

# SEEDS OF CHANGE:

Supporting social and emotional well-being  
of children in Early Childhood Education  
and Care through team reflection



**Summary guidelines for coaches and mentors**

October 2019

## WHAT IS THE SEED PROJECT?

'SEED: Social and Emotional Education and Development' is a European project designed to **draw attention to the importance of social and emotional well-being** of children in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) centres, and support the continuing professional development of practitioners working with 2.5 to 6-year-olds in this area. SEED conducted research and improved ECEC practice in Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Norway and the Netherlands. The SEED Project was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission – Strategic partnerships for school education (2017-2019). For more information about the promoters of SEED and its activities, visit:

<https://icdi.nl/projects/social-and-emotional-education-and-development-seed>



# WHY ATTENTION TO SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IS IMPORTANT

If only he/she would at least know how to...

- not get angry so easily,
- stop hurting others,
- express his (or her) feelings,
- play as others do,
- not stay alone and make friends instead.

These are thoughts Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practitioners often have when thinking about the children they work with every day. Behind these simple "If onlys..." is a genuine and sincere wish for children to be happy, and be able to relate to others in a positive way. But there is also a huge educational challenge to deal with. Here starts the story of socio-emotional learning and the process through which ECEC practitioners can support children to acquire skills and competencies to help them navigate school and life in general. This is also the story of SEED.

These Summary Guidelines, titled SEEDs of Change, are the outcome of the second part of the SEED project. We piloted a **group reflection pathway, called WANDA[1]** with 80 ECEC practitioners with the aim to help them to deal with daily challenges in their practice so they could better support the socio-emotional well-being of children in their care.

The full Guidelines, which can be downloaded here, are intended to inspire **ECEC pedagogical coaches, mentors and trainers** who want to invest in reflecting on practice with teams or groups of practitioners, in order to support the socio-emotional well-being of children.

[1] WANDA is a method developed in Belgium (FL) by Artevelde University College and VBJK (Center for Innovation in the Early Years). A manual in several languages, a toolbox and other materials have been developed. For more information: [www.wanda.community](http://www.wanda.community)

## WHAT IS GROUP REFLECTION AND HOW DOES IT SUPPORT **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING?**

The aim of **co-reflecting on practice** in an appreciative way is to **improve the quality of the services for children and families**, with an eye towards society as a whole. Reflective moments help individuals and groups to **learn how to negotiate, to increase their empathetic competences, to regain motivation in their job, to look at their practices** with a 'discovery attitude', and value diversity. All this is particularly important when thinking about socio-emotional well-being of children.



# WHAT PRACTITIONERS SAY ABOUT THE POWER OF REFLECTING ON PRACTICE?

## 1) It strengthens their awareness

*I learned to look at the situation from different perspectives – for example, about the involvement of Roma children in pre-school life – I never before thought how a Roma mother could feel about it. (Practitioner, Latvia)*

## 2) It changes their perspectives, rather than looking for the 'right' solution

*If you want to change your practice, you have to change yourself. It is all about you, how you change. (Practitioner, The Netherlands)*

## 3) It provides them with a concrete method to constantly improve practice, by connecting it with theory

*Today I had a situation where a child hurt another child and he said he did it on purpose. I found it easier to understand this situation and to take the time needed to help the children resolve the situation. (Practitioner, Norway)*

## 4) It provides a growth pathway for them as individuals and as a group

*I am surprised that the thoughts about the process and each meeting continues so long after the session, and the self-reflection is so strong. (Facilitator, Norway)*

## 5) It helps caring for the carers and sharing questions, worries and successes

*I think reflecting on practice can prevent burn-out. It gives us the opportunity to 'let out' our everyday challenges, and you also feel less lonely. (Practitioner, Croatia)*

# PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN ECEC SETTINGS

The four SEED Principles of Social and Emotional Well-being in ECEC settings and accompanying questions for reflection are intended to:

- **stimulate reflection** amongst practitioners about social and emotional well-being
- **inspire good practice** in ECEC settings.

## Principle 1

Practitioners support young children's social and emotional well-being and pay attention to their individual desires, needs and potential

## Principle 2

Partnership amongst practitioners, families and other community members are essential for children's social and emotional well-being

## Principle 3

Learning environments are physically and emotionally safe, and provide a stimulating and welcoming experience for all children, indoors and outdoors

## Principle 4

Inclusivity, respect for diversity and open communication are the guiding principles for the provision of all services and in all interactions with colleagues, children and families

See full Guidelines for questions of reflection.  
[https://icdi.nl/media/uploads/downloads/seed-guidelines-full\\_1.pdf](https://icdi.nl/media/uploads/downloads/seed-guidelines-full_1.pdf)

# SUCCESS FACTORS TO PROMOTE GROUP REFLECTION

These elements are crucial for policy and practice to create continuous professional development paths that support group reflection.

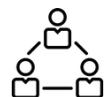
## TIME



In order to improve quality it is important to have **time to reflect together on practice**. **Child-free hours** (paid hours without children) are needed for ECEC staff to meet, plan, reflect on a regular and continuous basis.

*It's important to have enough child-free hours to meet, reflect, plan. We had to meet in extra hours, and this was a problem. (Facilitator, The Netherlands)*

## COLLABORATION WITH DIRECTORS/PRINCIPALS



In order to be effective, group reflection paths need to be built with the **engagement and collaboration of the directors/principals** of the ECEC settings.

*For us it has been very important to have the support of the directors. They helped us with the logistics, but especially they motivated practitioners to participate. (Facilitator, Latvia)*

## A PROCESS ORIENTED METHOD



Group reflection is “process oriented”, which means that the meaning of it cannot be revealed in one or two sessions. **Each session is related to the others**, and individuals and groups will grow during the process.

*This process needs time. Time for growing. After 4 to 5 sessions we saw a change in the group: going deeper, more challenging cases, feeling more at ease to share. (Facilitator, Croatia)*



## THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR



In the group reflection path, the role of the facilitator is crucial. He/she creates a **safe and challenging climate of dialogue and participation**. Facilitators need to be trained in order to be able to coordinate group reflection paths.

*This atmosphere that the facilitators created was crucial: that we are listened to – I learned that listening has a huge power in resolving difficult situations. I do not feel the urge any more to offer a solution, sometimes we don't need a solution, we just need someone to care and listen. (Practitioner, Hungary)*

## SUPPORTING FACILITATORS WITHIN A NETWORK



Facilitators have a delicate role that needs to be supported. **Supervision moments** or other kinds of support that bring facilitators together in a critical learning group, help them **learn from each other and share doubts and questions.**

*Online supervision moments for facilitators were very useful. They gave facilitators opportunities for shared learning and overall it increased our confidence as WANDA facilitators. (Facilitator, Croatia)*

## PROMOTING A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH



When reflecting on practice, bottom-up approaches are effective because they **start from what participants themselves find important**, from their concrete experiences.

*What I liked is the fact that we started from us, from our practice. It was not abstract, it was very concrete. (Practitioner, Norway)*



# CONCLUSIONS

- Policy and ECEC services should be committed to **ensuring that staff has opportunities to question, enrich and innovate** their pedagogical practice.
- It is the responsibility of policy makers and services to provide the **conditions for staff to meet and reflect together regularly**. This is crucial especially when thinking about the social and emotional well-being of children.
- By reflecting together on practice ECEC staff become more aware of their **professional role towards children and families, develop empathy, and value the points of views and the feelings of others**.

These are the 'seeds of change' that can have a powerful impact on young children's social and emotional well-being in ECEC settings across Europe.



**SEED Project Consortium (2019) *SEEDs of Change:***  
*Supporting social and emotional well-being of children in Early  
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**SUMMARY, Leiden: SEED Project.**

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For more information, please contact:  
International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI  
www.icdi.nl - info@icdi.nl  
+31 (071) 512 7420



Designer: Alberto De Nicola

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