All children and adults have the right
to evolve and to develop
in a context
where there is

**equity and respect**
for **diversity**

Making Sense of good Practice

Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training
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Diversity & Equity
Making Sense of Good Practice
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Also, we like to thank all children and adults who gave us the permission to use their photos.
Foreword

Recently, the OECD issued the second comprehensive and influential ‘Starting Strong’ report. It makes a strong case, backed up by international research, that early childhood matters. But also that not every early childhood matters in a similar way. In order to enable all children to benefit from early childhood care and education, service provision must offer high, rather than average quality. And that obviously is a matter for continuous debate: what constitutes high quality?

Recent international research contributed to the understanding that quality is not an objective truth that lies out there, waiting to be discovered by experts. It is constructed and reconstructed over and over again. Developmental psychology, for instance, has helped us to understand children's needs, but it has historically also been a science about the average child, that of course, does not exist. Today, it is clear that what quality is also depends on who the families are we wish to serve. What excellence is in an inner city of the UK differs significantly from what excels in a Greek suburb. Consequently, framing universal quality criteria has very often contributed in privileging the already privileged groups in our western societies.

This understanding of quality as contextualized and value laden, has often been misunderstood as a 'postmodern' perspective, wishing to deconstruct all standards. In turn, this may lead to an attitude of 'anything goes' that may convey the message that early years management or policy makers can withdraw from their responsibilities. The United Nations' International Convention on the Rights of the Child does not allow us to cherish such a 'laissez-faire' attitude. It is after all our common responsibility to set the highest standards possible for today's and tomorrow's children. But to do so in a way that involves all stakeholders and that includes practitioners, parents and children.

That is exactly what the DECET network has been attempting to develop over the last three years. The DECET network members started from three basic and very simple questions: What kind of early years service provision is appropriate to give each child a sound and positive image of belonging, the self-confidence to build on in later years? What early years service provision fosters the building of communities, where different people can communicate with each other? And what kind of service provision contributes to social justice? In societies that are marked by growing diversity, by fragmentation and individualisation these questions are at the heart of many concerns, shared by educators and policy makers alike: concerns regarding citizenship, social cohesion and social inclusion.

The uniqueness of what the DECET network presents in this document is threefold: it is not only based on the expertise within the network, but also takes into account local contributions of educators, parents and children; it acknowledges that quality is value laden and clarifies its values explicitly in the introduction and throughout this publication; and it presents clear standards to build upon, but in an open-ended, non-prescriptive manner. By doing so, they offer us a document which stimulates us to think and act and consequently it is a document for change.

Michel Vandenbroeck, Ph. D.
Department of Social Welfare Studies, Ghent University

Introduction

Equity and Respect for Diversity

What is it about?
The early years are logically and practically a good place to start to foster and strengthen children’s identities and to raise positive awareness of diversities. It is a time when children are learning about their world from everything that is around them – their families, their peers, other people they meet, the media, their toys, books and other resources that they play with or encounter. Practitioners will need to ‘look, listen and note’ in fostering these aspects of children’s diverse identities so as to offer experiences that effectively support them in their development of positive knowledge and understanding of the world. Early Years and Childcare settings that positively include children from a range of different social backgrounds, cultures, religions and embrace diversity as a part of life, help children to grow in their understanding, respect and appreciation of the diverse society we all live in.

In many countries throughout Europe, governments, policy makers, decision-makers and service provider managers are seeking to give emphasis and priority to respecting diversity and valuing the multiple identities of children, families and communities. As a result, many stakeholders are interested in developing policy and strategy documents which support and promote a more holistic view of a child within a family, a family within a community and a community as part of a national strategy.

This document is the result of work undertaken by members of the DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training) network. DECET brings together a network of European organisations with common goals about valuing diversity in early childhood education and training. The network aims at promoting and studying democratic childcare, acknowledging the multiple (cultural and other) identities of children and families.

What is DECET striving for?
All children and adults have the right to evolve and to develop in a context where there is equity and respect for diversity. Children, parents and educators have the right to good quality in early childhood education services, free from any form of - overt and covert, individual and structural - discrimination due to their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (in reference to Article 2, UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The DECET network will nurture knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable children and adults to construct together early childhood education services and communities where everyone

• feels that he/she belongs
• is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity
• can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries
• can participate as active citizens
• actively addresses bias through open communication and willingness to grow
• works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination

The principles presented in this document are based on DECET’s mission statement, aims and objectives and could serve as benchmarks for all early childhood care and education provisions.
Will you share our process of co-constructing common knowledge?

**DECET** is organised into transnational sub-groups, called workpacks. One workpack was entitled 'Participatory Research on Making Sense of Good Practice' and consisted of members from Germany, Scotland, Belgium, England, Greece and France. Workpack members worked on investigations with colleagues, parents and children in their respective countries to identify how practice(s) promote respect for diversity in early childhood settings. The results of this research have informed this document which outlines principles and quality criteria on respect for diversity and suggest some methods for their promotion.

There are 'real' examples of how the workpack members used the principles and criteria material in different ways in the six countries involved: to compare early years setting’s attitudes on respecting diversity in mono and multi-cultural settings; to challenge perceptions of staff and managers; to develop existing practices; to involve parents and children in research activity; to illuminate exemplars on respect for diversity; to gather information from heads of centres who have been successful in promoting respect for diversity.

The **DECET** workpack has illustrated these principles by identifying criteria for participants in the co-construction of knowledge to gauge whether the principles have been implemented. This document is interactive and is not meant to be prescriptive.

In developing this document, we are hoping that the principles and criteria will be taken to stimulate discussion. **DECET** expects all those who use it will re-word the criteria into languages in which they are comfortable. The process of altering the criteria is seen as an essential part of participants developing a deepening sense of ownership for promoting respect for diversity.

The quotes are real and are meant for critical reflection. They have emerged from interviews with practitioners, mothers, fathers and children. They are not meant to highlight good practice. In fact sometimes they may challenge what is good practice, what is the value-base of work with children and families or who has the right to transmit values to children.

**How can you use this document?**

We share our work results in this document. Feel free to use it
- to inform interested policy makers, academics, practitioners and parents about the work of **DECET**: its mission statement, its aims and its objectives;
- to stimulate interactive dialogue with policy makers, staff teams, staff, parents and children about promoting respect for diversity as a major foundation of any early years practice;
- to challenge negative attitudes and develop further existing practice on respect for diversity.

We invite you to contact us and share your thoughts, doubts, ideas, suggestions, experiences.

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Some personal questions

Before you start reading the principles with their criteria, we would like to invite you to reflect on some personal questions. You may also use these questions for discussions with parents, staff and other stakeholders.

What gives you a sense of belonging?

How does it make you feel when you experience being accepted, recognised and included?

Have you ever experienced aspects of your identity not accepted or recognised in your environment? Can you describe the feelings you had?

How can we learn from each others’ backgrounds and experiences? What might be obstructive, what supportive?

What might make you strong enough to challenge your own values and convictions?

Have you ever experienced instances where effective communication could break down barriers? What made this communication effective?

What does being an active citizen mean for you? What can help you to act as an active citizen?

Can you imagine standing up in the face of bias, prejudice or discrimination? What makes you feel anxious, what courageous?

Have you ever experienced not doing something to challenge bias, prejudice or discrimination? Can you describe your feelings?

If early childhood education and care provisions were built on principles of equity and respect for diversity, what would they be like?
Everyone feels that she/he belongs

- The staff actively shows to all users of the early childhood education and care provision and the local community that everyone is welcome and that they are invited to be part of the provision.
- The provision guarantees equality of access to all members of the community throughout all its services.
- The needs of everyone are recognised and given individual attention.
- The setting and the pedagogical process reflect diverse characteristics of all families.
- The policy, practice and organisational structures of the centre are transparent.
- Professionals regularly reflect on their own experiences, feelings and attitudes.
'I myself need a very long time to feel that I belong. What I need is being accepted and a feeling of trust.'
Marina, centre manager

'If the preschool hadn’t come into the travellers’ site I wouldn’t have left the children down the road. I wouldn’t leave them. No one talked to me about preschools. I had no information, so why would I go off with my children to somewhere I knew nothing about.'
Bridget, mother

'It is very helpful that I can bring my daughter around eleven in the morning after breakfast and a nice time of playing with her. Then I go to sleep after my night shift.'
David, taxi driver

'You are only a guest here. Behave according to the rules!'
Alexandra, director

'When my son was born with Down’s Syndrome I was very concerned about if it would be possible to find appropriate childcare. The centre invited me to have a close look and I got answers to all my questions. I got an information sheet that told me everything about their philosophy. I really felt invited, so I can imagine that my son will be well here, too!'
Navina, mother of two children

'In the lobby of the centre all staff members present themselves with a photo and some personal information: what is important for them in their work, a photo of them as a child, their hobbies, their own children, the languages they are capable to speak… That impressed me very much.'
Alen, father

'The little baby-boy was crying and could not sleep. We asked his mother what we could do to help him. She always sings a lullaby for him. This gave us the idea to record her singing, so now when the boy is tired or upset we play this song for him.'
Teslime, early childhood educator
Everyone is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of her/his identity

- Professionals nurture each person’s individual and group identities in developing their sense of pride in their multiple identities.
- A safe atmosphere is provided where all convictions, values and beliefs – even when perceived as conflictual - can be expressed and negotiated.
- The children’s needs, interests, questions and experiences and how they make sense of these are the focal point of the pedagogical activities.
- Children, parents and professionals exchange information to gain greater knowledge and understanding of their life-situations in order to be appropriately responsive.
- Children, parents and staff set the boundaries for any exploration into family lives.
‘During their first weeks in our centre, the mother of Kieran always looked stressed and worried, when she came to bring or pick up her 18 months old boy. One evening, she told me that her mother was blaming her for bringing her son to childcare. We invited the grandparents to spend some time with their grandson in our group. They were very impressed by seeing Kieran playing with the other children. They changed completely their idea about childcare. It was a big release to Kieran’s mother.’

Sofia, educator

‘Mammy, I was in school today!’
(excited response to the introduction of jigsaws depicting Traveller life into the setting)

Winnie, four years old

‘Every afternoon, when parents come to pick up their children, digital pictures are projected on a small screen, so parents can see what their children did that day. Those photos help them to discuss our activities, show them how their child felt and parents inspire us with their ideas and proposals.’

Carine and Hava, educators

‘We ask every new child and family in our group, to bring some music they usually listen to at home. So we can count on a real diverse collection of dance music!’

Hatice and Gerd, educators

‘At my first visit to the centre, there was Jusuf, a three years old boy, who took me to the family wall. He invited me to sit down and explained to me, very proudly, his whole family structure: parents, uncles, aunts, grandmother, sisters and brother, with whom he lives very closely. He made me dream about how my daughter would present her family when she will be his age…’

Alice, mother of Melissa

‘No one in this centre is interested in our difficulties in teaching our children to speak, read and write the Arabic language, their heritage language that they need to communicate with their grandparents.’

Ahmed, father of two children

‘When my daughter Lisa went for the first time to the childcare centre, the educators asked me how we, as parents, wanted them to speak about the handicap of our daughter in communicating with other children and parents. I was very touched by that question because in that period, my husband and I were not ready to use words as handicap or disability and we did not want others to use them when speaking about Lisa.’

Catherine, mother of three children

‘I am so very happy that Anette (the professional) knows that I have two names: a Turkish name from my father and a German name from my mother.’

Aline Öztürk, four years old
Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries

- The professionals promote a positive climate of diversity by celebrating both similarities and differences in every day life.
- The staff create an atmosphere that enables all to exchange and negotiate ideas and proposals. Thus all stakeholders are actively involved in the co-construction of high quality care and education.
- The professionals make the learning processes, the co-construction of knowledge visible through dialogue with all stakeholders.
- Any documentation values the voices of children, parents, professionals and other stakeholders and is used as a means for dialogue and reflection.
- Each professional reflects on and strives to go beyond their own boundaries and the limitations of their knowledge, values, images, assumptions and emotions.
'In our daycare centre we work in real collaboration; it is usual for parents and professionals to discuss the pedagogical objectives. For example, as children are currently very interested in firefighters, Julie’s father, a fireman, has proposed to come in the childcare with his uniform and his truck. Parents and educators were very enthusiastic thinking it would be a good moment to speak about safety.'

Sophie, mother

'My son left the daycare when he was three years old. Helen, his nursery nurse, gave him his journal with photos and personal notes made by her and drawings of my son. Now he is ten years old and when we look together at this journal, I realise how important it is for him to have a trace of his first three years.'

Julien, father

'In our centre we have a world map on which we ask parents and practitioners to indicate the places they feel they belong. Since the map is in the hall, a lot of parents, children, visitors and professionals stop in front of it, to discuss the diversity represented.'

Anne-Marie, educator

'This morning I saw Fimobibe playing at a dinner party with dolls. He put all plates on the floor just behind the table. When he sat down and began to eat, Enzo picked up the plates and put them on the table. Fimobibe stood up and told Enzo: No, put them on the floor, it’s time for dinner!'

Dominique, educator in toys library

'My usual way was to put Henry to bed and leave him to sleep on his own. My friend, a Korean mother, never left her child until she was asleep. Recognising the other way increased my understanding.'

Veerle, mother

'This afternoon we’ve given a lot of pieces of cloth for the children to play with. Souhé stretched a piece on the floor in front of her. Then she took another one, and put it on her hair. Then she prayed. Louise looked at her and asked: What are you playing?’

Nathalie, educator
Everyone can participate as active citizens

- The early childhood education and care provision is a vital part of the local community networks and staff are actively involved in issues of current concern to community members.
- The professionals create democratic structures and actively seek the opinion of all children, parents and staff.
- Parents, staff and children all share responsibilities in order to design every day life together and achieve a sense of ownership and belonging.
- The provision contributes to the dynamics of the community by enabling children, families and staff to make use of the resources available: space, staff, equipment and information.
- Staff seek to increase their own knowledge, skills and capabilities in diverse forms of participation.
'I don’t like the smell of Tuesdays but they make me eat it.’
   Petros, four years old

'For me there is absolutely no point in managing an early years and family centre and not relating the centre to the child’s life at home and in the community: it is my job to make sure that the connections are strong, it is my job to make sure parents are not only welcome but expected to participate at a level they are happy with.’
   Julie, centre manager

'Even though I work full-time, I know what is going on for my child, they make a point on keeping me up-to-date. I am given the chance to speak to staff in the evening if I want to, to offer my opinion, to meet other mothers and it is all done with a sense that nothing is a bother or that I am not interfering. In fact I feel they know it is my right to know.’
   Aanchal, mother

'I get to choose the activity today and I get to be the boss - even if I want to tell everyone to go home, I think they would have to, honest they would!’
   Melissa, nearly five years old

'My staff are encouraged to sit on different committees; children’s assessment teams, community festival and drama committees, parent’s committees, interagency groups. It means that they see a bigger picture and get to know everyone in the community.’
   Eva Maria, centre manager

'I work for minority ethnic parents to help them take responsibility for their children; some centres take that responsibility away from them.'
   Jimmy, social worker
Everyone actively addresses bias through open communication and willingness to grow

- The early childhood education and care provision takes positive action to ensure that the composition of the staff reflects societal diversity.
- The provision establishes channels of exchange and communication with families belonging to less visible groups that might not be represented at the early childhood centre or even within the local community.
- The provision promotes an ethos within the centre whereby discrimination is never seen as acceptable.
- In the face of bias or discrimination, staff find ways to take a firm stand against it.
- The staff create opportunities for discussion on forms of inequity, social injustice and power relations in society.
- There is a direct role for staff to mediate and advocate in local policy formation by raising awareness of existing inequalities in children’s and families’ needs.
'When we realized that a priest had come to give the 'blessing' in the inauguration ceremony, we sent a clear message to the mayor that such an act would be incompatible with the multicultural character of the Centre and could alienate the Muslim community’s children and families that we worked with. Faced with a clear and articulate stance, the office of the mayor ensured that the priest remained as a guest during the ceremony.’

Evgenia, educator

‘One day a mother, while waiting for her child, saw Maria who makes loud noises when excited. The mother got frightened and showed disgust. I took that as an expression of dislike and probably so did Maria, I reacted aggressively. Perhaps I better should have taken Maria by the hand and given her the opportunity to communicate with that mother.’

Panaghiotis, educator

'The minority cultures became visible to the wider majority community when their music was played out over loudspeakers at an open cultural event for children and families held centrally in the city.'

Dimitris, taverna waiter

'Bilal kicked Mohamed and hit him with his fists, because he had just called his mother a ‘whore’ in their own language. Bilal’s parents are separated and his mother lives with a new man. The teacher turned to Mohamed and said so that we all heard it: Bilal’s mother is not a whore! She loves her children very much just like your mother loves you. We do not allow such a language to be used here!’

Lena, five years old

'When I collected my child at the end of the day, his key worker told me that she heard some of the children using the word Paki. She informed me of how she talked to all the children during circle time helping them to understand how damaging this word is.’

Iram, mother
Everyone works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination

- The staff recognise that communities and the society as a whole are changing. In co-operation with stakeholders they identify, analyse and address the changing needs of the local communities.
- The professionals work out clear policies, procedures and protocols which are inclusive, ensure equality of access and display respect for diversity.
- The management of the provision includes parents and staff working as equal partners to identify and eliminate all forms of inequalities.
- The staff are alert to any forms of institutional discrimination and make it visible in order to start the process leading to its elimination.
- The staff play an active and pivotal role in promoting respect for diversity and challenging stereotypical attitudes by engaging in the dominant discourse on public fora.
'We noticed Polish migrant workers working on the farms in our community. We contacted the local support centre for newly arrivals and set up a meeting with families. We now have four Polish children, and they bring rich diversity to our setting.'

Nurgün, centre manager

'We don’t do the multicultural stuff, because we don’t really have those people here, occasionally we get the one or two but they don’t stay long.'

Linda, curriculum leader

'We had no racism in our school, until Matthew started our school.'

(Matthew is a black child.)

Tom, headteacher

'We are aware of the negative media coverage about the large number of immigrant families moving here. We regularly attend local village forums and neighbourhood groups to break down the prejudices and assumptions.'

Margarita, educator

'The staff of the day care centre, where I’m working, reflect the diversity of our city. There is Enna who is Tunisian, Badella is Moroccan, Annie is Lebanese, Santie is Spanish and Dominique and me are French. We share aspects of our culture through communication with parents and children. As professionals this really helps us to fight against bias and to respect each person, both service users and staff.'

Karine, educator

'We offer focus group discussions to our parents, to encourage a dialogue with staff to identify any specific needs and to ensure that our environment, ethos, resources and day to day practice reflect the local community.'

Jenny, senior educator

'Stop the name-calling, stop the slagging off!'

Traveller children, four to eight years old, asked if they had one request to make of the Minister of Education
Publications of DECET

Lullaby for Hamza
Childcare as a meeting place

Travel journalist Mark Gielen reflects on those days when his own daughter went to a childcare centre. That was twenty years ago and his daughter is now a grown-up. Since then, the world has changed a lot. Diversity in society has increased enormously. That is why Mark Gielen decided to find out how European child care centres handle this diversity. In his quest he stops in four European cities: Ghent (Belgium), Auby (France), Berlin (Germany) and Birmingham (England). Each city is briefly presented and the context of how ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) came to be is summarised.

VBJK & DECET 2003

Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood Training in Europe
Examples of training practices in the DECET network

Diversity in families, standards and values within European society influences educational systems as well as early childhood education and services. Every day early childhood trainers and educators are confronted with new questions and challenges. How to deal with these different standards and values? How to communicate with the diversity of parents? What do we want for the children? Who decides how to raise the children in early childhood education?

The manual is available on www.decet.org
DECET 2004

Respect for Diversity, Equity and Social Inclusion
Working with Parents and Professionals in Early Childhood Education

European seminar for trainers, training managers and policy makers
Barcelona, May 15-19, 2006
Plenary contributions on www.decet.org
DECET 2006
Toowey - Toowey
Playing, Drawing, Singing for Diversity

Art is a universal language that people of different cultural and social backgrounds can share. Art can be used as an effective pedagogical tool for promoting respect for diversity. The film presents examples of artistic activities that:

- empower children to develop the diverse aspects of their identity and gain self-respect;
- allow children of different cultural background to share elements of their culture and learn from each other;
- encourage children and adults to communicate and develop a sense of belonging;
- encourage children to participate as active citizens and fight for their rights.

DECET 2006

Toolkit "Documentation of families"

This set of tools (poster, game, DVD) contributes to the improvement of information, communication and mutual understanding between parents and the daycare centre. Trainers may also find it useful as a guide for their work on documentation of families.

The poster shows a range of diverse family forms, different families and their children. It clearly says in many languages what it is all about: Respect for every child, respect for every family. (The poster can also be ordered here: www.verlag-dasnetz.de)

The sensitizing game allows teams to exchange ideas about the objectives, the methods and the principles of documentation of families in a convivial atmosphere. The DVD gives a lot of information on the objectives of documentation of families. It presents different methods with a focus on the family wall. The texts on the DVD represent the fruits of shared reflection of parents, professionals and the project coordinators.

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