

Collaboration is key to creating a culture that supports children's behavior in early childhood education, says study

May 17 2023

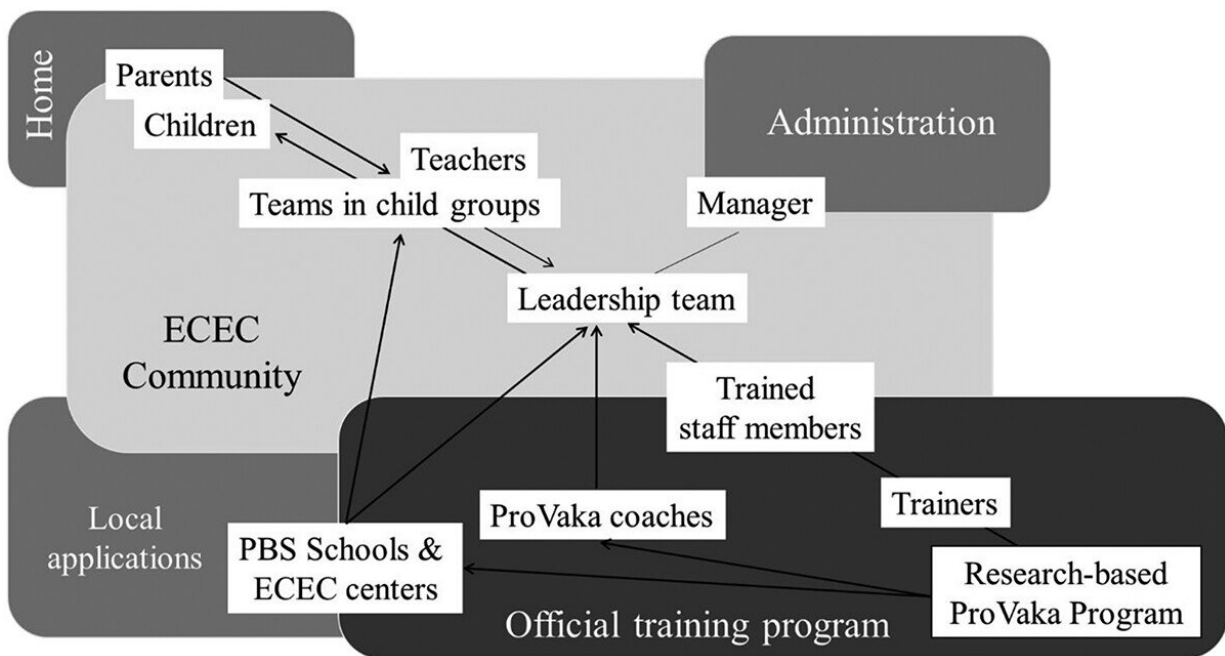


Illustration of the organization and communication of ProVaka development work. Credit: *European Journal of Special Needs Education* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2023.2207057

When a child behaves in an unwanted manner, changing their behavior often becomes a focus. Research, however, suggests that influencing the behavior of adults who interact with the child would be more effective.

Researchers at the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Jyväskylä conducted an 18-month follow-up of 18 Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) centers that were piloting positive behavior intervention and [support](#) (PBIS), which takes a research-based approach to creating an operational culture that supports the behavior of all [children](#).

The PBIS approach sought to clarify the situation-specific behavioral expectations of the ECEC centers and provided training and coaching on how to comply with them. Children's appropriate social behavior was acknowledged as systematically as possible through [positive feedback](#), and efforts were made to pay less attention to possible failures.

One ECEC center, for example, managed to make its corridors less noisy and crowded by teaching children about [personal space](#) when moving in the corridors. Professionals working in the ECEC center, on the other hand, were committed to acknowledging children's success in considering personal space, and they gave plenty of individual and positive feedback whenever children moved about in the corridors in an orderly manner.

In some ECEC centers, children's success with social behavior was also reinforced with tokens. Collecting these tokens gave cause to collective celebration of achievement, or otherwise served as a pleasant collective activity.

Change takes time

According to Senior Researcher Noora Heiskanen of the University of Eastern Finland, the study showed that even when successful, development was a balancing act between many challenges.

"In order to support children in their behavioral challenges in the right

way, the entire environment of ECEC, and the ECEC community, must commit to the change of pedagogical practices and understand its significance."

The theoretical implementation of the new approach and its integration into the existing practices of ECEC centers require time, collaboration, and competence.

"It is not always easy for ECEC professionals to accept change, and enough time should be given to the adoption of the new approach. The ECEC centers piloting the PBIS approach succeeded in creating a uniform way of teaching social behavior to children, specifically through the participation of the whole community, as well as through research-based, guided development."

According to University Lecturer Anne Karhu of the University of Eastern Finland, the findings give good tools for a wider development of practices in ECEC.

"Review and development of the common practices plays a key role. The PBIS approach can be used to build an ECEC community that is welcoming to all children and that has research-based means to address possible challenges in children's behavior."

According to Karhu, behavioral support should be integrated into all activities. In addition, social behavior should be taught in a preventive manner, while also ensuring enhanced support for those who need it.

"The PBIS approach also provides a good basis for providing more advanced and more intensive behavioral support for children who need it."

The joint research project between the University of Eastern Finland

and the University of Jyväskylä will continue to develop and study these enhanced and individual forms of behavioral support. Highlighting the importance of developing community-level practices, the findings are very topical in view of the discussion related to inclusion in ECEC, and in the educational system at large.

The study is published in the *European Journal of Special Needs Education*.

More information: Noora Heiskanen et al, Implementing positive behaviour intervention and support in Finnish early childhood education and care: leadership team's perspective, *European Journal of Special Needs Education* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2023.2207057](https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2023.2207057)

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

Citation: Collaboration is key to creating a culture that supports children's behavior in early childhood education, says study (2023, May 17) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-collaboration-key-culture-children-behavior.html>

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