



## VALUE professional learning path - draft framework

This text is a further elaboration of the framework constructed during the TOT. The text is based on the input and discussions of the TOT and the desk research carried out in so far. Besides this work, we made use of an exercise done by the Flemish VALUE team: we translated the draft of the framework into questions to ask in preparing the professional learning path for the pilot schools; but also questions to ask throughout the guidance process in the pilot schools.

This text is not a finished product, but **work-in-progress**. **Please feel free, to comment, add suggestions, document with your experiences in the pilots in your country!**

The text concerns the following questions:

- What is the central aim of the professional learning path in the pilot schools?
- What are the underpinning principles that guide us?
- What are the essential conditions which needs to be in place in order to obtain sustainable change?
- What are the various areas for learning and action ('areas of change') within the professional learning path in the pilot schools?
- What are the common phases in each pilot?

### 1 Central aim of the professional learning path in the pilot schools

Inclusive ECEC services<sup>1</sup> asks for collaborative practice in which different practitioners involved in the care and learning process of young children work and learn together. From the CoRe Study and the NESET II study, we know that in many countries part of the workforce is represented by (often low qualified) ECEC practitioners that help and assist the 'core' practitioners in working with children and families. In some countries this can be quite high: 40 à 50% of the workforce. Besides, according to national experts consulted in the NESET II study<sup>2</sup>, the share of practitioners with ethnic minority background may be higher among assistants than among core practitioners.

The aim of the VALUE professional learning path is to strengthen the collaboration between all ECEC practitioners involved in the care and learning process of young children, valuing the divers background and experiences of these various groups of ECEC practitioners. By having a stronger collaborative practice, we hope to address the learning and care needs of diverse children, families and communities in a better way.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of ECEC in European Quality Framework: ECEC refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age – regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content – and includes centre and family daycare; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision.

<sup>2</sup> Sharmahd N., Peeters J., Van Laere K., Vonta T., De Kimpe C., Brajković S., Contini L., Giovannini D.; *Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward*, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017. doi: 10.2766/74332.



## 2 Underpinning principles of the professional learning path

### 2.1 Tackle social inequalities

Access to high quality, affordable early childhood education and care for young children (ECEC) is beneficial for all children and especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds as means to enhance equal opportunities<sup>3</sup>.

One of the main challenges today is to create inclusive ECEC services that can tackle social inequality and exclusion: therefore, services should be adapted to the needs of diverse children, families and local communities. The context of complex multi-diverse societies in which we live, asks for services that encourage participation, work proactively on social inclusion and respect the existing diversity.

Questions:

- What is the policy of the ECEC center on creating equal opportunities and on diversity?
- How can the professional learning path complement or strengthen the equal opportunity policy or diversity policy of the school?

### 2.2 Diversity within families and teams as a resource

We start from a strength-based approach to equity in ECEC. We focus on what works for the child and his family instead of focusing on what is 'wrong' and the child's supposed deficits. Instead of insisting the child/family fits the curriculum, the curriculum is built to respond to the child. In other words: children and families should be at the center of education.<sup>4</sup> As stated in the *European Quality Framework* successful inclusion is based on (amongst others) approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents and assure that all children and families are welcome in the ECEC centre<sup>5</sup>.

A diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities in which ECEC institutions are operating, can be an important way to build inclusive ECEC<sup>6</sup>. It gives a clear welcome message to diverse communities and helps to broaden the understanding of the team in respecting diversity<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, we should value the diverse background and expertise present within a team.

Questions:

- What are the characteristics of the community/neighborhood in which the ECEC center is operating?

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<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union (2017), Interinstitutional proclamation endorsing the European Pillar of Social Rights <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13129-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

European Commission (2018), Council Recommendation on High Quality ECEC systems. COM (2018) 271 final <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/StrengthsBased.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> EQF

<sup>6</sup> Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. European Commission: DG Education and Culture.

<sup>7</sup> Vandenbroeck, M., Lazzari, A., Accessibility of Early Childhood Education and Care for children from ethnic minority and low-income families. Background paper Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years January 2013. For additional information: <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-1-ghent>.



- To what extent does the population of the ECEC center reflect the diversity of the community?
- What is the current practice of the ECEC center on diversity within the school population? How is it handled in the classroom?
- Is the diversity of the community reflected in the ECEC team?
- What are opportunities to strengthen a diversity approach in the ECEC center?

### 2.3 Participation as a key principle

Inclusive ECEC asks for provisions that encourages participation of families and a working context in which all practitioners can participate in reflection and decision making.

Questions:

- How will we involve the different practitioners (core and assisting practitioners) in discussing the aims and actions of the action plan? What are crucial moments and who will be involved when?
- How will we support the practitioners in questioning and involving parents in the learning process?
- How will we support the practitioners in documenting and communicating the realized actions and changes in their practice?

### 2.4 The competent system and reflective practice

Competence has to be understood as a characteristic of the entire early childhood system. "The competent system develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context. A key feature of a competent system is its support for individuals to realize their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices that respond to the needs of children and families in ever-changing societal context. At the level of the individual practitioner, being and becoming 'competent' is a continuous process that comprises the capability and ability to build on a body of professional knowledge, practice and develop and show professional values. Although it is important to have a 'body of knowledge' and 'practice', practitioners and teams also need reflective competences as they work in highly complex, unpredictable and diverse contexts. A 'competent system' requires possibilities for all staff to engage in joint learning and critical reflection."<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the professional learning path will take into account different levels:

1. individual and interpersonal level,
2. institutional and team level,
3. inter-institutional and governance (local, regional) level.

See 4. Areas of change.

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<sup>8</sup> Urban, M, Vandenbroeck, M., Peeters, J., Lazzari, A. and Van Laere, K. (2011) *CoRe: Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. European Commission: DG Education and Culture.



## 2.5 Care and education are intertwined and in essence the same

ECEC should encompass a broad, holistic view of learning, caring, upbringing and social support for children. Care and education should be intertwined: it is neither possible to divide them nor appropriate to rank one superior to the other (European Commission, 2011, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014; UNESCO, 2010). This should be reflected in the roles of and collaboration between different practitioners involved in caring and learning of young children.

Questions:

- How can you explain/articulate/discuss the educare approach starting from the context and practice within the school? (in order to avoid a merely theoretical debate, how can it connect to people's experiences and thoughts on education?)
- How to create a process in which classical ideas about (the separation and/or hierarchy) of learning and care are questioned?
- What role can parents and various practitioners play in this process to challenge the classical care and learning ideas?

## 3 Conditions supporting sustainable change

What are the essential conditions that need to be in place to obtain sustainable change? In other words: these conditions are key factors to take into account throughout the entire process.

### 3.1 Engagement

The director/coordinator and team needs to be engaged to work on the topic of collaborative practice in the context of diversity.

Do they experience the need to develop their policy and practice on this topic?

What are their exact questions and learning needs?

Is this a need of the entire team or of a part of the team? Who exactly?

### 3.2 Strong leadership

The leadership within the ECEC center has an important impact on the success of a professional learning path. In a recent study on professional learning communities we defined leadership as follows:

*Leaders (school directors, pedagogical coordinators etc.) can be drivers of change. PLCs in competent systems need democratic leadership that is capable of combining a top-down with a bottom-up approach. Leaders in PLCs need to be able to orient the group, but at the same time they need to listen to and value each member of the staff, and create shared responsibilities. This means creating a safe place (in which people feel free to express themselves) that is at the same time challenging (meaning that people feel motivated in improving and transforming their practice) for the people involved.*

[http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/AR2\\_2017.pdf](http://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/AR2_2017.pdf)

### 3.3 Ownership

In order to create sustainable change, it is important that the ECEC team (leader, various practitioners) has ownership over the change process and the achieved results.



As a consequence, it is important to look for working methods that give voice to the different practitioners involved. Secondly, an internal coordination team is needed. This team of pioneers take the lead, motivates the entire team to engage in the process and is responsible for the follow-up of the actions in the ECEC centre.

Who are the persons in the school who are 'in' for the project and perceive the project as a challenge/opportunity?

Who has the mandate to motivate the team to engage in learning activities and actions?

Who has the mandate and needed competences to consolidate the project results during and after the project?

### **3.4 Facilitator**

The facilitator (of the Value project) is responsible to guide/support/challenge the ECEC center in the professional learning path. E.g. He/she collaborates closely with the coordination team, keeps the focus on the aim of the professional learning path, motivates, facilitates reflection, organizes learning activities, etc.

What is the role of the facilitator?

What are the competences of a facilitator?

How does the facilitator collaborate with the coordinating team?

What is needed to support and create a safe learning environment for the facilitator him/herself?

### **3.5 Safe context**

By a safe context, we mean a context in which each practitioner – and in particular lower qualified practitioners – can express him/herself and explore and question his/her professional identity and practice.

How is the current context experienced by the different practitioners?

At what moment do they experience a safe context to reflect?

What is needed to create a safe learning context for the various practitioners?

When to work with the entire team and when it's better to work in 'homogenous' or separate working groups (e.g. assistants /core practitioners, director/practitioners,...)?

### **3.6 Time for planning and reflection**

At this moment how can practitioners involved in one class room engage in shared planning?

How to organize learning activities and meetings with the team (or a part of the team) on a regular basis?

### **3.7 Tailor made**

We do not follow a fixed script for a professional development path on collaborative practice in the context of diversity. Each professional development path needs to be tailored to the local context and the situation and needs of the ECEC center, the ECEC system and the country.

### **3.8 What will happen when the project is finished?**

In the VALUE project we have the possibility to work with several pilot schools during one year. As we all know, one year is a very short time period. Therefore, it is important to question from the beginning how the process started and how it can be continued after the first year?

What can be the role of the coordinating team after the first year?



Who can fulfil the role of the facilitator after the first year, when the Value project facilitator will be less present?

## 4 Areas of change

Based on the desk research and the experiences of the different partners, we identified several 'areas of change': areas for learning and action within the pilot schools at various levels. These 'areas of change' are also connected to the previous mentioned principles and conditions. These areas of change create together the foundations for a collaborative ECEC practice in the context of diversity.

### 4.1 Individual and interpersonal level

Focus = various practitioners working together in one class group / with one group of children.

Questions:

- Who are the different practitioners involved in one class group?
- Are their practitioners involved in the caring and learning of young children who remain often 'invisible'? E.g. practitioners responsible for out-of-school care, practitioners supervising lunch, practitioners supporting children with special needs, ... Who are they?
- How do the different practitioners understand and appreciate their own and each other's professional role and responsibility?
- How do they communicate with each other? What are strengths/challenges?
- How do the different practitioners think of the benefits and downsides of collaboration in ECEC in the context of diversity?
- What characterizes the professional relationship between the different practitioners? To what extent is this relationship based on reciprocal trust and respect? What is the power (im)balance between the different practitioners? In which context / at what moments do the different practitioners feel ownership of the decision-making and working methods?
- To what extent is there a shared vision on caring and learning in a context of diversity between the various practitioners?
- Knowledge and experiences of the practitioners in working in a context of diversity: What are their learning needs on dealing with diverse caring and learning needs of children?
- Do they exchange experiences and reflect together on how to deal best with the diverse caring and learning needs of the children? Do they have time to plan together? If yes, how often, when, how, ...?
- What forms of team teaching are used in the class room? Do they stick to the 'assistant teaching model' or do they use various forms? Cf. desk research VBJK.
- Autonomy of the practitioners?



Actions/learning activities/tools to support the practitioners and the collaboration between the practitioners in addressing the learning and care needs of diverse children and families.



## 4.2 Institutional and team level

Focus = ECEC/school team, leadership and organization

Questions:

- What are the short-term and long-term goals of the team?
- How are they organized as a team?
- What is the policy of the ECEC center on creating equal opportunities and on diversity?
- How does the leadership of the ECEC center connect, motivate and empower practitioners?
- Strengths and challenges concerning the continuity in the collaboration (e.g. staff turnover, teachers being employed in a fragmentary way in too much groups, ...)?
- Does the team have the possibility to exchange experiences and reflect on their practice from different perspectives?
- Does the team have the possibility to participate in professional learning activities? Who is involved, what kind of activities, ...?
- In which way does the school support/hinder a strength-based approach towards diversity in the school population and in the team?
- In which way does the infrastructure support/hinder collaborative practice?
- How can the team be involved in the process of building a shared knowledge base about tackling social inequalities through collaborative practice?
- ...



Actions/learning activities/tools to facilitate organizational learning on collaborative inclusive approach in ECEC centers

## 4.3 Inter-institutional and governance (local, regional) level

Focus = local and regional stakeholders who can support or create structural conditions for collaborative practice in the context of diversity.

Questions:

- Who are important stakeholders? What is their interest in this project? What can be their role and influence on the project results?
- How can stakeholders be involved in the process of building a shared knowledge base about tackling social inequalities through collaborative practice?
- Role of training institutions in disseminating and exploiting project results? How to involve them from the beginning?



Actions to involve stakeholders and create support for sustainable project results.



## 5 Common phases in each pilot?

### 5.1 Preparation phase

Indicative timing: September – November 2018

The central focus is getting to know each other, gaining trust, mapping the starting situation, developing an action plan tailored to the pilot school and making the necessary organizational arrangements.

Questions:

- What are the aims of the preparation phase in this particular pilot school?
- How and when will you discuss this with the team and director?
- Who will be involved in the preparation phase and how?
- In which way will you support the ECEC center during this phase? What will you as a facilitator do? What do you expect from the director and the team?
- How can you safeguard and built a safe learning environment from the beginning on, taking into account the needs of/the power imbalance between the different practitioners? What is needed in this ECEC center?
- When will you plan your first stakeholders meeting and what to discuss?
- How will you document the actions and experiences throughout the preparation phase? How do you document the voice of the different practitioners, taking into account the power imbalance between different kind of practitioners?

### 5.2 Learning and action phase

Indicative timing: November 2018 – April 2019

The central focus is learning and action within the ECEC center. Learning and action is facilitated via different kind of activities, e.g. learning labs, documentation, group reflection, ...

Questions:

- What are the aims of the learning and action phase in this particular pilot school?
- How and when will you discuss this with the team and director?
- Who will be involved in the learning and action phase and how?
- In which way will you support the pilot school during this phase? What will you as a facilitator do? What do you expect from the director and the team?
- What will you undertake to follow-up the pilot school in between meetings?
- How will the learning and action in the pilot school will be documented?
- When to plan a stakeholder meeting and what to discuss?



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### 5.3 Consolidation phase

Indicative timing: April – June 2019

The central focus is looking back and forward: what did we achieved in the past months? What needs to be done to consolidate the achieved results and to continue the started process?

Questions:

- What are the aims of the consolidation phase in this particular pilot school?
- How and when will you discuss this with the team and director?
- Who will be involved in the learning and action phase and how?
- In which way will you support the pilot school during this phase? What will you as a facilitator do? What do you expect from the director and the team?
- How to document the actions and experiences in this phase?
- When to plan a stakeholder meeting and what to discuss?