

TEACHER

Introducing competence - based preschool teacher education curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina
574076-EPP-1-2016-1-BA-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

MINUTES *from* THE INTRODUCTION CONFERENCE „Competences in Early Childhood Education and Care“

Date: 18-19 May 2017

Venue: University of Travnik, Bosnia and Herzegovina

At the Faculty of Education in Travnik, on 18th May 2017, with the attendance of numerous guests, project partners, the Introduction Conference titled “Competences in Early Childhood Education and Care” was officially opened within the TEACHER project, whose leader is the University of Travnik from BiH, and the only university from BiH with an opportunity to lead a project within the Erasmus + programme.

Day one, Thursday, 18th May 2017

The TEACHER project was presented in the welcome speech. The project coordinator **Selma Šeta**, LLB, presented the general project information and emphasised that the goal of this project is innovating and modernising the first cycle academic studies in Early Childhood Education and Care in Bosnia and Herzegovina by introducing a competence-based curriculum. Apart from the previously stated, the project strives to improve interactive teaching methodology and the academic staff’s transversal skills needed to modernise the entire study programme. She introduced the participants with the fact that the project will be implemented in the following 3 years, that it officially began on 15th October 2016 and that it will last until 14th October 2019. There are 11 project participants - 6 universities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 universities from the European Union and one non-academic partner – Association of Preschool Institution Employees of FBiH. This Conference has a twofold task

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- presenting the research results and making conclusions to be used as instructions and guidelines with the goal to modernise the curriculum.

The University of Travnik's Steering Committee chairman - **MD MSc Nihad Selimović** expressed immense gratitude and welcomed all the partners to the Introduction Conference - one of the TEACHER project activities. In his speech, he reviewed the important information about the project and emphasised that each project participant will, in three years, be proud of it. Among others, with this project, the University of Travnik shows that it has the potential to move away from the local setting and cooperate with universities from the European Union.

On behalf of the Faculty of Education's expert team **Amra Tuzović, Ph.D.** welcomed the representatives and project partners and emphasised that the partners made Bosnia and Herzegovina visible in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care, as well as that all the partners are ready to take on any obstacle, which they confirm today with their presence at the Faculty of Education.

In her speech, the president of Društvo zaposlenika predškolskih ustanova FBiH **Ljiljana Kovač** emphasised the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care and an increase of child participation in education, as well as expressed her gratitude to the partners, directors, parents and preschool teachers for participating in the survey. She concluded her speech with an old Chinese proverb: "If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people."

The Travnik Municipality Mayor **Admir Hadžiemrić** addressed the guests, expressed a warm welcome and stated that he is really impressed that the University of Travnik is the Erasmus + project leader, as well as congratulated the partners on implementing this project and wished them good luck and a lot of success in their future endeavours.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the Chief Cantonal Inspector **Refija Kulašin** addressed the audience by expressing immense gratitude and honour to be attending such an important project for the education system. She stated that Early

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Childhood Education and Care is highly neglected, but that it is actually really important. She emphasised that the ratio of children attending preschools is really low, that the curricula are obsolete, as well as that preparing the teaching staff, i.e. preschool teachers is of great importance in education.

She took this opportunity to express gratitude on behalf of the Minister of Education **Katica Čerkez**, who could not attend the Conference due to previously scheduled obligations, stating her words that the University of Travnik breaks down prejudice that private faculties cannot implement projects such as the TEACHER project.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs' Deputy Minister **Suvad Đafić** stressed that Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country, which is not even a candidate for entering the EU, can take part in such projects and that the University of Travnik's success in contending for it has shown that Bosnia and Herzegovina has great potential needed to be directed properly.

In the end, the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance HEA director **Enver Halilović** addressed the guests by expressing his satisfaction to be present at such a conference. He stated that the University of Travnik can be seen as an example of progress and that this is a significant step towards internationalisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially for the University of Travnik. He emphasised that these projects introduce modernisation of study programmes and congratulated the University of Travnik on such a significant success.

After the welcome speech, the project partners took part in various activities.

Professor Siniša Opić from the University of Zagreb, presented the results from the Report on preschool teachers' education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the results of the study programmes' comparative analysis. The partner institutions' curricula were shown in a presentation. Key elements from the curricula analysis were established and they served as a basis for a detailed analysis. In the end, conclusions and guidelines for further activities on modernising the institutions' curricula were presented:

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- In order to create the prerequisites for adjusting to internal and external conditions of the education process in time, they need to be continually monitored;
- The key is to get an insight into the study performance, as well as opinions of all the participants included in the education process so as to receive comparable information that will serve as a basis for reaching harmonisation;
- The curricula have to be structurally and essentially designed so that the clarity, accuracy, integrity and the process implementation are easily visible;
- Moreover, the study outcomes, methods and contents intended to achieve them have to be clearly defined;
- High quality is characterised by harmonisation with the students' needs and aspirations, the demands made by all the participants, as well as cooperation with the Agency for development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance;
- With the goal to achieve harmonisation of the previously mentioned curriculum, it is necessary to analyse the extent to which a study programme is appealing to students and the profile of candidates enrolling in a study programme in accordance with the students already enrolled in the first year of studies, as well as analyse the success of the education process, the ratio of graduate, unemployed students, conduct a sample analysis of the students' failure and evaluate the quality of the study programmes according to the students', graduates' and the faculty staff's opinions;
- These results will provide an insight into the segments that have to be changed so as to achieve as higher level of quality as possible;
- In order to achieve curricula harmonisation on a national level, it is necessary to strive towards balancing the existing or passing a new document that would be a unique starting point based on professional and scientific research, both from the Bosnian and the education theory of practice in Early Childhood Education and Care from the world, founded on Bosnian education tradition;

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- On this level, the education system is thought of as an important link in the system as a whole, together with all the renowned professionals' scientific theories based on neurological research of preschool children.
- Therefore, professionals have a duty to ensure a continuous professional development on every level, starting from the initial preschool teachers' education, in accordance with the individual and social dimensions of education.

Following the presentation given by the colleagues from the University of Zagreb, the colleagues from the Manchester Metropolitan University held their own. The topic was presenting the Report on stakeholder analysis in Early Childhood Education and Care in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Professor Karolina Kardas briefly presented the stakeholders analysed in this activity. Among others, they are: associate professionals, representatives of authorities and policy makers, preschool teacher, professors and parents. The methodology used during the stakeholder analysis was in the form of short questionnaires with predominantly qualitative questions, so as to investigate the stakeholders' attitudes in the research. The main goals of this type of approach are primarily gathering and presenting typical attitudes, usual responses, thoughts and ideas. In other words, this is not a predominantly quantitative analysis, but a short overview of the way stakeholders perceive the problems. This should serve as a guide towards their perspective when competences are made. 216 participants were included in the survey. It was concluded that most participants have the same opinion, i.e. they consider Early Childhood Education and Care vital, necessary and obligatory. According to their responses, it can also be concluded that the teaching and the quality of preschool teachers are extremely important in Early Childhood Education and Care. Moreover, the respondents emphasise the importance and necessity of a multidisciplinary approach and cooperation in relation to the preschool facilities and they wish to provide an incentive for creating working relationships with other professionals. Detailed research results will be presented through a set of recommendations about curricula

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modernisation and a report on stakeholder analysis prepared by the Manchester Metropolitan University.

The presentations given by the colleagues from the University of Zagreb and Manchester Metropolitan University were followed by a short panel discussion regarding the results of the stated research. Alongside partner institutions, the Introduction Conference guests, i.e. representatives of education policies, preschool teachers, preschool directors, associate professionals, as well as professors, parents and students participated in the discussion. The current situation in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the techniques and ways to modernise the current state of curricula in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the subject of discussion.

The panel discussion was followed by a short lunch break.

The second part of the Introduction Conference started with a presentation given by the partner institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through their presentations, representatives of the University of Bihać, University of Mostar, Independent University of Banja Luka, Herzegovina University and University of Travnik shared their experience in the implemented research and their views regarding the current condition of Early Childhood Education and Care within the partner institutions' surroundings.

In their presentation, representatives of Udruženje zaposlenika predškolskih ustanova FBiH, as a non-academic partner, presented the education policy regarding the preschool facilities' staff and harmonisation with the labour market needs. Apart from the preschool teachers' professional development, they dealt with employment statistics in public and private preschool facilities gathered via field research conducted on a representative sample of preschool teachers from preschool facilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They concluded that, despite the obtained research results from the Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (APOSOS) showing that preschool teachers have a high level of competences in almost all the areas of education, they have to face a set of challenges where additional

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knowledge and skills are necessary. This primarily regards working with children in inclusion, working with gifted children, cooperating with parents, the community, etc.

The colleagues from Matej Bel University from Slovakia followed with their presentation in which they presented and shared their experience regarding the significance of the correlation between theory and practice for competences in Early Childhood Education and Care. They presented and explained the situation in Slovakia, especially after the great transformation process in education in 1989. Among others, they focused on the necessary competences preschool teacher have to have and divided them to three basic categories:

1. Competences directed towards children;
2. Competences directed towards education processes;
3. Personal development of competences in preschool teachers.

During the activities within the Introduction Conference, presentations given by the students of BiH partner institutions were especially interesting. Through the eyes of a student, they expressed their expectations of the Early Childhood Education and Care study programmes.

The first day was completed with a workshop prepared by the EU partners. Through interactive work, they have enabled an exchange of opinions, attitudes and experience regarding the preparatory activities for the Introduction Conference.

Together with the colleagues from the University of Zagreb and the students from all the partner institutions, the colleagues from the Matej Bel University from Slovakia held a workshop on the topic Creative approaches in Early Childhood Education and Care.

The aim of this workshop was to start a discussion regarding innovative approaches in Early Childhood Education and Care in the sense of improving the quality itself. Even though quality is such a broad notion that can be interpreted in different ways, the colleagues from Matej Bel University focused on several fields, such as management and financing, obligatory

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Early Childhood Education and Care, preschool teachers' professional development and Early Childhood Education and Care curriculum.

The workshop participants strived to determine the level of their preparation for implementing pedagogical goals, values and an approach that enables children to fully develop their potential in a holistic manner during the initial training. The participants analysed the weak and strong points of their initial preparation as teachers and the results of their thought process were summarised on flipcharts in order to compare and describe the key questions and problems. As the most relevant problem, they stated the lack of practical training in the actual surroundings.

In the end, it was concluded that only qualified staff can really understand and maintain their own practice that can reach quality and help in managing the development of potential in children in a holistic manner.

Together with the rest of the partner institutions, the colleagues from the Manchester Metropolitan University held a workshop on the topic of Qualitative and quantitative methods. The aim of this workshop was that, after its conclusion, participants are enabled to understand the concepts of research and methodology and have knowledge regarding when quantitative/qualitative methods are to be applied.

At the beginning of this workshop, each participant was given papers in two different colours: yellow and pink. The pink paper was meant for qualitative and the yellow for quantitative methods. Each participant had 5 minutes to write everything they know regarding qualitative and quantitative methods. One part of the wall was intended for qualitative and the other for quantitative methods. When the 5 minute period ended, each participant stood up and glued the paper to the appropriate part of the wall.

After that, the participants were divided into 4 groups - pink, orange, yellow and green. Each participant had to find information regarding qualitative and quantitative methods, analyse them and share their knowledge with the other members of the groups in the room. The

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participants then watched a video showing the practical application of quantitative and qualitative methods and debated about which method should be represented more.

Each participant had an opportunity to learn something new, think about the workshop and share what they learnt with the group, as well as state whether their understanding of the research methodology improved.

A summary and a conclusion of the first day at the Conference followed the workshops.

Day two, Friday, 19th May 2017

The second day of the Introduction Conference began by drawing conclusions which will direct the further implementation of the project.

The colleagues from the University of Zagreb gave a short overview of the implemented Comparative analysis and once more presented the results and conclusions of the study programmes' analysis in the area of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The colleagues from the Manchester Metropolitan University gave a presentation and an overview of the project activities within the work package 2. The presentation was related to the agenda of the study visit to Manchester planned for 10th July 2017.

Following the presentations given by the colleagues from Udruženje Zaposlenika Predškolskih Ustanova FBiH on the topic: Parents as partners in the Early Childhood Education and Care system in preschool facilities, the colleagues from Matej Bel University presented the work package 3, and modernisation and innovation of the teaching methodology.

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Work meetings with the partners' representatives were held during breaks. Drawing conclusions alongside agreements for the following period and a review of activities until the end of 2017 concluded the Introduction Conference activities.

Before departing, the partners took photographs.

The successful realisation of the Introduction Conference and the TEACHER project partners' satisfaction was shown through an evaluation report in which the participants gave the highest marks.

Minute taker: Selma Seta