a national level; nevertheless the data indicate that the quality of the observed interactions seems not be sufficient. The overall picture of the early childhood settings investigated shows that a) although most settings investigated were characterized by a large number of children with a migration background, their home languages are not always effectively acknowledged and b) the analysis of observation schemes show that the input level and the level of language support provided to the children are below ideal standards. The methods and findings are presented in the Course Reader alongside with theories of second language acquisition, examples of good practice and online resources of other innovative European initiatives on the topic “multilingualism and multiculturalism in early childhood education”. Questions for reflection are used to intertwine theory and practice. The course description, Guidelines for instructors and Learning materials show various ways of how the Course Reader can be used to promote knowledge, apply research based criteria to evaluate practice and to develop critical awareness. This module offers new, research-based insight in the complex task of providing a rich language environment to cultural diverse groups of young children.

The Course material “Enhancing Parental Involvement in Toddler’s Education” contains two main components: a) Course Reader and b) Video. For the Course Reader, questionnaires to parents in early childhood settings have been distributed and collected by all the project partners. A review of research and development was done in all partner countries. In Portugal interviews with parents were carried out, a relationship with local health centers was established and workshops were organized. The purpose was to identify "best practices" for working with families and supporting parental involvement in formal childcare. The findings were used for the design of the Course Reader, which contains a theoretical introduction, identifies factors that facilitate or hinder parental involvement, a presentation of parental involvement programs/good examples and questions to evaluate the collaboration with parents.

One of the key aims is to support the development of the “reflective practitioner”. The leading idea has been to encourage the participation and to develop practical situations that could be analyzed and discussed among participants. In order to promote a questioning attitude, all situations presented in the Course Reader should be consulted as starting points for well-considered actions in a specific reality. A detailed outline of the proposed activities and use of teaching materials is offered in the Guidelines for instructors. An extended version of the Course Reader will be published as a paper book in Portuguese and in English as e-book.

1 Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies (ELIAS) www.elias.bilikita.org
The video Parental Involvement is a 22 min. film based on a case study of a Norwegian ‘Open Kindergarten’, were caregivers come together with their child to take part in the pedagogical environment of an ECE-setting. The film shows an example of good practice. Similar settings exist in other countries; called ‘family centers’ or ‘supervised playgroups’. This kind of setting might recruit parents and children who often are described as “families hard to reach”. The TODDLER-project’s intention is to inspire professionals to enrich learning for all children including those with migrant backgrounds. Because of that, it is interesting to have a closer look at this Open Kindergarten to explore how they manage to reach out to a diverse group of families. The guidelines for instructors show how the film can be used in a reflective session, either as a short separate training session or within the other course modules.

The Course material “The EYP as a Reflective Practitioner” offers a rationale for reflection as a tool for continuous professional development and consists of these elements: Guidelines for instructors, Guide book for Reflective sessions, a Catalogue of Cases/Examples and Further Readings. Departing from the idea of reflection as a tool for continuous professional development, specific Reflective Sessions have been arranged and evaluated by all partners. This work is presented in nine languages in the Catalogue of cases. The issues addressed in the evaluation reports of these reflective sessions are discussed and developed further in the Guidelines for Reflective Sessions and the scientific articles collected under the headline Further Reading. Most important is, that the principles of the “reflective session approach” are integrated in all the courses. Therefore, the modules invite practitioners to reflect on their practice/previous experience, make connections between theory and practice, deal with complex/controversial issues (enduring complexity), share experiences and learn in collaboration with instructors and course mates.

Local seminars have been conducted in Santarem (Portugal), Timisoara (Romania) and Schwäbisch Gmünd (Germany) to communicate the rationale of the TODDLER project. We adapted the content to the context, so that the discussion addressed the current challenges in this particular country. In Santarem the English presentation of the project was interpreted and the panel discussion conducted in Portuguese. This facilitated a local debate with experts and officials from various departments of social, health and education, childhood educators and students on this issue. In Romania no experts or officials responded to the invitation, so the seminar was mainly attended by master’s students of psychology. Some of them also worked as early years practitioners. These students expressed that the seminar was an eye opener for them in regard to ECEC for toddlers, inspiring them to better support to practitioners and efforts to enrich toddlers’ environment. The main message communicated during this seminar was: “Even though the working conditions in Romanian ECEC are difficult, teachers can make a difference!” In Schwäbisch Gmünd the local seminar “Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Early Years’ Settings” was conducted as a workshop (in German) with practitioners and students, followed by a panel of experts who discussed the questions that had evolved during the group discussions. In this local seminar the challenging task of good language support in ECEC was discussed from the perspective of the local authorities, headmasters, practitioners, researchers and experts of bilingualism as well as the project leaders. In all countries the seminars addressed the need for better support to the work force in ECEC.
Four project meetings have been arranged in Santarem (PT), Timisoara (RO), Schwäbisch Gmünd (DE) and Ghent (BE) to discuss, coordinate and adapt the ongoing work of the different partners to the common project goals.

Leaflets describing the project and bookmarks inviting to the Final Conference have been distributed throughout Europe. The leaflet can be downloaded from the web.

The dissemination has been taken care of by all partners throughout the project period. The project content has been dealt with by several hundred of students in the nine partner institutions, presented to a European network of teacher education (The Comenius Association), European research conferences (EECERA and ECER) and at many local/regional conferences on early childhood matters in the countries involved. The public as well academics and practitioners have been informed by press articles and articles in professional as well as scientific journals. In Germany these presentations were focused on the issue of bilingual language learning, whilst the Portuguese team highlighted the issue of listening to parents' voices. The Rumenian partner addresses several of the topics in the TODDLER project in scientific articles. One of the partners participated also in an international roundtable meeting with academic ECEC-experts and policy makers from 6 countries to discuss recent research, developments and new questions in ECEC in an international framework. Crucial questions like “What are the preconditions for establishing an integrated ECEC-system for all children and what are the obstacles” were discussed with staff from ministries. During the entire period the partners have provided knowledge about the project. Thus, the TODDLER-project contributed to national and international discussions on the benefits and shortcomings of early education.

The Final Conference in Ghent was a very important event to present the rationale of the project, the outcomes and their implications for toddler's education to approx 300 participants from ten European countries. Amongst them a Norwegian group of 30 municipal ECEC-authorities and staff from the County Governor in Rogaland. A large number of Flemish preschool teachers/ECEC-providers used this opportunity to learn more about ECEC in a European perspective and to attend workshops in English and Dutch. Guided study visits to ECEC-setting were organised for foreigners, followed by post-visit discussions. The keynote lectures showed how the Flemish community plans to react to challenges in the actual situation of ECEC in Flanders. What research can tell about the quality of the early years provision was outlined in the first keynote lecture, also adressing questions research can not answer yet. Based on the feedback given in the participants evaluation, this conference was well organised, inspiring and met the participants' expectations.

Alltogether we have initited many discussions with students, teacher educators and practitioners, about the need for better education and care in toddler settings. We have inspired to higher professional awareness and to intertwine education and care of toddlers, especially for those at risk. We have also emphasised the need for improvements in the area of language learning, wellbeing and parental involvement. A lot of the course materials is already put to use in initial teacher training.

2 Documentation of the keynote lectures and workshops can be found at www.toddlerineurope.eu
4. Partnerships

The consortium was built up by nine partners from teacher education in eight countries (Belgium French & Flemish, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom). The partners represent countries with different socio-economic, linguistic and cultural conditions as well as split and unitary ECEC systems (health care for age group 0-3 and education for age group 3-5, or ECEC for 0-5) and different educational traditions. In Starting Strong II (OECD 2006) these traditions are described as Readiness for school or Nordic tradition. Due to the geographical spread, we got the chance to learn and experience from both traditions. As Europe consists of different cultures and traditions, we have to be aware of the cultural diversity in the implementation of our project results. Therefore the partners have collected and tested all materials within their educational context and based on their reports, the course materials have been adapted and developed further. This strategy has been chosen to promote the implementation and sustainability of the course content.

The experience of working together in European partnerships has provided the opportunity to share knowledge and understanding in relation to early years practice, legislation, theoretical underpinning and literature. It has been rich to understand better the multiple influences between our different countries and cultures. Collecting ‘good practices’ on the different topics evoked discussions on the meaning of ‘high quality’ in toddler settings. These discussions were valuable for the project as well as for the development of quality of early years’ settings in Europe in general. Working on the different course modules has broadened existing knowledge, which has been used with our own students and colleagues. The flexible and participatory approach enabled a good atmosphere. Working together we have extended relationships across Europe which in turn offered opportunities for teaching abroad and hosting visiting Erasmus lecturers. It has been a great benefit for our understanding of the diverse conditions and traditions of ECEC in Europe to visit local institutions during the meetings. The critical question “is this an adequate way to promote all children a fair chance for learning” was repeatedly asked by our external advisor Professor Leseman and elaborated further in his keynote lecture on “Quality of the Early Years Provision: European Perspectives” at the Final Conference.

Even though European collaboration is an eye-opener, it has been quite demanding to communicate in a foreign language. To write, develop and present the course content in a second language has been a difficult task. As most partners were not native English speakers, we have struggled with the language. A lot of time has been invested helping each other to improve the texts. Working with people from other educational cultures and with different work mentalities, we needed also to develop new skills for problem solving. The meetings have been characterized by high spirits and people have been most cooperative. One of the benefits of working in a European team is that we have become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses in our own educational system.

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3 Available as a Working Paper under the headline Final Conference at www.toddlerineurope.eu
Partnerships outside the consortium with target users:

Two partners have established focus groups with teachers from toddler settings, policy-makers in the field of young children, colleagues from the teacher training and delegates from parent associations. These groups have enabled us to gather constructive feedback on the development of the course materials drawing on the expertise and experience of the members.

Two other partners arranged working sessions with coordinators and teachers from two ECEC settings, which have been of enormous value for the Toddler project members. Working together and sharing experience, knowledge and reflection has been very enriching and productive for the development of the questionnaires and content. They are very interested in the project outcomes because they feel, and in fact they have been, part of the process.

All partners consulted their colleagues in teacher training for scientific resources and advice on the different aspects of the project. The demonstration of a reflective session for representatives from all partners also offered training to teacher educators in this teaching strategy.

The partners have informed their students in initial teacher training about the project and discussed the issue of combining care and education for toddlers. The pictures and film produced in the project have been used. The teaching materials gathered on the topic Toddler’s well-being have been shared with master’s students to evaluate their worth and we have used their constructive feedback to improve this unit.

The distance learner students in Denmark who took part in the pilot project on reflective sessions did so as an extracurricular activity which was appreciated. Students in all the nine partner institutions have been involved in reflective sessions in function of the project. Three partners have inspired their students to go more deeply into the thematic of the TODDLER project, either for their bachelor thesis, their fourth year final project or their Master thesis. An example is Timo Meister’s master thesis (Germany), analyzing the language observation scores based on the data collected by the partners.

The Flemish partner is involved in the European project ‘Wanda’ on the reflective practitioner in ECEC settings. A delegate from the TODDLER-project is member of one of the experts group in order to gain mutual stimulation.

The British partner has been able to disseminate information about the Toddler Project at regional and national levels (SEFDEY) to early year’s professionals and constructive feedback was obtained.

The German partner cooperated with institutions representing “Verein für Mehrsprachigkeit an Kitas und Schulen” (Association for early multilingualism in day nurseries and schools), allowing valuable exchange of up-to-date knowledge. As part of the expert panel in a Conference on Multilingualism as a Chance and Challenge, they could also discuss key issues of the TODDLER-project with representatives of
the Turkish Consulate and the City Council of Schwäbisch Gmünd, in other words politicians and authorities.

The Norwegian partner presented project's aims and method to European researchers at the EECERA-conferences in Switzerland 2011 (Poster session) and seven members of the TODDLER team got valuable peer review in a self-organized EECERA symposium at the EECERA-conference in Portugal 2012. Finally, the project also got presented at the ECER-conference in Istanbul 2013.

It has been crucial to collaborate with all these partners outside the consortium, mainly to achieve a better connection between theory and practice, as university research is often lacking the concrete information about the field situation and difficulties. It encouraged further cooperation with target groups. For instance in Romania it helped getting up-to-date with the reality in the school system in the context of the new Education, implemented on 1.01.2011.

All partners experienced that educators and parents were very supportive to the various data collections in our project. Our questions were informative for them as well. In Denmark for instance the ECEC staff gained new knowledge about their setting. Initially the educators did not consider their crèche as multinational; it is situated in a town in a rural area and they had not observed any severe language problems. However, it turned out during the data collection that 11 nationalities were represented, still with only few language problems.
5. Plans for the Future

The best options for dissemination are at the end of the project, as we now have interesting results and findings to present to practitioners, policymakers, school/social work authorities and parents.

First of all, the consortium will implement the course content within the initial teacher training or in-service training courses for early years' practitioners in their home institution. As the course material got finalized in October 2013, the implementation into the curriculum is still in progress.

The partners will continue to publish articles in newspapers, professional journals in their own country as well as in international journals on the findings and lessons learnt in this project.


The video “Parental Involvement” will be available with Spanish subtitles at the TODDLER-website in 2014.

The University of Stavanger will sustain the TODDLER-web site to give access to the course materials and products of the TODDLER project and provide updated information about relevant events.

The consortium will use the TODDLER course material and provide a European in-service course for practitioners within the new Erasmus+ programme. This kind of training event will be announced at the TODDLER-website.
6. Contribution to EU policies

Our point of departure has been the efficiency of pre-primary education for lifelong learning and its potential for reducing social and cultural inequalities. We address the goal of reducing the number of school failure/early school leavers (long term goal) by answering the question: In which ways can early education in centre-based settings promote children’s social-emotional development and language learning, particularly for those from disadvantaged, migrant backgrounds? According to the 2009 Eurydice report on ECEC, there is no evidence-based reason to postpone education until children reach the age of three. In this project we collected research based knowledge and examples of good practice in centre-based settings for toddlers (18-36 months of age) from eight European countries as well as approaches to support parental involvement. Based on the fact that teacher quality is the most important within-school factor affecting children’s competence acquisition, we elaborated teaching materials and methods for the pre-service training of preschool teachers as well as in-service training of practitioners. Therefore the enhancement of quality in teacher training for the early years has been an important short term goal.

The project worked in close line with the Council conclusions on ECEC: Providing all children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (Official journal of the EU 15. 6. 2011)

These Council conclusions were communicated after we had started our project work. Nevertheless in this text we could clearly recognize the rationale of the TODDLER project. We will outline this by putting in quotation mark the quotations from these Council conclusions:

The TODDLER project collected examples of good practice and reading material in order to contribute to “high quality ECEC” by describing some key issues of high quality education for toddlers. Offering such kind of provision from an early age to all children can “help to close the achievement gap by supporting cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development”. The TODDLER course material deals with the support of toddlers’ wellbeing (social, emotional) and bilingual language learning in multicultural ECEC settings. Our mission has been to promote enhanced support of toddlers’ competences, in order to “break the cycle of disadvantage and disengagement that often leads to early school leaving and to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next”. In the longer run the TODDLER project will contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy targets of “reducing early school leaving below 10% and lifting at last 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion.”

The project offers an “integrated and holistic approach to the care and education of toddlers, and addresses the issue of how to ensure close collaboration between the home and ECEC”. We did so by listening to parents’ views and opinions in eight countries continued by the production of a guideline book and a film for practitioners. Thus the project will “encourage ECEC services to work in close partnership with parents”. The completed course material, articles and project activities will “increase the awareness of the opportunities offered by ECEC for toddlers and learning from this early age” in teacher education, the workforce, amongst stakeholders and
researchers. Altogether, the TODDLER project supports the requested “professionalization of ECEC staff”.

The TODDLER-project contributes to reach several objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)

To contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background

To encourage the best use of results, innovative products and processes and to exchange good practice in the fields covered by the LLP, in order to improve the quality of education and training.

Comenius programme:

To help young people acquire the basic life-skills and competences necessary for their personal development, for future employment and for active European citizenship,

To enhance the quality and European dimension of teacher training

To support improvements in pedagogical approaches and school management

Transversal programme:

To promote language learning and to support linguistic diversity in the Member States; Furthermore to promote an awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe.