

Practical Examples – Aspects Of Quality In Everyday Life

Quality And Cultural Diversity

Ana del Barrio Saiz works as a trainer and advisor in the Netherlands in day-care centres to improve quality. Her focus lies on respect for diversity, professional team development and the daily implementation of a practice based on democratic values and social inclusion in childcare settings. In her practical example she showed that social engagement and a clear vision on what it means to work on diversity (with children, families and professionals) is absolutely necessary in order to achieve high quality. In this regard cultural or ethnic diversity is only one of the many different aspects in which people differ and in how they give form to their lives.

In the Netherlands, every ECEC centre decides itself if and how it engages with diversity in childcare settings.⁶ To deal with increasing contexts of diversity childcare centres have to develop as meeting places for democratic practice. And professionals need to explore new forms of cooperation and be supported to put in practice equal opportunities and participation of children and families. This includes promoting open communication and dialogue as well as critical team reflection and self-reflection of one's own perspective and experiences. Yet these necessary competences are not just the result of training. They develop rather through interactions in daily praxis. To support this process, Del Barrio Saiz uses the model 'Permanent learning in teams'.⁷ One important tool of this model are critical questions regarding the everyday work of ECEC professionals, like: Are we alert to the needs and wishes of all parents? Do we only cooperate with parents or colleagues who share our ideas – or do we cooperate with all the families? What do we know about the parents/children/colleagues in our setting? Which are their strengths? The aim of these critical questions and of other tools of the model is to create space for dialogue and reflection, to learn to appreciate the value of diversity and to actively work on social inclusion. By using this model professionals are often more committed in daily praxis, the cooperation in teams improves, the critical reflexion on own role and practice increases and the existing diversity in the centre is more appreciated.

Diversity of children, families and professionals is a core characteristic of all childcare settings. Therefore, to improve quality in these settings it is necessary to develop a vision and a practice on respect for diversity and social inclusion. In this regard Del Barrio Saiz mentions two important challenges that need to be addressed: The implementation of structural conditions, for example time for observation, reflection, documentation, coaching and monitoring, and the recognition of respect for diversity as a right, included in article 2, UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, instead of seeing diversity as "a problem in need of treatment". The belief of a unique and superior perspective harms all children'.



„Actively working on Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion is a crucial approach for assuring quality in early childhood centres“

Ana del Barrio Training & Consulting, Voorschoten

6) Example of pedagogical frameworks on Diversity in ECEC: 'Together different' (Van Keulen, A. & Singer, E., 2012). And the brochure 'Exploring competences for professional practice in Early Childhood Education and Care' (2011) from DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training) and ISSA (International Step by Step Association)

7) 'Permanent learning. From self reflection to team reflection' (Van Keulen, A. & Del Barrio Saiz, A.; SWP, 2010, Amsterdam)