

Brief description of the project

The focus of this project lies within the training procedures of in-service educators. More specifically, the issue at hand is that the training procedures for in-service educators are not always accurate regarding their actual needs, or easy to be organized without taking them out of their classrooms.

Possible causes for this problem can be attributed to:

- a) Effective training procedures can be applied in small numbers of teachers and small audiences. Thus, training large numbers of educators requires ample time and high costs.
- b) In most occasions, the contents of training procedures are not addressing the actual needs of each educator, but instead they address general topics decided/chosen by ‘external experts’
- c) The majority of educators, even in distant trainings, find it difficult to express and share the feeling of personal difficulties and problems about their educational practices.
- d) Taking early educators out of their classrooms requires substitute teachers something that in turn has increased costs.
- e) At a personal level several educators avoid to participate or participate rarely in training procedures because of limited personal time, family obligations, etc.

The current project aspires to develop an alternative approach for the professional development of early educators. The project aims to provide to practitioners the methodology and the instruments for self-evaluation and self-improvement with a ‘low cost’ way. To achieve this goal, the project will implement to the educational field an innovative technique named Discrete Choice Modeling (DCM). The DCM is widely used in marketing, biostatistics and other scientific areas, while its use in education is still very sparse. The usefulness of the DCM is that it reveals the real and actual preferences of the responders, by extracting their representations about a topic.

By implementing the DCM method in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), the project will develop a self-assessment tool and a self-improvement educational package to investigate and in turn to support the way early childhood educators promote physical activities in their classroom. Physical activities in ECEC were selected as the domain for which the Self-Improvement Educational Package (SIEP) will be initially developed, because of the integral part physical activity has in the development and learning of young children (CEECD, 2011, OECD, 2001; 2012).

The project will be implemented in four phases:

1. Development of the Teacher Self-Assessment Assistant (TSAA). The initial development of the self-assessment tool based on the DCM approach. The TSAA will contain the most important attributes for promoting physical activities in ECEC.
2. Self-assessment phase. Test the validity and reliability of the TSAA in a pilot and then a main study. At the end of this phase, the TSAA will be a valid and reliable instrument ready to be applied in the ECEC field practice.
3. Development of the Self-Improvement Educational Package (SIEP). The SIEP will be developed based on the attributes contained in the TSAA in order to include supportive materials for all the dimensions of promoting physical activities in ECEC. This way, according to the feedback they will receive from the completion of TSAA, they will be able to use the SIEP and design their personal training agenda.
4. Self-improvement phase. Early educators will fill in the TSAA and get feedback about their weaknesses and strengths in promoting physical activities in ECEC. The SIEP will be provided to them and it is anticipated that based on their self-evaluation they will design their personal training agenda based on the contents of the SIEP. Any changes in their competences regarding the promotion of physical activities will be measured. Additional measures will assess any impact on their students’ physical activity levels

The main innovation of this project is that it attempts to invent an easy, individualized, and ‘low cost’ method for the self-improvement of early childhood educators.

Additional innovations within the project are:

- The implementation of an innovative method in education (Discrete Choice Model)
- The assessment of the educators’ competences regarding the physical activity domain of ECEC.
- The development of a self-assessment instrument (Teacher Self-Assessment Assistant) and a self-improvement package (SIEP) for a specific domain of ECEC.
- The provision of the resources for the self-improvement of the educators in an easy and low cost way.