

# VALUE ROADMAP

Pathways toward Strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care

Presentation at the Research Programme meeting  
*Early Childhood: Education and Care in everyday life*  
**Friday 6. November 2020, DPU, Copenhagen**

Bente Jensen, Phd., Professor mso  
DPU, Department of Educational Studies, Denmark



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# DISCUSSION THEMES

- > A participatory approach to continuous professional development (CPD) in ECEC- why and how? And what is the relevance of a VALUE approach TO CPD in a Danish context?
- > The idea of a VALUE ROAD MAP – and its relevance in research and practice from your view?



# CONTENT

- I THE VALUE PROJECT
- II VALUE ROADMAP/AND STAGES OF A VALUE PATHWAY
- III DISCUSSION



# THE VALUE PROJECT

# OBJECTIVES

Value explores the following question:

- How can continuous professional development (CPD) strengthen professional identity, holistic approaches to educational work (educare) and cooperation between core and assisting practitioners working within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)?

This question is explored through pilot projects conducted by research groups located in four different countries - Belgium, Denmark, Slovenia and Portugal - within the Erasmus+ project *VALUE diversity in care and education* (VALUE).

# PROJECT OVERVIEW RESULTS

- [Baselinestudy](#)
- [Four country reports](#)
- [Endline report](#)

<https://www.value-ecec.eu/>



PHOTO CREDIT © Fundação Aga Khan Portugal

# BACKGROUND

- Evidence-based consensus that high quality ECEC, and ultimately positive outcomes for children and their families, depends on well-educated and competent staff (Jensen & Rasmussen, 2016).
- At the European level, the importance of a qualified workforce is acknowledged in the revised priorities for strategic cooperation in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2018).

Ref: Jensen, P., & Rasmussen, A. W. (2016). *Professional development and its impact on children in early childhood education and care: A meta-analysis based on European studies*. CARE project; Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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

# CONCEPTS

A need for more research concerning how collective professional development within ECEC (Rutar et al., 2019) can strengthen participants'

- **professional identity**,
- a holistic **educare** approach and
- equal and democratic **collaboration** between two groups of practitioners: core and assisting practitioners.

Research also offers important and relevant knowledge and experience (e.g., the CORE study, Urban et al., 2011) concerning how to enhance the competences of everyone working in **an ECEC system** through CPD and not individuals.



# RESEARCH

- Baseline report was based on survey to the four countries' participants
- The endline report aimed to exemplify through casestudies how changes in **the three core concepts** from baseline occurred and were manifested within the specific country and across the countries.
- The analyses also described **the conditions** that are desirable to strengthen the VALUE CPD pathways.
- Each country **provided a snapshot** briefly outlining the context of the pilot project, how the VALUE CPD pathway was implemented, and a short description of lessons learned in their specific endline analysis.



# FINDINGS

# AN EXAMPLE – THE DANISH CASE

[HTTPS://WWW.VALUE-ECEC.EU/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2020/09/DENMARK\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.value-ecec.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/denmark_final_report_final.pdf)



# CONTEXT

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

# CPD IN - A VALUE APPROACH

- Workshops in terms of learning labs where professional's (all) worked together with linking the theoretical framework on 'educare' and inclusion related to the Strengthened Educational Curriculum to own practices, knowledge and challenges.
- Professionals shared in groups experiences and created new perspectives and activities aimed at better inclusion. Groups were composed in different ways (sometimes managers work alone, other times they integrate), pedagogues and assistants mostly work together.
- Processes with reflection, analysis and evaluation were supported by a TOOL – the VIDA model of experimentation (Jensen, 2014, 11).
- Facilitation of learning labs throughout the process was crucial



# LESSONS LEARNED

- The aim of VALUE was **to strengthen collaboration** among all ECEC practitioners working with young children, through **valuing the diversity** of their professional backgrounds and experiences.
- Special attention was paid to **the role and position of assisting practitioners.**

# PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The strengthened Professional identity manifested in the following experiences of the core and assisting practitioners by:

- **Feeling competent**
- **Having one's work acknowledged by managers and colleagues**
- **Being involved in teams.**

All three elements were improved through the VALUE learning labs in the Danish context. These are regarded as vital prerequisites for successful professional ECEC work with children, as well as for meaningful participation in team collaboration.

We saw how these improvements manifested in greater self-confidence and especially assisting practitioners profited by the VALUE.

# EDUCARE

- **Educare is a holistic** way of working with care and education of young children. Well-being, learning and playing are seen as inseparable and equally important.
- **Educare is more than the simple assurance** that children feel emotionally and physically well within the ECEC setting. It also represents belonging and creating an inclusive environment for a diversity of children.
- **Educare implies a role for ECEC practitioners as attentive observers and listeners** who are able to understand the needs and goals of children (not only future goals, but also current ones) and to provide relevant responses and equal opportunities.

In the Danish context the Educare perspective was not unfamiliar, but in the other countries, e.g. Belgium the VALUE implied a shift in approach. *"Caring moments, are good moments to invest in the relationship and interaction with an individual child."* (teacher, Belgium)



# COLLABORATION

VALUE improved collaboration understood as a continuous process. In the CPD paths in the four countries we saw how it took place daily and was incorporated into all aspects of working with children and families, but particularly on these three:

- Collaboration **in planning activities** within everyday practice
- Collaboration **in implementing** these activities
- Collaboration **in collectively evaluating** the child's wellbeing and involvement and/or of the processes and pedagogical activities.

*"Knowing how we will work and what we would like to achieve, is a necessary basis for good educational work." (assisting practitioner, Slovenia)*

# IN ADDITION

We also found that two features of CPD pathways within ECEC influenced the results:

- **Structural features**, such as time, space, and other resources
- **Process features**, such as motivation, openness and engagement.

These must be supported through different approaches to participant involvement, responsibility for real tasks in the co-creation process and facilitation of learning and partnerships between core and assisting practitioners

The lesson learned made it also clear that the choice of CPD pathways is closely linked to the country's context with regard to ECEC.

# II ROADMAP: PATHWAYS TOWARDS STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION IN ECEC

- The content in the roadmap is inspired by the experiments developed, tested and evaluated in pilot projects in different ECEC settings in four countries (Belgium, Denmark, Portugal and Slovenia).

Ref: Van der Mespel, S., Brazinha, M., Marquard, M., Režek, M. & Sousa, J. (2020). VALUE Roadmap. Pathways towards strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care. Belgium VBJK.

# A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From the Danish VALUE model that builds on the VIDA approach (2010-2013) **learning laboratories were used as a way to improve CPD:**

## **Expansive learning**

Drawing on Engeström's theory of change laboratories

Starting with identifying problematic situations in practice.

In addition we were inspired by Hviid & Plotnikoff (2012) in relation to learninglabs as a new way to cocreate through dialogue in ECEC.

## **Co-creation**

Drawing on Bason's theory of Mindlabs and innovation.

## **Translation**

with the goal of understanding what happens when the 'outer' conditions and 'local' practice come together - a bottom-up approach (Røvik).

Ref: Jensen, B. & Marquard; M. (2020) At lære at værdsætte diversitet i dagtilbud – professionel kompetenceudvikling i læringslaboratorier. I: Nordisk Netværk for Voksnes læring, 28-05-2020. <https://nvl.org/Portals/0/DigArticle/16374/At-laere-at-vaerdsaette-diversitet-i-dagtilbud.pdf..>



# MAIN CONCEPTS – A STARTING POINT

**The definitions of the core concepts can function as a starting point for discussing** and developing participants own understanding and definition

- Professional identity
- Educare
- Collaboration.



# ORIENTATION POINTS

Four orientation points are identified in the studies of VALUE and can guide further development and implementation of a VALUE pathway:

- A **participatory** and **democratic** approach
- **Reflection on and for** practice
- Importance of the role of the **facilitator**
- Involvement and support by **ECEC leaders**.

# A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

- Handling a participatory approach implies that all staff (assisting and core practitioners and school management and leaders) are engaged from the beginning.
- In this way, the ownership of the learning journey is strengthened.
- A participatory approach means that the work in the VALUE pathway is closely connected with the practitioners' practice and daily life in ECEC settings.
- The participants decide what challenges they want to work with.

*"We don't have a manual for the VALUE learning pathway. It's about trying to be the investigator and observer and really just looking at what the problems are, what problems we need to solve, instead of just being given the answers." (ECEC leader, Denmark).*

# SHARED REFLECTION ON AND FOR **PRACTICE**

- A second orientation point of the pathway is shared reflection on and for practices implies that the staff works collegially and continually with analyses of their practices in order to improving them.

This implies a constant interchange between action and reflection:

- By sharing real situations in their daily work with children, colleagues and families, they reflect on images, concepts, beliefs and intentions underlying those situations.
- In doing so, they widen perspectives for themselves and others.





# A CREATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Creating an open and safe environment is fundamental in order to instigate 'real' participation and collaboration.
- To achieve this, the facilitator must provide a secure time and place for all participants to express their thoughts and experiences, to have their expressions, ideas and inputs taken seriously and thereby be actively involved in the whole process.

# LEADERSHIP

- By engaging ECEC leaders from the beginning, they become involved in the process of constructing a collaborative approach to respond to care and learning needs of diverse children and families. In this sense, they are also part of the learning journey.
- ECEC leaders include school principals, middle management, pedagogical coordinators, representatives and consultants for local authorities responsible for ECEC services in their municipality.

*"Leadership gives encouragement, motivates staff, proposes structure and presents it to staff. It is important to give staff the autonomy. In this way, they gain confirmation and start acting proactive, not just waiting for instructions." (kindergarten principal, Slovenia)*

# RESOURCES

Three types of resources are needed

- **Engagement** of the ECEC leaders for ensuring the resources needed to develop and implement a VALUE pathway.
- **Working hours and resources**, which allow practitioners (not only core practitioners) to participate in the professional development pathway over time. (this is the responsibility of the ECEC leaders).
- **Discussion with organisers and ECEC leaders** on the important demands, that sustainable learning and change (innovation) require time, process and experimentation.

There are no quick fixes.

# STAGES OF A VALUE PATHWAY

- Practical questions
- Exploring contexts and needs
- Mapping out a VALUE pathway
- Different set-ups of a VALUE pathway

READ more:

Van der Mespel, S., Brazinha, M., Hulpia, H., Jensen, B., Marquard, M., Režek, M., Sousa, J. (2020). *VALUE Roadmap. Pathways towards strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care*. Belgium: VBJK.

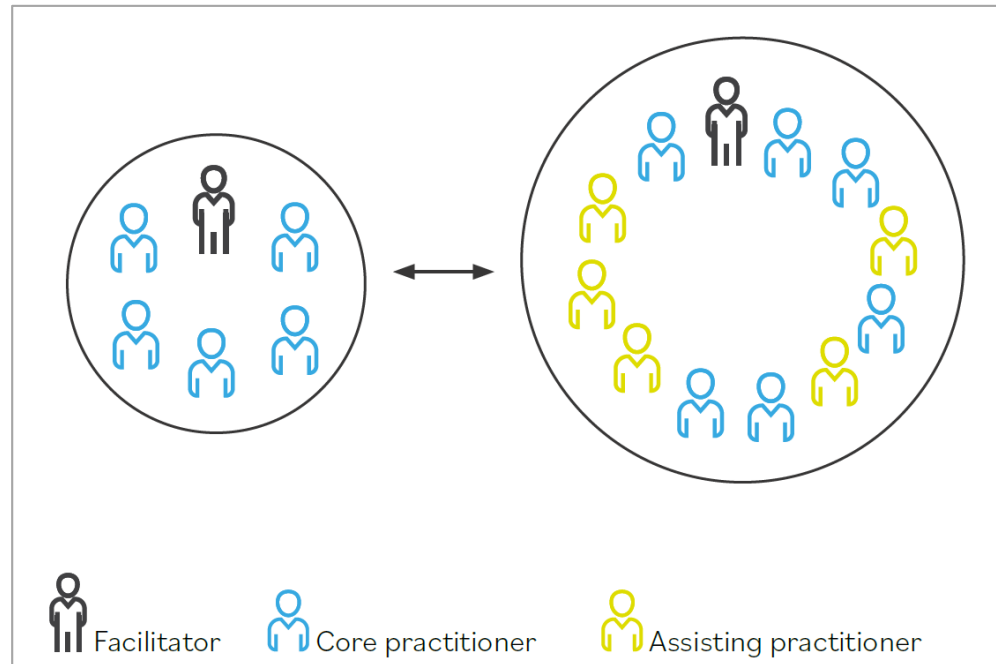
# DIFFERENT SET-UPS

- Mixed learning groups of practitioners working in the same ECEC setting



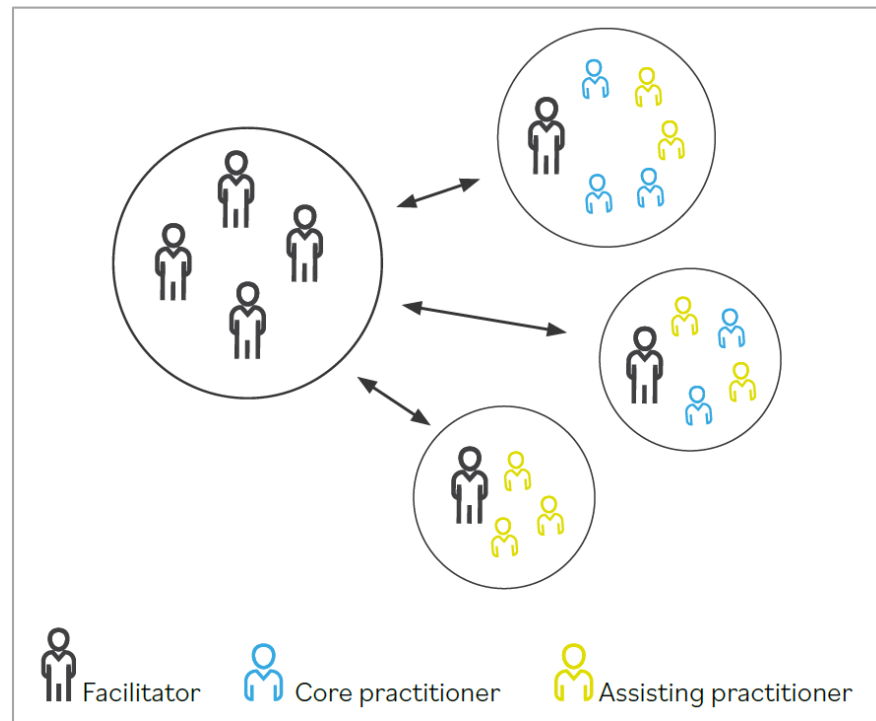
# DIFFERENT SET-UPS

- Homogeneous learning groups working in the same ECEC setting



# DIFFERENT SET-UPS

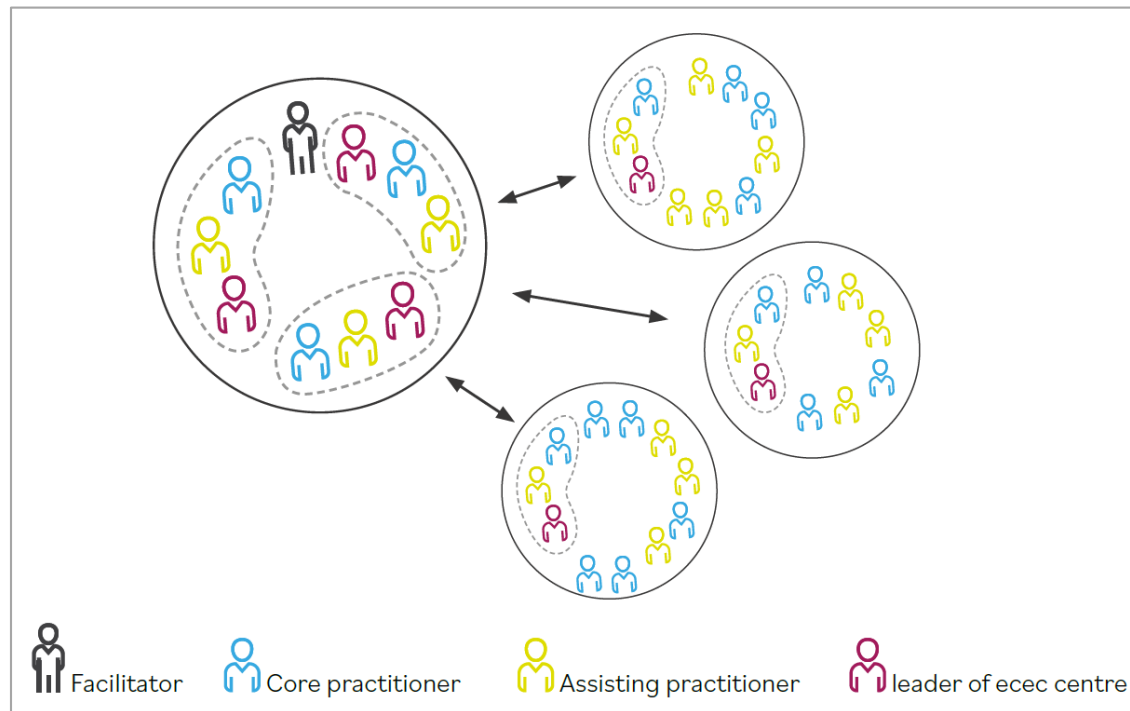
- Group of facilitators of a professional learning community within their own ECEC setting.



Van der Mespel, S., Brazinha, M., Hulpia, H., Jensen, B., Marquard, M., Režek, M., Sousa, J. (2020). *VALUE Roadmap. Pathways towards strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care*. Belgium: VBJK. (pp. 33-36)

# DIFFERENT SET-UPS

- > Learning group of practitioners and leaders comin from different ECEC settings (cross institutional)



Van der Mespel, S., Brazinha, M., Hulpia, H., Jensen, B., Marquard, M., Režek, M., Sousa, J. (2020). *VALUE Roadmap. Pathways towards strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care*. Belgium: VBJK. (pp. 33-36)



# THE ROADMAP CAN INSPIRE TO

- Initiate a VALUE pathway
- Facilitate shared reflection
- Supporting evaluation and consolidation.

READ more:

Van der Mespel, S., Brazinha, M., Hulpia, H., Jensen, B., Marquard, M., Režek, M., Sousa, J. (2020). *VALUE Roadmap. Pathways towards strengthening collaboration in early childhood education and care*. Belgium: VBJK. PP. 26-45

# DISCUSSION



# DISCUSSION THEMES

- > A participatory approach to continuous professional development (CPD) in ECEC- why and how? And what is the relevance of a VALUE approach in a Danish context?
- > The idea of a VALUE ROAD MAP – and its relevance in research and practice?



# THANK YOU!

Bente Jensen: [bj@edu.au.dk](mailto:bj@edu.au.dk)

*With special acknowledgement to*

## **Researchers from the VALUE group:**

All researchers and partners related to the Baseline, Literature review, Endline and the ROADMAP.

## **Participants**

from three ECEC centres in Randers municipality, core and assisting practitioners, managers and the children and their parents.

## **Participants in the Danish team:**

Peter Allerup (Statistics) (AU/DPU)

Andre Torre (Baseline, AU/DPU)

Lars Huge (Baseline, AU/DPU)

Students (Litterature search, baseline and casestudies, AU/DPU)

Maria Marquard (Facilitation, AU/DPU)