

## **General recommendations for action**

### **Well-being and participation as mutually reinforcing goals in early childhood education and care**

WiFF is one of Germany's largest projects in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, aiming to advance the professional development of early childhood educators. The project works through a variety of approaches and channels in order to develop suggestions for continuing professional development in the ECEC field. The project's homepage [www.weiterbildungsinitiative.de](http://www.weiterbildungsinitiative.de) provides information on conferences, research findings and publications.

The work presented here focuses on the interplay between 'well-being' and 'participation in education' in the early childhood sector and was developed in the context of guidance for early childhood professional development. The so-called *Wegweiser Weiterbildung* [Professional Development Guides] are key publications within the project and focus on a variety of topics such as Multilingualism, Inclusion or Science Education in the Early Years. The guides aim to support persons working in professional development contexts to plan and develop their programmes in a competence-oriented way. For this reason they include a detailed competence profile.

#### **1. Structure of the WiFF competence profiles**

The WiFF competence profiles are based on a so-called competence model as utilised in the German Qualifications Framework. Models such as these illustrate the underpinning dimensions of professional competence.

The guiding principle in the WiFF competence profiles is the broad and general understanding of competence found in the German Qualifications Framework, according to which competence is defined as the "individual's ability and willingness to utilise knowledge and skills as well as personal, social and methodological abilities and to behave in a reflective as well as individually and socially responsible way" (AK DQR 2011, p. 4). In other words: the ability to do something is not enough; one must also be willing to implement it. Knowledge and skills – professional competencies – need to be developed and implemented as well as personal, social and methodological abilities (personal competencies). The aim is to reflect on and act responsibly towards the social environment.

Based on the competence model of the German Qualifications Framework and on relevant scientific theories, these dimensions are structured in the following way:

- Knowledge includes among other things an understanding of domain-specific and empirically based theories, principles, legislation and facts related to ECEC settings as organisations, educational approaches, developmental processes in early childhood, the life-worlds of children and parents and the specific thematic focus (e.g. nature) (Faas 2013; AK DQR 2011).
- Skills are the abilities to implement this knowledge through thinking and acting in professional practice. It is also about solving problems in a creative way (AK DQR 2011; Edelmann / Tippelt 2007).
- Social competence is reflected in the empathic cooperation with others (e.g. legal guardians). The motives of others need to be understood and their own articulated. Social competence

also includes the ability to shape one's own field of work in a responsible way (AK DQR 2011; Edelman / Tippelt 2007).

- Self-competence leads to the development of an awareness of one's own identity. Values and standards need to be managed responsibly. This includes the ability to reflect and also the willingness to develop oneself further (AK DQR 2011; Edelman / Tippelt 2007).

Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
Depth and breadth	Instrumental and systemic skills, assessment ability	Team and leadership ability, co-construction and communication	Independence / responsibility, reflectivity, learning competence
e.g. legislation, curricular frameworks, educational knowledge	e.g. implementing methods, creating structures, initiating and implementing projects	e.g. cooperating with others, communicating, managing public relations, negotiating	e.g. reflecting on one's own actions and those of others

Table 1: Outline of the structure of the WiFF competence profiles based on the German Qualifications Framework

The WiFF competence profiles represent an understanding of competence orientation which includes education. They aim to / want to stimulate the educators' independence and understanding of other perspectives as well as their abilities to have their say and be critical.

## 2. Using the competence profiles

A group of experts supported the work on the *Professional Development Guide on Science Education in the Early Years*, deciding on the three general recommendations relating to the competence profile presented here:

- Ensuring the well-being of all children in early childhood education and care (ECEC)
- Ensuring participation in education for all children in the ECEC setting
- Being aware of the specific life contexts of all children and how they explore the world according to diverse interests, competencies and developmental potentials

The recommendations for action and associated competencies form the basis for an inclusive approach towards early childhood education and care, regardless of the specific content focus.

### *Suggestions for reading the competence profile*

Related to the 'General Recommendations for Action', the WiFF competence profiles describe competencies needed to master these requirements in the specific field of action. The individual facets of Knowledge, Skills, Social Competence and Self-Competence relating to the field of action can be read both in columns as well as across the page. In the 'Knowledge' dimension of the competence profile, the content orientation is highlighted because it runs through the entire line up to 'Self-competence'. The profile can thus be read both horizontally in terms of content as well as vertically in terms of the competence dimension. Within the General Recommendations, each field of action is structured from the abstract to the specific according to the following order:

- Legislative framework
- Approach and theory
- Communication and interaction
- Structure and general conditions
- Summarising reflections

### *Competencies = specific learning goals*

The competence formulations represent specific learning objectives of continuing professional development. They provide an orientation framework for content and didactic approaches. At the same time, the competence profile provides a backdrop for examining to what extent existing professional development programmes contribute towards the development of key competencies. Individual recommendations for action can be used for this purpose.

### *The competence profile as an instrument for quality development*

By showing how recommendations for action can be formulated and associated competencies defined, the competence profile is a first step towards embedding competence orientation in professional development. In this sense it is not to be understood as a mandatory catalogue of requirements or a check list, but as an instrument for quality development, supporting the continuing development of early childhood educators' individual competencies and based on research and practice.

## I Ensuring the well-being of all children in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The official mandate of ECEC in Germany is to educate, care for and bring up children (Book Eight of the Social Code). In order to achieve these statutory goals it is essential that children have a sense of well-being in the setting they attend. The question of what exactly the term 'well-being' means and how it is understood is a focus of research in disciplines as diverse as medicine, psychology and law. Moreover, well-being is measured according to different sets of indicators (such as, for example, social or economic criteria) (Becker / Tylla 2014; BMFSFJ 2013; WHO 2012; Schumacher et al. 2003; Deci / Ryan 2000). This means that the core issue of children's well-being may be answered in different ways.

Children's well-being also depends on the (universal and individual) satisfaction of their needs (Andresen / Albus 2009), which at the same time are general, age-independent needs. Continuing the discourses, Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan were able to show on the basis of their self-determination theory that the following innate basic needs are central to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and consequently also to a person's well-being (Deci / Ryan 2000, 1993):

- competence (being able to act in an effective way),
- autonomy (being able to act independently),
- relatedness (having a sense of belonging).

They also emphasise the importance of the social context, which either facilitates or inhibits opportunities to satisfy needs and thus "the stimulation of intrinsic motivation and the internalisation of extrinsic motivation" (Deci / Ryan 1993, p. 230). For children, particularly important are the experiences they make in the relationships formed with their parents, especially in the relationship with their mother, who not only brings the child into the world but is also frequently the main caregiver.

In the light of different stages of attachment (Bowlby 1969), children gradually develop an 'internal working model' during the first years of life based on their early experiences with their caregiver, "during which the child discovers the extent to which his or her needs are satisfied, enabling a feeling of security... It is therefore assumed that children's inner working model of attachment influences their general attitude, their social behaviour, their perception of others, as well as the development of a positive self-image and a concept of Self (Thompson 2006 in Siegler 2016a, p. 401). Among other things, children's regulatory competence is also dependent on these early experiences and on their inner working model: "Within the parent child relationship the child learns, through the experience of regulating emotions, which kinds of reaction and which forms of regulation are effective and in this way builds up expectations about situation-specific regulation strategies resulting from different kinds of emotional expression" (Bundschuh 2003, p. 58).

Alongside the home environment, ECEC settings are increasingly becoming a key part of families' and children's social worlds, with ECEC staff taking on a direct caregiving role. Well-being results not only from the above-mentioned aspects such as the feeling of safety and security which children develop, but also from a respectful attitude of all persons involved, based on appreciation of the diversity of

children and their families (Prengel 2014). This includes valuing their cultural origins. Linking the diverse family and institutional life-worlds of the children and building a respectful culture which enables emotional learning and reliable relationships is an important task of ECEC settings. This provides the children with a sense of orientation and a feeling of security and helps them to develop a stable and confident self-image. In the everyday routines of the setting, ECEC staff need to take into account the diverse experiences, expectations and needs of the children and their families in an individual way. At the same time, the children's home environment is faced with a given set of conditions in each setting and the specific care approaches and (emotional) competence of the staff and teams.

The needs of children which ensure their well-being are very similar to basic human needs. In other words, needs

- are always individual,
- are subject to continuing change and
- are viewed, assessed and responded to from an external perspective (in the case of children's needs usually from an adult perspective).

To summarise according to Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, there is a need for "environments with key caregivers which satisfy psychological needs, enable the learner to strive for autonomy and support the experience of individual competence building... These can promote the development of motivation based on self-determination" (Deci / Ryan 1993, p. 236), which also improves the quality of life and strengthens the development of the child's self-image.

As previously mentioned, early childhood educators can meet these basic needs appropriately through a professional attitude and can support them, for example, in their interactions with the child. These procedures develop into a mutual commitment between the educator and the child (Werner 2006; Fuhrer 2005). The educator ensures stress reduction, offers security as well as attentiveness and supports or accompanies the child in building up and expanding his or her opportunities for self-regulation and exploration (Link 2015; Ahnert 2005). This is the best way "for developing a mature form of autonomy which enables the child to do those things he or she is able to do and also, if needed, to openly seek support" (Werner 2006, p. 131). Attachment is therefore an essential prerequisite for the personality development and exploratory behaviour of young children (Siegler et al. 2016a). However, attachment and relationships are not rigid concepts, they need to be balanced and confirmed again and again, and they presuppose openness for entering into new relationships.

Various studies have indicated that the quality of the relationship between educator and child influences not only the child's well-being but also his or her cognitive, linguistic and social development. Important factors contributing to the intensity of the relationship are the educator's sensitivity, but also the child's age, gender and ethnicity, as well as the relationship to the child's parents (for a summary, see Textor 2007). Robert C. Pianta, Bridget Hamre and Karen M. La Paro describe the sensitivity of ECEC staff as a key indicator regarding the emotional support of the children in institutional spaces (Pianta et al. 2007). Sensitivity is understood as the sensitive perception of the child's needs and

promptly reacting to these. In this way the child experiences a certain degree of self-efficacy and reliability. These experiences express themselves when the child is balanced, shows interest and enters into relationships with other children and with adults.

By using the Leuven Involvement Scale (LIS), the link between a child's well-being, which in the Leuven approach is associated among other things with confidence and self-esteem, and the degree of his or her involvement, it is possible to assess the quality of the educational and learning processes in ECEC settings (Laevers 2009). These processes are considered to be "the result of interaction between child and environment" (Laevers et al. 2015, p. 20). Well-being thus forms the basis for the development of trusting relationships between children, their families and ECEC professionals. Together with the child's involvement, these relationships are also a reliable indicator for the quality of educational processes. They are supported above all through respectful interaction and communication between the educator and the child, but also initiated by the child. The well-being and involvement of all children and the quality of their relationships to the educator or a number of staff members as well as to their peers are thus also the basic requirement for participation in education. Empirical evidence shows that children learn well if they feel at ease and secure.

Besides a prepared learning environment, sensitive interaction partners are of great importance (Remsperger 2015). In particular 'assisting' and 'supporting exploration' are important aspects in the pedagogical relationship between child and educator for supporting the children's knowledge acquisition (Ahnert 2010, p. 17 f.; Ahnert 2004, p. 265). At the level of relationships with peers, it has been shown that as the child progresses in age these play an increasingly important role in terms of personality development, subjective well-being and the children's learning, for example through the development of increasingly cooperative and complex games (Siegler et al. 2016b). Playing together among peers is seen as "the ideal way of creating participation and involvement in ECEC settings", impacting on, among other things, the language, cognitive and social-emotional development of the children (Heimlich 2017, p. 18). In order to initiate and support cooperative play, children need not only sensitive perception and support through the ECEC staff, but also "optimal conditions in terms of room space and materials", as well as playing with the children or modelling play in order to transmit "new ideas" (ibid, p. 15).

Well-being is a multidimensional construct, it "goes beyond 'child welfare' and includes child protection and children's rights and thus also their participation and role as active persons. In this way, the child as a subject with his or her own rights becomes a central tenet. As such, he or she is namely dependent on care, protection and stimulation through adults, but also has an independent status" (Hurrelmann et al. 2014, p. 383 f.). The discourse on needs makes it clear that there is still a great deal to be done in terms of research into children's well-being; particularly for young children there is currently scant knowledge available (Puroila et al. 2012; McAuley / Rose 2010; Fattore et al. 2007).

#### *Issues for reflection: questions for ECEC educators*

- How can we tell when children feel at ease?
- In what ways are the individual and current needs of the children taken into account in the everyday routines of the ECEC setting?

- Do we exchange information about the experiences, interests and competencies of the children with their main caregivers and with team colleagues?
- Do the children enjoy attending the setting? Are they balanced, communicative, open-minded and eager to learn? Do they have stable social contacts?
- Are the rights of children the focus of attention? How are they made explicit, how are they represented, strengthened and guaranteed?
- How can adults avoid misinterpreting the needs, interests and wishes of the children?

*Get to know more!*

Brazelton, T. Berry / Greenspan, Stanley I. (2008): Die sieben Grundbedürfnisse von Kindern. Was jedes Kind braucht, um gesund aufzuwachsen, gut zu lernen und glücklich zu sein [The seven basic needs of children. What every child needs to grow up healthy, eager to learn and happy]. Weinheim

Estola, Eila / Farquhar, Sandy / Puroila, Anna-Maija (2014): Well-Being Narratives and Young Children. In: Educational Philosophy and Theory, Vol. 46 (8), p. 929 -941

Laevers, Ferre (2009): Beobachtung und Begleitung von Kindern [Observing and accompanying children]. With Els Vandenbusche and Klara Schlömer. Wegberg

## **II Ensuring the participation in education of all children in the ECEC setting**

The right to education is a universal human right (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 26(1)) and is particularly emphasised in Articles 28 and 29. According to the **German** Social Code (SGB VIII, 22, paragraphs 2 and 3), ECEC facilities are responsible for children's education, care and upbringing. In the Twelfth Report on Children and Young People it is stated that education is the most important of these tasks and it is described as an active process "in which the person educates himself or herself through independent and active engagement with the social, cultural and natural environment. Education in this sense thus requires opportunities provided by a stimulating environment and through communication with other persons. Education takes place in a process of co-construction between a person who is willing to learn and his or her social environment" (BMFSFJ 2006, p. 83), for example through play with peers or in interactions with educators. In the light of the 16 ECEC curricular frameworks in Germany, the above definition can be extended to include the following:

"1. Education is a lifelong process which begins at birth; it is controlled by the individual and is based, particularly in the early years, on sensory perception and activity.

2. The educational process combines the accommodation of external experiences with the child's own individual interpretations.

3. The aim of education is the individual's connection [or relationship, author's note] with the outside world through an equal balancing of personal and social competencies" (Hebenstreit 2008, p. 48).

On the basis of a (human) rights perspective on education and a humanist understanding of education, each child is a person with individual rights who can create himself or herself through education in an informal way. However, as Anke König explains, informal learning is not a conscious process, but "takes place in each child in a holistic way through social contacts and encounters with the surrounding environment and cultural world" (König 2010, p. 12). Children interact with others on the basis of their perceptions and experiences. Knowledge is constructed through mutual exchange and the process of education promoted through a co-constructive approach. From an anthropological point of view, this exchange also takes place in the context of dynamic relations between the generations – both within one's own generation and also in a general way across generations. It is influenced by culture and may enable or restrict participation in education. "Strengthening participation in education includes, for example, reducing economical, socio-cultural and gender-specific hierarchies, the power of the older and powerlessness of the younger generation" (Prenzel 2016, p.13).

Such a holistic educational process is supported through a deliberately designed, stimulating and rich learning environment and through promoting thinking based on developmental dialogue between the educator and child and between children. Among other things, such a learning environment is initiated and realised through the educators and the family (König 2009, 2007). In order to promote these learning processes and furthermore to make it possible for them to occur in early childhood settings, the goal of a respectful culture in the setting needs to be that of enabling participation in education. This should also be reflected in the implementation of the diverse requirements of the Competence Profile at the different levels of the participating persons.

The concept of educational participation in the context of ECEC settings includes, in the words of Annedore Prenzel, "adapting the setting to enable equity of access for all children – without exception – by respecting their life-worlds and offering educational approaches tailored to their individual needs" (Prenzel 2016, p. 60). Access to early childhood education and care thus begins before the child actually starts attending a setting and can be measured by looking at which children and which families or caregivers make contact with the setting in the first place, respond to its public relations activities or, in some cases, are even directly recruited. The selection criteria of the settings also need to be taken into account as well as the varying perspectives of the parents. For example, from the parents' perspective the question of 'selection' may be related to the reasons motivating the choice of a particular ECEC setting (e.g. because it provides a multilingual, integrative programme or because of a lack of alternatives) and the extent to which these are respected by the setting. If the aspiration is to provide 'access for all', then various dimensions of diversity need to be taken into account, including the specific location of the setting in an urban or rural area, the family's home language and the family's economic situation.

According to Annedore Prenzel, in the context of safeguarding children's well-being, participation in education through access to an ECEC setting provides a basis for participatory processes which need to be established in the setting and which include above all 'listening to children' and 'decision-making by children' (Prenzel 2016, S. 61). She emphasises that in particular the process of participation helps

to safeguard children's well-being and early education and describes a cycle which offers an invitation to the inclusive construction of a democratic society.

In the same way that the diversity of the children's life-worlds needs to be respected in creating access to ECEC, it is also necessary to ensure inclusive and participatory structures, approaches and elements in the setting. These include the following levels:

- the institutional level (for example, through forms of cooperation),
- the professional level (through, for example, multi-professionalism and a participatory conceptual framework),
- the relational level (e.g. through sensitive, dependable and respectful pedagogical relationships and supporting peer relationships),
- the didactic level (through, for example, appropriate learning topics and choice of materials as well as including the children's interests),
- the levels of funding and educational policy (through, for example, the provision of staff and equipment, external advisory support or quality assurance measures through the service provider) (Prenzel 2016).

The complexity and the interplay between these levels can be seen in detail in the various dimensions of the Competence Profile. A humanist understanding of education provides a suitable orientation framework for the implementation, an approach which places the strengths and interests of children at the centre. The specific identity and life-world of each child and that of his or her reference group are respected within this approach and children are supported in the process of growing up. Representing the life-worlds of all children in the ECEC setting is a fundamental goal of 'anti-bias education' (Sulzer / Wagner 2011, p. 43), which has become a key task for (early) education in the context of contemporary societal developments.

Early childhood educators cannot steer education or actively produce it, they can only provide stimulation and support. Sensitive perception and the building of relationships within the everyday routines in the ECEC setting and reflecting on these enable them to develop a conscious image of their role in the support of participation in education. On this basis they are able to develop and implement inclusive approaches within everyday practices, such as addressing the children in a focused verbal or non-verbal way.

Beyond this, they encounter the children's caregivers – who in the case of young children belong above all to the home environment – in an empathetic way and view them as a resource and as experts. Children are well aware of the societal status of their reference groups and integrate this assessment into their self-concept (Richter 2014; Derman-Sparks 2008; Wagner 2008b, 2008c). It is therefore imperative that educators take into account the experiences children bring with them from their home and community environment and include these in the organisation of the inside and outside spaces in the setting. Activity areas in the ECEC setting need to stimulate a variety of sensory experiences and

provide challenges which build on the interests and abilities of the children and on their perception of children's everyday lives in order to help them transform their experiences (Dewey 1988).

*Issues for reflection: questions for ECEC educators*

- What procedures are in place for gaining access to the ECEC setting? Do all children have equal access?
- In what way are the life-worlds of the ECEC setting and family linked? How do communication and interaction take place with the child and with the caregivers?
- What activities and experiential spaces are offered? Do they stimulate various sensory experiences?

*Get to know more!*

Schäfer, Gerd E. (2003): Was ist frühkindliche Bildung? [What is early childhood education?] In: Schäfer, Gerd E. (Ed.): Bildung beginnt mit der Geburt. Förderung von Bildungsprozessen in den ersten sechs Lebensjahren [Education begins at birth. Supporting educational processes during the first six years of life]. Weinheim / Basel, pp. 10 – 42

Schelle, Regine (2011): Die Bedeutung der Fachkraft im frühkindlichen Bildungsprozess. Didaktik im Elementarbereich [The role of the educator in early childhood learning processes. Didactic approaches in early education]. Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte, WiFF Expertisen, No. 18. München

Sulzer, Annika / Wagner, Petra (2011): Inklusion in Kindertageseinrichtungen – Qualifikationsanforderungen an die Fachkräfte [Inclusion in ECEC settings – qualification demands on the educators]. Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte, WiFF Expertisen, No. 15. München

### **III Being aware of the specific life contexts of all children and how they explore the world according to diverse interests, competencies and developmental potentials**

For children, exploring the world in an active way is not only dependent on a secure attachment to a caregiving person (Lengning / Lüpschen 2012), but also on the specific conditions of the environment and on the extent to which these adequately satisfy the child's basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci / Ryan 2000). Particular emphasis is placed on the process which begins with active exploration and leads to identity forming exploration of the social, material and conceptual world. This is the same for all children, regardless of the specific challenges or characteristics (e.g. being multilingual, having a background of migration, having special needs) they may have when they start attending an ECEC setting (Prengel 2016; Haberkorn 2009; see also the article "Auf dem Weg zum Verstehen der Welt" [On the way to understanding the world] by Ulrich Gebhard and Markus Rehm in the Professional Development Guide). The significance of perception, respect and appreciation, particularly with regard to the individual appropriation processes of children in the institutional context, increases along with the growing diversity of children and families.

It is the goal and task of educators to emphasise the child's strengths and not to focus in a deficit-oriented way on individual aspects which ('still') appear to need boosting. This also means to always view perceived interests, competencies and potentials in the context of the child's family situation and his or her relationships and well-being (related to the life-worlds of family and setting). Such a procedure corresponds to a salutogenetic perspective or the promotion of resilience<sup>1</sup>. This means that the resources, competencies and interests of the children, their subjective protective factors, are made visible as well as strengthened and reinforced.

Moreover, children can also be supported through external protective factors such as stable attachments, appropriate participation or taking on responsibility (Haberhorn 2009). In this sense it is also necessary to take into account aspects of diversity such as gender. In this connection, a meta-analysis including over 40 studies by Lieselotte Ahnert, Martin Pinquart and Michael E. Lamb was able to show that particularly in larger group contexts stable educator-child attachments (as a protective factor) tend to favour girls rather than boys (Ahnert et al. 2006). For educators, sensitive perception and documentation, as well as deliberate attention to and a reflexive attitude towards one's own subjective observations – also related to one's own needs – are the foundations for considering the previously mentioned holistic aspects.

If children experience rejection, disregard or even depreciation in terms of, for example, their (family) language and if at the same time they do not possess sufficient protective factors, this can impact negatively on their development, particularly on their identity, on the contact to their family and on the atmosphere in the group (Panagiotopoulou 2016; Röhner 2005). Annedore Prengel refers to recognition and in a reverse sense violation as appropriate categories for describing the qualities of relationships (Prengel 2013). Axel Honneth's recognition theory distinguishes between three levels of recognition which are also useful for ECEC settings when it comes to organising the goal of recognition: love, justice and solidarity (Honneth, cited in Jerg 2014). As a basis, the level of love can be described as unconditional acceptance. In the Reckahn Reflections on the Ethics of Pedagogical Relationships this is condensed in the fifth guideline as: "(...) educators respect the interests, pleasures, needs, troubles, distress and worries of children and young people. They take note of their concerns and the subjective meaning of their behaviour" (Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte et al. 2017, p. 3). The level of justice focuses attention on the children as holders of individual rights and on respect for "legally guaranteed freedom and equality" (Prengel 2013, p. 60). The level of solidarity is understood in the sense of a social respect for children's diverse starting situations on the basis of an ethical principle. Pivotal are the ethical values and goals underpinning the self-image of society (Jerg 2014; Prengel 2013).

Not least, the recognition of children and their interests and strengths is given if each child has the chance „to feel valued in his or her achievements and capabilities“

(Honneth, cited in Jerg 2014, p. 51). According to Annika Sulzer and Petra Wagner, developing a values-based competence is the prerequisite for implementing an inclusive approach in ECEC settings which views diversity as an enriching factor and aims to achieve justice for all children (Sulzer / Wagner 2011). This includes the recognition and appreciation of diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> „The term resilience refers to psychological robustness in the face of biological, psychological and psychosocial developmental risks“ (Haberhorn 2009, p. 88).

*Issues for reflection: questions for ECEC educators*

- Are all children in the group and their families treated with respect and recognition, for example in terms of their cultural origins and languages?
- Do staff react in an empathetic, attentive and tolerant way, for example towards diverse ways of living?
- Which developmental areas are foregrounded in the pedagogical work? Are the children's experiences explicitly considered?
- What are the current interests of the children, what are they less interested in?
- Is adequate attention paid to listening to and acting on their ideas, inspirations and wishes?
- Are children seen in terms of their strengths and resources and are these utilised and further developed?

*Get to know more!*

Heller, Elke (2013): Mit den Jüngsten die Lebenswelt erkunden und gestalten im Kontext des Situationensatzes [Discovering and shaping life-worlds with the youngest children in the context of the situational approach]. [https://www.kita-fachtexte.de/uploads/media/KiTaFT\\_heller\\_2013.pdf](https://www.kita-fachtexte.de/uploads/media/KiTaFT_heller_2013.pdf) (Accessed on 24.08.2017)

Viernickel, Susanne / Völkel, Petra (2017): Beobachten und Dokumentieren im pädagogischen Alltag [Observation and documentation in everyday pedagogical work]. Freiburg im Breisgau

Professional competence		Personal competence			
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence		
<b>General recommendations for action</b>					
<b>I Ensuring the well-being of all children in early childhood education and care (ECEC)</b>					
The early childhood educator...					
a)	... is aware that a humanist approach views human beings as positive individuals, striving for self-fulfilment (see Basic Law, Article 1 <sup>2</sup> ).	... adopts a professional stance based on humanist ideals and places the well-being of each individual child at the centre of her/his work.	... views children as competent and equal and creates a professional relationship which provides safety and protection and is characterised by respect and recognition.	... reflects on her/his professional attitude and values according to daily observations and activities.	
b)	... is aware of the close link between individual well-being and the fulfilment of (basic) human needs <sup>3</sup> and knows that these can vary from individual to individual according to context and situation.	... takes note of the individual needs of the children, document her/his observations regarding each child's social-emotional and cognitive development and stability and ensures the fulfilment of the children's needs.	... pays special attention to children whose needs need balancing or who find themselves in a challenging life situation (e.g. in the case of illness, moving homes, separation).	... reflects on the well-being of the children in the ECEC setting and on the extent to which the children's basic needs are considered and fulfilled in everyday activities.	

<sup>2</sup> Human dignity is inviolable. To respect and protect it is the duty of all state authorities (Article 1, Basic Law).

<sup>3</sup> According to Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan the (basic) needs include loving relationships, physical integrity, safety and regulation, experiences tailored to individual differences, developmentally appropriate experiences, barriers and structures, stable and supportive communities and cultural continuity as well as safeguarding the future (Brazelton / Greenspan 2008).

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
c)	... knows about the link between well-being and (active) participation, also in relation to resilience.	... takes time for the children, is aware of their strengths and individual resources and seeks day-to-day opportunities for supporting the children's self-determination and participation.	... works together with the children on, for example, viewing the diversity among children in the group as a resource and conveys a positive image of human beings.	... reflects on her/his work, focusing on the opportunities provided for children in terms of self-realisation, self-determination and participation.
d)	... knows how important communication and interaction are for the child's well-being and is aware of the variety of non-verbal and verbal signals children and adults use in communicating with one another.	... builds up a relationship to the child / the children through care, responsiveness, physical proximity (particularly in the case of very young children), attentiveness and by supporting independence and positive (peer) contacts.	... uses both non-verbal and verbal communication when working with the children (e.g. seeks eye contact, talks directly to children and notes the signals they send in a sensitive way.	... reflects on (non)verbal forms of communication and interaction with the child in terms of her/his perceived well-being.
e)	... knows how important cooperation with the child's home environment is for her/his well-being in the ECEC setting.	... signals openness and friendliness towards the children and their home environment and pays attention to transparency in communication.	... communicates regularly with the persons from the home environment about the child's well-being and development.	... reflects on whether the members of the children's home environment also feel at ease in the setting.
f)	... realises that the specific conditions in the setting (e.g. rules and procedures) influence the individual well-being of the children, the home environment and the staff.	... plans a reliable pattern of activities throughout the day (including e.g. fixed routines / procedures and activities), aiming to balance the current needs of all those involved.	... reacts, despite clear procedures, in a very flexible way to the individual needs of the stakeholders (primarily of the children) and foregrounds these wherever possible.	... reflects on the general conditions in the setting in terms of their 'value' for the diverse stakeholders.

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
g)	... is aware of the connection between her/his own well-being and the children's opportunities for regulation and well-being.	... is aware of her/his own needs and knows how to sustain well-being or, if necessary to improve it.	... is mindful of her/his own needs during the working day and reflects on these, e.g. with colleagues.	... reflects on her/his own well-being and needs in the working context.
The head of the ECEC setting...				
a)	<i>In terms of ensuring the well-being of all children in ECEC, the knowledge requirements for the head of the setting are the same as those for the educators.</i>	... ensures the quality of the factors influencing the children's well-being together with the service provider: responsive educators whom the children trust, positive peer contacts and opportunities for co-construction as key prerequisites for children's well-being.	... communicates in an open and respectful way with all involved stakeholders and acts according to her role model and leadership function – also with regards to her/his own well-being and (basic) needs.	... reflects on the (internal and external) communication culture in the setting and in the team.
b)		... pays attention to qualified staff and sensitises particularly new staff for the goals of the educational work and the culture of the setting (e.g. in the induction phase).	... organises procedures and structures together with the team so that staff have enough time for individual work with the children and for reflection.	... reflects on strategies regarding staff composition and professional development in the settings.
c)		... represents the rights of the staff towards the service provider and communicates the expectations of the provider to the staff.	... explains in team meetings the rights of individual staff members and informs them about current developments in legislation.	... reflects on her/his mediating role between provider and staff.

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
<b>II Ensuring the participation in education of all children in the ECEC setting</b>				
The early childhood educator...				
a)	... is aware of the national and international legal foundations <sup>4</sup> for participation in education, the relevant state-level curricular framework and the core mission of participation in education for all children in ECEC settings.	... makes sure that all children experience positive responses (e.g. being spoken to, being included, being stimulated) and are taken notice of during everyday activities (regardless of their achievements and competencies).	... makes sure in the communication and interaction with the children that each child's right is regarded in terms of participation and support (cf. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).	... reflects on the extent to which she/ he communicates regularly with each child and takes note of the child's opinion in an appropriate way (according to age and developmental stage or maturity).
b)	... is familiar with the educational approach of the setting (e.g. with regard to the key role of the educator) and with the numerous everyday opportunities to realise participation in education.	... takes her/his function as a role model seriously, understands himself or herself as a learner, shows interest in the children, their life-world and their questions and is eager to learn and curious about the world.	... actively invites children to participate and be involved in procedures and activities by being active himself or herself, setting (challenging) impulses, asking questions and expressing her/his own enthusiasm.	... reflects on her/his attitude, role and tasks as a supporter of participation in education. This includes reflecting on the political and societal dimensions of professionalism and the professional role. He or she is aware of controversial developments and positions in society, e.g. regarding migration, and takes a stand.

<sup>4</sup> For example: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Federal Child Protection Act; curricular frameworks.

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
c)	... knows that participation in education is always <b>child-focused</b> and that a flexible approach is needed in everyday routines (regarding the individual interests and needs and also the context).	... takes into account the individuality of the children in terms of their interests, experiences and development and utilises these as a starting point for planning, implementation and reflection.	... ensures a regular exchange with each child and her/his home environment about the child's cognitive, social and emotional development.	... reflects on how flexibly he or she reacts to the interests and ideas of the children, taking into account the suggestions and information provided by the home environment.
d)	... knows how he or she can support the children's participation in education, both <b>individually and collectively</b> .	... makes use of diverse, inclusive approaches and formats to enable participation in education for all children (e.g. through an anti-bias approach towards education <sup>5</sup> ).	... is committed, together with the team, towards ensuring that all children experience chances to build on their strengths and to use these as far as possible in an independent way.	... reflects on the extent to which the everyday activities in the setting provide opportunities for the involvement and participation of all children.
e)	... is aware of the need to <b>include</b> and have regular <b>exchange with the home environment</b> of the children in order to learn more about the familial context (e.g. culture and understanding of education) and to take account of these.	... regards the persons in the home environment as important partners, experts and as a valuable resource.	... respects the parents' perspectives and suggestions and takes account of the home environment as a resource in an active and explicit way in everyday activities in the ECEC setting.	... reflects on her/his communication with the child's home environment in terms of congruent perception and support.

<sup>5</sup> "The approach is understood as a contribution towards educational opportunity: Each child has a right to education and each child has a right to protection from discrimination. The approach pursues the goal of inclusion, linking respect for diversity with the non-acceptance of exclusion and discrimination. Its principles provide an orientation for inclusive pedagogical practices" (Institut für den Situationsansatz o.D.).

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
f)	... knows that for the child's cognitive development (e.g. transition to school) coordination is needed above all regarding curricular goals, content and methods as well as exchanging information about the child's individual developmental status.	... uses observations and documentation about the child's individual development in a resource oriented way <sup>6</sup> in communication with, for example, the teachers of neighbouring schools and takes into account the data protection requirements.	... enters into an exchange about the child's individual development, educational goals and learning strategies with, for example, the teacher (possibly in consultation with the parents).	... reflects on her/his own school experiences in the area of science and on the memories and feelings linked with these.
g)	... is aware of the meaning of inclusive educational activities (approaches and formats) in order to enable participation in education.	... supports the social competencies in everyday activities which are needed for cooperative educational processes, e.g. listening to one another, communicating with one another, respecting one another, taking on responsibility for oneself and others.	... pays attention to a resource oriented focus, giving each child regular positive and individual feedback and, if possible, including other children or the group.	... is aware that he or she plays a central and influential role in the educational participation of the children.
h)	... is aware that he or she cannot construct the children's individual educational processes but can influence the opportunities for participation in education.	... shows respect towards the child's remarks and activities and her/his individual needs, questions and interests.	... takes time to listen and adapts her/his language to the level and understanding of the child and the home environment.	... reflects on whether he or she manages to provide, ideally for all children, access to processes of learning and education. She/he makes use of the offers in the setting to communicate with others about this and for professional learning (e.g. in a team workshop).

<sup>6</sup> "Resources are understood as those skills and skill potentials of children [or staff, parents, etc.] which (...) support coping in difficult situations and thus enable development. Resource orientation is understood as discovering, revealing and utilising these resources (...) by the educator [and/or others]" (Kiso / Lotze 2014, p. 137).

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
The head of the ECEC setting...				
a)	<i>In terms of ensuring the participation in education of all children in the ECEC setting, the knowledge requirements for the head of the setting are the same as those for the educators.</i>	... establishes a <b>learning culture</b> in the setting for children and staff which is <b>tolerant of errors</b> and based on the well-being of the stakeholders.	... reflects on and creates a culture of mutual learning and partnership through explicit forms of cooperation with the team, the children and the home environment.	... reflects on the procedures and processes maintained or developed in the setting in terms of equality of opportunity for all children.
b)		... helps to make all relevant stakeholders aware of the need for <b>participation in education for each child</b> , e.g. by emphasising the scope of participation in education and by indicating the interplay between needs orientation, well-being and participation.	... informs the team about the newest developments relating to the mission of <i>participation in education</i> (e.g. through reports from professional conferences).	... reflects on her/his own role in the (co-)responsibility for a place of learning and education for young children (e.g. tasks, opportunities, restrictions) and if necessary seeks contact with settings with a strong culture of involvement and participation, learns about their educational principles and uses professional literature to find out about ways in which a climate of involvement and participation can be introduced.
c)		... ensures, together with the setting provider, the <b>educational participation of the staff</b> .	... creates opportunities for team involvement and development in the sense of a learning organisation and motivates active participation in professional learning activities.	... reflects on the educational participation of the staff (e.g. lifelong learning, educational opportunities at the workplace, personnel development).

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
<b>III Being aware of the specific life contexts of all children and how they explore the world according to diverse interests, competencies and developmental potentials</b>				
The early childhood educator...				
a)	... realises that each child is the bearer of individual rights "with her/his own human dignity and with an individual right to develop her/his personality according to Article 1 paragraph 1 and Article 2 paragraph 1 GG" (Bundesverfassungsgericht 24, 119).	... includes participatory elements in the daily procedures and opens up possibilities for the children to participate co-constructively e.g. in decision-making processes, learning procedures and the use of free time.	... ensures, together with the team, that all children are given an equal amount of attention, particularly during group situations.	... reflects on whether the agency of the child as an individual with specific interests and potentials is sufficiently taken note of and whether the child's stakeholder perspective is/was appropriately taken into account.
b)	... is aware that the child's education should support the development of her/his personality, potentials and skills (Article 29, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).	... takes her/his role as a supporter of educational processes seriously and is aware of the key role that he or she plays.	... makes sure, together with colleagues, that opportunities are available for stimulating the personality, potentials and skills of each child in an individual way.	... reflects on whether he or she has been successful in stimulating and promoting the child's individual potentials and skills in diverse ways.
c)	... is familiar with suitable process oriented procedures of observation and documentation, can use them in a resource oriented way and is aware of the subjective nature of perceptions and assessments.	... observes the children in their exploration of the surroundings individually and documents her/his assessment of the children's learning experiences and activities in a meaningful way through portfolios which are also attractive for children and parents.	... consults with the team in the case of irritations (e.g. general lack of interest, withdrawal) and communicates in a respectful way with parents about their observations and interpretations and her/his own.	... is aware of her/his own subjectivity in the process of observing children and reflects in a critical way about her/his own preferences, dislikes and prejudices.

Professional competence		Personal competence		
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence	
d)	... knows about the children's development of <b>concepts about the world</b> as an important precursor to knowledge acquisition.	... can organise interactions which 'provoke' the expression of subjective concepts or, for example, can infer children's concepts by observing their activities.	... provides space and time each day for the children's own ideas, enabling them to become visible and where appropriate to develop them further together.	... reflects on her/his own knowledge and subjective concepts, also regarding formative experiences in her/his own childhood.
e)	... is aware of the <b>developmental potentials</b> which group dynamics enable children to develop.	... stimulates group activities which ensure that the children's interests are regarded in an equal way and complement their educational opportunities.	... moderates the search for topics and other processes of negotiation among the children rather than exclusively specifying a topic or inferring one from observations.	... reflects on the extent to which she/he not only focuses on the needs and interests of individual children in everyday situations in the setting, but also on those of the group.
f)	... knows that intrinsically motivated, <b>exploratory processes</b> and children's <b>play</b> support their development.	... takes note of the current dynamics in the group/ group room and accordingly changes plans and procedures in a flexible and individual way (e.g. by respecting children who are 'immersed' in their play).	... provides sufficient time, in consultation with the team, for children's free play and exploratory learning and closely observes the children in their activities.	... thinks about the (play) situations in which children are particularly immersed and considers how she/he can take these into account more.
g)	... is aware of the significance of the <b>home environment as a socialising factor</b> in the child's personality and identity development.	... ensures that the individual experiences, interests and resources of the home environment are taken note of and included in the context of the ECEC setting.	... informs the home environment about her/his observations regarding the interests, competencies, strengths, challenges, etc. of the child in everyday situations in the setting. She/he uses these as the basis for exchange and reflection with the home environment about the child's development and interests.	... reflects on whether it is possible to build a bridge to the home environment by, e.g. encouraging children to bring items from home into the ECEC setting.
Professional competence		Personal competence		

	Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
h)	... is aware of the motivating and stimulating character of e.g. materials, objects, persons and spaces.	... provides opportunities for children to interact with others (e.g. with peers, group, educator, caregiver) and actively explore their surroundings in an unhampered way according to their interests and developmental status.	... makes use of diverse opportunities for providing children with objects and materials or for including other persons (e.g. grandparents) and utilises in this connection communication with the team, with the children's home environment and with the local community.	... reflects on which everyday situations offer opportunities to communicate with the children about their current interests, experiences and observations.
i)	... is aware of her/his role and responsibility in supporting the process of children's active (knowledge) acquisition and of the related significance for identity development.	... supports the children in their exploration of the world, respecting their individual learning paths, ways of experiencing and interests and involving herself/himself in these.	... communicates with the children about her observations in everyday situations in the setting (e.g. about the children's strengths) and about her suggestions for activities, etc. and develops or adapts these accordingly.	... reflects on her/his own role as a supporter of children's individual exploration of the world.

Professional competence		Personal competence	
Knowledge	Skills	Social competence	Self-competence
The head of the ECEC setting...			
a)	<i>In terms of being aware of the specific life contexts of all children and how they explore the world according to diverse interests, competencies and developmental potentials, the knowledge requirements for the head of the setting are the same as those for the educators.</i>	... ensures a <b>positive social climate</b> in the entire setting, thus creating links between the home environment and the setting for supporting the children.	... develops or maintains a positive working atmosphere through a respectful attitude, error-friendliness, participation, transparency and open communication, thus strengthening commitment to the setting.
b)		... provides and ensures all stakeholders (primarily the children) a <b>stable environment</b> and encounters insecurities with a high level of sensitivity.	... reflects on the extent to which she/he reacts in a sensitive way to the needs of children and staff and to balancing out discrepancies.

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