SUPPORTING THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ECEC CORE AND ASSISTING PRACTITIONERS

Endline report of the VALUE project in four countries (BE, DK, PT, SL)

September 2020

Value diversity
in care and education

1.
INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the endline report of the VALUE project. In the report, the following question will be examined: How can continuous professional development (CPD) strengthen professional identity, holistic approaches to educational work (educare) and cooperation between core and assisting practitioners working within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)? This question is explored through pilot projects conducted by research groups located in four different countries - Belgium, Denmark, Slovenia and Portugal - within the Erasmus+ project *VALUE diversity in care and education* (VALUE).

1.1 WHAT IS VALUE ABOUT?

There is evidence-based consensus that high quality ECEC, and ultimately positive outcomes for children and their families, depends on well-educated and competent staff[1] At the European level, the importance of a qualified workforce is acknowledged in the revised priorities for strategic cooperation in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2018).[2] The VALUE project takes this prioritisation for the training of highly qualified ECEC staff as its starting point.

The literature review conducted as part of VALUE[3] revealed that there is a need for more research concerning how collective professional development within ECEC can strengthen participants' **professional identity**, a holistic **educare** approach and equal and democratic **collabora-**

tion between two groups of practitioners: core and assisting practitioners. Research also offers important and relevant knowledge and experience (e.g., the CORE study, Urban et al., 2011)[4] concerning how to enhance the competences of everyone working in an ECEC system through CPD. These include both teachers and other core practitioners (with qualifications at the bachelor's level or equivalent) as well as assisting practitioners (with vocational qualifications or, in some cases, little or no formal pre-service training). The aim of VALUE was to strengthen collaboration among all ECEC practitioners working with young children, through valuing the diversity of their professional backgrounds and experiences. Special attention is paid to the role and position of assisting practitioners by strengthening their professional role and professional identity, as well as by involving them in professional development and planning. In other words, VALUE is about valuing diversity in care and education, just as valuing diversity in collaboration between all ECEC practitioners addresses the diverse learning and care needs of children, families and communities.

To achieve these objectives, different CPD pathways were developed and piloted in the four participating countries over a school year. All VALUE CPD pathways were different, reflecting the differences in national and local contexts. However, all VALUE CPD pathways included participatory approaches to collaborative learning, such as learning laboratories, co-creation, pro-

1. Jensen, P., & Rasmussen, A. W. (2016). *Professional development and its impact on children in early childhood education and care: A meta-analysis based on European studies*. CARE project; Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications. Last accessed 2017-07-19.

2. European Commission. 2018. *Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. SWD (2018) 173*. Brussels: European Commission.

3. Rutar, S., Jensen, B., Marques, A., Cardona, M.J., Van der Mespel S. & Van Laere, K., (2019). *Supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners. VALUE Literature Review in 4 countries (BE, DK, PT, SL)*. Ljubljana: ERI. https://www.value-ecec.eu/?p=3873

4. Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A. & Peeters, J. (2011). *Competence requirements in early childhood education and care. Final report*. London and Brussels, European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture.

fessional learning communities, communities of practice, co-teaching and coaching. All of these approaches were centred on the common idea that CPD in ECEC services improves not only the individual practitioner, but the entire community of practitioners.

1.2 THE DESIGN OF THE OVERALL EVALUATION

This report presents the overall endline evaluation and highlights the findings from the VALUE CPD pathways of the four countries.

This overall endline evaluation builds on the following background studies:

▸ The baseline study, which was based on a survey sent to staff in the participating pilot schools and built on quantitative data and statistical analyses (Jensen, Jager, Hulpia, Marques, & Cardona, 2019).[5]

▸ The four country reports, which reported on the experiences of facilitators and participants with the VALUE CPD pathways.[6]

The analyses reported in this overall endline report aim to exemplify how changes in the three core concepts (professional identity, educare, collaboration) occurred and were manifested as a result of the VALUE CPD pathways. Moreover, the report describes the conditions that are desirable to strengthen the VALUE CPD pathways. The insights that are presented in this report were

examined via descriptive analyses of focus group interviews with facilitators and participants. In some cases, observations and logs were also used.

Each country provided a snapshot briefly outlining the context of the pilot project (see section 2), how the VALUE CPD pathway was implemented, and a short description of lessons learned. The individual reports from each of the four countries are available in **https://www.value-ecec.eu**

To conclude, the endline analysis is part of a larger study analysing themes emerging across the four countries concerning the VALUE CPD paths and their impact in terms of the three core concepts: professional identity, an educare approach, and collaboration. In addition, we addressed ethical considerations.[7]

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE VALUE ENDLINE REPORT

The endline report first presents the different VALUE pilot projects as snapshots from the four countries (section 2). It is then followed by a description of the overall lessons learned from the projects and the insights that emerged regarding important conditions at both policy and practice levels, which can be used as a framework for the future development of CPD at all levels of ECEC (section 3). Finally, we present our conclusions and make a number of recommendations (section 4) based on the descriptions and examples in this VALUE endline report.

5. Jensen, B., Jager, J., Hulpia, H., Marques, A. & Cardona, M.J. (2019). *Supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners. Baseline study in four countries (BE, DK, PT, SL)*. Copenhagen, Denmark: DPU. https://www.value-ecec.eu/?p=3900

6. Country reports available in https://www.value-ecec.eu

7. Ethical considerations related to this study centred firstly on the very idea of involving ECEC practitioners in the experimental CPD pathway. .Practitioners were involved in all processes; their participation was entirely voluntary and they were free to leave the project at any time. In terms of research ethics, participants gave their informed consent. We ensured the sensitivity of data by respecting the anonymity of participants and considered other potential ethical issues at all stages of the process – from planning to dissemination of the findings.

2.

SNAPSHOT OF THE VALUE PILOTS

2.1 THE BELGIAN (FLEMISH) VALUE CASE

2.1.1 The context of the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE pilot project

In Belgium, ECEC has a split system. Childcare for children from 0-3 years old is under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare, whereas preschool for children between 2.5-6 years of age is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Due to the split system, the two types of institutions have distinct curricula, professional profiles and child-staff ratios.

Preschools are often part of an elementary school with one school principal. Schools in Flanders have a lot of autonomy, although the educational networks are powerful organizations (e.g., in defining the professional profiles). In Flanders, preschool teachers mainly have a bachelor degree (ISCED 6). Many preschools also have a childcare worker with a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 3B) who works for limited hours per week. These childcare workers support the core teachers in the preschool by primarily taking on caring tasks; the core teachers focus on the learning aspect. In many preschools, a holistic educare approach is not yet a reality.

2.1.2 The Belgian (Flemish) VALUE pilot schools

Two schools participated in the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE pilot project:

▸ One of the pilot schools is situated in Anderlecht (part of Brussels) and is affiliated with the subsidized public educational network. There are 76 pupils in preschool education (2.5-6 years old) divided into 4 age-specific classes. In the preschool, there is 1 childcare worker (kinderverzorgster). Next, there are

so called 'hulpopvoeders' or assistant educators. This is a specific position created by the municipality of Anderlecht, and they work in shifts from 7am-1.00pm or 12-7.00 pm.

▸ The other pilot school is situated in Antwerp and is affiliated with the Catholic educational network. In total, there are 135 children in the preschool (2.5-6 years old) divided into 6 mixed age groups. The preschool has one childcare worker (kinderverzorgster).

BELGIAN VALUE PILOT PROJECT
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

ANDERLECHT	**ANTWERP**
76	135
Subsidized public educational network (2.5-6 years old)	Catholic educational network (2.5-6 years old)
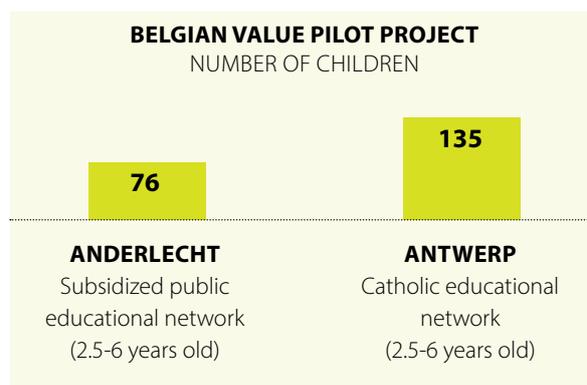
Both schools are characterized by a high percentage of ethnic diversity among children and families, which mirrors the diversity of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated. However, this diversity is not mirrored by the core practitioners of the school teams.

2.1.3 The Belgian (Flemish) VALUE CPD pathway

Both pilot schools were supported in their VALUE CPD pathway by a tandem of 2 VALUE facilitators from the Erasmus University College in Brussels and the Karel De Grote University College. In each pilot school, each of 2 facilitators had a different background and expertise: pedagogical coaches in childcare (0-3) or preschool education (2.5-6). All VALUE facilitators met regularly during a coaching trajectory supported by VBJK.

BELGIAN VALUE CPD PATHWAY
ANDERLECHT

7 PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

2 ASSISTING PRACTITIONERS

1 CHILDCARE WORKER

1 PEDAGOGICAL COACH

1 COORDINATOR OF THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE

BELGIAN VALUE CPD PATHWAY
ANTWERP

6 PRESCHOOL TEACHERS
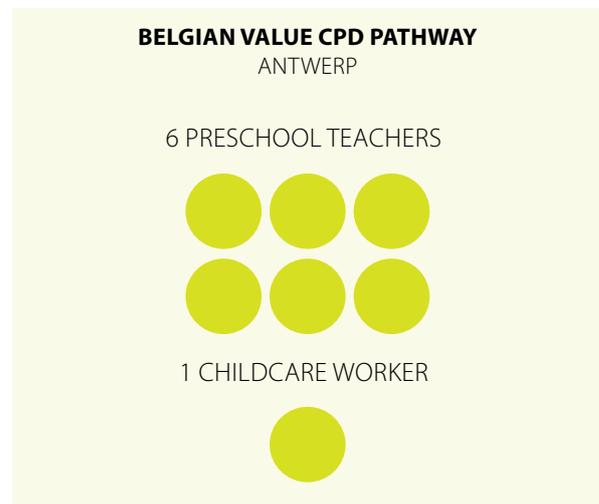
1 CHILDCARE WORKER

The VALUE CPD pathway was different in the 2 pilot schools.

▸ In the VALUE pilot project in Brussels, the VALUE learning group consisted of 7 preschool teachers, 2 assisting practitioners, 1 childcare worker, and 1 pedagogical coach from the pedagogical guidance centre, as well as the coordinator of the out-of-school care. The VALUE learning pathway was based on the idea of narrative coaching. The VALUE cycle consisted of 4 phases with 7 meetings. In each phase, the role of the VALUE facilitator was crucial and evolved: from facilitator, to confronter, co-creator, and then to companion. There were also regular meetings with the school principal.

▸ In the VALUE pilot project in Antwerp, the VALUE learning group consists of 6 preschool teachers and, sometimes, the childcare worker. The VALUE cycle consisted of 4 phases with a kick-off and 6 meetings. During this VALUE CPD pathway, a great deal of effort was put into providing in-spiration (e.g., a study visit to an inspiring preschool and an inspiring childcare service for children between 0-3 years of age) and reflection. Next, the VALUE CPD pathway was linked to the new curriculum of the Catholic educational network (ZILL – Eager-ness to Live and Learn).

Although the 2 VALUE CPD pathways were different in the 2 pilot schools, there were also some similarities. First, in both pathways the participatory approach was crucial. The content was decided together with the facilitators and the participants. Second, both pathways were char-acterised by reflection on the daily practice of the participants.

Alongside of the two VALUE pilot schools, the VALUE stakeholders group played an important role in the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case. This stakeholders group consisted of representatives

of core organizations in ECEC. In addition to the follow-up of the VALUE pilot projects, they discussed the position of assisting practitioners in Flemish education and provided input for the Flemish policy recommendations.

2.1.4 Lessons learned from the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE pilot projects

The continuous reflections of the VALUE facilitators and the focus groups with the VALUE participants and the school principals revealed the importance of taking time to reflect and discuss the professional identity and educare approach of all professionals. This, combined with the actions taken, led to changed mind sets and changed daily practices towards children, families and colleagues[8].

The Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case also shows the importance of a stakeholders group, working more from a 'helicopter level', transcending the micro level, in order to have a sustainable impact on Flemish education (e.g., by discussing the topic of educare and by discussing the policy recommendations based on the 2 Flemish pilot projects).

2.1.5 Three core concepts

The Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case led to the following crucial core points concerning the three core concepts:

‣ Due to the VALUE CPD pathways, there was a growing awareness in both pilot schools of the core and assisting practitioners'

professional identity. For example, in the Brussels pilot school, the core and assisting practitioners came to feel more appreciated and valued in their professional roles. They developed from personal friends into professional colleagues. Due to the VALUE pathway, they started to see themselves as equal and complementary professional partners.

‣ Next, the VALUE CPD pathway resulted in a mind-shift to start working more in a holistic **educare approach**. For example, in the pilot school in Antwerp they now work in a more child-centred fashion from an emergent curriculum, instead of focusing mainly on 'the learning and education' following prescribed plans.

‣ In both pilot schools, there was inter-professional **collaboration** between assisting and core practitioners during the VALUE CPD pathways. In both schools, the practitioners believed that they were already an engaged team. However, this became stronger due to the VALUE learning pathway. All of them now feel the need to continue to collaborate even more. An important part of the VALUE learning pathway in both pilot schools that strengthened this inter-professional collaboration was the creation of an open and safe environment.

2.1.6. Conditions and challenges

Flemish education is historically characterized by a division between education and care. This is

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8. To gather the data for the Belgian report, focus groups were held in the 2 pilot schools. In the pilot school in Antwerp, the focus group consisted of the school principal, the care coordinator, 2 preschool teachers and one intern pedagogical coach. In the Brussels' pilot school, there was a focus group with a representation of the participants and an individual interview with the school principal.
Then, the data were based on the continuous reflection of the VALUE facilitators. In two VALUE pilot projects, the 2 facilitators reflected together on each VALUE meeting. Subsequently, they also reflected during the coaching with VBJK.

displayed in the separation of roles between the core practitioners, who focus on learning, and the assisting practitioners who focus on care. Next, there are limited opportunities for inter-professional collaboration or CPD where both core and assisting practitioners 'learn together.' Hence, VALUE had an added value for all professionals. This was clearly expressed by the core and assisting practitioners during the focus groups. For example, a participant stated: *"We could take time to reflect, to share thoughts and we could really listen to each other during the VALUE sessions. It seems to me that this is also one of the achievements of the VALUE learning pathway."* By analysing the VALUE pilot projects and the perceptions of the facilitators and the participants, we can determine several conditions that are important in order to have a sustainable impact.

▸ A first crucial condition is **strong leadership**. The school principal should provide the organizational and structural environment to strengthen collaboration between all professionals, such as child-free hours. In both pilot schools, the school principal searched for possibilities so that both core and assisting practitioners could meet (e.g., in one pilot school, bachelor degree students took over the classes; in the other school it was the gym teacher who did so). The school principal should also, in a participatory way, define a vision on continuous professional development that strengthens an educare approach and the professional identity of all staff members. For example, in the pilot school in Antwerp, the school principal and his team linked the VALUE learning pathway to the new curriculum.

▸ A second condition is the tandem of **competent VALUE facilitators** who supported the VALUE learning pathway in the pilot schools. They stimulated the professionals to reflect and act together on their daily practice and feel free to change their minds about how they work. One strength of the Belgian VALUE case was the different background and expertise of the VALUE facilitators' tandem (i.e., pedagogical coaches in childcare 0-3 years of age and preschool education 2.5-6). After each VALUE meeting, the 2 VALUE facilitators reflected on the process, and there were regular intervisions between the 4 VALUE facilitators supported by VBJK. This reflection is crucial, as it stimulated the facilitators to constantly re-evaluate the VALUE process (e.g., the content and their own facilitation roles).

▸ A third condition is the creation of an **open and safe environment**, where all professionals feel trusted. The facilitators found that their core role was the creation of a climate in which both core and assisting practitioners feel confident in reflecting and taking actions which change their daily practices towards children, parents, and colleagues.

▸ A fourth condition is a **competent system** with good labour conditions, job qualifications, job mobility, better salaries, … for all ECEC professionals (assisting practitioners, core practitioners and school principals). This was stressed by the stakeholders group.

▸ A final condition is sufficient **time**. One school year is too short to change the minds and actions of all professionals. So, during that time, only the first steps can be taken in the VALUE pilot project. However, these first steps are crucial and can lead to changes in the long run in strengthening an educare approach, in professional identity and in collaboration between core and assisting practitioners.

2.1.7 In Summary the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case

The Belgium ECEC system is characterized by a split system. This has an influence on a perceived division between education and care, with the core practitioners focusing mainly on learning and the assisting practitioners mainly focusing on care.

The Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case stressed the importance of a competent system. In the two pilot schools, a tandem of VALUE facilitators supported the collaboration between all professionals. It strengthened their professional identity and, due to the VALUE CPD pathway, core and assisting practitioners were more aware of the link between care and education and started to work more from a holistic educare approach. Also, the stakeholders group, which worked on an overarching level, played a crucial role in the Belgian (Flemish) VALUE case in discussing the crucial conditions for the three core concepts. This VALUE case can be a source of inspiration for other Belgian (Flemish) preschools. It can inspire the strengthening of collaboration, an educare approach and the professional identity of all pre-school professionals.

2.2 THE DANISH VALUE CASE

2.2.1 The context of the Danish VALUE pilot project

In Denmark, ECEC is provided through a unitary system which includes children from 0-8 years of age. The Ministry of Social Affairs (State) oversees the ECEC system. The responsibility for implementing the national curriculum is placed at the municipal level. The Danish professional development systems and policies (pre-service and in-service) are aimed at strengthening educational attainment and competence development among ECEC staff in meeting new demands and challenges. The most recently introduced legislative requirements for the content of ECEC are encompassed in "The Strengthened Educational Curriculum", ("Den styrkede læreplan", 2020),[9] which also focuses on an educare approach. In terms of diversity, Danish ECEC research has explored how ECEC might support children in socially disadvantaged positions and tackle negative social heritage and inequality. This could be done for instance, by studying how everyday life in ECEC services influences children in socially disadvantaged positions, and how the learning environment can improve learning opportunities for all children. Despite this growing amount of research, some practitioners question how ECEC can make a difference in reducing the effects of social inequality in daily practice.[10]

2.2.2 The Danish VALUE pilot schools

Three schools participated in the Danish VALUE pilot project, involving a total of 3 managers and 62 staff members. The staff questionnaire had a total of 55 respondents: 31 core practitioners, 22 assisting practitioners and two others. The three schools had 57, 98 and 135 children, respectively, giving a total of 290 children attending the pilot schools. All three schools are located in the same municipality (Randers), in an area characterised by a predominantly middle socioeconomic class demographic. One of the pilot schools divides the children into age-specific groups; the other two pilot schools have mixed age groups.

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9. Ministry of Children and Education (2020). The strengthened pedagogical curriculum, Framework and content.

10. Jensen, B. (2020). Social arv, ulighed og dagtilbuds betydning – tænkt forfra. I: *'Social ulighed og mobilitet i det 21. århundrede'. Bidrag til den danske debat.* Niels Rosendal Jensen, Anne Larson, Christian Christrup Kjeldsen, Bente Jensen & Thomas Clausen (eds.) (In press).

DANISH VALUE PILOT PROJECT
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

RANDERS #1	RANDERS #2	RANDERS #3
57	98	135

DANISH VALUE CPD PATHWAY

3 TEACHERS

3 ASSISTANTS

3 MANAGERS
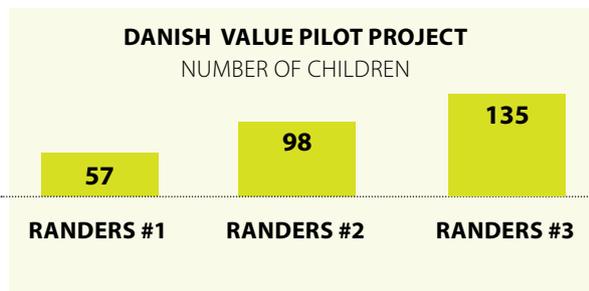
2.2.3 The Danish VALUE CPD path

The Danish VALUE case is based on the concept of learning labs (LL), a social constructivist approach to organisational learning and co-creation of knowledge within communities of practice. The VALUE CPD pathway at the three Danish VALUE pilot schools combines the following theoretical traditions: learning laboratories, co-creation, collaborative learning and communities of practices, and theories of translation. Central to this approach is that all employees, including management, participate on an equal footing and that the CPD learning pathways take a participatory approach. A team of facilitators and researchers initiated the LL process together with the local managers at the three pilot schools. There were 6 LLs, each lasting 4 hours and spread over a 6-month period, as well as an initial kick-off meeting and a final wrap-up meeting (8 months in total). Sixty-three employees from the three pilot schools participated. Nine participants (one teacher, one assistant and one manager from each institution) were selected to take part in a coordinating joint LL. Joint LL was the name given to the CPD workshops held in the Danish Case for the selected 9 participants.
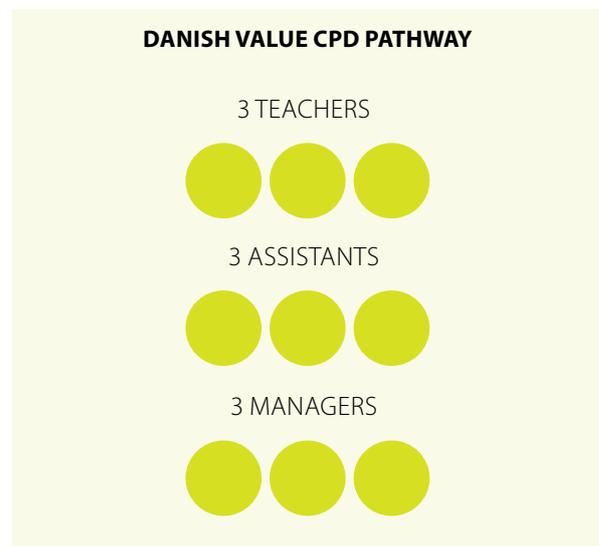
The three participants from each institution became the coordinating team with the task of translating the LL method and the new insights from the joint LLs into local LLs (the workshops held in the pilot schools).

2.2.4 Lessons learned from the Danish VALUE pilot projects

What are the crucial lessons learned? First of all, participating in LLs should underline the importance of the idea of expansive learning. Expansive learning was internalised through dialogue, critical reflection and collaboration.[11] Second, developing ideas for change of practice based on identified challenges, e.g., inequality and diversity in ECEC, was crucial for the translation of the work done in coordinating the LL to further developmental work in the local LLs. The expansive learning approach is inspired by Engeström's theory of change. Learning is not a question of adaption. Instead, learning happens when participants develop new experimental methods in collaborative practices, and collaborative reflec-

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11. http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Expansive_learning. Expansive Learning is a term coined by Engeström to describe the creation of new professional knowledge, as opposed to learners' acquisition of existing knowledge previously unknown to them.

tion for future practices is part of this learning process. This concept of reflection transcends the thinking of reflection on and in practice.

Next, the following 3 core points should be mentioned:

1. This model of collaborative/co-created LLs offered a way of working with the participants at workshops where teachers, assistants and managers were involved on an equal footing. The overall thinking was that all partners should be involved as equals, which is in line with a Nordic approach to adult learning.[12]

2. Framing and facilitating these learning processes based on dialogues among participants with diverse perspectives, as well as challenging each other and the status quo (inspired by Engeström,[13] Plotnikof, 2015),[14] was a way to include all participants collectively in the work on developing new inclusive practices (inspired by Bason).[15] This way of working collectively became pivotal throughout the Danish VALUE process. In terms of the concept of translation (inspired by Røvik)[16], it was important to secure translation processes between learning labs

in the coordinating team (Joint LL) and the local learning labs (Local LLs). Homework became a part of this translation process.

3. Participants used reflection to work on current and future practices in relation to making changes locally based on an experimental model (inspired by the VIDA project, Jensen & Brandi, 2017).[17] We learnt in VIDA - and now in VALUE - that participants were able to share an innovative educare approach with their colleagues at the ECEC institution where they worked (Jensen & Ianonne, 2018).[18] They implemented this by translating the processes of observation, reflection and analysis, learned at the joint LLs into the local learning labs.

Based on a focus group interview with the nine participants after the joint LL and discussions at the wrap-up meeting, we gained insight into the participants' perceptions of VALUE in general and on how VALUE CPD paths contributed to their professional identity, their work with educare approaches and collaboration (see 2.2.5). In addition, we gained insights from the other participants working in the local LL's through LOGS sent to an IT platform from all participants. Thus, all participants reported on how they perceived the

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12. See also the article by VALUE NVL - Nordisk netværk for voksnes læring.www.nvl.org.June 2020; Jensen, B. & Marquard, M. (2020). At lære at værdsætte diversitet i dagtilbud- professional kompetenceudvikling i læringslaboratorier (Learning to appreciate diversity in childcare centres-professional competence development in learning labs). *https://nvl.org/content/samarbejde-styrker-arbejdet-med-diversitet, https://nvl.org/Portals/0/ DigArticle/16374/At-laere-at-vaerdsaette-diversitet-i-dagtilbud.pdf.* https://nvl.org/nyhetsbrev

13. Engeström Y. (2013). Collective Concept Formation as Creation at Work. I: A. Sannino & V. Ellis (2013). *Learning and Collective Creativity. Activity-Theoretical and sociocultural Studies. (pp. 234-257)* New York: Routledge.

14. Plotnikof, M. (2015). Negotiating Collaborative Governance s: A Discursive Approach, *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal,* 20 (3), 1–22.

15. Bason, C. (2010). *Leading Public Sector Innovation. Co-creation for a better society.* Bristol: Policy Press.

16. Røvik, K. A. (2007). *Trender og translationer. Ideer som former det 21. århundredes organisation.* Oslo Universitetsforlaget AS.

17. Jensen, B. & Brandi. I. (2018). Enabling professionals to change practices aimed at tackling social inequality through professional development: results from a case study. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.* 26, 1, s. 50-65.

18. Jensen, B. & Iannone, R. L. (2018). Innovative approaches to continuous professional development (CPD) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Europe: findings from a comparative review. *European Journal of Education.* 53, 1, s. 23–33.

process with VALUE CPD pathways on LOGS by keeping diaries.

2.2.5 Three core concepts

Being involved in the Danish VALUE CPD learning pathways strengthened the three core concepts of VALUE:

1. Having a greater sense of **professional identity**, defined as a subjective feeling of being more competent, feeling better acknowledged and more involved in teams in all processes.

    One example from the focus group was an assisting practitioner who stated that being given the responsibility for introducing new ideas at the school was something new for her. She told us that her new task was to inspire colleagues to participate in the new learning processes and said: *"I feel more and better prepared for the tasks that I do daily, and I was given a voice."*

2. Feeling better equipped to implement an educare approach, i.e., a holistic way of working with learning, care and inclusion.

    For example, an assisting practitioner explained to us how she understood education, care, and inclusion as integrated rather than separate aspects of her work. She explained this holistic viewpoint: *"If the children feel that you are there for them and are not afraid to put an arm around their shoulder and have a dialogue, I think it's easier for a child to learn."*

3. Having a greater degree of **collaboration**, defined here as collaborative tasks based on three dimensions: planning activities, executing activities and evaluation.

The learning labs, for instance, encouraged reflection and the use of professional judgement through the experimental approach. An assisting practitioner described this as demanding, but also underlined: *"Being allowed to reflect is vitally important if we are to acquire and apply new knowledge and then go out and act on it."*

2.2.6 Conditions and challenges

This CPD pathway might be challenging for participants from different educational backgrounds. However, we found that, in particular, the assisting practitioners benefited from this approach to CPD.

Crucial preconditions for working with LL in the VALUE CPD pathway were:

1. Space, time, organisation, and resources, such as a suitable location for inviting 63 participants (structural features).

2. Motivation, willingness and engagement in joining the dialogue and experiment with an open mind (personal and process-oriented features).

    ▸ This attitude is created, first of all, as a result of working with experience-based challenges from daily practise, which made it possible for all practitioners to contribute equally. They all had valuable experiences.

    ▸ Working with real challenges also provides a strong feeling of involvement when developing new solutions. Using a set of diverse perspectives from all professional groups makes it possible to co-create varied flexible and sustainable solutions. The facilitators' role is to create a framework for the process: to secure

a time and place for all participants to express their thoughts and experiences, to have their expressions, ideas and inputs taken seriously, and thereby be actively involved in the whole process.

▸ Facilitation. The feeling of trust and the courage to participate arise from the professional acceptance of one's own expressions and ideas. The facilitator needs to have the patience and courage to give the responsibility for developing the content, vision, ideas and actions to the participants. The facilitator can, if necessary, give overall inspiring presentations on the relevant topics - e.g., 'inclusion' - but cannot give 'good' advice and concrete ideas. The facilitators learned that, if they took on the role of the 'expert', defining concepts and 'right actions,' the participants left the acceptance and responsibility to the facilitators.

3. The engagement of managers. As expressed by one manager: *"It requires managerial will" and "For me, the employees, both core and assisting practitioners, become more skilled and talented." The manager then continues her reflections on the role as a leader within the VALUE CPD pathway: "The task of management is to ensure that choosing challenges and content makes sense for the participants, and they must be part of the creation process. The main task of management is to maintain the balance between external requirements, frameworks and direction, and to set the framework for what the employees can decide themselves."*

In the Danish case, we also found that ECEC managers felt a need to develop new leadership roles and practices to successfully implement the LL in the CPD pathway. This means

leading through learning communities and using the learning labs' methodology. It then brings learning communities into focus and sets new agendas for leadership in ECEC. VALUE helped to strengthen the *"leadership among a group of managers", as they themselves stated in the interview. They wanted to work together in small groups of managers, developing new forms of managerial collaboration, and they now hope it will continue after the project's completion. They think it is important for further facilitation of new forms of everyday cooperation. According to the three managers, "we were inspired by the positive results that arose from the new initiatives on the specific type of educational work in the LLs."*

2.2.7 In Summary the Danish VALUE case

The learning laboratories developed for the Danish VALUE case strengthened the three core concepts: professional identity, collaboration and an integrated educare approach. We identified a number of preconditions that were present in the Danish case. One problem might be that a group of employees was selected to join the coordinating team (joint LL) and the others worked in local LL's. The translation process from the joint LL to the local LL takes leadership, as well as time and resources.

It is important to stress that it is the manager's role not only to provide a framework and the necessary time and resources for the work with LLs. Also, it is important to support and encourage employees to take initiatives, actively participate in discussions, collaborate with the colleagues in the joint and collective, local LL and dare to take on new roles in the educational work specific to their ECEC institution.

Hence, sustaining professional development requires managerial support. As one manager explained: *"It requires an abundance of man-*

agement skills to include everyone and not just delegate to the resourceful people."

2.3 THE PORTUGUESE VALUE CASE

2.3.1 The context of the Portuguese VALUE pilot project

The ECEC system in Portugal is characterized by a split system of childcare (0-3 years old), under the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, and preschool education (3-6 years old), under the Ministry of Education. Both sectors are centralised. Responsibilities at the level of ECEC financing, monitoring and curriculum development are set at the national level (Araujo, 2017).

The assisting practitioners have very differentiated status compared to that of the preschool teachers. Usually, the collaborative practice is emphasized, involving all pedagogical staff. Nonetheless, in some institutions the assisting practitioners are not always included in the team meetings, which are only for preschool teachers.

2.3.2 The Portuguese VALUE pilot schools

Two schools participated in the Portuguese VALUE pilot project.

▶ One pilot school is a small school unit (192 children from 3 to 12 years old) situated in Santarém and is part of a large public-school cluster. There are 43 children in preschool education and 11 assisting practitioners, but only two of them assist the two preschool teachers. All aspects concerning assisting practitioners are handled by the Municipality. They work full-time (35 hours/week).

▶ The other pilot school is situated in Lisbon and is a non-profit school (IPSS) with

443 children ranging from 4 months to 12 years old. There are 243 children in nursery, crèche and preschool education combined. There are 11 core practitioners and 17 assisting practitioners. They work full-time (35 hours/week) in shifts in order to cover the school opening hours from 8am to 7.15pm.

Both schools are characterized by diversity in children and families, with various nationalities, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this diversity is not represented either in the core practitioners of the school teams or in the assisting practitioners (0, 01%).

PORTUGUESE VALUE PILOT PROJECT
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

SANTARÉM	LISBON
Public-school	Non-profit school (IPSS)
(3 to 12 years old)	(4 months to 12 years old)
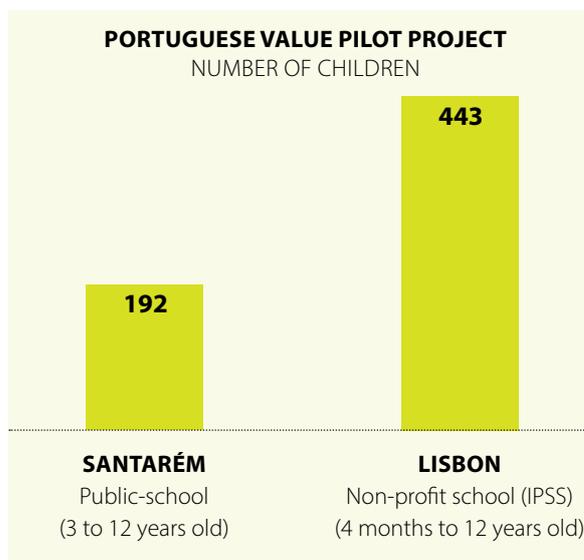
2.3.3 The Portuguese VALUE CPD pathway

Both the contents and the methods of the VALUE CPD pathway were defined by the Lisbon and Santarém teams based on the objectives set out by the VALUE Project and carried out by 2 facilitators from the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal in Lisbon and 2 facilitators from the Santarém's Higher School of Education (Escola Superior de Educação de Santarém - ESES).

2. SNAPSHOT OF THE VALUE PILOTS

PORTUGUESE VALUE CPD PATHWAY
SANTARÉM

11 ASSISTING PRACTITIONERS

PORTUGUESE VALUE CPD PATHWAY
LISBOA

17 ASSISTING PRACTITIONERS
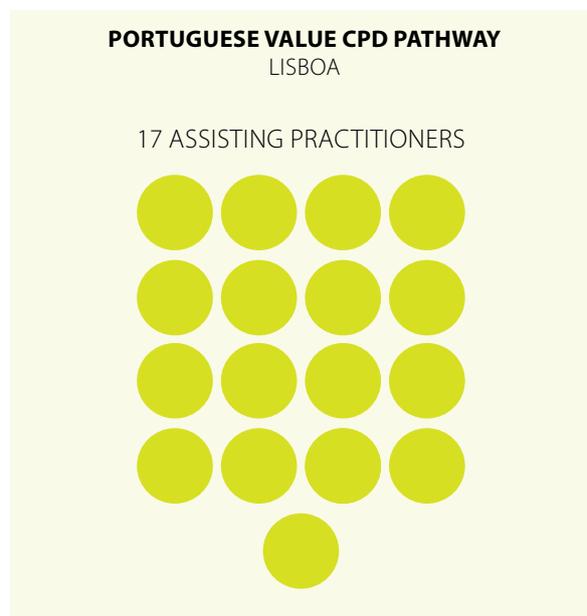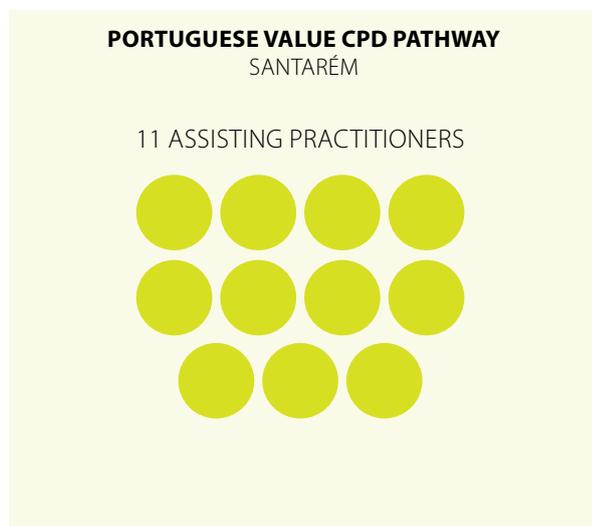
Although sharing similar goals, contents and methods, the VALUE CPD pathway was carried out differently in the 2 pilot schools:

- The VALUE pilot project in Santarém comprised of 11 assisting practitioners, though only 6 completed the VALUE CPD pathway. This CPD pathway was based on a participatory model and on the basic principles of childhood pedagogy (inclusion of diversity, collaboration, integration of care and learning). It took place over 6 sessions in an after-school schedule (30 hours in total). Staff meetings took place at the beginning and the end of the process, involving the core practitioners, the pedagogical coordinators and the assisting practitioners.

- The VALUE pilot project in Lisbon comprised of 17 assisting practitioners, meeting with the facilitators on a fortnightly basis. The 11 core practitioners working in nursery and pre-school were also part of the project, meeting on a quarterly basis. The VALUE CPD pathway took place over 10 sessions (30 hours total) and during working hours. The working method was based on the Contextual Professional

Learning (CPL) approach, focusing on the assistants' professional identity and their daily work with children, core practitioners, families and community. The CPL approach is characterized by cycles of action-reflection-transformation. It starts from the identification of 'problems' present in each practitioner's daily work. Next, practitioners collaboratively define focuses of action and reflection in order to experiment with gradual changes in daily work. Finally, these processes of action-reflection-transformation are documented in professional learning portfolios.

Both learning groups met twice during two seminars aiming at sharing experiences, reflections and impacts of the VALUE CPD pathway - one was in Lisbon and the other in Santarém.

2.3.4 Lessons learned from the Portuguese VALUE pilot projects

The Portuguese VALUE case highlights important changes of mindset and learning resulting from the VALUE CPD pathway: respectful and inclusive

communication is important in getting everyone involved. It establishes personal and professional mutual respect and fosters the development of a common perspective of a holistic and integrated approach to early childhood education. These insights result from an interpretation of data retrieved mainly from the focus group interview, but also from observations and field notes gathered in the facilitators' research portfolios and from their analysis of the participants' portfolios.

2.3.5 Three core concepts

When zooming in on the changes that occurred in each core concept due to the VALUE CPD pathway, we stress the following:

- **Professional identity** – The VALUE CPD pathways allowed the creation of space and time to provide everyone with a voice. By sharing experiences, we encouraged the participation of the assistants and the recognition of their voice in planning, decision making and daily professional activity.

- **Collaboration** – The VALUE CPD pathways increased everyone's awareness that each one involved in an educare approach has a collaborative role. This is done through sharing and suggesting ideas, debating and coming to decisions together on the school issues, both in parts and as a whole. It means making collaborative decisions regarding the whole school as to what the school stands for, its vision and mission. It also means making collaborative decisions concerning the day-to-day practices of the school (its parts), regarding each group of children, each child, each family or each member of the educational team.

- **Educare approach** – The reflection and experiences resulting from VALUE CPD

pathways made it possible to understand a new way of looking at children. This encompasses the role of other adults, i.e., that of attentive and empathetic listeners with respect to children's needs, as well as equitable opportunities for care and learning for the diverse children, families and communities.

2.3.6 Conditions and challenges

The analysis and interpretation of data from focus group interviews and facilitators' research portfolios revealed that, in order to develop and implement the VALUE CPD pathway, it is important to address central conditions and challenges, including:

- Creating **respectful time and space to listen** to each group of practitioners about their own perceptions is a crucial starting point in developing trust between participants and facilitators and engaging them in the processes of the learning pathway.

- The learning pathway needs to start from an explicit theoretical and empirical framework that supports a **reflexive and critical dialogue** on professional practices in early childhood education.

- The **leadership** needs to be equally distributed within the learning pathway. This means that the leader is involved in constructing the **collaborative approach** for responding to diversity. Thus, there is a participatory approach to shared decision-making. It also refers to a type of management that - in order to lead collaboratively - needs to be involved in the learning pathway together with the practitioners; a type of management that is willing to engage in shared leadership in the decision-making process.

2.3.7 In Summary the Portuguese VALUE case

The VALUE learning pathway created time and space for practitioners to have a voice and make themselves feel recognized and valued. Also, their confidence increased about their professional identity, leading to the creation of encounters to build collaboration.

As to building this collaboration, it is important to place the VALUE learning pathway within an explicit framework because it gives management, practitioners, children, families and communities shared awareness, shared language, and shared action. Also relevant is that school management needs to be committed to the learning pathway and that there should be a participatory approach to professional development in order to have supportive and collaborative leadership. This is leadership that motivates and helps practitioners to be committed and engaged in collaborative work, which then leads to continuity and sustainability.

2.4 THE SLOVENIAN VALUE CASE

2.4.1 The context of the Slovenian VALUE pilot project

Slovenia has a unitary system of preschool education for children from 11 months to six years of age. The participation of children in preschool education is not mandatory. Preschool education is an integral part of the education system. The kindergarten programmes are implemented by core and assisting practitioners, who work in pairs in the classroom. The national curriculum sets out broad goals and principles for early childhood education, and represents a shift away from the traditional emphasis on content towards emphasizing the process and enabling practitioners' autonomy and responsibility.

2.4.2 The Slovenian VALUE pilot schools

Two preschools participated in the Slovenian VALUE project. In total, 2 principals and 21 staff members were directly involved in project activities. There are 171 and 772 children in the pilot preschools. One preschool is located in Grosuplje (near of the capital Ljubljana) and one is in Vavta Vas (70 km south-east of the capital). Both preschools are located in socioeconomic middle-class neighbourhoods but, in one of them, there is growing number of immigrant families and, in neighbouring area of another, there are Romani settlements.

SLOVENIAN VALUE PILOT PROJECT
NUMBER OF CHILDREN

772

171

VAVTA VAS
Preschool
(11 months to 6 years old)

GROSUPLJE
Preschool
(11 months to 6 years old)
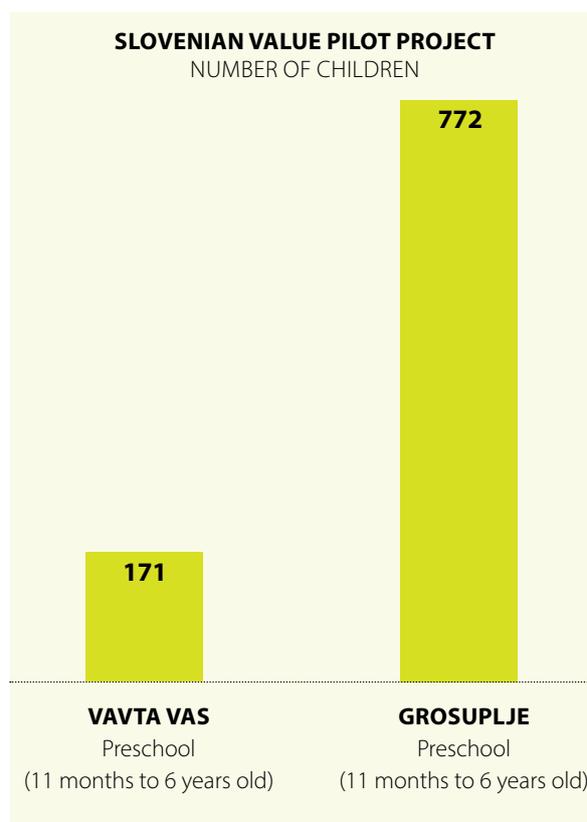
2.4.3 The Slovenian VALUE CPD pathway

The Slovenian VALUE case was built on the development of **Professional Learning Communities** (PLC), which is a school-based professional

SLOVENIAN VALUE CPD PATHWAY
GROSUPLJE

11 LEADERS OF PLCs

5 MENTORS

SLOVENIAN VALUE CPD PATHWAY
VAVTA VAS

3 LEADERS OF PLCs
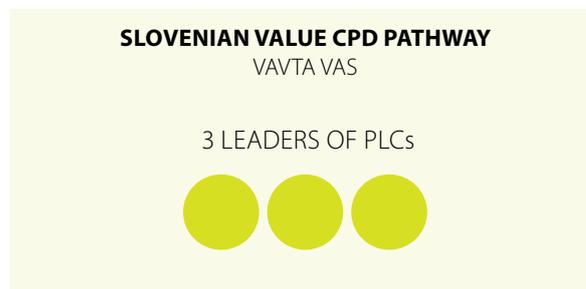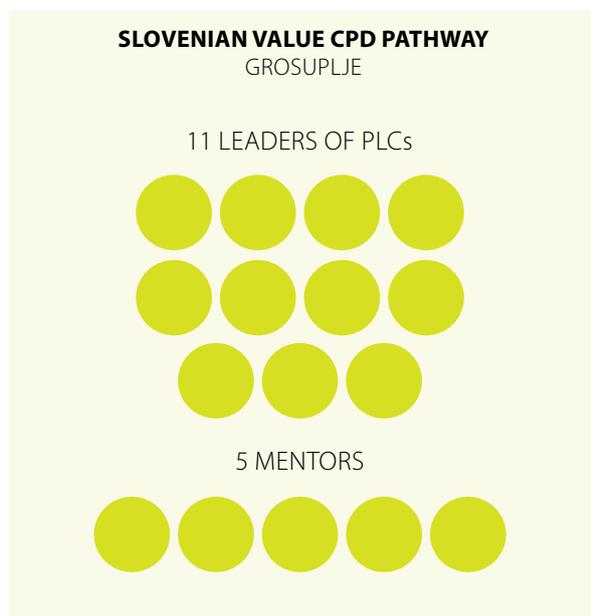
▸ inclusion, diversity and democratic values (one of the ISSA's principles of quality pedagogy) in Vavta Vas;

▸ creativity in conjunction with ISSA's principles of quality pedagogy in Grosuplje.

development strategy, based on three pillars: cooperation among members, shared vision, and reflection. Educational Research Institute (ERI) researchers acted as facilitators in this process. Their main task was to strengthen the competences of the leaders of PLCs. In Grosuplje, they formed a so-called "developmental group," consisting of eleven leaders of PLCs (leaders of PLCs were both core practitioners and assisting practitioners), and their five mentors (management staff, kindergarten principals, vice principals and kindergarten counsellors). In Vavta Vas, they were supporting three leaders of one PLC. At monthly meetings, they reflected on the process in their PLCs, and supported the leaders. They did this with new or additional contents, methods and techniques for developing a common understanding of selected focus areas. All together during the school year, they met 7 times in Vavta Vas and 10 times in Grosuplje. By doing so, they strengthened their competences for leading PLCs. In both preschools, the whole staff was included in PLCs (11 PLCs in Grosuplje, 1 PLC in Vavta Vas).

The content goals in both preschools were linked to deepen the selected content area:

Throughout the process, a great deal of emphasis was dedicated to the formative monitoring of educators' own professional development. All involved staff developed their own professional reflective diaries (portfolios), in which they documented and reflected on their professional development. The focus of the PLC leaders was on monitoring, documenting and reflecting on their role as a leader of PLC. The focus of the core and assisting practitioners was on monitoring, documenting, and reflecting on their understanding of the selected content areas described above.

2.4.4 Lessons learned from the Slovenian VALUE pilot projects

The VALUE PLCs were recognized as positive and useful pathways towards changing the quality of practice in both pilot schools. The PLCs provided a safe space for expressing doubts and concerns, and created the opportunity to become better acquainted with colleagues and their roles at the preschool. Through reflection of the practice, professionals had the opportunity to gain a deeper insight into their practice and to adopt some changes. The PLC setting enabled profes-

sionals to contribute equally to the conversation, reflect on their own and colleagues' practices and prepare their own action plan for their work for the upcoming month.

2.4.5 Three core concepts

In Slovenia, there is already a long tradition of working from an educare approach. Preschool education is organized as unitary system; care and education are traditionally understood as a complex joint process, implemented at the preschool level. Thus, according to the three core concepts in the VALUE project, the biggest change is seen in the field of professional identity, which can be observed mostly among assisting practitioners, but also among core practitioners. All of them achieved a great deal at the professional and personal levels. The main changes at both pilot sites were:

▸ Professional identity, collaboration: improvement in communication among professionals. Consequently, more mutual learning happened and colleagues felt more connected to each other. Vavta Vas also reported that they developed the feeling that they can depend more on their colleagues;

▸ Professional identity: confirmation of professionals' work from their colleagues and managerial staff;

▸ Professional identity: improvement in the field of equality of all professional workers;

▸ Collaboration: improvement in collaboration between core and assisting practitioners;

▸ Professional identity, collaboration: due to regular reflective meetings, more frequent opportunities arose for conversations

about the roles of both practitioners. Due to this, awareness of both professionals about the importance of their role increased, and, consequently, also mutual respect.

▸ In general about PLC: insight into the importance of reflection on their pedagogical practice.

2.4.6 Conditions and challenges

PLC leaders reported that the **reflective meetings** with the facilitators were crucial for the quality of the work within the PLCs. Conditions for successful implementation of PLC also include:

▸ motivated management;

▸ well-prepared PLC leaders: knowing the process within PLC, feeling secure about leading the learning process of professionals within PLC;

▸ motivated professionals in order to grow, readiness to learn and to collaborate;

▸ clear and structured invitation to PLC;

▸ treating all colleagues equally;

▸ positive atmosphere at settings and timing of the meetings.

The professionals were highly motivated to work within the PLC, because it gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own work from their daily practice.

The process of PLC is structured, but the broad content was decided in a **participatory process** with all professionals involved. In Grosupl-

je, all participants decided that they want to explore the topic of creativity. In Vavta Vas, it was a joint decision to explore the topic of social inclusion. Moreover, within the PLC meeting, the practitioners were able to reflect on their real life challenges (i.e., concrete examples from their practice), so they were very motivated; the context was tailor-made to their situation.

Challenges were connected to the understanding that the process within the PLC is co-constructed and that all participants are needed in order to create an atmosphere of mutual learning. Challenges were also connected to finding an appropriate time for all to meet.

2.4.7 In Summary: the Slovenian VALUE case

In both pilot preschools, it was crucial to engage all staff in the VALUE learning pathway and to ensure that all involved participants developed a sense of ownership over the project. That was achieved by working closely with the management, carefully presenting the project idea to staff, finding connections with existing professional development activities in both preschools, incorporating ideas and including them and the proposals expressed by the staff.

The staff supported the idea of PLC as a positive and useful pathway toward changing the quality of practice. PLC provided a safe space for expressing and reflecting on professional practice, expressing their thoughts and giving the opportunity to get to know colleagues better and understand their role at the preschool. PLC had an impact on improving the pedagogical practice. Participants would also recommend it to other preschools throughout Slovenia.

3.

OVERALL ANALYSIS: WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE VALUE PILOT PROJECTS?

I n this section, we explore the question: What did we learn from the VALUE CPD pathways in the four countries? The analyses are based on the VALUE CPD pathways, as described in section 2 and the country reports. First, we explore lessons learned - expressed as differences and similarities among various aspects of the VALUE CPD pathways (section 3.1). Second, we present the most important findings concerning the three core concepts: professional identity, educare and collaboration (section 3.2). Third, we present additional insights regarding important conditions for the successful implementation of the VALUE CPD pathways, manifested in various ways in each of the four countries. These insights relate to leadership, a participatory approach and reflection (section 3.3). This section also includes a discussion of the important role played by facilitators in implementing the VALUE CPD pathways.

3.1 LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE VALUE CPD PATHWAYS IN THE FOUR COUNTRIES

In the snapshots from each country (section 2), the lessons learned are analysed and summed up. There were some similarities throughout the 4 VALUE pilots, such as the use of participatory approaches and collaboration between core and assisting practitioners. Furthermore, all VALUE CPD pathways were rooted in the everyday practice by core and assisting practitioners. However, also differences in understanding were identified. These differences are due to differences in the national and local context, for example, with regard to target groups, organisational structures and systems and instructional and pedagogical methods and theories.

3.1.1 Diverse set-ups of the VALUE CPD pathways

As the context differed greatly in the four countries, and even within countries at the different pilot

schools, different CPD pathways were set up. Some pilot schools used narrative coaching (2.1 in Brussels), one pilot school used learning laboratories (2.2) and others used professional learning communities (2.4). However, all VALUE CPD pathways were rooted in the everyday practice of the core and assisting practitioners at the specific preschools.

In all four countries, CPD pathways were based on the idea of VALUE learning processes with different phases. The set-up varied due to the contexts of the pilot projects:

▸ Core and assisting practitioners organized in mixed groups, participating together in meetings on a regular basis. There were also occasional meetings with a larger group of practitioners who were not directly involved in the VALUE learning paths in order to share the process and results with colleagues.

▸ Core and assisting practitioners organized in separate groups, participating in homogenous meetings. Alongside of these meetings, there were, at different points in time, mixed meetings with both core and assisting practitioners to share and discuss the process and the results.

▸ A number of core and/or assisting practitioners facilitated and led a professional learning community comprising fellow practitioners.

▸ A number of assisting and core practitioners from one ECEC centre, who had a role as PLC leaders, worked in heterogeneous group and met on a regular basis.

▸ In one case, participants met regularly during learning laboratories, as well as at kick-off and wrap-up meetings. Both core and assisting practitioners, as well as the

principal, participated in all these meetings in order to strengthen equal collaboration among all three groups.

Hence, in the VALUE project, there was a desire to develop ways of working with different types of practice-based, continuous professional development involving all professionals. The concrete CPD pathways were flexibly organised to suit the specific context and take into account different conditions; e.g., different time frames, target groups and/or cultures.

3.1.2 Facilitators

In all of the VALUE pilot projects, the facilitators played a crucial role. In some cases, facilitators worked with heterogeneous groups from the centres (e.g., in Slovenia it was a group of PLC leaders. In other countries, it was a group combining core and assisting practitioners, sometimes also with school leaders), or a homogenous group of practitioners (core and assisting practitioners split into different groups).

The facilitators were responsible for supporting and organizing the reflective meetings, ensuring that all members participated and contributed on an equal footing. For example, as mentioned in the Danish snapshot, the facilitators provided a safe space and sufficient time for all participants to express their thoughts and experiences, to have their ideas and contributions taken seriously, and to thereby be actively involved in the entire process. When this happened, the participants became more motivated because they were being given real responsibility for the content they worked with - the pedagogical activities and issues discussed at learning laboratories. The facilitators had to have the patience and courage to share and surrender responsibility to the participants for developing content and working with changes and renewed practices.

Depending on the context, there were different facilitator roles and facilitation styles in the VALUE pilot projects. We identified a number of different examples:

▶ In a VALUE case, a tandem of VALUE facilitators supported the VALUE CPD pathway, each from a different field of expertise (i.e., childcare for children aged 0-3 and preschools for children aged 2½-6). This combination was seen as a positive step by the facilitators themselves and by the participants. The four facilitators met regularly during a coaching trajectory, supported by VBJK.

▶ In a VALUE pilot project, the role of facilitator intentionally changed during the VALUE CPD pathway from facilitator, to confronter and co-creator, into a companion.

▶ In another pilot project, the facilitator gave inspiring presentations on relevant topics such as 'inclusion.' However, the facilitator never gave 'good advice' or concrete ideas.

▶ In another VALUE pilot project, the facilitators were the key communication mediators for the different groups (core practitioners, assisting practitioners, principals), gradually shifting responsibility for this mediation to the three groups.

3.1.3 Participants

The target groups of VALUE are both core and assisting practitioners. This is an important strength of VALUE, especially as assisting practitioners are often perceived as 'invisible workers.' In the Danish case, ECEC leaders were an additional target group.

How the target groups were involved differed across the different VALUE pilot projects. In some

cases, the VALUE groups were mixed, meaning that both core practitioners and assisting practitioners participated in the same learning group. In Denmark, ECEC leaders were also part of the VALUE group. In one of the Slovenian pilot projects, ECEC leaders played the role of inner counsellors to PLC leaders. They supported them in planning the PLC meetings, in the selection of additional reading material for members of PLC, in reflection of the meeting etc. Other VALUE pilot cases grouped core and assisting practitioners separately (e.g., the Portuguese case). This difference is related to the different contexts and cultures at the different pilot schools, which had implications for the approach taken. In addition, different target groups might require different pedagogical approaches, different levels of support and guidance from facilitators and different time schedules.

Furthermore, the number of participants in the VALUE CPD differed among countries: VALUE learning groups varied in size from 3 to 17 participants.

VALUE LEARNING GROUPS PARTICIPANTS
AMOUNG COUNTRIES

3 **17**
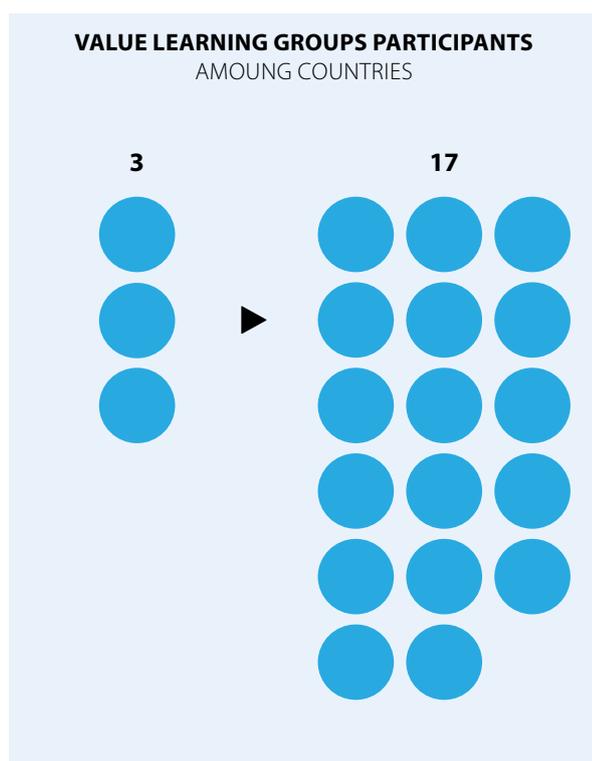
3.1.4 School leaders

In all of the VALUE pilot projects, the school leaders played crucial, but also different, roles. They supported the processes and the organization of the VALUE CPD pathways and were involved from the beginning of the project. It was up to them to provide the time, the organization and the space for regular meetings, etc. In two pilot projects, the school leaders also participated in the VALUE meetings on an equal footing with the core and assisting practitioners.

3.1.5 Stakeholders

The aim of involving stakeholders was to inform, disseminate, and provide relevant feedback on the experiences with the VALUE CPD to local and national policymakers and other key bodies in order to explore possibilities for collaboration and further implementation of the results. The invited stakeholders, therefore, represented social partners such as trade unions, municipalities, NGOs, and authorities with political influence, as well as educational institutions. An additional aim was to receive professional feedback and input or inspiration for the development of the CPD pathways. Stakeholder groups played a key role in supporting and further developing the implementation of VALUE at a broader regional or national level.

The degree of stakeholder involvement differed across the 4 countries. In some countries the stakeholder group was strongly involved from the beginning; in other countries, they were initially consulted, but played a more important role at a later stage in the process. When involved from the beginning, stakeholders were highly influential in shaping the learning processes, whereas later involvement meant that stakeholders acted more as an advisory board, making suggestions and contributing to the dissemination phase.

3.1.6 In Summary

Here, we see that there were differences and similarities across the VALUE CPD pathways in all of the pilot projects. The main similarities were in the participatory approach: facilitators and participants worked together to determine the content. Other similarities were characterised by the participants' reflection on their daily practice.

3.2 WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM VALUE CPD REGARDING THE THREE CORE CONCEPTS?

All of the VALUE CPD pilot projects aimed to strengthen the three core concepts: professional identity, educare, and collaboration. In this section, we elaborate on the lessons learned from the VALUE CPD pathways on these three core concepts. The *VALUE Literature Review* (Rutar et al., 2019)[19] revealed that the three core concepts overlap and intertwine, and are influenced by the local context, working conditions, and culture in which VALUE is implemented. Therefore, an operationalization of these three concepts helped to clarify the analysis of the four countries' findings (see Baseline report, Jensen, et al., 2019, p. 6).[20]

3.2.1 Professional identity

Participants' sense of professional identity, defined as feeling more competent, better acknowledged and more involved in teams, increased throughout the VALUE CPD process across all four cases.

This was due to the continuous processes of team learning and collaborative work. One example can be found in a focus group interview where an assisting practitioner explained that, for her, it was a new experience to be given responsibility for introducing new ideas at the school, which resulted in greater acknowledgement from her colleagues and manager. This assisting practitioner stated that *"my new task was to inspire colleagues to participate in the new learning processes,"* adding *"I feel more and better prepared for the tasks that I work with on a daily basis - and it gave me a voice."*

In other cases, professional identity was strengthened through the **"***creation of time and space to make use of each one's voice to share experiences, with the participation of assistants, recognising their voices in planning, decision-making and everyday professional activities.***"**

One important change in relation to VALUE CPD pathways mentioned in one example (2.4) can be seen in the field of professional identity, which can be observed mostly among assisting practitioners, but also among core practitioners. In this case, it was mentioned that all participants gained a great deal, on both the professional and the personal levels.

In summary, the VALUE CPD pathways have enhanced professional identity as something that is fluid. As Beijaard et al., (2004)[21] state: *"It is strongly influenced by how we see ourselves, how we perceive others, how others perceive us and how we are viewed by society at large".* The VALUE CPD

19. Rutar, S., Jensen, B., Marques, A., Cardona, M.J., Van der Mespel, S. & Van Laere, K., (2019). *Supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners. VALUE Literature Review in 4 countries (BE, DK, PT, SL).* Ljubljana: ERI. https://www.value-ecec.eu/?p=3873

20. Jensen, B., Jager, J., Hulpia, H., Marques, A., Cardona, M.J., Van der Mespel, S., & Van Laere, K., (2019). Supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners. Baseline study in four countries (BE, DK, PT, SL). Copenhagen: Denmark, DPU. https://www.VALUE-ecec.eu/?p=3900#top

21. Beijaard, D., Verloop, N. & Vermunt, J. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. Teaching and Teacher Education. Vol. 20 (2): 107-128, In Baseline, p.6.

pathways have an impact on professional identity at the individual level, but can also develop systems of learners at a broader level.

3.2.2 An educare approach

Different traditions for applying a holistic approach to ECEC that integrates children's well-being, learning and development (education and care) have influenced the VALUE CPD pathways.

In Belgium, the holistic educare approach was quite new and unfamiliar, while it is a cornerstone of the national curriculum in the three other participating countries (i.e., Denmark, Slovenia and Portugal).

In some cases, the VALUE CPD paths resulted in a shift in mindset towards a holistic educare approach. Such a shift might lead to feeling better equipped to address an educare approach, as well as a holistic way of working with learning, care and inclusion (see e.g. 2, 2.5). This implies a role for ECEC practitioners as attentive listeners, observing and reflecting on children's needs and goals (both current and future) and providing empathic responses and equal opportunities. It also implies a new view regarding the role of care and learning in relation to a diverse range of children, families and communities.

In other countries, where educare is a familiar approach, integrated into national legislation, participating in the VALUE CPD still led to improvements. As expressed by one practitioner, the integration of learning and care became more natural through VALUE CPD: *"If the child feels that you are there completely for him, and maybe put an arm around his shoulder and have a dialogue, I think it's easier for a child to learn."*

In addition to a holistic concept of education and care, the educare approach may also encompass inclusion, play, and formative development (in Danish: dannelse, in German: Bildung). This was most recently stressed in a Danish study (The Strengthened pedagogical curriculum, 2020).[22]

Applying a holistic approach to ECEC is related to the culture and context in the specific countries. It is important to underline that it is not always easy to implement an educare approach in a tradition and culture where education and care are seen as separate tasks. However, due to VALUE, the first steps can be taken towards a shift in mindset.

3.2.3 Collaboration

Collaboration is here defined as related to three aspects of pedagogical work: planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. VALUE CPD pathways focused on all three aspects. Across the VALUE cases, we found that enhancing collaboration depended on four elements: providing an open and safe environment, developing awareness of the potential benefits, establishing collaborative roles, and an interplay between professional identity, educare and collaboration. These elements are outlined below.

▸ **Providing an open and safe environment.** Collaboration in teams was enhanced by the VALUE CPD pathways. All participants worked together better, towards a collaborative, competent professional system. In addition, one important aspect of the VALUE CPD pathways that strengthened collaboration between core and assisting practitioners was the creation

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22. Ministry of Children and Education (2020). The strengthened pedagogical curriculum, Framework and content.

of an open and safe environment. This was characterised by dialogue built on trust and confidence, listening with an open mind, accepting diverse experiences, providing a serious, professional response, and allowing experimentation with different ideas.

▶ **Developing awareness of the potential benefits.** Another element enhancing collaboration was the focus on developing awareness that collaboration is not only important when carrying out activities, but also during the planning and evaluation stages. The VALUE CPD pathways encouraged reflection and professional action competence, a concept explored by Jensen (2009).[23] Both are crucial parts of the collaborative process, as exemplified in the following quote from an assisting practitioner: *"Being allowed to reflect is vitally important if we are to acquire and apply new knowledge and go out and act on it"* (2.2).

▶ **Establishing collaborative roles.** Collaboration is also about ensuring each participant has a role to play and is involved in the process of sharing, suggesting and discussing ideas and reaching mutual decisions regarding a wide array of school issues.

▶ **Interplay between the three core concepts.** There are strong links between collaboration and professional identity. Collaboration has led to improved communication among professionals and, consequently, more mutual learning, stronger relationships between colleagues, and a stronger sense of shared identity. Some participants also reported that they realised they can

learn more from their colleagues. The interplay between collaboration and professional identity became clear, strengthening the identity of all professionals, but also (and especially) improving the collaboration between core and assisting practitioners. These two elements were also strongly linked with educare. For example, a special case was Portugal, where practitioners were aware of an educare approach highlighted in the national curriculum, but usually refrained from following it. They used school infrastructure conditions, a lack of collaboration between practitioners or their own personal perceptions and convictions as a justification. Hence, in Portugal, the VALUE CPD pathway brought recognition of their professional identity and fostered collaboration. This led, in turn, to them dropping the excuses and starting to make the integration of learning and care a reality.

3.2.4 In Summary

In this section, it became clear that the three core concepts were improved during the VALUE CPD pathways across all country cases in various ways. Collaboration - at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages - improved, participants' professional identity was strengthened, and an educare approach was more thoroughly realised.

3.3 FACTORS OF IMPORTANCE

The analyses of the VALUE CPD pathways in the 4 pilot countries provide insights into factors that have an impact on the successful implementation. The work included in the CPD pathways re-

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23. Jensen, B. (2009). *A Nordic approach to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and socially endangered children*. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 17:1,7-21, https://doi.org/10.1080/13502930802688980.

flects the concrete contexts and indicates the fundamental conditions and elements in establishing a sustainable CPD pathway for core and assisting practitioners. These important factors include: leadership, a participatory approach, reflection on practice, and the crucial role of facilitators.

3.3.1 Leadership

Leadership is a relevant aspect in all of the VALUE cases, although it is experienced in different ways reflecting the different contexts. The overall analysis of the VALUE CPD pathways in the 4 countries shows that there are 3 different aspects of leadership that are important: setting a vision; shared leadership; ensuring the structural conditions.

All 3 aspects can, jointly or partially, be manifested in leadership practices. In one pilot project, a leader displayed all three aspects by, first of all, setting his/her vision for professional development alongside the closest collaborators. He/She then shared the leadership power with the entire staff in order to achieve the agreed goals and vision. Finally, at the same time, he/she was able to ensure that structural conditions supported the pursuit of this vision. In another pilot project, the leader mainly focused on the creation of structural conditions that enabled the development of the CPD pathway. However, the leader became increasingly involved in setting a vision with staff and gradually learned to share the leadership in order to foster collaborative processes. In the following, we describe each of the three aspects separately.

- ‣ **Leaders setting out a vision.** In some cases, the school leaders were involved from the beginning. They considered how to embed the ideas of VALUE within the preschool's system of professional support for practitioners and also set out a sustainable vision regarding CPD for core and assisting

practitioners. For example, in one case, a school leader and the closest collaborators 'reshaped' existing forms of professional meetings into more reflective meetings, as envisioned in the VALUE project. The principal and his/her closest collaborators acted as direct supporters/advisors/mentors to the core and assisting practitioners who were acting as leaders of PLCs (see 2.4). In another case, it was stated that: "The school principal should, in a participatory way, define a vision for continuous professional development that strengthens an educare approach and the professional identity of all staff members" (see 2.1.5). Leadership could also be understood as a way of improving the continuity and sustainability of the CPD initiatives. Leadership that focuses on *"learning together as an approach to professional development is strong leadership that motivates and supports professional learning… thus sustaining its continuity and sustainability"* (PT country report).

- ‣ **Shared leadership supporting co-created processes.** Most VALUE pilot projects revealed that leaders support and encourage employees to take initiatives, actively participate in discussions, collaborate with colleagues and have the courage to take on new roles in the educational work specific to their ECEC institution. Sustaining development requires managerial support, which involves not 'just' delegating responsibility to the most resourceful members of the team (e.g., core practitioners), but to all employees. *"It takes managerial will"* and *"Employees become more skilled, whether they are core practitioners or assisting practitioners"* (see 2.2.6). This aspect of leadership could also, in some cases, involve framing or facilitating group discussions, which can encourage motivation and support profes-

sional growth (readiness to collaborate) and action competences. This provides opportunities to participate in learning activities. It treats all colleagues equally (see 2.2.6), and frames a constructive atmosphere with mutual respect for differences with respect to opinions, expressions (see 2.4.6) and actions (see 2.2.6). A similar pattern is identified in relation to establishing an equal footing in the work with CPD: *"The leader needs to be engaged in the learning pathway in an equal manner with the practitioners, meaning that they are also learning together to respond to diversity"* (see 2.3.6). This involves working with inclusive learning environments. Additionally, some ECEC managers felt there was a need to develop new leadership roles and practices. This can be done, for example, through learning communities and using the learning labs/collaborative learning methodology. This brings learning communities into focus and sets new agendas for leadership in ECEC services. VALUE has helped to strengthen this new form of collaboration among managers.

▸ **Leadership ensuring structural conditions.** In some cases, the leader's role in the VALUE CPD pathway was to ensure structural conditions, such as providing the necessary time to meet and find the necessary resources for the work. Finding time to meet for core and assisting practitioners was not always easy. However, in all cases, this structural condition was ensured.

Based on these insights, we can conclude the following: leadership in relation to VALUE is understood as the skill to influence and encourage others; enable professional growth of employees; generally encouraging commitment and support processes of learning, thinking and doing. The leaders supported the professional growth of

employees and their readiness for collaboration, provided clear and structured opportunities for participation in CPD activities, treated all colleagues equally and created a positive atmosphere at meetings.

However, also challenges arose at the level of the leadership, when implementing the VALUE CPD pathways. This resulted in a variety of new demands on ECEC managers - demands they may not be accustomed to or trained to address. In some of the VALUE cases, ECEC managers felt a need to develop new leadership roles and practices in response to these new demands. Thus, there was the emergence of a new agenda for leadership in ECEC (such as working in pairs).

3.3.2 Participatory approach

In all VALUE cases, the CPD pathways start from a participatory approach. However, due to different target groups and contexts, there were differences in the levels of participant involvement and responsibilities, and in the roles of the facilitators and leaders. For example, in some cases the leaders/facilitators were expected to provide inspiration through overall visions for the work; in other cases the participants themselves were tasked with creating such visions. Sometimes, leaders/facilitators and participants worked together in developing visions. Likewise, in some cases leaders played the role of 'motivator,' while in other cases the motivation arose from participants' needs. This created the situation that 'nothing would happen' if the participants do not introduce content (real challenges) and are motivated to work with it.

It is important to consider which level of participant involvement/responsibility and which roles for leaders/facilitators are the most appropriate to support the VALUE aims in each context and in each target group. In some cases, it might be

important to begin with activities which can empower specific groups of employees (e.g., assisting practitioners) to prepare them for further collaboration, or start activities with leaders to strengthen the understanding of VALUE aims.

In the VALUE CPD pathways, the participants were involved and participated in planning, decision-making and evaluations that relate to and have an impact on the daily life in the pedagogical institutions. The participatory approach is also closely tied to the democratic forms of CPD that VALUE builds upon and develops.

A participatory approach is about **sharing and creating together**; it is about working together to create new ideas and bring them to life in a workplace community.

Participating in dialogue and collaboration to develop ideas for changing practices to identify and address challenges within ECEC (e.g., inequality and diversity) is one way to actively employ a participatory approach as part of the CPD pathway. For example, participating in learning labs required professional judgement due to the experimental nature of the approach (see 2.2.4). Other examples include learning groups that met during seminars with the aim of sharing experiences, reflections and impacts of the VALUE CPD pathway (see 2.2.1, 2.3.4). Through sharing and creating together, professionals had opportunities to gain deeper insights into their practice and to adopt appropriate changes. Enabling all employees to contribute to the conversations on an equal footing, discuss their own and colleagues' practices and prepare a personal action plan for their work is a concrete example of how the participatory approach works (see 2.4.4). In summary, CPD pathways can't be set up successfully without involving the participants: a participatory approach is crucial.

3.3.3 Reflection on practice

Despite the differences in the various VALUE CPD pathways, all were rooted in a participatory approach and realised through regular meetings and collaborative learning activities, including critical reflection for all practitioners.

In some of the VALUE cases, it was important that collaboration was based on shared reflection on existing practices, and in some cases, reflection was also a tool to experiment with and use to change practices. This idea of shared reflection also builds on the participatory approach. Here, collective reflection is a crucial element in examining and changing existing practices. As such, the participatory approach and reflexivity are understood as mutually dependent.

This reflection was not always self-evident. Some core and assisting practitioners, especially in the beginning of the VALUE CPD pathways, preferred 'action'. However, in the end, they came to value the reflection on practice. One assisting practitioner described this as demanding but added: *"Being allowed to reflect is vitally important if we are to acquire and apply new knowledge and go out and act on it"* (2.2.4).

3.3.4 The crucial role of facilitators

The VALUE CPD pathways revealed that the role of the facilitator, who guides the VALUE processes, is also crucial.

The facilitator is variously described as a confronter, co-creator - in one case even becoming a companion - and as someone who is responsible for creating a trusting, creative and democratic learning environment. The role of the facilitator is not seen as the expert with all the 'right' answers.

Reflection is also an important element of the facilitator's work with VALUE CPD pathways. We already highlighted the importance of taking time to reflect on and discuss professional identity and the educare approach with all professionals. Along with the implementation of targeted actions, this led to changes in participants' mindsets and everyday practices in relation to children, families, and colleagues.

Facilitators played different roles in the different cases: from facilitating learning processes by encouraging a dialogue based on involvement and reflection, and making sure that everyone was given a voice (DE, BE and PT cases) or an opportunity to have their say, to facilitating and strengthening competences among leaders of PLCs (SL case). Facilitators organized the process in various ways, from planning the work with (often) inclusion and creating an inclusive learning environment for children, to initiating dialogue, and reflection among practitioners.

3.3.5 In Summary

In this section, we shed light on a number of factors that relate to and strengthen a sustainable VALUE CPD pathway. The CPD pathways varied, reflecting the varying contexts and cultures of ECEC in the four countries. The identified factors are seen as fundamental conditions and important aspects in efforts to develop and establish sustainable CPD pathways for core and assisting practitioners (and sometimes also leaders) as equal partners. We identified four important factors that were explored in this section: leadership, a participatory approach, reflection on practice, and the role of facilitators.

4.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary aim of this endline evaluation of the VALUE CPD pathways was to explore the crucial lessons learned across the four participating countries on themes that emerged concerning the different CPD pathways. A secondary aim was to explore how the three VALUE core concepts - professional identity, an educare approach and collaboration - were improved through participating in the VALUE CPD pathways. A third aim was to elucidate some of the primary conditions in the different countries: leadership, a participatory approach, reflection on practice, and the role of the facilitator. All these conditions were found to be crucial to the successful implementation of the VALUE CPD pathways. At an overall level, it is relevant to ask the sustainability question: Will VALUE continue in the future?

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The main findings are summarised below:

The VALUE project stresses pedagogical work with children, addressing diversity and social equality by working with inclusive pedagogical approaches. The organization and context of ECEC (such as split or unitary ECEC systems) played an important role in relation to the setup and design of the VALUE CPD pathways and the three core concepts.

Diverse setups of the VALUE CPD pathways emerged (section 3.1). The setups emphasise collaborative learning among core and assisting practitioners in CPD pathways as co-creation of knowledge or, in some cases, as learning trough communities of practice. Furthermore, the CPD designs shared the aim of enhancing professional identity, educare and collaboration, which are seen as intertwining concepts, in groups of core and assisting practitioners. In addition, the different designs used a participatory approach focused on involvement and reflection, with the

goal of involving both core and assisting practitioners.

The framework for facilitation of the VALUE CPD processes was mostly based on **dialogues** among the participants, and **reflections** on participants' diverse perspectives and on the real challenges they experienced in practice. This allowed the exploration of and experimentation with new opportunities to employ an educare approach and to create more inclusive learning environments for children. Collaboration became pivotal throughout the VALUE process. The lessons learned from this part of the process stressed that collaboration between core and assisting practitioners, based on an educare approach, enabled different target groups (i.e., core and assisting practitioners) to share this educare approach with colleagues. Participating in VALUE CPD involved observing, analysing, and reflecting on actions in and for practice - methods that were 'learned' at the VALUE CPD sessions.

Professional learning communities were at the heart of the work in VALUE. It was within these learning communities that participants continuously shared and critically analysed their everyday experiences in a reflective, collaborative and inclusive way. The assumption behind the VALUE project is that, if participants learn to value diversity in ECEC, it will strengthen learning communities among professionals and encourage them to try out new and experimental approaches in the pedagogical work with inclusion and diversity. Moreover, it is assumed that, by learning to appreciate diversity among ECEC practitioners, the practitioners become better equipped to include, recognize and value diversity, also within the groups of children.

Based on the data from the four countries, we gained insights into perceptions among participants and facilitators regarding the impact of

the VALUE CPD pathways on the **three core concepts**: professional identity, an educare approach, and collaboration. We also concluded they are intertwined concepts. A number of aspects emerged from the VALUE CPD pathways as important conditions for successful implementation: leadership, a participatory approach, reflection on practice, and the role of the facilitators.

With respect to the first condition, **leadership**, we saw different aspects that are relevant when developing sustainable VALUE CPD pathways. These include: setting a clear vision that guides all CPD activities; supporting collaboration and co-creation among staff through shared leadership; ensuring structural conditions that allow participation on an equal footing and reflection, and involvement in the CPD pathways.

With respect to the second condition, **a participatory approach**, we saw that the involvement of participants in decision–making processes was important: giving participants ownership of their own CPD pathway led to changes, both in their mindset and their practices.

With respect to the third condition, we saw that VALUE CPD enabled shared **reflection** on existing practices, as well as shared decision-making processes regarding necessary changes.

With respect to the fourth condition, **the role of facilitators**, we saw, in all the CPD pathways, that the 'process leaders' were facilitators. However, the degree to which they steered the process and their involvement in deciding the content of the CPD pathway varied. The variations in the facilitation style point to the importance of the pedagogical aim and conditions. These conditions have to be taken into consideration and the facilitator role and style must be adapted accordingly.

In summary, the findings stress that the VALUE CPD in the different contexts became a way to reflect and co-create ideas and develop a subtle understanding between both core and assisting practitioners, leading to a positive influence on the three core concepts: professional identity, educare approach, and collaboration.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this endline report exploring the implementation of VALUE CPD pathways, in order to enhance professional identity, educare and collaboration within ECEC, we recommend that two features of CPD pathways within ECEC be addressed:

- ▸ Structural features, such as time, space, and other resources;

- ▸ Process features, such as motivation, openness and engagement. This must be supported through different approaches to participant involvement, responsibility for real tasks in the co-creation process and facilitation of learning and partnerships between core and assisting practitioners.

The analyses in this report have made it clear that the choice of CPD pathways is closely linked to the country's context with regard to ECEC. Furthermore, it was clear that the conditions identified here must be met if we are to strengthen ECEC in relation to the three core concepts and the interplay between them. In this context, we stressed the role and importance of leadership and facilitation of the participatory way of working and professional learning in VALUE CPD.

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