Building partnership
with parents
in inclusive ECEC

Catalogue of inspirational resources



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- VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years)
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Table of contents

1 Introduction 4

2 A 'ready-to-share' literature review 5

A. Inclusive Early Childhood Education - Literature review 5

B. Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care 6

C. Voices into Action: Promoting learner and family participation in educational decision-making 6

3 Three case studies report 7

4 The tool 'Connecting with parents' as a central resource 7

5 Extra inspirational resources 8

A. Inclusive ECEC Environment Self-Reflection Tool 8

B. What if Marit's or Abel's parents knock at your door? 8

C. The All-Inclusive Game 9

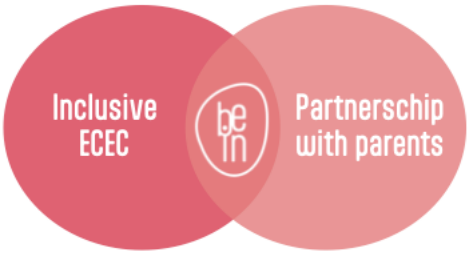
D. The *Pencils* short movie 9

E. The little astronaut 10

F. A tool to make a child portrait 10

Catalogue of inspirational resources

1 Introduction



For three years (2022 - 2025), the partners from the **Erasmus+ project Be-In** engaged in an action research project at the intersection of two key aspects of early childhood education and care (ECEC): inclusion and partnership with parents.

All partners from the three countries (Iceland, Belgium and Portugal) started with the conviction that both topics are essentials in their work with children. Throughout the process, they learned to critically reflect more and more on what inclusion and partnership with parents truly mean. It is one thing to say that we consider parents as expert of their child, but it is another thing to really embody this in daily practices. At the start of the project, all pilot ECEC centres were already considered as inclusive ECEC centre. However, they still learned to be more open for on-going discussions on what inclusion means in their daily practices, instead of seeking a fixed definition. This openness allowed them to engage their entire team in a transformative process.

> *"It's easy to say we see parents as experts. We all started this project with the conviction that we already considered parents as experts. But the more the project was advancing, the more we noticed how little we know about what this really means 'to see parents as experts', and how much we can still explore and learn in how to adjust our practices and our actions to really enact it."*
>
> - *Be-In* partner, final dissemination event

During these three years, they developed their specific Be-In reflection tool: 'Connecting with parents', but they also made use of different high-quality, existing resources, at European level but also in each country, to enrich their reflection process with their entire team. In this catalogue of inspirational resources, Be-In partners share a range of resources they used during their journey.

To read more about Be-in project, you can also read *Stories and experiences from Be-In: an overview* available on: www.vbjk.be/en/project/be-in/

2 A 'ready-to-share' literature review

At the start of the project, it was necessary for the consortium to have a common framework to align their work in the same direction and allow in-depth discussions among the partners. The partners from Ghent University conducted a literature review on both topics (inclusion and partnership with parents) with the goal to provide all partners with definitions of the important concepts, as well as a common conceptual framework to initiate the reflections. They presented their literature review in two PowerPoint presentations, one on each focus, during the Be-In training week in October 2022, in Águeda, Portugal. We decided to give access to those presentation in that ready-to-share format, which allows all partners and interested organisations to adapt, translate and use the presentation slides with their own teams, partners and students back home.

Both presentations can be found online: www.vbjk.be/en/project/be-in/

The literature review highlighted three important references, which were foundational in the Be-In journey, that we highly recommend consulting directly.

REFERENCE A

A. Inclusive Early Childhood Education - Literature review

LINK



In 2017, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education conducted an extensive analysis of existing literature on inclusion in ECEC in order to:

- identify and promote the characteristics of quality in IECEC
- conduct a qualitative analysis of 32 examples of IECEC services across Europe
- describe how European ECE practitioners perceive inclusion and how are they trying to make their provision more inclusive?
- organise, in a bioecological model, 25 themes which could be clustered in 5 aspects.

The Be-In partners found it enlightening to be able to picture in one schema all aspects that plays a role in inclusion of children with special needs, a complexity with which they juggle every day. It was an acknowledgment of what they perceived, and it put common (English) words on important concepts.

THE REPORT IS AVAILABE IN ENGLISH, BUT RELATED TOOLS ARE TRANSLATED IN DIFFERENT EU LANGUAGES (SEE ALSO RESOURCE A)

REFERENCE B

B. Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care

LINK



As part of the European Union, an expert group was set up (ET2020 Working Group on ECEC) to offer a forum for the exchange of experiences and best practices on the professionalisation of ECEC staff and leaders. Over a two-year period (2018-2020), the working group discussed how to advance high-quality ECEC, with a special focus on inclusion and staff development. The working group included national experts from 35 countries and representatives from eight European organisations with expertise in ECEC, as well as three European or international organisations.

From the question 'How to work for higher quality and more inclusive ECEC system?', their Toolkit for *inclusive ECEC* includes, in an accessible way:

- Exchanges of best practices and input of experts;
- Examples of ECEC inclusive services for children 0-5 in 34 countries;
- Practical solutions to inspire policy and practitioners.

An up-to-date reference document to keep close to distribute to different stakeholders. *(The group also produced the report: "How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff?")*

THE TOOLKIT IS AVAILABLE IN **ENGLISH**.

REFERENCE C

C. Voices into Action: Promoting learner and family participation in educational decision-making

LINK



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education initiated, with their 30 members countries, the project *Voices into action*, with the goal to indicate effective ways of promoting the voices of learners and their families in decision-making processes.

They dray on the 'Lundy model of participation' which has proved in Be-In project to be a very interesting framework to bring discussions and reflections a step further on voices of parents and of children.

The Luny model includes four dimensions:

- space (Do they have the opportunity to express their voices?)
- voice (How can they express they voices?)
- audience (Are there voices listened to? By who?)
- influence (Which impact bring their voices?).

THE REPORT IS AVAILABLE IN **ENGLISH**.
DIFFERENT REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LUNDY MODEL OF PARTICIPATION CAN BE FOUND IN OTHER LANGUAGES.

3 Three case studies report

How to strengthen the competences of ECEC professionals in building partnership with parents within inclusive ECEC?

This question was explored in this Erasmus+ project (2022-25) in three countries, Portugal, Belgium and Iceland. Each local consortium conducted in two pilots ECEC centres a three-year action research, from their own contextualised specific learning questions, exploring this complex and rich interplay between inclusion and partnership with parents in ECEC.

Each ECEC centre experimented and documented with new actions to strengthen the partnership with all parents, with special attention of parent of children with special needs. Their trajectories, with challenges, reflections, discussions, 'aha' moments and solutions - show how small actions can lead to transformative change in an organisation – and even beyond.

Their stories are developed in three case studies - one for each country - meant as inspiration for any organisation that wants to engage in such journey.

The three country reports can be found at: www.vbjk.be/en/project/be-in/

4 The tool 'Connecting with parents' as a central resource

Throughout the Be-In project, the partners from all countries worked together on the **reflection tool *Connecting with Parents***. This tool is designed to capture the complexities of coaching ECEC professionals in their interactions with parents, particularly those of children with special needs. The partners' efforts ran parallel to the implementation of actions in all pilots ECEC centres ensuring that insights from practice informed the tool's development and vice versa. The aim of this tool is to establish and maintain a relationship of trust with parents, by strengthening ECEC educators' skills and confidence. From a common English version, each country developed its own version, in their own language, which nuances that reflects their reality.

Each tool is composed by about 28 cards, in 6 dimensions:

- building a relationship of trust, positive image of the child
- shared care through an alliance with parents
- connecting parents with each other
- transition to school and out-of-school care
- accessible communication with parents

The cards can be selected and used in a flexible way, according to the context. Each card proposes reflective questions, inspirations and ideas and links to other existing tools and resources in each country.

The tools are available for download and print here: www.vbjk.be/en/project/be-in/

5 Extra inspirational resources

This section present come of the extra tools and methods used and explored by the partners during the project. Each tool is accessible with a click!

TOOL A

A. Inclusive ECEC Environment Self-Reflection Tool

LINK



Derived from the work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (see REFERENCE A), this tool proposes simple questions to start a reflection on inclusion within an ECEC organisation. It allows to sketch the baseline situation: what happens already? Towards which changes would the organisation be aiming for?
This Self-Reflection Tool focuses on increasing IECE environments' capacity to enable all children's participation, where 'participation' means attending and being actively engaged in activities and interaction.
Its availability in different languages made it a useful tool when working in a consortium with different partners. However, we refined the baseline study in this Be-In project with other tools (see TOOL B and C

THE TOOL IS AVAILABLE IN 26 LANGUAGES, AMONG OTHER **ENGLISH, ICELANDIC, PORTUGUESE** AND **DUTCH.**

TOOL B

B. What if Marit's or Abel's parents knock at your door?

LINK



Interview fragments from a research project, directed by Elisabeth De Schauwer, Ghent University, allow to dive into two cases of inclusion and partnership with parents. The case of Marit gives the perspective of parents of a child aged 0-2 years, while the case of Abel is related to the experience of parents of a 2-4 years-old child.
These cases can be used as a trigger for discussions in your local team, to reflect on your vision about inclusion and working with parents. The tool proposes a thorough range of questions to pick from, to orient and enrich the conversation.
Arising from the question "What would it be like in your organisation if Marit's of Abel's parents knocked at your door", the tool allows a team to draw a complete picture of actual practices and vision on inclusion and partnership with parents.
During the initial phase of the Be-In project, it allowed the partners to go deeper in documenting their baseline situation and to refine their learning questions, from concrete, recognisable situations.

THE TOOL IS AVAILABLE **ENGLISH** AND **DUTCH.**

TOOL C

C. The All-Inclusive Game

LINK



The All-Inclusive game is a methodology to reflect with teams on inclusive childcare for children with specific support needs. How would you approach that specific situation? While playing, you gain a powerful vision on inclusion.
Children discover early on that there are others who look, smell, move and communicate differently. How we handle and respond to this depends on how the trusting persons around us handle it, such as parents, caregivers, siblings.
Would you like to reflect with your team about inclusive ECEC?
During Be-In, for both Belgium pilots, playing the game with their whole team during a pedagogical meeting, was a turning point in defining their learning questions, but also in making this Be-In a team journey.

THIS GAME IS ONLY AVAILABLE **DUTCH.**
CONTACT CITY OF GHENT FOR INFORMATION OR TO ORDER
(dienst.kinderopvang@stad.gent).

TOOL D

D. The *Pencils* short movie

LINK



Pencils is an 3D animated short visualizing the sometimes difficult to explain concept of "inclusion". The short has been made by students from course digital arts and entertainment, Howest college in Belgium, Kortrijk for the Belgium organisation "Parents for inclusion", striving for more inclusion in education and society.
It speaks for itself, without words, and offers a very soft check-in for any meetings, trainings, etc. about inclusion.

There are other similar short films, to be used to start a conversation on the topic inclusion:

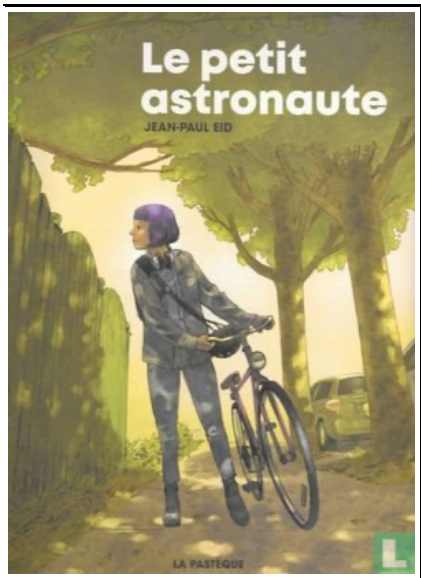
- La petite casserole d'Anatole (in French), was first a book, and then became a short film.
- *Quatre petits coins de rien du tout* is a children's book, which has been filmed.

THE SHORT MOVIE ***PENCILS*** CAN BE USED IN **ALL LANGUAGES!**

TOOL E

E. The little astronaut

LINK



The little astronaut is a graphic novel by Jean-Paul Eid that tells the story of a family with a child – Tom – with cerebral palsy. It brings us into the first years of Tom's life, with a very sensitive close up on the reality of the parents. It illustrates their quest for an inclusive ECEC centre, showing what inclusion can look like and what it can mean for a family.

During the Be-In project, we often started presentations or meeting by reading a few pages of this fantastic book and reflecting on it.

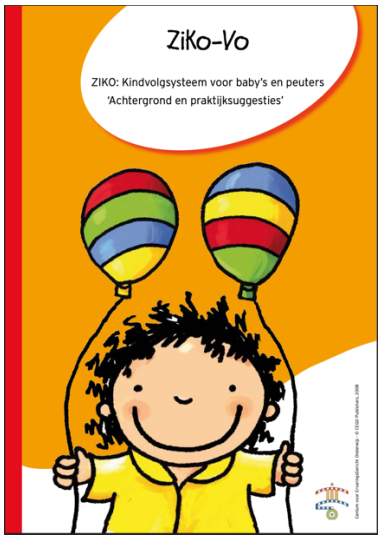
Jean-Paul Eid also made illustrations for different tools on inclusion in ECEC for *L'Observatoire des touts-petits du Québec*. Reports are in French, but nicely illustrated material can be downloaded.

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL HAS BEEN ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN **FRENCH**, BUT HAS ALREADY BEEN TRANSLATED IN DIFFERENT LANGAGES (AMOUNG OTHER **DUTCH** AND **PORTUGUESE**)

TOOL F

F. A tool to make a child portrait

LINK



The process-oriented self-evaluation instrument for care settings (SiCs) is designed to help settings to get aware of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to create the best possible conditions for children to develop. It is based on the observation of children's wellbeing and involvement, as developed by the Leuven scales for involvement and well-being. Is has been developed by CEGO, a research center based at Leuven University.

It allows to make a child portrait (of child's profile), starting from its strengths, which can be discussed with parents. Both in Belgium and Portugal, it is often used to support conversation with parents about their child, based on the observations made in the ECEC centre.

In Dutch, CEGO developed a new version of this observation tool named *Kijk ik*.

THE ORGINAL *ZIKO-VO* WAS PRODUCED IN **DUTCH**, BUT ADAPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE IN **ENGLISH**, **FRENCH** AND **PORTUGUESE**.