








Project: Kit@ - Media competence training for professionals in daycare centres and relevant institutions in rural areas of Europe

REPORT AUTHOR: Dr. Miroslav Sklenka – Executive Director of Skola dokoran - Wide Open School n. o., Ziar nad Hronom, Slovakia



FOCUS GROUPS – FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT (August 2020)

The multiplier events were held as focus group workshops. They were carried out in each partner country. These activities were also part of a very extensive test phase and were carried out after the completion of the development work. They were thus an external evaluation of the entire project work. Focus group workshops were held as practical applications with representatives from the wider target group or the social partners.

They contained the following elements:

-  Presentation of the project and the developed products at a glance
-  Instruction in dealing with the developed products
-  Practical application by the auditorium
-  Evaluation
-  Recording the results.

HOW WE DEFINED OUR FOCUS GROUPS?

-  A focus group is a small group of six to ten people led through an open discussion by a skilled moderator. The group needs to be large enough to generate a rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out.
-  The focus group moderator nurtures disclosure in an open and spontaneous format. The goal of a moderator is to generate a maximum number of different ideas and opinions from as many different people in the time allotted.

- ✚ The ideal amount of time to set aside for a focus group is anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. Beyond that most groups are not productive and it becomes an imposition on participant time.
- ✚ Focus groups are structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions – usually no more than 10 – but the discussion is free-flowing. Ideally, participant comments will stimulate and influence the thinking and sharing of others. Some people even find themselves changing their thoughts and opinions during the group.
- ✚ It takes more than one focus group on any one topic to produce valid results – usually three or four. You will know you have conducted enough groups (with the same questions) when you are not hearing anything new anymore.

The aim of the project is to allow ECEC teachers to promote (digital) media literacy of preschool children, using a training concept in the form of an interactive manual, e-learning, and practical work instructions.

SEVERAL GOALS we pursued by leading the focus groups:

- ✚ Get feedback – insight deep look from practitioners on the quality and contribution of an interactive manual to support media literacy of preschool children.
- ✚ Summarize specific positive elements of the practice manual.
- ✚ Summarize suggestions for possible proofreading of the interactive manual.

The reason and objective of implementing these focus groups was to test and directly and actively evaluate the results of the project with reference to the feedback of the target group of these resources, that is, ECEC teachers. This feedback had a high priority in the project as it could have led to final changes in the results, since all results of the project must be usable in a sustainable way and oriented to the target group.

DATES OF REALIZED FOCUS GROUPS:

Germany 1. Focus group: March 5, 2020 in Finsterwalde, Germany – 16 participants

Germany 2. Focus group: June 19, 2020 in Finsterwalde, Germany – 8 participants

Slovakia: June 9, 2020 in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia – 10 participants

Bulgaria: July 1, 2020 in Sofia, Bulgaria – 10 participants

Greece: May 31, 2020 in Hermoupolis, Syros, Greece – 10 participants

Portugal: July 8, 2020 (online) – 20 participants of the online focus group









INTRODUCTION:

Media literacy is an essential skill in children’s daily lives, both in their understanding of the world around them and in their personal and social development. With simple activities and guided by pedagogical objectives, ECEC professionals can promote the development of creative, active, reflective, and participatory skills, which are fundamental throughout children’s lives. Media education does not have a separate elaboration in many of our national curriculums, as for example, the linguistic or natural sciences are among the cross-cutting themes. The issue of media education is covered by methodological manuals or publications of various pedagogical publishers. Sometimes teachers get to this issue through short-term training organized by state or other institutions that are entitled to do so. Although we do not have specific statistical data, based on experience from pedagogical practice, it can be argued that there is interest in this topic on the part of teaching professionals. However, as this is a cross-cutting theme, it is important to raise teachers’ awareness of its need and relevance. Since the children are interested and entertained by media, including the modern digital ones, it is natural to consider their sensible and meaningful application in pedagogical activities. It is necessary to look for a balance between receptive and productive media activities in pre-primary and primary education. The background of these activities must be based on education for ethical communication and social responsibility. From this point of view, we consider activities, whether publishing or direct educational workshops, to be desirable in today’s society.

PARTICIPANTS:

- ✚ The target group consisted of educators and professionals at ECEC centres both from private and public sector, ECEC teachers, future ECEC teachers, directors, trainers, librarian teachers, social workers, youth coordinators.
- ✚ Participants were recruited via personal invitations, Facebook invitations, e-mails

EQUIPMENT USED:

-  Interactive White Board
-  Screen
-  Data projector
-  PCs
-  Laptops
-  Tablets
-  Smartphones
-  Handouts.

CONTENT OF DISCUSSIONS:

Carried out focus groups made it possible to evaluate openly and through debate and discussion, with sharing of opinions, perceptions, and practices, the resources produced within the scope of the project and its suitability for the exploitation of media literacy with young children.

The topic and resources presented were considered relevant and useful for the pedagogical practices of early childhood educators with young children, highlighting the way resources were developed (e.g. articulation between theory and practice, tips, practical examples) and referring to the extent to which this supports the development, application, and transfer of knowledge and skills developed with these resources, within the scope of media literacy. The usefulness and relevance of these resources was also highlighted in the current pandemic context, with COVID requiring the use of distance learning with young children, in a context of few resources available for ECEC professionals.

For **IO2**, the following contents were presented: concept of the media literacy and why it is important, representation of media education and themes, important considerations in media literacy in early childhood education (e.g. child development, pedagogy), the role of the media in the child's life, the children's world media, partnership with parents, media selection criteria, diversified resources to be explored. The nine modules of the interactive manual were also presented: basics of media literacy, basic knowledge of media technology, children's media worlds, media heroes, advertising, photo, stop-motion and video, audio and coding, the contents of the individual modules were briefly explained.

Regarding **IO4**, the objectives of the practical examples were presented and explored. The aim of the practical examples is to provide practical instructions for media pedagogical work with children that are suitable for everyday use. There are 10 practical examples at the end of the project.

Intellectual outputs were shared with the participants prior to the focus group workshops, so that they could analyse the resources and give their feedback during the focus group.

CONCLUSION:

The interactive manual provides a comprehensive set of technical information processed in a meaningful and clear language. Respondents appreciated the interactive nature of the manual and its easy orientation in it. We assumed that a comprehensive handbook supplemented by a number of practical examples will engage the attention of teaching professionals.

By leading the focus groups, we aimed to obtain feedback from practitioners on the benefits of an interactive manual focused on the development of media competencies. Based on the analysis of the statements of the respondents from the focus groups, we state that they evaluated the Interactive Handbook as beneficial for their work, but they perceive its contribution to a large extent in the field of improving technical skills and digital competencies. Respondents rated very positively that the authors of the Interactive manual count on new, digital technologies in the educational process, which they recommend integrating into various educational activities across the entire curriculum. They appreciated that these activities include a child who is actively learning. The activity is manifested in various possibilities of self-sacrifice, e.g. through the creation of a film, photograph or sound recording.

The **interactive manual** gives teaching professionals initial tools how to overcome obstacles and also give the teachers more confidence in the implementation of media education in ECEC institutions. Children will acquire knowledge by using new media in a playful way, develop new skills in an interesting and creative way, explore and thus learn via safe and recreational content. Children will have multiple linguistic and cognitive benefits. The interactive manual was considered as a useful resource, especially at this moment, with the dilemmas associated with the use of technologies. It was considered an interesting resource and the practical component, the tips and examples presented were valued, as they show the feasibility of approaching these themes with young children, even themes that they considered difficult to address with children in this age group.

In general terms, the educators agreed that this resource is positive for their pedagogical practices with children in context of kindergarten. They highlighted the articulation between the different elements present that create conditions for educators to apply media education in their work context. They also emphasized the possibility of accessing external resources, with links, and the fact that it is a resource that allows the extension and search for new resources. Participants also referred to the importance of exploring step by step and progressively complexifying, based on the structure of the interactive manual. They also reinforced the relevance and importance of these themes today, the sequential nature and good fit of the information, in accordance with what is expected in ECEC, highlighting the articulation between theory and practice in a practical, simple and not very extensive manner, where articulation with the practice is visible. Participants of focus groups revealed that this resource allows them to approach education with a playful vision, giving visibility to topics that are rarely discussed with students (e.g. advertising). Thus, these resources make it possible to fill gaps that exists both in terms of training in this area for early childhood educators and in the presentation of practical proposals for young children.

The ECEC teachers consider the content of the manual to be helpful in improving the medial literacy of children. It is well structured, clear, contains simple explanations, has a high practical relevance and can be used as a reference book.

Regarding the **practical examples**, participants highlighted the ability to visualize in practice how to approach certain contents, guiding and giving greater confidence, even to educators who are not comfortable with the use of technologies. The participants highlighted the current relevance of these resources, either due to the increased use of digital technologies, including by young children, or by the fact that they are everyday resources and of great interest to children.

The developed practical examples were positively evaluated with regard to their integration into the daily work in the ECEC centres. Lack of time and staff is sometimes seen as a problem. Overall, however, the practical instructions are very well suited for preschool children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Due to the overall positive responses, it can only be stated that the results from output 2 and output 4 have reached the target groups very well and are very well accepted.

Few suggestions:

- ✚ Strengthen the emphasis on ethical communication and accountability.
- ✚ In places where it is appropriate to strengthen children's metacognitive abilities, focus attention on promoting critical thinking.
- ✚ The project team should ensure that resources and proposals are regularly updated according to the educational trends, making new technological media tools known and providing guidelines on how they could be explored with children of this age group.
- ✚ The manual and practical examples should be printed and disseminated to the various school clusters to enhance the impact of these resources on the educational community.