



Educational Equity in Migration Societies

Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes

- **Part C:** Module for Master Programmes



Project: Reflecting Cultures of Education. Transnationality and Cultural Awareness in Early Childhood Education Programs (RECOdE)

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Contents

Contents	03
Preliminary remarks	04
Demands	04
Dimensions of Competence	05
Knowledge	05
Skills	06
General Competence	07
The module	08
Literature	12

Preliminary remarks

The development of a module for teaching competencies in the context of cultural awareness in childhood education programmes is part of the project Reflecting Cultures of Education – Transnationality and Cultural Awareness in Early Childhood Education Programs (RECOdE 2025c) funded by Erasmus+. Together with the University of Stavanger (Norway) and Dublin City University (Ireland), the project develops a study programme that will provide students with key competencies for a culturally diverse working field. This includes, among other things, the development of the following competencies that are based on systematic literature research, interviews of childhood education students as well as workshops and discussions with lecturers and leaders of various European childhood education courses (e.g. Artevelde University of Applied Science, Ghent, Belgium; Ramon-Llull University Barcelona, Spain; Hogeschool KPZ, Zwolle, Netherlands).

Demands

The growing migration in European countries presents both opportunities and challenges for local and national communities. Individuals cross national, linguistic, and cultural borders for a variety of reasons — such as refuge, employment, family reunification, or education — often for varying periods of time and with diverse ties to their countries of origin (Odden, 2018). As a result, local communities are increasingly dynamic and heterogeneous, making it challenging to provide equal educational opportunities.

We believe that creating strong and inclusive learning communities can address some of the challenges faced by migrants and children of migrants within educational systems.

The RECOdE project was established to explore shared experiences of belonging within migrant societies across Europe. As migration and globalization increasingly shape our societies, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings are seen as pivotal in promoting social sustainability. The project has produced four key outputs aimed at supporting higher education programs working with critical cultural awareness: the Framework for Cultural Awareness (RECOdE 2025b), BA and MA modules addressing different aspects of Critical Cultural Awareness, and a toolkit, Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institutions (RECOdE 2025d).

This MA module will provide students with expert knowledge in the field and offer opportunities for reflection and learning. The module emphasizes the role of ECEC settings as spaces for fostering belonging, non-discrimination, equal participation, and inclusion in migrant societies.

Relations to Critical Cultural Awareness in BA Curriculum of Early Childhood Education Higher Education Programmes

The RECOdE project involved creating BA modules for Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Programmes, and the current MA module builds on these foundations. While the BA module adopted a critical-reflexive approach, combining strategic success-oriented and communicative, understanding-oriented action (Habermas, 1984) as a starting point for the requirements for culturally sensitive action, the MA module departs from the classical Aristotelian concepts of theoretical understanding (*nous*), practical skills (*techne*), and practical wisdom (*phronesis*), adapting them into Knowledge, Skills, and General Competence.

Building on the BA module, the MA module focuses on advanced knowledge, skills, and general competence on the theme of Critical Cultural Awareness.

Dimensions of Competence

There is a pressing need to develop ECEC settings as inclusive spaces for children, parents, and staff. A society marked by increasing mobility and globalization presents new contexts for ECEC institutions. These societal shifts present both opportunities and challenges, and intercultural competence is essential for staff to effectively address them. This specialization will contribute to developing competence through both theoretical and comparative perspectives, facilitating the practical application of this knowledge.

The ECEC staff must possess intercultural competence in their interactions with children, parents, and colleagues. This competence encompasses understanding various aspects of cultural encounters, including power dynamics and discrimination, as well as the potential for perspective expansion and formation. Given their wide-reaching impact, ECEC institutions are central to realizing the vision of an inclusive society.

Knowledge

This study module will equip students with advanced knowledge across several interconnected topics. Students will learn to use concepts such as diversity, inclusion, and belonging to inform early childhood education practices. Through class discussions and group work, students will critically define and redefine these concepts, exploring their relevance to everyday life in ECEC settings. The issue of belonging — who belongs and who does not — entails drawing social and moral boundaries, a process that occurs at all levels of society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Consequently, ECEC institutions are key sites where belonging is both created and contested (Kyrönlampi et al., 2021).

As European societies become increasingly complex, ECEC institutions must evolve to meet new demands. This module will highlight the complexities of migrant societies, characterized by multifaceted identities and senses of belonging. Recognizing diverse backgrounds and religio-cultural affiliations is a vital skill for the future, and this work must begin in ECEC settings. This can be seen in how democratic values are taught and developed among preschool children (Zachrisen, 2018).

Inclusion and belonging are reflected in everyday practices within ECEC settings, such as meals, circle time, outdoor activities, and the selection of materials like books, toys, and art. These practices, in various ways, can foster inclusion and challenge hegemonic norms. However, achieving this requires professionals who understand how to work effectively with children and parents, equipping them with the knowledge to navigate differences thoughtfully (Laird Iversen, 2023).

The module will train students' advanced analytical skills concerning children's cultural practices and their abilities to adopt and contextualize sociological theories of interethnic play (Zachrisen, 2017). The module explores how these theories are applied in practice by ECEC teachers and provide students with firsthand experience in bridging theory and practice. The module will also examine how teacher interactions within children's groups can serve as a tool for promoting equal opportunities (Zachrisen, 2016).

Local communities require spaces for individuals to connect with one another. This study module will focus on the role of ECEC institutions as meeting points for children, parents, guardians, and staff, and how to create belonging for all involved. ECEC institutions serve as venues for interactions among diverse groups, and as such, they can facilitate local networks for children, parents, and staff (Eidsvåg, 2022).

Skills

Throughout the module, students will be trained in various skills that correspond with the knowledge described above. It is essential that students are able to explain, analyze, and translate the concept of belonging into practice. The ability to critically evaluate new knowledge and adapt it to real-world settings is a key skill for ECEC professionals. In a rapidly changing landscape of ECEC providers and global trends toward standardization, ECEC staff must be capable of critically assessing and applying new approaches. This module will emphasize the development of critical cultural awareness.

As part of this skill set, students will be encouraged to reflect on their own positionality and the privileges or disadvantages they may experience. Awareness of one's own social position is a fundamental skill in fostering communities that promote equity, solidarity, and freedom.

The module will also train students to identify and analyze power structures within language and among language users. Social structures and formal institutions are shaped and sustained through language, both in informal contexts, such as friendships and play, and in more formalized systems, such as education.

While the primary aim of ECEC staff is to create communities within children's groups (Eidsvåg & Rosell, 2021; Einarsdottir et al., 2022), ECEC institutions also play an important role as meeting points within the local community. This module will explore this role and focus on how ECEC settings can be developed into spaces where belonging to the broader community is fostered for all family members (Eidsvåg, 2022).

General Competence

The development of specific knowledge and skills is closely tied to the acquisition of general competences. From an epistemological perspective, this means that students will broaden their understanding through metacognitive reflection on their study topics. Therefore, the module aims to enable students to apply research-based knowledge regarding culture, play, and belonging to relevant practical situations and to apply this knowledge in other aspects of their lives.

A critical mindset is essential for developing cultural awareness, and the module will help students develop the ability to scientifically evaluate inclusive practices in their interactions with children, parents, and colleagues. The goal is for students to adopt a resource-oriented approach to diversity in their professional practices.

Epistemological knowledge and analytical skills are foundational to Critical Cultural Awareness. Given that educational institutions are committed to upholding human rights, the module is also morally grounded. The aim is to empower students to detect, analyze, and challenge discriminatory practices, thereby creating safe, inclusive spaces that foster authentic dialogue.

The module

Course description		
1.	Course code	CCA100
2.	Number of credits.	6 credits
3.	Name of the course	Critical Cultural Awareness in Migration societies [Early Childhood Education and Care study program]
4.	The language of instruction	English
5.	Semester (autumn/spring):	Spring 2024
6.	Study programme(s)	Master in Early Childhood Education and Care
7.	Prerequisites:	Bachelor in Early Childhood studies * Other relevant education at Bachelor level * English skills required for course participation
8.	Recommended prerequisites:	ECEC-experience
9.	Content:	<p>This module enhances cultural awareness as a key skill in Early Childhood Education settings. Globalization has transformed national and local communities into migrant societies. ECEC is an institution where children, guardians, parents, and staff from diverse backgrounds and with multiple belongings meet. This gives ECEC a central role in fostering inclusion and belonging within dynamic communities affected by both local and global concerns.</p> <p>The course will enrich students' knowledge and skills for leading and guiding processes to create belonging in children's groups, collaborating with diverse groups of parents/guardians, and finding practical, enjoyable, and efficient ways to work as professional staff.</p>

10.	Learning outcome:	<p>Knowledge: Students will have advanced knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concepts of diversity, inclusion, and belonging, and the early childhood education practices associated with them. • The complexity of migrant societies with multifaceted identities and belongings. • How ECEC practices and materials (such as books, toys, and art) can promote inclusion and counteract hegemony. • How to analyze children’s cultures and develop sociological theories of interethnic play. • The role of ECEC institutions as meeting places for children, guardians, parents, and staff, and how to create belonging for all involved. <p>Skills:</p> <p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate, analyze, and translate theories of belonging into practice. • Develop theories and reflect on power and privileges. • Create communities in diverse ECEC settings that enable equity, solidarity, and freedom. • Discern power structures within languages and between language users. • Develop ECEC as a place in which belonging to the local community is created for the whole family. <p>General Competence:</p> <p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply research-based knowledge regarding culture, play, and belonging to relevant practical situations. • Develop and scientifically evaluate inclusive practices in interactions with children, parents, and colleagues. • Detect, analyze, and counteract discriminatory practices. • Create brave and safe spaces to enable authentic dialogues. • Adopt a resource-oriented approach to diversity.
11.	Working methods:	<p>The course is an intensive, one-week program (5 days), complemented by online learning activities before and after the in-person sessions. The program consists of lectures, seminars (including online seminars), workgroups, world cafés, and student presentations. Additionally, the course will integrate theory and practical knowledge through a collaborative seminar held at Jättå University Kindergarten.</p>

12.	Conditions for taking the exam	<p>Assessment Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in teaching activities: Students must attend at least 80% of the course sessions. • Individual Presentation: Students will present a case with theoretical reflections. <p>a. Failure to complete the required coursework will result in denial of access to the examination. For more information, refer to the Regulations on Studies and Examinations at the University of Stavanger (Examination Regulations), § 2-8, no. 3.</p> <p>b. The compulsory requirements outlined in section 12a will be assessed as either approved or not approved.</p>
13.	Examination	<p>The course concludes with an essay-based exam, which can be completed individually (2,500 - 3,000 words) or in pairs (4,000 - 4,500 words). The essay must follow the guidelines provided during the course. The topic of the essay will involve a critical discussion of cultural awareness in schools/kindergartens within migration societies.</p> <p>The essay will be assessed on a scale from A to F, with A-E denoting a pass (A representing the highest achievement) and F indicating a fail.</p> <p>The exam is due within 20 working days. The topic for the essay will be introduced during the five days of the course. The exam period begins on the Monday following the course and is due 20 working days later.</p>

14.	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RECOdE (2025). Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in ECEC Higher Education Institution. Toolkit. Schwäbisch Gmünd/Stavanger/Dublin. • Egilsson, B. R., Einarsdóttir, J., & Dockett, S. (2021). Parental experiences of belonging within the preschool community. <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i>, 53(31–47). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-021-00281-z • Haga, R. (2014). "Freedom Has Destroyed the Somali Family": Somali parents' experiences of epistemic injustice and its influence on their raising of Swedish Muslims. In M. Sedgewick (Ed.), <i>Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe</i> (pp. 39–55). Routledge. • Kyrönlampi, T., Uitto, M., & Puroila, A. M. (2021). Place, peers, and play: Children's belonging in a preprimary school setting. <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i>, 53(65–82). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-021-00285-9 • Laird Iversen, R. (2023). The convivial concealment of religion: Navigating religious diversity during meals in early childhood education – A Norwegian case. <i>British Journal of Religious Education</i>, 45(3), 263-276. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2022.2138829 • Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." <i>Patterns of Prejudice</i>, 40(3), 196–213. • Zachrisen, B. (2018). Recognizing children's diverse backgrounds: Democracy and equality in preschool. In E. Johansson, A. Emilson, & A. M. Puroila (Eds.), <i>Values Education in Early Childhood Settings</i> (pp. 231–247).
15.	Student evaluation:	<p>At the end of the one-week program, students will be encouraged to evaluate their learning experience. Based on the evaluation results, the exam outcomes, and feedback from the instructors, a report will be compiled.</p>

References

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