FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY
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Unsilencing multilingualism. Supporting professionals in Early Childhood Education and Care.

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Way past the middle of May 2023. I am on the verge of finalising this thesis and I realise that the past few months have marked a strange, rather atypical period. Never before have I worked so long, so individually on this project, and I feel that this is at odds with the process that has preceded this final phase. A PhD, after all, is never a purely individual matter. I consider it a collective labour, achieved from collaboration and interconnectedness. This certainly applies to my PhD, or at least, to how I view my work. No individual - and certainly not the PhD student that I am – is, or, acts entirely autonomously, but always within relationships of mutual dependence and care that influence each other. This is also how this PhD should be read. I therefore find it only evident to name and thank everyone who influenced me and contributed in one way or another to the creation of this piece of work.

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The first house is the PRO-M building: a strongly founded consortium of academic and social institutions with motivated 'residents' who formed a four-year alliance to learn more about multilingualism in the early years and support for professionals. Anouk, Bart, Christele, Doha, Esli, Fauve, Federica, Graziela, Hester, Ily, Lisandre, Michel, Orhan, Panayota, Piet, Rachida, Simon, Tine, Victoria and Wendelien: it was more than a pleasure working with you.

Having my PhD embedded in a large SBO project like this is a major advantage, but it comes with a lot challenges and work. Despite the fact that the different speeds were not always aligned and that a lot of searching, changing and adapting had to be done, we did manage to realise a lot of output together. There is now so much material ready to support professionals and families grounded in decent knowledge and with validated tools that the possibility of a society where multilingualism in all forms is valued and utilised can become a reality. It is up to us to continue to build on this story and remain united in this shared mission.

Dear PRO-M promotors, I am enormously grateful for the space I was given in the project to pursue the double track of research and valorisation simultaneously. Thank you for your endorsement and trust and I hope you will see the value of it reflected in this dissertation.

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The second house is the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy. A passionate Department that has not only grown tremendously since my first collaboration in 2012, but which has also seen many changes (for example, I recently experienced the third 'power change': from Maria over Michel to Rudi). That being said, two people have long represented the most trusted and consistent duo on our second floor and I cannot express enough appreciation for all they do. Patrick and Tina, I am of course referring to you. In my experience, no question is too much for you. The support you provide to the entire department is unprecedented and I don't think we see even half of what you all accomplish in front of and behind the scenes. This is a huge gift to each and every one of us. In addition, your office is also a warm-hearted hub on our floor

and I have often been able to nestle there for a question, a supportive chat and a hug. Thank you.

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During that period, our more or less defined entity also provided identity and connection to the university. I do believe that, in a certain way, this also brought us closer together. The hybridity of *den bureau* as a space also showed itself in the comings and goings of the many colleagues who were assigned a seat in 120.078 for short and longer periods of time and who were directly, unconditionally part of *den bureau,* exemplified by, among other things, the

bureau dinners. That one didn't need a blue-lined seat in the room to join these was proved by An, Patrick, Robin and Yan, among others. Thank you, dear colleagues, for allowing me to be part of that warm nest.

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In the introduction of this dissertation, I write about how I experience working on the double track of VBJK and the Department (see paragraph 1.3.3) as an added value that feeds and invigorates my professional development. That double track was and still is taking shape from the multitude of projects I get to work on with a diversity of captivating colleagues. In the past five PhD years, this was no different and BOA, BLINK, NESET, REC and SEEPRO (long live the

acronyms!) in particular were on my PhD-extracurricular agenda. That this was fascinating, there is no doubt. That this was sometimes difficult to combine, that too... In this sense, I would not only like to thank the colleagues I had the pleasure of working with on these projects (Annekatrien, Caroline, Hester, Ine, Katrien, Lisandre, Lobke, Nima) for the fascinating collaboration and for what I was able to learn from you, I would also like to apologise for the many times I was struggling to meet the deadline rushes and for the times when I had to let things down.

Throughout my thesis, I write in several places about the importance of creating high-quality meaningful interactions in the pedagogical environments of young children. These interactions make children grow and contribute to their well-being on several levels. During my PhD trajectory, I myself was also lucky to meet some people with whom I had those meaningful high quality interactions that allowed me to grow as a person and as a researcher. Giulia Cortellesi, Helen De Sadeleer, Sarah Degano, Jan Devos†, Carolien Frijns, Karolien Huylebroek, Liesbeth Lambert, Joanne Lehrer, Reinhilde Pulinx, Tania Van Acker and Ankie Vandekerckhove: you have all touched and inspired me in different ways. Thank you. I believe the sustainability of our encounter lies in its meaningfulness although I am convinced we will meet again. Reinhilde, I can never forget the 'shocks' we experienced together. I want to thank you for how we carried this at the time and how we managed to turn it into a meaningful research project. Without you, Chapter 2 would not have existed.

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Now moving away from the 'professional' sphere...

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Dedicated to Lola Boks-Peleman,
that you may fully develop all aspects of your multilingual identity in complete confidence and freedom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"*La langue a cette merveilleuse particularité d'être à la fois facteur d'identité et instrument de communication*"
(Amin Maalouf, Les identités meurtrières, 1998)

1.1 Introduction

"One of the most important questions in Early Childhood Education research is how to best support the development of children growing up with two or more languages and how language education and promotion should be designed and organized in multilingual settings to meet the needs of children in early education".
(Lengyel, 2012, p. 169)

1.1.1 Pedagogical encounters in ECEC

1.1.1.1 Possibilities within a culturally hybrid space

As a result of free mobility inside Europe, immigration outside Europe and intensifying globalization processes, social, cultural and linguistic diversity in all European societies has increased significantly in recent decades (Jeskanen, 2018). A large number of children nowadays grow up in social contexts where more than one language is spoken (Extra & Yağmur, 2011) and professionals working in education encounter a variety of home languages every day (Duarte & Kirsch, 2020). This is especially the case for Early Childhood Education and Care[1] (ECEC), where working with culturally and linguistically diverse families constitutes the everyday practice of the professionals in many countries (Norheim & Moser, 2020).

Confrontation with diversity is therefore a central feature of ECEC practice. As such, ECEC can be conceptualized as a *culturally hybrid space* where different cultures meet and where large differences exist between the individual lifestyles of different families on the one hand, and public life on the other. Drawing on Bhabha's concept of *cultural hybridity* (Bhabha, 1994), 'culture' should not be viewed as a fixed or predetermined entity, but rather as something flexible and hybrid. The different beings that encounter one another in ECEC bring their own hybrid culture. In the words of Schepen (Kimmerle & Schepen, 2014), this means '*a constant back and forth between different cultures and at the same time an inner dialogue between different cultural identities of everybody present*.' (Kimmerle & Schepen, 2014, p. 61 own translation). In this sense, what constitutes an ECEC-service can never be fixed or pinned down to one identity as multiplicity is an intrinsic feature of the setting. ECEC can therefore be viewed as a *space,*

[1] Referring to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age.

concurring with Bronwyn Davies' (2009) Deleuzian reading of the term (as *"not fixed, but open to multiplicity"*) as opposed to *place* ("*a somewhere that already has an identity*") (p. 5).

On a micro-level, also the parent-professional-relationship in ECEC can be regarded as a culturally hybrid space in which parents and professionals meet each other in the care for the child. Indeed, this encounter is not a mere embodied encounter between two persons; it is an encounter that would not have occurred were it not for the care of the child. As such, it is characterized by a confrontation of different and differing cultural beliefs systems about socialization and education: not only parents have their *ethnotheories* on child development and on parenting, also professionals have their own beliefs regarding the upbringing of the child (Harkness & Super, 1996) and these will not always fully match.

The dialogue through which parents and professionals share the upbringing of the child on a daily basis, can be perceived as what Davies and Gannon (2009) call a *pedagogical encounter*. Central to Davies' and Gannon's conception is the idea that a dialogue is not a mere exchange, but a process of change wherein one completely loses the possibility to control the result (Rinaldi, 2005) and wherein new and different truths and modes of being can come about. Considering the ever-changing diversity of families, the hybridity of their cultures and the multiple encounters between parents and practitioners in ECEC services, this perspective prompts reflection on the relationship between ECEC professionals and multilingual parents.

Being confronted with difference (e.g. a language that one doesn't understand, or a habit that one hasn't seen before) can be strange, frightening and sometimes even shocking. Margalit Cohen-Emerique (1993) terms this as *le choc culturel* to explain how working in intercultural contexts may cause conflict when one comes to realise that her/his personal frame of reference is not the only valid one. Yet, it is precisely the conflict with difference, or 'the affect', that constitutes a pedagogical encounter. Difference is the basis. From the works of Levinas (Levinas et al., 2012) we know that, somewhat paradoxically, a real connection between me and the other is only possible when there is a radical separation between me and the other. Being open to the difference of the Other implies an attempt to listen to the Other as an Other, from his or her own position and experience, instead of treating the Other as the same (Ellwood, 2009).

"(…) *to be in relation to a face is to be in relation to an individuality that precisely refuses to be reduced to nothing more than an instance or a token of a general type. Violence against the other thus consists in denying or ignoring the other's individuality and instead* (…) *to make her a means for one's own plans and purposes and nothing more. To be face to face with another is to be before the other as a concrete human being who must be recognized as such.*" (Perpich, 2019, p. 251)

Indeed, this 'face-to-face listening' is crucial in a pedagogical encounter and it opens up the possibility to create something new. As such, a pedagogical encounter provides the opportunity to move towards the Other, the 'not-yet-known' and to experience a process of *becoming*. It is, as such, a relationship in which one doesn't stay who she/he was or who she/he is (Claes, 2014).

Here, a connection can be drawn between the openness to the 'not-yet-known' and one of the aspects that Kimmerle (2004) considers necessary when speaking of intercultural dialogues; namely 'openness with regard to the expected results'. According to Kimmerle, although a certain interest or pre-understanding of the topic under discussion should already be there - which, in the context of ECEC, is the education of the child - the conversation should be lead in a way that is oriented at reaching discussion. Kimmerle states that '*the result of a dialogue appears in its being carried out*', and as such, he seems to perceive dialogues as processes in which *relational knowing* and *intersubjective knowledge* can be created. In the context of ECEC, this means that the knowledge on how to take care for an individual child arises from the dialogue and can never be considered as complete nor a priori known or established. Moreover, it also means that not only the knowledge changes, but also the *beings* that mutually create the knowledge, while they are creating it.

As such, it appears that ECEC as a complex culturally hybrid space can open up possibilities to realize mutual understanding between parents and professionals in their pedagogical encounter.

1.1.1.2 Barriers to realizing understanding

For more than a decade, ECEC has been given increasing importance at the European policy level and ECEC settings are now considered to play a key role in supporting inclusion, equity and social mobility (European European Commission, 2011). In this regard, intercultural competencies of professionals are seen as vital in creating stimulating environments to foster young children's

linguistic development and in establishing cooperative relationships with parents in which the responsibility for the education of the child can be shared (Romijn et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2020). Consequently, research on the relationship between parents and professionals in ECEC has, for several decades, put the notion of partnership central (Alasuutari, 2010).

However, one might question how balanced this partnership really is? Rouse & O'Brien (2017) note that in the academic literature on parent-professional-relationships in ECEC it is now established that 'partnership' should be underpinned by mutuality, reciprocity and shared decision making. Very often, also the notion of 'equality' comes into play, insinuating that an effective partnership would require the assumption of an equal status to parents and professionals. The position of parents is, however, never equal to that of the professionals. Inherent to the relationship between a parent and a professional is that it is characterized by power asymmetries, as parents have the position of subalterns (Spivak, 1988). This is especially the case for parents who speak one or more languages that differ from the dominant language in society and in the ECEC setting. To put it with the pertinent questions of Glenda Mac Naughton in her book on 'Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies': "*How do you as a parent establish your truths as 'normal' when your language is different from that of the staff? How do you as a parent establish your truths as 'normal' when your cultural values are in the minority?"* (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 35).

While this points to a barrier that may prevent multilingual parents from entering into dialogue with professionals, it does not imply that parents do not 'want' to engage in a conversation. From research with parents from disadvantaged backgrounds, we know that parents do have questions, but don't always raise them. Or, put the other way round: the fact that parents do not ask questions does not mean that they don't have any (Van Laere et al., 2018). Norheim & Moser (2020) found in their review on barriers and facilitators for partnerships between parents with immigrant backgrounds and professionals in ECEC that while parents expressed a wish to build partnerships with the professionals, they often experienced a lack of opportunities to communicate with them, most often due to a language barrier. This is in line with the review of Aghallaj et al (2020) that shows that in general, parents from language minorities neither speak the same language nor have the same cultural background as the ECEC-professionals. Not only might this result in linguistic and cultural discontinuity, it can also contribute to parents feeling less welcome or accepted and perceiving interactions with professionals as challenging (Cheatham & Santos, 2011).

1.1.1.3 Language

The issue of 'language' is an interesting one to look at in this regard. First of all, in the encounter between an ECEC-professional and a multilingual parent, language can be considered as one of the most visible or significant fields in which 'difference' becomes apparent. After all, when the other speaks a different language, one is directly confronted with the radical strangeness of the other in the encounter and this makes dialogue and the process of understanding more complex. In the words of Kimmerle: '*The fact that the other person whom I want to understand, speaks a different language makes clear what is at stake in any understanding, namely that 'to understand' also means 'to translate'. It is inevitable that in an intercultural context there will be more misunderstandings and that in the result, the lingering differences will also need to be identified.'* (2014, p. 18 own translation). So, while a radical strangeness can be considered necessary to realize true understanding, it simultaneously makes understanding more complex when this strangeness is dictated by a different language. This complexity can be considered as another obstacle in the pedagogical encounter.

Furthermore, the topic under discussion in the pedagogical encounter between parents and professionals is the education of the child. A topic that, taking into account contemporary views on partnership, should be 'equally shared' between parent and professionals. However, one might wonder if it is really possible to share the upbringing of the child without a common language? How can a parent express her/his own beliefs about education, which are shaped by her/his different cultural backgrounds, in a language that is not her/his own or first language, and which is rooted in different cultural beliefs systems? Even before any dialogue takes place, already the concept of 'education' or 'upbringing' is contestable. Every cultural belief system has its own images of the child, its own images of the parent and its own views on parenting and education. In this sense, the notion of 'partnership' may very well be incompatible with 'childrearing' from a specific point of view. It may be that ECEC-practitioners are regarded as experts whose advice must be followed unquestioningly, or, at the other extreme, that parents are considered as having sole responsibility of the child. And these are just two simple examples of what can culturally be instilled about education. Cultural beliefs systems about parenting are far more complex and not always clearly visible, let alone definable, especially in a language that is not one's own.

Second, in the dialogue between multilingual parents and professionals, 'language' is not only an important means of conversation, it is also one of the concrete themes under discussion. After all, by attending ECEC, children will be

confronted with different languages, including the dominant one in society, which raises the question of how one would like the child to grow up with all these languages? The first languages of the child are not only important for the child's wellbeing, its sense of being and identity (Cummins, 2004), these languages are also, in a hybrid way, connected to both the child's cultural backgrounds and the child's present and future life in society (Fillmore, 2000). Parents and professionals have to relate to this and make certain choices, which, again, are dictated by cultural beliefs systems and societal expectations that do not necessarily correspond.

1.1.2 Monolingual orientations in a multilingual Europe

1.1.2.1 Multilingualism in Europe

The issue of diversity has been a prominent topic since the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Vandenbroeck, 2017). This has been due to various factors such as economic crises, the rise of far-right racist political parties, and an increase in migration from Eastern European countries, Africa and the Middle East. The ensuing growing diversity in terms of the composite complexities of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity, is often referred to as 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007).

In Europe, the linguistic diversity can be illustrated by the estimation that in addition to the 24 official languages, more than 60 local and regional languages and dialects are spoken, and that approximately 175 languages or dialects from countries outside Europe are in use (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, an increasing number of children is growing up in family contexts in which more than one language is spoken (Extra & Yağmur, 2011) and Eurostat (2019) calculated that 35% of the Europeans use two languages in their daily lives; 21%, three languages; and 8% of the European citizens use four or more languages. These general figures, of course, conceal different realities. While some regions in Europe experience a situation in which a majority of families use different 'minority' languages and where the 'majority' is in fact made up of various minorities (Vandenbroeck, 2017), others experience specific multilingual situations linked to their geopolitical or historical background. Observed examples of such situations are the presence of a distinct linguistic community that speaks a minority language without official status, a sudden influx of refugee families,… (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023).

Regardless of this variety of multilingual situations in Europe, multilingualism is embraced and valued at European policy level as a reality and as a fundamental part of European culture. In this sense, the Council of the European Union (2019a) has recommended European Member States to enhance language learning from a young age onwards and to promote multilingual education in ECEC by supporting all children to learn the language of education while also taking into account and respecting their first language. Also, the EU Quality Framework on ECEC (Council of the European Union, 2019b) highlights that *"Creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds contributes to the development of their sense of belonging. Appropriate continuous professional development also prepares staff to welcome and support bilingual children."* (p.12). It is important to note that these policy intentions are in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) that considers maintaining and nurturing home language(s) as fundamental rights of children and families.

1.1.2.2 Monolingual orientations

Despite the positive discourses about multilingualism, it seems that the confrontation with super-diversity often results in feelings of insecurity and national destabilization (Duyvendak, 2011). To cope with these feelings, many forces in European societies push for a solid national identity and a stronger social cohesion, and, in doing so, overlook differences and prioritize equality in the form of homogeneity (Van Avermaet, 2009). In this endeavour, a single shared identity is often promoted, with 'language' as the means to achieve social cohesion. This, however, does not refer to just any language, but to the dominant language in society, leaving heritage languages unvalued (Fillmore, 2000; Pauwels, 2016).

Although there is a growing recognition among specialists that multilingualism is an added value for all children, educational practices and policies continue to perpetuate this 'myth of homogeneity' and corresponding monolingual beliefs (Pulinx & Van Avermaet, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2017) that wrongly assume that multilingual children are the same as monolinguals (Hélot, 2012; Orioni, 2020). This occurs by privileging the dominant language over minority language(s) and by viewing monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as a deviation from it (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Consequently, hybrid language practices in educational settings are often disregarded and multilingualism is constructed as a problem to overcome rather than a resource or a condition for learning (Lengyel, 2012; Ruiz, 1984; Vandenbroeck, 2017).

Gogolin (1997) explains that this monolingual orientation is an intrinsic element of the professional 'habitus' of teachers in European educational systems. She argues that the monocultural traditions of European educational systems, rooted in the origins of the classical nation state, constitute a 'monolingual habitus' in teachers that assumes that establishing monolingualism in the official national language is imperative to their professional ethos.

In Bourdieusian sense, a habitus is the product of primary and secondary socialisation. As a subconscious system of dispositions and observations, a personal biography, it guides and structures an individual's actions and it expresses the ways an individual relates to the social world (Bourdieu, 1977). As education professionals across Europe are overwhelmingly monolingual, personal experiences of and reflection upon multilingualism are often missing (Lengyel, 2012), making their behaviours and dispositions unconsciously monolingually inspired. This monolingual standard will also be conveyed in their interactions with multilingual parents and children, leaving education professionals struggling to draw on children's full linguistic repertoire and the various cultural resources of multilingual families (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Lengyel (2012) states that the monolingual habitus is also apparent in early childhood education.

Despite the fact that there have been changes towards greater appreciation of multilingualism since Gogolin's (1997) original observations, monolingualism as a dominant norm is still evident (Bak & Mehmedbegovic, 2017; Ellis et al., 2010; Knudsen et al., 2020). According to Lamb (2015), this may be due to the ubiquitous nature of habitus that makes any aspiration to reposition multilingualism very challenging. He states that: *"Habitus does not need legislation or oppressive policy to develop. Though power is involved in its construction, it is not determined directly by structures but by dispositions that have been dynamically created by past experiences and that, in turn, both influence current practices and condition our perceptions of these."* (Lamb, 2015, p. 6). It seem that the less an individual professional is aware of the existence of the monolingual habitus, the more effective the monolingual habitus operates (Lengyel, 2012).

1.1.3 Support for ECEC professionals

Not only the monolingual habitus of ECEC professionals has an impact on working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse background. Research shows that professionals also often feel insecure and not

competent enough to approach the various multilingual realities in their everyday practice (Chan, 2011; Hu et al., 2014; Michel & Kuiken, 2014; Norheim & Moser, 2020). It should come as no surprise, however, that professionals sometimes feel uncertain about this. Not only do different multilingual realities bring with them different complex questions for which there is no simple one-size-fits-all answer, it is also increasingly recognised and acknowledged that ECEC and the professionals working there play a crucial role in the lives of multilingual children and their families.

Indeed, it has been documented that professionals have a vast potential in contributing to children's language(s) development (Beller, 2008; Buschmann & Sachse, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2009; Salem et al., 2020). With regard to multilingual children, ECEC professionals have a 'double task': not only must they provide high-quality meaningful interactions (OECD, 2021) in the official/institutional languages, they must also recognise, respect and support children's different heritage languages in the process (Banse, 2019; Halle et al., 2014; Raikes et al., 2019).

Paying attention to children's heritage languages in ECEC is considered important because, on the one hand, this linguistic repertoire can be exploited as a resource for learning the official language (Cummins, 1979; Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014) and thus contribute to the child's academic opportunities. On the other hand, research also points to socio-emotional benefits of sustaining home languages in ECEC and its impact on intergenerational language transmission among multilingual families (Council of the European Union, 2019a; De Houwer, 2017; Eisenchlas et al., 2013). It should be noted that attention to children's language(s) development goes hand in hand with attention to the well-being of children. Indeed, without strong emotional support, multilingual children will benefit far less from high-quality language support (Gosse et al., 2014; Willard et al., 2021).

In parallel with supporting children's development and well-being, ECEC professionals must create a welcoming and supporting environment for the children's parents or caregivers. Research points out that professionals' abilities to establish partnerships with parents/caregivers together with the quality of these partnerships influence the multilingual development and well-being of children in ECEC (Bromer, 2001; Mary & Young, 2017; Sims et al., 2017). The literature on the relationships between parents and professionals highlights, however, that this is anything but clear-cut, for example when parents and professionals share neither language nor cultural beliefs (Aghallaj et al., 2020;

Halgunseth, 2009; Tobin, 2020). Clearly, creating stimulating early childhood environments that simultaneously address the multilingual development of young children and establish partnerships with parents, requires ECEC professionals to have intercultural competencies as well as knowledge of the social and cultural realities of multilingual families (Romijn et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2020).

The important role ECEC professionals play vis-à-vis children and parents is also recognised in European policy texts. For example, the European Quality Framework for ECEC states that although quality in ECEC is determined by the coherence of 5 dimensions (access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding) workforce is crucial therein (Council of the European Union, 2019b). Moreover, it has been established that the quality of ECEC and hence the outcomes for children and families – especially those who live in disadvantaged circumstances – depend on well-trained, experienced and competent staff (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014; Urban et al., 2012). This entails a plea to ensure that professionals should be given the best possible support in their jobs, both in terms of initial training and through processes of continuous professional development (CPD).

CPD refers to the broad range of in-service training activities for professionals already in the job. Engaging professionals in such activities is found to make a substantial contribution to improving overall quality in ECEC (Egert et al., 2018; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017) and process quality in the form of meaningful interactions between adults and children, and between parents and professionals (OECD, 2021). Moreover, research findings also confirm that the well-being of children can be fostered through CPD of ECEC staff (e.g. Brunsek et al., 2020).

In short, there is consensus on the importance of CPD in contributing to more quality ECEC practices for children and families. Research on CPD in complex multilingual ECEC contexts is, however, at present rather limited (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019).

1.1.4 Multilingualism in the Flemish Community of Belgium

1.1.4.1 A history of language conflicts

To understand the current language situation in the Flemish Community of Belgium, which serves as the research context for this dissertation, it is important to first briefly outline the origins and peculiarities of the language situation in Belgium. Through several state reforms between 1970 and 1993, Belgium became a federal state composed of regions and communities that more or less independently exercise authority within their domains. The three regions (the Brussels Capital Region, the Flemish Region and the Walloon Region) were constituted from a push for greater economic autonomy. The establishment of the three communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) was driven by cultural and linguistic motives and resulted in the fact that there are three official languages in Belgium today: Dutch, French and German (Belgian Federal Government, 2023).

However, underlying this current situation are many language conflicts that, since Belgium became independent in 1830, have mainly revolved around the dichotomy between Dutch and French-speaking language groups (Janssens, 2015). Although from the independence, freedom of language use was guaranteed to all Belgian citizens, this did not imply equal status between Dutch and French. French was the language of the government and the elite, which meant that it was also considered the only official language. This created language conflicts in the northern part of the country, as the majority of residents there were Dutch-speaking but needed to master French for the purpose of upward social mobility. According to Janssens (2015), this shows how the language conflict was also a social conflict. At the end of the 19th century, the Flemish Movement's pursuit of the recognition of the Dutch language ('Flemish') led to Dutch officially becoming equivalent to French in the administration. However, given the territorial composition of Belgium, general bilingualism was considered as unrealistic. After years of political debate on this language issue, a language border was established in 1963 and regions and municipalities were assigned to one language (Janssens, 2018). This resulted in a specific form of societal and territorial bilingualism, in which monolingual communities were seen as the norm. However, it did not take individual bi- or multilingualism into account and, moreover, it required several complex arrangements in municipalities close to the language border and in the capital region of Brussels, which still led to a lot of political conflict (Janssens, 2015).

The struggle of the Flemish Movement resonates to this day, notably in the idea that the Dutch language is threatened and must therefore be protected (Mettewie & Mensel, 2020). This undeniably has its impact on the stringency of the monolingual Dutch policy in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Moreover, a political mindset based on a society divided into two exclusive language communities – each allegedly linguistically uniform – is at odds with the reality of (growing) language diversity (Janssens, 2018).

This Belgian language issue might put additional pressure on the pedagogical encounter in an intercultural context. Indeed, through their interactions with childcare and pre-primary education, multilingual parents will be confronted with a language policy that is rooted in historical conflicts.

1.1.4.2 Increasing linguistic diversity

In the last decades, the Flemish Community of Belgium has experienced a steady increase in linguistic diversity. Although Dutch is the official language, in 29.4% of the births in the Flemish Community in 2021 the language between mother and child was not Dutch (Opgroeien, 2023). French is the most common other language (6.5%) followed by Arabic (3.9%), Turkish (2.3%) and Romanian (2.0%).

Also in Flemish education, this linguistic diversity is visible in the number of pupils who at home speak a language different from Dutch. Here too, the proportion of pupils with a non-Dutch home language has increased sharply over the past decade. Schools do not register the specific home languages, but they indicate it as 'non-Dutch'. For the 2020-2021 school year, it was counted that 22.7% of preschool children did not have Dutch as a home language. For primary school children, this was 20.2% and for secondary school pupils 17.5% (Opgroeien, 2023).

Although multilingualism occurs in all provinces, the percentages give a general picture that masks large differences in urbanised areas such as Antwerp and Brussels, where more than half of all zero-to-five-year-olds have home languages other than Dutch and where it is estimated that more than 100 different languages are spoken daily. In Antwerp, Turkish, Arabic and Tamazight together accounted for 25% of the languages heard in 2017 (Delarue, 2019).

If we look at origins - based on the nationality at birth of the child or of one of its parents - in 2021, more than 40% of all children under the age of three had other than Belgian roots. The larger half were from outside the EU and more than 10% had African roots. Again, these figures mask differences for urban contexts,

where it can be observed that more than half of 0-5-year-olds in Ghent have non-Belgian roots and almost three quarters of the youngest children in Antwerp have origins outside Belgium (Delarue, 2019). In these cities, 0-5-year-olds with Belgian origins are effectively a minority. Of course, the 'majority' does not consist of one group, but of different groups. As more than 170 different nationalities were counted in Flanders in 2021 (Opgroeien, 2023), this represents a wide range of minorities.

1.1.4.3 Multilingualism in Flemish policy on ECEC

Despite the multilingual reality in the Flemish Community, it seems that a strong monolingual orientation remains. To some extent, there is a discrepancy that follows the breaches between childcare and pre-primary education. On the one hand, the policy on pre-primary education puts a strong emphasis on the knowledge of Dutch as key to strong educational performance, full integration and workability in the classroom, and puts measures in place that focus on the acquisition of the Dutch language. The concept of multilingualism is virtually absent in policy texts on education. On the other hand, in childcare, a more open view towards multilingualism and heritage languages is present. For example, in the Pedagogical Framework that was adopted in 2014 (Kind en Gezin, 2014) explicit references to multilingualism and linguistic diversity are made. Yet, this does not mean that full exploitation of multilingualism in childcare is an acquired fact. In what follows, we will concisely elaborate on this.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, there is a concern about the quality of education. Policymakers draw on results of national and international assessments, such as the PISA study, to exemplify how mean scores deteriorate year after year on the specific items measured by those tests (mainly mathematical literacy, reading skills and scientific literacy). This devolution is eagerly seized upon to proclaim that *the* quality of *the* education in Flanders is declining. However, a societal debate on what might be understood 'by quality of education' is currently rather absent in Flanders[2].

[2] For example, the question of whether student results on a limited number of items is a good indicator of quality (or the only valid one) is not asked. There are, however, interesting initiatives such as the video series by Platform L (KU Leuven) in which education experts from different strands present their views on 'quality of education'. See https://ppw.kuleuven.be/platforml/video

Either way, in response to the various concerns about education in Flanders, language (Dutch) is mainly put forward as both cause and solution. Policymakers and education professionals alike often assume that multilingual pupils lag behind at school because of a poor knowledge of Dutch (Agirdag, 2020; Pulinx et al., 2014). Consequently, the solution seems obvious, notably: considering Dutch as a 'top priority' in the Flemish Education Policy and getting started with it as early as possible. The current coalition agreement of the Flemish government describes this as follows: '*The pre-primary classroom must act as a gateway to Dutch to ensure that as many children as possible start their school careers with equal opportunities*' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019, p. 32; author's own translation). According to the current education minister, Dutch is therefore "*the beginning of everything*" (Vancaeneghem & Lesaffer, 2019).

Against this background, Dutch language tests were conducted for the first time in the 2021-2022 school year for all 5-year-old toddlers in order to detect early language delays in preparation for the transition to primary school. In the public and political reactions to the results of this "Koala-test", blame was quickly put on 'non-native' parents as not doing enough to teach their children Dutch. However, neither the results of the test itself nor the public debate on it took into account the children's full linguistic repertoires nor the complex multilingual reality in which some families find themselves. According to Agirdag (2010), building on Bourdieu, this reflects the 'doxa of monolingualism', in which proficiency in Dutch is seen as a sign of societal integration and those with insufficient mastery are viewed as unwilling to be part of society (Pulinx et al., 2017).

As for Flemish policy on childcare, a slightly different picture is painted. Both the Pedagogical Framework for Babies and Toddlers adopted in 2014 (Kind en Gezin, 2014) and the government-imposed regulations on licensing (Vlaamse Overheid, 2013) value multilingualism by highlighting the importance of respect for home languages. In these texts, it is stated that:

> *"Facilities should also provide in their pedagogical policy for a language policy that stimulates the Dutch language acquisition of each child, while also giving positive attention to the language spoken by the child in the home environment."* (Regulations on licensing, Subsection 2: pedagogical policy and pedagogical support; Vlaamse Overheid, 2013)

> *"In childcare, children are given every opportunity to play, listen and enjoy the variety of languages and modes of expression. They experience respect for various home languages of children and multilingualism is valued."* (Pedagogical Framework for Babies and Toddlers; Kind en Gezin, 2014, p.28)

Although these texts propose a rather positive view of multilingualism by highlighting the possibility of combining attention to Dutch and attention to home languages, empirical studies conducted in the past 10 years show, however, that supporting multilingual children and parents and reconciling Dutch with other home languages remain a challenge in Flemish childcare (Van Gorp & Moons, 2014). This was also exemplified in the results of the large-scale baseline study *MeMoQ* on the quality of childcare for children from 0-3 (Hulpia et al., 2016). In that study, observations were conducted in a representative sample of 400 childcare centres using the CLASS instruments (Hamre et al., 2014; La Paro et al., 2012). It was found that the scores for educational support, including language support, were low and this was especially true in groups that had a larger share of children with a home language different from Dutch.

1.2 Research questions and aims

It is now established that ECEC can play a crucial role in contributing to a more inclusive and equal society with equal opportunities for all families. In a context of increased cultural and linguistic diversity, this means that for ECEC to properly fulfil this role, multilingual children and their parents need to experience meaningful, high-quality interactions in which their full linguistic and cultural repertoire is recognised and exploited.

Pedagogical encounters in ECEC are, however, in paradoxical ways complicated by the linguistic diversity and the multilingual reality of today's world. While the radical strangeness of the Other is a necessary premise to realize understanding in a pedagogical encounter, the confrontation with different or 'foreign' language(s) might at the same time convolute mutual understanding. This is especially articulated in the context of ECEC, where understanding in a pedagogical encounter relates to the education and socialization of the child. Indeed, ideas, expectations and desires about education are instilled by hybrid and changing cultural beliefs systems and societal expectations on which parents and professionals do not necessarily agree.

Moreover, realising mutual understanding and shaping the upbringing of the multilingual child together are further put under pressure by predominant monolingual orientations in society and a monolingual habitus that unwittingly influences the actions of professionals and thus daily ECEC practice. Although this monolingual orientation is ingrained in the DNA of educational systems rooted in the context of the rise of European nation-states, it is currently reinforced out of a reaction to increased super-diversity and associated feelings of dislocation and fear of (national) identity loss.

While research shows that continuous professional development (CPD) can make an important contribution to the quality of ECEC practices, the specific conditions CPD must meet to realise that potential in contexts of complex multilingualism remain rather underexplored.

The present doctoral research aims to provide an answer to that issue. In this sense, it can be understood as an attempt to challenge and to carve cracks in the monolingual orientation through CPD of ECEC professionals. This might allow steps to be taken towards a sustained appreciation of multilingualism through which ECEC can be supported in fulfilling its key role in contributing to an inclusive society with equal opportunities for all children and their parents.

As such, the overarching aim of the present doctoral dissertation is twofold. First, it aims to explore what exactly happens in an ECEC context enmeshed in the complex interplay between a multilingual reality and a monolingual orientation. The Flemish Community of Belgium is a well-suited research context for investigation this issue, as outlined above. Second, the study attempts to identify the conditions for successful CPD to fully realise its potential in breaking through the monolingual orientation and opening up possibilities for appreciating and exploiting the multilingual reality in ECEC.

This can be translated into the following research questions:

1. How does the pedagogical encounter between multilingual families and ECEC professionals take shape in a monolingual-oriented multilingual society?

    a. What happens when multilingual children transition to pre-primary education?

    b. How do ECEC professionals experience their relationships with multilingual parents?

    c. How do multilingual parents experience their relationships with ECEC professionals?

2. How can ECEC professionals be supported to foster pedagogical encounters with multilingual families that fully acknowledge and exploit the multilingual realities of these families?

    a. What is the link between CPD on multilingualism and attitudes towards multilingual children and parents?

    b. What are important criteria for CPD to have an impact on ECEC quality?

    c. How can ECEC professionals be supported to establish multilingual practices and dialogue with multilingual families?

1.3 Methodological approach

1.3.1 Research context

1.3.1.1 Organisation of ECEC in Flanders

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, Early Childhood Education and Care is organized as a split system. The formal childcare (under the auspices of the Ministry for Welfare, Public Health and Family) targets children from birth to three years old (with a coverage of almost 54% in 2020 (Opgroeien, 2021)). From the age of two and a half years old, children can start school in kindergarten (pre-primary education, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Training). Although the compulsory school age is set at five, more than 98% of children under five were enrolled in school in 2020 (Agodi, 2021). Childcare for children from 0–3 is organised in two settings: *groepsopvang* ('group-based childcare') and *gezinsopvang* ('home-based care'). The day-to-day running of childcare centres is the responsibility of service providers (local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also private for-profit providers). Approximately one-third of childcare places is provided by small-scale licensed home-based care providers and two-thirds by group-based childcare. All childcare services must be registered with *Agentschap Opgroeien* (the governmental Agency 'Upbringing'). The adult to child ratio in childcare is set at 1 adult per 8 children, but there are no regulations regarding group size or age range of the children in a group. All childcare services are free to choose how they arrange the groups. When there are two childcare workers in a group, the maximum group size is 18 children, which lowers the adult to child ratio to 1:9. In the 2014 Decree on childcare, it was stipulated that every childcare worker should have a qualification by 2024. The minimum qualification requirement is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (Pirard et al., *in press*).

Pre-primary education school boards are distributed over three educational networks and they may belong to an 'umbrella organisation' (a representative association of school boards that acts as a partner for schools in policy discussions with the Flemish government). All pre-primary school teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (EQF level 6). They often have additional support from a Childcare Worker ('*kinderverzorgster*') for a few hours per week, depending on the number and socio-economic situation of the toddlers. Schools with less than 35 toddlers receive funding for four hours 'childcare' in the week (Pirard et al., *in press*).

1.3.1.2 CPD in Flemish ECEC

The split system for ECEC in Flanders also implies that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is set up differently for childcare professionals than it is for pre-primary school teachers. In what follows, a brief overview of the organisation of CPD provision for both sectors will be sketched, largely drawing on the Belgian ECEC Workforce Profile compiled by Pirard et al. (*in press*) for the latest SEEPRO3 study.

In childcare, the service providers are obliged to organise CPD for their staff. They are free to decide on the content, the delivery mode (training courses, coaching, learning networks, ...), the quantity and the duration. There is no requirement regarding the minimum number of days per year professionals must participate in CPD activities and there is no system of childfree hours.

The financial resources for CPD are allocated according to the scale of the childcare services: income related childcare services (where parents pay a fee according to their income) with more than 18 full-time child places receive a subsidy which allows them to choose how they want to organise CPD. They can either employ or hire a pedagogical coach themselves, or they can use the available training opportunities provided by different pedagogical support centres and training centres in Flanders. The funds for income related childcare services with less than 18 full-time child places and the funds for childcare services that are not income related go to a support network, which is called *Mentes*. Mentes is a network of about 20 support organisations that are active in the entire Flemish Community. Childcare services get support from *Mentes* through a Regional Counsellor (*regionale ondersteuner*) or through a Pedagogical Coach (*pedagogisch coach*). With the Flemish Intersectoral Agreement VIA 6 (Vlaamse Regering, 2021) that was reached in 2021, financial resources were made available to recruit 264 FTE Pedagogical Coaches for the whole childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

It needs to be noted that the genealogy of CPD of childcare professionals in Flanders is marked by counterproductive processes that have led to what is called a 'de-professionalization' of the sector (Peeters, 2008). Before the introduction of the Childcare Decree in 2014, a striking paradox was present in the policy on childcare: while the quality requirements imposed on the job kept increasing, access to the profession was driven less and less through qualification requirements. Moreover, this coincided with a significant rise in the number of child places in settings with precarious working conditions and no or few training

requirements for staff. The 2014 Decree opened perspectives to reverse the Flemish 'spiral of de-professionalization' thanks to the equalisation of quality requirements for the entire childcare sector, the installation of a minimum qualification level for practitioners (with the intention to have the full childcare workforce qualified by the year 2024) and the obligation for organisers to provide professionalization for their staff.

For pre-primary teachers in Flanders, CPD is mostly offered by educational guidance services (*pedagogische begeleidingsdiensten*) within the own umbrella organisation. These services provide on-site support and schools can call on them for advise on innovation projects, self-evaluation projects, classroom initiatives,…). Apart from this, there are also private organisations that offer specialised courses in pedagogy, didactics, arts education, and so on. Schools are required to develop a training plan for the teachers and to provide follow-up in order to receive funds for CPD. Since schools are free to decide how to organise the plan, there is no requirement for a minimum amount of CPD hours for pre-primary teachers (nor for the assisting childcare workers). Only one pedagogical training day per year for all the teachers is obligatory (Pirard et al., *in press*).

1.3.1.3 Childcare sector under pressure

During the period of finalising this dissertation, childcare is 'talk of the town' in public media in Flanders. This media coverage stems from a combination of legitimate societal concerns about the welfare of children, parents and professionals and political reluctance to facilitate sustainable transformation of the sector. The difficulties and challenges facing Flemish childcare anno 2023 have their origins in the historical construction of the sector, but they have come to the forefront of societal awareness in recent years with the uncovering of various malpractices towards children and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well.

The pressure on childcare is high. On top of the shortage of places for children in childcare, the past year alone saw a record number of childcare centre closures. While those closures were mostly due to an identified lack of guarantees to provide pedagogical quality, it left many parents out in the cold. In addition, the childcare workforce took a big hit in Flanders during the corona crisis: childcare was one of the few sectors that had to keep on operating in very difficult circumstances without much societal appreciation in return. For example, childcare workers were not included in the priority target group for vaccinations. Not surprisingly, there was a lot of staff attrition and many professionals put a

final stop to their jobs in childcare. This added to the already existing staff shortages. The fact that the Covid-19 pandemic had such a major impact on childcare in Flanders (Van Laere et al., 2021) illustrates the vulnerability of the sector.

Indeed, structural working conditions of childcare in Flanders are considered as unfavourable to safeguard the sector's resilience. The high number of children per adult is unparalleled in Europe (Eurydice, 2019), the initial training of childcare workers is graded at EQF level 4 (2 levels lower than a Bachelor's degree) and considered inadequate to meet the requirements of practice, and although there have been recent investments in CPD for childcare staff, conditions are often not always in place to reap its benefits (Devlieghere et al., 2023; Pirard et al., *in press*).

There is a sense of urgency about the structural difficulties that clamp down on childcare in Flanders. This has resulted in the emergence of grassroots initiatives and activist groups from within the sector raising a loud call for transformation by organising several campaigns and initiatives. In 2022, a group of childcare services from Brussels joined forces in an action group called *De 1000 eerste dagen* ('The first 1000 days')[3]. They launched a petition to ask for structural changes towards quality childcare that was signed by more than 25.000 people within a few months. The petition holds a plea for what is called a 'Marshall plan' for the childcare sector. This Marshall plan starts from the recognition of the first 1000 days in the life of a child. It asks for structural changes for the sector, appreciation for the job of a childcare worker and better working conditions and opportunities for continuous professional development of childcare staff. Moreover, the organizations behind the initiatives want to have an active role in designing the directions for structural changes to the sector.

Also parents have organised themselves in several action groups such as *Kind en Gezien* ('Child and Seen', which is a pun on *Kind en Gezin* – Child and Family – the former name of the governmental agency responsible for childcare in Flanders) and the *Crisiskabinet Kinderopvang* ('Crisis cabinet Childcare'). Since the fall of 2022, after setting up different campaigns and initiatives separately, these parent initiatives have joined forced in the *Crisiskabinet Kinderopvang 2.0*[4]*.* Each Wednesday, when the Flemish parliament holds its plenary meeting with all

[3] https://petitie.be/petitions/een-marshallplan-voor-kwalitatieve-kinderopvang-32542360-9bae-47a2-acc6-1ea1153cc89e/signatures?locale=nl

[4] https://www.facebook.com/Crisiskabinet.Kinderopvang

124 elected representatives, a group of parents attends this meeting together with their child(ren) to highlight the sense of urgency. One of the main points of attention is the child-to-adult ratio, which is framed *de kindnorm* ('childstandard'). Supported by the hashtag-slogan *#9 is te veel* ('nine is too much'), they argue that the current ratio is too high to provide quality care for children and they call for this ratio to be lowered.

The response from the incumbent government and the responsible ministry to the worries and to the demand for additional investment in the sector is perceived as insufficient. Although there is an increased focus on safety and enforcement (e.g. more staff for the inspectorate, quicker intervention in case of complaints and suspected risk situations,...), extra funding for the sector seems hardly feasible within a policy period characterised by cutbacks. Evidently, this leads to a lot of disappointment and frustration.

1.3.2 Research design

The PhD project adopts a comprehensive research design in the sense that it aims to bring together the perspectives of multilingual children, multilingual parents and professionals working in ECEC. Moreover, it covers the whole range of ECEC, which in the context of the Flemish Community of Belgium means that both the childcare sector (for children aged zero to three) and the pre-primary education sector (for children aged two-and-a-half to six years old) are considered. In addition, this PhD blends research from three different projects, each of which had its own approach and framework. This not only provided a rich research experience that allowed the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, it also entailed an exciting and fruitful collaboration with outstanding colleagues from different research groups and organisations.

This section presents an overview of the three research projects. As the chapters in this dissertation are based on research manuscripts containing data from the different research projects, this section is limited to a brief description of the context, the participating partners and the methodological approach of each study, thus avoiding overlap with the content of further chapters in this thesis.

1.3.2.1 Eurofound Study on working conditions, training of early childhood care workers and quality of services

In 2014, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) commissioned a review study about working conditions and continuous professional development in European ECEC from three different

institutions: 1) VBJK, Centre for Innovation in the Early Years, Belgium; 2) the Institute of Education, University of London, UK; 3) PPMI, Public Policy and Management Institute, Lithuania[5].

The aim was to identify, assess and synthesize a range of evidence relating to aspects of the ECEC workforce in relation to outcomes for children. By exploring existing research evidence on how professional development and working conditions in ECEC influence outcomes for children, the study intended to identify how training and development of professionals might be tailored to most effectively improve the quality of the services available for children below compulsory school age in European member states.

The study was designed as a large-scale systematic review that was explicitly European in orientation. At the time, systematic review studies on the topic mainly existed from the USA, New Zealand and Australia. Moreover, existing studies seemed to rely almost exclusively on English language databases, leaving out potentially interesting findings from non-English-language sources. Therefore, the Eurofound systematic review included English as well as non-English language studies from all EU-28 languages (the UK was still a part of the EU, back then). To achieve this, cooperation was set up with local experts representing all European member states. Furthermore, the review covered all types of primary studies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods).

The overarching review question was: *Which features of ECEC professional development and working conditions are most effective in improving cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes as well as learning and socialising experiences for children attending ECEC services?* As such, the review aimed at exploring links between continuing professional development, working conditions, staff-child interactions (process quality) and children´s outcomes and experiences.

After 13,670 papers were screened on title and abstract by the core team and 1,551 by the national experts, another 281 and 27 papers respectively were screened on full text basis. At both stages, each paper was screened in accordance with the predefined exclusion criteria by two researchers separately. This eventually left 44 studies, of which 29 were English and 15 non-English.

[5] The following scholars were part of the core team: Prof. Dr. Claire Cameron, Hanan Hauari (Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London); Dr. Jan Peeters, Dr. Arianna Lazzari, Brecht Peleman and Dr. Hester Hulpia (VBJK, Ghent); Irma Budginaite, Hanna Siarova (PPMI, Vilnius).

These 44 studies were subjected to an in-depth review for synthesis in the final report.

In February 2015, the report was published by Eurofound (Eurofound, 2015). In 2018, the findings of the effects of CPD initiatives on the quality of the pedagogical practices of ECEC practitioners were published in the *European Journal of Education* as a separate research article (Peleman et al., 2018). As such, this article concerns a subset of data from the overarching research project. The 2018 article was the basis for Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

1.3.2.2 FWO Study on transitions to preschool for children in poverty

From 2015 to 2018, a study on the transition to pre-primary education for children living poverty was conducted in collaboration between the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy and the Centre for Diversity and Learning (*Steunpunt Diversiteit en Leren*), both from Ghent University[6]. It was funded by the Children's Poverty Fund (*Kinderarmoedefonds*) and the FWO Research Foundation Flanders.

This study originated in a policy context that strongly emphasised preschool participation (*kleuterparticipatie*) and it ran in conjunction with (parts of) Katrien Van Laere's research on conceptualisations of care and education (Van Laere, 2017). Since 2007, the policy on pre-primary education in Flanders has a clear aim to stimulate parents to send their children as early (from two and a half years old) and as much as possible to pre-primary school. The rationale behind this is prompted by what is called the 'schoolification' of ECEC, in which pre-school facilities are increasingly reduced to a preparatory role towards children's further school career and the prevention of all kinds of social and academic problems. This obviously affects children (who have to be made "school-ready"), parents (who are virtually obliged to send their children to preschool) and professionals (who have to work in a challenging context). However, the voices of these children, parents and staff are barely heard in debates on preschool participation. Therefore, research was set up to explore perspectives of professionals, parents and children on the transition to pre-primary education. Given that the policy on preschool participation is primarily focussed on families living in disadvantaged circumstances (as they are found most often to be insufficiently present at

[6] The core team consisted of the following scholars: Prof. Dr. Piet Van Avermaet and Reinhilde Pulinx (both Centre for Diversity and Learning), Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck and Brecht Peleman (Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy)

school), the research explored the perspectives of these families in particular. The overarching research question was: *What can we learn from the daily experiences of the youngest toddlers and their parents from disadvantaged backgrounds about how (un)equal learning opportunities are shaped from the start of pre-primary school and why some parents are less inclined to send their child to school?* (Peleman & Van Laere, 2018)

While Katrien Van Laere's research focused on the perspectives of parents and staff (see Van Laere, 2017), our study investigated the experiences of the youngest toddlers during their transition to pre-primary school. As such, the study aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of the early school experiences of children at risk of poverty during their transition to pre-primary school; the (missed) learning opportunities of these children with a focus on learning through social interaction; and the reproduction of social inequality in the earliest school experiences. Furthermore, the intention was to derive implications for policy, classroom practice and teacher education.

Through quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study captured the first school experiences of eight children from disadvantaged groups. Those eight children came from four different entry classes in four different schools and they were closely followed by video observation for 11 months, starting from their first day at school.

During the observation days, two focus children per class were filmed by the researchers at different times throughout the day. To achieve a diversity of moments, blocks of two to four hours were filmed each time, with the cameras running non-stop. In order to best capture the children's daily experiences, filming was usually done with two cameras: one camera following the focus children (handheld camera) while the second camera captured the rest of the classroom from a wider perspective (overview camera). Consequently, two researchers were usually present, which also allowed extensive field notes to be taken. A total of 44 video observation moments took place and 166 hours of film were recorded with the two cameras. All hand-held camera recordings from these observation days were transcribed and coded in a custom-made spreadsheet.

The video footage was coded and analysed according to the following criteria:

1. Well-being and Involvement
2. Type and duration of activities
3. Amount of waiting time during the activities
4. Type and duration of interactions (verbal utterances) at the level of the whole class
5. Type and duration of interactions (verbal utterances) for each of the eight focal children individually
6. Quality of the individual interactions with the eight focal children

The report was published in 2019 (Peleman et al., 2019). In 2020, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the interactions (verbal utterances) were published in the *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* as a separate research article (Peleman et al., 2020). As such, this article concerns a subset of data from the overarching research project. The 2020 article was the basis for Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

1.3.2.3 FWO SBO PRO-M – Promoting Early Multilingualism in Childhood and Childcare

From 2018 to 2022, a consortium of three universities and three societal organisations in the Flemish Community of Belgium carried a large-scale research project on multilingualism in early childhood. The academic partners consisted of scholars from KU Leuven (also the main promotor of the project), Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and Ghent University (the Centre for Diversity and Learning and the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy). The civil society organisations were the Governmental Agency Opgroeien (*Growing up*), Iedereen Leest (*Everybody Reads*, the umbrella organisation of libraries in Flanders) and VBJK, Centre for Innovation in the Early Years[7].

[7] The following members participated in the core team: Prof. Dr. Orhan Agirdag, Dr. Anouk Van Der Wildt, Dr. Graziela Dekeyser, Rachida Aghallaj, Doha Ramzi, Panayota Cotzaridis (KU Leuven); Prof. Dr. Esli Struys, Ily Hollebeke (VUB); Prof. Dr. Piet Van Avermaet, Prof. Dr. Wendelien Vantieghem, Victoria Van Oss, Dr. Fauve De Backer, Helen De Sadeleer (UGent CDL); Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck, Brecht Peleman (UGent SWSP); Dr. Hester Hulpia,

In its design, the project consisted of two large parts that were considered equally important: a research part led by the academic partners within the consortium and a valorisation part of practice development led by the societal partners.

The overarching aim of PRO-M was to investigate and optimize the relationships between early childhood professionals and multilingual families. This was driven by the observation that while scholars consistently point at the cognitive, social and economic benefits of early multilingualism, key social organisations in the field of early childhood note that there is a lack of competencies among professionals to provide support for multilingual families. Therefore, the project intended to valorise and disseminate existing scientific knowledge about early multilingualism and to increase the competencies of early childhood professionals to enable them to support harmonious multilingual development within multilingual families.

For this purpose, a comprehensive research design was deployed in order to investigate both the perspectives of multilingual families and early childhood professionals as well as their mutual relationships. The underlying theoretical framework was based on Spolsky's model of Language Policy, consisting of Beliefs, Practices and Management (Spolsky, 2007), which implied an exploration of family language policy (FLP) among multilingual families on the one hand and centre's language policy (CLP) on the other, as well as the point where the two meet.

As for the research part, a large-scale survey study was first conducted among 1181 multilingual parents with at least one child between zero and three years old, and 773 professionals working in infant welfare clinics (*consultatiebureaus*) and childcare (both group-based settings and family day care). Second, qualitative research was performed to explore in more depth the perspectives of multilingual parents (n=18), nurses in infant welfare clinics (n=11) and childcare professionals (n=42)[8]. This wealth of research data led to several sub-studies, each with its own research questions. Some of these studies have already been published and two PhDs were successfully completed within the PRO-M project: the first one within the context of infant welfare clinics: *Multilingual policy*

Dr. Lisandre Bergeron-Morin (VBJK); Tine Rommens, Frederica Portaluri, Christele Van Nieuwenhuyzen (Agentschap Opgroeien); Simon Bequoye, Bart De Nil, Tania Van Acker (Iedereen Leest).

[8] This is the status of the PRO-M qualitative research component at the time of writing (spring 2023). As research is still ongoing, the number of participants may still increase.

dynamics of early childhood health care professionals (Van Oss, 2022), the second one within the context of multilingual families: *From Afrikaans to Zarma. Family language policies in multilingual families in Flanders, Belgium* (Hollebeke, 2023).

The sub-studies conducted with PRO-M data within the context of infant welfare clinics investigated Spolsky's model of Language Policy (Van Oss, Van Avermaet, et al., 2022), professionals' advice towards multilingual families (Van Oss, Vantieghem, et al., 2022; Van Oss et al., 2023) and the place and role of self-efficacy therein (Van Oss et al., 2021). The sub-studies conducted in the context of multilingual families concerned Spolsky' model of Language Policy (Hollebeke, Van Oss, et al., 2022), predictors of parental efforts to 1) maintain heritage language (Hollebeke, Dekeyser, et al., 2022), 2) expose children to institutional language (Hollebeke, Agirdag, et al., 2022) and 3) expose children to both the heritage language and the institutional language. A final study within the context of multilingual families investigated the stability of a family's language policy in a longitudinal research design (Hollebeke, *under review*).

The sub-studies conducted with PRO-M data within the context of childcare investigated multilingual parents' perspectives on their relationships with professionals through the large-scale survey (Anouk) and by bringing together multilingual parents in group interviews for a qualitative exploration of their experiences and views (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation). Furthermore, perspectives of childcare professionals on their relationships with multilingual professionals were qualitatively explored (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation) through group interviews. And finally, associations between continuous professional development and supportive practices towards multilingual children and parents were explored through a multilevel analysis on data from the large-scale survey (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation and Peleman et al., 2022).

As for the valorisation part of the PRO-M project, three trajectories of professional development were set up in three sectors: the libraries, family support services and childcare. Each of the trajectories eventually led to the development of a specific toolbox that can be used by the respective professionals to better approach and support multilingual families in their practices. They have been widely tested throughout the process and together with the development of the specific tools, dissemination strategies were put in place to promote, spread and implement the material. This was made possible due to the strong involvement of an advisory committee of stakeholders and representatives from within the different sectors.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the professional development trajectory within the childcare was of particular importance. In this trajectory, a co-constructive process was set up with 29 tutors who joined forces to develop a toolkit that offers an array of possibilities to expand the knowledge base and to foster reflection among childcare professionals on early multilingualism. Chapter 7 of this dissertation offers an insight into this process by drawing on documented experiences throughout the development and on individual interviews conducted with the participating tutors.

At the end of the PRO-M project, all the supportive materials were brought together on a website that acts as a referral page and as an online training platform.

To this end, seven modules were developed:

1. Knowledge and insights on (early) multilingualism
2. Knowledge and insights on multilingual (language) development
3. The theory behind Language Policy
4. Family Language Policy
5. Multilingualism in Childcare
6. Multilingualism in Family Support Services
7. Multilingualism in Libraries

The website can be accessed through:
http://pro-mproject.be/opleidingsmateriaal/.

1.3.3 Positionality

Shortly upon the finalization of my Master Studies in Social Work at the University of Ghent in 2011, I started working for VBJK, the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years, also located in the city of Ghent. When I embarked on a first research project in 2012 (investigating children's perspectives on their experiences in out of school care), I got the chance to closely collaborate with colleagues from the department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (SWSP), under the supervision of Professor Michel Vandenbroeck. Since then, I have deliberately ridden my professional route on the double track of both organizations, a journey that was facilitated by the already existing partnership and collaboration between the department and VBJK. Although this was never an actual 50-50 split, a common thread was that I always had one foot in each organisation. This was also characteristic of the past years. Not only was I a member of both the research team and the valorisation team within the PRO-M project, I remained involved in some VBJK-projects throughout the duration of this PhD trajectory. This allowed close collaboration with colleagues from VBJK during my employment at the university. I look forward to pursuing this double-track in my further professional journey, wherever it may take me.

What I particularly appreciate about that position – apart from the varied encounters with the wonderful colleagues in both organizations – is the fact that it puts me at a crossroad where two intersections meet. The work of VBJK is situated at the intersection of research, policy and practice development, resulting in an abundancy of challenging (international) projects in various subfields concerning young children and their families. For me personally, I have been involved with projects on Family Day Care, Group-based Childcare, Out of School Care and Pre-Primary Education, focussing on topics such as Professional Development, Transitions, Multilingualism, Teacher-Child interactions, etc. The work of the department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy is (mainly) concerned with 'the social', conceptualized as the space – the intersection – where the private and the public meet (Bouverne-De Bie, 2015). Early Childhood Education and Care is the field par excellence where societal interests and expectations intersect with the intimacy of the daily lives of mothers, fathers and children (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011), and where, consequently, the relationship between individual and society is constantly questioned and constructed.

Throughout the years, both organisations have granted me with many opportunities to further develop myself as a social pedagogue. For me, my social pedagogical commitment entails an attempt to explore mechanisms and

processes of inclusion and exclusion that strain the experiences of people living in difficult circumstances. I consider it an essential part of my work to translate findings from research and innovation projects into recommendations for policy and practice, in an attempt to contribute to processes that could lead to sustainable/structural change in society and in the lives of children, parents and education professionals. This implies a constant exploration of and reflection on the ever-changing realities of families with young children, the societal construction of educational services and on how this construction affects the lifeworld of families and professionals. Although in my work I collaborate with intermediaries and professionals rather than directly with families, I nevertheless try to bring together the different perspectives of all actors involved, each with their own meanings and hybrid idiosyncrasies. I consider the intersection between VBJK and the department as a prolific space where I can blunt and further develop my social pedagogical commitment.

1.4 Chapter Overview

This dissertation is structured around eight chapters and it is mainly composed of research manuscripts set out to provide an answer to the research questions. The first three chapters after the introduction aim to shed a light on the pedagogical encounter between multilingual families and ECEC professionals in a context characterised by a multilingual reality and trapped in a monolingual orientation. In this way, the pedagogical encounter is successively examined from the point of view of the three actors that interact in ECEC on a daily basis: the children, the professionals and the parents.

Chapter two focusses on the experiences of multilingual children in pre-primary education. Eight children at risk of poverty (most of whom had a migrant background) were followed during their first year in pre-primary school by means of detailed video-observations. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of their language interactions allowed for a reflection on the structural characteristics of pre-primary education and the way these characteristics give space to (unintended) mechanisms that hinder an equal distribution of learning opportunities, especially for multilingual children.

Chapter three puts the perspectives of childcare professionals at the centre. By engaging 42 childcare workers in 9 video elicited group interviews, we explored their views and beliefs towards multilingualism in general and their relationships with multilingual parents in particular.

Chapter four explores the perspectives of multilingual parents on their interactions with the childcare centre and their relationships with the professionals. This study deliberately used the same methodology as the previous study. In this sense, it acts as a 'mirroring-chapter' to chapter three. The study in chapter four had a relatively small and not very diverse sample (in terms of parents' socio-economic situation), making the chapter rather exploratory in nature.

The next three chapters focus on the potential of CPD in fostering pedagogical encounters in ECEC in which multilingualism can fully flourish.

Chapter five examines the link between CPD and positive attitudes of childcare professionals regarding multilingual children and multilingual parents. More specifically, by drawing on a multilevel analysis of the PRO-M survey data, associations were sought between CPD on multilingualism, dialogue with multilingual parents and home language use in interaction with multilingual children.

Chapter six presents the results of a European systematic literature review on the impact of CPD on process quality in ECEC. The study set out to unravel the necessary criteria that CPD must meet if any impact on the quality of pedagogical practice is to be made.

Chapter seven brings together the knowledge from all previous chapters with the desire to transform ECEC practices towards a valorisation of multilingualism. Together with a group of tutors, a collaborative process of professional development was set up that took into account the criteria highlighted in chapter six. The trajectory aimed at realising a sustainable implementation of support for professionals towards positive approach of multilingualism in childcare.

Finally, chapter eight completes this dissertation with a general conclusion and a reflection on the results. The main findings of the previous chapters are summarized and multiple implications for policy and practice are discussed. Lastly, limitations and directions for future research are considered.

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CHAPTER 2

EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN TRANSITIONING TO PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION.

"*He had to dip his tongue in cold water as if the only way to speak like the people of the North was to freeze his roots.*"
(Sulaiman Addonia, Silence is my Mother Tongue, 2018)

This chapter is based on Peleman, B., Vandenbroeck, M., & Van Avermaet, P. (2020). Early learning opportunities for children at risk of social exclusion. Opening the black box of preschool practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *28*(1), 21-42.

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Quality ECEC experiences

Children from families with a migration background are considered to especially benefit from the positive impact of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (Brilli et al., 2011; Felfe & Lalive, 2018). As a result, ECEC has been framed as a potential equaliser of opportunities (European Commission, 2018; Marope & Kaga, 2015; OECD, 2017), although these beneficial effects can only be achieved in contexts of high quality provision. The UK-based Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education project study (EPPSE[9]) shows that in high-quality settings, all children make more progress in their development and that this effect can last up to secondary education (Taggart et al., 2015). However, not all studies draw similar conclusions. For example, research in France (Caille, 2001) comparing grade repetition in primary school of children who entered preschool aged two and aged three, shows that - when controlled for socioeconomic background - entering preschool at two years old instead of three has no significant positive effect on later school success. Along similar lines, a recent study in the Flemish Community of Belgium (Sierens et al., 2020) finds mixed effects of early universal preschool participation on academic outcomes measured at nine years old: a significant small positive effect for science, but not for reading. These studies contribute to the understanding that it is not only the extent of preschool participation that should be considered, but also its process quality, with a special focus on adult–child interactions (Slot, 2018). Nevertheless, a Danish study by Jensen, Holm, and Bremberg (2013) shows that raising the quality of preschool through in-service training of teachers increases the gap between children of higher and lower SES. Given these somewhat contrasting findings, it is crucial to understand how process quality of preschool education is constructed and implemented by teachers and school staff, and how the conceptions of process quality relate to the experiences of children and parents at risk of social exclusion.

2.1.2 Adult-child interactions and language development

The preschool age is a crucial period for young children's language acquisition (Becker et al., 2013; Magnuson et al., 2004). There is consensus in this regard that

[9] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research-projects/2022/nov/effective-pre-school-primary-and-secondary-education-project-eppse

process quality is crucial (Slot, 2018) and that it is characterised by stimulating and supportive teacher-child interactions in enriched classroom settings (Sabol et al., 2013). This is rooted in socio-constructivist learning theories (Hedges & Cullen, 2012), which state that children learn by acting and communicating in everyday situations with their parents, other educators and other children. The acquisition of skills in general, and language skills in particular, arises from a child's desire to understand its environment and to share experiences and emotions with meaningful others. In these interactions, the role of the adult is crucial (Duru-Bellat, 2004; Fillmore & Snow, 2003; Hattie, 2008). Teachers' expectations and (linguistic) beliefs influence a child's development (Pulinx et al., 2017), as does the quality of the adult-child interaction in ECEC services (Slot et al., 2015). This is especially true for language acquisition (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2014). Establishing a high-quality environment in this regard requires a rich, natural and spontaneous language input that actively stimulates children to use verbal expression and to articulate actions and thinking processes (La Paro et al., 2012; Loman et al., 2012). The language used by adults in this context should be adequately abstract, but comprehensible in the way it connects speech and actions (Bogaert et al., 2015). Moreover, it should start off from the lifeworld and experiences of the children themselves (Ramaut et al., 2013). To achieve this in the context of a preschool class, it is necessary for children to be offered many rich opportunities to practice, and for them to receive supportive feedback on their verbal utterances (DeKeyser, 2007; Ellis, 2005). In addition, when the multilingual repertoire of the child is acknowledged, valued and used, school success can be improved (García & Wei, 2014; Jaffe, 2003; Moodley, 2007; Olivares & Lemberger, 2002; Olmedo, 2003; Ramaut et al., 2013). A key aspect for migrant children is the valorisation of multilingualism as an 'added value' and 'resource', rather than a 'problem' or 'deficit' (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). In contrast to the availability of these findings, empirical research into daily interactions in contexts of diversity and multilingualism is still scarce, and as a result, the qualitative processes by which preschool might be equalising or broadening the gap, remain under-theorised. Too little is currently known about the first lived experiences of migrant children in preschool. In our study, we closely followed eight children during their first year in preschool, leading to detailed quantitative and qualitative analyses of daily interactions.

2.1.3 Research context

The ECEC system in the Flemish Community of Belgium is characterised by a split between childcare (for children from birth to three years old, under the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family) and pre-primary education or 'preschool'

(for children from two and a half to five years old, under the Ministry of Education), with the latter being the focus of the current study. Although they are free to choose, the majority of the Flemish preschools are organised according to the ages of the children, with separate classrooms for three, four and five year olds. Because preschool education in Flanders is accessible to children aged two and a half, most schools offer 'entry classes' for these toddlers. In some schools, the children move to the following class after a few months. In others, the entry classes offer education for children from two and a half to four years old. Both types, however, are characterised by groups of around 20 children or more under the responsibility of one teacher who is sometimes supported by an assistant for a few hours per week. All preschool teachers are qualified to Bachelor's level (ISCED 6); the assistants usually have a post-secondary diploma in 'Childcare' (ISCED 4). Professional support for teachers is provided by Pedagogical Counselling Services (PSCs), which are set up by the educational umbrella organisations. A recent evaluation of the PSCs shows that they mainly provide support by organising seminars and lectures for the staff rather than offering in-service training accompanied by coaching (Commissie Monard, 2019).

The Flemish Community of Belgium has the highest enrolment rates at one of the earliest ages (more than 98 per cent of all children aged three to five are enrolled) among OECD countries (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, 2016). Despite the quasi-universal preschool enrolment, a persistent achievement gap remains between children with and without a migrant background, and between children who speak Dutch at home and those who use a different language (Danhier & Jacobs, 2017). There is accordingly a compelling case to study qualitative processes in preschool and to discover how these processes may or may not reduce inequalities (Jacobs et al., 2009). Detailed observations of the lived experiences and early learning opportunities of children at risk in preschool may contribute to unravelling what precisely defines high-quality interactions in contexts of cultural and socioeconomic diversity. In so doing, this could help us to understand the early reproduction of social inequalities. Our study uses a mixed-method design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, to closely examine real-life experiences in four preschool classes.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Sample

Our study investigates the first learning experiences of eight children entering preschool, during one year starting from their very first day in the classroom. A purposive sample (Robson, 2002) of four cases was built, each being a classroom of the youngest children in preschool (an entry class, as per the above description). Each case was selected in a different school to maximise the diversity of contexts. Schools were selected on the basis of having 30–60 per cent of enrolled children belonging to at risk populations, and being situated in four different cities. 'At risk' is defined by the Flemish community by the following indicators: low income (using a school allowance), low educational level of the mother and a home language other than Dutch. For each case, two 'focal children' were selected. These eight children were indicated by their respective school board as belonging to one or more of the 'at risk' categories. Seven of them had a home language different from Dutch and six came from a family with a migration background.

2.2.2 Data collection

Data collection consisted of extensive video observations over a period of 11 months. Each of the four cases was visited 8 to 13 times by one or two researchers, who recorded the classroom practice on video without intervening. No specific activities were chosen prior to the observations. Instead, uninterrupted periods of two to four hours at different times during the school day were filmed. In this way, the full spectrum of what happens in the classroom was caught on camera. Observations were carried out using two cameras: one camera following a focal child and a second fixed camera overlooking the entire classroom. In total, there were 44 observational periods, which resulted in over 166 h of video footage. Additional field notes were made to capture as much of the actual experiences as possible.

This procedure was explained to the teachers in advance, as well as who were the focal children. We asked the teachers to act as they normally would, when being filmed. Informed consent was obtained from all the parents in the selected classes, as well as from the staff and management of the schools. We treated children's consent as an ongoing process, open for negotiation throughout the study (Flewitt, 2005). At the beginning of the observation period we explained the purpose of our presence to the children and we provided the teachers with pictures of the research team, which could be used to visually announce our visits

to the classroom. During each observation, the researchers sensitively interpreted children's nonverbal actions and gestures expressing their assent. Because of the importance of being emotionally and physically close to the children when video recording them (Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2016) we tried to create familiarity and safety by being present in the classroom and on the playground before and after filming. In between filming periods, we occasionally discussed issues of safety and possible discomfort with the teachers, as well as with the research team. The study was in line with the ethical protocol of the Faculty of the authors.

2.2.3 Procedure

All video recordings were transcribed and coded in a custom-designed spreadsheet, distinguishing different activities and specifying in which activity the focal children were involved. Each activity was timed, allowing us to compute how much time was spent in each of the activities, how the time was divided among the activities and the durations for which children were asked by the teacher to sit still and wait quietly.

For the in-depth analysis of the children's experiences, we selected six types of activities: circle time (whole group activity in a designated classroom area); free play (individual and small group activity in different corners of the classroom); snack time; changing clothes and arranging satchels; playtime in the playground (free play outside the classroom); and lunch at noon (outside the classroom, in the school's lunchroom). For each of the cases, we randomly selected video footage of these six types of activities where both of the focal children were involved. The teachers did not take part in this selection process.

This resulted in the selection of 79 activities (31.5 hours of video recording) eligible for analysis. All teacher-child (TC), child-teacher (CT), teacher-teacher (TT) and child-child (CC) utterances were transcribed verbatim and their duration was quantified to the nearest second. A verbal utterance was conceptualised as any language expression by a speaker until he/she was interrupted or stopped (Sacks et al., 1974). Therefore, when a pause of two seconds occurred in between a word sequence, we coded this as two distinct utterances. During playtime and during lunch break, the children were together in a large group including other classes, playing outside or having a meal in a large lunch room. This coincided with much excitement and noise. As a result, the coding of individual utterances appeared to be unreliable. Therefore, the individual utterances of the focal children during

these activities lacked verbatim transcriptions, which resulted in the full coding of 54 activities instead of 79.

2.2.4 Analysis

We quantitatively analysed the number and duration of all verbal utterances during each of the 54 activities, at the level of the whole class as well as at the level of each individual focal child. In addition, we assessed the quality of the TC interactions with each of the eight focal children individually. Drawing on state of the art research findings concerning language development support and inspired by existing frameworks (e.g. Bogaert et al., 2015; Loman et al., 2012) and validated rating scales (La Paro et al., 2012), we focussed on three core dimensions: language input (LI), opportunities for language production (LP) and feedback (FB). The indicators for these three dimensions, based on a literature review, are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Indicators for the qualitative analysis of teacher – child interactions

Language input (L.I.)	a) Rich: spontaneous, natural, varied, limited amount of diminutives, using full sentences, articulate actions and thinking processes, challenging children to use new vocabulary b) Understandable: making a connection between language and actions and objects, repeating and paraphrasing, alternating and good intonation c) Connected to the lifeworld and knowledge of the child, its vocabulary and concepts
Opportunities for language production (L.P.)	a) Using open ended questions b) Stimulating the child to analyse and to reason and stimulating its capacities for problem solving and reflection c) Stimulating mutual interaction between children d) Stimulating informal interaction
Feedback (FB)	a) Giving clues and help b) Posing supportive questions c) Responding to questions with new questions d) Giving stimulating comments e) Giving extra information after a response f) Challenging the child to articulate actions and to put deeds into words

The occurrence of each of the three key dimensions was scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with 0 = absent, 1 = limited, 2 = medium and 3 = frequent. Together with the quantitative coding of individual utterances, this served as the starting point for an in-depth analysis of the verbal interactions. The 54 activities serve as the unit of analysis. Table 2.2 presents the number of selected activities (N) for each class and their average duration.

Table 2.2: Overview selected activities [a]

	Class 1			Class 2			Class 3			Class 4		
	N	Average length	SD	N	Average length	SD	N	Average length	SD	N	Average length	SD
Circle time	4	0:10:56	0:04:33	3	0:16:51	0:07:40	5	0:13:44	0:11:28	4	0:12:37	0:08:52
Free play	4	0:32:25	0:06:04	4	0:29:17	0:07:12	3	0:27:08	0:05:18	4	0:39:31	0:02:48
Snack time	3	0:22:10	0:02:37	3	0:16:21	0:03:47	2	0:13:34	0:04:23	3	0:24:08	0:02:00
Clothes Satchels	3	0:08:38	0:03:46	4	0:08:22	0:02:48	2	0:03:22	0:00:08	3	0:10:17	0:03:38

[a] Except for class 1 and class 2, the specific number of activities (N) goes for both the focal children in the classes. Focal child 1 of class 1 had three free play moments instead of four, focal child 2 had two free play moments instead of four and three snack times instead of four. Focal child 1 of class 2 had three free play moments instead of four, two snack times instead of three and three clothes & satchel moments instead of four.

We counted the number of individual verbal interactions that involved the focal children during the four types of activities. For each class and for each activity, all utterances to and by the focal children were counted and indicated according to their direction, as shown in Table 2.3 for class 1, Table 2.4 for class 2, Table 2.5 for class 3 and Table 2.6 for class 4. The total and average number of utterances per activity is indicated, as well as their respective duration. We particularly focused on individual interactions with the focal children, as these contain the most learning opportunities. Therefore, we did not consider the utterances of the

teacher to a whole group of children (for example group instructions such as 'Okay children, it's time to clean up') as individual utterances to the focal children, even when they were involved in the group that was addressed.

Table 2.3: Quantity of individual utterances (class 1)

	Activity	Interaction Mode	Focal Child X				Focal Child Y			
			Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity	Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity
Class 1	Circle Time	T-FC	11	0:00:36	2,8	0:00:03	13	0:00:59	3,3	0:00:05
		FC-T	1	0:00:01	0,3	0:00:01	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**12**	**0:00:37**	**3**	**0:00:03**	**13**	**0:00:59**	**3,3**	**0:00:01**
	Free Play	T-FC	23	0:01:17	7,7	0:00:03	34	0:01:28	17	0:00:03
		FC-T	6	0:00:03	2	0:00:01	1	0:00:00	0,5	0:00:00
		C-FC	12	0:00:49	4	0:00:04	2	0:00:07	1	0:00:04
		FC-C	14	0:00:44	4,7	0:00:03	2	0:00:02	1	0:00:01
		Total	**55**	**0:02:53**	**18,3**	**0:00:03**	**39**	**0:01:37**	**19,5**	**0:00:02**
	Snack Time	T-FC	32	0:01:48	10,7	0:00:03	16	0:00:32	8	0:00:02
		FC-T	1	0:00:00	0,3	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	1	0:00:03	0,3	0:00:03	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	1	0:00:08	0,3	0:00:08	2	0:00:07	1	0:00:04
		Total	**35**	**0:01:59**	**11,7**	**0:00:03**	**18**	**0:00:39**	**9**	**0:00:02**
	Clothes & Satchels	T-FC	15	0:00:51	5	0:00:03	8	0:00:43	2,7	0:00:05
		FC-T	2	0:00:03	0,7	0:00:02	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**17**	**0:00:54**	**5,7**	**0:00:03**	**8**	**0:00:43**	**2,7**	**0:00:05**

Table 2.4: Quantity of individual utterances (class 2)

	Activity	Interaction Mode	Focal Child X				Focal Child Y			
			Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity	Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity
Class 2	Circle Time	T-FC	9	0:00:39	3	0:00:04	24	0:01:38	8	0:00:04
		FC-T	4	0:00:04	1,3	0:00:01	3	0:00:03	1	0:00:01
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**13**	**0:00:43**	**4,3**	**0:00:03**	**27**	**0:01:41**	**9**	**0:00:04**
	Free Play	T-FC	49	0:03:13	16,3	0:00:04	43	0:02:28	10,8	0:00:03
		FC-T	20	0:00:30	6,7	0:00:02	8	0:00:05	2	0:00:01
		C-FC	12	0:00:20	4	0:00:02	21	0:00:40	5,3	0:00:02
		FC-C	16	0:00:25	5,3	0:00:02	22	0:01:01	5,5	0:00:03
		Total	**97**	**0:04:28**	**32,3**	**0:00:03**	**94**	**0:04:14**	**23,5**	**0:00:03**
	Snack Time	T-FC	26	0:01:06	13	0:00:03	21	0:00:54	7	0:00:03
		FC-T	3	0:00:02	1,5	0:00:01	3	0:00:00	1	0:00:00
		C-FC	1	0:00:01	0,5	0:00:01	2	0:00:07	0,7	0:00:04
		FC-C	2	0:00:07	1	0:00:04	1	0:00:01	0,3	0:00:01
		Total	**32**	**0:01:16**	**16**	**0:00:02**	**27**	**0:01:02**	**9**	**0:00:02**
	Clothes & Satchels	T-FC	27	0:01:36	9	0:00:04	27	0:01:16	6,8	0:00:03
		FC-T	2	0:00:04	0,7	0:00:02	1	0:00:01	0,3	0:00:01
		C-FC	9	0:00:25	3	0:00:03	6	0:00:13	1,5	0:00:02
		FC-C	7	0:00:19	2,3	0:00:03	9	0:00:25	2,3	0:00:03
		Total	**45**	**0:02:24**	**11,3**	**0:00:03**	**43**	**0:01:55**	**10,8**	**0:00:03**

Table 2.5: Quantity of individual utterances (class 3)

	Activity	Interaction Mode	Focal Child X				Focal Child Y			
			Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity	Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity
Class 3	Circle Time	T-FC	60	0:03:20	12	0:00:03	24	0:01:06	4,8	0:00:03
		FC-T	13	0:00:17	2,6	0:00:01	4	0:00:06	0,8	0:00:02
		C-FC	1	0:00:04	0,2	0:00:04	1	0:00:02	0,2	0:00:02
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**74**	**0:03:41**	**14,8**	**0:00:03**	**29**	**0:01:14**	**5,8**	**0:00:03**
	Free Play	T-FC	28	0:01:57	9,3	0:00:04	22	0:02:16	7,3	0:00:06
		FC-T	8	0:00:15	2,7	0:00:02	10	0:00:09	3,3	0:00:01
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	5	0:00:25	1,7	0:00:05
		FC-C	3	0:00:19	1	0:00:06	4	0:00:16	1,3	0:00:04
		Total	**39**	**0:02:31**	**13**	**0:00:04**	**41**	**0:03:06**	**13,7**	**0:00:05**
	Snack Time	T-FC	20	0:00:55	10	0:00:03	12	0:00:51	6	0:00:04
		FC-T	11	0:00:32	5,5	0:00:03	1	0:00:02	0,5	0:00:02
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**31**	**0:01:27**	**15,5**	**0:00:03**	**13**	**0:00:53**	**6,5**	**0:00:04**
	Clothes & Satchels	T-FC	8	0:00:29	4	0:00:04	4	0:00:20	2	0:00:05
		FC-T	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**8**	**0:00:29**	**4**	**0:00:04**	**4**	**0:00:20**	**2**	**0:00:05**

Table 2.6: Quantity of individual utterances (class 4)

	Activity	Interaction Mode	Focal Child X				Focal Child Y			
			Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity	Total Number of Utterances	Total Duration	Average / Activity	Average Duration / Activity
Class 4	Circle Time	T-FC	6	0:00:17	1,5	0:00:03	10	0:00:46	2,5	0:00:05
		FC-T	1	0:00:03	0,3	0:00:03	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	3	0:00:08	0,8	0:00:03
		Total	**7**	**0:00:20**	**1,8**	**0:00:03**	**13**	**0:00:54**	**3,3**	**0:00:04**
	Free Play	T-FC	6	0:00:15	1,5	0:00:02	44	0:04:15	11	0:00:06
		FC-T	4	0:00:04	1	0:00:01	6	0:00:05	1,5	0:00:01
		C-FC	1	0:00:04	0,3	0:00:04	1	0:00:01	0,3	0:00:01
		FC-C	1	0:00:08	0,3	0:00:08	1	0:00:01	0,3	0:00:01
		Total	**12**	**0:00:31**	**3**	**0:00:03**	**52**	**0:04:22**	**13**	**0:00:05**
	Snack Time	T-FC	29	0:01:12	9,7	0:00:02	30	0:01:21	10	0:00:03
		FC-T	5	0:00:07	1,7	0:00:01	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**34**	**0:01:19**	**11,3**	**0:00:02**	**30**	**0:01:21**	**10**	**0:00:03**
	Clothes & Satchels	T-FC	14	0:00:38	4,7	0:00:03	7	0:00:22	2,3	0:00:03
		FC-T	3	0:00:04	1	0:00:01	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		C-FC	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		FC-C	1	0:00:03	0,3	0:00:03	0	0:00:00	0	0:00:00
		Total	**18**	**0:00:45**	**6**	**0:00:02**	**7**	**0:00:22**	**2,3**	**0:00:03**

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Quantity of utterances

There were very few utterances from the teacher to the individual focal children. Similarly, the focal children gave very few utterances towards the teacher and they had even fewer verbal interactions with their peers. During circle time, snack time and clothes and satchels, utterances to and from the focal children were even scarcer. Circle time was the activity with the least individual utterances: apart from two exceptions (eight TC utterances for focal child 2 in class 2 and twelve TC utterances for focal child 1 in class 3), the focal children were addressed individually on average 1.5 to 4.8 times.

TC utterances were more frequent than any other interactions, irrespective of the type of activity. The language input was thus largely determined and initiated by the teacher. During most activities, the focal children verbally addressed the teacher on average 0 to 1.5 times. Verbal interactions between children were even scarcer, with no more than 0.8 utterances on average observed.

During free play times, the number of individual verbal utterances was higher, which was the case for all interaction modes, including peer interactions. However, the interaction patterns with the focal children differed. The language quantity during free play was largely determined by the presence or absence of a teacher in the activity. When a teacher-guided activity occurred during free play time, more expanded language input from the teacher was observed. However, while the spontaneity of free play has the potential to increase language opportunities, the focal children often did not benefit from this. Whether or not they did, depended largely on the presence and the behaviour of the teacher. We found that the number of utterances of a teacher towards an individual child during free play was positively associated with the number of utterances of the child towards the teacher ($p = .026$; one-tailed). However, we found no significant correlation between the number of utterances between peers and of utterances from the teacher to the focal child ($p = .274$; one-tailed).

2.3.2 Quality of TC interactions

Table 2.7 shows the sum scores of the qualitative coding of the TC interactions with the focal children for language input (LI), opportunities for language production (LP) and feedback (FB).

Table 2.7: Quality of individual TC interactions

		N	Total duration	Focal Child X												Focal Child Y											
				L.I.			L.P.			FB			L.I.			L.P.			FB								
				0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
Circle Time	Class 1	4	0:43:43	2	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	3	1	0	0
	Class 2	3	0:50:33	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Class 3	5	1:08:41	1	3	1	0	2	3	0	0	4	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	4	1	0	0	5	0	0	0
	Class 4	4	0:50:27	3	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
	Total	**16**	**3:33:24**	**8**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**11**	**5**	**0**	**0**	**14**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**9**	**7**	**0**	**0**	**14**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**15**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Free Play	Class 1	4	2:09:42	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Class 2	4	1:57:08	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
	Class 3	3	1:21:25	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Class 4	4	2:38:03	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	2	1	1	0	3	0	1	0
	Total	**15**	**8:06:18**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**0**	**6**	**4**	**3**	**0**	**9**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**5**	**5**	**3**	**0**	**9**	**3**	**1**	**0**	**11**	**1**	**1**	**0**
Snack Time	Class 1	3	1:06:30	0	2	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Class 2	3	0:49:04	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Class 3	2	0:27:08	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Class 4	3	1:12:23	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Total	**11**	**3:35:05**	**2**	**6**	**2**	**0**	**3**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**7**	**3**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**9**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**10**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Clothes & Satchels	Class 1	3	0:25:54	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Class 2	4	0:33:27	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
	Class 3	2	0:06:43	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	Class 4	3	0:30:50	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Total	**12**	**1:36:54**	**4**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**10**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**9**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**7**	**5**	**0**	**0**	**12**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**12**	**0**	**0**	**0**
	Total	**54**	**16:51:41**	**19**	**23**	**8**	**0**	**30**	**15**	**5**	**0**	**39**	**10**	**1**	**0**	**23**	**24**	**4**	**0**	**44**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**48**	**2**	**1**	**0**

2.3.2.1 Language input

The focal children experienced richer language during activities such as individual care moments (for example nappy changing) or an individual activity guided by the teacher during free play. However, these moments were short, did not occur frequently and opportunities for language-rich interactions were often not seized. The majority of the TC utterances were directive and disciplining in nature: teachers in the four classes frequently used language to guide the organisation and manage the activity or the group. Routine times and transitions during the day often coincided with disturbance and noise. This impacted on the language use of the teachers: the noisier the occasion, the more the teachers used specific and commanding language with short sentences and without invitations for interaction. This hindered both qualitative peer interactions and child-teacher interactions. This was most explicit during clothes and satchel times and during circle time, but it was also the case during the rare moments when the home languages of the focal children were used by the teacher.

Although seven of the eight focal children were multilingual, the language input of the teachers was almost exclusively Dutch. In class 1 and class 2 we did not record any use of language other than Dutch in all 28 activities. In class 3, the teacher only once spoke French to focal child Huri[10], who has a Turkish-French background. We recorded three utterances where the teacher used French:

> Oh, Huri, what are you doing? No, no! You are not allowed to do that.
> No, c'est dangereux.
> It's dangerous. You cannot! Now sit down nicely and quietly.
> Huri, finit. Sit down on the bench! Stop it!
> Put it down softly, Huri. Doucement. Oui, bravo.

In class 4, we recorded three similar TC utterances in French towards Yano during two activities. These examples suggest that the teachers used the home language as a means to control the behaviour of the children and to manage the group activity.

We observed that group size had an influence on both the quantity and the quality of verbal interactions. This was most obvious in class 3, where the group size increased from 8 children in September to 20 in the following January. During circle time on 9 September 2015, the small group of eight children clearly benefited from a peaceful atmosphere and mutual verbal interactions. Visibly at

[10] All the names in this chapter have been changed to maintain anonymity.

ease, the teacher explained the structure of the day. During circle time on 18 December 2015, the group had almost doubled to 15 children. There was more disturbance and the utterances of the teacher were more negative, directive and reprimanding.

The language input during free play differed from during the other activities. In most cases, the teacher was also present at a table or in a corner to support the individual activity of a child, mostly crafts chosen by the teacher. One by one, the teacher asked the children to come to the table. She explained what the children were expected to do and she helped them to get started. During these times, both the quantity and the quality of the individual TC interactions were higher for most children, albeit not for every child. For example, during the four free play times in class 4, we observed focal child Milena, who was not engaged in any of the individual activities. Over a total of 2 h and 40 min, there were only six individual TC utterances:

> Um, Milena (7 September 2015).
> Um, Milena, bicycles over there! (7 September 2015).
>
> You can ride the bicycle, but you have to do it over there (7 September 2015).
> Yes, we'll wash, Milena (7 September 2015).
>
> Here, Milena (22 September 2015).
>
> Do you want to take a look at the books, Milena? The books? Or the dolls? (6 October 2015).

The utterances were all very short, had no open questions and no invitations for interaction. During the fourth free play period, we observed no individual TC interactions with Milena. On average, the free play times in this class had a duration of 39.5 min, on the vast majority of occasions without any verbal learning opportunities for Milena in interaction with the teacher. Considering the relatively large groups in the four cases, it is understandable that teachers cannot involve every child in a long one-to-one interaction during each activity throughout the day. However, this example illustrates what a child may miss when being unintentionally overlooked in a group.

2.3.2.2 Opportunities for language production

The conversational turns in individual TC interactions were mostly reduced to one (closed) question followed by an answer. For example, in all 13 activities (for a total of 3 h and 51 min) focal child Precious (class 1) was only asked six open-ended questions:

> What is that? (clothes and satchels, 9 September 2015).
> Where is your fruit, love? (snack time, 9 September 2015).
> What's wrong? (snack time, 9 September 2015).
>
> Hi Precious, what do you have there? (free play, 20 October 2015).
> What do you say? (free play, 20 October 2015).
>
> How do you get to school? (circle time, 3 March 2016).

These questions did not stimulate Precious to engage in a conversation. All the other questions put to Precious were closed questions. There was only one exceptional dialogue of more than just one question and one answer during the circle time on 20 October 2015:

> Precious: Miss, look. Miss.
> Teacher: Hi Precious, what do you have there?
> Precious: Two sticks.
> Teacher: Are there two sticks?
> Precious: Yes.
> Teacher: One, two, three. Three magic wands.

In the 13 activities (with a total duration of just over 3 h 51 min) focal child Precious (class 1) made only ten CT utterances:

> What is that? (clothes and satchels, 9 June 2015).
> Please (snack time, 18 September 2015).
> Miss, look Miss (free play, 20 October 2015).
> Two sticks (free play, 20 October 2015).
> Yes (free play, 20 October 2015).
> No (free play, 20 October 2015).
> I'm ready (free play, 20 October 2015).
> Miss (free play, 20 October 2015).
> Ride a bicycle (circle time, 3 March 2016).
> Your hair. His hair (clothes and satchels, 3 March 2016).

Both the quantity and the quality of focal child Ramiz' (class 1) individual interactions were low. There was only one verbal interactive moment with the teacher that showed some qualitative aspects (during free play on 21 January 2016). Ramiz was working on a puzzle with the teacher. The scene lasted about four minutes. The teacher asked Ramiz three questions about putting a piece of the puzzle in place, and one question about how the task was proceeding. Ramiz never replied verbally:

> Teacher: This one where?
> Teacher: Put it in.
> Teacher: Oh, easy.
> Teacher: And the little sheep? Take the sheep!
> Teacher: No, that's not right, Ramiz. It doesn't fit.
> Teacher: Try here. Look.
> Teacher: Easy!
> Teacher: Yes, easy.
> Teacher: Yes, bravo Ramiz, good! And the doggy?
> Teacher: Good! Bravo Ramiz, super! No, here.
> Teacher: Yes, bravo, super!
> Teacher: Good, Ramiz.
> Teacher: Yes! Bravo! Wow. Now you have to try alone. Now alone. Like this.
> Teacher: Come on Ramiz. Try!
> Teacher: Turn it Ramiz.
> Ramiz: Cat.
> Teacher: How are you getting on, Ramiz?
> Teacher: Try, Ramiz.

In all of Ramiz' 11 activities (with a total duration of approximately 2 h 54 min), 'cat' was the only word he spoke to the teacher. His other verbal utterances, towards classmates, were also limited: 'Hello! Hello!' (during snack time on 6 May 2015), something to his brother that we could not understand during snack time on the same date, 'Mais, non' (during free play on 9 June 2015) and 'No!' (during free play on 21 January 2016).

We observed few verbal peer interactions in general, and in all 54 activities there were no TC interactions wherein the teacher stimulated peer interactions. When children were in the classroom as a group, they were instructed to be quiet and listen to the teacher. We found no examples of a teacher stimulating the children to ask other children for help or to do something together.

2.3.2.3 Feedback

We observed hardly any feedback in any of the activities. When feedback occurred, it was aimed at confirming the desired behaviour of a child, mostly benefitting the organization of routines. Many individual utterances by the children were ignored by the teacher. It was the teacher who decided which child got to say something and, in most cases, also the frame of what was allowed to be said. There were times when children wanted to speak, chat or stand up and take the floor, for example during circle time. However, in most cases, the children were asked to be quiet. The utterances of children who were already proficient in Dutch (school) language skills, however, were more easily recognised and valued by the teacher, which resulted in more opportunities to speak and to interact.

Sometimes, they took the floor by speaking out loud in a way that the teacher appreciated, even when they broke the 'be quiet' rule by doing so. A salient example was during a snack time for class 1 on 18 September 2015. The children were having a snack in the corner of the classroom where the circle times were also held. Pan flute music was playing and the children had to be quiet. When a child was ready, he or she had to wait in silence on the bench until the rest of the group was ready. The teacher paid extra attention to this and rebuked the children when they were not silent. She also verbally prompted the children to continue and to hurry up with their snack. The most common utterances of the teacher were: 'shush', 'good', 'thumbs up' and 'carry on eating'. A nonverbal interaction between focal child Precious and another girl (Maya) took place. Both children looked at each other, made funny faces and laughed. Even though they hardly made a sound, the teacher reprimanded focal child Precious: 'shush, Precious!' She did not address Maya. One minute later, another girl (Ante, a Dutch speaking girl) asked and got the floor:

> Ante: Miss?
> Teacher: Yes, Ante?
> Ante: I ate an ice cream with my granny.
> Teacher: Did you eat ice cream with your granny?
> Ante: Yes, with chocolate.
> Teacher: With chocolate?
> Ante: Yes, at home.
> Teacher: At home? In your granny's house or in your house?
> Ante: With my granny.
> Teacher: With your granny. So she has ice cream in the house? Wow!

Ante: One ice cream, not two!
Teacher: No, not two!

This scene suggests that native Dutch speaker Ante was given the opportunity to speak because of her assertiveness and her skills, and probably because her social and cultural capital was in line with that of the school.

We also frequently observed an interaction with a focal child being ended in favour of an interaction with another child, thus hindering opportunities for language-rich conversations with the focal child. For example, while putting on coats, focal child Yano of class 4 was called by the teacher to help with his coat. 'Yes, come here, Yano!' This could have been a perfect occasion for an individual verbal interaction between the teacher and the child, and this may very well have been the intention of the teacher. However, other children demanded the teacher's attention and received it. Yano, in turn, did not ask for personal attention and remained quiet, missing the opportunity for interaction. Our observations illustrate how the teachers' behaviour of unintended prioritising when caught up in these routine moments influences opportunities for interaction.

2.4 Discussion

High expectations are set for preschool education as offering powerful equalising opportunities for migrant children and their development in general, and their language development in particular. However, the setting and the working conditions of local ECEC contexts may seriously affect a teacher's potential ability to meet these expectations. In the Flemish pre-primary educational system, the typically large groups with their specific group composition - separating the youngest children from their older peers - have downsides that may be considered challenging for teachers. In their transition to school, most children are unfamiliar with the ins and outs of their class and its daily routines, and have no experienced peers to socialise them.

In our study, we observed that the teachers concentrated predominantly on structure and routines. Earlier research (Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2018) suggests that they do this out of a concern to socialise the children as soon as possible and to include them in learning processes. In so doing, there is a risk of neglecting caring tasks, which are often considered a hindrance for teaching. However, the focus on structure and routines mostly impeded children from

engaging in meaningful interactions with the teacher and with peers, jeopardising the full realisation of the learning possibilities for each child.

Our observations also suggest that disruption and noise may deepen existing inequalities. Indeed, children have to combine verbal assertiveness with an active knowledge of the school language and routines to be able to rise above the disturbance and obtain reciprocal verbal interactions with the teacher. Requests or attempts of children who are more insecure, verbally less assertive or hesitant are more often overlooked in the turmoil. This gives the already privileged children (who use the school language at home) more opportunities for meaningful interactions with the teacher. Conversely, most remarks, reprimands or restrictions are aimed at children who have difficulties in understanding routines and the school language. Because of the focus on group management and structure, there is a lack of additional attention given to children with more caring needs. Paradoxically, children who are less familiar with the school language and its routines (for example, because of a different cultural background) have to rely more on their own initiative and are often left unaided to learn the structure and the routines. Consequently, they are made responsible for their own learning process. Moreover, we never observed a situation where a child was stimulated to ask other children for help or to give support to another child. The children in our study missed opportunities and were not encouraged to care for each other and to learn from one another. There are no indications that this might be the result of a deliberate choice by the teachers. Instead, we assume that the behaviour of the teachers is based on an implicit bias and co-constructed by the systemic conditions of large classrooms where all children without preschool experience are enrolled together.

Considering the low number of verbal peer interactions, the children were mainly dependent on teachers to further their Dutch language skills. One-on-one interactions with teachers are therefore paramount. However, they did not occur for each child during each activity, and when they occurred, these moments were short and did not initiate verbal interaction. There were hardly any conversational turns consisting of more than a closed question followed by a short answer. Moreover, we only found a few examples where the teachers expanded the vocabulary of the children in an individual interaction. The most extensive conversations took place in interactions with children who already possessed adequate Dutch language skills.

Seven of the eight focal children were multilingual, yet this was barely apparent in the four classes. The home languages of the children were not valued and the

few examples where teachers used a home language in individual interactions were intended to better control the behaviour of the children. The full potential of including multilingualism in the class practice was never reached, nor was it used to expand meaningful learning experiences for the children.

2.5 Conclusion

2.5.1 Part of the problem …

The aim of the present study was to examine the first school experiences of children at risk of social exclusion. Driven by the growing number of longitudinal studies that show the overall positive effects of preschool attendance, this study was designed to unravel the emergence of learning opportunities for the youngest children in the Flemish pre-primary education system. The results point towards a paradox. While it is often readily assumed that preschools matter and may contribute to reducing inequalities in education, the findings suggest that preschools may also be part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. Classroom interaction of high quality and a rich verbal interaction climate is pivotal to enhancing language learning. However, our study suggests that this potential is not always reached. Both the quantity and the quality of individual verbal interactions were found to be low, and the opportunities for children's language production were very scarce. This was especially true for children with a home language different from the dominant one in the school as feedback was almost non-existent and often interrupted by children with more skills in the dominant language. According to the meta-study of (Hattie, 2008), the quality of feedback is essential for learning in schools.

2.5.2 … or part of the problem?

This suggests that mere attendance at preschool might reproduce or even increase the existing inequalities when poor verbal classroom interaction quality is observed. Consequently, the findings of this study have a number of implications for future practice. First, they show the importance of continuous professional development and coaching of preschool staff in working with children in contexts of increasing diversity and migration. Second, they bring the systemic conditions in which early years' professionals work to the fore. Providing inclusive care and education for a diversity of young children and their families asks for a competent ECEC system that goes beyond individual competencies (Urban et al., 2012).

Necessary preconditions for enabling this includes cooperation and appreciation among colleagues, accompanied by child-free hours that facilitate group reflection and are supported by the active involvement of team leaders or principals (Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2018). When professionals are given opportunities for collegial consulting, to observe and critically reflect on each other's practice and build strong relationships with the community and the parents, they can break down the walls of their own classrooms and evolve together with their team towards a professional learning community that fosters both wellbeing and learning opportunities for all children and their families (Sharmahd et al., 2017).

2.5.3 Limitations of the present study

One major limitation of this study is its relatively small scale. Data on the experiences of eight children cannot be generalised nor is it representative for the whole population of toddlers starting preschool. Moreover, only four types of activities were selected for the analysis of individual verbal interactions. To fully grasp the learning opportunities, more detailed observations and the analysis of interactional practices at a micro level are necessary. A second weakness of the study is the fact that we did not use validated instruments such as the Caregiver Interaction Profile (CIP) or the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Because of the specificity of the data and in line with the research objectives, a self-constructed framework for the evaluation of verbal interactions was chosen, having made use of an array of validated instruments. The last notable limitation is that we did not involve the teachers in the selection or the analysis of the activities. Although we watched some of the video material with three teachers, their own assumptions, values and beliefs were not considered, as these were not the focus of the present study. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret some of the results, and further research will need to unveil teachers' beliefs about early (language) learning.

Notwithstanding these limitations, by integrating qualitative and quantitative data we have been able to obtain a glimpse into the black box of what really happens in preschool classes and have unravelled micro mechanisms that potentially might enforce existing inequalities.

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CHAPTER 3

'THEY SAY "YES", BUT THEY MEAN "NO"'. CHILDCARE PROFESSIONALS' VIEWS ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH MULTILINGUAL PARENTS

"La conversation est en somme une partie de tennis qu'on joue avec une balle en pâte à modeler qui prend une forme nouvelle chaque fois qu'elle franchit le filet." (Laurent Binet, La septième Fonction du langage, 2015)

This chapter is based on Peleman, B., Vandenbroeck, M., (*Under review*). 'They say "yes", but they mean "no"'. Childcare professionals' views on their relationship with multilingual parents in a monolingual-oriented society.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Multilingual vs. monolingual orientations in early childhood

Societies are becoming increasingly diverse as a result of intensified migration and globalization (Duarte, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). This produces growing linguistic diversity, leading educational institutions to be more frequently faced with complex forms of multilingualism. Given the scientific consensus on the importance and value of multilingualism in early childhood (e.g. Bialystok, 2018; De Houwer, 2017), supporting multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is crucial (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020).

The potential roles of ECEC for multilingual children and their families have been documented at different levels: supporting language(s) development through daily interactions (Buschmann & Sachse, 2018; Buysse et al., 2014), encouraging retention of home language(s) (Verdon et al., 2014), ensuring pedagogical and linguistic continuity with families and communities (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017), and strengthening social cohesion and inclusion (Council of the European Union, 2019). According to Salem et al. (2020), in addition, ECEC professionals should establish partnerships with children's parents with whom they often do not share language or culture (Aghallaj et al., 2020). Given that these partnerships are essentially characterized by power asymmetries (e.g. Spivak, 1988), it is necessary for professionals to constantly look to create reciprocity and mutuality in this unequal relationship (Alasuutari, 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017; Van Laere et al., 2018). Therefore, ECEC professionals' intercultural competences and negotiation skills are central (Romijn et al., 2021). Collaboration and negotiation with parents on educational practices in general and language policies in particular nevertheless yield disagreement (Vandenbroeck et al., 2009), as parents may have different views on multilingualism and may not favour multilingual programmes (Adair et al., 2012).

Research on collaboration with parents often fails to consider the socio-political context, although this is important given the current super-diversity in Europe and the ensuing variety of linguistic situations within families (Extra & Yağmur, 2011). It has been shown that the socio-political context is often characterized by the paradoxical combination of a complex multilingual reality and a strong societal monolingual orientation or mindset (Clyne, 2008). Gogolin (1997)

explains that this monolingual mindset is an intrinsic element of the professional habitus of teachers in European educational systems, which are rooted in the origins of the traditional nation state. This professional habitus means that establishing monolingualism in the official national language is an imperative in a teacher's professional ethos, through which multilingualism in ECEC is constructed as a problem to be overcome rather than a resource or a condition for learning (Lengyel, 2012; Ruiz, 1984; Vandenbroeck, 2017).

3.1.2 Multilingualism in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Belgium's Flemish Community offers a unique context to examine these issues. Despite the multilingual reality of the region, where 43.3% of children under the age of three have origins other than Belgian, and where 29.4% of children born in the Flemish Region in 2021 have a home language other than Dutch (the official language) (Opgroeien, 2022), a strong monolingual orientation remains. Policymakers emphasize Dutch as key to successful education, integration and opportunities later in life, and consider heritage languages as problematic. In an interview for a popular newspaper on the first day of his nomination, the current minister of education stated: 'Dutch is the beginning of everything' (Vancaeneghem & Lesaffer, 2019; author's own translation). The current government agreement on education has also given Dutch language skills 'absolute top priority' and states that 'The pre-primary classroom must act as a gateway to Dutch to ensure that as many children as possible start their school careers with equal opportunities' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2019, p. 32; author's own translation).

By contrast, both the Pedagogical Framework for Babies and Toddlers adopted in 2014 (Kind en Kind en Gezin, 2014) and the government-imposed regulations on licensing (Vlaamse Overheid, 2013) value multilingualism by highlighting the importance of respect for home languages. Empirical studies conducted in the past 10 years, however, show that supporting multilingual children and parents, and reconciling Dutch with other home languages remain a challenge (Van Gorp & Moons, 2014). For example, the large-scale 2016 baseline study *MeMoQ* on the quality of childcare for children from 0-3 (Hulpia et al., 2016) found that process quality is lower in childcare centres with more multilingual children. For the relationship with multilingual parents, a recent study by Van Der Wildt et al. (2023) shows that only a third of the 404 parents surveyed indicated language or multilingual parenting to be topics for dialogue. To our knowledge, the views of

childcare professionals on their relationships with multilingual parents in Flanders have not previously been investigated.

3.1.3 Findings from the PRO-M online survey

The Pro-M project (see Chapter 1) sought to fill this void by exploring the views of childcare workers through a large-scale online survey and in-depth group interviews. The findings from the group interviews are discussed further in this chapter; the survey results are partly discussed here as they provide a good introduction to the group interviews. A word of caution is needed, as not all survey data have been thoroughly analysed, nor reviewed. However, in their descriptive format, they provide an added value to understanding the context of the childcare services under investigation as well as the prevailing monolingual orientation in Flemish childcare. The survey was conducted in 85 childcare services in the Flemish Community in Belgium and Brussels. A total of 351 professionals completed the survey, representing 56% of the 628 practitioners working in these services. The survey explored the childcare centre's language policy, the professional support for the childcare workers (see Chapter 5) and the views of professionals about their relationships with multilingual children and multilingual parents.

The descriptive results show that most practitioners held monolingual beliefs. 87.3% of the respondents (N=315) believed that it is best to speak Dutch to a multilingual child and 93.9% of the professionals (N=330) indicated that they 'always' or 'mostly' only speak Dutch with the children. Almost half of the professionals in the sample (45.6%, N=305) did not agree with the statement that it is best to speak to a multilingual child in the language in which the child feels safe and 61.2% (N=281) did not think it is his or her job to educate children in a multilingual way. The childcare workers also indicated that languages other than Dutch are rarely used during reading sessions and group activities.

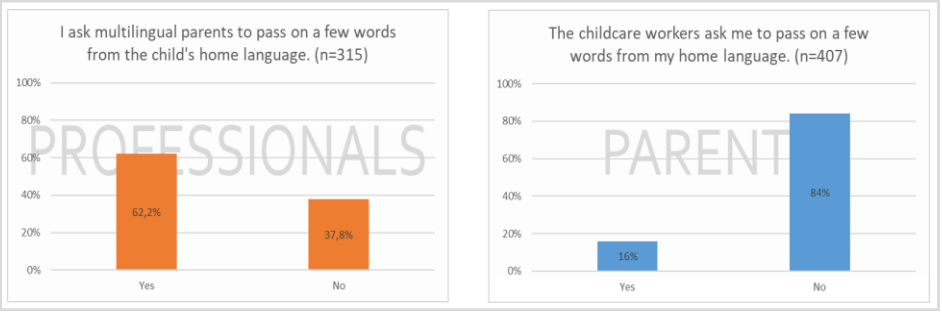
These monolingual beliefs and attitudes also appeared to be held towards the parents: more than half of the respondents (61%, N=282) believed that multilingual parents should not have the opportunity to be assisted in their own language in the childcare centre. Also, almost half of the respondents (44.1%, N=315) didn't agree with the statement that it is important to give multilingual parents advice on multilingual upbringing.

There was, however, also variation in these responses. About one-third of respondents stated they sometimes greet multilingual parents (31.2%, N=317) as well as multilingual children (30.3%, N=330) in their home language, and 37.6% of professionals (N=330) said they sometimes use a few words in the child's home language when they are alone with the child. 62.2% of respondents (N=315) indicated they ask multilingual parents to pass on some words from the child's home language. 42.6% of professionals (N=312) declared to ask multilingual parents to come and read to the group and almost half of respondents (48.9%, N=315) stated that they spontaneously give multilingual parents advice about multilingual upbringing.

Along with the childcare workers, all multilingual parents from the same 85 childcare centres were also invited to participate in a survey. This survey was sent to 638 parents and completed by 404 parents, reflecting a response rate of 63% (see also Chapter 4). The parent survey contained several items that were also covered in the childcare professionals' questionnaire. When looking at the answers to those mirrored items, it is noticeable that professionals' estimation of how they interact with multilingual parents did not always match with how the multilingual parents experienced it.

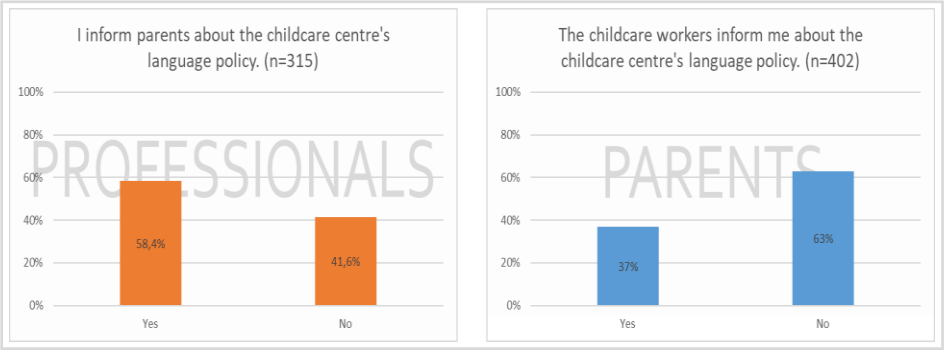
This was the case, for example, for the item that probed about passing on a few words from the home language: although more than 60% of professionals indicated that they ask multilingual parents to pass on a few words from the children's home language, only 16% of multilingual parents appeared to experience professionals doing so (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Multilingual parents' vs. professionals' view on passing on words in the home language



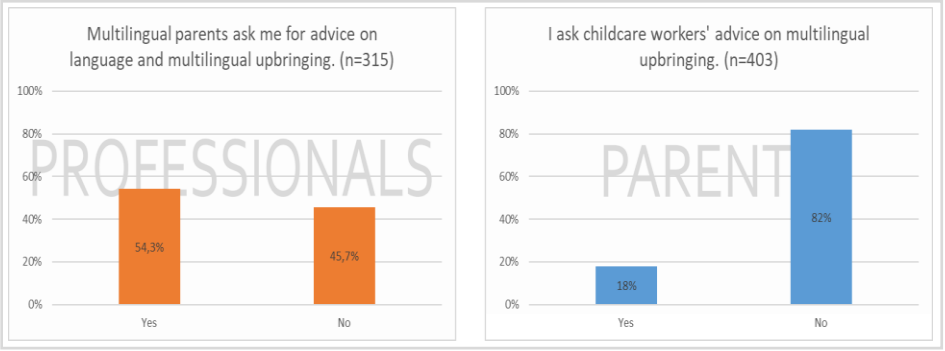
Also in terms of informing parents about the childcare centre's language policy, experiences were not consistent: 58.4% of professionals said they inform parents, but 63% of parents said professionals do not (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Multilingual parents' vs. professionals' view on information regarding the language policy



In the same vein, perceptions about advice also differed: according to more than half of the childcare workers, multilingual parents ask for advice on language and multilingual parenting, while only 18% of multilingual parents indicated they actually do so (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Multilingual parents' vs. professionals' view on advice

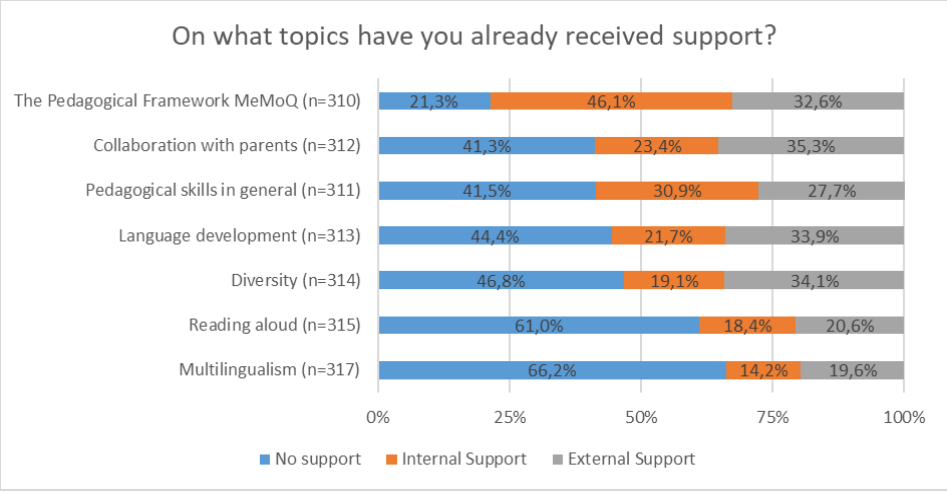


These findings obviously need to be tempered: they bear upon descriptive results obtained by simply mirroring items covered in both questionnaires. No comprehensive analyses were performed on them. Although they do concern the same 85 facilities, the multilingual parents cannot simply be linked to the professionals surveyed.

It should also be noted that for certain mirrored items the responses did match. In these few cases, the descriptive results illustrated that both multilingual parents and professionals indicated that little is done with parents' home languages. Based on the survey results, multilingual parents and professionals seem to agree that 1) multilingual parents are not often asked to come and read to the children in the group, 2) multilingual parents are not often greeted in their home language and 3) professionals mainly speak Dutch to multilingual parents.

Returning to the survey for the professionals. This survey also included questions about the professional support provided to the childcare workers and the views the professionals hold in this regard (see Chapter 5). In the survey, childcare workers were asked to indicate, from a list of possible topics, on which topics they had already received professional support. As illustrated in Figure 3.4, multilingualism is the topic on which most childcare workers in our sample did not receive support.

Figure 3.4 Topics on which professionals had already received support



For each topic, the childcare workers had to indicate what kind of support was concerned: 'internal' support (guidance or coaching during working hours or guided reflection/supervision during childfree times), or 'external' (participation in external training, a course, or a learning network). Figure 3.4 shows that multilingualism was the topic on which professionals had received the least internal and the least external support.

From the concise display of descriptive survey results presented in this introduction, a tentative and preliminary conclusion can be formulated in four key points. 1) Professionals appeared to hold monolingual views towards multilingual children as well as multilingual parents. But not exclusively so. 2) In the views and attitudes of the professionals, an opening towards and appreciation of multilingualism could be detected here and there. 3) The estimation of childcare workers did not always match the perception of multilingual parents, but this should be interpreted with caution. 4) Multilingualism appeared to be the topic on which professionals receive the least support about.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at the perspectives of professionals and aim to explore the underlying motives of their monolingual and multilingual views and attitudes. We will also zoom in on how professionals experience their relationships with multilingual parents.

Chapter 4 then discusses the perspectives of multilingual parents themselves, who in turn articulate how they experience their relationships with childcare workers. More specifically, the absence of dialogue on language and multilingualism will be discussed. Chapter 5 builds on the theme of professional support. Because it could be that a training or a coaching on one of the previously mentioned themes also addressed the theme of multilingualism, we have taken five of the topics together to see whether professionals who were supported on one of these topics were more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents and whether they were more likely to use children's home language when interacting with multilingual children than professionals who did not receive this support.

3.2 Methods

Nine group interviews were conducted to explore the views of childcare workers. Each interview began with the same two open-ended starter questions, exploring 1) how the participants understood the concept of multilingualism and 2) how they would describe 'the perfect childcare centre for multilingual families'. Pre-recorded videos were then displayed, in order to provoke debate and encourage the participants to share their experiences and underlying beliefs. Previous research shows that video-elicitation interviews are powerful in uncovering underlying perceptions and beliefs, and exploring elements of human interaction that are difficult to observe (Henry & Fetters, 2012; Nguyen & Tangen, 2017).

The videos depicted a variety of real-life situations related to multilingualism in two childcare centres, recorded by the first author. Four somewhat provocative and ambiguous video-vignettes were developed (Tobin et al., 2010). When the conversation following the two starting questions stagnated, the videos were played one by one, and time was taken after each to reflect with the participants on the content. During these discussion rounds, elements that had already been raised during the starting questions were revisited, adding depth to the participants' reflections.

The group interviews lasted about 1.5 hours and six of them took place in the participating childcare centres. Due to restrictive measures following the COVID-19 pandemic, three group interviews were held online by means of video chat. All the group interviews took place between October 2020 and August 2021.

3.2.1 Sample

42 childcare workers from 12 different childcare services located in different Flemish regions participated in the study. All the participants gave informed consent and approval was received from the ethical commission of the authors' university. Ten professionals had a heritage language other than Dutch: Tamazight (n=4), Moroccan-Arabic (n=2), Turkish (n=1), Bulgarian (n=1), Creole (n=1) and Afrikaans (n=1). All the participating professionals were female.

3.2.2 Analysis

All the group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author. A data-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. In a first stage, broad codes were assigned to text fragments after multiple readings of the transcripts (Dey, 2003), using NVivo software. Attention was also paid to aspects inherent in bringing research participants together, such as shared meaning construction, shared experiences and specific comments that were seized on for further discussion (Ansay et al., 2004). In the next stages, recurrent patterns of meaning were sought by merging codes into overarching themes and sub-themes, with the aim of reviewing the extracts of each theme and ultimately defining the four main themes presented in the next section.

3.3 Findings

3.3.1 Multilingualism as a silenced theme

For the professionals in our sample, multilingualism was not a distinct topic or theme. It seemed as if, at different levels of the childcare centres' practice, multilingualism was not an issue of concern to them. For example, when the professionals were asked about the pedagogical policy or curriculum at their centre, they claimed that multilingualism was not included, even when the centre had an explicit language policy. During team meetings or reflection moments with the team, multilingualism was hardly discussed as a separate issue. The following example from Group Interview (GI) 4 is typical:

> Researcher: Do you have a language policy in the childcare centre?
> Professional 2: I don't think so.
> Professional 1: No, me neither.
> Researcher: And, does the team sometimes discuss language or multilingualism, or do you receive training or guidance on these topics?
> Professional 2: Not that either, I think [laughs]. We are not scoring well here [the other participants laugh].

Yet in the professionals' views, today's multilingual reality in society is highly apparent in the settings, and still growing. Moreover, by discussing concrete practices in the group interviews, professionals recounted challenging situations related to their multilingual context. When asked whether they received any form of support to deal with these situations, the professionals indicated sometimes being given practical support or help from a colleague or a centre leader, such as translating or taking over a conversation with a multilingual parent. The topic was otherwise not typically or structurally addressed during in-service training or professional development activities. In this sense, multilingualism can be considered a 'silenced' theme.

The absence also manifested in the dialogue with multilingual parents. The professionals revealed that in their contact with multilingual parents, language or multilingual development issues were only rarely discussed. During the group interviews, participants talked about their approaches towards multilingual children and parents, and the challenges they faced. When they were asked if they discussed these challenges with the parents, however, the answer was almost always negative. The analysis of the group interviews shows that the lack

of dialogue with multilingual parents about multilingualism was not out of ill will, but should rather be regarded as an ingrained habit.

> Researcher: Is language a topic you discuss with parents?
>
> Professional 3: Talking about that doesn't really happen, does it?
> Professional 1: No, it's more something automatic. (GI 9)
>
> Professional 2: There is little communication with parents about this. Only when we are among colleagues. (GI 6)

Interestingly, the absence of the topic was also mentioned by multilingual childcare workers and by those working in services with a large number of multilingual families. Although the childcare workers all claim to work 'with their hands and feet' and aim to put all parents at ease, this does not imply that multilingualism is discussed with the parents.

A few comments were nevertheless made that multilingualism may be discussed with multilingual parents. This happened mainly during the welcoming period and usually at the intake interview, which was mostly conducted by a centre leader or coordinator. The childcare workers pointed out that the information did not always reach them, but they did not describe this as a problem or a shortcoming. As one professional from GI 2 put it:

> Well, if the mother enters and she says 'hello', you already know, right, what language she speaks! [Others laugh] You know...

A second situation in which language or multilingualism was discussed with multilingual parents, according to the childcare workers, was when multilingual parents expressed concerns or questions about their child's development or wellbeing. In these conversations, the professionals indicated that they mainly focused on reassuring the parents so they would not worry about their child.

> Professional 2: I sometimes notice that parents are concerned when their child doesn't speak much or not so well in the centre. But then I try to explain that it sometimes takes a bit longer when there is another language at home. Then I try to reassure them by saying things like: 'But that's no big deal', or: 'But they already understand a lot, and they already do this and that' and then I give some examples. (GI 3)

By and large, the participants testified that the contact moments with multilingual parents were often shorter and more superficial than with Dutch-speaking parents.

3.3.2 'Schoolification' and the concern about Dutch

The participating childcare workers attached great importance to the Dutch language in their interaction with children, as a preparation for the later school career.

> Professional 1: My principle anyway is: Dutch, that's the main language. That is the language spoken here, which is very important. We have to teach them [the children] the Dutch language. So I do think that's important. (GI 8)

The professionals stated they infrequently used the children's home languages, but when they did, it was mainly in the early days after the child's arrival in the childcare centre, to comfort the child, to put them at ease or to clarify something. This functional use of the home languages does, however, not start from an appreciation of multilingualism as a reality and opportunity with a view to harmonious multilingual development, but as a transition to serve the main goal of learning Dutch.

This attitude was motivated by a well-intentioned concern for the children's later opportunities, for example, referring to the children's future transition to pre-primary education. The childcare workers in our sample were well aware of the focus on Dutch in Flemish pre-primary schools and felt they had an important role in providing children with a sufficient foundation in Dutch. In this sense, the concern about Dutch can be understood as a form of 'schoolification': top-down pressure to prepare children for the next step in the educational track (Van Laere et al., 2019).

> Professional 3: The children don't all have to know Dutch when they come in, but the idea is that eventually you will prepare the children by the time they go to school to be able to speak Dutch anyway. (GI 2)

> Professional 3: I have a toddler in my group who will soon go to school but who comes to childcare very little due to circumstances. He pretty much doesn't talk to me and certainly not in Dutch. I think he also has a very hard time understanding me. But soon he has to go to school and there he is going to have a lot of trouble to, yes, be able to say

> anything at all or understand anything.
> Professional 4: And to feel good in that place.
> Professional 3: Yes, because he's going to end up in a super-large environment there, and he's going to be alone there, nobody is going to understand him and he's not going to understand anybody.
> Professional 4: That's going to be very difficult, right. Professional 3: Yes, I think about that a lot.
> Professional 4: Yeah, me too. (GI 6)

For some childcare workers, their conviction of the importance of Dutch — however well-meant — sometimes caused them to be judgemental about parents who allegedly did not sufficiently invest their energy in learning Dutch. According to these participants, parents then could not contribute enough to their child's Dutch language development.

> Professional 1: And then I think it's unfortunate that the children bear the brunt of that. [...] You know, because they [the parents] don't want to make an effort to speak Dutch. They bring the children to us, and then they expect us to teach them Dutch in the six months before the children go to school. But they [the children] already have a false start. It has to come from both sides. We work on it, but the parents also have to be willing. Because otherwise it clashes. So I think: we want to do that, but we also tell the parents: 'try to do something at home too, as much as possible', um, yes. That's a two-way street. It's the same with everything. (GI 8)

3.3.3 Ambivalent attitude towards multilingual parents and self-efficacy

In all the group interviews, the professionals mentioned that they always used — or tried to — Dutch first when communicating with parents. However, they also indicated that this was not equally easy with all multilingual parents. The childcare workers in our sample mentioned difficulties conveying nuances when communicating with non-Dutch speaking parents, as subtleties and nuances play an important role in talking about a child's upbringing and they felt that discussing these issues with parents without a common language was a major complication. They were aware that this difficulty affects both themselves and the parents.

> Professional 2: I do notice that the relationship with parents who have difficulties speaking Dutch is different. It's harder to, um...
> Professional 3: ... they keep it more superficial...
> Professional 2: ... yes. More superficial.
> Professional 3: They're not going to say things spontaneously like that. (GI 3)

> Professional 3: You want to say that the child is doing well, that it is progressing. You want to tell them that, but then the mum stands there and I think: 'Gee, how am I supposed to...?' And yes, you can sometimes use Google Translate for a word here and there, but to tell a story to a mum who doesn't know English ... yes, that's not ... [easy].
> Professional 2: Yes, I also find that one of the most difficult aspects. That you can't tell those parents a lot. (GI 9)

> Professional 5: When you explain something in English, [...] the answer is always 'Yes yes yes' [in English]. And they always nod. And you actually know: they say 'yes' but they mean 'no'. (GI 5)

The professionals often referred to their own efforts to make themselves understood. They described how they tried to pass on information to parents 'with their hands and feet', often also using online tools to make communication smoother.

> Professional 2: The other day, I had to tell a father that his son had diarrhoea. And the father was laughing: 'Hahaha'. And I said: 'But that's not good, hey' and then I really did use my hands and feet to [explain] 'flat poo'. So stupid, but he understood it eventually. (GI 4)

> Professional 2: You also speak with your gestures and with your...
> Professional 3: ... body language, right.
> Professional 2: Body language. That is also quite important. Especially towards parents who [...] don't speak Dutch well, but also not English or French. Then it is definitely important that you also, [use], your facial expressions."(GI 3)

The professionals talked about making sure that parents properly understood all information. However, as professional 2 from GI 7 noted:

> We use back-and-forth booklets with pictograms and we visualize the daily structure with pictures in the rooms, but that is not enough, right? I think it is merely a tool. But you don't really have fine communication.

In almost all the group interviews, childcare workers very much appreciated when parents actively and clearly showed that they were making efforts. This referred almost exclusively to using Dutch in communication with the professionals. The childcare workers appeared to be particularly positive about non-native parents demonstrating their attempts at the Dutch language. Conversely, the expectation that parents should make an effort to speak Dutch sometimes led to a negative evaluation of the relationship when, according to the childcare workers, parents did not comply.

> Professional 4: The mother of that English-speaking boy really tries so hard to express herself in Dutch that I sometimes say: 'Mum, you can say it in English, you know.' And she doesn't. She always makes the effort and then I want to explain it in English too, if she doesn't understand me properly. Then that really does come from both sides.
> Professional 6: And then you also tend to try harder yourself. Right? If it comes from both sides, if it costs her [the parent] effort, then I am also very keen to make an effort. Yes. (GI 5)

> Professional 1: You know, you have some people here who have lived here for 20, 30 years and still don't speak Dutch. Yes, sorry, [...] that's not possible.
> Professional 2: No.
> Professional 1: Get it? But like parents who really make an effort, who you see really trying. I respect them for that, for daring to do that. (GI 8)

When the professionals mentioned their relationships with non-native parents familiar with Dutch, it seemed that they expected these parents to make the effort to communicate only in Dutch. If, according to the professionals, these parents did not use their Dutch enough, 'even though they can', some professionals rated the relationship as more difficult and the parent as 'unwilling'.

> Professional 3: When you ask the mother of a child who has been coming to childcare for two years: 'Bring nappies, mummy?' and then when she replies: [in English] 'I don't understand', I think : I've been saying 'bring nappies' for two years, if they don't grasp it after two

> years, it's because they don't want to. And I have a hard time with situations like that. (GI 9)

A last aspect in how the childcare workers perceived their relationship with multilingual parents relates to their own perceived self-efficacy. When the professionals talked about parents who could not speak Dutch but who could use another language known to the professionals, their perception about that relationship appeared to depend on how well they rated their own skills in the other language. Professionals who considered their language proficiency as adequate or good tended to use this language easily and they sometimes even felt proud that they were able to do this. Conversely, they felt insecure when they thought that their language skills were insufficient.

> Professional 1: But you know, with me it's mainly the uncertainty.
> Professional 2: Yes, with me too, if I don't know one word of the sentence, I don't dare to say the whole sentence. (GI 8)

> Professional 3: I just feel insecure because I am not 100 per cent proficient in that language [English]. Then again, I feel more confident in French and I also notice that sometimes colleagues will call me in to translate something for a parent who speaks French. (GI 7)

Feelings of uncertainty were even more pronounced when childcare workers talked about interactions with non-Dutch-speaking parents whose skills in a shared language were considered as better developed than their own. This was most evident in a childcare centre where the professionals frequently encountered highly-educated multilingual parents with high SES and advanced English language skills. Strikingly, this insecurity sometimes seemed to turn into a form of negativity towards these parents: the childcare workers viewed these parents as 'demanding' or 'difficult'.

> Professional 1: It is sometimes, um, more difficult with the highly-educated parents, I think. They set the standard rather high for us. And because we already translate a lot of documents [...] there is a rather quick expectation that all communication will be in English.
> Professional 4: The vulnerable parents are more easily satisfied. They have, well, they have as good as no requirements. Um, I think it's just important that you can give those parents a safe feeling, or a warm feeling, the atmosphere that exists here and they don't really need

> much more than that [...]. Whereas the higher-educated parents, yes, they really do have demands and questions, yes.... (GI 5)

3.3.4 Meta-reflection on the group interview

As already indicated above, across all the group interviews, professionals noted that multilingualism was a 'silenced' theme, and this was a matter of ingrained order rather than ill will. This prompted the professionals initially not to problematize the issue of multilingualism during the group interviews. They regarded the multilingual reality as something that they just (had to) deal with. In the same vein, their answers to the starting questions for the group interview showed a positive view of multilingualism, albeit rather superficially, and almost all participants indicated that they considered being multilingual as an advantage.

Our analysis of the course of the interviews, however, shows that by bringing childcare workers together in groups and asking them to reflect on concrete experiences with multilingualism, many challenging issues eventually emerged. It also became apparent that the practitioners did have relevant questions about multilingualism, such as 'Does growing up with multiple languages cause confusion in children or language delays?' or 'What can I expect from multilingual parents?' In this sense, the group interview acted as a time of reflection for the childcare workers. For some of them, it was the first time they really considered what it meant to work in a multilingual context and what it may mean for multilingual families.

The following example shows how professional 1 (GI 3) started to doubt and reconsider her own taken-for-granted beliefs during the interview. She made this particular remark after 55 minutes — well past halfway through the interview.

> Professional 1: You know, the thing is, I admit I have never really thought about it very much. Because, in my opinion — but of course I could be wrong — I have always felt that we can manage ourselves very well. And, I have also always felt that the parents had a good feeling with us, but I could also be wrong about that. That maybe they [multilingual parents] may go home frustrated thinking, 'Gosh, actually I don't know what my child did today', or... frustrated about something that they wanted to say to us, but that we didn't properly understand.
> Researcher: What causes you to doubt that now?
> Professional 1: Well, actually by talking about it here. As I said, I haven't

> asked myself too many questions about that because my feeling has always been good. [...] But I could be wrong. Yes. Just because a parent nods at you, and smiles and ...
> Professional 2: ...it doesn't mean everything is ok ...
> Professional 1: ... that he is not troubled by something. Get it? Maybe. Yes. I haven't asked myself enough questions about that. (GI 3)

3.4 Discussion

In this study, we have explored how Flemish childcare workers view their relationships with multilingual parents. The Flemish Community of Belgium is an interesting research context, as it is characterized by the complex concurrence of a high multilingual reality and a monolingual orientation.

An important finding is the absence of the topic of multilingualism in the dialogue between multilingual parents and ECEC professionals. This is consistent with the results of a recent study by Van Der Wildt et al. (2023), surveying the perspectives of multilingual language-minority parents on their relationships with childcare professionals in Flanders. This silence could conceivably be explained by the fact that multilingual parents do not ask the professionals questions. However, we know from previous research that the absence of questions does not mean parents do not have any (Van Laere et al., 2018). There may be several reasons why parents shy away from asking questions or engaging in communication with professionals. Linguistic discontinuity between the two parties might be one. Research points out that the lack of a common language poses a major barrier for interactions between staff and parents (De Gioia, 2013), and that such a mismatch challenges the relationship (e.g. Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2013; Sims et al., 2017; Whitmarsh, 2011).

Professionals often feel insecure in approaching the multilingual reality of the ECEC setting and in both fostering young multilingual children's language development and supporting parents in multilingual parenting (e.g. Chan, 2011; Hu et al., 2014; Michel & Kuiken, 2014). In our study, the professionals also indicated that their lack of self-efficacy about using languages other than Dutch hindered them from engaging in dialogue with multilingual parents. Interestingly, these professionals were well aware that multilingualism is a silenced theme and they also realized it is sometimes very difficult for multilingual parents to engage in a meaningful relationship with the childcare centre. Our analysis shows that failure to engage in dialogue with multilingual

parents about language and multilingual parenting is more likely to stem from ingrained order and automatism, rather than ill will. It is almost as if it is evident or normal that this is not happening. This may be due to the strong monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2008) in Flemish society, which virtually erases multilingualism in educational settings (Agirdag, 2010; Van Gorp & Moons, 2014). Research shows that language ideology in the wider society shapes actual preschool language practices (Cornips, 2020; Silverstein, 1985). In fact, early childhood is often dominated by the majority's discourse (Sønsthagen, 2020), and the language policies practiced by teachers are found to be the product of engrained monolingual language ideologies, deeply rooted in the social, historical, economic and political context (Shohamy, 2006; Young, 2017).

In our study, a monolingual mindset was visible in the importance the professionals attributed to Dutch. Primarily, this stemmed from a genuine concern for children's opportunities when transitioning to school, but it simultaneously adds to the 'schoolification' of ECEC (Vandenbroeck & Van Laere, 2020). The professionals' emphasis on the importance of 'Dutch only' also suggests a fear that other languages would interfere with or even impede Dutch language development. This indicates an insufficient knowledge base on early multilingual language development, also confirmed by other studies (e.g. Sullivan, 2011; Young & Mary, 2021). Furthermore, the monolingual mindset led the professionals in our sample to have expectations of parents, in particular that the parents should also contribute to the children's language development by using Dutch themselves. Professionals find it disturbing when they consider parents language efforts as not compliant and they hold more negative views towards parents who they believe are 'unwilling' to do their best.

A somewhat dichotomous image of the multilingual parent emerges, concerning the disruptive space a parent claims by asking concrete questions and voicing clear expectations. On one side, there is the 'difficult multilingual parent with high SES', on the other, the 'easy multilingual parent with low SES'. The relationship with the latter appears to be the easiest, as these parents seemingly have fewer expectations or demands. It appears that childcare workers become even more insecure when parents ask questions, and presumably this is associated with a lack of solid knowledge on early multilingualism and professional support on the subject. The so-called demands that high-SES multilingual parents make are then more likely to be disruptive and add to the childcare workers' lack of self-efficacy, as they challenge or undermine the expertise of the professionals as well as the existing power relationship between the two parties. In this sense, it is not surprising that the efforts of non-native

parents to understand and speak Dutch are highly valued, because they pose no threat to the professionals' position of power. However, if childcare workers find themselves in the inverted position of being the ones with poorer language skills, the loss of their power position lurks. Language thus has a symbolic meaning of power (cfr. Bourdieu, 1991) in the relationship with parents: the good parent shows that they make an effort to adapt and speak 'our' language, and remains in a subordinate position. After all, it is harder to talk about education in all its complexity in a language that is not one's own. Overall, this may lead to a negative appreciation of the multilingual reality, which can be reinforced by the lack of professional support and conversation about multilingualism in the team and the childcare centre.

3.5 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how childcare workers view their relationship with multilingual parents. It was conducted in the Flemish Community of Belgium, a context characterized by a high multilingual reality but a powerful monolingual orientation. This orientation was visible in the importance the professionals attached to speaking Dutch, mainly for the purpose of preparing multilingual children for their transition to school. The professionals often found themselves struggling to communicate with multilingual children and parents. Feelings of insecurity, for instance about their own language use, were particularly prevalent. The topic of multilingualism, however, was silenced in their work. Our study suggests that if childcare professionals are not supported in approaching the multilingual reality present in their centres, they may view multilingualism — as well as their relationship with multilingual parents — more negatively. This in turn could affect their ability to establish high-quality partnership with parents, in which the upbringing of the child can be shared.

Our study also reveals there is fertile ground for taking multilingualism as a theme to heart in processes of professional development. In this light, we can conclude by arguing for the establishment of professional development (PD) on multilingualism in ECEC. Previous research already shows that childcare workers who receive such support are more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents (Peleman et al., 2022). In PD processes on multilingualism, attention should be paid to knowledge about early multilingualism and to the beliefs that professionals have. According to Young (2014), understanding one's own beliefs is a prerequisite to start deconstructing and reconstructing positive views and practices of multilingualism. Given the lack of self-efficacy highlighted by the

professionals in our study, PD could also work in increasing what Van Oss et al. (2021) call 'multilingual confidence'. They found this to be an essential contribution to a positive approach to multilingualism in advising multilingual parents. Lastly, PD processes regarding multilingualism could also focus on the relationship with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, given that this is a major stumbling block in ECEC pedagogical practice.

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CHAPTER 4

'THEY SAY: "EVERYTHING WAS FINE." AND THAT'S IT.' MULTILINGUAL PARENTS' VIEWS ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDCARE PROFESSIONALS.

"I saw a side of you I never knew
But were we ever near enough?
And all we have to do is talk it through
But words are never good enough."

(Bonobo & Nicole Miglis, 'Surface', from *Migration*, 2017)

4.1 Introduction

We cannot fully say anything about a relationship, if we only consider one side of that relationship. Therefore, a glimpse on perspectives of multilingual parents is an indispensable addition to this dissertation and a necessary sequel to the previous chapter, which addressed the views of childcare professionals on working in a multilingual context and on their relationships with multilingual parents. In the present chapter, the views of professionals will be mirrored by what multilingual parents themselves have to say about the relationship.

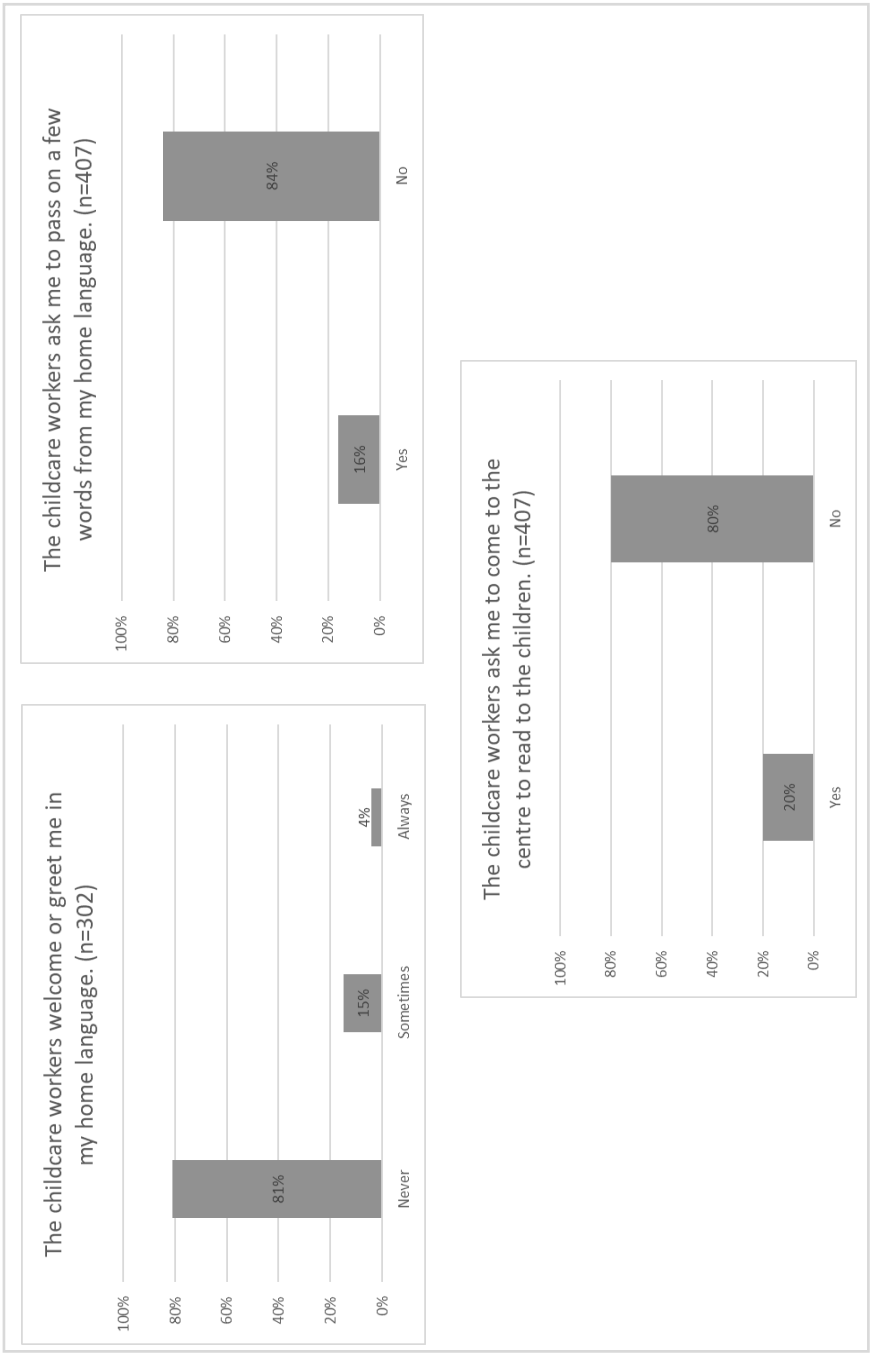
Notwithstanding the reasonable growth in knowledge about the parent-professional relationship in ECEC in recent decades, scholars in the field have pointed out that parental involvement and partnerships are all too often conceptualized in a one-sided or instrumental manner, both in practice and theory (Lehrer et al., 2023). Moreover, it appears that frameworks that adopt concepts such as 'partnership' to describe the relationship between parents and professionals often propose a model of consensus, thus failing to recognise patterns of unequal power distribution between parents and educational services (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Van Laere et al., 2018). And these power inequalities matter.

Research by Van Laere et al. (2018) found that parents take a rather subordinate position in relation to preschool staff and preschool as an institution. In that qualitative study, conducted in the context of Flemish pre-primary education (for children aged 2,5 to 6 years old), parents expressed a desire to have more contact with staff and they seemed to have questions about how care was provided for their children in preschool. However, it appeared that there were several reasons why parents refrained from asking these questions: out of feelings of powerlessness, some parents did not even consider asking questions; other parents said they were afraid of being perceived as stupid or difficult, and some parents seemed to be convinced that staying silent is the best strategy to ensure that the child is given every learning opportunity and would not fail in preschool. This leads Van Laere et al. (2018) to conclude that "*parents tended to be rather compliant and subordinate by adapting their expectations to the implicit and explicit rules, norms, and routines of preschool institutions"* (pp.194).

Few studies have explicitly focused on the views of multilingual parents in this regard nor on how multilingual parents experience their relationships with childcare workers regarding children's multilingual upbringing. This is, however, an important angle, given that research points out that multilingual parents often feel challenged and insecure about their multilingual parenting and the pursuit of a harmonious multilingual development for their children (De Houwer, 2015). Moreover, research taking into account multilingual parents' perspectives is often conducted in bilingual contexts (e.g. Bergroth & Palviainen, 2016) or in contexts where a specific minority language group is introduced in ECEC (e.g. Ragnarsdóttir, 2021). Multilingual parents' perspectives on their relationships with childcare professionals in societal and educational contexts marked by a high linguistic diversity are less studied.

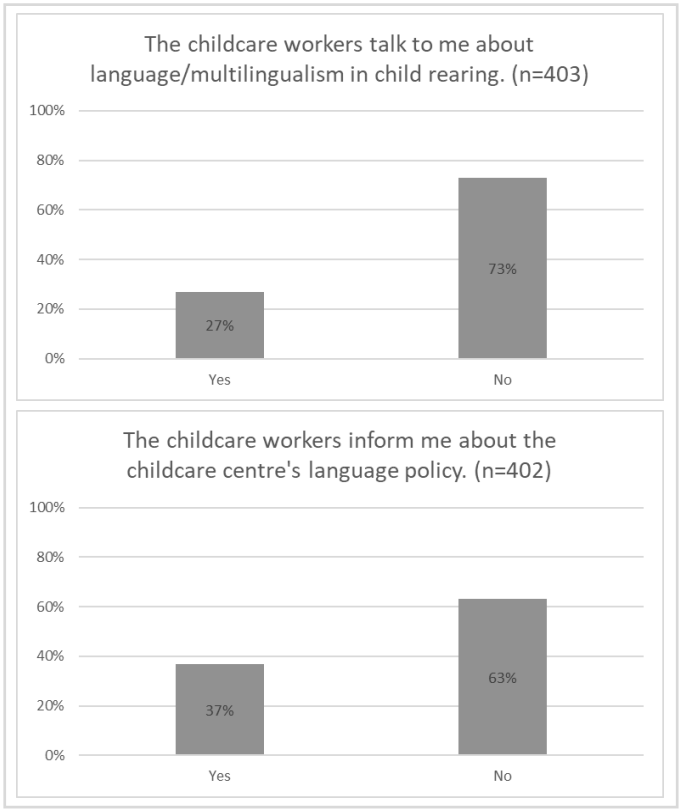
The large-scale Pro-M project (see Chapter 1) is an exception. In one of the sub-studies within that project, 404 multilingual parents with children aged two months to three years old, attending 85 childcare centres in Flanders participated in an online survey. This survey explored the family's language policy as well as the views of the parents about their relationship with the childcare service of their child. The first findings of this survey have been published by Van Der Wildt et al. (2023). The results show that most parents were positive about their relationship with childcare workers: on a scale of 0-100, parents gave a mean score of 93 for the degree of trust and contact they experience with the staff. However, the survey results also indicate that the multilingualism of the parents was often disregarded. This was e.g. evidenced by parents' responses on statements about the home language use by childcare workers (see Figure 4.1). 81% of parents said childcare workers never use the home languages of the parent to welcome or to greet the parent, only 16% of the surveyed parents stated that professionals ask them to pass on a few words from their home language and 80% of the parents declared that the childcare workers did not ask them to come to the centre to read to the children.

Figure 4.1 Multilingual parents' responses on 3 statements about home language use by childcare workers



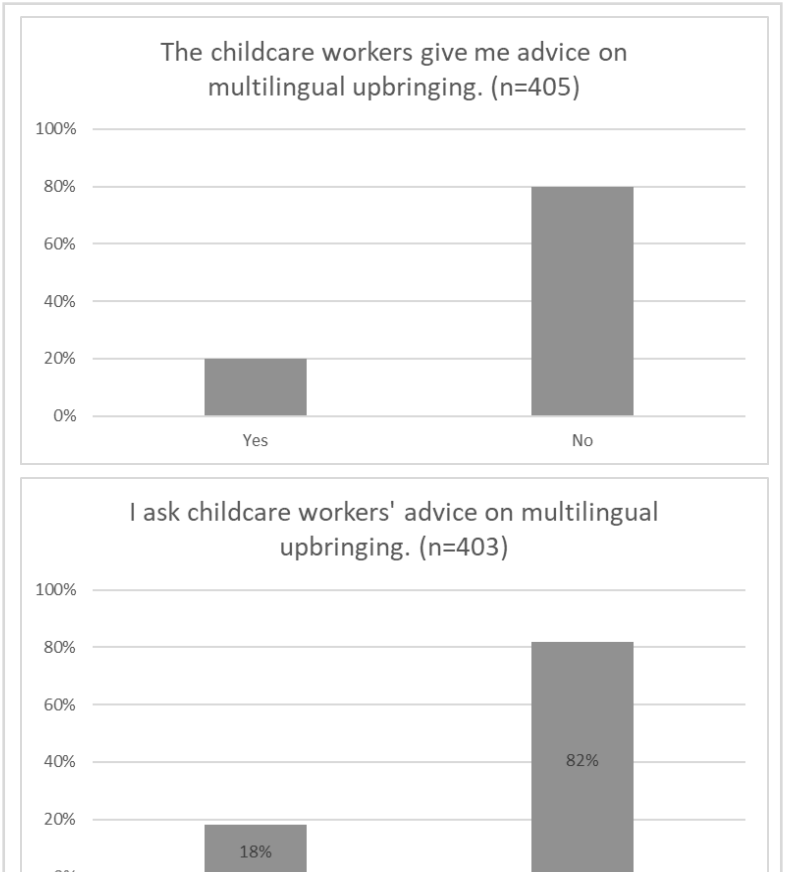
One might consider these as three efforts that childcare workers could make to acknowledge home languages, or to exhibit a positive attitude. According to the surveyed parents, these actions did, however, not occur. In addition, dialogue between multilingual parents and childcare workers about language and multilingualism appeared to be rare. For example, 27% of the surveyed parents indicated that childcare workers talked with them about language or multilingualism in the education of the child and 37% of the parents mentioned that childcare workers informed them about the language policy of the childcare centre (see Figure 4.2). It seemed that language and multilingualism were not topics that were often discussed.

Figure 4.2 Multilingual parents' responses on 2 statements about dialogue on multilingualism



In the same vein, advice on multilingual upbringing also appeared to be rather absent in the dialogue: only 20% of surveyed parents reported receiving advice on multilingual upbringing, and 18% indicated asking for such advice (see figure 4.3). According to Van Der Wildt et al. (2023), this implies that 67% of the total number of respondents received nor requested any advice, nor have they discussed any linguistic upbringing. These figures challenge the value of the previously mentioned level of satisfaction, for which parents gave a score of 93% for the degree of trust and contact they experience with the staff. The fact that multilingual parents indicate that they are 'happy' or 'satisfied' with their relationships with professionals is apparently not related to how the professionals approach multilingualism in their interactions. It can be argued that parent satisfaction is a contested measure of quality. While research points out that it can be worthwhile to include parents' views on childcare quality (e.g. Lehrer et al., 2015; Scopelliti & Musatti, 2013), it seems that parent satisfaction - as a marketized construct - is only slightly moderated by classroom quality and it is not clear why (Janssen et al., 2021). In the words of Janssen et al. (2021, p. 104): '*The meaning of parent satisfaction remains a kind of mystery.*'

Figure 4.3 Multilingual parents' responses on 2 statements about advice on multilingual upbringing



The study by Van Der Wildt et al. (2023) also found that fewer than half of the participating parents indicated having expectations concerning multilingualism. By drawing on existing scholarly work, Van Der Wildt et al. discuss a few possible hypotheses, including that parents may be more likely to have expectations about the majority language rather than about multilingualism for the sake of school readiness (Janssen et al., 2016; Laloumi-Vidali, 1998); and that it may be rather obvious for parents not to expect the caregivers to master the children's heritage languages (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2008); or that parents in general may be focused on other issues than language.

However, for a more in-depth insight into parents' rationales behind these findings, qualitative research seems to be appropriate. Hence, this is the purpose of the present study: by organizing qualitative group interviews with multilingual parents, we aim to dive deeper into the experiences of parents about their relationships with childcare workers, the place of langue issues in the dialogue with professionals and the status of multilingual upbringing in the context of childcare.

4.2 Methods

For this exploratory study, we deliberately used the same methodology as for the study of childcare professionals' perspectives (see Chapter 3).

Four group interviews were conducted to explore the views of multilingual parents. Each group interview began with an introductory round where all parents could present themselves as well as the language situation within their family. This was followed by an open-ended starter question, namely: 'How would you describe the perfect childcare centre for multilingual families?'. The same pre-recorded videos that were used in the group interviews with the professionals were then displayed, in order to provoke debate and encourage the parents to share their experiences and underlying beliefs.

The group interviews lasted about 2 hours. Two interviews were held online through a Zoom video chat. The other two were conducted in real life, in a separate meeting room within the childcare centre. None of the childcare staff was present at the interviews.

4.2.1 Sample

18 parents participated in the study, representing 16 different family situations as two couples took part in the interviews together. Three of the 18 participants were fathers. The age of participating parents ranged from 29 to 44 years. Although the sample size of this exploratory study was relatively small, the variety of language situations across the participating families was quite extensive. In contrast, we suspect that diversity in terms of socio-economic status was rather limited, as all parents had higher education, except two (secondary education).

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the sample and illustrates the linguistic diversity by detailing the country of birth of each parent and the language situation in each family.

Table 4.1 Linguistic situation family of the participating parents

#	Age	Gender	Country of Birth	Family Linguistic Situation
Group interview 1				
P1	39	M	Slovenia	P1 speaks Slovenian to his son, his partner Portuguese. To each other, they speak English.
P2	31	F	Argentina	P2 speaks Spanish to her son, her partner (P3) Dutch. To each other, they speak Dutch.
P3	33	M	Belgium	
P4	32	F	Ukraine	P4 speaks Russian to both her children, her partner Dutch. To each other, they speak a mixture of Dutch and English.
P5	39	F	Mexico	P5 mixes Spanish and Dutch with her son, her partner speaks Dutch. To each other, they speak English.
P6	35	F	Italy	P6 speaks Italian with her daughter, her partner German. To each other, they speak English.
P7	41	F	Mexico	P7 speaks Spanish with her son, her partner German. To each other, they speak English.

Group interview 2				
P1	38	F	Bulgaria	P1 speaks Bulgarian to both her children, her partner Italian. To each other, they speak French.
P2	30	F	Belgium	P2 speaks Dutch to her son, her partner French. To each other, they speak French.
P3	31	F	Japan	P3 and her partner both speak Japanese to their daughter. To each other, they speak Japanese.
P4	42	F	Poland	P4 speaks Polish to her son, her partner Dutch. To each other, they speak English.

Group interview 3				
P1	30	F	Belgium	P1 speaks French to her son, her partner Dutch. To each other, they speak Dutch.
P2	?	F	Burundi	P2 speaks French to both her children in the mornings and Kirundi in the evenings. Her partner always speaks Bulgarian with the children. To each other, they speak English.
P3	40	F	Belgium	P3 speaks Spanish to her youngest daughter and Dutch to the oldest one. Her partner speaks Dutch. To each other, they speak Dutch.
P4	38	F	Paraguay	P4 speaks Spanish to her daughter, her partner (P5) Dutch. To each other, they speak Dutch.
P5	?	M	Belgium	

Group interview 4				
P1	44	F	Turkey	O1 and her partner both speak Turkish to their children. To each other, they speak Turkish.
P2	29	F	Lithuania	O2 and her partner both speak Lithuanian to their children. To each other, they speak Lithuanian.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Parents have questions…

In three of the four group interviews, the participating parents posed very specific questions related to their own linguistic family situation and to the multilingual language development of their children. In most cases, these questions came up early in the interview, often as early as during the presentation round. It seemed as if these questions were on the tip of the parents' tongues, and that they participated in the interview wishing and wanting to see these questions answered.

Some parents described the language situation within their family as 'complex' or 'complicated'. Consequently, across the group interviews, many questions addressed the complexity of the particular multilingual family situation:

> Parent 6: My husband and me, we speak our own language to our daughter, so Italian for me and German for the father. But of course, there is a lot of English flying around. So my daughter is exposed to four languages and I don't know if this is good for her. I've spoken to other parents with similar experiences and they tell me: 'Don't worry, they will speak and learn all four languages in parallel and one day they will be fluent in all of them.' But I still have concerns whether this is not too much for her, or too confusing. I am also wondering if it will make it harder for her to learn other things? (GI 1)

> Parent 2: I speak French to my children in the morning, Kirundi in the evening. My husband always speaks Bulgarian to them. Among themselves, the children speak Dutch to each other. Is this any good at all? Will our children even have a mother tongue? (GI 3)

These examples also show that questions are based on specific concerns or worries, related to the development of the children. Sometimes, these concerns were explicitly mentioned by the parents:

> Parent 5: Sometimes my son stutters a bit. I don't know if the childcare workers have noticed it, but I don't know if that is normal. I don't know whether it has to do with the fact that he has to speak so many languages? (GI 1)

> Parent 1: I was raised bilingual myself, in Dutch and French. I want this for my son too, but I have doubts about my French language skills: are they sufficient to pass on the language to my son? (GI 3)

Often, these concerns were accompanied by an articulated need for advice:

> Parent 4: We are afraid that our son might be delayed in terms of language, because of the linguistic situation. At this point we don't see much advantages of being multilingual. We want him to be more communicative. What can we do? (GI 2)

> Parent 4: My daughter still doesn't talk that much. My husband is like: 'Stop speaking Russian to her.' But I cannot communicate in Dutch with her because my Dutch is not good and I am afraid that she will learn *bad Dutch*. What do I have to do? (GI 1)

Already during the first group interview, we were surprised about the amount of questions that parents raised regarding the multilingual upbringing of their children. Besides questions concealing a particular concern about their own situation, parents also appeared to have questions that were knowledge-oriented, pointing to evidence-based information on multilingualism in the early years. We felt the need to somehow provide an answer to these questions and concerns, but obviously, we could not do that during the interview, as it would interfere with our role as interviewer / researcher. Therefore, we came up with the proposal to organize an online webinar for these parents in which they would have the time and space to freely ask all their questions. The parents from the second group interview were also invited and we made the webinar open to external parents as well. We asked Prof. dr. Piet Van Avermaet to join the webinar as an expert to whom the parents could direct all their questions. The webinar took place on the 22th of December 2020 and was joined by 14 parents.

4.3.2 … and desires…

Besides having very clear questions, some parents also expressed expectations and desires. When the parents reflected on aspects that constitute an ideal childcare, they usually first talked about the interpersonal contact or the interaction between childcare workers and multilingual parents, often with reference to personal experiences in their childcare centre. Although most parents explicitly mentioned that they were very happy and satisfied with the childcare staff, they revealed aspects that could nevertheless be improved in

communication and they pointed to conditions that they considered 'ideal' but currently lacking.

Underlying the parents' expectations about interpersonal contact with childcare workers was the desire to (be able to) communicate with the professionals about the children. Some parents referred to the fact that, due to their work situation, they did not see their children much, unlike the childcare workers, and thus had to rely on the childcare workers to find out how their child was doing, suggesting a desire to share the upbringing, but also an appreciation of the professionals as important figures in the child's life.

> Parent 5: For me it would also be very useful to communicate with the caregivers. Also, it would be a form of empathy and a way to establish a connection with them. They are important people in the lives of our children: they are lucky to be able to spend eight hours a day with our children. They know so much about our children. And we miss a lot. (…) For me, from my personal experience, it would be much better if I could communicate better with the ladies that take care of my baby. (GI 1)

> Parent 3: We have a lot of questions about our child in childcare. The caregivers spend about eight hours a day with our child, but we only get to talk for two minutes each day about how the day was. There should be more and longer moments with the caregivers, so that we can show that we are interested in that. And so we can build mutual respect. (GI 1)

> Parent 3: For me it would be great if they would take the time to have a conversation around the table, face to face. Everybody can speak English, also the teachers in daycare. So, we can communicate. But English is not my language and also not for them. So, it's really hard to speak, like in short time, and to understand how my daughter is doing during the day. (…) I think this expectation is different for non-Dutch people. Sometimes I have to use a word that I don't use in daily life. *Kaka* is basically the only word that I know in Dutch. But sometimes I have to look up a word in Dutch and then it takes some time. So, it's different. Maybe because of my language skills. But maybe also because of my culture. We don't have a common background. So, I have to check if my understanding is the same as the teacher. So, it's really difficult. (GI 2)

The latter quote points to the fact that not sharing a mother tongue may further complicate communication about the child and about upbringing. According to this parent, this even holds when both the childcare worker and the parent can communicate in a shared language such as English. Indeed, the fact that English can be used as a common second or third language does not guarantee genuine mutual understanding between parents and childcare workers. As parent 3 from GI 2 suggests: different cultural backgrounds might be a constraint to realizing understanding.

The issue of language was also of importance to parents that expressed a desire to be addressed in their first language or mother tongue in the childcare centre:

> Parent 7: I wish I could come in and that someone would speak Spanish to me. (GI 1)

> Parent 1: In the beginning period, in the first months, there should be extra support. There should be a person that speaks my mother tongue. Maybe it's difficult to arrange this, but for example, already one week with *vrijwilligers* can be… This is important for a smooth transition and to feel safe. (…) That is the most important expectation of me, for the ideal childcare centre for multilingual parents. (GI 4)

For these parents, being able to communicate with a professional in their own language may not only benefit interpersonal contact, it is also something that offers a degree of safety and trust, especially during more demanding periods such as during the transition from home to childcare.

Besides aspects concerning interpersonal contact and interactions between childcare workers and multilingual parents, the parents also shared desires and expectations concerning their child. First and foremost, the desire that the child would encounter its heritage language in the childcare, was often expressed:

> Parent 1: If we would have found a crèche that's bilingual: French-Dutch, that would have been the best for us. But that doesn't exist here. That would be perfect for us, because we speak French. For me it's a bit surprising that a bilingual school or a bilingual crèche doesn't exist in Belgium. It's a very multilingual society, so I thought that French and Dutch would be closer together. (GI 2)

> Parent 3: If I were to paint a dream picture, it would be a childcare centre where there is a childcare worker that speaks the language that I pass on to my child. In that way, my son would get more input in that language. And the more people whose mother tongue is Spanish speak to my son in Spanish, the better. (GI 3)

> Parent 4: In my ideal childcare, there would be more songs in Spanish and more stories in Spanish. (GI 3)

Some parents took the presence of other languages than Dutch in the childcare centre even a step further by expressing a desire for the child to be introduced to a diversity of languages:

> Parent 3: I would appreciate it if the childcare workers would sing in other languages every now and then. In Arabic, or Turkish, or whatever. I would like that. I don't know if this is happening now, but I would like it because it is an enrichment for the children, hearing different languages. (GI 3)

> Parent 2: I really like something that they did in our childcare, they don't do it that often, but I really like it, they could do it more: they have these reading moments and they ask foreign parents to come and read to the children in their own language. I really liked it. I did it once. But I think it's interesting as an introduction to different languages. Children have a plastic brain, maybe they cannot understand everything, but they can easily adapt to different languages. (GI 1)

> Parent 6: Maybe it would be an idea to complement the personnel or the people interacting with the kids, with students, or volunteers that speak different languages. (GI 1)

However, linking this desire to the aforementioned concern that exposure to (a lot of) different languages might complicate language development with children, it's important to note that not every parent agreed with this.

The expressed desires for the child to learn the mother tongue and to be introduced to different languages, does not mean that the parents would be against Dutch immersion. Quite the opposite, they considered it normal and important that their child be introduced to the Dutch language in childcare. Not one parent questioned the focus on Dutch in the interaction between childcare

workers and children. Some parents even remarked that they found it obvious that their children would become Flemish. They seemed to be more worried that their child would lose affinity with its heritage language.

> Parent 4: I hope that my son will speak Polish. It's also geographical and historical. I have no doubt that my son will feel Flemish. But I have family that never will speak Flemish, so he needs to understand Polish, at least a little bit. (GI 2)

> Parent 1: I am not worried about a foundation for the Dutch language, because here they speak Dutch to my son. I am more worried about the fact that I am the only one that speaks French to my boy. My mother does too, a little, but not that consistent (…) So, my worry is that he will not be able to speak much French. He will be able to speak Dutch quicker than French because he hears it more. (GI 3)

4.3.3 … but they don't always express them.

Discussing the worries, questions and desires, we consistently asked the parents if they brought these into communication with the childcare workers and whether there was any dialogue about these issues. This was mostly not their experience. There appeared to be several reasons that inhibited parents from posing their questions or raising their concerns. Given the exploratory nature of this chapter, we hereby provide an overview of the different arguments of why pertinent questions and concerns were not raised.

4.3.3.1 Dialogue moments are scarce and rather short

> Parent 5: Giving my child to the ladies of the daycare is the most difficult thing in the world. Especially for me at least, because sometimes I feel like, you know, these ladies that take care for my son, if they don't feel comfortable in speaking English, they will not give me as much information as what they would do with a Dutch speaking mom. Especially when I come to pick him up. If I ask them: 'How did it go?', they say: 'Everything was fine'. And that's it. But then I see that other mommies, that speak Dutch, speak for longer with them. And then I am like 'Blah', and I think: 'I also want to know more about how my child is doing!' (GI 1)

The experience that the daily contact moments between parents and professionals are short, was shared by many of the parents across the group

interviews. Especially during pick-up moments, the amount of information that the parents sometimes received about the day of their child, seemed to be rather limited and superficial, as parent 5 from GI 1 recounts in the quote above. For parents that clearly expressed a desire to know more about how their child is doing in childcare, such short answers are insufficient and frustrating. Moreover, as also illustrated in the quote above, some parents had the impression that their daily dialogue moments with childcare workers were shorter and more superficial compared to the dialogue moments between childcare workers and Dutch speaking parents. Some multilingual parents across the group interviews experienced this somewhat as a rejection, which added to their reluctance to engage in communication with the childcare workers and to ask further questions about their child. Other parents who also experienced this, stated that they tried to ignore it, put any judgement aside and asked the childcare worker what they wanted to ask anyway, thereby risking to be perceived as the difficult parent. Still other parents reported using certain strategies to find out more about their child's day. For instance, some said they immediately looked for the childcare worker who knows English best, while others said they first consciously show empathy and interest in the childcare workers' practice in the hope of eliciting more information by doing so. And still others tried to express themselves in Dutch to show that they were making an effort.

Besides the fact that daily communication during bring and pick-up moments was often perceived as short, the parents' stories also revealed that parents generally experienced little dialogue on language and multilingualism.

> Researcher: The things we are discussing now, your questions and your ideas, is this something that you discuss with the childcare workers? Or, if you would worry about the language, would you then...? Parent 5: I have thought about it, but I have never talked about it. (GI 3)

> Researcher: Is language a topic that you discuss with the childcare workers? Parent 2: Me not. (…) But I can see from him that he loves them. He is okay. (GI 4)

The parents in this study did not always have a view on language practices in the childcare centre. This is for instance evidenced by parent 3 from GI 3 who expressed her fondness for songs in other languages but stated that she ‘doesn’t know if this is happing’ and by parent 5 from GI 1 who mentioned that her son stutters a bit and wonders if the childcare workers have noticed this.

For some parents, the group interview also seemed to act as a moment of awareness about the fact that language *can* be a topic of discussion. For example, in GI 1, GI 2 and GI 3 parents talked about the opportunity for multilingual parents to come and read to children in their mother tongue in the childcare centre. Although, according to the parents, this happened rather exceptionally (e.g. once during the 'read aloud week'), the conversation in the group interview reminded them that they really had appreciated this opportunity. It prompted some of the parents to recall this to the childcare workers. In the same vein, in GI 3, by discussing the language practices that occur in the childcare centre, parent 5 started to reflect on the language policy of the childcare centre:

> Parent 5: I wonder if this *crèche* has a policy on language. Besides from what we have been discussing about how they approach and comfort multilingual children. Do they have guidelines? Or are they just following their gut feeling and everybody adapts a little? I wonder. But, maybe they will tell me: 'You are asking the wrong question. Just leave it.' [laughs]. But I just don't know if there's such a policy.

4.3.3.2 Fear of being misunderstood

Besides the apprehension that there are but a few opportunities to engage in dialogue with the childcare workers, some parents also expressed a fear of being misunderstood when they would want to say or ask something to the professionals. In one of the earlier quotes above, parent 3 from GI 2 already pointed at the difficulty of not having the same cultural background as the childcare workers, which may hinder mutual understanding. Also other parents highlighted their reservation to approach childcare workers out of a worry that they would not be able to make themselves understood, and could therefore cause unintended offensive misunderstandings.

> Parent 7: One time I found out that they were giving my child bread with *chocopasta* and I don't want my child to eat that. But I didn't feel that I could go to the teacher. I had to go to the lady who is in charge to talk to her in English. I didn't want to make a mistake or offend anybody. My Dutch is enough, but it's not that very good to include all the intricacies and the little things. I didn't want to sound rude or make her feel that she was doing wrong by giving *chocopasta* to my baby, I just don't want my child to eat that at any point. (…) I don't know, maybe that's a cultural Mexican thing, but I don't want her to think: 'Oh no, not that mum again'. (GI 1)

4.3.3.3 Fear of breaking the relationship

In relation to the fear of being misunderstood, some parents also expressed a concern that speaking up might break the relationship with the childcare workers. This belief emerged most strongly in one of the experiences of parent 3 from GI 2 who recounted a situation with her daughter in the childcare service that shocked her greatly, but about which she did not say anything to the childcare workers.

> Parent 3: Once, I went to the daycare to pick my daughter up in the evening. I saw no adult, no teachers were in the room. My daughter was rolling on the floor and crying but no one was looking and I was the first to find my daughter. So I was very shocked. I don't even know why she was crying. Maybe she was sick, or she hit her head. But no one knows. The other teacher, from the other class, was like running to me and she was: 'Oh my God, I don't know what happened', because the main teacher was outside to put the garbage away. I was so shocked, but I couldn't express it because I was too shocked, and also, I didn't want to break the relationship between me and the teacher. So I discussed with my husband at night whether or not I should talk to them, or to the director. Or just like let it go. We chose to not tell it to the director and see how it goes. (…) I have a good relationship with the teacher and I don't want to break it. Maybe if I would be a native speaker of Dutch, maybe I could say something. Then I would know how to communicate mildly, not to harm them. (GI 2)

Here again, according to the parent, the issue of language and having a different mother tongue comes into play. It seems that building a relationship is already quite delicate and that not sharing a mother tongue might further complicate the establishment of a relationship in which one can freely encounter the other in a dialogue.

4.3.3.4 Prior negative experiences

Some parents appeared to have already experienced a situation where they expressed a concern to one of the workers and received an uncomprehending response in return. Such a negative experience caused the parents to think twice next time before making their comment, or not expressing it at all. In the quote below, parent 5 from GI 1 also indicates that such a bad experience made her fear that the childcare workers would take it out on her child.

> Parent 5: I did have a bad experience with daycare. I had to bring my son when he was four months. When I came in, I saw something that I considered dangerous [a toddler running around with a metal rod and a triangle]. I told the team leader, because when the children fall, it can get into the eyes, and she replied: 'Well, it is what it is.' I was like 'Oh no!' and I cried for three days because I had to take my baby there. I was shocked. Maybe here it was not just the language, but more like a cultural empathy. This first impression was not good. (…) This was a bad experience. I spoke up, got a bad reaction, so... And also the fear that they would react towards my child… Honestly... (GI 1)

4.3.3.5 The belief of having no right to ask questions

Most parents seemed to be well aware of the socio-political context of the Flemish childcare. Some parents referred to the complexity of the system, other parents talked about the difficulty of finding a place for their child. In the view of these parents, the organization of childcare in Flanders also has an influence on their position. It appeared as if some parents presume that the system puts them in a subordinate position from which they are not entitled to ask questions or to express their wishes:

> Parent 1: I don't feel I have the right to pose those questions. A bit like: 'We have not signed for this. We have signed to take care for your child, and that's it. Don't ask too much'. (…) The first reason is that finding a place in *crèche* for your child is a mission impossible. On top of that, if you start asking questions, they might say: 'You know, we have a waiting list of 200 people...' (GI 1)

> Parent 6: It's super hard to get the place, we don't really have a choice. But then again: it's also *dirt cheap*, at least for myself. I find it extremely cheap and affordable. I mean, it's a child, not a dog. I would rather pay more money and then I would feel more entitled to expect higher quality or to ask questions. (GI 1)

> Parent 5: What also affects us as foreigners is that we don't understand anything of the system. Okay, you have to adapt to a bunch of things and you go to Dutch classes. I understand some of it. Maybe it's a cultural thing, but for us, it's not normal to be in this system. (…) I think also Belgian parents will have frustrations on the system. But for us, not knowing much about the system, combined with the lack of

> communication, it is more difficult. We share the frustrations of the Belgian parents, we just don't understand how we would be able to do something, or that we do have the right to ask, to go further. And maybe that is easier for parents who speak the language. (GI 1)

4.3.3.6 Awareness of the difficult situation of childcare workers

The awareness of the socio-political context of the Flemish childcare also caused some parents to recognize that professionals do not work in easy conditions. When parents talked about the difficult working conditions of childcare professionals (e.g. the large groups, the adult-child ratio, the COVID-restrictions, …), they seemed to sympathize with them, adopting a lenient attitude and making statements such as: 'They'd love to do more, but they can't.' Thus, from this attitude of understanding, parents seemed less inclined to put additional burden on the childcare workers by asking questions or expressing their wishes.

> Parent 3: And then there is this thing: you come in, you see that they are busy, there are twelve kids crying, and then I think… You feel it's not the time to discuss your linguistic problems with the daycare. (GI 1)

> Parent 6: Every time I pick up my child, she has snot all over her face and it annoys me very much. Especially in Covid times, I like her face to be clean. But, then I think it through and I think: they never have the time to run after eight children continuously to clean their faces. It's just not humanly possible. So, it is what it is. (…) I cannot ask them to do the impossible. (GI 1)

4.3.3.7 The belief that things are practically impossible

By exploring the different narratives of parents about their desires and aspirations for their children and the encounter with childcare, the image of a 'reality check' emerged. It appears as if some parents put aside their wishes out of the conviction that they would be impossible to implement.

> Parent 4: Other than being open to children who are multilingual, I don't expect the childcare workers to help me turn my child into a Spanish-speaker. I think that is impossible. You can't have a supervisor for all the languages that are spoken. (...) I don't see it happening. Even with the best intentions. (GI 3)

> Parent 3: I don't expect that. Now, should there be a Spanish-speaking childcare worker, I would ask: 'Speak Spanish with my child.' Because, the more input my child gets, the better. (GI 3)

The confrontation of a desire and the practical impossibility to transform that desire into (the childcare's) practice seemed to inhibit parents from expressing their expectations.

4.3.3.8 Trust in the childcare workers. Language is not an issue.

Whereas the previous arguments were rather negative motivations that made it difficult or impossible for multilingual parents to engage in dialogue with childcare workers, the following two are more positive. A first motivation seemed to be driven by trust. When parents expressed that they feel good or satisfied with the childcare practice and with the professionals, they claimed that there is not really a reason for them to discuss language. If everything goes well, it's not really an issue.

> Parent 1: We don't speak Dutch at home. It's a coincidence actually that we have a job here. At this moment, language is not really an issue now. (...) If the crèche would be bilingual French-Dutch, it would allow me to participate more in the school life, to follow up on stuff. But now, they are doing a great job. Language is not really a focus. (...) For me the most important is that the kid feels good there. It's more intuition. (GI 2)

In the same vein, also other parents stated that when the childcare professional says '*Alles goed*' at the end of the day, then they have no reason to doubt this.

4.3.3.9 It's evident / within the expectations.

A second motivation is related to the expectations of parents. If what the professionals do in childcare concurs with the expectations of parents, then there seems to be no reason to discuss or question certain language practices.

> Parent 2: At home, we only speak Lithuanian, but we plan to stay in Belgium. So, it is my expectation that they [the childcare workers] only speak Dutch. And they do that. (GI 4)

> Parent 4: I see it as a part of the education. And we live here, so education is in Flemish. I am not even considering anything else. Parent 1: It's true.

Because daycare prepares for the *kleuterschool,* right. We count on it for the language, for the kids to be already acquainted with Dutch.

4.4 Reflections

4.4.1 A word of caution

In this chapter, we explored how multilingual parents experience their relationships with childcare professionals. This was achieved through a preliminary analysis of four group interviews with 18 multilingual parents. The methodology used was the same as that of the study of childcare workers' perspectives on their relationships with multilingual parents (see Chapter 3). In this sense, the findings from both studies can be mirrored. However, some caution is needed, given that the participating parents in the present study are not linked to the participating professionals from the previous study. Indeed, although for both studies parents and professionals were partly recruited from the same childcare providers, we do not know whether they also come from the same location or group nor whether they know each other. A second reason why the findings should be interpreted with caution has to do with the sample size. Since we spoke to only 18 parents, we do not in any way want to claim to represent *the* perspective of *the* multilingual parent. (This obviously also applies to the study on the views of professionals.) On the contrary, despite the small number of parents, the study allowed us to gather a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to the language situations in the families (that we nevertheless do not consider comprehensive). Moreover, the small sample size did offer the advantage to describe the variety of questions, opinions and experiences expressed by the participating parents in a fairly extensive manner. However, it should also be noted that while diversity in terms of language situation is considerable, diversity in terms of socio-economic situation is not. The majority of parents in the sample were highly educated and many lived as 'expats' in Belgium. While it can already be inferred from the stories of these parents that they are often in a subordinate position in their relationship with childcare professionals, we can surmise that aspects of inequality in the relationship matter more strongly for parents with low socio-economic status.

Despite these caveats, and despite the exploratory nature of this chapter, we nevertheless consider the inclusion of multilingual parents' perspective in this dissertation to be of added value and we concur with the plea of scholars in the

field to include the voices of parents in research and debate on early childhood education and care (Lehrer et al., 2023).

Obviously, *the* multilingual parent does not exist. Right from the introduction round in every group interview, it became clear that language situations across different families vary greatly. This diversity was visible in terms of the types of heritage languages, the number of different languages within a family, and the concrete language practices and strategies used within a family. This, of course, implies that childcare professionals encounter these linguistic diversities on a daily basis in their practices, and that there can be no single answer on how to approach these.

Some of the parents seemed to struggle with the complexities inherent to their linguistic situation. A lot of them had very specific questions and concerns about the language development of their child and some even solicited for concrete advice during the group interviews. By reflecting on what might constitute an ideal childcare for multilingual families, wishes, desires and sometimes even expectations about their child's linguistic development and about the role of childcare in this regard emerged in the group interviews. The majority of parents also expressed desires about how they themselves would like to be treated in the childcare centre and they recounted personal experiences and interactions with professionals and the extent to which they met those desires and expectations.

4.4.2 Bringing together the views of multilingual parents and childcare workers

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the parents actually experienced little dialogue with the professionals about language and multilingualism, despite their questions and wishes. This was also highlighted in the study by Van Der Wildt et al. (2023) where around a third of the surveyed parents indicated that they had never talked about language upbringing with the childcare workers. Based on the discussions in our group interviews, we can discern several reasons for this. A first major reason appeared to be related to the fact that there are generally few and short moments of interaction between parents and professionals. These scarce moments, usually at the end of the day, do not seem to allow many parents to engage in dialogue about language and multilingualism. Language plays a role in this: some parents mentioned that it is not easy to express themselves in a nuanced and complete way in a language that is not their mother tongue while others expressed a fear of being misunderstood and thereby causing a rift in the professional relationship. Also,

some parents stated that they sometimes have the impression that the professionals have longer and less superficial dialogue moments with Dutch-speaking parents. Interestingly, this last point was also raised by the childcare professionals in Chapter 3. Thus, it seems that both parents and professionals regard dialogue moments between Dutch-speaking professionals and multilingual parents as less rewarding than dialogue moments between Dutch-speaking professionals and Dutch-speaking parents. A possible explanation for this may lie in the difficulty of conveying certain nuances correctly or, at least, in the fear of not being able to do so properly. This is another common point that came up in both the group interviews with multilingual parents and with the childcare workers.

In Chapter 3, the professionals indicated that when language or multilingualism was discussed with multilingual parents; it was often when multilingual parents expressed concerns or questions about their child's development or wellbeing. From the parents' stories, we learn that this is indeed sometimes the case, but mainly with parents who claim to be more insistent or who are not afraid to use their limited Dutch skills. Nevertheless, we cannot refrain from concluding that the multilingual parents often do not express their questions or concerns and, as a result, set aside certain wishes and expectations about their child's upbringing. This sometimes seems to be happening automatically or a priori by multilingual parents from an estimation that they simply cannot raise expectations due to alleged practical constraints. This might be part of an explanation for Van Der Wildts et al's (2023) finding that only fewer than half of the surveyed parents indicated having expectations of childcare concerning language and multilingual upbringing.

A distinction between 'desire' and 'expectation' is perhaps appropriate here, in the sense that a desire - what parents wish, want or long for their child - does not automatically include an expectation - what parents expect the childcare to do to fulfil that desire. It seems that the confrontation of a desire and the practical impossibility to transform that desire into practice might inhibit parents from expressing their expectations of childcare. While it may seem obvious that there are practical concerns that make it difficult to deploy certain practices, this should not imply that it would also be obvious that parents therefore have to stop thinking of and talking about desired outcomes for their children.

In general, the multilingual parents in this chapter and the professionals in chapter 3 seem to share the same concern about Dutch for their children, especially when the parents are intended to stay in Belgium or at least send their

children to pre-primary education in Flanders. Dutch is considered an important language for which the foundations are best laid in early childhood. This is, however, not the view of every parent, which makes it no surprise that some of the multilingual parents struggle with how to relate to the predominant focus on Dutch. Moreover, for some parents the emphasis on Dutch adds to their concern about maintaining and transferring the home languages to the children. From e.g. the study by Verhaeghe et al. (2022) we know that this is a legitimate concern for multilingual families in Flanders. Language shift and language loss appear to be realities for many families with a migration background, making it impossible or very difficult for grandparents, for example, to communicate with their grandchildren. On a side note, we also observed that both multilingual parents and professionals appeared to be well aware of the socio-political context of Flanders and the role of the Dutch language and of ECEC within that context.

Chapter 3 also revealed that professionals sometimes judged multilingual parents in a negative way when they considered the parents as 'unwilling' to learn or to use Dutch. This rather judgemental framing seemed to be prompted by a well-meant concern for later school chances of the children. From the group interviews with multilingual parents we learn, however, that the parents share this concern and that not using Dutch has nothing to do with contrariness or defiance. Rather the opposite. Some parents expressed fear of speaking poor or insufficient Dutch to their children and thus doing more harm than good. Other parents appeared to be afraid or insecure of speaking poor or insufficient Dutch to the childcare workers and therefore being misunderstood, and still other parents said they simply could not speak Dutch. Some non-Dutch-speaking parents said they made a conscious decision not to use Dutch in order to preserve their mother tongue, while other parents said they already spoke several languages and did not feel the need to add Dutch as yet another language to their repertoire. Again, this shows that parents have a variety of motives and concerns, but deliberate unwillingness towards professionals is not among them.

4.4.3 To conclude

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of the exploratory nature of this chapter, by bringing together the perspectives of professionals and of multilingual parents, we can learn something about the relationship between the two.

Taken together, it seems that multilingual parents and professionals actually struggle with similar issues. First, for both, dealing with the complexity of language situations may be challenging. They both lack factual information

about multilingual language development in early childhood, and they have concerns and questions for which there are no ready-made answers. Second, both multilingual parents and professionals sometimes find it difficult to deliver messages to each other in a nuanced way, partly out of fear that the other would misunderstand the message or be offended. This makes that both of them sometimes see language as a stumbling block in their relationship. Third, multilingual parents and professionals explicitly share a common concern about the child's opportunities and they attribute an important role to Dutch in this regard. Fourth, they both experience that dialogue on language and multilingualism is fairly non-existent and therefore not satisfactory. As a result, multilingualism remains a silenced topic on both sides within the relationship, causing both parents and professionals to make assumptions about the other that are not tested.

From what multilingual parents and professionals actually share with each other in the context of childcare, there does seem to be fertile ground for them to also approach each other better and open up to each other. In this way, not knowing each other would not have to result in negative treatment or judgement of the other, but it could instead be adopted as a starting point for mutual understanding and for building a relationship or partnership together.

In this pedagogical encounter, dreams, desires and confrontations deserve a central place. After all, pedagogy is all about dreams and wishes for the child and for the world in which the child is growing up. And of course, pedagogy is also about how to deal with the confrontation with the impossibilities of some of those wishes. About how to do deal with an imperfect world that impedes certain desires or renders them impossible. Indeed, about how to deal with what Camus (1971) described as ‘the absurd’. The fact that there is not a straightforward answer to a difficult question, or the fact that a practical implementation of a certain desire is not immediately at hand, does, however, not mean that parents and professionals should withdraw from engaging in dialogue about it. Again, dialogue on dreams, exploring together desires and discussing mutual concerns are the essences of a pedagogical partnership or an encounter. Such a partnership is then driven by not-knowing, by not seeing how, by questioning and by being open to unexpected outcomes (Moss, 2009).

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CHAPTER 5

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN HOME LANGUAGE USE WITH CHILDREN, DIALOGUE WITH MULTILINGUAL PARENTS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

This chapter is based on Peleman, B., Van Der Wildt, A., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2022). Home language use with children, dialogue with multilingual parents and professional development in ECEC. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *61*, 70-80.

5.1 Introduction

As multilingualism is a societal reality in most regions across the world, a large number of children currently grow up in social contexts where more than one language is spoken (Extra & Yağmur, 2011). Professionals working in education also encounter a variety of home languages every day (Duarte & Kirsch, 2020). Given the wealth of evidence about the social, cognitive, and linguistic benefits of multilingualism (Agirdag, 2014; Barac et al., 2014) and the importance of the first years of life for children's development, there is now scientific consensus that attention to early multilingualism is paramount and that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has a crucial role to play in this regard (Lengyel, 2012). As ECEC is key in supporting inclusion, equity, and social mobility, the intercultural competencies of early childhood professionals are vital in creating stimulating environments to foster the language development of young emerging multilingual children, and in establishing partnerships with parents (Romijn et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2020).

In early childhood contexts characterized by linguistic diversity, professionals need to support language acquisition in the official language(s) of the society, while being attentive to the children's home languages. This is considered important in welcoming families from migrant backgrounds (Kummerer et al., 2007) and in valuing each child's multiple identities (Cummins, 2001). Also, the incorporation of home languages can contribute to children's learning experiences and language development (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Moreover, in line with the approach to intercultural education outlined by Salem et al. (2020), it is not only necessary to value the children's home languages, but also to contribute to the multilingual development of children in partnership with the parents. Although multilingual parents can be considered the experts on the cultural background of their home languages (Schwartz, 2018), research has shown that many non-native families do not feel self-assured in their approach to the multilingual upbringing of their children (e.g. Eisenchlas et al., 2013). Therefore, early childhood professionals play an important role in shaping multilingual education together with the parents. Educational practices may, however, still often be based on a monolingual mindset (Ellis et al., 2010), implicitly favouring homogeneity and considering diversity and multilingualism as problems to overcome, rather than conditions for learning (Vandenbroeck, 2017). Research suggests that early childhood professionals may be insecure and have little expertise in approaching young children's multilingualism, in

supporting parents in multilingual upbringing (Chan, 2011; Michel & Kuiken, 2014), and in working with non-native families (Ragnarsdóttir, 2021).

It is now well established that the professional development (PD) of practitioners can make a substantial contribution to fostering their competencies and self-efficacy, and thus to improving quality in ECEC (Egert et al., 2018; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017). The potential of PD in relation to multilingualism nevertheless remains largely understudied, compared with, for example, research in the field of language and literacy development (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018). The present study explores links between the professional development of early childhood practitioners and the use of home languages with multilingual children, as well as the engagement of professionals in entering into a dialogue with multilingual parents about their children's multilingual upbringing.

5.2 Theoretical background

5.2.1 Home language in ECEC

Scholars have focused on the experiences of young dual-language learners (DLL) in monolingual or bilingual contexts (e.g. Raikes et al., 2019). Although it is not always clear which aspects of home language instruction account for the positive effects, it is now well established that the use of the home language in early childhood classrooms does not impede the learning of the dominant language. On the contrary, research documents favourable outcomes for the integrative use of the home language in ECEC. In her review of empirical evidence on instructional practices to support DLLs in ECEC, Banse (2019) concludes that: "*Teacher use of DLLs' home languages may be key in literacy and math learning, as well as with regard to social-emotional development*" (Banse, 2019, p. 9). Halle et al. (2014) also found that the use of the child's first language in ECEC is significantly and positively associated with closer relationships with teachers, as well as with other children. Moreover, combined exposure to and instruction in both a child's home language (L1) and the main language in society (L2) has also been found to benefit language outcomes of Spanish-English children in both languages in U.S. (Latino) early childhood contexts (e.g. Collins, 2014; Partika et al., 2021; Raikes et al., 2019). This is crucial in the light of counteracting language loss. Indeed, when young children are immersed in a new language in an educational setting, they risk losing their home language and this may, in turn, affect familial bonds and communication (Fillmore, 2000). As noted by De

Houwer et al. (De Houwer, 2018), frequent and high-quality home language input to children is a vital enabler of home language maintenance. Furthermore, knowledge of children's home language can provide practitioners with an extra advantage in creating culturally and linguistically sensitive environments, which can in turn foster the early childhood experiences of non-native children (Espinosa & Magruder, 2014; Kummerer et al., 2007).

In contrast to the consensus on the importance of L1 support, according to Kirsch (2021), very few studies on effective language supporting strategies and the positive effects of integrative home language use have been conducted in multilingual settings, where the linguistic diversity is more complex than the way in which bilingual contexts are often portrayed. Moreover, research on the youngest children in ECEC (0–3 years of age) remains scarce, as most studies have examined the outcomes for children from 4 to 5 years old and above. This is startling, considering that recent studies confirm that children can learn two or more languages perfectly well from a very young age (Ferjan Ramirez & Kuhl, 2017b, p. 39) and that growing up in multiple languages has many benefits for children's cognitive and social development. For example, multilingual children are often good at mentally demanding processes such as staying focused and ignoring distractions, switching attention, and retaining information (Barac et al., 2014). In addition, multilingual children practice empathy by constantly having to consider which language they will speak to whom. They learn to empathize with others and are well able to observe changes in the social context. Moreover, multilingual children have it easier to build good relationships with all their family members and to access multiple communities through their different languages (Agirdag, 2014).

Exposure to frequent high-quality input from each language is crucial from an early age onwards (De Houwer, 2020), since infants' innate neural ability to distinguish phonetic units in all languages declines at 12 months of age and will be limited to the language or languages they hear frequently (Ferjan Ramirez & Kuhl, 2017a). In this regard, it should be noted that exposure to more than one language in the early years does not cause confusion in young children and that these children reach language milestones in a timeframe similar to that of children who learn only one language. Research also shows that children's total vocabulary across their different languages is usually comparable or higher tot that of their monolingual peers (Grosjean, 2010). Consequently, the role of ECEC professionals working with the youngest multilingual children is of utmost importance. According to Gogolin (1997), however, teaching practices may be characterized by a "monolingual habitus" when teachers unconsciously view

monolingualism as the norm, and multilingualism as a deviation from it. This orientation is marked by an unwitting disregard for hybrid language practices, rooted in a notion of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Lengyel (2012) states that this also holds true for early childhood education. Kirsch and Aleksić (2018) therefore, argue that practitioners should be supported in this regard, so that they become familiar with dynamic conceptions of multilingualism, gain awareness of the monolingual habitus, and are able to reconsider their own beliefs regarding multilingualism.

5.2.2 Dialogue with multilingual parents

According to Salem et al. (2020), promoting multilingual development requires not only valuing children's home languages, but also establishing cooperation with the parents. Research on the relationship between parents and professionals in ECEC has, for several decades, focused on the notions of partnership (Alasuutari, 2010), mutuality, reciprocity, and shared decision-making (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). However, as the relationship between parents and professionals is characterized by power asymmetries (e.g. Spivak, 1988), it is necessary to acknowledge that it is not so much about creating an equal partnership as it is about the constant search for how to create moments of reciprocal dialogue in an unequal relationship (Van Laere et al., 2018). Asymmetrical power in the relationship between parents and professionals emerges as a barrier to creating partnerships. This often appears as a perception of the professionals as experts, both by parents and by the professionals themselves (Norheim & Moser, 2020). From this point of view, professional knowledge is prioritized over parental knowledge about the children (Einarsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2019). Norheim and Moser (2020) show that this notion of professionals as experts is found across cultures. However, given that ECEC professionals generally have low professional status and low societal appreciation, the "professional as expert" discourse may not be the only driver behind the asymmetrical relationship between parents and professionals. As Einarsdóttir and Jónsdóttir (2019) point out, there are indeed many levels of power involved in the relationship between parents and professionals. Given that parents are often confronted with unequal financial, social and cultural resources, equality is hardly conceivable. Moreover, the subordinate position in which parents find themselves makes them more likely to adjust their own expectations to the implicit and explicit rules, norms and routines of childcare (Van Laere et al., 2018).

Communication in itself is often a major difficulty for parents and for professionals in establishing a reciprocal dialogue. For example, Norheim and

Moser (2020) found that while parents expressed a wish to build partnerships with educational professionals, they often experienced a lack of opportunities to communicate with them, most often due to a language barrier. A literature review by Aghallaj et al. (2020) shows that parents from language minorities encounter linguistic and cultural discontinuity, which may contribute to them feeling less welcome or accepted, and perceiving interactions with professionals as more challenging (Cheatham & Santos, 2011). In this regard, a readiness for communication (Salem et al., 2020, p. 3) and a willingness to enter into dialogue with immigrant parents (Adair & Tobin, 2008, p. 137) in ECEC is needed. Such a dialogue should focus on getting to know each other, sharing beliefs and exploring what is important to all parties, as well as with regard to the multilingual development of the children (Nemeth & Erdosi, 2012). By engaging in these conversations, professionals not only learn about a family's linguistic repertoire, goals, and expectations, but also have the opportunity to express their positive attitudes toward language and multilingualism (Mary & Young, 2017, p. 10).

Non-native parents do not always feel confident in their approach to the multilingual upbringing of their children (Eisenchlas et al., 2013), as they may be insecure and anxious about their parental role and troubled by linguistic issues, such as the possible inability to transfer their heritage language to their children (De Houwer, 2015; Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018). The review by Aghallaj et al. (2020) illustrates that while some non-native parents would like for their children to have a multilingual education, others prefer their children to be educated solely in the majority language, even though professionals are committed to promoting home language use in the service. Accordingly, the discussions with different parents about educational and linguistic practices may produce disagreements that, in addition to communications skills (Slot, Halba, et al., 2017), call for ECEC professionals to have negotiation skills in order to construct meaningful practices and true partnerships with parents (Vandenbroeck, 2009).

5.2.3 Professional Development

Creating stimulating early childhood environments that simultaneously address the multilingual development of young children and establish partnerships with parents, requires ECEC practitioners to have intercultural competencies (Romijn et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2020). In many countries, ECEC professionals increasingly work with families with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Norheim & Moser, 2020), they therefore need thorough knowledge of the social and cultural reality of these families, and are expected to pay specific attention

to those having migrant, minority, or vulnerable backgrounds (Silva et al., 2020). Research suggests that professionals may feel uncertain and may have little expertise in working in linguistically diverse ECEC contexts (Chan, 2011; Michel & Kuiken, 2014), but that they may also overestimate their own knowledge base (Cunningham et al., 2009). Engaging ECEC practitioners in processes of professional development (PD) can make a substantial contribution to improving quality in ECEC (Egert et al., 2018; Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017). Indeed, there is now a general consensus about the relationship between PD and the enhancement of process quality, defined as meaningful interactions between adults and children, and between parents and professionals (OECD, 2021).

Professional development encompasses a broad spectrum of learning opportunities for ECEC professionals, ranging from initial pre-service training leading to formal degrees and qualifications, to many forms of in-service training activities for professionals already in the job (Egert et al., 2018; Sheridan et al., 2009). The latter types of training are often referred to as "continuous or continuing professional development" (CPD). Research has identified specific points of attention in order for CPD to be successful, including that it should be well integrated into individual centres' practices, in order to meet the actual needs of the professionals involved (Peleman et al., 2018; see Chapter 6). CPD aimed at improving pedagogical quality is best realized by giving staff the opportunity to learn in groups, where they can reflect on their own practice and where a pedagogical coach or supervisor supports this process. Brunsek et al. (2020) concur, and found that internal PD (such as coaching) is more effective than external PD (such as following a course or workshop), as a coach provides opportunities to reflect on the participants' practice through individualized attention and feedback in a collaborative way. This was also found to be crucial in the meta-analyses of Egert et al. (2018) and by Markussen-Brown et al. (2017). Internal PD enhances reflection, which is particularly important with regard to working with families and children from vulnerable backgrounds (De Gioia, 2015; Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011).

Furthermore, studies on CPD also highlight that programs combining internal and external PD through a mixture of workshops, courses, and on-site support may be very effective in terms of quality improvement (Egert et al., 2018; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2009). Indeed, Slot, Romijn, et al. (2017) also found that the most successful CPD interventions rely on more than one strategy. By employing a wide range of training modalities and learning opportunities, the different learning styles of individual participants can be

addressed, offering the potential to increase the effect of an intervention. These findings indicate that focusing solely on external PD may not yield the greatest impact on ECEC practice. Lastly, it is crucial that CPD programs are evidence-informed and well embedded in a curricular framework. In the European review on effective CPD in ECEC commissioned by Eurofound (2015), CPD initiatives based on the active engagement of practitioners and on peer exchanges within a shared scientific framework proved to be the most effective. It needs to be noted, however, that research on CPD with a focus on multilingualism in early childhood is still scarce (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018).

5.3 Research questions

The current study aims to explore the links between the (in- service) professional development of ECEC practitioners with a focus on multilingualism, and two important aspects in creating a positive, welcoming, and stimulating ECEC environment for multilingual families. First, home language use in interaction with multilingual children, and second, engaging in a dialogue with multilingual parents. By focusing on the youngest children in ECEC (0–3 years old), this study attempts to shed light on the factors that support the development of emerging multilingual children and their families. The first research question explores the relationship between professional support (on topics related to multilingualism) and home language use in interactions with multilingual children. We hypothesize that professionals who have been given support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to use children's home languages during interactive moments. A second, additional hypothesis is that this relationship is weaker for professionals who have only received external support (by attending external courses, training, or workshops) compared with those who have received a combination of internal and external support. The second research question looks at the relationship between professional support (on topics related to multilingualism) and engaging in a dialogue with multilingual parents about multilingual upbringing. We hypothesize that professionals who have been given support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to enter into communication with multilingual parents in this regard. A second, additional hypothesis is that this relationship is weaker for professionals who have only received external support (by attending external courses, training, or workshops) compared with those who have received a combination of internal and external support.

5.4 Research context

Flanders (the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium) is an interesting context for the study of these issues. While Dutch is the official language, in 30% of the births in 2020, the language between mother and child was not Dutch, and 30% of the children born in Flanders in 2020 had a mother of non-Belgian origin (Opgroeien, 2021a). In large cities such as Antwerp and Brussels, more than half of the 0–5-year-olds have home languages that are not Dutch. The other most widely used languages in family contexts are French, Arabic, Turkish, Romanian, English, Polish, and Berber (Opgroeien, 2021a). Despite the multilingual reality of Flanders, the childcare sector consists mainly of Dutch-speaking providers and staff, and policy measures to support a foreign home language are virtually absent. More than half of the children (54%) regularly attend licensed and publicly funded childcare from birth to the age of 3 (Opgroeien, 2021a). All regulated facilities must meet the same structural quality characteristics, which are centrally monitored. The adult to child ratio is set at 1 adult per 8 children, but there are no regulations regarding group size or age range of the children in a group. Childcare services are free to choose how they arrange the groups. Process quality varies from one facility to another. In 2016, a large-scale baseline study on the quality of childcare in Flanders was carried out as part of the MeMoQ (Measuring and Monitoring Quality) project commissioned by the governmental agency for childcare, "Child and Family" (Hulpia et al., 2016). The study showed that scores for emotional support on the CLASS-Infant instrument (Hamre et al., 2014) and the CLASS-Toddler instrument (La Paro et al., 2012) were moderate to good. By contrast, educational support was moderate to low. Both emotional and educational support (in particular the dimensions related to language support) were significantly lower in groups with more children than average, when their home language was different to the official one in the ECEC-service (Hulpia et al., 2016).

5.5 Methodology

5.5.1 Sample and data collection

The data used here originate from a survey in 85 childcare services in Flanders, carried out as part of the "Pro-M"project (2018–2022, see Chapter 1). This inter-university research project studied multilingualism in the early years, with a specific focus on the relationship between early childhood professionals and multilingual parents. Between October 2018 and March 2019, a total of 161

centre-based childcare services were contacted, of which 85 (52.8%) agreed to participate. Services were selected by means of a stratified two-stage sampling method. First, 19 municipalities in Flanders and Brussels were selected, because they have a high proportion of mothers who do not speak the dominant language (Dutch) to their child. Second, childcare services were randomly selected in each of the 19 municipalities. These selected services were then contacted by phone to inform them about the study and invite them to participate. The service leaders or directors were subsequently sent an information letter via email, which they could use to inform the childcare workers about the study. The email also included a response form for the childcare services to confirm or decline their participation in the study. All the childcare workers from the 85 services that consented were then invited to take part in the sur- vey via a URL that allowed them to complete the questionnaire on any computer, tablet or smartphone with an internet connection. A paper version of the questionnaire was provided for childcare workers with limited access to the Internet. This resulted in a final sample of 351 professionals (69 of whom also have a coordinating role) completing the survey, representing 56% of the 628 practitioners working in these services.

5.5.2 Survey design

The electronic survey was developed in close collaboration between the researchers from the four universities within the "PRO-M" project, using the Qualtrics XM software. It consisted of seven overarching sections:

1) Language Policy (72 items questioning practices and beliefs toward children, parents and colleagues);
2) Beliefs about Language and Language Development (15 items);
3) Relationship with Parents in General (14 items);
4) Beliefs about Multilingualism and Diversity (22 items);
5) Collaboration with the Public Library (10 items);
6) Professional Support (12 items);
7) Personal Information (9 items).

The survey was administered in Dutch and pilot tested in a convenience sample of seven professionals to test its flow, ease of administration, clarity and validity. The survey was revised according to the feedback. Data were exported from the Qualtrics software and then imported and analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software version 27. Given the comprehensiveness of the survey and in line with the concrete research objectives, the following sections were used for the present

study: (1) Language Policy (linguistic practices toward children and parents); (6) Professional Support; (7) Personal Information. Hereafter, we describe how the different variables were constructed and prepared for analysis.

5.6 Measurements

5.6.1 Dependent variable 1

The first dependent variable is "use of home language with children." A 5-item scale was constructed, consisting of the following items:

(1) I greet/welcome multilingual children in their home language;
(2) I read books to the children in languages other than Dutch;
(3) When I read out loud, I deliberately use a few words from the different home languages of the multilingual children;
(4) When I am alone with a multilingual child, I deliberately use a few words from the child's home language;
(5) During a group activity, I deliberately use a few words from the different home languages of the multilingual children.

These items stem from the survey section on linguistic practices toward children and were answered on a 5-point Likert scale: "never", "hardly ever", "sometimes", "often" and "always." Item correlation substitution was performed for missing values (Huisman, 2000). Missing values for an item were replaced by the value of the item correlating most highly with that item. This reduced missing values from 7% missing for at least one of the original items, to 6% (= 21) of the items that were used for scale construction. Principal component analysis revealed that the items loaded on a single factor. This factor explained 53.4 % of the variance and there was a clear decrease in eigenvalues between the first (i.e., 2.67) and second retained factor (i.e., 0.76). All factor loadings were between 0.60 and 0.80 and the Cronbach's alpha was .77. On aver- age, professionals scored 1.85 on a scale from 1 to 5, with a standard deviation of 0.65 (see Table 5.1). Higher values on this scale indicate a more active commitment by professionals to integrate and deliberately use the children's home languages during interactive moments. The overall score on this scale is in the lower region, despite the relatively high proportion of multilingual families in the services in the sample (see below).

5.6.2 Dependent variable 2

The second dependent variable is "dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing." This 6-item scale consists of the following items:

1) I ask multilingual parents to give me some words in the child's home language;
2) I inform parents about the language policy of the centre;
3) Multilingual parents ask me for ad- vice about multilingual upbringing,
4) I spontaneously give multi- lingual parents advice about language and multilingual upbringing, and suggest best practice;
5) I give multilingual parents family- oriented advice on language and multilingual upbringing;
6) I find it important to give advice to multilingual parents on multilingual upbringing.

These items stem from the survey section on linguistic practices toward parents and were answered "no"(0) or "yes"(1). Item correlation substitution was performed for missing values (Huisman, 2000). Missing values for an item were replaced by the value of the item correlating most highly with that item. This reduced missing values from 18% missing for at least one of the original items to 10% (N = 36) of the items that were used for scale construction. Principal component analysis revealed that the items loaded on a single factor. This factor explained 40.3 % of the variance and there was a clear decrease in eigenvalues between the first (i.e., 2.42) and second retained factor (i.e., 0.92). All factor loadings were between 0.45 and 0.73 and the Cronbach's alpha was .69. On aver- age, professionals scored 0.56 on a scale from 0 to 1, with a standard deviation of 0.31 (see Table 5.1). Higher values on this scale indicate a more active commitment by ECEC professionals to engage in a dialogue with multilingual parents about language and multilingual upbringing.

5.6.3 Service-level variables

Two measurements were used at the level of the ECEC service: "proportion of multilingual families" and "proportion of multilingual staff". These two variables were derived from two specific questions in the survey that asked "What percentage of the children speak something other than just Dutch at home?" and "What percentage of the staff speak something other than just Dutch at home?". For both statements, responses ranged from 0 to 100%. The average proportion of multilingual families in the participating services was 34% compared with an average of 31.3% of multilingual staff (see Table 5.1).

5.6.4 Professional-level variables

Four variables are included at the level of the ECEC professionals: "type of professional support received", "multilingual background", "level of qualification", and "years of experience". All four variables were self-reported. The "type of professional support received" is a categorical variable, indicating the type of professional in-service training that the respondents had been given. In the survey section on Professional Support, respondents were first asked: "On what topics have you already received support?". A menu of ten topics was presented in which respondents could tick the specific topics on which they had already received support. For each topic, the respondents then had to indicate what kind of support was concerned: "internal" support (guidance or coaching during working hours or guided reflection/supervision during childfree times), or "external" (participation in external training, a course, or a learning network).

Conceptually, we considered five of the ten topics relevant to working in linguistically diverse ECEC contexts and thus to our research questions: "multilingualism", "diversity", "working with parents", "language development", and "reading aloud". By applying a Chi-Square test for independence, we were able to determine that there was also a statistically significant relationship between each of the five topics ($P < 0.001$). We then checked the standardized residuals (z-scores) to analyse associations on the level of the specific kind of support for each of the five topics. We used three categories: "no support", "internal support", "external support" and found statistically significant z-scores for each of the categories indicating an association between the five topics on the level of the kind of support. Consequently, our data allowed us to create a cluster of the five topics and use that cluster for further analysis on the level of type of support. This resulted in the inclusion of three dummy variables in the model:

1) "only internal support"
2) "only external support"
3) "a combination of internal and external support"

These dummy variables were compared with the reference category: "no support". The sample consisted of 58 professionals who received no support on any of the five topics, 40 who received only internal support on at least one of the five topics, 83 who received only external support on at least one of the five topics, and 80 who received a combination of internal and external support on at least two of the five topics.

The "multilingual background" of the professionals was obtained from the question "Were you raised as multilingual?" Respondents could answer with "no" (0) or "yes" (1), and 70 respondents in the sample indicated a multilingual background. In order to construct a variable for qualification level, professionals were asked to give their highest level of education. These answers were then scaled according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The basic training for childcare workers in Flanders is an ISCED 4 level; however, childcare services can also hire staff below that level. We therefore converted answers into three categories: "Lower than ISCED 4" (78 respondents), "ISCED 4" (118 respondents), and "Higher than ISCED 4" (68 respondents). Lower than ISCED 4 and ISCED 4 were included in the model, as well as the professionals' number of years of experience (M = 11.64, SD = 9.08). Since 96.3% of the participating professionals stated "female" as their gender, this was not included as a variable in the analysis.

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables: frequencies (%), means, and standard deviations.

Variables	Mean(SD) or %	N
Professional level		
Use of home language with children	1.85 (0.65)	330
Dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing	0.56 (0.31)	315
Self-assessed professional support (ref. cat.: No support)		
Internal support only	15.3%	261
External support only	31.8%	261
Combination of internal and external support	30.7%	261
Multilingual background (ref. cat.: Monolingual)	25.8%	271
Level of qualification (ref. cat.: Higher than ISCED 4)		
Lower than ISCED 4	29.5%	264
ISCED 4	44.7%	264
Years of working experience (range: 1–42)	11.64 (9.08)	256
Service level		
Proportion of multilingual families	0.34 (0.24)	72
Proportion of multilingual staff	0.31 (0.28)	76

5.7 Research design

Two parallel multilevel regression designs with a random intercept were set up for the analysis of the two dependent variables separately. This means that the dependent variables were analysed separately, but the construction of the models was carried out in the same way, with the same independent and control variables added in an identical order. A multilevel design is appropriate for the present study, given that the sample consists of ECEC professionals who are "nested" in services. By applying multilevel analysis, a relationship can be sought between variables across all groups, while taking into account the dependencies between individuals within the groups (Verboon & Peels, 2014). For each of the dependent variables, the unconditional model was first estimated to determine the amount of variance in the use of home language with the children, and the dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing, situated at the level of the ECEC service. The dummy variables on received support were then added (Model 1), to identify the possible effects of professional support and to find out which type of support has the strongest association with the dependent variables. Next, the indicator for multilingual background was entered (Model 2), to test whether these effects still hold or are mediated by practitioners being multilingual. In Model 3, the service level variables on the proportion of multilingual staff and multilingual families were included, followed by the inclusion of the two dummy variables on qualification level and the remaining variable on years of work experience in Model 4.

5.8 Results

5.8.1 RQ 1: CPD and use of home language with children

For dependent variable 1 "use of home language with children", the unconditional multilevel analysis (professionals nested within ECEC services, "Model 0") indicates that 28.4% of the variance in the use of home language with children was between services ($p < 0.001$). This confirms the appropriateness of using a multilevel model for our analysis (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). As illustrated in Table 5.2, the first hypothesis (professionals who received support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to use children's home languages during interactive moments) has to be rejected, and the second hypothesis (the relationship is weaker for professionals who received only external support) thus becomes irrelevant.

By contrast, the variable "multilingual background" (Model 2) is positively and significantly associated with the use of home language ($b = 0.267$, $p < 0.01$). Professionals who were raised as multilingual are more likely to report using the children's home language during individual and group situations with multilingual children. The influence of having a multilingual background remains equally strong and significant ($b = 0.268$, $p < 0.01$) when the service-level variables related to the proportion of multilingual families and the proportion of multilingual staff (Model 3) are added. The significant association between multilingual background and the use of home language also persists in Model 4, when the level of qualification and the number of years of working experience are controlled for, albeit less strongly ($b = 0.232$, $p < 0.05$).

This last model explains 13.7% of the total variance in use of the home language. For random intercept models, the proportional reduction in total variance is considered a viable measurement to determine the overall R^2 (LaHuis et al., 2014).

5.8.2 RQ 2: CPD and dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing

For dependent variable 2, "dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing", the unconditional multilevel analysis indicates that 15% of the variance is between services ($p < 0.001$), confirming the necessity for multilevel modelling. Table 5.3 shows that our third hypothesis is confirmed: professionals who report having received support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to enter into communication with multilingual parents on multilingual upbringing compared with professionals who have not received support. In Model 1, the three types of support are positively and significantly associated with dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing (Model 1). The strongest association is found with the combination of internal and external support ($b = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$). Professionals who indicated that they were given only internal support or only external support are more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents than professionals who did not receive any support, but the associations are slightly weaker than when the support given comprised a combination of internal and external. A coefficient of 0.169 ($p < 0.01$) is found for only internal support and 0.161 ($p < 0.01$) for only external support. These associations persist when the variable "multilingual background" is added (Model 2). Being raised as a multilingual does not show any significant association with engaging in dialogue with parents about multilingual parenting, and it does not influence the associations with the received support. These associations remain positive and

significant (for internal support only: b = 0.157, p < 0.01; for external support only: b = 0.159, p < 0.01; for the combination of internal and external support: b = 0.232, p < 0.001).

The service-level variables related to the proportion of multilingual families and the proportion of multilingual staff added in Model 3 have no significant association with the dependent variable, and they do not substantially change the associations that were already apparent in the previous models. When adding the two dummy variables on qualification level in Model 4, a negative association for qualification level = ISCED 4 (b = -0.095, p < 0.01) is revealed. This means that compared with professionals who have a qualification level higher than ISCED 4, professionals qualified at ISCED 4 are less likely to engage in dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing. The association is, however, relatively weak. Model 4 also shows that the number of years of experience is significantly associated with dialogue with parents (b = 0.005, p < 0.01), but this is negligible considering the low value of the coefficient: for each additional year of experience, the extent of dialogue with parents increases by 0.005 on the scale. This last model explains 14.1% of the total variance in dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing.

To check our fourth hypothesis (the relationship is weaker for professionals who have only been given external support), a Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc test (Williams & Abdi, 2010) was performed in order to make a pairwise comparison between the different types of support. The results of the test show that despite the finding that all categories differ significantly from the reference category, there are no significant differences between the categories of "internal support only", "external support only", and "a combination of internal and external support". As this post-hoc test did not reveal relevant findings, the fourth hypothesis is not supported.

Table 5.2 Association between received support and the use of home language with multilingual children.

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ICC	0.284				
Intercept	1.902***	1.837***	1.734***	1.724***	1.677***
Professional level					
Self-assessed professional support (ref. cat.: No support)					
Internal support only		-0.106	-0.106	-0.204	-0.211
External support only		0.060	0.100	0.088	0.065
Combination internal - external support		0.133	0.168	0.126	0.113
Multilingual background			0.267**	0.268**	0.232*
Qualification level < ISCED 4					-0.012
Qualification level = ISCED 4					0.093
Years of working experience					0.003
Service level					
Proportion of multil. families				-0.001	-0.001
Proportion of multil. staff				0.003	0.002

Dependent variable: The use of home language with multilingual children

° p≤0.1

* p≤0.05

** p≤0.01

*** p≤0.001

Table 5.3 Association between received support and dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
ICC	0.150				
Intercept	0.564***	0.404***	0.397***	0.377***	0.420***
Professional level					
Self-assessed professional support (ref. cat.: No support)					
Internal support only		0.169**	0.157**	0.133*	0.112°
External support only		0.161**	0.159**	0.149*	0.101°
Combination internal - external support		0.237***	0.232***	0.204***	0.150**
Multilingual background			0.053	0.045	0.077
Qualification level < ISCED 4					-0.077
Qualification level = ISCED 4					-0.095°
Years of working experience					0.005*
Service level					
Proportion of multil. families				0.001	0.001
Proportion of multil. staff				0.000	-0.000

Dependent variable: The use of home language with multilingual children

° p≤0.1

* p≤0.05

** p≤0.01

*** p≤0.001

5.9 Discussion

The present study has explored links between the professional development of early childhood practitioners and two crucial aspects in dealing with families from multilingual backgrounds: home language use and the engagement in entering into dialogue with multilingual parents. By making use of a multilevel regression model, we analysed whether professionals who are given support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to use multilingual children's home language in interactions with them, compared with professionals who have not been given such support. Similarly, we analysed whether professionals who received support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to enter into a dialogue with multilingual parents concerning the children's multilingual upbringing, compared with professionals who have not received such support.

5.9.1 Home language use

We found no significant association between support being given on topics related to multilingualism, and the use of the home language in interactions with multilingual children. By contrast, having a multilingual background was found to be significantly associated with home language use, suggesting that ECEC professionals who are themselves raised as multilingual are more likely to report using the children's home languages in interaction with multilingual children compared with professionals who do have not had a similar upbringing. This finding is not surprising, as it may be expected that being capable of expressing oneself in more than one language would facilitate the use of different languages in a professional context. This is consistent with findings from Flores and Smith (2009), who inferred that the ability to speak a minority language induces more positive attitudes toward children from language-minority backgrounds.

One possible explanation for the absence of a strong link between CPD and home language use could be related to the fact that the specific content of the support provided may not automatically lead to a clear change in a person's abilities. For example, although professionals who have received training on topics related to multilingualism may be more aware of the importance of home language and have adopted a more positive attitude toward multilingualism, they may not necessarily have acquired the skills and self-confidence to actually integrate children's home languages into their practice. Indeed, causal relationships between CPD and changes in practice are not straightforward. Further, several factors apart from specific training may be involved. The CoRe study on competence requirements in ECEC (Urban et al., 2012) shows that

ensuring quality requires a "whole-school" approach, within which the policy, leadership, and day-to-day practices of an ECEC service must be aligned to achieve sustainable change. In such a competent system, the various levels work together to enable quality development, as it is not the sole responsibility of an individual practitioner to change the practices.

In addition, Romijn et al. (2021) found that the wider context in which CPD takes place (consisting of local and national policies, organizational structures and resources, evaluation, access, and outreach) can explain the lack of impact of an intervention. This is often due to insufficient differentiation regarding the needs of participants in CPD, the non-involvement of key actors within an organization (such as service leaders), or because of prevailing monolingual discourses in the ECEC service (the "monolingual habitus"). These aspects may greatly hamper the transfer between what has been learned and what is being practiced, and thus negatively affect the impact of an intervention. In Flanders, the policy for children from 3 to 6 years old is strongly focused on a narrow definition of learning in terms of knowledge acquisition, with a predominant use of Dutch language. This leads to the "schoolification" of the 0-3 sector that is then supposed to make children "ready" for school, with a particular focus on their Dutch language skills (Vandenbroeck & Van Laere, 2020). This context, together with a monolingual habitus, may counteract the impact of CPD on the attitudes and behaviour of ECEC professionals.

In contrast to our results, Castro et al. (2017) provide evidence that professionals can be trained to use children's home languages to a greater extent. Further, the detailed case studies of de Oliveira et al. (2016) in the U.S. and Mary and Young (2017) in France profoundly illustrate that monolingual teachers can develop skills that enable them to incorporate children's home languages in ECEC practice. In the study by Mary and Young (2017), this is illustrated with "translanguaging" as a pedagogical strategy. Thus, being unable to speak any of the home languages present or not being multilingual does not mean that a person cannot use others' home languages to a greater extent, provided they are properly supported in doing so. Castro et al. (2017) also argue that teachers who are fluent in the home languages of young dual-language learners may still require support to intentionally use these home languages more often. This is especially true in complex multilingual contexts where many different home languages are present among the families, as is the case in Flanders. Bilingual or multilingual staff cannot possibly know all of the children's home languages, and it is often the case that they are more frequently confronted with and challenged by languages that they have not mastered well (Knudsen et al., 2020). The results

of the study by Kirsch and Aleksić (2018) show that participating in a CPD course on the development of multilingual education can actually lead to increased promotion of children's home languages in daily practice.

5.9.2 Dialogue with multilingual parents on multilingual upbringing

Our study shows that professionals who indicate a higher level of dialogue with multilingual parents also report being given support on topics related to multilingualism. Interestingly, all three modalities of being given support (internal support only, external sup- port only, and the combination of the two) were found to be significantly associated with greater dialogue with multilingual parents. The post-hoc test, however, could not identify which of the three types of received support had the strongest association, preventing us from confirming the hypothesis that only having external support yields a lesser impact.

With regard to the relationship with multilingual parents, Van Oss et al. (2021) found that professionals who were given some forms of multilingual training were more likely to offer parents advice on multilingual upbringing than those who did not receive any such training. Although their study was conducted in the context of infant welfare clinics and their analysis did not distinguish by the delivery mode of the training, it is noteworthy that the results closely parallel those of our study. The finding that receiving professional support concerning multilingualism is related to increased dialogue with multilingual parents is relevant in the light of other research indicating that early childhood professionals are often insecure about their relationships with multilingual parents (e.g. Chan, 2011; Michel & Kuiken, 2014). This insecurity hinders practitioners from establishing communications with multilingual parents and being open to dialogue. Thus, one possible explanation for our findings could be that as a result of a CPD intervention on multilingualism and related topics, professionals feel more confident in dealing with multilingual parents and therefore engage in dialogue more often or more quickly. Support for this interpretation can be found in a previous review on the impact of effective CPD initiatives in ECEC (Peleman et al., 2018; see Chapter 6) that points to an increased feeling of confidence being one of the main overarching benefits of CPD for practitioners.

Another possible explanation for the positive association between CPD and increased dialogue with multilingual parents may be that a change in the communication with parents is easier for professionals, as the relationship with

parents is associated more with the personal sphere, whereas communication with the children is associated more with the professional sphere. For most early childhood professionals, communication with parents is not considered as a primary part of their work, and therefore changing this may not necessarily require a fundamental alteration of their professional attitudes or of the pedagogical policy concerning ECEC provision. Consequently, the transfer between insights gained during training (e.g., about the importance of communication) and changes in daily practice may be achieved more easily than would be the case for the deliberate use of children's home language as a pedagogical strategy.

This does not imply in any sense, however, that the engagement of the team and the organization should be omitted in shaping CPD on the relationship with parents. As Slot, Halba, et al. (2017) show, the commitment of the team as a whole, combined with a shared focus on attitudes toward involving parents, are crucial in order to ensure the increased inclusiveness of the ECEC service toward parents. This is in line with the aforementioned concept of the "competent system" (Urban et al., 2012). The finding that the multilingual background of the early childhood professionals is not associated with an increased engagement in terms of entering into dialogue with multilingual parents is also consistent with those of Van Oss et al. (2021), who found that the multilingual background of professionals from infant welfare clinics was not a significant factor regarding the advice offered to multilingual parents. These observations are somewhat surprising, given the many studies indicating that shared (linguistic) experiences can foster stronger relationships (e.g. De Gioia, 2009; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2014).

Indeed, if professionals are raised as multilingual, this does not necessarily entail that they share a linguistic and cultural background with the parents. The review by Aghallaj et al. (2020) shows that minority-language parents and ECEC professionals rarely share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, frequently resulting in professionals having less interest and listening to parents less. The results of our study show that well-supported early childhood professionals tend to be more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents, regardless of these professionals' own linguistic background. This suggests that CPD can be a mediating or facilitating factor in establishing mutual communications between ECEC professionals and parents, even if they do not share the same language and/or cultural background.

Lastly, our analysis concerning the dialogue with multilingual parents also reveals that professionals qualified at ISCED 4 (which is the legally required minimum in Flanders) are less likely to engage in dialogue with parents on multilingual upbringing compared with professionals who hold a higher level of qualification. This result may be explained by the fact that professionals who have attained higher levels of education (e.g., a bachelor's degree) are more likely to take on a coordinating role in the ECEC service. In Flanders, leaders of services with more than 18 child places are required to hold at least a bachelor's degree (Opgroeien, 2021b). In their role as coordinators, these professionals are often the first point of contact for parents, for example at intake meetings, during conversations about the contract, during evaluation times, etc. Although they may not have as much contact with parents on a day-to-day basis, throughout the entire childcare period there are several set times or (formal) occasions when they engage in conversation with parents. Additionally, it might also be the case that those who are more highly qualified (with or without a coordinating role) are more likely to be specifically assigned to handle or take over certain tasks that transcend daily practice or that occur in more complex situations, such as with refugee families of families that need special care. Nevertheless, even when controlling for levels of qualification, the perceived support that has been given still matters with regard to engaging in dialogue with multilingual parents.

5.10 Limitations and future directions

Although our study responds to the need for research on CPD with a focus on multilingualism in ECEC (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018), it nevertheless has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The first limitation regarding CPD is that while we know how the professionals in our sample were given support about topics related to multilingualism (internally, externally, or both), we lack information about the specific content of the CPD, its context, and its duration. For example, we do not know whether "home language use" was specifically targeted as a subject matter in the CPD, and we have no insights into whether the CPD focused on skills, knowledge, attitudes, or on a combination of these. We are also missing details of reflection about and enactment of the received support. These are highlighted in the review by Romijn et al. (2021) as two important aspects in determining the effectiveness of CPD.

In addition, we have little information about the context of the ECEC services in our sample, making it difficult to make statements about how the transfer into practice was (or was not) supported by the management of the services. As a

result, it cannot be unambiguously explained why received support in our study is associated with engaging in dialogue with multilingual parents, but not with using the home language with multilingual children. More small-scale intervention studies would be necessary in order to fully understand how CPD concerning multilingualism may foster positive educational practices toward multilingual children and their parents. In particular, our findings could be supported and enriched by studies on the specific content of training designed to stimulate the purposive use of home language by both monolingual and multilingual professionals working in linguistically diverse ECEC contexts. This also applies to further research on the specific factors that allow an ECEC service with a predominantly monolingual discourse to evolve into more openness to multilingualism, and on how service leaders can build a supportive climate for this development. In contexts with increasing multilingualism, this seems to be all the more important. For example, Schalley et al. (2015) show that in Australia, increasing multilingualism is accompanied by assimilationist policies and monolingual discourses in society.

Another limitation of our study is related to the fact that the received support was a self-reported measurement and should therefore be considered as perceived support. Accordingly, caution is needed in interpreting the associations, as "practices" should be understood as "reported practices". We can nevertheless assume the participants answered truthfully, and we believe that any effect of social desirability was minimal, given the relatively low mean scores on both scales. Further studies could, however, include family ratings of professionals' multilingual support or observations of concrete practices to develop a more comprehensive picture of the effects of CPD interventions on multilingual practices.

Lastly, our study focuses on only one side of the CPD spectrum, specifically that of in-service training and support. However, as Norheim and Moser (2020) point out, little is also known about how teacher education programs and curricula prepare prospective early childhood professionals for working with families from different cultures. Therefore, further research could usefully explore the role of pre-service training and the ways in which in-service and pre-service can become more strongly connected and together contribute to the development of quality ECEC practice for multilingual families. Despite these limitations, our study is unique in that it combines (reported) practices in dealing with multilingual children and with multilingual parents in a relatively large sample, and in a context of complex multilingualism and high attendance of formal, regulated childcare. As underlined by Salem et al. (2020), valuing the home languages of

children should always be in concert with cooperation with their parents when creating quality, inclusive, and accessible ECEC for multilingual families. In this sense, we advocate that further research on supporting multilingual families in ECEC should aim for the inclusion of both perspectives (that of the children and that of the parents).

5.11 Conclusion

This study shows that in an ECEC context primarily oriented toward monolingualism, professionals who have been given support and those who were themselves raised as multilingual, exhibit a more positive approach to multilingual families. The former by being found to engage more in dialogue with multilingual parents, the latter by being found to use the families' home languages more often when interacting with multilingual children. These are important findings, given ECEC's key role in contributing to a more inclusive and equal society with equal opportunities for all families. Our research shows that if ECEC is to fulfil that role, it pays to provide professional support for early childhood practitioners on the topic of multilingualism, and to offer it in such a way that it combines internal and external CPD modalities.

5.12 References

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CHAPTER 6

CPD AND ECEC QUALITY: FINDINGS FROM A EUROPEAN SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW.

"We are able to see and see beyond the limitations and partialities of our ways of thinking only when they are brought into relief in exchanges with others who approach the same questions from different paths."
(James Tully, Dialogue, 2011)

This chapter is based on Peleman, B., Lazzari, A., Budginaitė, I., Siarova, H., Hauari, H., Peeters, J., & Cameron, C. (2018). Continuous professional development and ECEC quality: Findings from a European systematic literature review. *European Journal of Education*, *53*(1), 9-22.

6.1 Introduction: policy context

In response to recent demographic, economic and social challenges, early childhood education and care (ECEC) has moved up the European policy agenda (European Commission, 2011). Findings from recent studies carried out in Europe concur that participation in high quality ECEC services have long-lasting beneficial effects on children's overall development (Bennett et al., 2012) and can make a substantial contribution towards addressing social and cultural inequalities by fostering social cohesion (European Commission, 2014; Eurydice, 2009a, 2009b). Despite being a world leader in providing ECEC services, international reports have identified that more efforts needed to be made to increase the quality and accessibility of provision across EU Member States (European Commission, 2014; NESSE, 2009).

The purpose of education and social policies should be to ensure an equal and generalised access to ECEC services of high quality, facilitating a positive impact of attendance on children's learning and socialization experiences, especially in contexts of growing socio-cultural diversity (European Commission, 2011). In May 2011, the European Council concluded that, whilst considerable attention had been given to increasing the number of ECEC places over the last decade, generalised equitable access to high quality ECEC was now equally important if the EU 2020 benchmarks on reducing early school leaving and tackling poverty and social exclusion were to be met (Council of the European Union, 2011).

In this regard, the Council Conclusions also mention *'supporting the professionalization of ECEC staff, with an emphasis on the development of their competencies, qualifications and working conditions, and enhancing the prestige of the profession*' (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 6) as measures to improve the quality of ECEC provision. The European Commission DG Education and Culture responded to these conclusions by setting up a Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care in the context of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020). The Thematic Working Group, consisting of a group of representatives from 26 EU Member States and of a stakeholder group, developed a European Quality Framework (EQF) on ECEC that was released at the Presidency conference in Athens in June 2014 and officially launched by the DG Education and Culture at the 'Great start in life conference' in 2016. The EQF acknowledges the important role played by the ECEC workforce in enhancing the pedagogical quality of services for young children and improving their outcomes. The statements

encourage EU Member States to develop comprehensive training programmes for all staff employed in these services (e.g., preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers) and provide supportive conditions which create opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents (Bennett & Moss, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2012; Urban et al., 2011). Beyond the EU context, high-profile international organisations like the OECD and the International Labour Organisation have increasingly recognised the importance of continuous professional development (CDP) of early years staff and their working conditions as determinants of ECEC structural and process quality which, in turn, are linked to children's cognitive and non-cognitive attainment (International Labour Organisation, 2014; OECD, 2012a, 2012b).

However, whilst a broad consensus exists among researchers and policy-makers on the importance of investing in staff professionalization in order to increase the quality of educational and care practices in early childhood services, the processes and tools whereby practitioners' development can be promoted remain underexplored in international literature (Sheridan et al., 2009). Moreover, across EU Member States, there seems to be little investment in strong systems of continuous professional development (Peeters et al., 2016).

In the light of the current policy context where accountability for outcomes is increasingly high and resources for professional support are limited because of austerity in many EU countries, policy-makers are progressively relying on research evidence to provide relevant information to orient decision-making processes in the educational field. In this regard, the 'Evidence Informed Policy-making in Education in Europe' (EIPEE) Project's recommendations suggest increasing the use of systematic reviews of research in order to '*ensure complete, relevant, quality assured and accessible research evidence*' (Gough et al., 2011, p. 10). Such research evidence includes not only evaluation studies on which interventions work, but also practice-based research evidence about which interventions could work, for whom and in which contexts (Pawson et al., 2005). It has been argued that determining 'what works' by relying solely on the measurements of pre-defined outcomes may not necessarily provide the most valid form of evidence in the ECEC field (Vandenbroeck et al., 2012) in which multiple stakeholders are involved in decision-making processes at several levels (e.g. policy-makers, local administrators, practitioners, children, families and local communities). It is therefore important to look at both quantitative and qualitative studies.

6.2 Aim of the research

In 2014 and 2015, researchers of the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK), the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education in London and the Public Policy and Management Institute (Lithuania) jointly conducted a systematic literature review (Eurofound, 2015) on the impact of work conditions and continuous professional development (CDP) of the ECEC workforce on the quality of the services provided and the outcomes for children. The study was commissioned by Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, and aimed at supporting European decision makers in designing effective ECEC policies in their countries. The overarching goal was to explore links between continuous professional development (CPD), work conditions, staff-child interactions (process quality) and children's learning and socialising experiences and outcomes.

More specifically, its objectives were:

1. to investigate whether – and in which conditions – the investment in CPD initiatives and work conditions contributes to the improvement of practitioners' educational and care practices in ECEC settings;
2. to document the effects of CPD activities and work conditions on the everyday interactions between practitioners and children, as well as on children's learning and well-being;
3. to identify the features of CPD programmes and work conditions that are found to be more effective in relation to point 1 and 2.

In order to achieve these objectives, the studies analysed in the systematic review, which were published in several EU languages, included:

1. quantitative studies (RCTs, quasi experimental designs, controlled before and after interventions) examining the impact of CPD on ECEC quality (measured by rating scales), staff-child interaction (assessed through observation scales) and outcomes for children (standardised assessment of cognitive and social abilities);
2. qualitative studies exploring practitioners' views and experiences of continuous professional development and reflective accounts on their practices and on children's achievements;
3. mixed method studies, combining quantitative and qualitative elements.

An analysis of the findings emerging from the synthesis of quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies was then carried out in order to answer the research questions identified for the literature review.

6.3 Methodology and procedures

Systematic reviews of the literature are research projects that map, synthesise and critically evaluate the results of all existing studies within a particular field of study, circumscribed by clear hypotheses or clearly defined research questions (Gough et al., 2012). At every stage of the process, the researchers use standardised procedures that are previously encoded in a research protocol (systematic review protocol). In the case of the review we conducted – and with particular reference to the protocol developed for the review of qualitative literature –, the procedures adopted for the systematic analysis of study findings were as follows (Hauari et al., 2014):

1. Selecting criteria: the specific criteria determining which studies should be included in the analysis were jointly elaborated by the research team and referred to: a) date of publication (after 1991), b) geographical location (EU-28 Member States), c) the research design used (exclusively empirical studies), d) the subjects (educational staff and children aged 0–7 attending ECEC services), and e) the type of results reported in the publication (practitioners' perceptions, narrative accounts, case studies analysing good practices, observations and standardised testing, rating scale measurements, etc.);
2. Searching: exhaustive search and reproduction of all relevant information (published studies and 'grey' literature) on the subject under consideration via major international databases such as ASSIA, BEI, Child Data, ERIC, IBSS, PsycInfo, SCOPUS, Sociological Abstracts, and SSCI. In addition, for sources in languages other than English, we consulted country experts from the EU-28 Member States who searched national databases or specialized journals. Their involvement allowed for the search and inclusion of studies across all European research traditions and more evidence for this review;
3. Screening: systematic selection on the basis of previously-defined inclusion criteria (see point 1) of the studies to be included in the analysis (the screening was carried out in two stages – abstract screening and subsequent full text screening);

4. Mapping: mapping of existing literature from the analysis of the descriptive characteristics of each of the selected studies (objective research, methodological, selection of participants, characteristics of the CPD programme or work conditions studied);
5. Quality Assessment/Data Extraction: the assessment of the methodological quality of each of the selected studies used a grid that was specially structured to determine the degree of soundness with which they were given the perceptions of those involved and the degree of reliability with which the results were presented: for the textual extracts that were relevant for the analysis of the results of the studies we used an additional grid (complementary to the previous one) that allowed us to organise and systematise information from each study in descriptive categories that are typical of qualitative research.
6. Narrative synthesis: the results of the empirical studies which were assessed as sound, accurate and reliable were finally analysed in-depth by grouping significant text extracts in thematic categories and their discussion in narrative form (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The use of these procedures were elaborated by the research team on the basis of guidelines developed by the EPPI Centre for conducting systematic reviews in the social sciences. This made it possible to explain step by step the ways in which the study had 'answered' the research questions by means of a rigorous analysis that comprehensively mapped the existing evidence provided by the qualitative and quantitative literature published on this issue in Europe.

The main limitations were scarce primary empirical studies on the topic and a lack of comparability of the findings. For example, the contexts in which the studies were produced were often historically different in terms of the typology and processes of ECEC provision, making comparison and generalisation more difficult. Nevertheless, it was possible to gather the findings through a 'third-level synthesis', allowing for the juxtaposition of the results from quantitative and qualitative studies (Thomas et al., 2004).

6.4 Focus of this chapter

A full description of the methodology and the procedures used and an overview of the main results are documented elsewhere (Eurofound, 2015; Peeters & Peleman, 2017). Given the ample scope of the systematic review, in the present article, we focus on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative findings that

investigate the effects of CPD initiatives on the quality of the pedagogical practices of ECEC practitioners. In doing so, we not only try to provide policy relevant information on continuous professional development initiatives implemented in the ECEC field, but also to offer an explanatory analysis allowing for a contextualisation of the research findings.

In the systematic review, the term 'continuous professional development' was adopted to refer to all planned programmes of learning opportunities for those working in ECEC that were undertaken to complement, update and consolidate the professional knowledge and competence of individuals and teams working in those settings (Hauari et al., 2014).

In focusing on the effects of CPD initiatives on the quality of ECEC services, we are aware that 'quality' is a contested concept: there is no internationally agreed definition in ECEC services (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, '*quality is a relative concept based on values and beliefs, and defining quality should be a dynamic, continuous and democratic process*' (European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities, 1996, p. 11). In the systematic review, we therefore did not solely focus on quantitative studies that provide data on the impact of CPD initiatives on the quality of ECEC services, as measured by international validated rating scales. A very import additional element was the views of practitioners in order to address the political, ethical and thus relational dimension of ECEC practices. In this sense, we align with the 'Contesting Early Childhood' movement and its criticism of standardised and unquestioning views of 'quality' as driven by attaining high returns on investment and reducing social problems (Moss et al., 2016), thus narrowing ECEC down to a mere technical issue. This neglects the high potentiality of the democratic value of ECEC for social justice and equity (Moss, 2011). Hence, the relevant research synthesised in this review includes both quantitative and qualitative studies. In the latter, the 'effectiveness' of continuous professional development initiatives is evaluated in relation to practitioners' views and understandings. Moreover, by also looking for research findings published in languages other than English, we aimed to include 'alternative narratives' that shed a different light, away from the dominant discourse towards the story of '*democracy, experimentation and potentiality*' (Moss et al., 2016, p. 5).

6.5 Geographical distribution and characteristics of the studies

As a result of the search and screening procedures described above, 44 studies were included in the in-depth systematic literature review of the Eurofound study (2015). 30 were defined as qualitative/views studies, four of which were originally mixed-method studies. However, as a result of the quality appraisal, only the qualitative research findings of these studies were included in the review. 12 were impact studies and 2 were defined as mixed-method studies, of which both the qualitative and quantitative research findings were included in the review. Of those 44 studies, 39 focused on CPD, 4 on work conditions and 1 on both. Of all the studies on CPD (including the one study that focused on both CPD and working conditions), 29 were defined as qualitative studies, 10 as quantitative and 1 as a mixed method study. Figure 1 explains how we arrived at these figures.

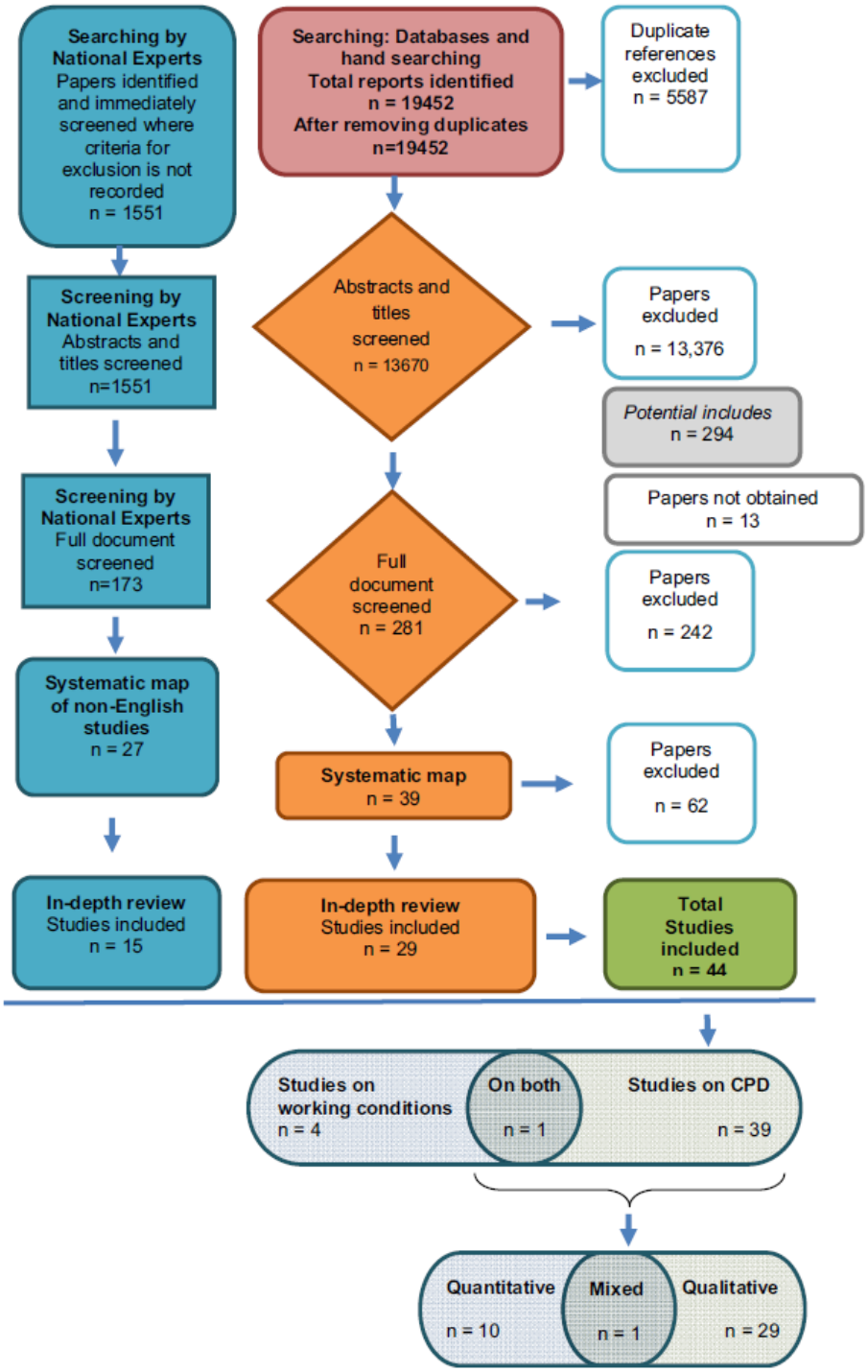
30 qualitative studies (Eurofound, 2015) reported on the link between CPD and ECEC quality, the results of which are discussed in this article. Seven were from the UK (Ang, 2012; Aubrey et al., 2012; Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; Jopling et al., 2013; Menmuir & Christie, 1999; Potter & Hodgson, 2007; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Five were from Portugal (Cardoso, 2011; Craveiro, 2007; Leal, 2011; Lino, 2005; Oliveira-Formosinho & Araújo, 2011). Five were from Ireland (Bleach, 2013; Hayes et al., 2013; McMillan et al., 2012; Share et al., 2011; SQW, 2012) and a further five from Sweden (Asplund Carlsson et al., 2008; Johansson et al., 2007; Rönnerman, 2003, 2008; Sheridan et al., 2013). Two were from Belgium (Peeters, 1993; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011). The remaining five studies were carried out in Croatia (Vujičić, 2008), Germany (Richter, 2012), Italy (Picchio et al., 2012), The Netherlands (Van Keulen, 2010) and Slovenia (Vonta et al., 2007).

Of these 30 qualitative studies, 12 were participative, using a combination of interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, reflective journals, participative observation and recordings of audio and video data related to pedagogical practices. Fifteen adopted an action-research approach in order to involve practitioners in the process of data collection and data analysis: findings were discussed and constructed with practitioners, mostly through collective planning and reporting sessions. The remaining three were descriptive case studies reporting on the effects of CPD initiatives on the knowledge and understandings of practitioners, as well as on pedagogical practice as observed by the researchers (Craveiro, 2007; Menmuir & Christie, 1999; Oliveira-Formosinho & Araújo, 2011).

Of the 14 impact studies (Eurofound, 2015), three focused on the impact of CPD on ECEC quality. The first was from Ireland (Hayes et al., 2013) and its mixed-method study is included under both qualitative and quantitative studies. It reported on the results of a 'cluster randomised trial', which is an experimental method whereby social units or clusters (Early Years services) are randomly allocated to intervention or control groups. The second study was from Sweden (Sheridan, 2001) and adopted an evaluation design with before and after measurement involving an experimental and a control group in order to assess the effectiveness of CPD interventions. The last study was from Belgium (Vandenbroeck et al., 2008; Vandenbroeck et al., 2014) and used a longitudinal design involving a before and after measurement to evaluate the impact of an intervention combining training and policy measures.

Since the present article focuses on the link between CPD and ECEC quality, 32 studies were selected, of which 29 were defined as views studies, two as impact studies and one as a mixed method study. Ten were published in another language than English: five in Portuguese (Cardoso, 2011; Craveiro, 2007; Leal, 2011; Lino, 2005; Peixoto, 2007), two in Swedish (Asplund Carlsson et al., 2008; Rönnerman, 2008) and the remaining three in Dutch (Peeters, 1993), German (Richter, 2012) and Slovenian (Vonta et al., 2007). We involved country experts in data extraction that was relevant for the in-depth review.

Figure 6.1: Flow diagram of the systematic literature review



6.6 Characteristics of the CPD interventions

All studies reported findings on the effects of training interventions that were integrated in ECEC practices through a combination of training sessions and follow-up activities in the settings. In particular, the 22 views studies and all three impact studies investigated integrated programmes in which training sessions were accompanied by coaching or supervision, thus providing practitioners with the opportunity to exchange reflections and receive feedback on practice. The many qualitative studies exploring CPD programmes accompanied by follow-up activities such as coaching, supervision and collective reflection are partly due to the fact that, in action-research, designs, revision and transformation of practices are integral parts of the research process which is carried out as a joint activity involving both practitioners and researchers. Hence, in this kind of research, the boundaries between the processes of CPD implementation and research investigation are less evident than in impact studies. Furthermore, most CPD initiatives reported in these views studies included in the in-depth synthesis refer to long-term programmes lasting from six months to one year (11 studies) or longer (13 studies). However, in six, the length of the CPD programme was not clearly specified. All three impact studies investigated the impact of long-term interventions lasting from one to two years.

6.7 Results

With regard to ECEC quality, most studies indicated that the main benefits of continuous professional development for practitioners concerned capability: greater pedagogical awareness, knowledge and sense of agency and pedagogical competence, i.e., the acquisition of new methodological skills linked to the improvement of practices in ECEC settings. Concerning the latter, two main areas were identified: a) the development, implementation and ongoing revision of the curriculum, and b) collegial (team) work, inter-professional collaboration and parents' engagement in decision-making processes.

6.7.1 Practitioners' knowledge, understanding and sense of agency

Effects of CPD initiatives on practitioners' knowledge, understanding and sense of agency were found at different levels: greater competence and sense of confidence, deeper reflectivity on practice – which sometimes implied deconstruction and re-conceptualisation of their professional role –, a change in

perspective on how children learn and make sense of experiences, a changed attitude towards parents and better planning and evaluation.

An overarching finding was that CPD improved participants' sense of confidence as practitioners and leaders in ECEC services (Ang, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013; Richter, 2012; Sheridan et al., 2013; SQW, 2012). Through the demands of the CPD programmes and the reflective tools, practitioners increased their pedagogical awareness and professional understandings, which, in turn, allowed them to strengthen their capacities and address areas for improvement (Ang, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013; Menmuir & Christie, 1999; Rönnerman, 2003; Vonta et al., 2007). For example, the study of Sheridan et al. (2013) on the effects of 'systematic quality work' in ECEC services in Iceland, Sweden and Norway reported that the knowledge gained by teachers through the analysis of pedagogical documentation and the systematic evaluation of educational practice made them more aware of their competence and the quality of their work. Such initiatives fostered the abilities of professionals to take into account multiple theoretical perspectives and to reflect critically on educational policies and curriculum intentions.

A crucial aspect of CPD provision in influencing practitioners' greater pedagogical awareness and deeper reflectivity was the active involvement of participants in transformative processes to improve educational practices in ECEC settings. By engaging in research-based enquiry, practitioners can critically explore the link between theory and practice in their everyday work and this enables them to identify and address the gaps between intended pedagogical principles and practices (Johansson et al., 2007; Lino, 2005; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Furthermore, involving them in a process of change where they can be 'actors of change' not only impacts their practical knowledge, but also their professional attitudes and understandings (Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011; Rönnerman, 2003, 2008). One of the most salient effects of professional development, especially when accompanied by guidance, is the empowerment of practitioners to question taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie their practices. Rönnerman (2003, p. 17) found that '*by letting the teachers find their own questions and by letting the question guide them in searching for new knowledge about their practices, the teachers retain authority over their improvement of practices*' and that this, in turn, strengthened their professional competences. Several studies also found that taking part in CPD led practitioners to reconceptualise their role as educators (Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; McMillan et al., 2012; Potter & Hodgson, 2007; Rönnerman, 2003; Sheridan et al., 2013; Vujičić, 2008; Wood & Bennett, 2000).

In parallel to rethinking their own role, practitioners also began to reconceptualise children as protagonists of their own learning (Cardoso, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2013). In this sense, the study by Cardoso (2011) on the effects of a CPD programme carried out in a community ECEC centre through an action-research process highlighted how practitioners changed their views of the children: from spectators, they became participants. This implied a change in the organization of the educational environment (space and time) within the setting. How practitioners planned and assessed their practice also changed, reflecting a shift towards an approach focused on listening to children. Play was reconceptualised from something that children did 'naturally' (without the involvement of adults) to something that enabled them to intervene directly in the everyday pedagogy and support their possibilities to invent and find out about the world (Cardoso, 2011).

Moreover, we found that engaging in practice-based research and professional development activities in highly socio-culturally diverse ECEC contexts could lead practitioners not only to refocus on children's needs and potential, but also to reconceptualise their perceived role of parental involvement. The Portuguese study evaluating the effects of a praxeological research[11] CPD intervention reported that practitioners started to view '*listening to children as an important dimension that supported activity and projects*' and '*listening to parents as a strategy to develop daily life in the classroom in a pluralist way*' (Oliveira-Formosinho & Araújo, 2011, p. 8). Similarly, findings from participatory action-research carried out in Flanders (Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011, p. 67) highlighted that practitioners became progressively '*more interested in the way parents educate their young children at home and in questioning how the childcare centre could take on some of the practices of the parents*'. Through these processes, children were increasingly considered as active citizens who could decide upon important aspects of the daily life in the childcare centre.

An analysis of practitioner perspectives showed that the adoption of particular CPD tools had contributed to improving the quality of their practice. For example, tools that sustained practitioners' reflection were identified in several studies as a key element in a cycle that usually included observation, documentation, action

[11] A research paradigm in which a deep reflection on power and ethics is put at the foreground of the participatory relationship with collaborators. It intends for social and political transformation. Oliveira-Formosinho, J., & Formosinho, J. (2012). Praxeological research in early childhood: a contribution to a social science of the social. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *20*(4), 471-476.

and review. Ang's (2012) study highlighted the use of 'journals' as a specific aspect of the training which was found particularly useful and on which centre leaders continued to draw in their work with partner agencies in order to facilitate inter-professional work. Similarly, the 'narrative dossier' used as a CPD tool in the municipal day-care centre of Pistoia (Italy) contributed to the enhancement of practitioners' competence in analysing and improving the quality of children's everyday experiences in early childhood settings by sharing observations with colleagues and parents (Picchio et al., 2012). Teachers' statements confirmed that the use of written documentation of children's experiences within the setting (weekly and monthly accounts) allowed them '*to grasp more fully the aspects of continuity and change*' underlying the ongoing development of learning interactions occurring in the centre and '*to re-direct educational practices*' more responsively (Picchio et al., 2012, p. 164). In Sheridan's (2001) impact study, the use of a specific tool called a 'competence development intervention' was evaluated in 20 Swedish preschool units. It adopted the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)[12] as a tool to reflect on and improve practices. The 'Model of Competence Development' evaluated in the study consisted of a combination of lectures, group reflection and pedagogical guidance (ECERS self-evaluation, reflective diaries and analysis of video-documentation). The evaluation found that the development work led to better quality in eight of the nine preschool units in the intervention group.

6.7.2 Curriculum development, implementation and innovation

The synthesis of qualitative study findings revealed that context-based CPD initiatives combining pedagogy and supervision 'on the job' were more successful in enhancing the quality of ECEC settings than traditional 'one off' training courses, or where learning was conceived as an individual process based on acquiring theoretical foundations and discrete skills with no integration in the specific operational contexts. More specifically, the analysis revealed that the systematic use of methodological tools such as video-observation and documentation of children's experiences, action plans, diaries, portfolios and analytical grids supported educational practices that were more responsive to children's needs, potentialities and learning strategies. Potter and Hodgson (2007) identified the fact that practitioners began to engage systematically in a critical reflection on their daily practice which was greatly facilitated by the use of video clips and work-based supervision. In the studies examined, videotapes

[12] http://ersfpg.unc.edu/early-childhood-environment-rating-scale-ecers-r

were also used to observe and/or document children-initiated activities (Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; Sheridan et al., 2013). In this sense, the main effect of action-research-driven CPD programmes that make use of such tools is to elicit practitioners' intentionality that leads to a more meaningful planning, implementation and evaluation of educational initiatives based on children's needs rather than on pre-determined choices made by adults (Bleach, 2013). For example, Oliveira-Formosinho and Araújo (2011, p. 8) reported that '*the development of systematic observations that identified children's interest and motivations allowed for educational planning that departed from children and not from an abstract child*'. In this case, educators' awareness of the importance of listening to children and their enhanced competence in observation strategies allowed them to apply educational practices that were more supportive of children's agency in experiential learning situations.

Along this line, the elaboration of more responsive educational strategies to enhance children's learning were highlighted as one of the main effects of CPD in 15 studies (Asplund Carlsson et al., 2008; Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; Cardoso, 2011; Hayes et al., 2013; Johansson et al., 2007; Jopling et al., 2013; Leal, 2011; McMillan et al., 2012; Picchio et al., 2012; Richter, 2012; Rönnerman, 2003, 2008; Share et al., 2011; SQW, 2012; Vujičić, 2008). As illustrated in the action-research studies conducted by Rönnerman (2003, 2008), following the CPD intervention, preschool teachers deliberately shifted their didactic approach by trying to find out what the children knew before planning an activity. Daily work was no longer pre-planned only, but was also open to listening to children's needs and ideas that arose during the day. Teachers asked the children and used the information to plan new themes, giving children an active role in the planning of, for example, thematic work. One teacher reflected on the change in the practice in her setting in these terms:

> '*You have been more sensitive about the children's' interests. Take their competence as a departure and spin on to it. You do not stop and stay within your frames anymore; you go a step further and find out things you might not have planned. You don't have to stick with your plans, if the child comes up with questions you find out the answers together with him/her.*' (Rönnerman, 2003, p. 16).

6.7.3 Collaborative practices

As might be expected with CPD initiatives that are workplace-based and focused on practitioner learning in dialogue with colleagues, a clear area of impact was on collegiality or teamwork, working with parents and inter-professional collaboration.

The positive effects of CPD initiatives on practitioners' teamwork were reported in 13 studies (Bleach, 2013; Craveiro, 2007; Hayes et al., 2013; McMillan et al., 2012; Picchio et al., 2012; Rönnerman, 2003, 2008; Share et al., 2011; SQW, 2012; Van Keulen, 2010; Vonta et al., 2007; Vujičić, 2008; Wood & Bennett, 2000). For example, Rönnerman (2003, p. 17) noted that keeping work teams together during CPD training had '*strengthened them as a group and gave them a common language to explain things'*. Through the work in teams carried out during CPD activities, practitioners gained the confidence to both '*give away our best ideas instead of keeping them to ourselves*' - as one pedagogue said - and to voice their opinions in staff meetings more readily Rönnerman (2003, p. 17). One particular method of strengthening team work that was considered valuable by Van Keulen (2010) was paired work with colleagues as 'critical friends' which enabled each pair to reflect, carry out assignments and give each other feedback on the learning process. Van Keulen (2010) reported that asking critical questions during the action research CPD encouraged practitioners, the team and the organisation as a whole to phrase questions about practice: '*What do I think?*; '*Why do I act the way I do?*; '*Who benefits?*; '*How does the team deal with parents that do not live up to our ideals?*; and '*With which parents has the organization had insufficient or no contact over the past period, and how come?*' This was considered productive at both a personal and a team level (Van Keulen, 2010, p. 109). This study concluded that, in The Netherlands, giving sufficient attention to developing teamwork discussion and exchange was key for creating sustainable change in ECEC services. Research findings, however, also shed light on the difficulties of sustaining changes in teamwork at institutional level, especially in settings where not all practitioners had participated in the CPD (Picchio et al., 2012) and where the amount of non-contact time granted to practitioners for collegial meeting was inadequate to sustain collective reflection (SQW, 2012).

Seven studies reported that CPD initiatives had a positive impact on working with parents (Hayes et al., 2013; Peeters, 1993; Rönnerman, 2003; Share et al., 2011; SQW, 2012; Van Keulen, 2010; Vujičić, 2008). For example, the study conducted by Share et al. (2011) found that practitioners' participation in the 'Pen Green

Training on Involving Parents in their Children Learning' led to a more intensive and more confident dialogue with parents and a more welcoming approach, '*generally fostering a spirit of openness with parents*' (Share et al., 2011, p. 58). Staff training had also helped parents to trust the practitioners and to give them confidence to '*ask questions about their child's learning*' (Share et al., 2011, p. 89). Conversely, dialogue with trained practitioners gave the parents confidence in their own parenting practices and new knowledge about how to name and value what the children were doing (Share et al., 2011). Rönnerman (2003) and Van Keulen (2010) both reported that greater practitioner confidence in working with parents led to parents' greater respect for staff. Vujičić (2008) found a higher level of parental engagement as a result of action research CPD, particularly in practical support such as '*bringing the material, sawing the cupboard and painting the walls*' (Vujičić, 2008, n.p.). Similarly, Peeters (1993) highlighted that at the end of the quality improvement process there was a noticeable increase in parental participation in childcare centres. Get-together events started to take place regularly and parent evenings began to be organised around a set theme (Peeters, 1993). The mixed method evaluation study conducted by Hayes et al. (2013) also reported greater trust and involvement of parents in those services where CPD interventions were carried out: these settings displayed fewer instances of very low child attendance when compared to control services (Hayes et al., 2013). With regard to parents, the study by Vandenbroeck et al. (2008; 2014) sheds light on structural quality aspects such as availability, access and enrolment. Over a 5-year period, new municipal policies were developed with financial incentives to enhance the accessibility of childcare to children from low-income families, single parent families and ethnic minority families. In addition, a CPD programme was set up with monthly training sessions with a trainer and coaching activities carried out within inter-professional exchanges with social and welfare workers. The findings showed that centre directors' awareness of social priority criteria changed, resulting in a significant increase in the enrolment of children from single parent and ethnic minority families whereas no significant effects could be found in the enrolment of children from low-income families. In addition, inequality in relation to the availability of childcare places remained. The results support the hypothesis that policy measures, combined with training and ongoing support, can influence inequalities in enrolment rates.

Finally, three studies showed that the positive effects of CPD initiatives on collaborative practices could extend beyond the boundaries of ECEC institutions, creating the conditions for fostering inter-professional learning and networking across social and health services operating in neighbourhoods (Ang, 2012; Bleach, 2013; SQW, 2012). For example, Ang's (2012) evaluation of a CPD

programme on leadership in children's centres found that the training led to more effective partnerships with colleagues from different professional backgrounds. This had come about partly by establishing a centre's vision and partly by the realisation that a more integrated strategy was needed in order to make a difference for children and families living in the local community. In this perspective, activating multi-disciplinary training became the necessary precondition for co-creating integrated practices at local levels (Ang, 2012). In other cases where participatory training initiatives brought together practitioners from a number of settings, networking and dialogue across settings helped to disseminate good practices and provided opportunities for reflection through peer exchange (Bleach, 2013; SQW, 2012).

6.8 Conclusions

In the light of the analysis of research findings synthesised so far, it can be concluded that CPD interventions that are integrated in the ECEC centre's practice with a feedback component are the most effective in terms of lasting impact on practitioners' learning, development and the quality of their practices. Long-term CPD interventions that are integrated in practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, produce positive impacts in very different contexts. The impact appears to hold both in countries where there is well established ECEC provision and high staff qualification requirements and in those with a low level of qualification entry requirements for ECEC practice.

The findings of the reviewed studies showed that taking part in CPD activities increased practitioners' pedagogical awareness and professional understandings and deepened their capacity for and practice of reflectivity, enabling them to strengthen their capabilities and address areas for improvement in their everyday work in ECEC settings. Several studies found that by taking part in participative CPD, practitioners reconceptualised their role as educators: they began to see children as protagonists of their own learning. Research findings also stressed that participatory and reflective CPD initiatives carried out in highly socio-culturally diverse ECEC contexts could lead practitioners to reconsider the role of parental involvement by provoking interest in the way parents educated their children at home and by questioning how these parenting practices could be adopted and included in the ECEC centres. The elaboration of more responsive educational strategies for enhancing children's learning, as well as of more coherent ways to develop, implement and evaluate the curriculum was highlighted as one of the main effects of CPD on practitioners' practices. The

reviewed studies also indicated that workplace-based CPD had a wider effect on collegiality, team work and inter-professional collaboration, as it contributed to strengthening the team of educators as a group by valuing their diverse competences and expertise.

Finally, our review also made it possible to draw indications of what could be critical success factors in determining a positive impact of CPD programmes on the improvement of pedagogical practices and hence on the quality of ECEC settings. First, CPD provision must be embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework or curriculum that build upon research and address local needs. Secondly, CPD initiatives should be grounded in an active involvement of practitioners in the transformative process for the improvement of educational practices within ECEC settings. Third, CPD needs to be focused on practitioners learning in practice, in dialogue with colleagues and parents and, in order to maximise the effectiveness of CPD practice, a mentor or coach should be available during ECEC staff childfree hours. Furthermore, it emerged from the systematic literature review that a dialogic engagement of researchers and ECEC professional in practice-based enquiry or action-research projects could sustain a joint reflection on the links between theory and practice. This could drive transformational change in the field of ECEC by allowing practitioners to critically explore their everyday work in order to improve their pedagogy and academics to draw attention to those issues that are relevant for the actors in the field (professionals, children and families). The cycle of observing, planning, acting, documenting and reflecting that is used in practice-based enquiry and action research can provide the structure to implement curricula that are focused on children's learning potentialities rather than on pre-determined outcomes.

In this sense, participatory and practice-based research studies could contribute not only to raise the quality of early childhood services through the dissemination and exchange of good practice, but also to raise the status of ECEC by spreading a local 'culture of childhood' and supporting policy-advocacy.

6.9 References

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CHAPTER 7

SUPPORTING CHILDCARE PROFESSIONALS IN APPROACHING MULTILINGUALISM.

" While we are up we are marching
Up, where we want to go
While we're alive we are lightning
lighting the search to grow
It's been a side of you and me."
(Amongster, 'We are lightning', from *Trust yourself to the water,* 2016*)*

This chapter is based on Peleman, B., Hupia, H. & Bergeron-Morin, L. (2023). Supporting childcare professionals in approaching multilingualism: insights from a collaborative process for professional development. *Early Years, 43(3):* 669-682.

7.1 Introduction

Nowadays, a large number of children grow up in social contexts where more than one language is used. As a result of migration and globalization, the language diversity of children in European countries has steadily increased over the last decades, leading to a changed linguistic landscape within educational settings throughout Europe (Kirsch, 2021). Hence, professionals working with infants and toddlers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) may encounter a variety of home languages on a daily basis (Duarte & Kirsch, 2020), which adds to the complexity already inherent to their pedagogical work. It has been shown that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) can their competencies in promoting the language development of multilingual children and in establishing partnerships with multilingual parents (Romijn et al., 2021).

The present study explores a collaborative process that led to the development of a toolkit aimed at supporting tutors (e.g. pedagogical coaches, trainers) in facilitating reflection with ECEC teams. The study took place in the Flemish Community of Belgium, with ECEC services for 0–3 year-old children (childcare).

7.1.1 Growing up with multiple languages

For language development, the first years of a child's life are crucial. During this formational period, infants develop the foundation of their linguistic and social skills through interactions with caregivers and others (Smidt, 2016; Sullivan, 2011). Opportunities for infants and toddlers to engage in high-quality interactions are therefore paramount in fostering language development outcomes (Hoff, 2006; Zauche et al., 2016). For children growing up in an environment where more than one language is used, frequent high-quality interactions in all those different languages become even more important. It is now well established that children are intrinsically able to acquire different languages in their early childhood, through early and frequent input in all languages, without negative consequences on their development (De Houwer, 2020; Montrul, 2022). There is a strong consensus that infants and toddlers, when learning an additional language, build on their home language skills and that it is beneficial to actively support those skills through their ECEC journey (Bialystok, 2018; De Houwer, 2020). Recognizing, supporting and maintaining home language(s) through the ECEC period (and beyond) are thus even more crucial than the age-of-onset of the additional language (Smolander et al., 2021). It is also essential to acknowledge that there are many trajectories towards

multilingualism. As (Navracsics, 2022, p. 32) points out: '*The "road to success" of becoming multilingual in early childhood depends on a wide range of factors, the interactions of those factors, and the unique and particular individual child. Hence, the path to childhood multilingualism may not be 'one size fits all', with great individual differences among multilingually developing children harnessed in their cognitive and linguistic assets.'* Indeed, 'the' multilingual child does not exist. Moreover, the social contexts in which a child lives, the interactions that take place in these contexts and the socio-political status of the languages used (Montrul, 2022) have an important influence on multilingual children's language development.

7.1.2 Multilingualism in ECEC: challenges and perspectives for professionals

For an increasing number of infants and toddlers, formally organized childcare is the first context where they need to navigate with an additional language. As such, the role of professionals working in childcare is of utmost importance in creating a stimulating and rich environment in which language development of multilingual children is fostered and partnerships with parents are established (Romijn et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2020). In those multilingual contexts, ECEC professionals are challenged in their pedagogical role towards multilingual children and multilingual parents, but also in their collaboration with colleagues.

With regard to multilingual infants and toddlers, ECEC professionals are committed to creating high-quality meaningful interactions that promote the official institutional language while also valuing, recognizing and supporting the home language(s). As described before, creating space for home languages in ECEC does not jeopardize the institutional language development, but can actually contribute to it (e.g. Larson et al., 2020). A focus on language development obviously cannot be detached from supporting young children's socioemotional development and well-being, as they are inextricably intertwined. This has been documented through studies showing how multilingual children benefit more from high-quality language support when it is anchored in strong emotional support (e.g. Willard et al., 2021).

With regard to multilingual parents, ECEC professionals should provide a welcoming environment and create reciprocal partnerships in which the multilingual upbringing of the child is shared and discussed. In ECEC contexts marked by linguistic and cultural diversity, establishing such a collaboration is

challenging, as professionals often do not share a common language or culture with the parents (Aghallaj et al., 2020).

Within the team, ECEC professionals must negotiate their visions and practices with their colleagues. ECEC teams may be culturally and linguistically diverse in their composition, but also in beliefs and convictions held by individual team members about multilingualism, language development and collaboration with parents.

It is thus no surprise that professionals often feel uncertain and inexperienced about working in linguistically diverse ECEC contexts (Chan, 2011; Michel & Kuiken, 2014). Moreover, it has been argued that ECEC professionals often lack specific knowledge about early multilingualism (e.g. Sullivan, 2011).

7.1.3 Continuous professional development for ECEC professionals

It is now well established that engaging ECEC professionals in processes of continuous professional development (CPD) can substantially improve the competencies and self-efficacy of ECEC staff and the quality of pedagogical practices in ECEC (Egert et al., 2018; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017). In order for CPD to be successful, however, specific points of attention need to be addressed. A European systematic literature review on ECEC staff working conditions and CPD (Eurofound, 2015) highlighted three critical success factors for a positive impact on the improvement of pedagogical practices and on the quality of ECEC settings. According to that study, CPD provision must first be embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework or curriculum that builds on research and responds to local needs. Second, CPD initiatives should actively involve practitioners in processes of change and improvement of educational practices within ECEC settings. Third, CPD should aim to ensure that professionals' learning is embedded into their practice, in dialogue with colleagues and parents. To maximize the effectiveness of CPD in this regard, a mentor or coach should be available during childfree hours of ECEC staff.

Here, fostering reflection among professionals is paramount, and the use of specific tools to support this is highly recommended (Eurofound, 2015; Peleman et al., 2018). In addition, research points out that combining an array of different delivery modes in a CPD trajectory may yield greater impact on professional practice than focusing on only one delivery mode (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Romijn et al., 2021). These different delivery methods allow reflection,

experimentation in a real work context and the provision of evidence-based knowledge to be provided in a combined way (Larson et al., 2020). Knowledge of language development is considered an essential factor in the implementation of multilingual strategies, specifically with regard to working in multilingual ECEC contexts (Young & Mary, 2021). Up-to-date knowledge is also necessary to challenge prevailing beliefs about multilingualism and to provide a solid basis for team discussions, as well as for dialogue with multilingual parents (Ragnarsdóttir, 2021).

The importance of mapping the participants' baseline situation is also highlighted (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023). This allows for better consideration of the current situation in which ECEC professionals find themselves, their previous experiences, their questions and their needs. Moreover, a good analysis of the baseline situation gives professionals more ownership of their own pathway, which appears to be conducive to achieving specific CPD goals (Portner, 2012; Zaslow et al., 2010). To date, however, still little is known about the specific needs of ECEC professionals in terms of knowledge and reflection on working with multilingual infants and toddlers, as studies overwhelmingly focus on older children (Elek et al., 2022).

Moreover, research conducted in recent years on CPD in ECEC has shown that the focus is mainly on inclusion and diversity in a broad sense, missing specific attention to multilingualism (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019). Furthermore, much research on multilingualism in ECEC comes from bilingual contexts, often from the US and Canada (e.g. Bialystok, 2018), which does not always match the complex linguistic and cultural realities in Europe. This calls for a need to examine and to respond to the professional development needs of ECEC professionals in working with emergent multilingual children and their families.

7.1.4 The present study

The Flemish Community in Belgium represents a particular context, both in terms of the linguistic situation and the organization of the ECEC system. There are three official languages in Belgium (French, Flemish/Dutch and German) and three corresponding official communities. Consequently, there is one official and institutional language within each community. At the same time, as is the case elsewhere in Europe, linguistic diversity is large and still growing. For instance, for 29.4% of the children born in the Flemish Community in 2021, the language between mother and child is not Dutch. In large cities, such as Antwerp and

Brussels, more than half of the 0–5 year-olds have home languages other than Dutch (Opgroeien, 2022).

In each linguistic community, ECEC is organized as a split system, with childcare services for the youngest children (0 to 3 years old) and pre-primary educational services for children from 2.5 to 6 years old. The two sectors are administered by separate ministries and different minimum qualification requirements apply to professionals, with lower standards for childcare professionals. Over the years, there has been a huge investment in creating a network of pedagogical coaches to support quality in childcare. Pedagogical guidance is now enshrined in childcare legislation, which means that every childcare organizer is obliged to provide pedagogical support for team members.

Despite the multilingual reality of Flanders, the childcare sector consists mainly of Dutch-speaking providers and staff. The recognition and valorisation of home language(s) within ECEC (and schools) is still scarce, with a prevailing monolingual mindset that implicitly regards multilingualism as a problem to overcome, rather than a condition for learning (Vandenbroeck, 2017).

With regard to childcare in Flanders, a curriculum (*Pedagogische Raamwerk*) has been implemented since 2016. This pedagogical framework highlights the importance of quality interactions with children, to foster both emotional and educational support, and it also promotes partnership with parents, stressing respect for diversity and multilingualism. A large baseline study, however, showed that the quality of interactions in Flemish childcare is rather low and that both emotional and educational support (in particular the dimensions related to language support) is significantly lower in groups with more children with different home languages (Hulpia et al., 2016). In response to this, a four-year inter-university project on promoting early multilingualism in childhood and childcare ('PRO-M', 2018–2022) was established. The PRO-M project emphasized the combination and integration of research and valorisation and, as such, provided opportunities for developing CPD materials for childcare professionals, which is the subject of the present article.

A co-constructive process, involving a group of 29 tutors, i.e. professionals with a supportive or coaching role in childcare, was conducted. The aim of this process was twofold: 1) developing a toolkit with an array of coaching tools to foster reflection among childcare professionals about their pedagogical practices towards multilingual children and parents in order to improve them; 2) gaining a better understanding of key elements in a professional development trajectory

on early multilingualism in childcare. The present article shares experiences and insights from the participants about the co-constructive process in an attempt to clarify how these goals have been addressed and what can be learned from the process.

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Participants

A group of 29 participants with a supportive function in childcare – hereafter referred to as 'tutors' - joined forces in a collaborative process. Of these tutors, 14 were pedagogical coaches (either employed within a childcare service or an external support organization), five were coordinators of a childcare service, five were part of the management staff of four umbrella organizations that provide childcare, three were Initial Professional Education (IPE) teachers, one was a speech and language therapist, and one was an intern (student of the Bachelor program on 'Pedagogy of the Young Child', which focusses on pedagogical coaching).

The tutors voluntarily participated in the project and were recruited from the stakeholder group overseeing the broader PRO-M project. Although some of them knew each other, none of the participating tutors worked together professionally in the same setting. All tutors were involved in the professional development of practitioners working in childcare (0–3). Their knowledge and experience in coaching on multilingualism in the early years, however, varied. Some coaches have focused in recent years specifically on the topic of early childhood multilingualism, while it was still a non-explored and complex topic for others. Considering their commitment to the PRO-M stakeholder group, these tutors were all highly motivated to contribute to the co-constructive process of developing a toolkit.

Informed consent was obtained from all tutors before data collection in each phase of the co-constructive process. During the process, deliberate measures were taken to treat all data in an anonymized manner.

7.2.2 Description of the co-constructive process

The co-constructive process of developing the toolkit lasted from October 2019 to May 2021. The methodology underpinning the process was inspired by the methodology of design-based research (DBR). DBR is a research approach

situated in real educational contexts that focuses on designing and testing an intervention through several iterative cycles, emerging from a partnership between researchers and practitioners. As such, it allows for a gradual implementation of the intervention by documenting feedback from testing cycles and repeatedly making adjustments to what is being developed (McKenney & Reeves, 2018).

The process was facilitated by two researchers (the first and second author of this article) and led to the design of a toolkit, through five phases. Each phase consisted of back-and-forth iterative exchanges between the two researchers, the tutors and the settings where the tools were tested:

(1) Analyzing the baseline situation. The participating tutors and researchers defined the needs of childcare professionals working in multilingual contexts as well as their own needs as tutors, related to supporting childcare professionals. More precisely, two questions were central to this need analysis: 1) What is resonating in childcare about multilingualism, in terms of beliefs, practices, questions? 2) Which aspects should be considered when developing CPD for childcare professionals working with 0-3 years children?

(2) Developing draft versions of the toolkit. Taking into account evidence-based knowledge on early multilingualism, critical factors for effective CPD and the results of the analysis of the baseline situation, the two researchers developed a first draft of a reflective toolkit, which was submitted to the 29 tutors. Feedback on this first draft was gathered and incorporated into a second draft version. Through a similar process, a third and a fourth draft were produced. The researchers also discussed and prepared together with the tutors the implementation of the testing phase and provided templates for the tutors to document their experiences by testing the toolkit in practice.

(3) Testing the toolkit. Twelve tutors from the development group tested the toolkit. This represented a variety of contexts (e.g. group-based childcare and family day care; urban and rural areas; in-service as well as preservice training). During the testing phase, the researchers organized two online supervision moments where the tutors exchanged and reflected on their experiences. Also, one researcher consulted tutors individually to examine their experiences and to discuss questions or

difficulties. The testing phase lasted 9 months and took place during the COVID- 19 pandemic. Hence, some initial testing had to be rescheduled and redesigned from real-life to online meetings.

(4) Designing a final version of the toolkit. Based on all received feedback from the testing phase, the toolkit was again adapted by the two researchers. The final version consists of five parts: 1) a manual; 2) basic texts on state-of-the-art knowledge on the topic of multilingualism in early childhood and the pedagogical principles in working with multilingual babies and toddlers, parents and the team; 3) a selection of interesting 'must read' articles for tutors seeking additional information on multilingualism in the early years; 4) an array of tools to encourage reflection on language policy and pedagogical quality in childcare in multilingual contexts (e.g. reflecting from video fragments or from cases), from which tutors can autonomously tailor a CPD-path, based on the specific context of the childcare services and the professionals they are supporting; 5) reflection exercises for the tutors themselves. More details about the toolkit can be found online (http://reflectiewaaier.vbjk.be).

(5) Disseminating and implementing the toolkit. A plan was co-designed with the tutors (and consequently executed) consisting of different modalities to further disseminate the toolkit: a webinar, a train-the-trainer course, several contributions to scientific and professional conferences, website publications, articles for pedagogical journals, professional learning community.

7.2.3 Data collection during each phase

Table 7.1 presents an overview of how data collection was performed in each of the five phases.

Table 7.1 Data collection during each phase of the co-constructive process.

Phases	Data
Phase 1: Analyzing the baseline situation	Two group meetings of 2h30 (8 participants each). Detailed reports of meetings.
Phase 2: Developing draft versions of the toolkit	One group meeting (14 participants) and individual follow-up with all 29 participants (face to face, online meetings, e-mails and phone calls). Report of group meeting, notes from individual exchanges and compilation of written feedback and communication.
Phase 3: Testing the toolkit	Individual conversations with the 12 testers. Detailed reports of each exchange.
Phase 4: Final design of the reflective toolkit	11 online semi-structured interviews with 14 tutors (3 double interviews, 8 individual interviews) were conducted by the researchers in order to: 1) receive final feedback on the toolkit; 2) evaluate the overall development process; 3) discuss the implementation and dissemination. Recordings and transcriptions of each interview.
Phase 5: Dissemination and implementation	

7.2.4 Data analysis

Due to the exploratory and practice-based nature of the study, an inductive qualitative analysis was performed, based on themes emerging from a triangulation of the different data sources. The first author went through all compiled data to first identify recurrent themes. Then, an iterative categorisation process was carried out with the second and third author to refine themes, in

terms of relevance, productivity and coherence (Miles & Huberman, 2003). Finally, all themes were reviewed in order to highlight specific elements related to working with multilingual infants and toddlers.

7.3 Findings

This section presents the main findings from the tutors' experiences throughout the co-constructive process that resulted in the development of a reflection toolkit aimed at supporting childcare professionals to work with multilingual infants, toddlers, and their parents. Findings are presented based on five themes that emerged from the data analysis: breaking the silence, offering an array of possibilities, expanding the knowledge base, valorising the role of the tutor, and highlighting the role of innovative and collaborative projects.

7.3.1 Breaking the silence

During phase 1, the tutors acknowledged that multilingualism was not a priority topic for the childcare professionals. This was a counter-intuitive finding, considering the fact that most of the childcare centres supported by the tutors were characterized by a multilingual reality. As one tutor pointed out: '*There are many multilingual children in our services, everyone is aware of that; but the subject was never really taken to heart. Small practical arrangements, such as a "welcome" sign in all languages, were already being made, but there was no team reflection on the subject*'. Overall, it appeared that there was little discussion or reflection on multilingualism in the childcare teams, and although many facilities did have a language policy, multilingualism was often not part of it. According to the tutors, this consequently leaves many deep-rooted beliefs and misconceptions about multilingualism undiscussed or silenced.

Some of the tutors also mentioned that in current CPD trajectories in childcare, limited attention is paid to topics, such as 'language' and 'multilingualism', to the benefit of more 'urgent' or 'pressing' topics such as the COVID-pandemic or the security and physical wellbeing of birth to 3-year-olds. '*There are so many topics and so little time*,' was a sigh that often came up throughout the interviews. Other tutors highlighted that there is sometimes only a need for in-service support on language after a negative evaluation by the governmental inspection agency. However essential, this leaves little room for comprehensive attention to the quality of educational support, a vision of multilingualism and partnership with parents.

These circumstances are not an ideal basis for processes of professional development and did not make it easy for tutors to initiate dialogue about multilingualism in some services and teams. Therefore, specific low-key instruments were included in the toolkit to make it easier for professionals to reflect on and improve their multilingual policies, practices and beliefs, including videos, case study descriptions, vignettes and photos.

7.3.2 Offering an array of possibilities

The analysis of the baseline situation revealed that there was a great variety in how different childcare centres approached multilingualism, but also in learning styles, experiences and knowledge of childcare staff. Moreover, opportunities for professional support are not consistent across childcare centres as these centres vary in size, administration and geographical region. Consequently, this complexity and the different needs that emerge from it, stressed the importance of developing a toolkit with an array of possible exercises and methods to stimulate reflection and action on multilingualism, instead of one single predefined tool. There indeed seemed to be no one-size-fits-all method to working with a variety of childcare professionals in a variety of contexts. Moreover, according to the tutors, if a toolkit is too much of a cohesive whole that has to be read in its entirety before using it, it loses much of its ability to be deployed flexibly. As one tutor said, '*For me, it was very important that I could disassemble the toolkit completely, like, "Ah, yes, I can use three statements here and do those exercises there and then that video and, ok, I can do my own thing with this".*'

The possibility of breaking down the content of the toolkit into small manageable chunks so that it can be introduced incrementally to childcare professionals has proved very fruitful, not only for the tutors themselves but also for the childcare professionals, as another tutor stated: '*By not offering large clusters at once, childcare professionals learn more.*'

The importance of aligning the toolkit with the existing Pedagogical Framework was also highlighted several times during the interviews. The Flemish governmental Agency *Opgroeien*, which is responsible for childcare, has put a lot of effort into implementing the framework and the derived tools for self-assessment in the sector. The tutors considered this as an opportunity for connection with the toolkit on multilingualism. Experiences with the corresponding exercises in the toolkit proved very beneficial in this regard.

7.3.3 Expanding the knowledge base

The analysis of the baseline situation revealed that both the tutors and the childcare professionals often lacked specific and state-of-the-art knowledge on multilingualism in the early years. The tutors admitted that some old ideas or 'myths' were still being taken for granted in childcare (e.g. that the 'OPOL-strategy' [one parent = one language] is still perceived as the only best strategy for multilingual parents). In this sense, the knowledge part of the toolkit proved very important. The toolkit incorporated knowledge on early multilingualism into user-friendly knowledge cards. Each card contains a 'fact or myth' statement on the front and easy-to-understand explanations of the statement on the back. Some tutors used these knowledge cards as a starting point to engage in group reflection with professionals. According to one of the tutors, implementing research based knowledge in such an accessible way offered 'quick wins', meaning an easy way to introduce the topic of multilingualism and rapidly challenge some predominant beliefs or myths about it. The tutor stated that, by doing so, there was already a visible return after one or two sessions, with childcare professionals being able to challenge and refine their beliefs and knowledge on multilingualism.

Interestingly, the lack of knowledge about multilingualism in the early years, which the tutors found particularly prevalent among the childcare professionals (cf. analysis of the baseline situation), proved to be equally true for some of the tutors themselves. The tutors indicated that they acted mostly in an intuitive way, rather than based on scientific knowledge. Some of them also mentioned that within their own organization, there is a need for a coherent vision on multilingualism and that this lack of vision stems from the fact that '*some people within the organization still have very old ideas and beliefs about multilingualism*'. Moreover, there appeared to be little support material available on multilingualism in the early years for tutors to integrate into their CPD trajectories. This emphasizes the relevance of the toolkit. One tutor also shared that she used the texts on state-of- the-art knowledge on early multilingualism as a foundation to review the language policy of her organization.

7.3.4 Valorising the role of the tutor

The role and presence of a tutor, who facilitates discussion about sensitive or silenced topics, such as multilingualism, was mentioned several times throughout the interviews. It is fair to state that without a tutor, the topic would hardly be addressed. This is especially true in the context of family day care, where childcare professionals, or childminders, work alone from their own homes. One

tutor mentioned that she organized two online reflection sessions with six childminders. She stressed the importance of starting the reflection in an accessible manner, with an open invitation for everyone to share whatever they wanted in relation to the topic. According to the tutor, the professionals were excited to meet and share their experiences related to multilingualism. Interestingly, a childminder with Turkish descent started the discussion by sharing her personal experiences of growing up with multiple languages and how difficult it was for her, as her Turkish language was not valued in school. This personal story was an eye-opener for the other childminders in the session. A similar situation occurred during a reflection moment organized by a different tutor in a team of childcare professionals working in group-based childcare. Here, a childcare worker with Armenian roots explained how she felt like '*living in paranoia*' when growing up with multiple languages. In both situations, the other professionals present had not yet fully empathized with the lifeworld and feelings of multilingual people, nor had they thoroughly considered the possible down-sides of emphasizing the use of 'Dutch only' in interaction with multilingual families. These personal stories from colleagues, when accompanied by reflective questions from the tutor, had a strong impact on the professionals.

The fact that in this project the tutors themselves were involved in a co-constructive process, in which they could actively contribute to shaping the instruments they will use themselves, turned out to be an important condition for valorising their role, as well as for sustainable implementation of the newly developed materials.

7.3.5 Highlighting the role of innovative and collaborative projects

Tutors play an important role in facilitating reflection processes. In this project, they were on top of that also involved in developing and testing the toolkit. From the interviews, we learned that this was an important driver behind their motivation to take part in the project. As one of the tutors stressed: '*I find it important to be a pioneer and to contribute to new developments in the sector. For me, I find a drive in collaborating in innovative projects like this.*' In this sense, it was crucial that the participating tutors were actively involved in the process and provided feedback on the toolkit. One could imagine this as a spiral move: innovative projects can steer new changes and bring pedagogical topics to the table.

The findings on the lack of knowledge and materials on multilingualism of infants and toddlers in childcare also point to the benefit of collaboration between researchers and professionals in an innovative project rooted in a design-based research approach. The co-constructive development process can be considered as a cross-pollination in which the collaboration is an opportunity for professionals to be introduced to scientifically grounded knowledge, whereas the researchers gain first-hand insights into what happens in practice.

7.4 Discussion and concluding remarks

As a result of migration and globalization, the language diversity of children in European countries has increased over the last decades, leading to a changed linguistic landscape within educational settings (Kirsch, 2021). This is also the case in Flanders, the research context of the present study. Childcare services are, for many multilingual children and parents, the first contact with the official language of the educational system and therefore crucial. However, childcare professionals often feel insecure when working in complex multilingual contexts and might benefit from sustained professional support in this regard. Therefore, a toolkit was developed in a co-constructive process taking into account some of the most important criteria for effective CPD-initiatives (Eurofound, 2015): the involvement and valorisation of intermediary professionals (the tutors) who provide pedagogical guidance and coaching, their active commitment to both the development and the implementation of the coaching materials, and the use of a coherent pedagogical framework as a scientific foundation in which the materials are embedded. By offering a guiding framework and an array of reflection tools, the researchers and the tutors aimed to create sustainable changes in the knowledge, skills and competencies of childcare professionals in their daily practices with multilingual children and families.

The findings of this study highlight the important role of tutors to strengthen collegiality by sustaining practitioners' processes of reflexivity on multilingualism, especially in situations where there is a lack of knowledge and tools, as is often the case in childcare contexts for the youngest children (0–3 years). This has the potential to increase pedagogical quality in childcare towards a more positive approach towards multilingualism. Involving tutors in the co-construction process increased their ownership and commitment, which has the potential to improve sustained implementation and use of the co- constructed toolkit.

Being able to rely on scientifically grounded tools that reflect the reality of childcare professionals also seemed to give the tutors the confidence that they needed to break the silence on the topic of multilingualism in ECEC teams. In the same way, this facilitated discussions between childcare professionals and parents about language development and multilingualism, enabling a closer relationship between parents and professionals by discussing together the multilingual upbringing of the children.

The array of possibilities offered by the developed toolkit supported and valorised the agency of the tutors as it allowed the tutors to deploy the tools flexibly in different contexts. This is in line with recent research on professional development (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Zaslow et al., 2010).

Although this study revealed positive results, some important lessons were learned. First, how to set up a co-constructed trajectory in COVID-19 times with tutors working in ECEC is not self-evident. Second, the study focused on the development process of the toolkit; how this toolkit will be used in supporting childcare professionals and whether this will lead to the long-term establishment of positive language policies and practices in ECEC has yet to be answered. More research documenting both implementation and impact is therefore needed.

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

" "Write a list of things to look forward to."
(Courtney Barnett, from Things take time, take time, 2021)

8.1 Introduction

The multilingual reality and the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of contemporary societies are caught up in a quandary. While a growing number of studies point out the opportunities that come with multilingualism (e.g. Agirdag, 2014; Barac et al., 2014; Bialystok, 2018), and international policy frameworks increasingly advocate multilingual education with exploitation of heritage languages (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Council of the European Union, 2019a, 2019b), multilingualism is simultaneously perceived as a challenge within educational contexts. Research shows that not only multilingual parents have concerns and questions about multilingual upbringing (De Houwer, 2015; Grosjean, 2009), education professionals also often appear to be unsure about how to approach multilingualism in their practices (Chan, 2011; Michel & Kuiken, 2014). Moreover, it seems that in many countries, despite the multilingual reality, a monolingual orientation prevails, reinforced by feelings of alienation and dislocation and the fear of losing a national identity in response to the growing complexity of diversity within the society (Duyvendak, 2011; Van Avermaet, 2009).

In these contexts, education professionals often lack personal experiences of and reflection upon multilingualism (Lengyel, 2012), making pedagogical practice unconsciously monolingually inspired. This 'monolingual habitus' (Ellis et al., 2010; Gogolin, 1997) will consequently be conveyed in interactions with multilingual parents and children, leaving education professionals struggling to draw on the full linguistic and cultural repertoire of multilingual families (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). This is characteristic of education systems in many European countries and it is already apparent in early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Lengyel, 2012).

It is now established that ECEC is key in contributing to a more inclusive and equal society with equal opportunities for all families (Council of the European Union, 2019b). To fulfil this role properly, ECEC professionals are expected to foster meaningful, high-quality interactions with children (OECD, 2021) and establish partnerships with parents in which the upbringing of the child can be shared (Alasuutari, 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Such pedagogical encounters are essentially marked by negotiation and disagreement and, as outlined, complicated by the interplay of increasing linguistic diversity and prevailing monolingual orientations. Examining what meanings parents and professionals attach to their relationships may allow a better understanding of what is at stake

in a pedagogical encounter in a multilingual environment and how it can be enriched in order to realise equal opportunities and counteract social inequalities.

The present doctoral research project is situated in the context of ECEC in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Embroiled by the complex confluence of a multilingual reality and a monolingual orientation, the Flemish Community makes a good case for exploring pedagogical encounters in ECEC. As such, a first overarching research question was: *How does the pedagogical encounter between multilingual families and ECEC professionals take shape in a monolingual-oriented multilingual society?* In an attempt to answer that question, three more specific questions were pursued, each of which was explored in a separate sub-study:

1. *What happens when multilingual children transition to pre-primary education?* (Chapter 2)
2. *How do ECEC professionals experience their relationships with multilingual parents?* (Chapter 3)
3. *How do multilingual parents experience their relationships with ECEC professionals?* (Chapter 4)

Research shows that continuous professional development (CPD) can make an important contribution to the quality of ECEC practices (e.g. Egert et al., 2018). The specific conditions CPD must meet to realise that potential in contexts of complex multilingualism remain, however, rather underexplored. Therefore, the present doctoral study attempted to identify the conditions for successful CPD to fully realise its potential in breaking through monolingual orientations and opening up possibilities for appreciating and exploiting the multilingual reality in ECEC.

This resulted in a second overarching research question: *How can ECEC professionals be supported to foster pedagogical encounters with multilingual families that fully acknowledge and exploit the multilingual realities of these families?* Also here, three more specific questions were identified, each of which was explored in a separate sub-study:

4. *What is the link between CPD on multilingualism and attitudes towards multilingual children and parents?* (Chapter 5)

5. *What are important criteria for CPD to have an impact on ECEC quality?* (Chapter 6)

6. *How can ECEC professionals be supported to establish multilingual practices and dialogue with multilingual families?* (Chapter 7)

In this final chapter, the main findings from the different sub-studies are first presented in order to respond to both overarching research questions. Based on the limitations of the research project and in combination with the main findings, possible routes for further research are then suggested. Finally, recommendations for ECEC policy and practice are proposed.

8.2 Main findings

By bringing together the findings from the different studies, it can be concluded that multilingualism is rather silenced in the pedagogical encounter in ECEC. This is reflected in attitudes and practices towards multilingual children and multilingual parents, but also in the absence of the topic within ECEC services and teams. Professionals seem to be hesitant to exploit heritage languages of children and parents, and dialogue about multilingual upbringing is virtually non-existent. The strong monolingual Dutch orientation that consequently prevails not only underutilises the potential of multilingualism, it also contributes to processes of 'schoolification' in which ECEC is primarily framed in terms of preparation for school. Given the focus on Dutch therein, it could be argued that (the schoolification of) ECEC in Flanders is characterised by a 'Dutchification'. There is, however, fertile ground in which seeds can be sown for ECEC practices that approach and exploit multilingualism in a positive way. The study results hint at the potential of professional support in fostering dialogue with multilingual parents and shed light on necessary conditions for CPD to transform pedagogical practices.

These main findings are detailed below in three sub-sections: 1) Multilingualism as a silenced aspect of the pedagogical encounter, 2) Dutchification and the disregard for the potential of multilingualism, 3) Opportunities of CPD

8.2.1 Multilingualism as a silenced aspect of the pedagogical encounter

Pedagogical encounters are multilingual encounters. This is essentially the case in any educational context, but it is particularly true in educational contexts in societies characterized by a large and growing linguistic diversity, such as the Flemish Community of Belgium. Yet, from the findings of all empirical studies in this dissertation, it can be inferred that paradoxically, multilingualism is not considered an essential aspect of that pedagogical encounter and that it is largely silenced in interactions with multilingual children, multilingual parents as well as within teams and the ECEC service.

8.2.1.1 … with multilingual children

In the study presented in Chapter 2, eight children were closely followed during their transition to pre-primary education. Detailed analysis of the video-observations showed that both the quantity and the quality of individual verbal interactions were low, and that opportunities for children's language production were particularly scarce. The language input was largely determined and initiated by the teacher, and the majority of the teachers' utterances were directive and disciplining in nature, privileging class-management and a unidirectional guidance of the organisation of activities. In the same vein, when children were in the classroom as a group, they were mostly instructed to be quiet and listen to the teacher, which impeded opportunities for language production. Moreover, no examples were found of a teacher stimulating peer interaction by, for example, encouraging children to ask other children for help or to do something together. Feedback on children's utterances was also limited and when it occurred, it was mainly aimed at confirming the desired behaviour of a child, mostly benefitting the organization of routines and classroom activities.

Although pre-primary education in the Flemish Community of Belgium is explicitly framed as "*the gateway to Dutch*" (see Chapter 1 and 2), these observations make clear that the basic conditions for creating high-quality language environments are not always met. While this obviously influences the learning experiences of all children in the group, the analysis showed that children with home languages different from Dutch were more affected by this. Seven of the eight focal children in the study were multilingual, yet this was barely apparent in each of the four classes. The home languages of the children were not exploited and the few examples where teachers did use a home language in individual interactions were intended to better control the behaviour of the children. All other verbal utterances observed were strictly in Dutch.

Moreover, the video-observations revealed that many individual utterances by the children were ignored or missed by the teacher. It was the teacher who decided which child got to say something and, in most cases, also the frame of what was allowed to be said. Despite attempts by the children to initiate conversation, during most guided activities the children were asked to be quiet and sit still. In these situations, utterances of children who were already proficient in Dutch, were, however, more easily recognised and valued by the teacher, which resulted in more opportunities for these children to speak and to interact. In this sense, the observations illustrate how teachers' (unintentional) prioritisation behaviour influences opportunities for interaction, resulting in an unequal distribution of (language) learning opportunities that constrain multilingual children's experiences in particular.

8.2.1.2 … with multilingual parents

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, perspectives of childcare professionals and multilingual parents are explored. The findings of both studies suggest that both multilingual parents and professionals experience little dialogue on language and multilingualism in their mutual encounters. This is remarkable, as the group discussions revealed that parents and professionals actually come across similar and interrelated challenges regarding multilingualism and multilingual upbringing. Apparently, they do not always find each other to discuss these challenges, let alone tackle them together. It seemed that both the parents and the professionals lack information about multilingual language development in early childhood, and they have concerns and questions for which there are no ready-made answers. For example, it appeared that although multilingual parents and professionals share a common concern about the child's future opportunities and assign an important role to the Dutch language in this respect, they did not engage in a dialogue on how they could approach this together.

Both multilingual parents and professionals indicated that they sometimes found it difficult to convey messages to each other in a nuanced way, partly out of fear that the other would misunderstand the message or be offended. In this regard, both sometimes considered language a stumbling block in their relationship, which seemed to be reinforced by the scarce time left to strike up a conversation during the short daily drop-off or pick-up moments. Moreover, in the group interviews across both studies, parents as well as professionals mentioned that they have the impression that dialogue moments between professionals and Dutch-speaking parents are often longer and less superficial compared to dialogue moments between professionals and non-Dutch-speaking parents.

8.2.1.3 … within the team and the ECEC service

Lastly, also at the level of the team and the ECEC service, multilingualism appeared to be rather silenced. When the professionals were asked about the pedagogical policy or curriculum at their centre, they claimed that multilingualism was not included, even when the centre had an explicit language policy. Also during team meetings or reflection moments, multilingualism was hardly discussed as a separate issue, according to the professionals. During the group interviews with multilingual parents, some of the parents declared that they did not know whether the childcare centre had a language policy and what it would look like. This seems to indicate that, for the childcare centres in our sample, it is not customary to discuss language policy with parents - provided there is a language policy. At least, not on a regular basis. Some of the childcare professionals mentioned that their coordinator discusses the language policy with parents during the intake interview, but that it often stops there.

In the PRO-M survey (see Chapters 1, 3, 5), childcare professionals were asked about the support they received through coaching at their workplace, or by participating in an external training or learning network. The results show that multilingualism was the topic on which professionals received the least support. This was also reflected in the group interviews. When professionals were asked whether they received any form of support to deal with the challenging multilingual situations they described, they indicated sometimes being given practical support or help from a colleague or a centre leader, such as translating or taking over a conversation with a multilingual parent. However, they declared that multilingualism was otherwise not typically or structurally addressed during in-service training or professional development activities.

8.2.1.4 Underlying drivers – Good intentions in a restrictive context

Taking into account the various sub-studies in this dissertation, there seems to be no indication that the silence on multilingualism described above is a deliberate strategy or choice by professionals. Instead, it can be assumed that this is rather the result of a complex interplay between implicit bias - stemming from the monolingual habitus of teachers, systemic conditions of ECEC in Flanders, and, somewhat paradoxically, genuine concerns for the children's future opportunities and wellbeing.

High expectations are set for ECEC as it would offer powerful equalising opportunities to families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in

general and to children's language development in particular. However, the studies discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 show how the setting and the working conditions of the ECEC context may seriously affect the potential to meet these expectations. For example, Chapter 2 sheds a light on how the organisation of Flemish pre-primary educational classes with their typically large groups and age-bound group composition - separating the youngest children from their older peers - have downsides that may be considered challenging for teachers. It was observed that, in an attempt to deal with this context and the ensuing turmoil, disruption and noise, teachers overwhelmingly focused on structure, routine activities and class management. This hampered opportunities for creating a stimulating learning environment and, consequently, affected the language learning experiences of multilingual children.

The near-exclusive use of Dutch in interactions with multilingual children and parents and the invisibility of multilingualism in pedagogical practices in childcare as well as in pre-primary education indicates the presence of a monolingual habitus among the professionals in our study. However, it can be argued that this is not driven by a deliberate choice or ill will among the professionals. Rather, the privileging of Dutch seemed prompted by ingrained habits and genuine concerns for the children's future opportunities and wellbeing at school. It is fair to state that the Flemish educational policy discourse on the importance of Dutch is propagated by ECEC professionals who want to prepare multilingual children for school and support multilingual families in the best possible way. This well intentioned concern for the knowledge of Dutch also rendered the few moments when children's home languages were used either directive to adjust children's behaviour (Chapter 2) or functional to get to Dutch faster (Chapter 3). Moreover, the concern for Dutch also influenced how professionals viewed multilingual parents and how they valued their relationships with these parents. It appeared that the childcare workers in our study very much appreciated it when parents actively exhibited efforts to speak Dutch and, conversely, rated the relationship with multilingual parents as more difficult when parents did not comply with this expectation.

In addition to the systemic drivers behind silencing multilingualism and privileging the Dutch language, there were also motives present at the level of the individual professionals. These motives mainly concerned feelings of uncertainty, a lack of self-efficacy and a lack of knowledge on early / emerging multilingualism, which left the professionals finding it more difficult to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents. In the same vein, the childcare workers in our sample mentioned difficulties in conveying nuances when communicating with

non-Dutch speaking parents, as subtleties and nuances play an important role in talking about a child's upbringing. From the analysis of the group interviews with childcare professionals it could be interpreted that the lack of support or conversation in team about multilingualism, combined with feelings of uncertainty, causes childcare workers to perceive the multilingual reality present in their centres and the relationships with multilingual parents as more negative.

By including perspectives from multilingual parents in this doctoral study, it was found that there are also drivers among multilingual parents that prevent them from voicing their questions and concerns to professionals. In Chapter 4, these various motives are explored in detail. Just like the professionals from Chapter 3, the multilingual parents from Chapter 4 also appeared to be very aware of the socio-political context of Flanders and the corresponding role of the Dutch language and ECEC. Some parents believed that the difficulty of finding a place for their child and the overall complexity of the system puts them in a subordinate position from which they are not entitled to ask questions or to express their wishes. Moreover, their awareness of the socio-political context of the Flemish childcare also caused some parents to recognize that professionals do not work in easy conditions (e.g. the large groups, the adult-child ratio, the COVID-restrictions …). Parents expressed understanding and mildness towards the professionals and they indicated less inclination to raise questions and concerns as a result.

According to the parents, not sharing a mother tongue with the childcare professionals was another aspect that complicated dialogue about the child and multilingual upbringing. Some parents expressed a fear of being misunderstood when they would want to say or ask something to the professionals, or that the professionals would feel offended by the parents not using the right words or habits when making a comment or a remark. Other parents feared that speaking up might break the relationship with the childcare workers or that it would result in a negative treatment of the child.

From the stories of the parents, it can be concluded that building a relationship is quite delicate and subject to power relations. Not sharing a mother tongue might further complicate the establishment of a relationship in which one can freely encounter the other in a dialogue, even in situations where parents and professionals are able to communicate in a shared second or third language.

8.2.2 Dutchification and the disregard for the potential of multilingualism

Notwithstanding the good intentions of professionals, their genuine concerns and the restrictive system in which they find themselves, the silence on multilingualism does have implications on pedagogical encounters in ECEC. First, the predominant focus on the Dutch language leads to what can be called a 'Dutchification' of ECEC through which the full potentialities of multilingualism are disregarded. Second, the combination of Dutchification with the lack of dialogue on multilingualism seem to put heavy strain on realizing mutual understanding in the pedagogical encounter.

8.2.2.1 Dutchification

The prevailing Dutch orientation in ECEC, prompted by the combination of a concern for the child's future opportunities and wellbeing at school and an awareness of the socio-political framing of the importance of Dutch, makes professionals see a significant role for themselves in preparing children for school by giving children a sufficient knowledge base in Dutch. In this sense, the concern about Dutch can be understood as an aspect of 'schoolification': top-down pressure to prepare children for the next step in the educational track (Van Laere et al., 2019), where the notion of 'preparing children' revolves around the acquisition of the Dutch language (of schooling). Therefore, it can be argued that the schoolification of ECEC in Flanders is characterised by a 'Dutchification'.

This Dutchification leads to an underutilisation of the full multilingual repertoire of children, parents and professionals in ECEC. From the pre-primary school observations in Chapter 2 and the stories of childcare professionals in Chapter 3, it can be concluded that the home languages of multilingual children were seldom used. The childcare professionals from Chapter 3 that did mention the integration of children's home languages in their practices, highlighted that this mainly occurred in the early days after the child's arrival in the childcare centre, to comfort the child, to put them at ease or to clarify something. From their examples, it can be learned, however, that this functional use of home languages does not start from an appreciation of multilingualism as a reality and an opportunity with a view to harmonious multilingual development (De Houwer, 2015), but as a transition to serve the main goal of learning Dutch. After all, as soon as the professionals feel it is 'no longer needed', they will only use Dutch when interacting with the children. The few examples of pre-primary school teachers' non-Dutch utterances presented in Chapter 2 show that the home languages of the children were used in a directive way to reprimand or to guide

the child's behaviour in a desired direction. No other examples were found in which the home languages of the children were recognised, valued or exploited. This finding is consistent with that of Van Gorp and Moons (2014) who illustrated and discussed the Dutch-only policies in Flemish ECEC.

The denial or expulsion of (one of the) children's languages can be seen as the expulsion of part of children's identities (Cummins, 2001). In this sense, the Dutchification of ECEC may harm children in the construction of their identities and it may lead to the development of negative self-images and prejudices (Vandenbroeck, 1999, 2007). Moreover, this also creates the risk of children losing connection with their cultural and family roots (Fillmore, 2000), or developing negative emotions about them (Seals, 2018).

In addition, more and more research shows that integrating other languages in educational contexts can also be an asset to enrich learning experiences - in multiple areas beyond just language - for all children (Larson et al., 2020). It has also been established that it is perfectly possible for an individual child to learn two or more languages simultaneously, provided there is a language environment with sufficient input, language production opportunities and feedback (De Houwer, 2018). In fact, there is evidence of the many benefits multilingual children can experience in their lives on various levels (Agirdag, 2014; Bialystok, 2018). For children who become multilingual in a successive way, learning (a) new language(s) thrives on roots already planted by (an)other language(s) (Cummins, 1979, 2021). In other words, by not making use of the full linguistic repertoire, multilingual children are deprived of learning opportunities and do not, or to a lesser extent, get the chance to develop in a broad holistic way that recognises all aspects of their identities.

Moreover, the analyses of the video-observations presented in Chapter 2 show that, by solely relying on Dutch and by expecting the children to 'jump on the train' in this regard, existing inequalities might further be deepened. It appeared that children had to combine verbal assertiveness with an active knowledge of the school language and the routines to obtain reciprocal verbal interactions with the teacher. This obviously privileges children that use the school language at home and that are already acquainted with the cultural habits of ECEC in Flanders. These children seized more opportunities for meaningful interactions with the teacher. Conversely, the observations showed that most remarks, reprimands or restrictions were aimed at children who seemed to have difficulties in understanding school routines and the language of schooling. The focus on group management and structure resulted in a lack of individual attention to

children, paradoxically leaving children who are less familiar with the school language and its routines more at the mercy of their own initiatives, thereby making them in fact responsible for their own learning process.

8.2.2.2 Strain on realizing mutual understanding

Interestingly, most multilingual parents appeared to have no problem with the Dutchification of pedagogical practices towards their children; they actually find it normal and obvious. As outlined in Chapter 4, multilingual parents and professionals seemed to share the same concern about Dutch for their children, especially when the parents were intended to stay in Belgium or at least send their children to pre-primary education in Flanders. In general, they seemed to agree on the importance of the Dutch language and that its foundation is best laid in early childhood.

This was, however, not the view of all parents, as some of them clearly expressed a desire for their child to be exposed to its heritage language(s) in childcare for fear that their child might lose affinity with the family and their cultural background. Consequently, some of the multilingual parents stated that they struggled to reconcile the predominant focus on Dutch in childcare with their own concerns about maintaining and transferring the home languages to their children.

In addition, across the different group interviews several parents expressed a desire to be addressed in their first language or mother tongue in the childcare centre. For these parents, being able to communicate with a professional in their own language may not only benefit interpersonal contact, it is also something that would offer a degree of safety and trust, especially during more demanding periods such as the transition from home to childcare. As outlined earlier, the parents mentioned that conveying nuances and emotions and realizing understanding is much more difficult in a language that is not their first. However, because these matters are generally not discussed with professionals (see above), multilingual parents are left with important questions, concerns and wishes. As a result, the full potential of a pedagogical encounter in shaping the child's upbringing together is not realized.

From the perspectives of professionals in Chapter 3, it could be inferred that professionals have ambivalent attitudes towards multilingual parents and the use of Dutch. The professionals' concern for children's wellbeing and later school success caused them to be rather judgemental about multilingual parents who

allegedly did not put enough energy into learning Dutch or using Dutch in interactions with children and with the staff. According to these professionals, by abstaining from integrating Dutch into their lives, parents are not contributing enough to their child's learning opportunities and future chances.

It should be noted that while the professionals in the group interviews indicated that they always (try to) use Dutch first when talking to parents, they also claimed to work "with hands and feet" when communication is difficult, in an attempt to put parents at ease and at least pass on the necessary information. This was 'verified' in the views of the multilingual parents confirming these attempts of professionals and showing general satisfaction with the interpersonal contact with professionals. However, in light of the observed lack of dialogue on language and multilingual upbringing, this satisfaction should be critically reviewed. 'Putting parents at ease' or 'passing on information to parents' are only minor attitudes within a pedagogical encounter that aims to shape the upbringing of the child together. Moreover, they illustrate the one-sided way in which communication between ECEC professionals and parents often takes place (Lehrer et al., 2023), suggesting that this unidirectional mode might be even more prevalent in the interaction with multilingual parents.

Taken together, the present Dutchification of ECEC raises questions, doubts and expectations among both multilingual parents and professionals which do not necessarily correspond. However, because parents and professionals do not engage in dialogue about this, on both sides of the relationship assumptions are made about the other that are not tested, which results in a rather negative appraisal of the other. This does not allow for mutual understanding in the pedagogical encounter from which shaping the upbringing of the child together can emerge. For multilingual parents, moreover, this leads to them being restricted in having, expressing and experiencing certain wishes and desires regarding their child, which practically excludes them from the discussion on what is good for the child.

For ECEC professionals, the lack of insights in the views and rationales of multilingual parents may lead to a negative appreciation of the multilingual reality in their centre. This might be reinforced by the lack of professional support and conversation about multilingualism in the team, as taken-for-granted assumptions are therefore mostly not called into question.

8.2.3 Opportunities for CPD: "*…one small step for man…??*"

In several sub-studies within this PhD, small and larger 'seeds' could be harvested that hold opportunities to grant multilingualism a prominent rather than a silenced place in the pedagogical encounter in ECEC. From the experiences and the stories of both the multilingual parents in Chapter 4 and the childcare professionals in Chapter 3, it can be inferred that, despite mutual barriers and constraints to realizing understanding, there is actually fertile ground to transform the pedagogical encounter into greater appreciation and exploitation of multilingual realities in ECEC. Besides these rather subtle opportunities to positively influence pedagogical practice, also the potential of continuous professional development (CPD) of ECEC practitioners in this regard has been explored in detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Taken together, these three studies shed a light on the potential impact of CPD on the quality of practices as well as on the necessary conditions for CPD in order to fully realise this potential.

As such, these three chapters are explicitly concerned with the second overarching aim of this dissertation, namely: identifying the conditions for successful CPD to fully realise its potential in breaking through monolingual orientations and opening up possibilities for appreciating and exploiting the multilingual reality in ECEC.

8.2.3.1 Fertile ground

A first place where seeds of a positive view on multilingualism could be harvested, was the PRO-M survey conducted among professionals and multilingual parents in 85 childcare centres (see Chapter 1 and 3). The descriptive exploration of the results show that the childcare professionals in general held overwhelmingly monolingual beliefs towards multilingual children and parents and that the answers on the items mirrored in both questionnaires did not always match. It seemed that the estimation of professionals was always a bit more appreciative towards multilingualism compared to how the parents viewed it. Nevertheless, from the parents' answers to these mirrored items as well as to a couple of other ones, it can be concluded that at least a small proportion of the parents (ranging from 16 to 37 %) encountered positive attitudes of professionals. These items related to how professionals approached multilingualism in the relationship (e.g. "The childcare workers ask me to pass on a few words from my home language": 16% answered 'Yes', "The childcare workers ask me to come to the centre to read to the children": 20% answered 'Yes, "The childcare workers give me advice on multilingual upbringing": 20%

answered 'Yes', …). Although these numbers are relatively small, it could possibly serve as a starting point for moving forward to build more positive practices towards multilingualism.

A second place where seeds were found, was in the group interviews with childcare professionals (Chapter 3). In all the group interviews, the professionals mentioned that they always used or tried to Dutch first when communicating with parents. However, they also indicated that this was not equally easy with all multilingual parents. The childcare workers talked about how difficult it sometimes is to convey nuances when communicating with non-Dutch speaking parents. Interestingly, without being explicitly asked about this during the interview, professionals stated that they were aware that this difficulty also played out for the multilingual parents. Elaborating on this, there were also other occasions where professionals thoughtfully exhibited awareness about the complexities multilingual families often face in ECEC as well as in the Flemish society. For example, childcare professionals were actually well aware that multilingualism is a silenced theme and they realized that it is sometimes very difficult for multilingual parents to engage in a meaningful relationship with the childcare centre. As reflection and the ability to put yourself in someone else' shoes are considered key competencies of education professionals (Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011; Petrie, 2011), this awareness can be viewed as an asset in building on pedagogical encounters.

Third, as already outlined earlier, the analysis of the group interviews with childcare professionals showed that the lack of dialogue with multilingual parents about multilingualism was not out of ill will, but should rather be regarded as an ingrained habit. In this sense, at first glance, the professionals did not explicitly problematize multilingualism, because it wasn't really a topic for them. By engaging the professionals in a group interview for the purpose of this study, and asking them to reflect on concrete experiences with multilingualism, many challenging issues eventually emerged. It also became apparent that the professionals did have relevant questions and doubts about multilingualism. In this sense, the group interview acted as a time of reflection for the childcare workers and for some of them, it was the first time they really thought about what it meant to work in a multilingual context and shared this with others. Some of them highlighted that this was a positive and provoking experience. In Chapter 3 this finding was described as a 'meta-reflection' on the group interviews as it emphasized the potential (fertile ground) and the power of bringing together professionals to reflect on their practices.

Fourth, also from the group interviews with professionals it can be concluded, in line with earlier conclusions presented above, that the childcare workers have a genuine concern for children's learning opportunities, wellbeing and chance later in life. Although their good intentions contribute to the Dutchification of ECEC and thus unwittingly to the neglect of the many opportunities offered by the full linguistic repertoire of multilingual children and parents, those well-meaning concerns are undoubtedly shared by multilingual parents. In this sense, from what multilingual parents and professionals actually share with each other in the context of childcare, there is fertile ground for them to approach each other better and to open up to each other. In this way, not knowing each other would not have to result in negative treatment or judgement of the other, but it could instead be adopted as a starting point for mutual understanding and for building a pedagogical encounter in which the multilingual reality can thrive.

8.2.3.2 Potential of CPD

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 the potential of engaging ECEC practitioners in processes of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is explored through three distinct studies. Chapter 6 presents a part of the results from a large systematic literature review conducted with representatives of all EU-member states and, as such, focuses on the effects of CPD initiatives on the quality of the pedagogical practices of ECEC practitioners. There was no explicit focus on multilingualism. Most studies included in the review indicated that the main benefits of CPD for ECEC practitioners concerned capability in terms of greater pedagogical awareness, knowledge and sense of agency. Effects were found at different levels: greater competence and sense of confidence, deeper reflectivity on practice, a change in perspective on how children learn and make sense of experiences, a changed attitude towards parents and better planning and evaluation. Other benefits of CPD for ECEC practitioners concerned pedagogical competences related to curriculum development and to collegial (team) work, inter-professional collaboration and parents' engagement in decision-making processes.

One of the most salient effects of CPD found in the review was the empowerment of practitioners to question taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie their practices. This was especially the case when the CPD was accompanied by guidance. In the light of this dissertation, this finding is very relevant as the prevalent monolingual habitus and the Dutchification of ECEC in Flanders are maintained by underlying taken-for-granted assumptions (like "*Dutch is the beginning of everything*", see Chapter 1). As such, the fact that CPD has the

potential to prompt professionals in questioning assumptions and personal beliefs can be a strong driver in the transformation of monolingual practices.

Another overarching finding in the systematic review was that CPD improved participants' sense of confidence. Also this is very relevant to the present dissertation, as it was shown in Chapter 3 that childcare professionals often felt uncertain and not well-equipped to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents.

The study presented in Chapter 5 made use of the PRO-M survey conducted among 351 childcare professionals in Flanders en Brussels. It deliberately aimed at exploring associations between professional support for childcare workers and positive attitudes towards multilingual children and parents. More concretely, by deploying a multilevel regression model it was first analysed whether professionals who are given support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to use multilingual children's home language in interactions with them, compared with professionals who have not been given such support. Second, it was analysed whether professionals who received support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to enter into a dialogue with multilingual parents concerning the children's multilingual upbringing, compared with professionals who have not received such support.

The results of the analysis show no significant association between support being given on topics related to multilingualism, and the use of the home language in interactions with multilingual children. By contrast, having a multilingual background was found to be significantly associated with home language use, suggesting that childcare professionals who are themselves raised as multilingual are more likely to use children's home languages in interaction with multilingual children compared with professionals who did not have a similar upbringing. Regardless of their own linguistic background, professionals who have been given support on topics related to multilingualism are more likely to enter into dialogue with multilingual parents on multilingual upbringing compared with professionals who have not received such support.

In this sense, the results of the study show that well-supported childcare professionals tend to be more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents, regardless of the professionals' own linguistic background. In the light of previously mentioned findings showing a reluctance among the professionals to engage into dialogue with multilingual parents, this is a relevant conclusion. Indeed, the study in Chapter 5 suggests that CPD can be a mediating or facilitating factor in establishing mutual communications between ECEC

professionals and parents, even if they do not share the same language and/or cultural background. In the views of both the professionals in Chapter 3 and the parents in Chapter 4 not sharing language or cultural background was often considered a hindrance to the pedagogical encounter.

Lastly, in Chapter 7, findings from the collaborative development process with 29 tutors from within the ECEC field in the Flemish Community of Belgium and Brussels are presented, highlighting tentative first results of a concrete CPD initiative in childcare under the PRO-M umbrella. The aim of this initiative was to develop in co-construction with the tutors an array of coaching tools to foster reflection among childcare professionals about their pedagogical practices towards multilingual children and parents in order to improve practices in a sustainable way. As a result, a toolkit was developed, consisting of an elaborate guiding framework and an array of reflection tools. In its design, the development process and the end product took into account the most important criteria for effective CPD-initiatives, which will be discussed in the next section.

Although dissemination was still in its early stages when Chapter 7 was written, some tentative positive impacts on pedagogical practice could be found from the testing phase. For example, the testing phase showed that although multilingualism was often a silenced topic, quality reflection exercises, facilitated by a tutor during non-contact moments with children were able to spark conversation among professionals, taking the first steps towards a positive approach to multilingualism in childcare. Moreover, the knowledge part in the toolkit (in the form of cards with 'fact-or-myth'-statements) proved very fruitful in challenging predominant beliefs among practitioners. This can be considered important in the light of this dissertation, as it has been established that specific and state-of-the-art knowledge on multilingualism in the early years is often lacking or insufficiently present among childcare workers.

8.2.3.3 Necessary conditions for successful CPD

Besides documenting the impact of engaging ECEC professionals in processes of CPD, the studies presented in Chapter 6 and 7 also shed a light on the necessary conditions for CPD to achieve impact. In this concluding section on main findings, these conditions will concisely be presented. For this purpose, the conclusions from the systematic review in Chapter 6 serve as a framework on which the findings of the study in Chapter 7 are mounted.

According to the systematic review, CPD provision must first be embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework or curriculum that builds on research and responds to local needs. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, there is one such a curriculum, called *Pedagogische Raamwerk* ('Pedagogical Framework'). It was developed under the auspices of the Governmental Agency responsible for childcare (then: *Kind en Gezin;* 'Child and Family') and implemented in 2014 (Kind en Gezin, 2014). This pedagogical framework highlights the importance of quality interactions with children, to foster both the emotional support and the educational support, and it also promotes partnership with parents. It holds a positive view towards multilingualism, although not very elaborate and without concrete pointers for practitioners. Notwithstanding, during the development process detailed in Chapter 7, the tutors indicated that it would be highly important to ensure alignment with this Pedagogical Framework and its accompanying self-assessment instruments. The tutors stated that 'by now', a decade after its appearance, most childcare services know the Pedagogical Framework, but that it was still necessary to provide training and coaching for a sustained implementation in the childcare practice in Flanders. The Pedagogical Framework was not only valued for its comprehensiveness and its science-based foundations, it was also considered a tool through which the tutors would gain access to the childcare services in order to foster reflection on multilingualism with the coaching tools to be developed. Moreover, the tutors feared that, if the new tools would be too different from the Pedagogical Framework in terms of look, feel and underpinning content, this would impede childcare workers' motivation to getting started with them.

Second, the findings from the systematic review showed that impact on the quality of ECEC practices will best be generated when CPD initiatives actively involve professionals in processes of change and improvement within ECEC settings. In the study in Chapter 7, it were the tutors who participated to the whole process of developing and testing the toolkit and eventually even to implementing it in the childcare sector. Their involvement in the co-construction process benefitted their ownership about the end product (the toolkit) as well as their overall commitment, which opens up the potential of realizing sustained implementation and use of the toolkit on multilingualism. As such, these tutors were the 'actors of change' in the development process.

In line with this, a third necessary condition for effective CPD found in the systematic review concerns embedding the professionals' learning on a concrete level into their practices. To maximize the effectiveness of CPD in this regard, guidance from a tutor (or coach or mentor) during childfree hours of ECEC staff

is required. It was already mentioned that the tutors from Chapter 7 played a crucial role in designing, testing and disseminating the toolkit. However, their role was of course also pivotal in establishing and guiding collegial reflection moments in which childcare professional could discuss, share and reflect upon their experiences with multilingualism. As a matter of fact, when designing the development process of what eventually would become the toolkit, it was a deliberate choice to specifically tailor the toolkit to tutors and not to core practitioners. Indeed, both reflection and the role of a coach or tutor in facilitating reflection moments are widely acknowledged as key in processes of professional development (Brunsek et al., 2020; Egert et al., 2018; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017).

Lastly, the systematic literature review in Chapter 6 also revealed that the use of specific tools can benefit learning processes as well as the quality of reflection. Of course, the mere provision of a tool for professional development won't suffice when aiming for sustainable change (Campbell & Sawyer, 2009). It needs to be combined with guided reflection sessions with a feedback component. Moreover, from the documented process in Chapter 7, it can be inferred that a tool for tutors who already have experience in coaching and supervision groups must meet some requirements, when the aim is to maximise the chances of the tool actually being used. These are:

- providing an array of possibilities and exercises, instead of a single predefined method to stimulate reflection and action on multilingualism with a variety of childcare professionals in a variety of contexts,
- allowing the option to break down the content into small manageable chunks so that it can be introduced incrementally to the participants, rather than all at once in large doses.

The experiences of the tutors in Chapter 7 show that this is important not only for the sake of user-friendliness of the tool. The language situations of multilingual families are so specific that there are no ready-made answers to the many questions posed by this linguistic complexity. 'The' multilingual child does not exist, just as 'the' multilingual parent does not exist either. This implies that any tool developed to support professionals in approaching multilingual situations in ECEC should be flexibly adaptable and able to be deployed to meet specific needs of specific multilingual families in a specific.

8.3 Limitations and future directions for research

8.3.1 Modest findings regarding the potential of CPD

By conducting the studies discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, we have tried to respond to the scarcity in research on CPD in complex multilingual ECEC contexts (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019). Both studies were driven by the established consensus on the important role of CPD in contributing to more quality ECEC practices and were able to demonstrate the potential of CPD in fulfilling this role in a childcare context marked by a complex linguistic diversity. However, both studies have shortcomings that should be acknowledged. In the study presented in Chapter 5, we found a clear association between CPD on multilingualism and the inclination to engage into dialogue with multilingual parents. However, apart from the broad distinction between internal and external support, this study lacked information on the specific content of the CPD, its context, and its duration. Conversely, in the study presented in Chapter 7, we have, so to speak, 'all' the information about how and in which contexts the professionals were supported by the tutors and the toolkit, but the 'impact' on the pedagogical practice was less visible and less documented. As such, this urges us to be humble in our answer to the second overarching research question of this dissertation.

From the interviews with the tutors we know that the reflection exercises and the knowledge cards helped to bring the topic of multilingualism to the table and to start a conversation about it. However important in a context where multilingualism is silenced, these are just small steps that do not directly lead to a change in practice towards "*pedagogical encounters with multilingual families that fully acknowledge and exploit the multilingual realities of these families*" – as described in the second overarching research question. To realize such a change in childcare practice, long-term coaching trajectories would be appropriate in which the developed toolkit could be used in all its facets to guide a team over a long period of time and document experiences, impact and challenges along the way. Such a trajectory could take the form of an action research process in which practitioners are involved as actors of change. From some of the studies included in the systematic review in Chapter 6, we know that such a design has the potential to benefit the learning experiences and to transform practices (e.g. Cardoso, 2011; Rönnerman, 2003; Van Keulen, 2010).

Besides such a long-term coaching trajectory in a specific context, it would also be insightful to follow-up and document how the toolkit is further used in

supporting childcare professionals working in different contexts and how the coaching materials and accompanying website find their way to the practice of pedagogical coaches in Flanders and Brussels. Such an investigation could be extended to the other valorisation materials developed in the PRO-M project in the context of public libraries and preventive family support. This would make it possible to assess the significance as well as the impact of such a large-scale project on early multilingualism in a monolingual-oriented society.

8.3.2 Sample limitations

A second limitation of this doctoral research that needs to be acknowledged concerns the research participants. The PhD project sought to combine a wide range of perspectives from across the ECEC scope by including experiences of children, parents and professionals in childcare (0-3) and in pre-primary education (2,5-6). However, due to the embeddedness in several overarching projects and the conceptual and methodological choices made in the different sub-studies, not every perspective within each sector was covered in an equally comprehensive way. This means that in a context of a split system of ECEC, the research findings should be viewed in their connection to the particular sub-sector within which the study was conducted (childcare or pre-primary education), and that statements about ECEC in general should not be understood as if it were an integrated system. At the same time, it opens up possibilities for further research.

For example, the perspective of children was only included in Chapter 2, which focused on a very small sample of children in pre-primary education. Although this delimitation was necessary for an in-depth examination of interactions and language experiences of children, it prevents generalisations to the entire pre-primary education sector and it renders the results inapplicable to childcare. As such, further research could draw on the same methodology to explore language environments in childcare as well as in more specific pre-primary school contexts (e.g. 'method-schools', classrooms with smaller group sizes, aged-mixed classrooms, etc.). This would paint a richer and more complete picture of children's experiences with language in ECEC. Also, a further study could document the long-term language experiences of toddlers in pre-primary education. The study in Chapter 2 focused on the first ten months of children in entry-classes, but as their educational trajectory does not stop there, it might be insightful to explore their experiences throughout the entire preschool period.

As far as multilingual parents are concerned, their perspective was only included in Chapter 4. Moreover, due to time constraints and restrictions imposed by specific COVID-19 regulations, we managed to conduct only four group interviews with a mere 18 parents. In addition, while diversity in terms of language situation across the 18 parents was considerable, diversity in terms of socio-economic situation was not. Clearly, there are many opportunities here for further research that seeks to include perspectives of multilingual parents in a more comprehensive way. First, the PRO-M questionnaire completed by more than 400 parents offers a wealth of untapped data that can be further explored. Second, more in-depth research with multilingual parents in socially vulnerable situations could be recommended. The results from Chapters 3 and 4 point to the influence of an unequal position of power in the relationship between parents and professionals. It can be assumed that this matters more strongly for multilingual parents with low socio-economic status. Understanding more about how these parents experience this themselves can be an important step in transforming ECEC practices into places where all parents are valued, recognized and included.

The perspective of professionals is covered more extensively throughout the dissertation. However, the fact that the viewpoint of staff is not addressed in Chapter 2 is a major limitation since quite a few interpretations are made in that chapter about the structural conditions of the pre-primary school class that were not checked with the professionals themselves. It would be interesting to conduct video-stimulated recall research with these professionals to explore how they themselves give interpretation to the observed classroom practices. Not only would this allow for a richer understanding of multilingual realities in pre-primary education in which the viewpoint of professionals could be valued, it would also open the floor to a process of awareness among the professionals, with the potential to change practices. From the systematic review presented in Chapter 6, we know that interventions that use video-stimulated recall or video-interaction-guidance in which professionals reflect on video-images of their own practices (and receive feedback on it) are powerful in stimulating reflection skills with professionals and consequently have the potential to improve interactions with children and parents (e.g. Blenkin & Hutchin, 1998; Potter & Hodgson, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2013).

8.3.3 Disregard for disruptive practices

The first three studies of this doctoral research project were mainly focused on the first overarching research question and, as such, they explored how the pedagogical encounter between multilingual families and ECEC professionals takes shape in a monolingual-oriented society. In the introduction of this dissertation a pedagogical encounter was described as a culturally hybrid space, open to multiplicity and to the possibility of *becoming*. In the same vein, dialogues were conceptualized as processes of change wherein one completely loses the possibility to control the result (Rinaldi, 2005) and wherein new and different truths and modes of being can come about. However, by critically reflecting on the studies presented in this dissertation, we have to admit that we have not fully harnessed or explored this intrinsic potential of pedagogical encounters.

Indeed, looking at the results of the different studies, a somewhat static image of the pedagogical encounter and of dialogues emerges, where it seems as if all those involved in the pedagogical encounter accept the constellation delineated by Dutchification and the silencing of multilingualism. However, parents and professionals should not be regarded as mere passive recipients of this constellation. Starting from the premise that in the pedagogical encounter the confrontation with difference can cause something to change in the individuals and in the relationship itself, further research together with parents and professionals could explore concrete moments in the relationship in which the 'affect' of their encounter brought about a palpable change. This would enrich our understanding of the possibilities of a pedagogical encounter between multilingual parents and ECEC professionals and it could offer professionals inspiration to redefine their own relationships with multilingual parents.

Besides the fact that a confrontation with difference can bring about a change in the relationship, it should not be overlooked that both parents and professionals also have individual agency to 'disrupt' or challenge the relationship and pedagogical practices in ECEC. Although in our research we reflected with professionals and with multilingual parents on their experiences and on the meanings they assign to their mutual relationships, we did not specifically ask about how they take ownership of this themselves. As a result, we somewhat failed to recognise their own potential to not just let a given situation exist, but actually be able to influence it. In this sense, further research could explore how multilingual parents resist or disrupt the prevailing monolingual orientation in ECEC and how their big and small 'acts of resistance' challenge or change their

relationships with the professionals (or have the potential to do so). For example, it could be interesting to unravel what strategies parents employ to gain more time and information in daily conversations with staff while bringing or picking up the children and how this affects professionals.

The same, of course, applies to ECEC professionals. They also have their own agency and the power to disrupt and to challenge the taken for granted and to transform pedagogical practices. The fact that a policy puts forward a strong monolingual orientation does not mean that all professionals simply implement it in their practice. ECEC professionals are 'street-level bureaucrats' who actively implement, shape and transform a policy through their own day-to-day experience and knowledge (Devlieghere et al., 2023; Lipsky, 1980). Moreover, research on CPD in ECEC shows how individual professionals can become actors of change that play an active role in transformation processes aimed at developing new pedagogical approaches to working with children and parents from vulnerable backgrounds (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014). In the same vein, Jan Peeters writes about 'pedagogical heroes' that are *"characterized by an amazing personal strength and motivation to continuously change their practice in order to give all children the opportunities they deserve*" (Peeters, 2020, p. 23). Considering the prevailing monolingual orientation in European education systems, it could be interesting to conduct research on how individual practitioners challenge this orientation and how this may lead to a transformation of practices.

8.3.4 Not the full PD spectrum

Throughout the doctoral research project, there is a predominant focus on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in the sense of in-service training and support through coaching and supervision moments. This leaves other elements within the full range of Professional Development (PD) initiatives out of sight such as pre-service or initial training, internships, etc… As Norheim and Moser (2020) point out, little is known about how teacher education programs and curricula prepare prospective early childhood professionals for working with families from different cultures. Therefore, further research could usefully explore the role of pre-service training and the ways in which in-service and pre-service can become more strongly connected and together contribute to the development of quality ECEC practice for multilingual families.

8.4 Recommendations for ECEC policy and practice

"Giving multilingualism a chance in education systems cannot come without fundamental change to the national linguistic self-conception; there must be established a 'multilingual habitus' among individuals and in education systems."
(Lengyel, 2012, p. 171)

8.4.1 Towards a multilingual habitus in ECEC

In today's world, dealing with difference and with diversity appears to become increasingly difficult. While growing super-diversity could lead to extraordinary richness, to cross-pollinations with unseen outcomes, to an increase in possibilities of expression, and to the presence of a greater number of different opinions, it paradoxically leads to its opposite, to impoverishment and to the erasure of heterogeneity. Amin Maalouf already described this in 1998 in his provoking essay '*Les Identités meurtrières*' (Maalouf, 1998), but it unfortunately still holds true, and perhaps all the more strongly, for contemporary times. From fears of losing a perceived national identity in response to intensified forms of migration and increased diversity, multilingual children and parents today are increasingly judged on one aspect of their identity, namely language. Language, and especially the ability to speak the dominant language becomes a critical point of distinction. In his essay, Maalouf powerfully showed how narrowing a person's multiple identities can have disastrous consequences on the individual and by extension on society.

In the final paragraph of this dissertation, we want to argue for a full recognition of ECEC as a space where diversity in all its forms - and in particular linguistic diversity - can flourish, giving it the potential to be an experimentation space for how diversity and difference can be approached and embraced more broadly in society. Indeed, it has been documented that a multilingual stance in education systems is not yet a reality in most European countries (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020), but we believe that education, and more specifically ECEC, is precisely the place where experiments with difference can begin.

We consider ECEC services as everyday environments for children, parents and professionals where educational practices and multilingual experiences are shared, communicated and thus get meaning. In this constructional process, children, parents and professionals are active participants in the pedagogical encounter (Moss, 2018).

Inspired by Terry Lamb's writings on multilingualism in cities (Lamb, 2015), we argue that ECEC has great potential for societal change towards a multilingual orientation and a multilingual habitus. Indeed, ECEC can be considered a 'super-diverse arena' that has the potential to enable multilingualism to become visible (*unsilenced*), which implies that everyone involved can "*be exposed to it, develop knowledge about it, recognise its benefits and learn not just to tolerate but to enjoy it and to aspire to be part of it"* (Lamb, 2015, p. 7). According to Lamb, a plurilingual/multilingual habitus "*offers more than a perception of multilingualism as normal; it represents the genesis of new relationships and commitments between languages, individuals and communities."* It opens the floor to "*an awakening to the enjoyment and value of all languages, a creative and flexible approach to using them as a means of understanding and communicating with others from different linguistic backgrounds, and an openness to creating the spaces not only for plurilingual encounters but also for collaborative subversion of the monolingual hegemony."* (Lamb, 2015, p. 10).

In short, ECEC can be a space in which a multilingual habitus can be nurtured. However, from the findings presented in this dissertation, it seems that this is not something that can be taken for granted. Indeed, while precisely the confrontation with difference and the affect this confrontation produces are essential in a pedagogical encounter, they simultaneously seem to be a stumbling block to achieving mutual understanding. The results of this doctoral research project point at the opportunities to create cracks in a prevailing monolingual orientation in ECEC, but at the same time, it can be inferred that this only/mainly happens through small steps and that persistent attention to make this a sustainable story is necessary.

In two NESET reports on multilingualism (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020), it was pointed out that even when innovative multilingual practices are already in place, it still appears necessary to continue adopting actions that recognise and value linguistic diversity. This is a challenge that must be tackled at various levels of the educational system, in concrete pedagogical practices with multilingual children and parents, at the team level of an ECEC, and in the CPD activities of professionals.

8.4.2 Recommendations for ECEC practice

For multilingual families, ECEC services that positively approach multilingualism and know how to exploit the full language repertoire of children, parents and staff are extremely important. They can ensure that multilingual parents and

children feel welcomed, respected and recognised in all aspects of their multiple identities, as well as empowered to build on these diverse aspects (DECET, 2007).

This can contribute positively to the inclusion of multilingual families in society. Harnessing the full multilingual repertoire provides ECEC services with additional opportunities to create a linguistic environment with quality language practices and stimulating interactions. This enables rich experiences and further opportunities for all children and their parents.

In an open and appreciative approach towards multilingualism, attention to the official/dominant language in society goes hand in hand with a focus on heritage languages and the languages present in the home environment of multilingual families. Such an approach should be embedded in a language(s) policy that places equality and respect for diversity at its core. This forms the basis for concrete practices with and between children, parents and professionals and thus contributes to strengthening pedagogical quality in ECEC.

According to Spolsky (2004), a language(s) policy constitutes a set of ideas, beliefs, rules, practices and agreements that exist in an educational context regarding language and multilingualism. It contains three components that differ from each other but mutually influence each other in their interrelatedness (Van Oss et al., 2022): beliefs, practices and management. Language beliefs are professionals' ideas and attitudes about what is appropriate or desirable regarding language, multilingualism, language use, forms of interaction and language acquisition. These beliefs mostly develop in an unconscious way: from personal experiences, knowledge and training and through contacts within the networks of individuals. Language practices refer to the language behaviour of individuals: what professionals actually do in their daily practices towards children, parents and colleagues. For example using one or more languages or language varieties, employing language-stimulating strategies or activities, actively using tools to support communication with multilingual parents and so on. Language management refers to deliberate and specific efforts by educational facilities to adjust or influence language practices and beliefs in line with the facility's goals, vision and mission. It involves rules and agreements that are often explicitly written down in a vision statement (Hulpia & Peleman, 2022; Spolsky, 2004).

This implies that working on language and multilingualism in a sustainable way in ECEC should always be a 'three-track strategy' in which the three components and their interrelationships are always considered towards children, parents and

the team. We take it for granted that all three of these actors have a broad linguistic repertoire that can and must be exploited if a prevailing monolingual orientation is to be broken. In this sense, it should be the mission of any ECEC service to create a positive climate towards multilingual children and parents. This involves an appreciative approach towards heritage languages by not regarding them as obstacles that get in the way of learning the institutional or dominant language in society.

8.4.2.1 Towards multilingual children

A shift in orientation is needed towards the valorisation of children's multilingualism. No matter what language or its position in society, every language that a child brings to the ECEC service should be considered an enrichment of the diversity (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017). In this sense, a child's full linguistic repertoire should be viewed as a strength, and an exclusive focus on the institutional language development alone should be avoided. One must not forget that maintaining and nurturing home language(s) is a fundamental right of children and families (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Moreover, it has been documented that making space and time for home languages in ECEC, even when this reduces the overall amount of input in the institutional language, is not detrimental to children's acquisition of the institutional language (Bialystok, 2018; De Houwer, 2018).

Dual role

With regard to the development of language(s) among multilingual children, professionals working in ECEC consequently have to undertake a dual function: offering high-quality interactions and fostering the dominant institutional language(s), while at the same time recognising, respecting and supporting the home language(s).

In working with the very youngest children in ECEC, language should be interpreted in a broad sense because these infants do not yet have a solid foundation of language proficiency; they do not yet speak 'words' in any delineated language. Nevertheless, these young children naturally have a need to communicate and get a grip on their environment. Babbling, grasping, looking, weeping, moving, moaning ... are all 'non-lingual' ways in which young children express themselves. As such, these young children benefit from sensitive professionals who respond appropriately to their communication needs and support children in a sensitive and responsive way. ECEC professionals working

with infants have important roles in expanding children's lifeworld through a wide range of interactions and activities in which they use a rich and varied language, give children many opportunities to speak and respond well to children's language expressions in all their languages (DULALA, 2017; Weitzman & Greenberg, 2019).

For multilingual children who do already possess some degree of fluency in a language other than the official one, it is crucial that professionals recognise, positively value and even harness this. This is not only important for the child's identity and well-being, the first language(s) also form(s) a basis for learning a second or third language in these children (Cummins, 1979). Of course, professionals do not need to know or master all home languages of all multilingual children present in the service. But, already by knowing just a few common words and expressions, they can make connections between the languages and thus contribute to the learning process of the institutional language and the home language(s) of the children. In this way, professionals show that they value multilingualism both as a learning tool and as part of the child's identity (Mary & Young, 2017).

ECEC professionals should create interaction opportunities with individual children as well as between children. They provide an environment that encourages language and play opportunities throughout the day, both during moments typically seen as 'care' and during specific 'learning' activities as well as during free play.

High-quality meaningful interactions

Building on this, there is now consensus regarding the importance of offering 'high-quality meaningful interactions' to all children in their daily life in ECEC (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; OECD, 2021) as they are found to have positive effects on language development of multilingual children (Buysse et al., 2014). High-quality meaningful interaction encompass creating meaningful opportunities for interaction, sustaining reciprocal verbal interactions, and offering high-quality support for language development. While those interactions often occur in the institutional language, home languages can and should be incorporated in each of these elements (Larson et al., 2020). Although incorporating home languages does not hinder the objective of institutional language development (Bialystok, 2018), a higher number of languages present in a single setting, increases the need for ECEC professionals to be conscious, intentional and reflective in their work

Furthermore, to initiate interactions, multilingual children who are in the process of learning the institutional language may require ECEC staff to pause and listen for longer. Installing less time pressure also facilitates multilingual children to exploit their linguistic repertoire to a fuller extent. There exists an array of practices and strategies that can be used to actively integrate home languages into ECEC settings and to help children to rely on their full linguistic repertoire. These practices can, in general, be described as 'translanguaging' referring to the intentional use of all available language repertoires (Duarte, 2020).

8.4.2.2 Towards multilingual parents

At the same time as supporting multilingual children's development and well-being, ECEC professionals must welcome children's parents or caregivers and strive for the creation of a partnership that concerns the education of the child.

Importantly, this partnership requires continuous dialogue (De Gioia, 2015). The silence on multilingualism identified in this doctoral research demands, almost cries out, to put the conversation on language and multilingualism at the forefront of the pedagogical encounter between multilingual parents and professionals. This should not only happen at formal introductory meetings or evaluation interviews, but also at informal drop-off and pick-up times, organised parent activities and informal moments when parents are present in the facility. Indeed, on a regular basis, because as the children grow up, the family context and parents' living situations also change. Therefore, professionals can use every new situation (e.g. the settling in period, a change of group in the setting, the transition to school, the birth of a brother or sister ...) to explore with multilingual parents what questions this raises in them. Moreover, cultural belief systems are also constantly evolving, which means that expectations and desires also change and should continuously be the subject of the negotiation space between parents and professionals.

Professionals should take the first step: they start the conversation with multilingual parents. As shown in this dissertation, this is far from evident. Both on the parents' side and on the side of professionals, certain prejudices, cultural beliefs, doubts and insecurities can get in the way of simply talking to each other. Not all multilingual parents have the same ideas or wishes about their child's linguistic education, and the language(s) policy of an ECEC service does not always match the vision of all multilingual parents. Also, as Chapter 4 shows, many parents have questions about their child's multilingual upbringing but, at the same time, there are many reasons for them not to raise those questions.

Many parents seem to be confronted with ambiguities concerning their role with regard to language development. They have to balance their ability and desire to transfer their home language(s) to their children with their wish to give their child the best possibilities to learn the institutional language of the country, while taking account of a predominant monolingual gaze in society that may consider these goals to be incompatible (Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018). Consequently, making decisions about family language policy is not self-evident, and may cause parents stress or doubt (Eisenchlas et al., 2013).

There is only one certainty: there is no one simple answer that counts for all multilingual families. This complex reality renders the process of shaping multilingual upbringing together a continuous process of searching. Professionals need to question their own assumptions critically and adopt a 'questioning' rather than 'knowing' attitude in the dialogue with multilingual parents (Vandenbroeck, 1999) allowing the parents to express their uncertainties, ideas, desires and needs.

Indeed, as pointed out in Chapter 4, dreams, desires and confrontations deserve a central place in a pedagogical encounter between professionals and parents, however complex they may be. The fact that there are no straightforward answers does not mean that parents and professionals should withdraw from engaging in dialogue about it. Dialogue on dreams, exploring together desires and discussing mutual concerns are the essences of a pedagogical partnership or an encounter. However, as such a partnership is consequently driven by not-knowing, by not seeing how, by questioning and by being open to unexpected outcomes (Moss, 2009), this may yield various disagreements between parents and professionals. Nevertheless, one should not be afraid of these disagreements. On the contrary, as they are essential within the pedagogical encounter, time and space should be created in ECEC in which disagreements have a right to exist (Vandenbroeck, 2009).

When professionals encounter such tensions or disagreements in the dialogue with multilingual parents, it is important that they do not to fall into extremes by either wanting to convince parents of the vision of the service or by just blindly implementing what parents want and ask for. They should always explore what lies behind a particular concern or demand.

Therefore, again, an inquiring attitude ('a pedagogical research mind-set' (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023)) is central in approaching multilingual parents. The same applies to their own beliefs. Professionals should question themselves

critically and not stubbornly cling to their own opinions or ways of working. In the same vein, ECEC professionals should also critically reflect on present power imbalances.

Lastly, besides deliberate efforts to engage into dialogue with multilingual parents, ECEC professionals can also deploy collaborative projects and activities in which parents are invited to participate in such a way that valorises and exploits their own linguistic repertoire. Attention should be given to preparing such activities together with multilingual parents.

8.4.2.3 Within ECEC teams

Acknowledging multilingualism at a team level of an ECEC service involves the implementation of a staff policy that values, respects and exploits the (linguistic) diversity of the team. This may concern the recruitment of staff (core-practitioners, assistants, volunteers and trainees) reflecting the diversity of the neighbourhood, and utilizing the linguistic diversity already present in the team. In this way, also multilingual professionals can experience an openness and respect towards their own languages and their full linguistic repertoire. For them, too, it is primordial to feel that all aspects of their identity are valued.

For multilingual children and parents, a culturally and linguistically diverse team can create recognisability and familiarity and the feeling of being welcome. Indeed, as the literature review of Aghallaj et al. (2020) shows, a cultural mismatch is often a major complication in the relationship between multilingual parents and ECEC staff. In this sense, a plea could be made to invest in the recruitment of multilingual staff.

There are good reasons for that. From our own research (Chapter 5) we know that childcare workers who themselves were raised in a multilingual way were more likely to include children's home languages into their interaction with multilingual children. In the discussion in Chapter 5, references to research from bilingual ECEC contexts were made to illustrate how the use of children's first language (in terms of exposure and instruction) is positively associated with closer relationships with teachers and with peers (Halle et al., 2014), but also with language outcomes of children in both the institutional and the home language (e.g. Collins, 2014; Partika et al., 2021; Raikes et al., 2019). This is considered crucial in light of countering the loss of home language and the resulting negative impact on family ties and communication (Fillmore, 2000).

Furthermore, knowledge of children's home language can provide practitioners with an extra advantage in creating culturally and linguistically sensitive environments, which can in turn foster the early childhood experiences of multilingual children (Espinosa & Magruder, 2014; Kummerer et al., 2007).

However, it should also be noted that having staff members who share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the multilingual families at the ECEC centre is not an exclusionary condition for establishing pedagogical practices that approach multilingualism in a positive way. Alstad and Tkachenko (2018) point out that a growing number of studies from different educational contexts show how multilingual approaches are viable even when professionals do not share the children's home languages. Indeed, being unable to speak any of the home languages present or not being multilingual does not mean that a professional cannot draw on children's home languages. Important in this sense is the support professionals receive in order to exploit the multilingual repertoire of children. Empirical studies show that teachers can be trained to develop skills that enable them to incorporate and promote children's home languages in ECEC practice (Castro et al., 2017; Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Mary & Young, 2017).

8.4.3 Recommendations for CPD

Since the publication of the research report of the Eurofound study on the impact of CPD and working conditions on the quality of ECEC services (Eurofound, 2015), many studies have been produced, all highlighting the importance of CPD for ECEC professionals on the one hand and showing effects of the impact of CPD on pedagogical practices on the other. There is no longer any doubt now about the essential role CPD can play – when certain criteria are met – in transforming ECEC practices towards more quality and better experiences for children and parents, especially from families living in socially vulnerable conditions (Council of the European Union, 2019b; European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2021). Review studies that focus on CPD in complex multilingual ECEC contexts remain, however, rather scarce.

A recent NESET analytical report on this matter is a rare exception (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023). In that report, it is highlighted that planning and implementation of CPD all too often starts by immediately defining concrete CPD modalities based on time constraints and the estimation of available resources. Therefore, Bergeron-Morin et al. (2023) propose a framework for the implementation of CPD in which the concrete goals of CPD (the question 'why') is put right up front, making a plea to first have a clear vision of the ultimate

goals for multilingual families before moving on to practical arrangements of any CPD trajectory. After all, CPD initiatives should always go hand in hand with a clear vision and a set of underlying values that drive the pedagogical work with multilingual children and families in ECEC. Considering the prevailing monolingual orientation in European education systems, making this vision and the underlying values explicit, is of utmost importance when designing CPD. By acknowledging that 1) language(s) development is indivisible from the development of the whole child, 2) multilingual children (and their parents) should be seen as competent, and all the resources they bring into the ECEC setting as an added value, and 3) multilingual development is a basic right, already the first foundations are being created for a path that will lead to a multilingual orientation in ECEC.

The conceptual framework presented in that NESET report comprises five components that together form a step-wise reflective path to developing and implementing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. The five steps each originate from a basic question:

1. Why? What goals or outcomes for multilingual children and families are envisioned by setting up CPD for ECEC professionals?
2. What? Which practices towards multilingual children and families can be implemented in ECEC centres?
3. Who? Who are the professionals targeted by the CPD? What are their needs, questions and experiences with multilingualism, and how can CPD pathways be tailored accordingly
4. How? Which CPD delivery modes and strategies should be chosen?
5. Where? What macro-context conditions can strengthen – or hinder – CPD trajectories?

Here, we concur with the recommendation in the NESET report that highlights that "*the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should follow a step-wise design, in which the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families are defined in advance of selecting the targeted practices and CPD delivery modes.*" (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023, p. 83)

Both the cited NESET report as well as other research reports on CPD contain numerous recommendations that are obviously applicable to the topic of this doctoral study. However, to avoid repeating ourselves and getting bogged down in an endless enumeration, we choose to highlight here a couple of aspects that

are more closely related to the main findings presented in this dissertation, fully aware of the ensuing incompleteness.

8.4.3.1 Addressing beliefs and knowledge

In general terms, offering evidence-based knowledge is widely recognised as a key feature of CPD (Larson et al., 2020). Given the prevailing monolingual orientation in ECEC and the monolingual habitus of professionals, this feature is, however, all the more important. From the experiences documented in Chapter 7, we learn that state of the art knowledge on early multilingualism is not directly at hand, and that professionals (as well as tutors) are not always aware of their knowledge deficit. This might leave them to overestimate their own knowledge base (Cunningham et al., 2009). Moreover, there is a risk that professionals will reproduce erroneous myths about multilingualism from their lack of knowledge, or see certain aspects of normal language development of multilingual children as a problem (Orioni, 2020).

Consequently, when language practices in ECEC stem from wrong assumptions about multilingual development, it can lead to only immersion in the language of the institution being considered important, reinforcing the already dominant monolingual orientation. Hence, up-to-date theoretical knowledge is necessary to challenge prevailing beliefs on multilingualism and to provide a solid basis for team discussions and dialogue with multilingual parents (Ragnarsdóttir, 2021). Moreover, making professionals aware of the prevailing monolingual habitus in ECEC can help them reflect on and reconsider their views on multilingualism (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018). In this sense, it is recommended that CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should directly address belief systems. According to Kirsch and Aleksić (2021) multilingual pedagogies in ECEC can only be transformative if professionals are aware of existing language hierarchies and if they are prepared to challenge their monolingual ideologies and practices.

8.4.3.2 Combining an array of CPD delivery modes

From the experiences documented in Chapter 7, we learn that an issue as complex as multilingualism requires an array of possibilities and exercises to stimulate reflection and action on multilingualism with a variety of childcare professionals in a variety of contexts. This means that trainers or tutors can select, from an array of different options, whichever CPD delivery modes will best allow the specific needs of the participants to be explored, within the available resources.

This is in line with research pointing out that a combination of different CPD delivery modes into what is often called a professional development '*dispositif*' may yield greater impact on professional practice than a focus on only one delivery mode (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2023; Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Romijn et al., 2021). A reason for this is that it allows better adaptation to different learning styles by reaching different learners in different ways and approaching different aspects of the content.

Hence, a menu-based approach to CPD should be favoured when focussing on multilingualism. As the multilingual realities across ECEC services vary greatly, different CPD delivery modes should be proposed that can be combined to adapt a CPD trajectory to the different needs and contexts of professionals.

8.4.3.3 Alignment with Spolsky's framework of Language Policy

There are many paths to multilingualism and just as many ways to deploy specific practices to support it. As contextual factors have a major influence on both the implementation of practices as well as on their effects, the most successful practices are those that are best suited to the particular context (Romijn et al., 2021). Such practices should be aligned with the team's vision, and with the unique story of each multilingual family.

In this sense, the aforementioned framework of language(s) policy (Spolsky, 2004) might provide a useful foundation for CPD aiming to support ECEC professionals in approaching multilingualism in a local context. Indeed, in a professional development trajectory, the language policy framework may serve as an entry point to reflect with professionals on their own concrete practices and their experiences with the multilingual families they meet. As multilingualism is often silenced at various levels in ECEC, it is necessary to openly and concretely discuss practices and beliefs in team, while constantly making connections with the existing agreements, rules and vision of the ECEC service. Although it is rather unlikely that everyone in a team shares the same beliefs, it is possible to start looking for a shared basis or vision from reflection on everyone's opinions and where they differ, as this may guide concrete actions and practices. This also implies that a language(s) policy is not set in stone and that it should be reflected upon on an ongoing basis. By openly reflecting on the language(s) policy with the team and engaging in conversation about it with each other, blind spots can be revealed, implicit beliefs made explicit and aspects that connect, differ or need revision can be sought. In this way, multilingualism as a theme can become visible, discussable and 'unsilenced'.

8.5 References

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English Summary

Multilingualism is a reality. That is the starting point of this doctoral research.

Due to processes of globalisation, migration, etc., along with diversity, the multilingual reality within European societies has also become more complex (Jeskanen, 2018). It is no longer uncommon for different languages to be spoken within a single family on a daily basis and for young children to grow up with multiple languages, all of which they need in their daily lives to move through their different contexts (Extra & Yağmur, 2011).

This makes early childhood education and care facilities (ECEC) important places. They are the first services that parents bring their young children to in order to share the child's upbringing and development, to enable reconciliation with other areas of life such as work, leisure, education ... and to participate in the social life of the community in an equitable way (Vandenbroeck, 2018). ECEC is there primarily to support families in these functions. This certainly applies to families that are in a socially vulnerable position because of language, origin or level of education (Council of the European Union, 2019). Moreover, ECEC is a *space* where different cultures, expectations and languages converge and where it is possible to experiment with those complex forms of diversity and thus, by extension, with what democratic living together might mean (Moss, 2007). The interactions that emerge within ECEC between parents, children and professionals can be described as pedagogical encounters (Davies & Gannon, 2009) in which difference with the Other forms the basis for the relationship and for the creation of new realities and rich experiences for all involved.

However, simultaneously with, or better, in response to increased diversities, many societies seem to have a strong yearning for a clear identity, prompted by feelings of insecurity and national destabilisation (Duyvendak, 2011). This search for identity is justified from a desire for social cohesion and takes shape within a monocultural and monolingual discourse that privileges homogeneity and leaves little room for the multiple layers of identity (Van Avermaet, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2017).

Although there is a growing recognition among specialists that multilingualism adds value to all children, educational practices and policies continue to perpetuate this 'myth of homogeneity' and associated monolingual beliefs (Pulinx & Van Avermaet, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2017). This occurs by privileging the dominant language over minority language(s) and by viewing

monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as a deviation from it (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). As a result, hybrid language practices are often ignored in educational contexts and multilingualism is constructed as a problem to be overcome rather than a resource or condition for learning (Lengyel, 2012; Ruiz, 1984; Vandenbroeck, 2017). According to Gogolin (1997), this monolingual orientation is a characteristic part of the habitus of professionals working in European educational systems rooted in the origins of the classical nation-state.

It is now well established that ECEC plays a key role in contributing to a more inclusive and equal society with equal opportunities for all families (Council of the European Union, 2019). To fulfil this role properly, ECEC professionals are expected to promote meaningful, high-quality interactions with children (OECD, 2021) and establish partnerships with parents in which child rearing can be shared (Alasuutari, 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Such pedagogical encounters are essentially characterised by negotiation and disagreement and, as argued, complicated by the interplay of increasing linguistic diversity and prevailing monolingual orientations.

Exploring the meanings that parents and professionals attach to their relationships can provide a better understanding of what is at stake in a pedagogical encounter in a multilingual environment and how it can be enriched to realise equal opportunities and counteract social inequalities.

This doctoral research is situated in the context of ECEC in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Due to the complex confluence of a multilingual reality and a monolingual orientation, the Flemish Community offers a good case to investigate pedagogical encounters in ECEC. A first overarching research question was therefore: *How does the pedagogical encounter between multilingual families and ECEC professionals take shape in a monolingual-oriented multilingual society?* In an attempt to answer that question, three more specific questions were posed, each of which was explored in a separate sub-study:

- *What happens when multilingual children transition to pre-primary education?*
- *How do ECEC professionals experience their relationships with multilingual parents?*
- *How do multilingual parents experience their relationships with ECEC professionals?*

Research shows that involving professionals in processes of continuous professional development (CPD) can significantly contribute to increasing the quality of ECEC for children and parents (e.g. Egert et al., 2018). However, the specific conditions CPD needs to meet to realise that potential in contexts of complex multilingualism remain understudied (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019). Therefore, this doctoral study sought to identify the conditions for successful CPD to fully realise its potential so that monolingual orientations in ECEC can be broken and opportunities for appreciating and exploiting multilingual realities can fully flourish.

This resulted in a second overarching research question: *How can ECEC professionals be supported to foster pedagogical encounters with multilingual families that fully acknowledge and exploit the multilingual realities of these families*? Again, three more specific questions were identified, each of which was explored in a separate sub-study:

- *What is the link between CPD on multilingualism and attitudes towards multilingual children and parents?*
- *What are important criteria for CPD to have an impact on ECEC quality?*
- *How can ECEC professionals be supported to establish multilingual practices and dialogue with multilingual families?*

The dissertation consists of an introduction (Chapter 1), a conclusion (Chapter 8) and six substantive chapters (Chapters 2 to 7) in which each research question is explored through a specific sub-study.

Chapter 2 focuses on the experiences of multilingual children in pre-primary education. In Flanders, pre-primary education is framed as the 'gateway to Dutch'. The education policy aims to send as many toddlers as possible to school as early as possible, in order to ensure that the children know enough Dutch to keep up in primary school. In the sub-study presented in Chapter 2, eight children at risk of poverty (most of whom had a migration background) were followed during their first year in pre-primary education through detailed video observations. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of their language interactions and language learning opportunities allowed to establish that despite the policy focus on Dutch, structural features of pre-primary education (large groups, year-class system, dominant focus on learning at the expense of care, etc.) contribute to mechanisms that hinder an equal distribution of learning opportunities, especially for multilingual children. Entry classes were found to provide insufficient conditions for multilingual toddlers to achieve meaningful

and language-rich interactions, putting these toddlers at risk of dropping out. Not only did the toddlers get few and low-quality opportunities to learn language, their multilingual repertoire was virtually ignored.

Chapter 3 centres on the perspectives of childcare professionals. By involving 42 childcare workers in 9 group interviews, their views and beliefs regarding multilingualism in general and regarding their relationships with multilingual parents in particular were explored. The professionals' narratives revealed that they were aware of the pressures on the Dutch language in pre-primary education and of the fact that the organisation of pre-primary school class is challenging for children with disadvantaged backgrounds. The childcare professionals appeared to want to prepare multilingual children for this by adopting and propagating the importance of Dutch in monolingual practices and beliefs. However well-intentioned, this unconsciously contributes to the 'schoolification' of ECEC and it often leads to a negative appraisal of multilingual parents who, according to professionals, are not trying hard enough to speak Dutch. Although the multilingual reality was visible in the childcare services and posed many challenges to the professionals, the issue of multilingualism seemed rather absent from the policies and practices of their centres, as well as from concrete dialogue with multilingual parents. This silencing of multilingualism seemed to be an ingrained order rather than ill will.

Chapter 4 examines 18 multilingual parents' perspectives on their interactions with childcare and their relationships with professionals. This study deliberately used the same methodology as the study presented in Chapter 3. In this sense, it acts as a 'mirror' to Chapter 3. The study in Chapter 4 had a relatively small and not very diverse sample (in terms of parents' socio-economic situation), making the chapter as well as the findings rather exploratory in nature. Nevertheless, it could be observed that the multilingual parents also strongly noted the silence about multilingualism established in Chapter 3. Although they generally expressed satisfaction with their relationships with the childcare workers, they indicated that little was done with their heritage languages and they experienced little dialogue about multilingualism. They appeared to have various questions, doubts and expectations about multilingual parenting and language development, but they did not (always) turn to the professionals to ask these questions and appeared to have different reasons for doing so. It seems that dialogue on this aspect of diversity is pressurised by power differences.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between CPD and childcare professionals' positive attitudes towards multilingual children and multilingual parents. Based

on a multi-level analysis on data from the PRO-M survey completed by 351 childcare professionals from 85 childcare services, links between CPD on multilingualism, dialogue with multilingual parents and use of home language in interaction with multilingual children were sought. The results showed that professionals who received support on multilingualism appeared more likely to engage in dialogue with multilingual parents about multilingual parenting. In turn, professionals who were themselves multilingual appeared more likely to use home languages when interacting with multilingual children.

Chapter 6 presents the results of a European systematic literature review on the effect of CPD on process quality in ECEC. The study aimed to unravel the necessary criteria that CPD must meet to have any effect on the quality of pedagogical practices. It can be inferred from the results of the review that not every form of CPD appears to be equally effective. To have a real effect on the quality of pedagogical practices, CPD must meet a number of important conditions. In summary, it appears that professionals are best guided by a pedagogical coach to reflect in groups in a long-term process that is integrated into practice, underpinned by an evidence-based framework and about which participants can take responsibility and ownership themselves.

Chapter 7 brings together the knowledge from all the previous chapters with the desire to transform ECEC practices into places where multilingualism can be valorised. Together with a group of 29 coaches, trainers, coordinators... from the childcare sector, a joint trajectory of professional development was set up that took into account the criteria highlighted in Chapter 6. The trajectory focused on sustainable implementation of support for childcare professionals towards a positive approach to multilingualism in childcare and led to the development of a toolkit for tutors in childcare. The first experiences documented in Chapter 7 show that the tool provides tutors with a range of opportunities to make multilingualism a 'discussed' rather than an 'silenced' topic and initiate reflection on it. In this way, small cracks can appear in the prevailing monolingual orientation, revealing a positive approach to multilingual reality and allowing ECEC to play its key role in contributing to an inclusive society with equal opportunities for all children and their parents.

Bringing together the findings of the different studies (**Chapter 8**), it can be concluded that multilingualism is rather silenced in the pedagogical encounter in ECEC. This is reflected in attitudes and practices towards multilingual children and parents, but also in the absence of the topic at the level of ECEC services and teams. Professionals seem reluctant to use heritage languages of children and

parents, and dialogue on multilingual parenting is virtually non-existent. The strong monolingual Dutch orientation that predominates not only underutilises the potential of multilingualism, it also contributes to processes of schoolification in which ECEC is mainly framed in terms of preparation for school. Given the focus on Dutch therein, one could argue that schoolification of ECEC in Flanders is characterised by a 'Dutchification'. However, there is fertile ground for practices that positively approach and exploit multilingualism. The research findings point to the potential of CPD to foster dialogue with multilingual parents and they shed light on the necessary conditions for CPD to change pedagogical practices.

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Nederlandstalige Samenvatting

Meertaligheid is een realiteit. Dat is het vertrekpunt van dit doctoraatsonderzoek.

Door processen van globalisering, migratie, etc. is samen met diversiteit ook de meertalige realiteit binnen Europese samenlevingen complexer geworden (Jeskanen, 2018). Het is niet meer ongewoon dat binnen één gezin op dagelijkse basis verschillende talen aan bod komen en dat jonge kinderen opgroeien met meerdere talen die ze in hun dagelijks leven allemaal nodig hebben om zich te bewegen doorheen hun verschillende contexten (Extra & Yağmur, 2011).

Dat maakt van onderwijs- en opvangvoorzieningen voor jonge kinderen ('OOJK') belangrijke plekken. Het zijn de eerste voorzieningen waar ouders hun jonge kinderen naartoe brengen om de opvoeding en de ontwikkeling van het kind te delen, de combinatie met andere levensdomeinen zoals werk, vrije tijd, opleiding, ... mogelijk te maken en op een gelijkwaardige manier te participeren aan het sociale leven in de gemeenschap (Vandenbroeck, 2018). OOJK is er in de eerste plaats om gezinnen bij die drie functies te ondersteunen. Dat geldt zeker voor gezinnen die zich omwille van taal, herkomst of opleidingsniveau in een maatschappelijk kwetsbare positie bevinden (Council of the European Union, 2019). Bovendien is OOJK een plek ('space') waar verschillende culturen, verwachtingen en talen samenkomen en waar geëxperimenteerd kan worden met die complexe vormen van diversiteit en dus bij uitbreiding met wat democratisch samenleven betekent (Moss, 2007). De interacties die binnen OOJK ontstaan tussen ouders, kinderen en professionals kunnen omschreven worden als pedagogische ontmoetingen ('pedagogical encounters') (Davies & Gannon, 2009) waarin het verschil met de Ander de basis vormt voor de relatie en voor het creëren van nieuwe realiteiten en rijke ervaringen voor alle betrokkenen.

Echter, tegelijk met, of beter, in reactie op de toegenomen diversiteit lijken veel samenlevingen een sterke hang te hebben naar een duidelijke identiteit, ingegeven door gevoelens van onzekerheid en nationale destabilisering (Duyvendak, 2011). Die zoektocht naar identiteit wordt verantwoord vanuit een streven naar sociale cohesie en krijgt vorm binnen een monocultureel en monolinguaal discours dat homogeniteit bevoorrecht en weinig ruimte laat voor de meerdere lagen van een meervoudige identiteit (Van Avermaet, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2017).

Hoewel er onder specialisten een groeiende erkenning is dat meertaligheid een meerwaarde is voor alle kinderen, blijven educatieve praktijken en beleid deze

'mythe van homogeniteit' en bijbehorende eentalige overtuigingen bestendigen (Pulinx & Van Avermaet, 2014; Vandenbroeck, 2017). Dit gebeurt door de dominante taal te bevoorrechten boven minderheidstaal/-talen en door eentaligheid als de norm te zien en meertaligheid als een afwijking daarvan (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Daardoor worden hybride taalpraktijken in educatieve contexten vaak genegeerd en wordt meertaligheid geconstrueerd als een probleem dat moet worden overwonnen in plaats van een hulpbron of voorwaarde voor leren (Lengyel, 2012; Ruiz, 1984; Vandenbroeck, 2017). Volgens Gogolin (1997) is deze eentalige oriëntering een kenmerkend onderdeel van de habitus van professionals werkzaam in Europese educatieve systemen geworteld in het ontstaan van de klassieke natiestaat.

Het staat inmiddels vast dat OOJK een sleutelrol speelt bij het bijdragen aan een meer inclusieve en gelijke samenleving met gelijke kansen voor alle gezinnen (Council of the European Union, 2019). Om deze rol naar behoren te vervullen, wordt van OOJK-professionals verwacht dat zij betekenisvolle, kwalitatieve interacties met kinderen bevorderen (OECD, 2021) en partnerschappen met ouders aangaan waarin de opvoeding van het kind kan worden gedeeld (Alasuutari, 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Dergelijke pedagogische ontmoetingen worden in wezen gekenmerkt door onderhandeling en onenigheid en, zoals gesteld, gecompliceerd door het samenspel van toenemende taaldiversiteit en heersende eentalige oriënteringen.

Door te onderzoeken welke betekenissen ouders en professionals aan hun relaties hechten, kan een beter begrip ontstaan van wat er op het spel staat in een pedagogische ontmoeting in een meertalige omgeving en hoe deze kan worden verrijkt om gelijke kansen te realiseren en sociale ongelijkheid tegen te gaan.

Dit doctoraatsonderzoek situeert zich in de context van OOJK in de Vlaamse Gemeenschap van België. Door de complexe samenloop van een meertalige realiteit en een eentalige oriëntatie is de Vlaamse Gemeenschap een goede casus om pedagogische ontmoetingen in OOJK te onderzoeken. Een eerste overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag was dan ook: *Hoe krijgt de pedagogische ontmoeting tussen meertalige gezinnen en OOJK-professionals vorm in een eentalig georiënteerde meertalige samenleving?* In een poging die vraag te beantwoorden, werden drie meer specifieke vragen gesteld, die elk in een afzonderlijke deelstudie werden onderzocht:

- *Wat gebeurt wanneer meertalige kinderen instappen in het kleuteronderwijs?*
- *Hoe ervaren begeleiders in de kinderopvang hun relaties met meertalige ouders?*
- *Hoe ervaren meertalige ouders hun relaties met begeleiders in de kinderopvang?*

Onderzoek toont aan dat het betrekken van professionals in processen van continue professionele ontwikkeling ('CPD') in belangrijke mate kan bijdragen aan het verhogen van de kwaliteit van OOJK voor kinderen en ouders (e.g. Egert et al., 2018). De specifieke voorwaarden waaraan CPD moet voldoen om dat potentieel te realiseren in contexten van complexe meertaligheid blijven echter onderbelicht (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019). Daarom werd in deze doctoraatsstudie getracht de voorwaarden vast te stellen voor succesvolle CPD om het potentieel ervan volledig te benutten zodat eentalige oriënteringen in OOJK doorbroken kunnen worden en mogelijkheden voor het waarderen en benutten van de meertalige realiteit volop kunnen floreren.

Dit resulteerde in een tweede overkoepelende onderzoeksvraag: *Hoe kunnen OOJK-professionals worden ondersteund om pedagogische ontmoetingen met meertalige gezinnen te bevorderen die de meertalige realiteit van deze gezinnen volledig erkennen en benutten?* Ook hier werden drie meer specifieke vragen geïdentificeerd, die elk in een afzonderlijke deelstudie werden onderzocht:

- *Wat is het verband tussen CPD over meertaligheid en houdingen tegenover meertalige kinderen en ouders?*
- *Wat zijn belangrijke criteria om CPD een impact te laten hebben op de kwaliteit van OOJK?*
- *Hoe kunnen OOJK-professionals worden ondersteund bij het opzetten van meertalige praktijken en de dialoog met meertalige gezinnen?*

Het proefschrift bestaat uit een inleiding (Hoofdstuk 1), een besluit (Hoofdstuk 8) en zes inhoudelijke hoofdstukken (Hoofdstukken 2 t.e.m.7) waarin elke onderzoeksvraag belicht wordt aan de hand van een specifieke deelstudie.

Hoofdstuk 2 focust op de ervaringen van meertalige kinderen in het kleuteronderwijs. In Vlaanderen wordt de kleuterschool geframed als 'toegangspoort tot het Nederlands'. Het kleuteronderwijsbeleid is erop gericht om zoveel mogelijk kleuters zo vroeg mogelijk naar school te sturen om ervoor te zorgen dat de kinderen voldoende Nederlands kennen om mee te kunnen in

de lagere school. In de deelstudie die gepresenteerd wordt in Hoofdstuk 2 werden acht kinderen met een armoederisico (van wie de meesten een migratieachtergrond hadden) gevolgd tijdens hun eerste jaar in het kleuteronderwijs door middel van gedetailleerde video-observaties. Een kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve analyse van hun talige interacties en taalleerkansen liet toe om vast te stellen dat ondanks de beleidsaandacht op het Nederlands, de structurele kenmerken van het kleuteronderwijs (grote groepen, jaarklassensysteem, dominante focus op leren ten koste van zorg, etc.) bijdragen aan mechanismen die een gelijke verdeling van leerkansen belemmeren, in het bijzonder voor meertalige kinderen. De instapklassen bleken voor meertalige kleuters onvoldoende voorwaarden te bieden om tot zinvolle en taalrijke interacties te komen, waardoor deze kleuters dreigen uit te vallen. Niet alleen kregen de kleuters weinig en weinig kwalitatieve kansen om taal te leren, hun meertalig repertoire werd vrijwel genegeerd.

Hoofdstuk 3 stelt het perspectief van professionals in de kinderopvang centraal. Door 42 medewerkers in de kinderopvang te bevragen via 9 groepsinterviews, werden hun opvattingen en overtuigingen ten aanzien van meertaligheid in het algemeen en ten aanzien van hun relaties met meertalige ouders in het bijzonder onderzocht. Uit de verhalen van de kinderbegeleiders bleek dat zij zich bewust waren van de druk op het Nederlands in het kleuteronderwijs en van het feit dat de organisatie van de kleuterklas een uitdaging vormt voor kinderen in een maatschappelijk kwetsbare positie. Zij blijken meertalige kinderen hierop te willen voorbereiden door het belang van het Nederlands over te nemen en uit te dragen in eentalige praktijken en overtuigingen. Hoe goedbedoeld ook, dit draagt onbewust bij tot de 'verschoolsing' van OOJK en het leidt vaak tot een negatieve beoordeling van meertalige ouders die volgens de professionals niet hard genoeg hun best doen om Nederlands te spreken. Hoewel de meertalige realiteit in de kinderopvangvoorzieningen zichtbaar was en de professionals voor heel wat uitdagingen stelde, leek het thema meertaligheid eerder afwezig in het beleid en de praktijken van hun voorzieningen, alsook in de concrete dialoog met meertalige ouders. Dit stilhouden of onbesproken laten van meertaligheid ('silencing') leek eerder een ingebakken orde dan kwade wil.

Hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt de perspectieven van 18 meertalige ouders op hun interacties met de kinderopvang en hun relaties met de professionals. In deze studie is bewust dezelfde methodologie gebruikt als in de studie voorgesteld in Hoofdstuk 3. In die zin fungeert het als een 'spiegelhoofdstuk' voor Hoofdstuk 3. De studie in Hoofdstuk 4 had een relatief kleine en weinig diverse steekproef (in

termen van sociaaleconomische situatie van de ouders), waardoor het hoofdstuk eerder exploratief van aard is. Toch kon vastgesteld worden dat de meertalige ouders de stilte over meertaligheid vastgesteld in Hoofdstuk 3 ook sterk opmerkten. Hoewel zij zich over het algemeen tevreden uitten over hun relatie met de kinderbegeleiders, gaven ze aan dat er weinig met hun thuistalen werd gedaan en dat ze weinig dialoog over meertaligheid ervoeren. Ze bleken verschillende vragen, twijfels en verwachtingen te hebben over meertalig opvoeden en taalontwikkeling, maar ze wendden zich niet (altijd) tot de professionals om deze vragen te stellen en bleken daartoe verschillende redenen te hebben. Het lijkt erop dat de dialoog over dit aspect van diversiteit onder druk wordt gezet door machtsverschillen.

Hoofdstuk 5 onderzoekt het verband tussen CPD en positieve attitudes van kinderopvangprofessionals ten aanzien van meertalige kinderen en meertalige ouders. Op basis van een multi-level analyse op data van de PRO-M enquête ingevuld door 351 kinderbegeleiders uit 85 kinderopvangvoorzieningen werd gezocht naar verbanden tussen ondersteuning op het gebied van meertaligheid, de dialoog met meertalige ouders en het gebruik van thuistaal in interactie met meertalige kinderen. De resultaten laten zien dat professionals die ondersteuning kregen op het gebied van meertaligheid meer geneigd blijken om met meertalige ouders in gesprek te gaan over meertalig opvoeden. Professionals die zelf meertalig opgevoed werden, blijken dan weer meer geneigd om thuistalen te gebruiken in interactie met meertalige kinderen.

Hoofdstuk 6 presenteert de resultaten van een Europees systematisch literatuuronderzoek naar het effect van CPD op de proceskwaliteit in OOJK. De studie had tot doel de noodzakelijke criteria te ontrafelen waaraan CPD moet voldoen om enig effect te hebben op de kwaliteit van pedagogische praktijken. Uit de resultaten van de review kan afgeleid worden dat niet elke vorm van CPD even doeltreffend blijkt te zijn. Om echt effect te hebben op de kwaliteit van de pedagogische praktijk, moet CPD aan een aantal belangrijke voorwaarden voldoen. Samengevat blijkt het dat professionals het best door een pedagogische coach worden begeleid om in groepsverband te reflecteren in een langlopend traject dat in de praktijk is geïntegreerd, geschraagd wordt door een wetenschappelijk gefundeerd kader en waarover de deelnemers zelf verantwoordelijkheid en eigenaarschap kunnen nemen.

Hoofdstuk 7 brengt de kennis uit alle voorgaande hoofdstukken samen met de wens om OOJK-praktijken om te vormen tot plekken waar meertaligheid ten volle gevaloriseerd kan worden. Samen met een groep van 29 coaches, trainers,

verantwoordelijken, ... uit de kinderopvang werd een gezamenlijk traject van professionele ontwikkeling opgezet dat rekening hield met de criteria die in Hoofdstuk 6 naar voren kwamen. Het traject was gericht op een duurzame implementatie van ondersteuning voor professionals in de richting van een positieve benadering van meertaligheid in de kinderopvang en leidde tot de ontwikkeling van een toolkit voor ondersteuners in de kinderopvang. Uit de prille ervaringen gedocumenteerd in Hoofdstuk 7 blijkt dat het instrument de ondersteuners een waaier aan mogelijkheden biedt om van meertaligheid een 'besproken' in plaats van een 'onbesproken' onderwerp te maken en de aanzet te geven tot reflectie daarover. Op die manier kunnen kleine barstjes in de heersende eentalige oriëntatie ontstaan, waardoor een positieve benadering van de meertalige realiteit zichtbaar wordt en OOJK zijn sleutelrol kan vervullen door bij te dragen tot een inclusieve samenleving met gelijke kansen voor alle kinderen en hun ouders.

Door de bevindingen van de verschillende studies samen te brengen (**Hoofdstuk 8**), kan worden geconcludeerd dat meertaligheid in de pedagogische ontmoeting in OOJK eerder stilgezwegen wordt. Dit komt tot uiting in houdingen en praktijken ten aanzien van meertalige kinderen en ouders, maar ook in de afwezigheid van het onderwerp op niveau van de OOJK-voorzieningen en -teams. Professionals lijken terughoudend te zijn om erfgoedtalen van kinderen en ouders te benutten, en de dialoog over meertalige opvoeding is vrijwel onbestaande. De sterke eentalige Nederlandse oriëntatie die daardoor overheerst, onderbenut niet alleen het potentieel van meertaligheid, maar draagt ook bij tot processen van verschoolsing waarbij OOJK vooral wordt gekaderd in termen van voorbereiding op de school. Gezien de focus op het Nederlands daarin, zou men kunnen stellen dat verschoolsing van OOJK in Vlaanderen gekenmerkt wordt door een 'vernederlandsing' ('Dutchification'). Er is echter een vruchtbare bodem voor praktijken die meertaligheid positief benaderen en benutten. De onderzoeksresultaten wijzen op het potentieel van professionele ondersteuning om de dialoog met meertalige ouders te bevorderen en werpen licht op de noodzakelijke voorwaarden voor CPD om pedagogische praktijken te veranderen.

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Data Storage Fact Sheets

% Data Storage Fact Sheet 1

% Name/identifier study: PHD BP - CH2 - FWO Transitions
% Author: Brecht Peleman
% Date:16/05/2023

1. Contact details
==========

1a. Main researcher

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies
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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Peleman, B., Vandenbroeck, M., & Van Avermaet, P. (2020). Early learning opportunities for children at risk of social exclusion. Opening the black box of preschool practice. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 28(1), 21-42.

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videoclips of specific scenes
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word
and Exel files reporting results
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informed consent
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  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical
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Professionals
% Author: Brecht Peleman
% Date:16/05/2023


1. Contact details
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1a. Main researcher
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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets
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Review). 'They say "yes", but they mean "no"'.
Childcare professionals' views on their relationship
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Transcripts of group interviews, NVivo Coding file
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word
files reporting results
  - [X] files(s) containing information about
informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical
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% Data Storage Fact Sheet 3

% Name/identifier study: PHD BP - CH4 - PROM Parents
% Author: Brecht Peleman
% Date:16/05/2023


1. Contact details
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1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)
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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet
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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets
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multilingualism. Supporting professionals in Early
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* Which other files have been stored?
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data to reported results. Specify:
  - [X] file(s) containing processed data. Specify:
Transcripts of group interviews
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word
files reporting results
  - [X] files(s) containing information about
informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical
provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the
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interpreted. Specify: ...
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* On which platform are these other files stored?
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% Data Storage Fact Sheet 4

% Name/identifier study: PHD BP - CH5 - PROM CPD
% Author: Brecht Peleman
% Date:16/05/2023


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1a. Main researcher
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1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)
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- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent
- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@UGent.be

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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets
are reported: Peleman, B., Van Der Wildt, A., &
Vandenbroeck, M. (2022). Home language use with
children, dialogue with multilingual parents and
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Research Quarterly, 61, 70-80.

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SPSS data sets containing cleaned data, aggregated
for analysis
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: SPSS
Output files, Word and Exel files reporting results
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about
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provisions
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% Name/identifier study: PHD BP - CH6 - EUROFOUND CPD
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% Date:16/05/2023


1. Contact details
==========================================================

1a. Main researcher
----------------------------------------------------------
- name: Brecht Peleman
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent
- e-mail: Brecht.Peleman@UGent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)
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- name: Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent
- e-mail: Michel.Vandenbroeck@UGent.be

If a response is not received when using the above
contact details, please send an email to
data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty
of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri
Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.


2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet
applies
==========================================================
* Reference of the publication in which the datasets
are reported: Peleman, B., Lazzari, A., Budginait?,
I., Siarova, H., Hauari, H., Peeters, J., & Cameron,
C. (2018). Continuous professional development and
ECEC quality: Findings from a European systematic
literature review. European Journal of Education,
53(1), 9-22.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet
apply to?: This sheet applies to all data used in
this publication.
```

```
3. Information about the files that have been stored
=====================================================
3a. Raw data
-----------------------------------------------------

* Have the raw data been stored by the main
researcher? [X] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [X] researcher PC
  - [X] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [X] main researcher
  - [X] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [X] other (specify): Server administrator of the
department


3b. Other files
-----------------------------------------------------

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw
data to reported results. Specify:
  - [X] file(s) containing processed data. Specify:
Excel file with data extraction and screening of
studies, Word files mapping the included studies
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word
files reporting results, Word and Exel files
containing quality appraisal
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about
informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical
provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the
stored files and how this content should be
interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify:
```

```
* On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [X] individual PC
  - [X] research group file server
  - [ ] other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [X] main researcher
  - [X] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [X] other (specify): Server administrator of the
department


4. Reproduction
=======================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [
] YES / [X] NO

* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:


v0.2
```

```
% Data Storage Fact Sheet 6

% Name/identifier study: PHD BP - CH6 - PROMEMOQ
% Author:Brecht Peleman
% Date:16/05/2023


1. Contact details
====================================================

1a. Main researcher
----------------------------------------------------
- name: Brecht Peleman
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent
- e-mail: Brecht.Peleman@UGent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)
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- name: Prof. Dr. Michel Vandenbroeck
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contact details, please send an email to
data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty
of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri
Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.


2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet
applies
====================================================
* Reference of the publication in which the datasets
are reported: Peleman, B. Hulpia, H. Bergeron-Morin,
L.(under review) Supporting childcare professionals
in approaching multilingualism. Insights from a
collaborative process on professional development.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet
apply to?: This sheet applies to all data used in
this publication.
```

```
3. Information about the files that have been stored
=====================================================
3a. Raw data
-----------------------------------------------------

* Have the raw data been stored by the main
researcher? [X] YES / [ ] NO
If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [X] researcher PC
  - [X] research group file server
  - [ ] other (specify): ...

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [X] main researcher
  - [X] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [X] other (specify): Server administrator of the
department


3b. Other files
-----------------------------------------------------

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [ ] file(s) describing the transition from raw
data to reported results. Specify:
  - [X] file(s) containing processed data. Specify:
Transcripts of group interviews, Word files
documenting the development process
  - [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word
files reporting results
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about
informed consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical
provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the
stored files and how this content should be
interpreted. Specify: ...
  - [ ] other files. Specify:
```

```
* On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [X] individual PC
  - [X] research group file server
  - [ ] other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [X] main researcher
  - [X] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [X] other (specify): Server administrator of the
department


4. Reproduction
=======================================================
* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [
] YES / [X] NO

* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:


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