

2. Towards a tool for the constant evaluation and improvement of early childhood education and care services

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2.1 Introduction: quality and evaluation of early childhood education and care services

This chapter will address three key aspects of early (very early) childhood education: what we mean by educational service, how we approach the concept of quality, and how we identify the indicators for assessing it. The first reflection leads us to describe the educational service as a space/time with an educational purpose, beyond schools for 0–3 (and/or 3–6) year olds. In this sense, we refer to nursery schools (*infant-toddler centres* or *nidi d'infanzia*), but also to various educational contexts, such as play areas (*play groups* or *spazi gioco*), family spaces (*centres for families* or *spazi per le famiglie*); all of which are educational environments, spaces characterised by an important pedagogical component, designed and implemented by early childhood professionals (educators, pedagogues) with the complicity and support of policy makers and other agents (families, citizens) with a clear educational intent.

All these educational spaces – which may range from informal to formal, and from loosely to highly structured – offer opportunities for interaction and socialisation, as well as learning and development (social, cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor) for both children and adults involved (parents, families, and education professionals).

Thanks to this *intentional framework*, within a prepared space/time, the educational purpose of the service is realised: weaving relationships, creating experiences, experiencing emotions and developing those skills, abilities and

capacities within the paradigm of *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be* (Delors, 1996).

The first cycle of early childhood education (0–3) and early childhood care models are still debated today between care and education (Sánchez-Vera, 2022), that is, between approaches linked, on the one hand, to family care *versus* care outside the family and, on the other hand, to the priority of work–life balance policies *versus* the right of every child to education from birth. The ‘debate between care and education’ (Sánchez-Vera, 2022, p. 105) has not yet been resolved; nor has the dispute between institutions with ‘a socio-welfare approach, which care for children under the age of three whose parents work, and those with a more strictly educational approach [...] until the start of primary school’ (Egido, 2010, p. 395) been overcome.

2.2 Quality of early childhood education and care services: state of the art

As exposed previously the concept of quality in the field of education contains a high level of complexity that has been widely discussed by various authors (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Moss, 2017). Controversial positions, aimed at considering educational services beyond the concept of quality envisioned in economist neoliberal views, are widely developed in the work of Moss (2014; 2019), taking wise distance from current dominant discourses and offering alternative narratives for early childhood education and care nowadays.

Zabalza (2014, p. 15) warns that the same term (quality) can refer to different things, depending on the various agents involved in childcare and early childhood education (politicians, families, educators, children), depending on the geographical context and depending on the historical period.

The author indicates some variables to be considered when defining the concept of quality:

- The training of educational staff and the availability of experienced professionals.
- Warm interactions with children.
- An inclusive context where children with different personal and social characteristics live together.

- An educational model that views instruction and the development of creative thinking in children as complementary and equally important in terms of both education and social development.

The first point we emphasise is the importance of teacher training, which frames all other aspects of curricular practice. There is a direct relationship between the quality of training of professionals and their educational performance, within the educational contexts of the various stages, not only in early childhood. We agree with Egido (2010, p. 412) when he states that ‘since the quality of early childhood education depends largely on the quality of its teachers, European countries, in addition to having adequate training systems, must take measures to make the working conditions of teachers at this stage attractive’.

It is therefore necessary to ensure the training of professionals, and, at the same time, their working conditions is a necessary condition for achieving the desired educational quality and, at the same time, an indication for policy makers, administrations and training agencies (universities, in particular) to improve education.

Galardini (2006, p. 7) links the notion of the reflective professional to the concept of quality and points out that quality ‘is cultivated’ and ‘is interpreted not as an abstract entity, but as a reflection on practice, on contexts and on the customs of a service in order to investigate its significance in relation to objectives’. Following quality indicators for early childhood care that should be kept in mind to advance the reflection:

- The ways in which each child (and their family) is welcomed in their uniqueness.
- The listening and observation practices that the school adopts in everyday life.
- The relationships and interactions between peers and with adult educators.
- The organisation of spaces (careful) and time (respectful of children’s rhythms of life).
- The selection of materials offered to children for their experiences of discovery, play and relationships within the educational context.
- The relationship with families and the promotion of a culture of childhood in the city (children as full citizens).

If the key factors for ensuring quality are the training of professionals, the pedagogical organisation, the grouping of children (adult/child ratio), spaces, time, the relationship with families and networking with the local area and other professionals, appropriate facilities, human and material resources, and links with the social/cultural environment, it will be necessary to have tools for reflection, evaluation and, if necessary, improvement of the elements identified as constituents of quality.

Based on the analysis of some of the existing tools for the evaluation and continuous improvement of early childhood education and care services, the challenge is to offer a new tool for self-evaluation of educational quality for all professionals, policy makers and administrators of educational services. To answer the question of how quality is assessed, there is broad international consensus on three tools considered to be impactful, which have been analysed in this study. We list them in chronological order of appearance so that the reader can situate them temporally, and then we will go into depth to explain each of them:

1. ITERS-R scale
2. Index for Inclusion
3. DAVOPSI

The first tool, the *ITERS-R scale* (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised), is a revision of the well-known ITERS scale (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, ITERS 1990), which was designed in the United States to assess the overall quality of programmes for children aged 0 to 3 years (Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2003). To define and measure quality, the ITERS-R scale has drawn data from three main sources: research evidence from various relevant fields, such as health, development and education; professional opinions on best practices; and practical limitations of real life in the nursery school environment.

Four main sources of information were used during the review process:

1. Research on early childhood development and findings related to the effect of childcare environments on the health and development of children.

2. Comparison of the content of the original ITERS with assessment instruments designed for a similar age group and additional documents describing aspects of programme quality.
3. Comments from ITERS users obtained through a questionnaire.
4. Intensive use of the instrument for more than two years by the co-authors of ITERS and more than 25 assessors trained in ITERS.

This scale, widely used by researchers, school administrators and educators to identify areas for improvement and ensure that educational environments are optimal for children's development, consists of 39 items organised into the following seven subscales:

1. **Space and furniture:** Assesses the quality of the physical space, the organisation of the environments and the furniture available for the care, play and comfort of the children.
2. **Personal care routines:** Includes aspects such as welcoming and saying goodbye to children in their daily life at school, hygiene, rest, nutrition and safety.
3. **Listening and speaking:** Measures how language and communication development is encouraged, how children are supported in understanding language, and how language production and the use of books are promoted.
4. **Activities:** Assesses the variety and quality of activities offered to children (such as fine motor skills, active physical play, art, music and movement, building, dramatic play, sand and water play, nature and science, use of televisions, videos and/or computers, and finally, how acceptance of diversity is promoted).
5. **Interaction:** Considers the quality of interactions between peers, interactions between children and educators, supervision of play and learning, and how discipline is measured.
6. **Programme structure:** Assesses the overall organisation of the educational programme (timetable, free play, small group activities, special educational needs for children).
7. **Families and professionals (educational team):** Measures family involvement, training of educational staff, interaction and cooperation

among professionals, personal and professional needs, continuity of educational staff, their supervision and evaluation, as well as opportunities for professional development (continuing education).

It is important to note that the above-mentioned tool does not only refer to the concept of *curriculum* but to a broader vision of early stages that includes all educational practices.

The second instrument cited, *Index for Inclusion: developing play, learning and participation in early years and childcare*, was created in the United Kingdom by professors Tony Booth, Mel Ainscow, and Denise Kingston to help schools move towards a more inclusive education (Booth, Ainscow, and Kingston, 2006).

The Index can be considered a guide that provides a framework for self-evaluation and continuous improvement in educational centres, focusing on three main dimensions:

1. **Creating inclusive cultures:** This dimension is about building a safe, welcoming and collaborative school community where all members feel valued. It includes aspects such as establishing inclusive values and fostering positive relationships among all members of the educational community (children and adults, professionals and families).
2. **Creation of inclusive policies:** The second dimension addresses the creation of school policies that promote inclusion and equity. The organisation of support for diversity and the promotion of a school for everyone, within a framework that includes all differences (cultural, social, economic, functional, etc.), is considered central.
3. **Development of inclusive practices:** This dimension focuses on the implementation of educational practices that encourage the participation and learning of all students, through the adaptation of the curriculum, teaching methodologies and learning assessment.

The Index for Inclusion is a flexible tool that can be adapted to different educational contexts and promotes the active participation of the entire school community (children and adults) in the process of improving education in their own educational centres. It is important to highlight the four key concepts of the Index that underpin the creation of a coherent approach to

inclusive development: *inclusion; barriers to play, learning and participation; resources for play, learning and participation; support for diversity.*

Finally, the third tool, *DAVOPSI* (Device for the Analysis and Evaluation of the Pedagogical Organisation of Nursery Schools), of Italian origin, was developed as an innovative tool to assess the quality of the pedagogical organisation of nursery schools (Bondioli and Nigito, 2011). The *DAVOPSI* tool, which began to be implemented some 15 years ago, takes into account three essential categories for creating an educational environment that promotes the comprehensive development of children in the early years: time, space and grouping of children, with special emphasis on the analysis and evaluation of the three fundamental aspects of the educational context mentioned above.

1. **Time:** Reflection on the concept of time, children's time and the pedagogical organisation of time at school. Consideration is given to how activities are distributed and organised throughout the day, including the balance between guided activities and free play time, as well as the flexibility to adapt to the needs of the children.
2. **Spaces:** From an ecological and organisational approach to educational spaces, the layout and use of spaces in nursery schools is assessed, considering both indoor and outdoor spaces, ensuring that they are safe, stimulating and suitable for different educational activities.
3. **Groups of children:** Groups of children and the relationships between them are assessed as an important educational resource that promotes the development of girls and boys; the tool associates peer relationships with their cognitive development and the maturation of their identity, valuing those characteristics of the context that promote educational relationships between children. *DAVOPSI* analyses the criteria for grouping, regarding the size of the groups, their composition and the dynamics of interactions between children, to foster an environment of collaboration and mutual learning.

From a pedagogical point of view, *DAVOPSI* is considered a training (and self-training) tool that allows reflection on one's own experience and considers meta-evaluation a resource for professional improvement both at the individual level and for the entire team at the educational centre. Although it will not be analysed in depth in this chapter, it is worth mentioning a

common working tool for all Italian schools, which allows educational centres to reflect on themselves and their own practices, identifying areas for improvement. The acronym for this newly incorporated tool is RAV = *Rapporto di Autovalutazione* (Self-Assessment Report). It was developed by INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System) for compulsory schooling (6–16 years) and has a specific version for nursery schools (3–6 years)¹.

Continuing with the reflection on the concept of quality and on the right to *quality education and early childhood care* for all children, today, there is, at least in theory, a specific commitment at the level of each Member State's Action Plan, which must comply with European guidelines, until 2030. The *State Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee* (Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, 2022) specifically refers in its strategic Axis 2 to the universalisation of social rights through access to and enjoyment of essential, accessible and inclusive quality services in the field of early childhood education, care and primary care (0 to 6 years).

On the right to education, at this point in the discourse, it is important to mention how education systems – to guarantee this universal right – would have an obligation to respond to the 4 As (*availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability*). These dimensions, translated and interpreted, allow us to verify how educational systems are still far from ensuring:

1. The *availability* of educational provision
2. The *accessibility* for all citizens
3. The acceptable quality (*acceptability*)
4. The *adaptability* to people's needs

According to the author Tomasevski (2001 and 2006), a deficit in any of the dimensions (availability, access, adaptation and quality of the education system) always harms the most vulnerable children and families.

¹ For more information, please visit the dedicated website <https://www.invalsi.it> and consult the document relating to the 3–6 age group. It is important to note that various Italian Regions have implemented their own versions, rigorously adapting the national guidelines to local contexts and complexities, making RAV a tool that responds to the specific needs identified in each region, even extending the age range to the 0–3 age group, where necessary.

On the issue of guaranteeing universal access to the first cycle of early childhood education and its free nature, the critical voice of Vicenç Arnaiz (Zafra, 2024) leads us to reflect on *the deceptive achievement of education from 0 to 3*, when free education from 0 to 3 is indeed a social achievement, but doing so without a commitment *from the public sector* and considering only funding for private schools entails risks. To begin with, according to the author, the distribution of these centres responds to market logic: they are disproportionately located in middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods, and those who live there are the ones who benefit most from free education. In poorer neighbourhoods, there are far fewer private schools and nurseries, *among other things because there has been no interest in opening them as there is no profit margin*.

Thanks to his critical eye, Arnaiz contextualises what could apparently be interpreted as a success for everyone: children, communities, parents, administrators, politicians, professionals, and so on. What he denounces in these statements is the lack (and the decision) of previous educational policies that have not provided for or defended an equitable distribution of educational services for the youngest children based on territorial criteria and the need for children to participate in the provision of places for those families with fewer resources in their neighbourhoods, villages or cities. There is clear talk of policies guided by economic interests, in those environments where early childhood education from 0 to 3 years of age is not understood as a *common good* or a *public good*, but rather as a commercial good.

2.3 A tool for evaluating early childhood education services

The assessment tool we present has been designed based on a conceptual and empirical framework that integrates various theoretical perspectives and international recommendations (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Mercer, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 2000; OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). The need to design this new tool arises from certain limitations identified in pre-existing instruments for assessing the quality of educational services and institutions, such as ITERS-R, the Index for Inclusion: developing play, learning and participation in early years and childcare and DAVOPSI. Although these tools have been fundamental in assessing educational quality, they have some

limitations. The ITERS-R, for example, focuses on structural aspects such as the physical environment and material conditions, but does not address in depth the interactions between educators and children or professional reflection in the educational process (Pianta et al., 2016). These structural assessment tools cannot capture the complexity of the social and emotional dynamics that occur in the classroom.

The instrument presented here below aims at taking a *picture* that, despite being static at a given moment, can identify aspects to be improved that may be transformed into specific actions to be developed over time.

On the other hand, the Index for Inclusion prioritises diversity and inclusion, but its effective implementation in the day-to-day running of educational centres can be hampered by a lack of adaptation and local understanding (Slee, 2011). Finally, DAVOPSI presents difficulties in adapting to the contextual diversity of different educational centres and does not facilitate the promotion of participatory self-evaluation as advocated by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), since for educational change to be effective, it is essential to involve all members of the educational system in the reflective and self-evaluation process to ensure sustained and contextualised improvement. These limitations justify the need for a new, more inclusive tool, capable of considering multiple dimensions, such as the quality of interactions, professional reflection, inclusion, diversity and the active participation of educational staff, thus promoting educational transformation.

The tool is structured according to the logic of ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which identifies the influence of different contextual levels on human development: the *microsystem* (direct relationships in immediate contexts, such as the classroom and the family), the *mesosystem* (coordination between institutions, services and the community) and the *macrosystem* (educational policies and cultural norms).

As is also outlined in Chapter 1,” this perspective has guided the design of the tool in three levels of assessment: the *macro level*, which analyses the coherence of educational policies, the allocation of resources and staff training; the *meso level*, which assesses the implementation of the educational project, leadership and institutional management; and the *micro level*, which focuses on classroom practices, the quality of interactions and professional reflection. In addition, the tool incorporates the principles of socio-constructivist

approaches (Brunner, 1996; Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 2000), highlighting the importance of social interaction in learning. This has led to the inclusion of dimensions that value the active participation of children, the co-construction of knowledge and collective reflection, aspects that are also found in the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2001).

The commitment to inclusion and diversity is another central pillar of the new tool. The principles of inclusion, taken from the Index for Inclusion: developing play, learning and participation in early years and childcare (Booth, Ainscow, and Kingston, 2006) and reinforced by recent international guidelines, ensure that the tool takes into account the diversity of children and promotes equitable environments. This approach is complemented by the perspective of reflective practice for educational improvement (Galardini, 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Schön, 1998).

2.3.1 Use of the tool

The tool is designed to be used in a participatory and reflective manner by the entire educational community involved in early childhood services. Its application follows a structured process that can combine self-assessment, collective assessment and continuous feedback, thus ensuring progressive and sustained improvement.

First, a thorough and collective reading, together with prior training, is essential to ensure that the professionals who will use the tool understand its criteria, dimensions, and theoretical foundations, and that they share common meanings. Training should be promoted that fosters professional dialogue and collective reflection, which are key elements for educational transformation.

Secondly, the tool is designed so that educational teams can use it for both individual and institutional self-assessment. This process seeks to generate spaces for professional debate where the results obtained can be used to reflect on one's own practices and identify areas for improvement.

The third key element is continuous feedback. Assessment should not be a one-off event, but rather an ongoing cycle of reflection and improvement. The results obtained must be analysed periodically to define action plans and establish strategies that will subsequently be re-evaluated. Finally, the tool is specifically designed for ECEC services and can be complemented

by other existing assessment instruments, such as the ITERS-R, the Index for Inclusion: developing play, learning and participation in early years and childcare and DAVOPSI, so as to obtain a more holistic view of educational quality. This integration allows quantitative and qualitative perspectives to be combined, thus expanding the capacity for analysis and response to the needs of children and educational teams. In short, the assessment we propose is not limited to a control tool, but is configured as a *mechanism for reflection, learning and improvement*.

A tool intended to foster deep, multifaceted, and contextualised reflection on ECEC services, without the need to deploy multiple assessment instruments that are often unmanageable in the daily work of teams. Through an ecological and participatory approach, it seeks to promote a culture of evaluation that supports continuous improvement, the professionalisation of the sector, and the guarantee of the right to quality early childhood education (Child Guarantee).

Evaluation of early childhood policies (macro level)

At this macro level, relating to early childhood policies, four dimensions are included. Firstly, the legislation, regulation and funding of the structure on which early childhood is based. Secondly, the role that educational services should play in promoting individual and social development. Thirdly, the basic principles that govern (or should govern) the characterisation of early childhood education services. And fourthly and finally, the working conditions of professionals who carry out their work in the field of early childhood.

In view of the nature of the different dimensions that make up this macro level, the persons responsible for carrying out the evaluation would be those within the public administration in charge of planning, designing and making strategic decisions on policies related to early childhood. This idea is important because the frequent disconnection between the political, institutional, and educational and care practice domains often hinders such a holistic, coherent, and shared approach. To do so, it would be advisable to carry out a periodic annual assessment of each of these dimensions at the beginning and at the end of a political term (approximately four years) to promote any adjustments and improvements that are deemed appropriate.

Legislation, regulation and funding

This dimension (see Table 2.1) encompasses a comprehensive analysis of the legal, regulatory, and financial frameworks that underpin early childhood education. It assesses not only the internal consistency of legislation with national guidelines, but also with international standards, as established by recognised organisations (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Likewise, the capacity of these policies to guarantee universal, equitable and inclusive access is measured, while ensuring the sustainability of the economic resources allocated to the sector, transparency in their management and efficiency in the distribution of funds.

Table 2.1 Indicators for the assessment of legislation, regulation, and funding of early childhood services (macro level)

To be completed by policymakers, senior managers, and technical staff with responsibilities for planning and managing public policies.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Regulation and legislation	The legal framework is reviewed and updated annually with documented evidence demonstrating 95–100 % alignment with international standards. <i>For example, annual reviews are published with explicit references to international frameworks (children's rights, ECEC quality), and decrees and guidelines are updated in a coherent manner.</i>	The legal framework is reviewed every 1–2 years, with 80–90 % alignment with international standards. <i>For example, regulations are updated periodically, but some instruments have not been adapted at the same pace.</i>	The legal framework is updated irregularly (every 3 years or more) and alignment with international standards is 60–70 %. <i>For example, existing regulations include general references to children's rights but lack operational specificity and regulatory implementation.</i>	The legal framework is obsolete (no update in more than 5 years) or non-existent, with less than 50 per cent alignment with international standards. <i>For example, there is an absence of regulatory review or fragmented regulation that does not guarantee common criteria for quality and equity.</i>

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Funding	Comprehensive annual reports are available that reflect stable, transparent funding distributed according to established criteria, ensuring sustainability and equitable access (documentation accessible to all staff). <i>For example</i> , annual public budgets with clear distribution criteria by territory or by areas within the same municipality and population group, and accessible monitoring reports clearly showing the application of equity criteria.	Funding reports are available which, although regular, have minor shortcomings in terms of documentation or transparency in some areas. <i>For example</i> , budgetary information is available, but allocation criteria are not clearly specified.	Funding documentation is partial, with deviations that hinder uniform implementation and generate inequalities of access. <i>For example</i> , significant differences in funding between territories or areas within the same municipality without clear justification.	There is no reliable documentation of funding; management is unstable and periodic reviews are not carried out, seriously affecting equity of access. <i>For example</i> , a lack of public information on budgets and dependence on ad hoc or extraordinary decisions.

The role of early childhood education in individual and social development

Early childhood education is valued as an essential space for the overall development of the child, promoting their emotional, psychomotor, cognitive, and social well-being. Its educational function must enable comprehensive development through teaching and learning processes that promote social cohesion and equal opportunities. This perspective (see Table 2.2) considers that learning is constructed through interaction with the environment, a fact that reinforces the need for quality education from early childhood.

Table 2.2 Assessment of the role of early childhood education in individual and social development (macro level)

To be completed by policymakers, senior managers, and technical staff with responsibilities for planning and decision-making in early childhood policies.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Functions and orientation of early childhood policies	Early childhood policies explicitly define early childhood education as a children's right and as a core pillar of their holistic development. This orientation is clear, shared, and coherent across legislation, strategic plans, and planning instruments. <i>For example:</i> laws, national, regional, or municipal plans that explicitly recognise the right to early childhood education from birth and implement it through defined objectives, resources, and timelines.	Policies acknowledge the role of early childhood education in children's holistic development, but this orientation is not always consistently reflected across all documents or strategic decisions. <i>For example:</i> strategic plans that refer to holistic development but lack coherence between regulation, funding, and territorial planning.	Policies refer in general terms to children's holistic development, without clearly defining the specific role of early childhood education as a right or as a structural axis of public policy. <i>For example:</i> programmatic documents with declarative statements that are not translated into concrete measures or budgetary priorities.	Policies do not clearly define the function of early childhood education in relation to children's rights and holistic development or do so only in broad terms without specifying implementing actions. <i>For example:</i> absence of a specific early childhood strategy or consideration of this stage solely as a childcare service.

(Continued)

Table 2.2 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Equality of opportunity and social cohesion	Policies incorporate equality of opportunity and social cohesion as central criteria and translate them into measures that guarantee equitable access to early childhood education services, with particular attention to social, territorial, and economic inequalities. <i>For example:</i> prioritisation criteria for enrolment and reinforced funding in areas with higher social vulnerability.	Policies include measures aimed at promoting equality of opportunity, but these are not always sufficient or do not reach all territories or groups equitably. <i>For example:</i> existing financial support schemes that are insufficient or include eligibility requirements that exclude some vulnerable families.	Policies recognise the importance of equality of opportunity, but with limited specification of measures or uneven impact on access to services. <i>For example:</i> isolated programmes without continuity or without mechanisms to assess their actual impact.	Policies do not clearly incorporate equality of opportunity or social cohesion as guiding principles, contributing to the maintenance or widening of inequalities in access to early childhood education services and high financial costs for families. <i>For example:</i> predominant reliance on private provision, high fees, and insufficient public coverage.

Basic principles

This dimension (see Table 2.3) brings together the fundamental pillars that should guide the formulation, implementation and evaluation of early childhood education policies. It is structured into seven sub-dimensions: *childhood culture, the role of families, inclusion, universal access, child protagonism, children's rights* and *family voices*.

- **Culture of childhood and the role of families:** Early childhood education must recognise and respect the cultural diversity of children, integrating families as active agents in the educational process.
- **Inclusion:** Services must be accessible and sensitive to diversity (economic, cultural, functional, etc.), guaranteeing equal opportunities for participation in teaching and learning processes and their use as a driver of comprehensive development.
- **Universal access:** A service model that does not discriminate on the basis of socio-economic conditions is promoted, guaranteeing equitable access. It analyses measures that eliminate barriers and ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic context and characteristics, have access to quality education.
- **Children voices and protagonism:** Children's perspectives and voices should be incorporated into decision-making processes, recognising children as active agents in their own educational pathways through their interactions with adults and the development of their capacities.
- **Children's rights – Child Guarantee:** Early childhood education services must ensure the protection and promotion of children's rights as a fundamental principle of educational action, taking into account the specific characteristics of this developmental stage.
- **Family voices:** Early childhood education policies should recognise and promote family participation as an essential component of ECEC services. This entails ensuring meaningful spaces and mechanisms for information and participation that enable families to express their needs, perspectives, and expectations, as well as to take part in decisions affecting their children's well-being and education. Considering family voices contributes to the construction of shared, coherent, and inclusive educational action, respectful of social, cultural, and family diversity, and strengthens co-responsibility between educational services and the family environment.

Table 2.3 Assessment of the core principles of early childhood policies (macro level)

To be completed by policymakers, senior managers, and technical staff of the public administration with responsibilities for planning, regulation, and strategic decision-making in early childhood policies.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Culture of childhood	Policies fully recognise and respect the cultural diversity of children. Educational practices are promoted that value different forms of learning and development according to the cultural context of each child. <i>For example:</i> adaptation of services and materials to the diverse cultures, languages, and religions present within families and communities in the territory.	Policies consider cultural diversity, but with limitations in their practical application. Some adaptations are contemplated, but not systematically. <i>For example:</i> recognition of cultural diversity in strategic documents without clear criteria for implementation at service level.	Cultural diversity is recognised superficially in policies, but there are no clear strategies for integrating it into educational practice. The materials and methodologies proposed still follow a dominant model that does not reflect cultural plurality.	Policies do not take into account the cultural diversity of children. There are no measures to adapt education to different cultural contexts or to ensure the representation of diverse identities and traditions. <i>For example:</i> occasional references to diversity without changes to provision or quality criteria.
Role of families	Policies guarantee the active involvement of families in early childhood education. A relationship of shared responsibility between families and institutions is promoted, with participation mechanisms adapted to social and cultural diversity.	Families are recognised as key educational agents, but there are still barriers to equal participation. Some actions are being taken to promote dialogue between families and	The importance of the role of families is recognised, but effective policies are not being developed to facilitate their real involvement in the educational process.	Policies do not contemplate the participation of families in early childhood education. Collaboration is not encouraged, nor are there spaces for dialogue between families and services.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Role of families	<i>For example:</i> inclusive information channels; formal and informal participation spaces; and systematic consultation of families integrated into service planning.	educational services, but these are not always accessible to all families. <i>For example:</i> communication channels exist but are not sufficiently adapted to all family realities.	Communication between services and families is limited. <i>For example:</i> predominantly one-way communication from services to families.	<i>For example:</i> absence of meeting spaces or dialogue between families and services.
Inclusion	Early childhood policies fully guarantee inclusion, ensuring equitable and universal access to high-quality services for all children, regardless of their socio-economic, cultural, linguistic or functional situation. There is a structured strategy with adequate resources, an intersectoral approach and monitoring mechanisms to ensure equal opportunities and social cohesion.	Policies incorporate a solid inclusive framework, with specific measures to ensure access and participation for all children, but there may be shortcomings in implementation or funding. Inter-institutional collaboration is present but could be more effective in ensuring real equality of opportunity.	Policies recognise the importance of inclusion and incorporate some measures to promote it, but these are limited or do not have a real impact on reducing inequalities. There are structural barriers to accessing services, and diversity is not fully considered in policy planning and implementation.	Early childhood policies do not effectively guarantee inclusion. Significant barriers are identified that hinder equitable access to services for certain groups. There are no clear mechanisms for addressing diversity, and structural inequalities are perpetuated. <i>For example:</i> absence of specific measures for children with social or functional needs.

(Continued)

Table 2.3 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Inclusion	<i>For example:</i> prioritisation criteria and targeted support for children in vulnerable situations and/or with SEND.	<i>For example:</i> availability of diversity-support resources that do not reach all territories, children, or families.	<i>For example:</i> statements of intent without resources or monitoring mechanisms.	
Universal access	Policies guarantee equitable and universal access to early childhood education, eliminating economic, geographical and administrative barriers. There are specific measures to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups and guarantee educational quality for all children. Access is fully guaranteed, regardless of economic, social or territorial status. There are no waiting lists. <i>For example:</i> a robust public network covering the entire territory based on equity and inclusion criteria.	Measures are being implemented to ensure more equitable access to early childhood education services, but barriers still exist that hinder the full participation of some groups. Financial assistance is available, but it may be insufficient to reach the entire vulnerable population. Access is guaranteed for the majority, with some minor impediments that may slightly limit accessibility. <i>For example:</i> financial support schemes exist	Policies establish the right to universal access, but in practice there are significant inequalities. There are still families who cannot access services for financial or geographical reasons or due to a lack of available places. Access is partially guaranteed, with inequalities depending on location or economic status. There is a waiting list. <i>For example:</i> lack of public places in certain neighbourhoods or municipalities.	There are no effective measures to guarantee universal access to early childhood education. Socio-economic, geographical and administrative barriers limit access for many children, especially those in vulnerable situations. Access is limited by economic, territorial or time barriers. There are long waiting lists and/or a lack of public places in various areas. <i>For example:</i> long waiting lists and reliance on private provision.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Universal access		but are insufficient to reach all families in need.		
Child's voice	Policies fully guarantee that child's voice is considered, promoting children's active participation in the learning process and decision-making. The development of teaching practices that respect their interests and needs is promoted and achieved to encourage meaningful learning. <i>For example:</i> regulatory criteria that guarantee time, spaces, and materials for free play, stimulation, and autonomous choice.	Child's perspective is integrated into policies, but there is still room for improvement in terms of children real participation in educational decision-making. The development of school practices that promote children's autonomy and expression is encouraged but not systematically achieved. <i>For example:</i> recommendations on free play without clear application criteria.	The importance of children's voices is recognised, but policies do not establish concrete mechanisms to guarantee them. The educational approach is still predominantly adult-centred, and opportunities for children's participation are limited. <i>For example:</i> rights-based discourse without changes to time or space organisation.	Policies do not consider children's voices as active agents in their learning. Early childhood education is based on directive and unidirectional models, where children have little or no ability to express their needs and preferences. <i>For example:</i> adult-centred service models with limited opportunities for children's choice.

(Continued)

Table 2.3 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Children's rights – Child Guarantee	Policies fully guarantee that ECEC services ensure the protection and promotion of all children's rights as a fundamental principle of educational action. Also taking into account the specific characteristics of this developmental stage and all intersectional diversities and inequalities (EU Child Guarantee)	Policies guarantee that ECEC services are oriented to the protection and promotion of all children's rights. Specific characteristics of this developmental stage and all diversities and inequalities are taken into account with difficulties.	Policies guarantee that <i>de iure</i> but not at <i>de facto</i> level that ECEC services are oriented to the protection and promotion of all children's rights. Policies have difficulties to recognise specific characteristics of this developmental stage and all diversities and inequalities.	Policies do not guarantee that ECEC services are oriented to the protection and promotion of all children's rights. Specific characteristics of this developmental stage and all diversities and inequalities are not taken into account.
Family voices	Policies fully recognise and promote family participation and voice as an essential component of ECEC services.	Policies recognise and try to promote family participation and voice as an essential component of ECEC services.	Policies partially recognise and promote family participation and voice in ECEC services.	Policies fail to recognise and promote family participation and voice in ECEC services.

Working conditions

The working conditions of early childhood education professionals are also assessed as a key element in the quality of the service. This dimension (see Table 2.4) analyses the labour and training factors that directly affect the quality of early childhood education.

- **Resources and ratios:** The availability of resources and materials, adequate infrastructure, and an optimal teacher-child ratio (Espinosa, 2018,

2018a) have an impact on the safety experience and the quality of the educational response.

- **Networking:** Networking between educational, health and social services is essential to ensure comprehensive care. Adequate coordination between different services is required.
- **Spaces and times:** Planning and organisation of diverse and flexible learning situations.
- **Initial training and induction:** High-quality initial and ongoing training for professionals contributes to reflective and improvement-oriented practice.
- **Staff training:** Continuous professional development, with a focus on reflection and constant improvement in educational practice.
- **Working conditions:** focusing on adequate salaries and calendar, and time to prepare activities and for training.

Table 2.4 Assessment of working conditions of early childhood education professionals (macro level)

To be completed by policymakers, senior managers, and technical staff of the public administration with responsibilities for planning, regulation, and decision-making in early childhood policies.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Ratios	The teacher-child ratio is optimal (1:4 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:8 for 3–6-year-olds), allowing for attention tailored to each child's needs.	The teacher-child ratio is good (1:6 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:10 for 3–6-year-olds), but at times of high demand this can slightly affect the quality of care.	The teacher-child ratio is higher than the recommended parameters (1:8 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:12 for 3–6-year-olds), making it difficult to attend to all children.	The teacher-child ratio is unfavourable (more than 1:10 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:15 for 3–6-year-olds), negatively affecting the quality of care provided to children.

(Continued)

Table 2.4 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Ratios	Working conditions are excellent, as professionals can attend to each child's needs with adequate time and resources. <i>For example:</i> all classrooms maintain the required ratio throughout the day, including peak periods.	Working conditions are adequate, but some situations can generate a certain level of pressure. <i>For example:</i> temporary increase in ratios during drop-off/pick-up times.	Working conditions can be difficult due to excessive workload. <i>For example:</i> one professional attending a large group for most of the day.	Working conditions are precarious and do not allow for the proper performance of educational tasks. <i>For example:</i> systematic lack of support staff or substitutes.
Resources	The resources and materials available are more than adequate and of sufficient quality to carry out high-quality educational work. This is documented in internal reports.	The resources and materials are adequate but are not always available in the necessary quantity or quality. Working conditions are good, but there are times when the availability of resources can cause difficulties. Shortcomings documented in periodic reports.	Resources and materials are limited, with some shortcomings in terms of quality or availability. Working conditions may be affected by the lack of adequate materials and resources to carry out educational tasks effectively.	Resources and materials are scarce or inadequate, negatively affecting the educational task. Working conditions are precarious, with a shortage of materials and resources, making the work of professionals difficult. <i>For example:</i> absence of basic materials or minimally equipped spaces.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Resources	<i>For example:</i> guaranteed annual budget for materials, regularly renewed and documented.	<i>For example:</i> shared materials between classrooms or delayed renewals.	<i>For example:</i> reuse of worn materials due to budget constraints.	
Networking	There is smooth and structured coordination between educational, health and social services, facilitating a collaborative working environment. Professionals have the time and resources to work in a network and develop effective coordination. Existence of well-defined intervention plans. <i>For example:</i> periodic intersectoral meetings with shared protocols.	Coordination between services is good, with regular interaction between the agents involved. Professionals have time to coordinate, but with some difficulties or workloads that limit this collaboration. Existence of generic or insufficiently comprehensive protocols or intervention plans. <i>For example:</i> occasional contacts without systematic follow-up.	Coordination is irregular, with moments of overlap between services. Professionals have little time or support for coordination, which hinders networking. Protocols or intervention plans are insufficient and/or unknown to the services involved. <i>For example:</i> lack of awareness of existing protocols.	There is no effective coordination between services. Professionals work in isolation and working conditions are precarious, with a lack of time and resources to coordinate with other agents. There are no protocols or intervention plans. <i>For example:</i> each service operates in isolation.

(Continued)

Table 2.4 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Spaces	The spaces are designed, maintained and reviewed periodically (at least annually), complying with 90–100 % of the established safety criteria (certifications and regular inspections).	The spaces are functional and generally safe, with periodic reviews (every 1–2 years) that comply with 80–90 % of the safety criteria, although occasional shortcomings are detected in the updating of equipment. <i>For example:</i> minor deficiencies in equipment updates.	The spaces fulfil basic safety functions but only meet 60–70 % of the criteria; deficiencies are detected in the inspection and updating of equipment. <i>For example:</i> outdated equipment pending renewal.	The spaces are inadequate or unsafe, without regular inspection or maintenance processes, meeting less than 50 % of the minimum safety criteria. <i>For example:</i> lack of certifications or serious accessibility deficiencies.
Time	Flexible hours that meet the needs of children and families, according to internal evaluation reports and user feedback. <i>For example:</i> drop-off and pick-up times adapted to family needs.	There are some minor aspects to be improved in terms of organisation and flexible hours to better meet the needs of children and their families. <i>For example:</i> occasional rigidity in specific time slots.	Shortcomings have been detected in the flexibility of working hours, with irregular reports highlighting the need for improvement. <i>For example:</i> schedules poorly adapted to diverse family situations.	Timetables are unstructured and inflexible, with a lack of periodic review, negatively affecting the learning environment. They do not respond to the needs of children and their families. <i>For example:</i> fixed schedules that do not meet children's real needs.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Initial training	It is essential that early childhood education professionals have specific, high-quality vocational training or university training. The training is comprehensive and covers all aspects necessary for reflective, high-quality practice. <i>For example:</i> specific university degrees mandatory for employment, excluding lower qualifications.	Early childhood education professionals are required to have initial university training or vocational training. There is no guarantee that the training covers all areas comprehensively, and there are some shortcomings. <i>For example:</i> some children are supervised by staff without specific early childhood content.	It is recommended but not required that early childhood education professionals have initial university training or vocational training. There is no guarantee that the training adequately covers certain pedagogical and psycho-educational areas. <i>For example:</i> hiring staff without specific qualifications.	Early childhood education professionals are not required to have initial university training or vocational training. <i>For example:</i> employment without minimum educational requirements.
Induction	The induction process is comprehensive and well structured, providing professionals with all the support	The induction is adequate, with good initial support, but may be lacking in some areas that hinder rapid adaptation.	The induction is insufficient, with little support for professionals to integrate into their role.	Induction is almost non-existent or very limited. Professionals do not receive adequate support to start working, and working conditions are precarious.

(Continued)

Table 2.4 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Induction	they need to successfully integrate into their role. Working conditions are very good, with a focus on enabling them to adapt quickly. <i>For example:</i> induction plans with personal and collective mentorship.	Working conditions are good, but support could be improved. <i>For example:</i> partial initial information.	Working conditions can be difficult due to a lack of adequate support and guidance. <i>For example:</i> direct entry without prior training.	<i>For example:</i> no support during workplace integration.
Continuing education	Professionals have access to quality continuing education, with regular opportunities for professional development. Working conditions are conducive to continuing education and professional development. <i>For example:</i> annual training plan with hours included in working time.	Continuing education is adequate, but not very regular or accessible. Working conditions are good, although they do not always allow for the time necessary for continuing professional development. <i>For example:</i> training outside working hours.	There are few opportunities for continuing education and/or they are not very accessible. Working conditions limit opportunities for professional development. <i>For example:</i> scarce, unplanned training offers.	There are no opportunities for continuing training. Working conditions are precarious and do not favour opportunities for professional development. <i>For example:</i> no budget or time allocated for professional development.
Working conditions	Professionals enjoy working conditions	Professionals have working conditions with	Professionals have working conditions far	Professionals have working conditions much

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Working conditions	(salary, calendar, hours, holidays) comparable to those in primary education.	some deficiencies compared to primary education.	below those in primary education.	lower than in other stages.

Evaluation of institutional dynamics in early childhood (meso level)

At this meso level, referring to institutional dynamics in early childhood, and following the structure proposed by the Index for Inclusion, three dimensions are identified. Firstly, cultures, which refer to the concepts and beliefs that underlie the educational service in question. Secondly, policies constitute all the decisions that enable the organisation and functioning of the context in question. And thirdly and finally, practices, which involve the deployment of the curriculum in more formal contexts, or of content, knowledge and skills from the perspective of contexts that are not so regulated.

Considering the nature of the different dimensions that make up this meso level, those responsible for carrying out the evaluation would be the direct managers of early childhood education services. It would be advisable that, both at the beginning and at the end of an academic year, or of an educational process with a defined beginning and end, an evaluation of each of these dimensions be carried out to identify areas for improvement and to be able to plan actions to promote it.

Given the idiosyncrasies of each educational centre and its internal and external context, it is understood that institutional dynamics will, by definition, necessarily differ.

Cultures

This dimension (see Table 2.5) examines the values and beliefs that shape the internal identity of an educational service. Analysing cultures within a context allows us to identify the degree of inclusion and respect for diversity, as well as their ability to adapt to the changing needs of children and families. The participation of the entire community, a democratic stance, collaboration between professionals, and the concept of childhood and its implications

for the organisation of the service's daily life are fundamental elements for quality early childhood education.

- **Participation of the entire community:** assesses how the community (families, teachers, external professionals) is involved in decision-making and in the day-to-day running of the service. Active and inclusive participation is fundamental to educational quality.
- **Democratic positioning:** assesses the extent to which the service adopts a democratic model, where decisions are made collectively, with space for dialogue and the active participation of all members of the educational community.
- **Collaboration between professionals involved:** considers the synergy between the different educational and support agents (teachers, psychologists, social workers, etc.), their ability to work in a coordinated manner and in line with common educational objectives.
- **Concept of child and family and implications for the organisation of the daily life of the service, nursery school, family space, and so on:** assess how the educational service deals with the diversity of children and families, and how these influences are reflected in daily life. The concept of children and families must be considered holistically, adapting to the specific needs of everyone.

Table 2.5 Assessment of institutional cultures in early childhood education services (meso level)

To be completed by management teams or those responsible for early childhood education services, with the participation of the educational staff and, where appropriate, other stakeholders associated with the service.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Community participation	The educational community (families, teachers, external agents) actively participates in	The educational community has opportunities for participation, although key decisions	Community participation is limited. Some opportunities for participation are offered, but	The educational community has no opportunities to participate in

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Community participation	decision-making and school management. Participatory processes are inclusive and transparent, and the contributions of all members are valued. <i>For example:</i> stable participation spaces (councils, committees) with real influence on organisational decisions.	are made by a smaller group. Collaboration is encouraged, but some voices may be more marginalised. <i>For example:</i> consultative meetings with families without clear feedback on how contributions are integrated.	they are not regular or well structured. Families and other members may feel little involvement in the decision-making process. <i>For example:</i> one-off surveys with no follow-up or continuity.	decision-making. There is little exchange of information and the community's contributions are not valued. <i>For example:</i> decisions made exclusively by management without consultation spaces.
Democratic positioning	The service promotes a democratic model where decisions are made collectively, and the inclusion and mutual respect of all members is encouraged. Democracy is an integral part of the daily life of the service. <i>For example:</i> regular collective deliberation spaces with staff and	The service promotes democracy in decision-making, but there may be times when hierarchy or authority take precedence over dialogue. The opinions of families and professionals are listened to, but decision-making can be more centralised. <i>For example:</i> prior consultation	The service shows signs of democratic positioning, but in practice decisions are made in limited spaces and the active participation of all those involved is not sufficiently encouraged. <i>For example:</i> information shared after decisions without opportunity for influence.	The service does not promote a democratic model, with decisions taken unilaterally. Communication between members is limited and opportunities for democratic participation are almost non-existent. <i>For example:</i> complete absence of dialogue or

(Continued)

Table 2.5 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Democratic positioning	other actors, with shared decision-making criteria.	with staff and stakeholders without real decision-making power.		collective debate spaces.
Collaboration between professionals	There is close collaboration between all professionals (educators, psychologists, social workers, other specialists), with regular meetings, exchange of strategies and mutual support. The work teams are fully aligned in their educational objectives. <i>For example:</i> interdisciplinary coordination spaces with shared planning.	Collaboration between professionals is good, although it may not be entirely systematic or structured. There are good practices in teamwork, but some areas could be improved. <i>For example:</i> occasional coordination depending on specific needs.	Collaboration between professionals exists but is sporadic or superficial. There may be a lack of effective coordination and fluid communication, with some difficulties in coordinating educational strategies. <i>For example:</i> informal information exchange without established spaces.	Collaboration between professionals is almost non-existent. The various educational agents work in isolation, without a coordinated system and with a lack of communication and mutual support. <i>For example:</i> absence of team meetings or coordination.
Concept of child and family and implications for the organisation of the daily life	The service has an inclusive approach and respects the diversity of concepts of children and families. Its educational work is based on a holistic vision that	The service works in a manner consistent with the concept of children and families, with spaces and activities that consider family needs and characteristics.	The concept of children and families is considered, but the educational task is carried out in a more homogeneous manner, with little recognition of family	The service has a limited or stereotypical concept of children and families, which is not reflected in the organisation of activities or in the way spaces are designed.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Concept of child and family and implications for the organisation of the daily life	recognises the individual needs of children and their families. The spaces and activities are adapted to encourage the active participation of families. <i>For example:</i> organisational flexibility and inclusive spaces designed to welcome families with diverse realities.	However, there may be a lack of full integration or flexibility in some areas. <i>For example:</i> occasional adaptations without over-all review of organisation.	and child diversity. The spaces or activities may not be fully adapted to the specific needs of families. <i>For example:</i> rigid daily organisation for all families.	Families play a minor role in the daily life of the service. <i>For example:</i> absence of spaces designed for family presence or participation.

Policies

This dimension (see Table 2.6) refers to the clarity, consistency and application of internal policies that guide the functioning of educational centres. Institutional policies, such as the service's educational project and pedagogical leadership, must reflect a clear orientation towards improving educational practices.

- **Educational project:** Clarity and consistency of pedagogical objectives with the service's educational proposal and the rules of organisation and operation, internal regulations, among others. And, at the same time, with the development of educational practices.
- **Leadership:** Management and leadership skills for the implementation of quality early childhood education. Need for specific training and experience requirements.

Table 2.6 Assessment of institutional policies of early childhood education services (meso level)

To be completed by management teams or those responsible for early childhood education services, with the participation of the educational staff.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Educational project	The educational project is clear and coherent, with well-defined pedagogical objectives that are fully aligned with the educational proposal of the service and with the Organisation and Functioning Regulations (NOF), as well as with the Internal Regulations. The pedagogical objectives are and are effectively translated into daily educational practices, and there is constant supervision to ensure that they are applied consistently and reflectively. <i>For example:</i> the educational project explicitly guides daily organisation (time, spaces, and activities) and is reviewed periodically with the team and stakeholders.	The educational project is generally clear, and the pedagogical objectives are consistent with the service's educational proposal. However, there may be some areas that are not fully aligned with the Organisation and Functioning Regulations or the Internal Regulations. The educational objectives are reflected in educational practice, but only partially or with some inconsistencies. <i>For example:</i> shared pedagogical criteria applied unevenly across groups or staff.	The educational project is generally understandable, but there are shortcomings in its consistency with the pedagogical objectives, the Organisation and Functioning Regulations and the Internal Regulations. This can lead to inconsistent application of the objectives in educational practices. Educational practice is partially aligned with the objectives. <i>For example:</i> institutional documents exist but are rarely used as a practical reference.	The educational project is unclear or incoherent, with poorly defined pedagogical objectives that are not aligned with the service's educational proposal, the Organisation and Operating Rules or the Internal Regulations. Educational practices do not coherently reflect the established objectives, with a lack of adequate monitoring and implementation. <i>For example:</i> absence of shared pedagogical criteria or a project disconnected from actual service functioning.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Leadership	Leadership is clear and shared. Management promotes a horizontal and shared leadership model, where professionals play an active role in decision-making and service management. There is an equitable distribution of responsibilities, and the work team is perceived as an organised and cohesive unit. Management has specific training and extensive experience and encourages the active participation and accountability of all members of the service. Management and supervision processes are well structured, and quality early childhood education is guaranteed. <i>For example:</i> work teams with defined roles, regular coordination meetings, and shared decision-making.	Leadership is adequate, with management that promotes collaboration and a shared leadership model, although the distribution of responsibilities may not be completely equitable or may vary depending on the circumstances. The management team has adequate training and some management experience and seeks to involve professionals in decision-making. Educational quality is generally guaranteed, although perhaps not all members of the service are always given the same degree of participation. <i>For example:</i> consultation with staff before decisions, but final resolutions remain centralised.	Leadership is functional, but participation in decision-making and the distribution of responsibilities are limited. Management exercises a more vertical leadership style, with little involvement of professionals in strategic decisions. There is a lack of consistent horizontal leadership, with centralised management and little focus on teamwork. Management training is partial and experience may be insufficient in some areas. <i>For example:</i> organisational decisions primarily taken by management, with minimal collective deliberation.	Leadership is unclear or centralised. Management does not promote shared leadership or active collaboration among team members, and responsibilities are not distributed equitably. Management has no specific training in early childhood education or minimal experience, which affects educational quality. Decisions are made unilaterally and the participation of professionals in the management or development of the educational project is not encouraged. <i>For example:</i> absence of coordination spaces and imposition of decisions without dialogue processes.

Practices

The analysis of pedagogical practices includes the implementation of the curriculum and/or the development of content, knowledge and the promotion of skills, strategies for welcoming families and children, the organisation of spaces and time, and the coherence of educational intervention. Assessing these aspects allows for the identification of good practices and promotes professional reflection.

- **Implementation of the curriculum/content/skills:** Implementation of a curricular framework, or development of content and knowledge, or promotion of adapted and flexible skills. This necessarily requires planning and specification approached jointly and consensually between the educational community and the various agents of the educational services (see Table 2.7).
- **Welcoming children:** Strategies to ensure a smooth transition and adaptation to educational services. Support and monitoring of children at different times of the day (daily life and play). Support for families referred by the child.
- **Welcoming families and caregivers (Foster care children):** framework and strategies to offer to all families and caregivers a personalised welcoming and continuous support and guidance (meetings, interviews, communication, etc.)
- **Organisation of spaces and time:** this sub-dimension refers to the quality and suitability of the physical spaces within the educational service, which must be designed and organised to promote the well-being and development of children. It includes aspects such as safety, accessibility, diversity of educational materials and resources, and the suitability of spaces to the specific needs of children. The organisation of time refers to how activity and rest times are distributed and managed within the educational service.
- **Orientation and coherence of the educational intervention proposal:** this sub-dimension covers the way in which learning situations are designed and implemented within the service, as well as the coherence between educational activities and care practices. Coherence implies that educational approaches and support strategies are consistent,

ensuring that children receive a comprehensive and balanced education that respects both cognitive and emotional aspects.

- **Assessment of the organisation and functioning of the service.** This sub-dimension refers to the way in which the service reviews, evaluates and improves its internal processes. Self-evaluation allows strengths and areas for improvement to be identified, with the aim of ensuring that the service operates efficiently and that educational practices are of high quality. This sub-dimension includes both the self-evaluation of professionals and the participation of families and children in the process, to ensure that the service is aligned with the educational objectives and needs of the children.

Table 2.7 Assessment of educational practices in early childhood education services (meso level)

To be completed by educational and management teams of early childhood education services as a tool for collective reflection and improvement of practice.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Implementation of curriculum / content / skills	Curriculum/ content/skills are fully adapted to the needs of the children, with detailed and flexible planning that is regularly reviewed and adjusted. Planning is carried out jointly and by consensus among all the professionals, with the clear involvement of all those involved in educational services. It is geared towards	Curriculum/ content/skills are adapted and flexible, with good planning involving the professional community, although there may be some room for improvement in terms of review and consensus among all those involved in educational services. The curriculum is implemented	Curriculum/ content/skills have undergone some adaptations, but the planning and implementation are not fully agreed upon by all educational agents. Flexibility is limited and is not reviewed frequently enough to adapt to the changing needs of	Curriculum/ content/skills are not flexible enough or adapted to the needs of the children. Planning is rigid and is not done jointly or by consensus among the group of professionals. There is no process for reviewing or adapting educational practices, and there is

(Continued)

Table 2.7 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Implementation of curriculum / content / skills	inclusive education, which allows for flexible implementation according to the individual needs of the children. <i>For example:</i> team-shared planning adjusted periodically based on observation and changing needs of children and families.	appropriately, with adjustments based on the needs of the children, but it could be more flexible in some cases. <i>For example:</i> occasional adaptations of educational proposals according to children and families.	children. Adaptations/ adjustments are made partially or irregularly. <i>For example:</i> rigid programmes that are only occasionally modified.	no effective response to the individual needs of children. <i>For example:</i> repetitive and fixed activities that do not respond to group diversity.
Welcoming children	The reception of children is individualised, with a smooth transition adapted to individual needs. The educational team offers a careful and constant reception at all times of the day, respecting the emotional, affective and educational needs of the children. <i>For example:</i> flexible adaptation periods agreed and carried out with families.	The reception is well structured and organised, ensuring a smooth transition. Adjustments are made according to the children's needs, although some improvements could be made in the transition. <i>For example:</i> temporary adjustment of schedules during the first days.	The welcome is general, without specific adaptations. The transition is not entirely smooth and may present difficulties in the inclusion of all children, as the welcome strategy is not fluid. <i>For example:</i> identical adaptation periods for all children.	The reception strategies are not very effective and do not guarantee a smooth transition. The individual needs of the children are not taken into account, and inclusion is difficult. <i>For example:</i> immediate integration without support process.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Welcoming families and caregivers (Foster's care)	The family or caregivers' reception process is fully personalised and offers constant support throughout the transition process. Resources, guidance and information are provided proactively and regularly. The service establishes fluid communication with families, adapting to their specific needs. <i>For example:</i> initial interviews and regular follow-up throughout the year.	The family or caregivers' reception is adequate and the support is regular. Families receive guidance and resources for the transition, although there may be a lack of personalisation or continuity in communication and support. <i>For example:</i> initial information meetings without systematic follow-up.	The welcome given to families or caregivers is superficial, with little follow-up or support. Families have limited access to resources and guidance in the transition process. Communication is infrequent and not always tailored to specific needs. <i>For example:</i> written information provided without dialogue opportunities.	Family and caregivers reception strategies are non-existent or very limited. No resources or guidance are provided, and communication is minimal or non-existent. <i>For example:</i> no meetings with families.
Organisation of spaces	Educational spaces are optimally designed for children's development. The spaces are suitable for activities and promote children's emotional and social well-being, with accessible, high-quality	The spaces are suitable and functionally organised. Although they are appropriate for the activities, they could benefit from improvements in the layout or availability of resources to promote a	The spaces are generally adequate but have limitations that may affect the well-being or development of children. There is a poor layout and a lack of accessibility to some resources and materials.	The spaces are inadequate or poorly organised. The layout of the spaces does not promote learning or the children's coexistence. <i>For example:</i> overcrowded or unsafe

(Continued)

Table 2.7 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Organisation of spaces	resources and materials. <i>For example:</i> differentiated spaces allowing diverse functions: free play, quiet time, interaction, stimulation.	more stimulating environment adapted to the diversity of children. <i>For example:</i> adequate spaces and materials but little renewal or diversity.	<i>For example:</i> spaces and materials stored out of children's reach.	spaces and materials.
Organisation of time	The distribution of time is flexible and adapted to the children's needs. There is an adequate balance between activity and rest times, and interaction times are balanced. <i>For example:</i> daily rhythms adjusted according to group needs and status.	The distribution of time is adequate, although it could be more flexible or tailored to the needs of all children. The activities are varied and rest periods are taken into account, but perhaps some adjustments are needed in the transition between activities. <i>For example:</i> stable routines with limited flexibility at specific times.	The distribution of time is rigid and inflexible. Rest periods and activities do not always respond to the individual needs of the children, and the transition between different activities is not very smooth. <i>For example:</i> abrupt transitions between activities without adaptation time.	The distribution of time is inappropriate for children, with few moments of rest or variation between activities. <i>For example:</i> long days without sufficient breaks.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Orientation and coherence of educational and care intervention	The learning situations are very varied and adapted to the needs and interests of the children. The educational and care proposal is fully integrated, and the professionals work together to promote the overall development of the children. The activities are planned in a flexible manner and in line with the educational and care objectives. <i>For example:</i> coherence between care routines and educational proposals.	Learning situations are appropriate and varied, although they could be more dynamic or adapted to certain specific needs. There is good consistency between education and care, but deeper integration between the two may be lacking. <i>For example:</i> good general coordination with minor inconsistencies.	Learning situations are limited and not very diverse, with little flexibility in planning. The consistency between the educational programme and care is partial, with moments of disconnection between the two aspects. <i>For example:</i> educational activities disconnected from daily routines.	Learning situations are monotonous and poorly adapted to children's needs. The educational proposal and care are separate, and there is no effective coordination between the two aspects. <i>For example:</i> care-focused practices without integration with educational activities.
Assessment of the organisation and functioning of the service	The evaluation of the organisation and functioning of the service is continuous, participatory and reflective. The team uses self-assessment	The evaluation is regular and participatory, but there are areas where the review processes could be improved. Adjustments are made, but	The service is evaluated sporadically and without a structured process. Data collection is limited and there is no rigorous	Evaluation is almost non-existent. There is no adequate monitoring of the organisation and functioning of the service,

(Continued)

Table 2.7 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Assessment of the organisation and functioning of the service	methods and rigorously monitors all processes to identify areas for improvement. Data is collected systematically and immediate adjustments are made to improve the functioning of the service.	less immediately and perhaps not all the data necessary for a complete diagnosis is collected.	monitoring of the quality of operations, which makes it difficult to implement immediate improvements.	which prevents the identification and implementation of improvements in processes.

Evaluation of psycho-pedagogical practices in ECEC services (micro level)

At this micro level, with regard to psycho-pedagogical practices in early childhood education services, four dimensions are identified. Firstly, the curricular/competency context, which refers to planned and developed learning situations. Secondly, the physical context, which includes spaces, times and materials. Thirdly, the relational and joint activity context encapsulates much of the essence that should characterise quality early childhood education based on interaction. And fourthly and finally, assessment, quality and reflective professionalism capture the essence of the professional profile that should characterise those who carry out their professional work in early childhood education services.

With respect to the nature of the different dimensions that make up this micro level, the people responsible for carrying out the assessment would be directly those who act as educational agents in practice. It would be advisable that, both at the beginning and at the end of the school year -or of any educational process (*learning situation*) with a defined beginning and end-, an assessment of each of these dimensions is carried out with a view to identify improvements and incorporate them into subsequent educational proposals. In order not to lose the overall perspective of the educational service, this assessment should, as far as possible, be collegial with shared responsibility, between all the professionals involved.

Curricular/competency context

Consistency between the educational project and daily practice, the type of learning situations and reflection on educational practice are key elements in assessing the impact of teaching on child development (see Table 2.8).

- **Implementation of the educational project and the curriculum and/or the competences to be developed:** Consistency between the centre's educational project and its development in educational practice.
- **Types of learning situations:** Analysis of educational proposals, with special attention to daily teaching and learning activities.
- **Evaluation of educational practice:** Continuous reflection on the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies used and the level of learning achieved by the children.

Table 2.8 Assessment of the curricular/competency-based context in early childhood education services (micro level)

To be completed by educational professionals as a tool for self-assessment and reflection on pedagogical practice.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Implementation of the educational project and curriculum and/or skills to be developed	The educational project is fully aligned with daily practice. The objectives and principles of the educational project are clearly and coherently reflected in all educational activities, with planning adapted to the needs of the children. The educational	The educational project is largely aligned with educational practices, with some minor discrepancies in its implementation. Educational activities are in line with the general objectives of the educational	There are some disconnections between the educational project and daily practices. The objectives and principles of the educational project are partially reflected in the	The educational project is not adequately reflected in educational practice. There is a lack of consistency between the established educational objectives and daily activities, with a lack of reference to the project in

(Continued)

Table 2.8 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Implementation of the educational project and curriculum and/or skills to be developed	project is used as a reference for pedagogical decision-making at all levels. <i>For example:</i> Decisions about activities, materials, and daily organisation are based on the criteria established in the educational project and align with the service and municipal objectives.	project, although some areas could benefit from greater consistency between the educational project and daily activities. <i>For example:</i> The project guides practice but is not always explicitly used as a reference in daily planning.	educational activities, and at times it is difficult to apply them to the dynamics of everyday life. <i>For example:</i> The project is known but rarely reviewed or considered in practice.	the planning and execution of activities. <i>For example:</i> Activities are improvised or disconnected from the pedagogical criteria of the service.
Types of learning situations	The learning situations are designed to encourage collaboration, dialogue and negotiation among children. The activities involve social interaction and joint problem-solving, with a strong focus on active	The learning situations do little to encourage interaction between the children and the educational agent. The activities allow for some collaboration and exchange of ideas, but the role of children as active builders	The learning situations do not encourage interaction or the shared construction of knowledge among children. The activities promote some social interaction, but opportunities for	The learning situations do not encourage interaction or collaboration among the children. Knowledge is transmitted in a unidirectional manner from the educational agent to the children, with little or no space for

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Types of learning situations	learning and critical thinking. The educational agent acts as a facilitator, offering support and guidance. <i>For example:</i> Diverse activities such as open-ended tasks and free play areas encourage shared play and decision-making among children.	of their own knowledge could be more prominent. The educational agent intervenes little. <i>For example:</i> Activities allow collaboration but have fairly rigid instructions, limiting children's choice.	group work and building knowledge together are limited. The educational agent does not intervene. <i>For example:</i> Individual activities with occasional unplanned interactions.	the collective construction of knowledge. The activities do not allow children to interact, and the role of the educational agent is solely that of an observer. <i>For example:</i> Repetitive, directive activities with children in a passive role.
Assessment of educational practice	Professionals carry out a continuous and reflective evaluation of the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies, using various tools and sources of information. They regularly identify the strengths and areas for improvement in educational practices and	Professionals carry out a reflective assessment of pedagogical strategies, but less consistently or with less depth. Periodic tools and observations are used to measure children's learning levels, but strategies may not always be adjusted in a timely manner. Reflection	Professionals carry out an assessment of educational practice on an irregular basis. Reflection on pedagogical strategies and children's learning takes place at specific moments or in a superficial manner, without systematic monitoring.	Professionals do not carry out continuous or reflective assessment of educational practice. There is no effective monitoring of the level of learning achieved by children or the effectiveness of teaching strategies. The lack of reflection and review of practices prevents

(Continued)

Table 2.8 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Assessment of educational practice	proactively adjust strategies to optimise children's learning. Reflection is thorough, detailed and based on concrete data, and involves critical and constant analysis of the educational process. <i>For example:</i> Recorded observations, team meetings, external mentoring, immediate adjustments of educational proposals.	is adequate, but there may be a lack of detail in the analysis of results and in the implementation of immediate changes. <i>For example:</i> Quarterly assessments that lead to gradual changes.	The identification of weak and strong points in practice is partial, and modifications to strategies are infrequent or limited. <i>For example:</i> Informal reflections without records or continuity.	the coherent improvement of teaching and learning. <i>For example:</i> No spaces for reflection or review of practice.

Physical context

Spaces and time must be flexible and adapted to the needs of children and promote meaningful learning experiences. The selection of play materials must meet criteria of quality and diversity so as to promote comprehensive development (see Table 2.9).

- **Spaces:** Adaptation of spaces to the needs of children and suitability for the educational proposal. What (disciplinary) knowledge is used to prepare the spaces and materials?
- **Time:** Flexible and diversified timetable organisation.
- **Selection of play materials:** Use of appropriate materials to promote learning that ensures the child's overall development.

Table 2.9 Assessment of the physical context in psycho-pedagogical practices (micro level)

To be completed by educational professionals as a tool for self-assessment of everyday practice.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Spaces	The spaces are designed to be flexible and adapted to the needs of children, promoting different types of activities (free play, guided activities, rest periods, etc.). The layout of the spaces facilitates social interaction and the progressive and the autonomy of children. The spaces are prepared considering the educational and emotional needs of each child, and their design is based on a deep understanding of the stages of child development and the educational proposal.	The spaces are suitably adapted to the needs of the children, with a good layout for educational activities. Although the diversity of activities is reflected in the design, the spaces could be more flexible or adapted to certain aspects of the children's individual development. The selection and layout of the spaces is based on general knowledge about the educational needs of children.	The spaces are adequate for the general needs of children, but the layout does not always encourage diverse activities or interaction. The spaces are functionally useful, but their organisation does not always facilitate a rich learning experience. The design of the spaces is not fully aligned with the educational proposal and is not very well thought out. <i>For example:</i> Adequate spaces always organised in the same way.	The spaces are not adequately adapted to the children's needs and do not respond adequately to the centre's educational proposal. The layout of the space is rigid and inflexible, limiting the possibilities for learning and progressive autonomy and interaction among children. The spaces are prepared without any clear rationale criteria.

(Continued)

Table 2.9 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Spaces	<i>For example:</i> Accessible spaces that allow children to freely choose where to play, move, or rest, designed from an inclusive, multisensory, and welcoming perspective.	<i>For example:</i> Differentiated spaces with limited possibilities for transformation.		<i>For example:</i> Fixed furniture arrangement preventing free play or movement.
Time	The organisation of time is flexible, with a timetable that allows for alternating periods of structured learning, free play, rest and social interaction. Schedules can be adapted to the individual needs of children, and their needs are considered. <i>For example:</i> Flexible rest and play times according to children's individual rhythms.	The organisation of time is quite flexible, with a good distribution of activities and moments of interaction. Although most children have sufficient time for various activities, in some cases the timetable could be better organised to respond to individual needs. Learning and rest times are balanced. <i>For example:</i> Stable routines with some scope for adaptation.	The distribution of time is rigid and inflexible. Although activity and rest times are respected, the timetable does not always allow for adaptation to the individual needs of children. <i>For example:</i> Clock-driven transitions without considering the group's condition.	The timetable is very rigid and does not consider the diversity and needs of the children. The timetables are inflexible and there is no room for personal choice, interaction or adequate rest. <i>For example:</i> Overly structured days without enough time for free play.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Selection of play materials	Play materials are of high quality, diverse and adapted to the interests, abilities and needs of children. They are used to promote children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, with a careful selection based on a thorough understanding of the stages of child development. Materials enable symbolic play, exploration, creation, psychomotor and problem-solving activities. <i>For example:</i> Diverse, unstructured materials that allow multiple uses and interpretations.	Play materials are appropriate and sufficient to promote children's development, although they could be more varied or better adapted to some specific needs. The materials are used to encourage learning and play, but perhaps their potential for children's overall development is not always maximised. <i>For example:</i> Adequate materials, but little renewed or combined.	Play materials are functional but limited in quality or variety. Although they encourage certain types of activities, they do not always respond optimally to children's developmental needs. The use of materials is limited to basic activities, without promoting overall development or full creativity. <i>For example:</i> Predominance of commercial toys with limited creative potential.	Play materials are not very suitable for children's development. Their selection is limited in variety, quality and pedagogical application, and they do not encourage children's overall development. Activities are restricted to the use of materials that are inadequate or not very stimulating for children. <i>For example:</i> Poorly stimulating, worn-out, or inaccessible materials.

Relational context and joint activities

The relational environment and joint activities are essential for quality early childhood education. An inclusive environment, educational interaction, the quality of the adult-child relationship and the social organisation of the

activity, promoting interaction between peers, form the basis of meaningful learning. Observation and listening practices should encourage constant improvement, based on analysis and reflection on practice (see Table 2.10).

- **Inclusion:** Creation of a safe and welcoming environment that allows for the presence, participation, and learning of all children.
- **Educational interaction and joint activity:** Processes and intervention in teaching and learning processes between educator and child, as well as between children.
- **Adult-child relationship:** Quality of interaction and type and degree of help provided. Use of discursive strategies during the educational process.
- **Social organisation of activities among children:** diversified proposals (individual, in pairs, in small groups, in large groups).
- **Type and quality of interaction between peers:** type of relationships (support and help, collaboration, cooperation, competition, etc.).
- **Assessment:** aligned with teaching and learning, continuous, formative and educational.

Table 2.10 Assessment of the relational context and joint activities (micro level)

To be completed by educational professionals as a tool for self-assessment and reflection on the quality of interactions and the relational life of the service.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Inclusion	The environment is completely inclusive and welcoming, where every child is valued and has opportunities to learn according to their needs.	The environment is inclusive and welcoming for most children, although it could be improved in terms of the diversity of adapted	The environment is welcoming but not always inclusive for all children. The activities offered are not always adapted to the diverse needs	The environment is not sufficiently inclusive or welcoming for all children. The activities are not adapted to diverse needs and there are

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Inclusion	There is a wide variety of adapted activities, and children receive the support they need to participate. Educational practices promote equal opportunities for all children. <i>For example:</i> Proposals are adapted so that all children can participate regardless of their abilities or pace, with specialised support guiding individualised assistance and overcoming barriers.	activities or in responding to individual needs. Situations of active participation are encouraged, although some specific needs could be better addressed. <i>For example:</i> Occasional adaptations are made only when a difficulty arises.	of children, and there may be difficulties in ensuring everyone's participation. <i>For example:</i> Proposals designed for the 'average' group without specific adjustments.	barriers that hinder the participation of some children. <i>For example:</i> Children are left out of activities without alternatives, with significant difficulties in adaptation or lack of resources.
Educational interaction and joint activity	There is constant and enriching interaction between educator and children, as well as among peers (children). Proposed activities promote active	Interactions between educator and children, as well as between children themselves, are good and allow for active participation. Although there are moments of	Interactions between the educator and children or between children are limited. Although some interaction is encouraged, there is no constant active or	Interactions are minimal or ineffective. Most of the time, children are on their own, and interactions between them or with the educator are not sufficient to

(Continued)

Table 2.10 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Educational interaction and joint activity	cooperation, joint problem-solving and the exchange of ideas. Educator provides adequate support to promote children's psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional development. <i>For example:</i> Adults accompany shared play or other activities, asking scaffolded questions and providing support without directing the activity.	cooperation, the exchange of knowledge could be more intense or structured. Educator intervenes, when necessary, but interactions could be more dynamic. <i>For example:</i> Shared activities with occasional adult interventions, mostly for classroom management.	collaborative participation. Educator intervenes little and opportunities for cooperation and joint learning are limited. <i>For example:</i> Parallel play without relational intentionality, or adult present but only physically, providing minimal guidance.	promote meaningful learning. <i>For example:</i> Children dispersed with no activities promoting interaction, peer relations, or adult engagement.
Adult-child relationship	The interaction between the adult and the children is of high quality, with respectful and thoughtful communication.	Interactions are of high quality, and adults use appropriate discursive strategies, although these could be more varied or better	Interactions between the adult and the children are adequate but not very consistent. The adult uses some discourse strategies to	Interactions between the adult and the children are not of high quality. The adult uses inappropriate discursive strategies or does not use

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Adult-child relationship	The adult uses appropriate discursive strategies. Situations of assistance provided according to the needs of each child are very clear. <i>For example:</i> Adults verbalise emotions and accompany children's actions with meaningful words, supporting verbally without interference.	adapted to the specific needs of the children. Adult intervention is effective, although there is space to be improved. <i>For example:</i> Appropriate language, but limited or sporadic, depending on the child.	promote learning, but these are limited or not very diverse. The assistance provided is basic and not always tailored to individual needs. <i>For example:</i> General classroom management responses; adults mainly observe and guide physically with minimal verbal support.	any at all, and the assistance provided is scarce or ineffective in promoting the children's development. <i>For example:</i> Minimal or purely instrumental communication focused on management.
Social organisation of the activity	The activities are designed to promote social interaction in various formats (individual, in pairs, small groups, large groups). Children have the opportunity to learn in different ways, promoting cooperation, shared thinking and autonomy.	The activities allow for certain types of social interaction, although the diversity of social organisation could be more significant. Children learn in groups of different sizes, but the potential of the activities to encourage cooperation and learning may	Activities are mostly individual or in very large groups, with few opportunities for learning in pairs or small groups. Interaction between children is limited and does not always encourage collaboration or development.	The activities are largely individual and do not encourage social interaction or peer learning. The activities do not promote cooperation or the development of children's social skills. <i>For example:</i> Children working alone

(Continued)

Table 2.10 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Social organisation of the activity	<i>For example:</i> Proposals allow children to decide how and with whom to participate.	not always be maximised. <i>For example:</i> Occasional alternation between individual and group activities.	<i>For example:</i> Activities always directed to the whole group.	without meeting spaces or whole-group reflection moments.
Type and quality of peer interaction	Positive peer relationships are promoted through strategies and dynamics that encourage mutual support, collaboration, and cooperation. Educator facilitates an environment where children can help and learn from each other to achieve common goals. <i>For example:</i> Conflict resolution with respectful adult mediation.	Positive peer relationships are promoted through activities that encourage collaboration and support among peers, although in some cases inclusion and relationship management need to be reinforced. <i>For example:</i> Free play activities where cooperation appears but peer relationships are not systematically monitored.	Positive peer relationships are rarely promoted, and activities and interventions do not encourage effective collaboration among children. There are occasions when competition or rivalry hinders cooperation. <i>For example:</i> Conflicts not addressed educationally; adults do not acknowledge all emotions positively.	Educator's strategies do not promote the creation of a collaborative or supportive environment, and opportunities to develop social skills are limited. <i>For example:</i> No adult intervention in children's relationships.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Assessment	Professionals carry out continuous, formative and educational assessment using a variety of assessment tools. This is aligned with the teaching and learning processes. The data obtained is used on an ongoing basis to adjust teaching practices and ensure the inclusion of all learners (children). Feedback is detailed and individualised, fostering an inclusive and flexible learning environment. <i>For example:</i> Recorded observations inform individual and collective improvements in educational proposals and family relationships.	Professionals carry out continuous and formative assessment using a variety of tools. It is well aligned with teaching and learning processes, but there may be room for improvement in the consistent use of data to adjust teaching practices. Feedback is useful and appropriately individualised, with a focus on improvement. <i>For example:</i> Periodic evaluations with progressive adjustments, e.g. twice per year.	Professionals carry out assessments irregularly or with few assessment tools. There is some alignment with teaching and learning processes, but detailed monitoring is not always carried out. Feedback is general and sporadic, without continuous or individualised monitoring. <i>For example:</i> Occasional evaluations at the end of the year without continuity.	Professionals do not carry out continuous or formative assessment. Assessment tools are limited or non-existent and are not adequately aligned with teaching and learning processes. Feedback is almost non-existent or very superficial, with no impact on the adjustment of teaching practices. <i>For example:</i> No systematic observation or reflection.

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Assessment, quality and reflective professionalism

Finally, assessment is conceived as an essential element for quality and reflective professionalism in early childhood education. The role of educators as agents of change and co-constructors of knowledge is key to ensuring the constant improvement of early childhood educational services. Reflective practical experience allows for the development of early childhood education aligned with socio-constructivist principles, where assessment must be continuous, formative and educational (see Table 2.11).

- **Educators as intellectuals:** Concept of teaching staff as agents of change and continuous improvement, co-constructors of knowledge.
- **Reflective practical experience:** Incorporation of reflection and assessment practices to improve psycho-pedagogical and didactic performance.
- **Observation and listening practices:** Focus on observation as a practice that promotes reflection and constant improvement of the teaching and learning process.

Table 2.11 Assessment, quality, and reflective professionalism (micro level)

To be completed by educational professionals as a tool for self-assessment and professional development.

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Educators as intellectuals	Educator is perceived as an active agent of change, with a reflective attitude and committed to continuous improvement. Educational practice is based on knowledge co-constructed with children,	Educator demonstrates an attitude of continuous improvement and reflection on her practice. Pedagogical interventions are consistent with socio-constructivist principles, although her/his	Educator has a partial view of herself/himself as an agent of change, with room for improvement in the co-construction of knowledge and reflection on her/his practice. Although she/he applies	Educator does not perceive herself/himself as an agent of change nor does she/he reflect on her educational practice. Pedagogical practices are limited and are not based on socio-constructivist

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Educators as intellectuals	and up to date with the latest pedagogical research. Practices are consistent with socio-constructivist principles and promote children's autonomy. <i>For example:</i> The educator reviews practice individually, in small groups, and collectively, based on readings, professional development, and child observations, introducing well-founded changes.	participation in knowledge co-construction processes could be more proactive or structured. <i>For example:</i> Incorporates new elements into practice without a structured reflection process or team discussion.	some quality teaching techniques, she/he may not always be aligned with socio-constructivist principles or actively contribute to continuous improvement. <i>For example:</i> Applies interesting proposals without reviewing their impact, changes strategies by imitation or aesthetics, or experiments randomly.	principles or a vision of continuous improvement. <i>For example:</i> Repeats routines and activities without questioning or adapting them, simply because 'they've always done it this way'.
Reflective practical experience	Educator systematically incorporates reflection on her/his practice into the teaching-learning process. Assessment practices are continuous, reflective and	Educator reflects on her/his practice on a regular basis, although perhaps not always systematically. She/he uses some assessment strategies to improve	Educator reflects sporadically on her/his practice, with some self-assessment or reflection, but these are not continuous or sufficiently integrated into	Reflection on educational practice is minimal or absent. The educator does not incorporate reflection or self-assessment into her/his educational process, and

(Continued)

Table 2.11 (Continued)

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Reflective practical experience	aligned with the needs of each child, with a clear formative and educational orientation. The educator uses reflections to adjust her/his pedagogical interventions and improve psycho-pedagogical skills. <i>For example:</i> Regularly reviews educational proposals based on observation and team discussion.	teaching practices but perhaps does not explore them in sufficient depth to continuously optimise the teaching-learning process. <i>For example:</i> Occasional reflections after significant or challenging classroom situations.	educational practice. Her/his interventions are not always tailored to the needs of the children or adequately geared towards improvement. <i>For example:</i> Informal reflections without records or continuity, e.g. hallway conversations.	she/he does not make changes or adjustments to her/his methodology to improve the teaching-learning process. <i>For example:</i> No spaces or opportunities for reviewing practice.
Observation and listening practices	Educator makes regular and detailed observations of the children, using this information to reflect on their development and improve her/his educational practice. Active listening is essential to her/his	Educator makes regular observations and uses the data to adjust her/his teaching practices. Although the observations are effective, their application in the teaching-learning process could be more	Educator makes observations, but these are not very systematic and do not always translate into concrete changes in teaching practices. Active listening is practiced, but it does not always have	Observations are infrequent or non-existent. Listening to children is neither active nor reflective, and the information gathered is not used to adjust or improve the educational process. <i>For example:</i>

Descriptor	Level			
	Excellent	Good	Sufficient	To be improved
Observation and listening practices	pedagogical approach, and her/his observations have a significant influence on the adjustment of teaching activities. <i>For example:</i> Observation records of all children at different times of the year lead to concrete changes in scheduling, space organisation, or educational activities.	consistent and in depth. <i>For example:</i> Useful but occasional observations, with limited connection to real classroom changes or structured written adaptations.	a substantial influence on the development of educational activities. <i>For example:</i> Sporadic observations made for procedural compliance rather than educational impact, not translated into meaningful changes.	Educational practice is disconnected from what children express or need.