INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) IN ECEC

A presentation related to the theme: "Promoting Inclusive and Innovative Societies: Modernising Childcare Systems"

Tackling Inequalities in Early Years
Ensuring Harmonised Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.
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AIMS

This paper highlights innovative approaches to in-service continuous professional development (CPD) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) strategies.

The overall aims of the presentation is to explore innovation as an aspect of in-service CPD in ECEC in relation to new ways to increase the knowledge, skill sets and attitudinal perspectives of ECEC practitioners as they engage in child development and care.

The paper contribute with

• An overview of innovation in CPD in Europe
• Deeper insights in the nature of innovation CPD and
• Innovation in relation to tackling social inequality in Early Years
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› The study represents the WP3 part of the CARE Project: Curriculum quality analysis and impact review of European ECEC CARE with focus on the impact of professional development on quality ECEC: http://ecec-org.resources/publications.

› And in the special Issue of European Journal of Education (EJE), March 2018.
BACKGROUND

- Existing consensus in research, ECEC organisations, and among policymakers regarding the importance of a highly qualified workforce to ensure ECEC quality (Milotay, 27.08.18).

- Since ECEC policies and systems are constantly evolving, involving new challenges and new requirements, the content and expectations regarding the work of ECEC professionals also change from year to year.

- In order for ECEC as a whole to be able to meet European objectives of strengthening child outcomes for all, enhanced and continued professional development (both pre-service and in-service) is crucial. (Jensen & Iannone, 2016)
The great challenge regarding CPD is to adequately prepare the workforce for ongoing transformations, such as digitalisation, changing family structures, new forms of diversity, migration and other complex societal challenges that all influence children’s lives in a broad sense and children’s opportunities to be active participant learners (UN’s Child-Convention, 1989).

The need to take an innovative approach to CPD is prompted by such growing societal challenges to modern life, and especially in terms of social inequality and issues regarding the vulnerable.

A concept of social and responsible innovation will be suggested as a new way to contribute to modernising childcare systems in terms of inclusion.
THEORY

› The concept of innovation is closely interconnected with the concept of creativity (Hammershøj, 2017) and based on the theories of Schumpeter (1934).

› According to Schumpeter, innovation is the key driver of economic development and he defines innovation as "the carrying out of new combinations" (Ibid). Innovation is in this definition a matter of carrying out a creative combination, as creativity is about making new combinations.

› The problem, according to Hammershøj, is however that the common definitions are definitions of products and not processes and are founded in economic theory.

› In the context of CPD within ECEC, we propose moving beyond an economic concept of innovation as commercialisation of new ideas/products by developing a broader concept of innovation that embraces process aspects of innovation (Jensen and Iannone, 2015, 2018).
CONCEPTS

› The study of innovative approaches to CPD in ECEC I present is based on a definition of innovation inspired by Schumpeter’s conceptualisation of carrying out new combinations and of creativity as an important aspect of innovation. However, we focus on the role of professionals in developing new competences to make and carry out renewed process quality within ECEC.

› The term ‘social innovation’ refers to a collective process of transforming ideas, values, theories and strategies into new processes of quality (Ibid.). As defined by Dawson and Daniel (2010), “social innovations [are] triggered by an interest in improving the well-being of people in society.”

› Social innovation is therefore a Key Concept for further explorations of innovative approaches to CPD in ECEC.
METHODS

Data from 10 European ECEC systems were gathered by means of a questionnaire on pre-service and in-service CPD strategies and innovation. Analyses of data are from 2016.

The questionnaires were deployed by national experts (CARE project partners) who were asked to describe the system of pre-service education and CPD in their countries, namely Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Portugal.

In addition, case studies were conducted in three of these countries (Italy, Poland and Denmark), further exploring innovation in CPD with special emphasis on social innovation.
ANALYSES

Responses to the survey explored how different approaches enabled professionals to address contemporary challenges, such as:

- Social inequality,
- Strengthening children’s well-being and learning by taking into account the UN convention on children’s rights (UN, 1989)
- Implementing high-quality ECEC with a focus on structural and processual quality
- Entering into new partnerships with stakeholders: parents – of all children, and in particular the most vulnerable
- Working in cooperation with universities, policymakers and local authorities

Findings from the survey were integrated with results from a narrative literature review (57 studies) and studies of the effects and impact of CPD.

Case studies contributed deeper insights into the nature of social innovation and its impact on quality, especially process quality.
RESULTS I: DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

- ECEC settings /contexts with a well-developed tradition of innovative CPD in ECEC are characterised by staff who are empowered to provide and expand on quality, renewed practices and/or emphasising data use on child outcomes.
  - This happens when professionals work in a context of change towards creative and critical thinking with fellow professionals. This is often self-governed (institutional/municipal) (bottom-up approach), few have centralised standards.

- In contexts without a tradition for innovation, there is a growing awareness of the importance of strengthening ECEC CPD in a lifelong learning perspective - and also through closer collaboration between research and practice.
  - Within this top-down control of ECEC CPD, innovation is often very slow or non-existent - due to bureaucracy, for instance.

- Coordination and leadership at all levels are key to any innovation in CPD.
RESULTS II: REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVITY

- Critical reflection, the question of ‘why’ (to-do) within communities of practice rather than merely ‘how’ and ‘what’ comes to the fore.
- Reflection and the relationship to ‘learning by doing’ holds enormous potential for innovation and professional learning in CPD since reflection is what can lead to the continuous renewal of ECEC strategies and practice.

- Reflection and reflexivity may also include the implementation of evidence-based knowledge in everyday practices, critical reflection on setting goals, improving best practices in staff groups and developing competences to work together innovatively towards learning and organisational change. This happens within in e.g. learning laboratories, where staff set goals for change.

- Settings/contexts with a strong emphasis on governing by monitoring stand in stark contrast to approaches to innovation and creativity based on the trends towards reflective practices and critical thinking
  - if working within a top-down governed system, critical reflection in CPD is not possible – and social innovation is hindered.
RESULTS III: INNOVATION AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

› Communities of practice were identified as increasingly important in promoting a culture of collaboration and co-creation, evaluation and critical reflection as the foundation for ongoing innovation and creativity in CPD in ECEC.

› They represent ‘democratic’ participatory approaches in professional development work that would also nurture critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on questions such as ”what is quality practice” (Bennnett, 2012, Jensen, 2013).

› Support for societal awareness and collaboration at an organisational learning level within systems of professionals is indispensable and becomes a key element in developing and maintaining high quality ECEC.

› The goal is to establish working communities which are competent and where individuals work is made transparent for different collaborations.
RESULTS IV: TACKLING INEQUALITY

Innovations in CPD targeting social inequality are approached in two different ways:

I. As part of communities of practice and special interest networks – a community and system level – in a context where democratic participatory CPD tackling society’s social challenges is the tradition and take departure in bottom-up approaches to CPD (– see Bove et al, 2018, p. 38-39, the Reggio Emilie and Milan case).

II. As a specifically designed CPD-based intervention, with a combination of renewed CPD and social innovation based on exploratory design and change laboratories – interrelation between a top-down and bottom-up approach moving from a deficit- to resource-oriented thinking on disadvantage ( – see Bove et al, 2018, p. 35 -36, The VIDA case).

In other ECEC contexts, the issues of social disadvantage remain invisible and efforts are still developing.
CONCLUSION

This study contributes to research, practice, and policy by conceptualization of innovation and creativity seen in a process perspective:

➢ In several countries, a shift is evident from hierarchical structure for CPD – innovation in ECEC towards a more horizontal structure, focusing on co-construction of knowledge and practice.

➢ The emergence of reflexivity, critical thinking seen in the light of communities of practice and organizational learning has further demonstrated how sustainability and scalability this approach might be within reach.

➢ Case studies showed further characteristics of innovation, as not episodic and systemic involving whole networks, it requires initiatives that goes beyond the initial scope, and target as many professionals as possible with learning opportunities (Bove et al., 2018, p. 36) – this findings lead us to question and further get insights in social dimensions of innovative approaches to CPD.
PERSPECTIVES

There is a need for more research, practice and policy based on the concept of social and responsible innovation

› Firstly, on the ECEC workforce as a collective of creatives (systems of CPD including all professionals)

› Secondly, on co-creation and reflexivity as a foundation for innovation in terms of practitioners’ competences to take responsibility for improving ECEC quality, by improved competences to ”the making of new combinations” and ”the carrying out of new combinations”.
FINALLY

› The term ‘social innovation’ referred to as a collective process of transforming ideas, values, theories and strategies into new processes of quality has an enormous potential in relation to promoting inclusive societies starting in early years.

› This will be relevant to develop and further explore at a practice level, a research level and a policy level, and in the interrelations between these three levels.

› The specific processes and tools for these collective and innovative processes however remain rather unexplored.

› There is still much to be done in terms of developing a comprehensive and widely accepted theoretical approach to innovative approaches to CPD in ECEC.
READ MORE!


Full publications from the CARE project: Curriculum quality analysis and impact review of European ECEC CARE. http://ecec-org.resources/publications
THANK YOU!

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