

Young Refugee Children in Greek Early Childhood Day Care Centers

A Toolkit for early
childhood educators



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Introduction

Dear early childhood educators,

As we all know, young refugee children undergo significant traumatic experiences as populations are forced to move from one place to another during the last years. International Organizations call on all refugee receiving countries to cooperate to ensure safety, living, and education conditions for young children (UNICEF 2019). Under this call, pre-school centres' role is seen as pivotal for integration and inclusion, as they constitute the first community outside the family into which children have to integrate.

In Greece, the registration of refugee children of over 4, has been ensured in kindergarten since 2017. However, a very much needed policy or an approach focusing on overcoming obstacles to children's registration to day-care centres (receiving children from 1-4 years old) is still missing (OCDE 2018).

The material we share with you is a handy tool you will need when you receive young refugee children and their families in your day care centre. It aims at your familiarization with the concept of respect to diversity. It helps you adopt the

practices easy to integrate into your programs, which will help smooth integration of refugee children.

The tool comprises a Guide, a set of Activity Cards, and a CD with traditional children' songs/music from Africa-Congo, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria performed by Greek musician Georgos Xaronitis.

EADAP (www.eadap.gr) completed these materials based on a long cycle of research, training, and multiyear, extensive efforts to make Greek educators respectful for cultural and other differences and sensitive to challenges and the needs of the youngest refugees and their families. We know that this work is challenging and demanding. It requires self-awareness and continuous self-reflection to carry out effective action. Although demanding, participation in this process can also be gratifying. It leads to new, creative paths, introduces new practices, and shapes new human and solidarity emotions for all children and their families.

We hope that our guide, "Young Refugee Children in Early Childhood Centres – Guide to Good Practices," will support your efforts in rendering the early childhood centres as multicolour microcosms for all children, where their identities and dreams about better future are encouraged.

Natacha Papaprokopiou
Athina Kammenou

CHAPTER 1

Accept the other:
Respect for diversity
Basic concepts



Accept the other:

Respect for diversity

Basic concepts


All children are equal.

The child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

Protection against all discrimination, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2, Paragraph 2, 1989

Let us call your attention to some terms which will help us clarify words, concepts, meanings, and expressions we often use:

What is diversity?

The term refers not only to people who are different due to their nationality and culture, but also due to different languages, religions, values, abilities, socioeconomic status, gender, and any other aspect that renders them different. Diversity recognizes and accepts that each child is different, and this is the rule and not the exception (Potter, 2007).

What is equality?

The concept of equality refers to social justice but does not imply equal treatment of all children. Educational philosophy cannot be based on equal treatment of all children; it has to provide every child with what he/she needs, which implies individualization and differentiation of our practices on case to case basis.

What is identity?

If we want to live peacefully in a society, it is essential to living in harmony with our roots. It is vital for those whose culture of origin is not the same as that of the country they live, to experience this double relationship without an internal conflict (Vandenbroeck, 2004). Some of the most significant barriers to personal development and harmonious social integration are the difficulty in recognition and the acceptance of own identity or the refusal of its elements on the one hand, and the dependence on other persons and situations, on the other.

What is prejudice?

Prejudice is an attitude or opinion developed without previous sufficient knowledge and experience, thinking or reasoning. Meertens & Pettigrew (1997) use the term 'prejudice' to describe a situation in which a person acquires tendency to extract negative judgements about a group of persons or a member of it.

What is racism?

Racism is an attitude, act, or institutional practice backed up by institutional power that subordinates people because of their skin colour or ethnic origin. This includes the imposition of one group's culture in such a way as to withhold respect for, demean, or destroy the cultures of other races. From the very beginning, young children are affected by social environment, and it is quite possible that they develop prejudices towards persons that are different from them. If these prejudices are not eradicated in time, they may lead to racism. (Derman-Sparks, 1989)

What does empathy mean?

Empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>

In the field of education, when empathy is present, the group dynamics changes and the children's behavior in and out of the classroom. These changes result in better integration of children from different backgrounds into the group, better relationships, and improved communication and cooperation skills. In this way, prejudices decrease, and respect for diversity is enhanced.

What is intercultural education?

Intercultural education is fostering the acceptance of each other, creating an atmosphere of trust, and eliminating negative stereotypes and prejudices among children in an everyday effort through dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

CHAPTER 2

**To what extent can we
help educators?**

The role of in-service continuous
training and the Synergy Project



To what extent can we help educators?

The role of in-service continuous training and the Synergy Project

A major precondition to fight racism and discrimination is to provide on-going training and support to teachers.

These training and support should enhance their skills to decrease stereotypes related to diversity, and take initiatives and responsibilities to promote all children's right to be accepted by the first out-of-the-family institution, i.e., the early childhood centre.

What is, then, the most effective training method?

SYNERGY represents a continuous in-service training program for early childhood educators conceived, launched, and implemented in Greece by EADAP for more than twenty years. SYNERGY methodology delivers training in a format of action research, implying that issues, topics, approaches, time, and duration of the training are planned together with partners. This approach can be adapted to different educational settings; it is culturally appropriate for Greece

SYNERGY approach was evaluated and found effective (Papaprokopiou & Papadakou, 2004), due to the following characteristics:

- ✓ Connections with everyday educational practices.
- ✓ Consistency with previous experiences.
- ✓ Respect for teachers' individual characteristics such as their preferences, knowledge concerns, difficulties, and resistance to the "other."
- ✓ Continuous feedback with documents adjusted to specific educators' questions.
- ✓ Support with active listening techniques, and intercultural material which educators are asked to complete with their productions and good practices (education kits, exercises of practical applications, etc.).
- ✓ Fostering the cooperation between all the staff of educational structures.
- ✓ Two-way and continuous information exchange between administration of preschool centers and trainees.

SYNERGY also has the following originality: Each training package ends with the development of "products" that constitute tools for further training projects in an extensive network of preschool centers. The present guide, for example, was written after the training project was implemented in the preschool centers and daycare centers in the Municipality of Elefsina, under the title: Building bridges - Bridging the gap, supporting wellbeing, learning, development, and integration of young refugee and migrant children in Greece.

CHAPTER 3

**Welcoming children means
welcoming their parents!**

Techniques for welcoming
parents



Welcoming children means welcoming their parents!

Techniques for welcoming parents

As early childhood educators, we must be competent to perceive parental diversity without being hindered by our own cultural reference framework. We must not face a parent as a representative of an ethnic group, but as a unique person with his/her personal views.

Group and cultural differences do exist, but individual differences are so many that group differences are meaningless.

First contact and everyday greeting

As with all parents, we should plan space and dedicate time exclusively to meet refugee parents.

During the first meeting, we welcome parents or their representatives who come from accommodation facilities. We inform them about the program content and its duration, show them around the premises, inform them about their rights and obligations, and gather information about their children or the persons who will accompany them. (For this purpose EADAP has developed a glossary in five languages) (EADAP, 2015).

In case that parents do not speak Greek, we may need an interpreter's help. An interpreter can be either a mediator or another parent who speaks Greek.

We are cautious with our non-verbal communication; we keep in mind that body-language might be interpreted differently in different cultures.

Sharing information, dialogue and negotiations

At regular intervals, we must inform parents about their children's development and accomplishments and creating appropriate conditions to make them feel comfortable. We also need to invite them to ask questions, express needs, submit requests, and support their expressed views. Through dialogue and negotiation, we can also collect information about the cultural characteristics relevant to children's behavior, dietary habits, hygiene practices, and the languages they speak at home.

In general, agreements between educators and parents can and must be reached on the level of upbringing and educational practices, but not at educational philosophy and values level.

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The meeting between teachers and parents should be considered as an accounted of two systems affecting and changing each other. According to Lejeune & Blanc, this meeting can have four different outcomes (Lejeune & Blanc, 1998).

MEETING BETWEEN PARENTS AND EDUCATORS	
ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS ZERO	There was a first contact, but there was no agreement. The parents' and the educator's routes are different, and the child stops coming to the early childhood care centre.
ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS ONE	The family conforms to the educator and the early childhood centre culture. Yet, the effect is unilateral.
ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS TWO	The meeting results in dialogue, but there is no interaction. Teachers and parents keep following their own practices. The child must cope with two different worlds.
ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS THREE	In this case, the two systems interact. Through the dialogue between the family and the educators, differences in methods, and educational philosophy, are determined and become the topic for discussion and negotiation, resulting in new practices that earlier, did not apply to the family nor the child.

The information provided by the parents and the “contracts” (agreements) we sign with them can enrich the early childhood curricula for the benefit of every child.



After discussing with the parents, we were divided into small groups for the end of the school year celebration. Each of us, depending on his/her abilities, undertook specific tasks.

One group decorated the yard; another one brought the sweets, others livened up dancing and singing, and dads set up the speakers. When the celebration ended, another group tidied up and cleaned the place.

Teacher, EADAP, 2011:48

CHAPTER 4

**Now, what do we do
in the classroom?**

Pedagogical approaches
and framing techniques



Now, what do we do in the classroom?

Pedagogical approaches and framing techniques

The critical role of active listening

Active listening is a part of every quality pedagogical program. It provides children with essential opportunities (time, space, and options) to express their thoughts, worries, feelings, ideas, and wishes and see that adults are interested in what they have to say.

Active listening means that we can hear children's voices even when they are expressed in multiple creative ways beyond talking. It especially helps children who come from different language and cultural environments (Clark&Moss, 2010).

We listen not only with our ears but with all our senses. And, there are thousands of languages, symbols, and codes we use to express ourselves and communicate.

Rinaldi, 2006: 49.

Active listening is especially useful for decoding non-verbal expression and communication. During any interaction, we send and receive non-verbal messages containing information about us and others at the same time.

The cultural context and the expression of emotions, which are defined and expressed differently in different cultures, play an essential role.

HOW DO WE PRACTICE TO LISTEN TO CHILDREN ACTIVELY?

A. By observing them and keeping a journal

By observing children’s behavior, we can gather valuable information without asking questions, since children can express themselves not only through talking but also through actions. We can observe children and, systematically, document their reactions and behavior in different pedagogical situations such as arrival and departure time, when they play alone or with the others inside and outdoors, during the meals, etc.).

Daily observation grid of children behavior

Name of children:

Activity: -----

Observation time: -----

Date: -----

NOW, WHAT DO WE DO IN THE CLASSROOM?

BEHAVIOUR	MAHMOUD	HELEN	BAI
Watches from a distance	✓		
Imitates other children		✓	
Exchanges material			✓
Claims material			✓
Protests	✓	✓	
Creates conflict		✓	
Leaves the group	✓		



Group of children 12-19 months old

Educators: _____

The week went by rather calmly. We had some problems with Helen and Fatima in the mornings, as they still had difficulty separating from their parents. Our choice to put them together did not help much. It may be useful to consider some other options such as a new center with things they can bring from home. When they were out in the yard, they were quiet and relaxed. Fatima played in the sand with George, who seems to like her.

During the meal, she was quiet. All children, except Helen and Dimitris, eat by themselves. We must talk to Dimitris' mother about it.

Plans for the following week:

- ✓ Talk to Dimitris' mother about pureed food
- ✓ Create a center with things that children bring from home
- ✓ Pair Fatima with George during sand activity

B. Through the young children's body language

The body constitutes a means of experiencing and expressing an individual's psyche. During the infancy and at the young age, the use of the body and the movement to understand the world around him, to find the way to relate to it, and participate in its formation is especially intense.

The educator must encourage children in every action to control and direct their body, to enrich their mobility, not to mimic stereotyped movements, but instead to choose their way of movement freely. At the same time, the educator provides safe, available and correctly set up space.

C. Through artistic expression

In preschool centres, art is conveyed in different forms: music, dancing, theatre, mimicking, pantomime, puppetry, literature, poetry, photography, and visual arts (painting, collage, and sculpture). Through art, children are also provided with alternative methods to express themselves and communicate more directly and effectively without the need to use language. Art is an international language with a unique advantage of expressing feelings and emotions and thinking and knowledge at the same time. Artistic expression allows refugee children to share the customs of their cultures and, in this way, feel that the nursery centre's small society accepts them.

The focus of artistic expression is not the creation but the feeling which is expressed throughout the artistic activity, the child's choices, negotiations and questions.

HOW DO WE PLAN AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAM FOR THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN INTO THE DAY CARE CENTRE?

Some time, when children face cultural differences, they display negative behaviour which hurts the other children. Even though the children’s reaction to diversity is expected, it is necessary to intervene so that prejudice is not allowed to be established.

Teaching politeness is not enough. Children need help to understand why they feel uncomfortable.

(Derman –Sparks 2008: 129).

A pedagogical approach against prejudices may include the following main objectives: (Vandenbroeck, 2004).

Cultivating development of self-image, self-knowledge, and self-confidence, and nurturing the feeling of "belonging" to a group.

This aim is set at a very early age and relates to building a positive self-image and being accepted by the groups to which we belong.

Promoting communication between every child and people of different origin.

To combat prejudices, it is significant to nourish empathy and develop children’s social skills. It is necessary to teach ALL children that the diversity is valuable, and that it is wrong to

- reject whatever differs from them (e.g. black people are bad).

Encourage children’s critical thinking about prejudices.

Children from the age of 4 or 5 can easily recognize the difference between right and wrong and distinguish, on their own, offensive scenes and expressions.

Develop children’s ability to defend themselves and the others, when facing discriminations.

This aim is a step further for children to understand that they must not tolerate any discrimination, and that social change is achievable if we all cooperate.

We encourage children to accept diversity, when:

- We focus on the cases where children are accepted or rejected by their peers. We try to explain the reasons why they are accepted or rejected and organize activities to make children feel comfortable with “the different”.
- We take action immediately in cases where children from minorities experience prejudices and stereotype behaviors from other children.
- We stop the activity and state categorically that this behaviour is unacceptable. We enter into discussion with the children and try to find alternative ways to communicate.
- We explain how the child that was subjected to the “attack” feels and how words can hurt us. We comfort the child that felt rejected.
- We encourage children not to use stereotyped language.

HOW DO WE HELP CHILDREN GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE GREEK LANGUAGE?

Research literature shows that educators tend to devote more time to children who ‘talk’ than to those who ‘do not talk’. This means that maybe educators devote less time to refugee children. Therefore, it is necessary to devote time to those children and respect the efforts they make to communicate in another language. At the same time, it is important to appreciate and support their native language.

In our centre, Greek is the common language, but all other languages were welcome. Together with the children we wrote bilingual glossaries with everyday words, and always managed to find interpreters to facilitate communication with the parents. They found this initiative so touching that they did everything they could to contribute to the good functioning of the centre.

Teacher of EADAP, 2011: 38-39

The following strategies may help in our communication with the refugee children:

- We learn some words from the children’s native language in parallel with the Greek ones. Children feel welcome and safe when seeing and hearing that their native language is being used.
- We use specific objects and gestures to communicate with the children that cannot communicate orally.

- We engage families by urging them to speak in their language both at home and while visiting the day care centre. We invite them to participate in the activities.
- We encourage children to communicate verbally in Greek.
- As we talk, we repeat, and we describe our actions.
- We give children time to organize their words and express themselves without pressure.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR COMBATING PREJUDICE IN THE CLASSROOM?

- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Music from the countries of children's origin present in the group
- ✓ The dramatizations which help all children put themselves in someone else's shoes
- ✓ Introducing picture and written glossaries in different languages
- ✓ Telling stories and reading books in different languages with the help of parents
- ✓ Implementing projects and activities addressing different topics, e.g. "water," which may be relevant to situations related to the country of origin
- ✓ Organizing events related to topics, situations, symbols and objects from different cultures

On the cards that accompany the text, we propose some activities that can help early childhood educators deal with intercultural education programs.

سوانح احمدی حضرتی



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