

Attention, Kids' Perspectives!

Improving ECEC together with children
User's Guide

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Dear pedagogues, ECEC administrators, consultants, trainers, educational authorities and parents

Children have a right to be seen, heard and asked. They have a right to “the present day” (J. Korczak), to be treated with consideration and to have their human rights respected.

Children play an active role in shaping the world and their interactions with adults and other children. Our task is to be attentive to the different ways children express themselves, to understand their perspectives and “translate” them when necessary, and to include children systematically in efforts to improve the quality of ECEC and of life in general.

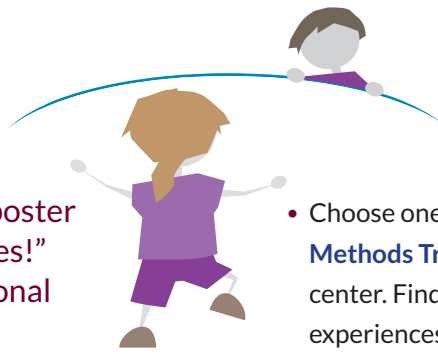
To ensure this is the case, a methodological tool kit has been developed and tested as part of the project

Children as Actors in Improving the Quality of ECEC. Called the *Methods Treasure – Improving ECEC Together with Children*, it provides children with a wide range of possibilities for communicating what they think makes an ECEC center “good.” It is available in German and can be ordered online at www.achtung-kinderperspektiven.de.



The poster “Attention, Kids’ Perspectives! Improving ECEC together with children” is the result of a comprehensive project that included both research and practice-development segments. It visualizes 23 quality dimensions from the perspective of children at ECEC centers, grouping the dimensions into seven “quality areas.” The poster provides insight into the evidence-based findings on what children aged 4 to 6 feel is important for an ECEC center, what they would like and what they need in order to feel happy and safe and to learn well in their own way.

The 23 quality dimensions invite you to see things as children do by considering on your own and, above all, by discussing as a group the importance that each of the quality dimensions is already being given at your ECEC center. Do you feel changes are needed and, if so, what are your ideas for realizing them? You play a key role in giving any such changes concrete form within your pedagogical practices. At the same time, the quality of an ECEC center can only be further developed in dialogue with others and by including the perspectives of multiple actors – educational authorities, administrators, instructors, parents and children.



How can you integrate the poster “Attention, Kids’ Perspectives!” into your everyday professional activities?

The quality dimensions depicted in the poster can be used as **input for your in-house quality-development process**:

- They provide information at a glance about findings from a current research project.
- They remind you daily that being aware of and honoring children’s perspectives is at the heart of pedagogical processes and serves as a seismograph of all measures used to improve quality.
- They invite you to discuss and consider with your team, parents and children the questions: What is the significance of each quality dimension at your ECEC center? Which dimensions are important to the children there and which are not?

Together with the Methods Treasure – Improving ECEC Together with Children, the poster offers you different options for **actively including children’s perspectives in your ECEC center**:

- Choose one of the quality dimensions depicted in the poster and work with the **questions** printed on the relevant card in the Methods Treasure.

- Choose one of the **data collection methods from the Methods Treasure** and begin using it at your ECEC center. Find out for yourself which topics and experiences are particularly important to the children at your facility. You can compare them with the quality dimensions in the poster, which are the result of in-depth research. You are sure to discover new aspects together with the children at your center! To ensure you can analyze the collected data, our Methods Treasure also contains an analysis card for each collection method along with an analysis example.
- Launching a dialogue and a quality-development process that takes a multiplicity of perspectives into account requires the very important step of **documenting and presenting** children’s points of view. You can use six documentation cards to publicize your insights and findings about kids’ perspectives, share them with your team and with parents and children, and initiate a conversation or discussion.

With our Methods Treasure, we are inviting you and the children at your ECEC center to begin an exciting journey of learning and discovery. Thanks to the methodical shift in perspective, you will not only find out much more about the children’s views, you will also learn more about your own. The children will open a window for you onto the world as they experience and see it. So be curious and attentive, look closely, listen carefully, don’t rush and trust the kids to show you the way!

ATTENTION!

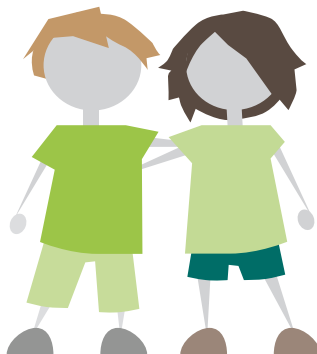
Children have a right to consideration and to have their human rights respected

Children have a right to have their experiences, feelings, relevancies, their rights and their dignity recognized and taken seriously by pedagogues.

The foundation for this is provided by the human rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹ Democracy education,² solidarity and a sense of community are not possible if children do not have secure, trusting relationships with pedagogues; they also require pedagogues who think, act and reflect in accordance with ethical principles.³

The basic needs that children have – to feel connected to a community while also being supported in developing their own sense of autonomy – must be taken into account and honored.⁴

Inclusion can only be realized based on the principles of participating, contributing and, above all, being part of the community.⁵



1
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

2
See Rüdiger Hansen & Raingard Knauer (2019): Das Praxisbuch: Mitentscheiden und Mithandeln in der Kita. Wie pädagogische Fachkräfte Partizipation und Engagement von Kindern fördern. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

3
See Annedore Prengel, Friederike Heinzel, Sandra Reitz & Ursula Winklhofer (2017). Reckahner Reflexionen zur Ethik pädagogischer Beziehungen. Reckahn: Rochow-Edition; see also https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF-Dateien/Reckahner_Reflexionen/Broschuere_Reckahner_Reflexionen.pdf

4
See Hans Rudolf Leu & Lothar Krappmann (eds.) (1999). Zwischen Autonomie und Verbundenheit – Bedingungen und Formen der Behauptung von Subjektivität. Frankfurt. a. M.: Suhrkamp.

5
See Tony Booth, Mel Ainscow & Denise Kingston (2006). Index for Inclusion: Developing play, learning and participation in early years and child care. Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

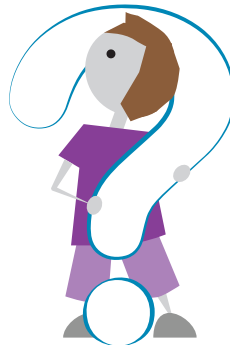
Children have a right to the present day

Children have a right to be considered – in the humanist tradition and out of respect for their human rights – as actors and beings whose explorations of the world and whose efforts to help shape it count, *here and now*.

To that end, children also have the right to attend educational institutions that do not primarily serve future-oriented economic and utilitarian interests; moreover, they have the right to be seen and addressed as more than just *adults in preparation*⁶.

Children thus have a “right to the present day” (Janusz Korczak):⁶ to non-structured time, to savor *having time* and to intensely experience and enjoy moments that are happy and fulfilled.

Children also have a right to learn and educate themselves while being accompanied, inspired, encouraged and strengthened by professionals.



6

See Peter Moss & Mathias Urban (2010). *Democracy and Experimentation – two fundamental values for education*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

7

See Urszula Markowska-Manista, Avi Tsur & Batia Gilad (2017). “Janusz Korczak und die Rechte der Kinder.” In: Claudia Maier-Höfer (ed.), *Kinderrechte und Kinderpolitik. Fragestellungen der Angewandten Kindheitswissenschaften*, pp. 13–28. Wiesbaden: Springer.

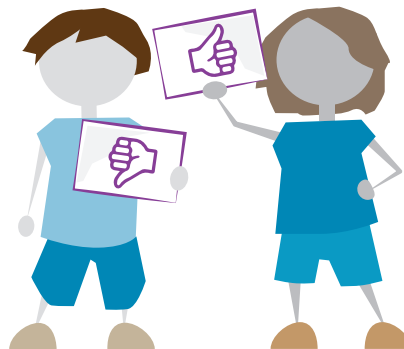
Children have a right to be seen, heard and asked

Children have a right to have their experiences, their perspectives and practices included as a set component accorded equal value and dignity⁸ in processes for assessing and improving quality.

What do they consider important and what do they like? What do they not like or wish were different? What makes them happy and contributes to their well-being? What is bothering them? What empowers them individually and as a member of the group?

What creates a space that allows them to discover themselves and the world? What and whom do they praise? About what and whom do they complain?

ECEC centers should be developed in a way that ensures children – whose fundamental interests the centers are there to serve – are not only seen, heard and asked, but also included as contributors and decision makers.



ATTENTION!

The Project: “Children as Actors for Improving the Quality of ECEC Centers”

The research and practice-development project Children as Actors for Improving the Quality of ECEC Centers was carried out from January 2018 to December 2019 on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung by DESI, the Berlin-based institute for democratic development and social integration.

Some 200 children aged 4 to 6 from 13 different ECEC centers throughout Germany participated in the study.⁹ The research team was able to access the children’s experiences and perspectives using 12 multifaceted and advanced data-collection methods, such as “Photo- and video-based ECEC guided tour,” “Children paint their ECEC center” and “A completely crazy, wonderful day.” The methodological foundation for evaluating the findings was the Documentary Method¹⁰ that makes it possible to include not only the children’s verbal statements, but other forms of expression, such as drawings, photographs and practices for acting and interacting. Once all the relevant materials were analyzed, quality dimensions were developed that make

the children’s views of their ECEC centers transparent. To enable them to be used professionally, the methods were tested and further developed in two continuing training programs for educational professionals. They are now part of the Methods Treasure – Improving ECEC Together with Children, making it possible not only to research children’s perspectives at ECEC facilities, but also to support the documentation and the joint development of quality with all participating actors.



9

Including prior findings from: Iris Nentwig-Gesemann, Bastian Walther and Minste Thedinga (2017). Kita-Qualität aus Kindersicht – Die Quaki-Studie. Abschlussbericht. A study by the DESI institute on behalf of the German Children and Youth Foundation, Berlin.

10

See Ralf Bohnsack, Iris Nentwig-Gesemann & Arnd-Michael Nohl (eds.) (2013). Die dokumentarische Methode und ihre Forschungspraxis. 3rd ed. Wiesbaden: Springer VS; and Iris Nentwig-Gesemann (2013). “Qualitative Methoden der Kindheitsforschung.” In: Margrit Stamm & Doris Edelman (eds.). Handbuch frühkindliche Bildungsforschung. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 759–770.

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