

WP3. Data collection and analysis

D3.3. Qualitative data collection and analysis: School ethnographies through SMAT technique



Let's care

BUILDING SAFE AND CARING SCHOOLS
TO FOSTER EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION
AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

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SMAT METHODOLOGY DOSSIER

Based on the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
recommendations

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1. CONCEPTUALIZATION: WHAT IS THE SMAT TECHNIQUE

The SMAT is a child-friendly version of a SWOT that responds to four axes of analysis and associated questions related to dreams, fears, joys, and sorrows. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is a framework used to evaluate internal and external factors, as well as current and future potential.

Enclave de Evaluación, a Spanish consulting firm specialized in qualitative work with children (<https://www.enclavedeevaluacion.com/>) initially designed this technique to carry out a Diagnosis with a Children's Rights Approach, although its effectiveness has led to its repetition in more than a dozen studies (Martínez and Velásquez, 2021).

The acronym SMAT stands for the Spanish words "Sueños, Miedos, Alegrías y Tristezas" (Dreams, Fears, Joys and Sorrows). Since this is an unpublished technique in English, we will continue to use its acronym, even though it does not correspond to the acronym in its translation.

In this way, we will investigate those situations that make them happy and/or sad, those that make them afraid, as well as their aspirations and desires for the future. The children in groups or individually **will write, draw or express** as they wish, using the materials provided and the facilitator's guidance, their own feelings in each of the four fields.

With whom can we work? They can be simultaneous groups, depending on the number of researchers. The groups can be mixed groups of 6 to 10 girls and boys (which would be the maximum ratio), from 3 years of age onwards.

The SMAT methodology seeks, based on children's opinions, to identify:

- Problematic situations for them.
- Barriers or limitations.
- Projections and wishes for the future.
- Its capacity and resistance to overcome possible obstacles.

In this case, the promotion or existence of a positive bond with the children will be fundamental. Dynamization is a crucial part of the SMAT technique, whether it is done by someone who already knows the children or adolescents or by someone who is approaching them for the first time. In the latter case, this relationship must be positively promoted from the very first moment, in the greeting and the initial games or dynamics.

The development of the activity is as follows. A group of children are grouped around or in front of a mural divided into four parts. The adult researcher conducts the technique and provides materials for the children to complete the mural. It is important to understand that this activity does not follow a strict script. The working order of the quadrants is a proposal that can change as required by the dynamization with the children.

We will discuss these issues in greater detail in Dossier B.

The appearance of the mural is as follows:

<p>DREAMS</p> <p>To delve into children's visions of the future. What they see as desirable, and where and how they see opportunities in their daily lives.</p>	<p>FEARS</p> <p>Identify possible risk situations or threats that children perceive in their daily lives.</p>
<p>JOY</p> <p>Knowing what brings them joy and strength. The bonds and spaces that make them feel safe, the spaces that bring them well-being.</p>	<p>TRISTIES</p> <p>Identify children's vulnerabilities or weaknesses, and those things that may compromise their well-being in their daily environment.</p>

The benefits of working with children are many, including the incorporation of new questions that are not open in theoretical frameworks, or the precision in the definition of problems, as stated by the founders of the technique. We are therefore going to introduce ourselves to a perception of children as active participants in the research (one could even say, following the indications of the PAR perspective, as co-researchers).

We will start, therefore, from the understanding and positioning of children as social actors with autonomy to express and defend their own rights. The maxim will be, therefore, to prioritize the benefits that the activity has for the children, behind their participation or the usefulness of their perspectives for the project. For this reason, the workshops should be playful as well as participatory.

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2. WHAT DOES SMAT BRING TO LET'S CARE AND WHY DO WE USE IT?

In LET'S CARE we are implementing the PAR perspective, an innovative strategy of participatory and empowering research for the subjects with whom we investigate. The work we must develop with children and adolescents is framed within the observation and conversation techniques of ethnography. Ethnography is a central technique in qualitative methodologies, whose object of study is the culture of a specific community. In this case, we aimed at understanding the school culture and the experience that children and adolescents have of their daily life.

For this purpose, we have chosen the SMAT technique, which implements in an innovative and creative way the objectives we are looking for in the project. For us, it is a method to access the subjectivity of children very useful for our analysis, but in addition, it also allows us to generate a process of self-awareness and empowerment in them.

The playful-participative workshop will be the place where children will be able to show their perceptions and feelings in relation to their daily life, and their particular history in relation to their family, their school and their community. As with the Photovoice technique, the SMAT Workshops will also produce two types of data, both produced in the workshop. The first will be the physical product of the workshops: the murals. The second will be the ordered transcription of what the children contributed in the workshop.

Recall that, according to the Grant Agreement, the information we intend to collect in Pillar 3 is as follows:

PILLAR 3 Safe Schools	School climate and environment	School Project and mission, Safe/healthy environment, Teachers training and development
	School relationships	Family engagement, Peer relationships, School-community partnerships, After/out of school opportunities
	School resources	Transitions support, Alternative schooling and/or supports, Educational guidance and tutoring projects

For its part, WP2 of our project, in its extensive review of the literature, has highlighted the **multifaceted nature of performance in the educational context**. Although the variables are diverse, the conclusions make a very clear headline: relational and attachment variables in the family and school contexts are crucial for students' academic success. WP2's review of school climate therefore also highlights the importance of **creating safe, supportive and inclusive school environments** that prioritize positive relationships, effective leadership and quality teaching experiences.

Therefore, the SMAT technique will be oriented to the exploration of the following 4 variables: **well-being and safety, relationships, teaching-learning processes and school climate**.

1) Well-being and security: The establishment of secure attachment relationships within the family has also been consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes. Similarly, the quality of peer relationships significantly influences children's school experiences.

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A **safe, caring, participatory and responsive school environment** fosters students' social, psychological and emotional development, while promoting a healthy attachment to school. In this way, the perceived safety of students acts as a protective factor for the mental and emotional well-being of students.

2) Relationships: The degree of bonding in school relationships is crucial, with significant impacts on academic performance. **Strong and flexible leadership and a supportive environment** are necessary for effective school systems.

The quality of the **teacher-student relationship plays** a crucial role in improving educational outcomes. Negative perceptions of students' race, gender, wealth, or learning difficulties have been found to be predictors of misbehavior, and teachers' views of students from vulnerable populations can lead to disproportionate punishment.

1) Teaching-learning processes: Teaching and learning are central aspects, encompassing values, norms and objectives that shape the school environment.

The feeling of belonging to a community and participation in **extracurricular activities** foster a positive school climate and the development of social skills, which positively impacts learning processes.

2) School climate and sense of belonging: Identification with the school by all stakeholders is an important component of student engagement and achievement, as well as student well-being.

The creation of a school culture and the **participation** of all educational agents in shaping the school climate is very important.

We must, however, distinguish our research concerns from the concerns and interests of the children. It is through the latter that we will approach the former. This translation exercise is very important, and we will develop it in Dossier B.

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3. CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS. WHAT SHOULD WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN LET'S CARE?

The implementation of the SMAT technique also requires some reflections, taking into consideration the following (and others may be added according to the particular contexts of each country):

- **We must** adequately **inform** the children of the work we are carrying out, so that they begin the workshop aware of what their participation consists of and why it is important.
- **Care** is paramount: We must assess the risks for each participant: the process may deal with topics that place a child in a position of vulnerability. Similarly, we should ask ourselves whether the practice will expose the child to difficult or dangerous situations. We must create a safe environment for the young person, and prevent situations that could harm him/her.
- **We need** informed **consent**, especially when minors are involved. The photographs we take in the workshop must respect privacy and not include the children from the front. We must pay special attention to the application of the informed consent of the adults in charge.
- **Stereotypes and prejudices** exist, even among researchers, but their application in this case can have fatal consequences for children's development. In this case, because the subjects are minors, we must be especially careful when intervening. The vulnerability of some of the children makes it necessary to predict and take great care in predicting possible harmful forms of research.

4. APPLICATION SCHEDULE

SMAT	RESEARCH PHASE	HOW MANY	WHEN	WHERE (COUNTRY)	WHO (PARTNER)
School ethnographies	PHASE 1 MODEL DEVELOPMENT	4/country, total 24	21 Nov 2023 - 29 march 2024	IT, PL, PT, ES, LT, BG, ES, LT, BG	KITE, ARID, PRSC, JEX, POLO, UCP

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