
PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE PILOTS

Report discussion tables

MAIN AIM OF THE DISCUSSION:

Reflect and inspire each other on the central concepts/issues of the VALUE project, starting from the experiences in the pilots.

- Collaboration in a diverse team,
- Educare approach,
- Professionalization.

AND Formulate first lessons learned on the basis of discussion/exchange on the process evaluation.

Collaboration in a diverse team

Guiding questions

- How to create 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?
- 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, etc.)?
- How to avoid an 'us and them' dynamic?
- What are the experiences in so far? What worked and which difficulties / challenges every one encountered in the pilots? And what are implications for the professional learning path and, more specifically, the role of the trainer/facilitator?



Discussion

GENERAL TOPICS in the DISCUSSION

US versus THEM OR WE

Is there an 'us vs them' or a 'we' feeling between assistants and teachers?

- Slovenia: WE; it is in the curriculum → there is collaboration between assistants and teachers. BUT how do the assistants perceive their identity? Is there really a 'We' feeling
- Portugal: US vs THEM
- Belgium: US vs THEM, collaboration is not yet a common practice (not between teachers, and definitely not between assistants and core practitioners) – But the goal of VALUE is to create the 'WE' feeling, or at least to create the awareness
- Denmark: in practice they work together in the classroom, but still US vs THEM, but in the learning lab 'WE'

SET UP OF THE PILOTS – WHO IS INVOLVED?

→ Starting point to decide who to involve = the context of the pilot

- Slovenia: PLC (professional learning community) with 'leaders'. These leaders can be the principal, teacher, or assistant. PLC is set up as a TOT (train the trainer)
- Portugal: training for assistants (not mixed, ethics, participative decision, need for safe environment and trust). But there will be bridging with other staff (principal and core practitioners)
- Denmark: learning labs with 3 'representatives' / actors of change: principal, pedagogue, assistant
- BELGIUM: original idea: mixed groups with assistants, teachers, principal. - - -
 - However, assistants didn't always felt so open to speak → also added working tables only for assistants, but with direct connection to each other
 - Role of the principal >< trust?
 - In Antwerp: work also with a core group



SET UP OF THE PILOTS – CONTENT?

- Starting from the content:
 - Slovenia: pilot school 1: diversity, democracy; pilot school 2: creativity
 - Denmark: 3 pilot schools: playground → but also focuses on relational level: how to train the whole staff?
 - Portugal: role of child, participation, ... → but also reflection: each assistant reflects in a portfolio on their role
- Starting from reflection:
 - Belgium: first focus on professional identity: what is our role/task in this school? E.g. Brussels: draw yourself on the map of the school: all teachers put themselves in the classroom, all assistants on the playground → based on these reflections decide on what / which actions they will work

E.g. develop a vision on what it means to be an assistant in the school – be a real team (assistants also to team meetings), role to parents (assistants also present when the parents come and visit the school for the first time), ... → assistants more involved in pedagogical vision and approach

Remark: often there is an immediate focus on actions, but without reflecting (cfr. PCDA)

BUILDING TRUST – CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Facilitator takes care of group dynamics (e.g. Denmark / Belgium: leaders talk a lot)
- Clear shared agreements
 - Slovenia: based on WANDA
 - Denmark: every voice is important, no wrong answers
- Meta communication e.g. Denmark communicate about choices
- Belgium: Starting with trust activities (joining them on a neighbourhood walk, joining them at a cooking activity, ...) → This takes TIME

ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

- Portugal: give confidence to the assistants & INTENTIONALITY
- Brussels: narrative coaching:



- first build trust, role of facilitator is limited, mainly listen
- in later stage confront them with the things they said.
- For example, in 1e session: 'teachers and appendix' → they came back to that in later sessions

ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

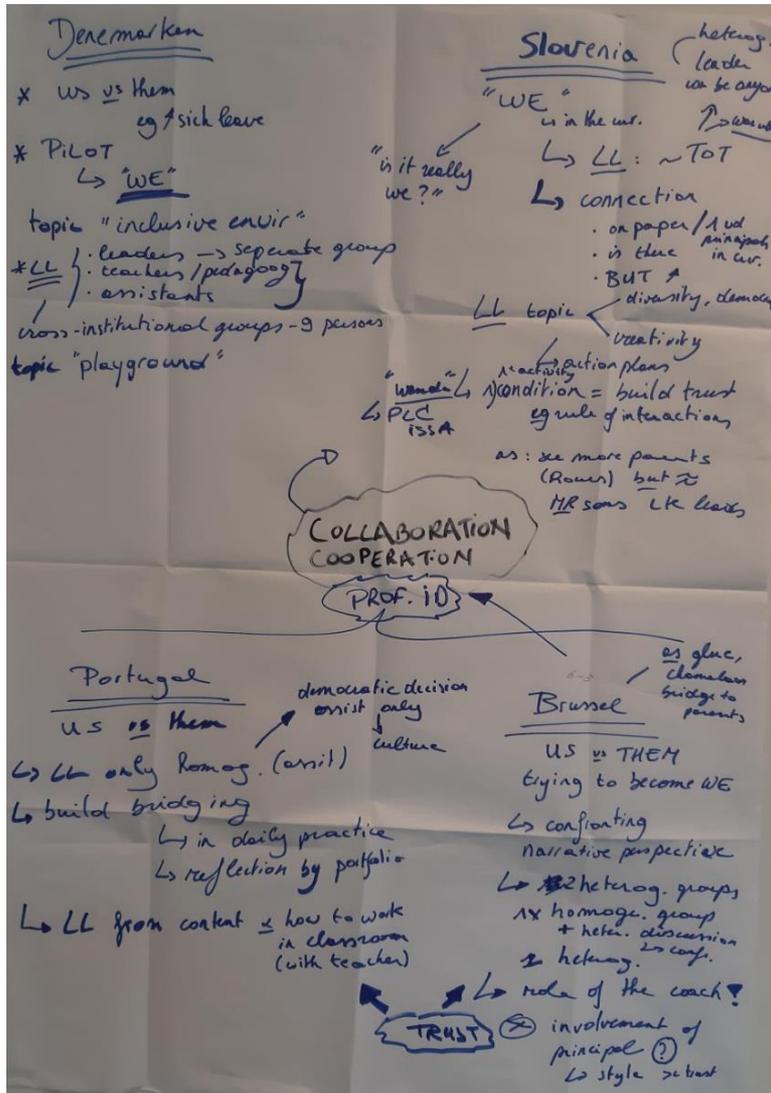
= crucial to really change things

e.g. Antwerp: principal is out for a long time, ad interim principal (= care coordinator) can't make sustainable decisions

OTHER POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Lack of assistants – e.g. in Flanders often only 9h/week for 'kinderverzorgsters' in a school
- What after VALUE? Make sure that it is sustainable (cfr. Discussion 15/03)





Educare approach

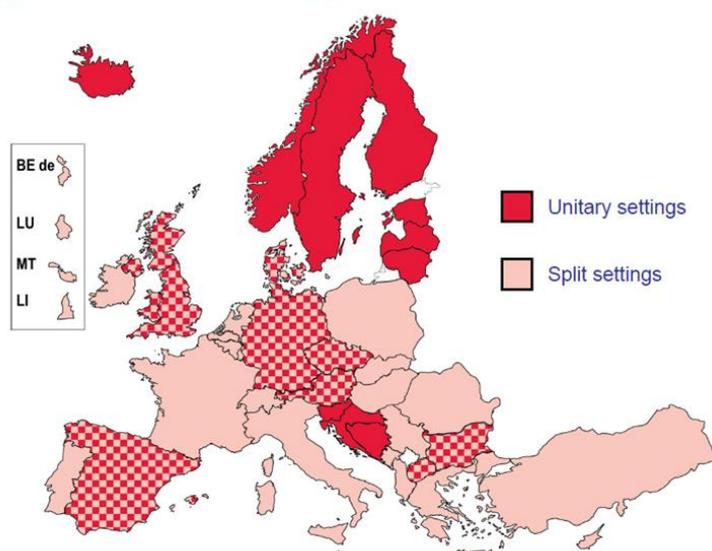
Guiding questions

- 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?
- What are the experiences in so far? What worked and which difficulties / challenges every one encountered in the pilots? And what are implications for the professional learning path and, more specifically, the role of the trainer/facilitator?

Discussion

In order to discuss the educare approach in different countries, one needs to understand that different countries have different histories in ECEC systems. Some countries are characterised by a split ECEC systems in which childcare services for the youngest and preschool education for the oldest children is organised under different Ministries. Others countries have a unitary ECEC system in which integrated services exist from birth until CSE.

Organisation of centre-based ECEC, 2016/17



Source: Eurydice.



The UNESCO report of 2010, *Caring and Learning together*, demonstrated how unitary systems are more likely to adopt an integrated Educare approach instead of split systems. The value project is interesting in this regards as it encompasses different countries and histories

- Slovenia is characterised by a long tradition of unitary system for ECEC centres from 1 until 6 years old. The introduction of a new pedagogical curriculum in the 90ies was a pivotal moment as this new curriculum was more child centered and respected children in what they are already capable of doing. Before the pedagogical program was more prescriptive. Due to this new curriculum also the professional qualification level increased. Before people with a nursery degree could work in ECEC. Now this changed to educational profiles based on a broad educational holistic concept. Due to this we have a long tradition in which core practitioners and assistants collaborate in a very egalitarian way. (even when salaries are different). Core practitioners are more involved in the bureaucratic requirements as well. In Slovenia they use one word to describe this educare approach in preschool (see photo below)
- Belgium is characterised by a longstanding split between childcare and preschool education starting in the 19th century. The institutional split between childcare and preschool education unintentionally perpetuated the ingrained idea that care and learning of young children are two completely different aspects of human life: care of young children is a matter that belongs to the private domain of family education and/or to childcare institutions. Learning of young children belongs to the formal (pre-)school settings. Because of this institutional and conceptual split between caring and learning, bot childcare - and preschool institutions are historically dealing with a lack of respectively learning and care. One of the main issues that have occasionally been addressed by different stakeholders since the 1970s is the fact that preschool education is not well adapted to the caring and learning needs of the youngest children throughout the whole school day. One of the ways to deal with this problem was deploying assistants with a childcare qualification on preschool education. But due to lask of budget, mostly non qualified people supervise the in between moments in school day. Currently a lot is happening in order to challenge the conceptual split between caring and learning. The European Quality Framework could definitely help in Belgium in order to progress in this matter
- Portugal is characterised by a split system between childcare and preschool education. During the repressive regime which ruled the country from 1926 to 1974, the care and education of young children were seen as a purely private matter, a responsibility solely for the family. Pre-school education had no priority in official



policy and the Ministry of Education was stripped of its responsibilities in this area. A major reform of the education system in 1973 included pre-school education. Because of this later start of ECEC, the split and hierarchy between care and learning is less dominant than in other countries with traditional ECEC split systems (e.g. Belgium, France,...).

- Denmark is characterised by a historical longstanding unitary system of ECEC centres for children from 0 until 6 years old. The educare approach is inherently typical of Denmark and was for the first time used by Stig Bröström in the international scene in order to make a clear division between more Anglo-Saxon cognitive learning focus of education and education in which upbringing, socialisation, caring, learning are inseparable. LEARNING THROUGH PLAY is an essential feature of this approach. Conditions are set so children can be PRESENT IN TIME. From this perspective tasks between pedagogues and assistants are fairly egalitarian. They plan together and the dialogue with parents is more the responsibility from the pedagogue. A challenge however, tackled in the VIDA project is that because of this extreme child-lead approach, this had a negative effect on social inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. So how to ensure that educare and social inclusion are intertwined? In general Denmark as other Nordic countries are characterised by lower power differences, less distance, less hierarchy in decision structures and organisations.

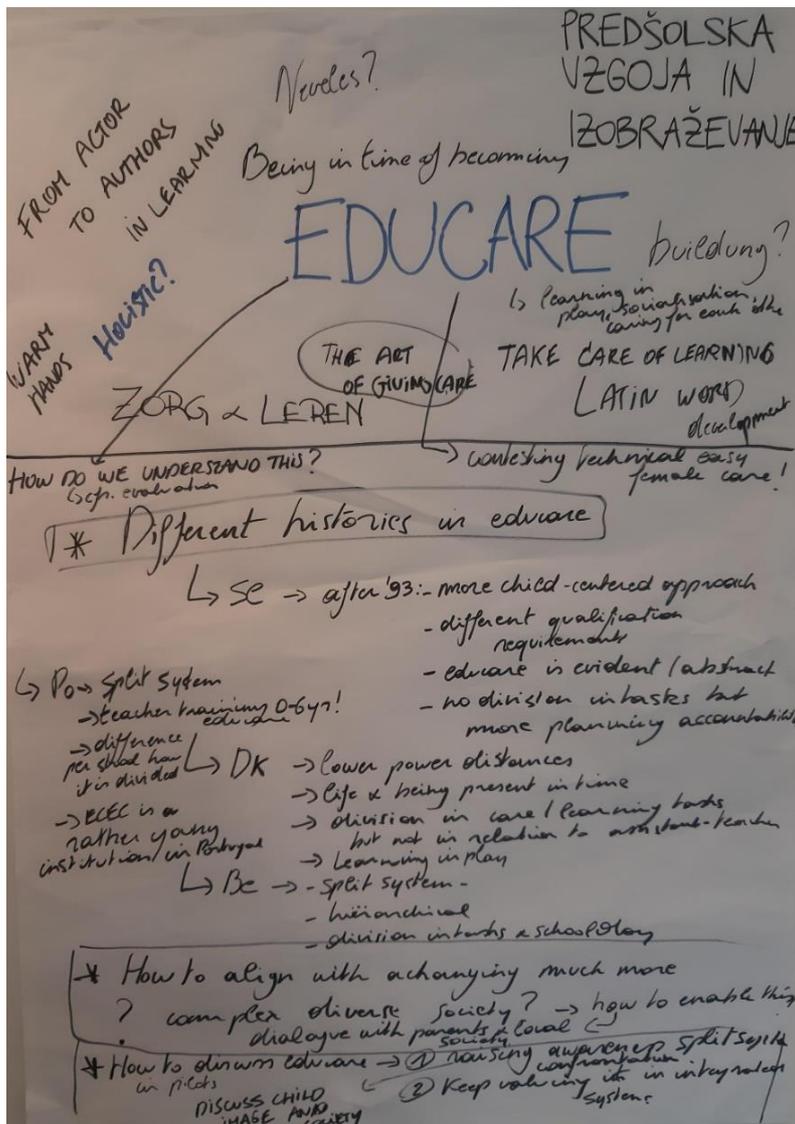
When discussing these differences in the different countries, this explains a lot what the current challenges are in terms of collaboration between core practitioners and assistants. Some participants made the remark that in a country like Belgium it seems that time stood still as care is still perceived as a burden that ideally is dealt with in the home environment so being the sole responsibility of mainly the mother. Why is educare so much more present in other countries is also related to the question **how ECEC centres fine-tune with the current challenges of society** (superdiversity, neoliberalism that commodifies care, schoolification of ECEC...)? That explains partially why a country like Portugal already has a different take on educare even in an institutional split ECEC system. The ECEC centre was developed much later in the 1970ies, the revolutionary period, so this will reflect in the pedagogical approach as well.

So the participants of this discussion table agreed that besides the focus on 'collaborative learning in team' we also need to work more on **RAISING AWARENESS & DISCUSSION:**

- On child image / on educare and the detrimental effects of a care and learning split /hierarchy and how it is understood in different contexts. In the photo below we summarised some key words to clarify educare even more.

- on the connection between society and ECEC – how to align ECEC with the challenges and needs of current super diverse societies? E.g. to ensure that educare and social inclusion are intertwined.

Although in unitary ECEC systems, there is a longer history in educare, also in these countries it is very important with the ECEC workforce and broader society to keep valuing educare in the context of an increasing schoolification tendency! Some researchers already have reported how care language even in Nordic countries might disappear.



Professionalization

Guiding questions

- Who are the assistants in the different pilots? What is their profile and current involvement and role in the pilot schools? How do they perceive their own professional identity (mother role vs. professional educator)?
- What is the initial training of the assistants in the pilot schools? If assistants have a lower qualification, are there initiatives/possibilities to participate in a qualification path?

Discussion

WHO ARE THE ASSISTANTS IN THE PILOTS?

Considerable differences between pilots:

- Level of initial training:
 - from low qualified, e.g. pilots in Belgium and Portugal
 - to higher qualified, e.g. pilot Slovenia: very mixed, also with bachelor degree (e.g. waiting for their promotion to work as a teacher); pilot Denmark: youngster working as an assistant before taking up their higher education
- Number of assistants / number of working hours
- Background/origin of assisting functions
- Job titles used to refer to assistants:
 - Denmark: Med-Hjælper ('with helper')
 - Belgium: kinderverzorgster ('childminder') or hulpopvoeder (educator's aid)
Remark: in the past the name 'childminder' was also used in childcare centres (0-3 y); today another name is used: kinderbegeleider, meaning 'educator of children' or 'accompanist of children' → change in name reflects change in thinking about job
 - Portugal: auxiliares (people who auxiliare~ operational assistants) or auxiliário de educação

Reflections on job titles used to refer to 'assistants':

- In most cases job title refers to a ROLE but is not to a PROFESSION



- Interesting to explore the meaning, the origin and changes in the job titles used: what does this tell about the content of the job, the perspective on educate, etc?

Remark: In one pilot school volunteers have an important role in taking care of the youngest children. Pitfall = depend entirely on volunteers to respond to basic needs of young children.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ASSISTANTS

What do we mean by 'professionalization'? What is the aim of professionalization?

- 1) *Professional development within the job with the aim to strengthen competencies to deliver high quality for children and families*

= focus VALUE

Important step in VALUE project = being involved as an assistant in CPD (continuous professional development) + exploring what hinders involvement of assistants in CPD:

- Working conditions, e.g. low payment, less childfree hours
Remark: amount of childfree hours also linked to willingness of leader: how does school leader perceive cooperation between assistants and core practitioners and the importance of CPD for assistants?
- Assistants themselves are reluctant to participate in a CPD path because it brings them out of their comfort zone (the CPD path and the collaboration with teachers can also lead to the feeling of being less competent)
=> important to build the CPD path as an emancipation process strengthening self-confidence and participation.
- Ideas about own professional identity and role (focussed on caregiving) → link to how educate + collaboration between teachers and assistants is (or is not) included in the curriculum (e.g. Slovenia); this has an impact on possibilities + willingness to engage in CPD.

Remark: this hindering factors are less in place in Slovenia: cooperation assistants-teachers is written in national legislation and curriculum + culture pilots

- 2) *Professional development with the aim to acquire a formal qualification and/or improve opportunities for job mobility*

= not central focus VALUE but exploring possibilities

When lower qualified (with low chances for job mobility) engage in a CPD path, how can we value their commitment in the CPD path? Possibilities to certify the learning



results (~validation of competencies acquired by experience and participation in CPD)?

Possibilities in different countries for assistants to following a qualification path in which working and learning are combined?

→ currently no structural initiatives/system in different countries?

e.g. Slovenia: participation in a qualification path is an individual choice. If it's in the interest of the preschool, an employee can get free hours. Currently there's no shortage of teachers => no incentive for schools to invest in qualifying lower qualified assistants to become a teacher

e.g. Denmark: in general system of validation of prior experience (with possibility to receive financial support to go through procedure); leads to shorter qualification path. Also in Denmark no lack of pedagogues.

In Belgium/Portugal: especially in cities need for teachers in primary education (and especially teachers representing socio-cultural mix of school population).

