



## Intermediate evaluation Denmark/ March 2019

### AIMS

#### Central aims of The Value Project

The specific objectives of the VALUE project are:

- Gain a *detailed understanding of the situation of lower qualified practitioners* that help and assist preschool teachers and the collaboration between both in dealing with the care and learning needs of diverse children and families in the countries involved.
- Develop, test and implement *innovative professional development pathways for the whole teams* within ECEC centres, which (1) strengthen a collaborative approach to address the learning and care needs of diverse children and families and (2) strengthen the role and position of lower qualified ECEC practitioners.
- *Raise awareness of policy makers and organizing bodies* in the ECEC field about: (1) making the invisible position of lower qualified practitioners more visible; (2) the importance of a collaborative approach in the context of complex multi-diverse societies; (3) the working conditions needed to strengthen the position and agency of lower qualified practitioners and to enable a collaborative approach.

**In other words:** VALUE is about appreciating the diversity of day-care services in terms of care and learning: To value diversity in the collaboration between all day care professionals, day care will help to better address the needs of learning and care among children with different backgrounds - family and local environment.

### METHODS

We create professional development pathways to strengthen a collaborative approach in the context of diversity (within staff attending ECEC). The VALUE pathway is collectively for the whole staff (lower qualified 'assistants' and preschool teachers), whereas mainstream professional development usually focuses either on preschool teachers only, or on different types of practitioners separately.

The project works on valuing diversity within the staff, already during the professional development path. This is an innovative approach to 'training' in which participants experiment actively what they are supposed to learn (they learn reflection by reflecting, negotiation by negotiating, valuing diversity by valuing their diversity).

The project wants to explore and create possible links between professional development and adapted pathways towards a qualification for lower qualified practitioners.

In the Danish model for TOT (Training og Trainers) as a part of VALUE aiming the above mentioned goals we are particularly interested in the social and experimental dimensions of collaborative learning aiming professionals with diverse educational background.



## PROCESS

### 1. Specific focus on the preparation phase

#### Who was involved?

- a. The preparation phase involved different participants at different levels: researchers, facilitators (DPU team), and managers from three ECEC institutions in Randers municipality. Randers municipality previously participated in the innovative CPD (continuous professional development) programme VIDA (Jensen & Iannone, 2018).
- b. Three day-care institutions in Randers municipality are participating in VALUE. In the preparation phase, representatives from the municipal day-care administration worked with researchers and facilitators to determine the overall framework for the project. Three managers at the institutions were involved in the planning at the overall level. Following initial communication via email and telephone, a face-to-face meeting was organised in Randers involving the three managers and the DPU team. Mutual and realistic expectations and opportunities were clarified and the overall implementation plan for the project was decided. The DPU team planned the overall TOT process based on the framework developed by the VALUE team.

Clarifying professional learning concepts and deciding pedagogical principles for the work was a very important part of the planning process and provided the fundament for the practical implementation. This work was based on a conceptual paper (Jensen, 2018) that provided the theoretical framework<sup>1</sup> for concrete CPD choices. Learning laboratories (LL) will be conducted over the course of a nine-month period (October 2018 – June 2019) based on the challenges experienced by participants in relation to 1) the current community of practice, characterised by educational diversity; and 2) day-care practices tackling social inequality and diversity among children and families.

A total of eight LL's will be held: 1) a kick-off seminar for all employees; 2) six joint learning laboratories involving representatives from each of the three participating day-care facilities and members of different professional groups (including day-care managers); and 3) a final seminar for the same group that took part in the kick-off seminar, e.g. all employees at the institutions.

Some key points:

Inspired by Engeström's concept of expansive learning and change laboratories, the learning laboratories (LL) that are central to the CPD in VALUE employ a practice-oriented and participatory approach. The participants select real world challenges from their everyday practice that they want to work with and decide how they want to work develop evaluation criteria etc.

Collaborative /co-created learning, inspired by Bason, was chosen as the way of working at meetings with the participants. It became pivotal to frame and facilitate a collaborative learning process among the participants, with their diverse perspectives, by challenging their views and the challenges they experienced and working together to create new opportunities for developing practice within the workplace. Between the joint Learning laboratories the institutions was expected to work in local laboratories (local LL's).

Translation, inspired by i.e. Røvik, was the third concept chosen to increase the opportunities for participants to implement new professional knowledge, insights and concrete ideas within

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<sup>1</sup> Jensen, Bente, Value Changing practices in ECEC through Learning laboratories – a Danish case, 12/12/18



their own practice. It was important to develop a structure securing the translation between joint and local LLs.

- c. The VALUE project - its purpose, ideas and concept - was presented and discussed at a kick-off meeting for all employees at the three-day-care institutions in Randers municipality October 2018. Expectations and possible ideas for content were discussed.
- d. After the kick-off meeting, the managers at the three institutions and their employees chose three participants (trainees) from each institution to participate in the joint LLs. Each institution selected a representative of each of the different professional groups – a manager, an early childhood educator with a BA degree and a childcare assistant.

### **How many times did the trainers meet with the trainees?**

In the preparation phase, the trainers met with the managers of the three institutions twice (plus telephone meetings), and with the employees once at the kick-off meeting.

### **What was the content of the meetings? What was discussed?**

The content of the meetings with the managers was to decide on and develop the overall implementation plan, agree on concrete issues such as a timetable, meeting places, choice of participants etc. In addition, the learning process and the managers' roles were discussed. It was decided that when the trainees worked in cross-institutional groups at the LLs, the leaders should be a group of their own.

At the kick-off meeting, employees at the institutions received the same information as the managers got, and had the opportunity to ask questions, discuss the project and confirm their participation.

### **Which methods were used?**

A participatory approach with open dialogue and shared responsibility for the overall planning was instrumental in securing a local anchoring of the ongoing process and ensuring local dissemination of information. The manager's role is pivotal in terms of allocating working hours for participation, facilitating local discussion and involvement among employees, and supporting initiatives. The kick-off meeting was founded on a participatory perspective that sought to facilitate dialogue among all participants via presentations and facilitated discussions.

### **Did this lead to activities or specific output**

The preparation phase led to the implementation of a concrete plan. The participatory approach seemed to strengthen motivation and meaning among all participants.

### **How do you document this phase**

We have minutes from the kick-off meeting, as well as from the first learnings laboratories, and have compiled process documentation, such as trainees' comments from group work and discussions. In the DPU team, we continuously discuss the process and what lessons can be learnt for the future.

### **Were there any unforeseen things that happened**

No – perhaps due to the participatory approach, whereby the process was not planned in detail in terms of expected outcomes, only the design and framework for facilitating the process.

## **2. Specific focus on the learning and action phase**

### **How was the learning and action phase designed? Is it based on a specific professional learning approach? Is it designed as a course, meetings; internal/external?**

As indicated above, the learning and action phase is based on a clear theoretical approach to learning. The DPU team planned a kick-off meeting involving all professionals at the three participating



institutions, followed by six four-hour learning labs (LL) for the trainees (approx. 1 LL per month), and a final seminar likewise involving all professionals at the three institutions.

During the periods between these cross-institutional LLs, the trainees are urged to work locally with concrete activities based on the idea of collaboration through local learning labs (local LLs). Participants in the cross-institutional LLs, arranged by the trainers, are encouraged to initiate similar collaboration/co-creation processes at their workplace aimed at identifying and analysing challenges and at developing new ways of addressing challenges related to the pedagogical work with educare and inclusion.

### **Who was involved?**

Three trainees (a manager and two employees) from each of the three participating daycare institutions and the DPU team participate in each LL.

At the local LLs, the trainees involve their colleagues. Topics and experiences are discussed at local pedagogical meetings held at the three institutions in order to involve as many of their colleagues as possible. In this way, not only the trainees, but also other employees participate in observing and identifying concrete challenges and in trying out new approaches to educare and inclusion in pedagogical practice.

### **How many times did the trainers meet with the trainees? How many times are you still going to meet?**

After the Kick off (October 2018), there have been three meetings at cross-institutional learning labs (November 2018, January 2019, and February 2019).

There will be a further three LLs during the spring (March, April and May 2019), as well as a final seminar in June 2019.

### **What is the general content of the meetings? What is generally discussed?**

LL Workshop 1. Introducing the concrete project, both the LL and the questionnaires. Clarifying mutual expectations. Discussion of and theoretical perspectives (presentations) on the concept of inclusion. Discussion and development of ideas for linking joint LLs and local LLs. Introduction of an “experiment” model as the framework for the project. Task for homework, this model has previously been used and tested in the VIDA project, we have thereby evidence that this model

- LL Workshop 2: Which challenges did the trainees want to work with? How had they used observations and what did they discover? Theoretical input: Which perspectives on inclusion became visible to the professionals? Decision regarding local topics for experiments. Theoretical input: How to move from observation and analysis to action and implementation of change? Homework was a part of the LL methods.
- LL Workshop 3 explored questions such as: Which concrete experiments were carried out? Which challenges emerged? How did the participants continue the work in their own institution? Theoretical input: Working with local goals and aims and moving from goals and aims to actions.
- LL Workshop 4. The aim is to work with a presentation and discussion of the experimental model for change in relation to the work with educare and inclusion.
- LL Workshop 5 – 6. The aims will be to consolidate the changes in the institutions in ways that help and assist preschool teachers and the collaboration between both in dealing with the care and learning needs of diverse children and families in the countries involved.



### **Which methods for reflection and discussion are used?**

Structured and facilitated learning processes that ensure individual reflection and that different “voices” are heard through common reflection and dialogue. Results written on large posters so that key points are made visible for all. Switch between individual work, group discussions and theoretical presentations that frame and enrich the discussions.

The first part of the work takes place in cross-institutional groups. The next part is in local groups. The process at LL 1: Identifying participants’ current preoccupations (preunderstanding); encountering new perspectives and mutual inspiration through discussions cross-institutional groups and theoretical presentations; and finally, translation to own practice in local groups.

### **Did this phase lead already to some activities, specific output, and ongoing results?**

It has led to both concrete practical activities and eye-opening new insights; e.g. how difficult it is to continue to observe and identify challenges, in order to gain a deeper and more varied understanding, rather than taking immediate action when a problem is recognized, which can often lead to a more superficial understanding and less sustainable solution.

While this approach can provide participants with a clear sense of direction and help focus discussions, it can also hinder innovation by excluding certain perspectives and preventing thinking outside the box’ it also led to new insights and discussions about ways of working with the process.

E.g. the consequences of a detailed playbook with strong control over topics and time allotted for discussions that might provide a clear feeling of the process or reduce perspectives and new thinking vs a more flexible and open planning of the process that can take into account participants’ current concerns and support emotional professional engagement, but also risks creating more chaos and insecurity.

The participants’ preconditions for learning and the personal needs and preferences of the facilitator when striking a balance between a more top-down or a more bottom-up approach are of importance.

### **How do you document the phase?**

We record detailed minutes of all LLs, including our observations and participants’ comments at the Learning Labs. We compile participants’ written documentation of experiments and conduct regular questionnaires to be completed by participants. In addition, we have developed a tool for self-description – a personal log and an experiment form that we distribute once a month helping participants describe in detail their collaborative work with experiments to change their educare and inclusion practice.

### **Did anything unforeseen happen?**

So far, the process has gone according to plan, other than understaffing due to illness within the team. Later, we will complete more analyses of the range of data we collected.

## **CONDITIONS**

The conditions that are crucial to the Danish VALUE pilot are

- A clear collaboration agreement with the municipal director of ECEC
- The necessary resources that allow the participating day-care managers to attend 4-hour workshops once a month
- Sites to hold monthly workshops, and catering
- Sites to hold the kick-off meeting and final seminar for about 60 people
- Resources to hold local LLs integrated in the everyday life at the institutions



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- Motivation and a sense of ownership are important aspects to develop and sustain throughout the project and after. The participants are used to working collaboratively – however, in VALUE, collaboration is a more visible and challenging part of everyday practice
- Facilitators are important – they must be familiar with the culture and have to understand the pedagogical approaches at the local institutions and be ready to exercise the bottom-up approach that gives the participants maximum involvement, both in facilitating the cross-institutional LL Labs workshops and when training participants to implement the same process at local LLs
- A safe and trusting environment
- A shared understanding that everyone's voice is important

The process will continue and participants have already expressed a desire to participate in writing a book presenting best practice' of ideas to be used by others working with educare and inclusion.

### **STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

People from key organizations are invited (Ministry, FOA, KL, EVA)

The director from Randers municipality

One or two representatives from a university college (responsible for training ECEC professionals)

One or two representatives from the professionals in the participating municipality

A total of 9 participants in addition to the three members of the DPU team

Three meetings will be held: April, October and December 2019

Invitation to the first meeting has been sent. The group will, in particular, be asked to contribute ideas for the dissemination of results, both locally and nationally as well as the projects potential sustainable ECEC quality enhancement in terms of tackling diversity and inequality.