

# D5.5 Integrative report: Professionals and organisations

AUTHORS: Pauline Slot & Gil Nata



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**AUTHORS:** Pauline Slot & Gil Nata

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## PARTNERS INVOLVED

Number	Partner name	People involved
1	Universiteit Utrecht	Pauline Slot
9	University of Porto	Gil Nata

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing societal cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity calls upon competent professionals who can support children and families aimed at equity and inclusiveness. The ISOTIS work revealed that professionals feel less competent in addressing this diversity in their daily work compared to feelings of general self-efficacy. The ISOTIS work involved professionals working in diverse informal (community or after-school care) and formal (preschool) education settings and focused on improving our understanding of their intercultural and global competences and the extent to which professional development can contribute to enhancing these competences. Intercultural and global competences encompass professionals' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that result in everyday behaviour and practices. The relation between professionals' competences and their behaviour and practices is bidirectional, suggesting that change can occur in both directions.

Overall, the different studies illustrated the complexity of professionals' beliefs towards cultural and linguistic diversity. Professionals generally showed more positive beliefs towards multiculturalism than towards multilingualism, but upon closer scrutiny, when professionals were confronted with their actual behaviour and practices in their daily work, professionals showed tendencies of ignoring or denying diversity, reflecting more of a colour-blind perspective. Professionals reported overall slightly positive practices towards diversity, which appeared particularly related to considering cultural or religious practices towards nutrition and availability of creative materials to address differences in physical appearance, reflecting more of a surface-level approach to diversity. Aspects such as integrating different cultural values, increasing children's knowledge on different cultures and adapting the work to children's cultural background were less commonly implemented in daily practice. Thus, a more comprehensive approach of embracing and addressing diversity in the (classroom) curriculum and practices or in communicating with children and parents were less well developed. There were differences between countries, though, and there also appeared a positive relation between more culturally sensitive beliefs and corresponding practices and organizational policies. Consequently, an important aspect of professional development included addressing one's beliefs and attitudes as a means of changing behaviour and practices.

Reflection and enactment were identified as key mechanisms for changing professionals' intercultural competences and played a central role in the intervention study. The interventions carried out in four different countries in different contexts were highly informative and indeed confirmed that reflection supported professionals in gaining more awareness of their beliefs and attitudes and how these affected their behaviour and practices in their daily work. The close relation between the professional development activities and the professionals' context and daily practices appeared to be effective. Moreover, reflection was also carried out using examples from other countries or contexts, which proved to enrich the professionals' experiences and considerations for expanding their perspectives and action repertoire. Enactment also showed to be an important mechanism for professionals' change as it allowed them to experience in real life how children or parents reacted to their change in actions or behaviour, which appeared an eye opener and powerful mechanism for enhancing their awareness and understanding of the situation at hand.

In addition to these intra-individual processes, the ISOTIS work also highlighted the importance of the context at different levels, including the proximal level (e.g. in the classroom or relations with parents), the organizational level (e.g. policies towards diversity or parent involvement, a clear organizational mission focusing on empowerment and equity or opportunities for professional development) and even the macro policy level (e.g. national or local curriculum framework or guidelines or lack thereof). The work revealed the necessity of addressing diversity in more diverse contexts, but also showed that when clear organizational or national/regional guidelines on addressing cultural and linguistic diversity are lacking or are inconsistent, this poses challenges for professionals to address diversity adequately in their everyday work, resulting in highly varying practices of professionals. This appeared especially difficult for professionals and volunteers working in non-formal settings. Therefore, it is foremost important to establish a clear vision and mission at the organizational level, which should be translated into concrete guidelines for professionals to support them in aligning their everyday practices with the organization's vision. At the same time, clear guidelines or a focus on addressing diversity and inclusiveness in (national) curricula provide further support and legitimacy for professionals to address this in their daily work with children and families.

The need for further professional development is obvious as professionals feel ill-prepared to deal with the challenges deriving from working in a highly diverse context. Professionals need sufficient and dedicated time to do so and would benefit from a team-based approach and continuous forms of professional development, which seems especially relevant for professionals working in non-formal settings. This means that a traditional approach of a one-off course or training will not suffice. Rather, professionals need to engage in continuous and dynamic forms of professional development, such as regular team meetings to reflect and discuss the work with children and families and how to tailor the work to the children's and families' needs in view of optimal child development. Exchange in a community of learners, especially when learners come from different contexts or countries, can be enriching and provide professionals with new and innovative ideas for enlarging their perspectives and changing their practice. Moreover, it is important to bridge the gap between (scientific) knowledge and theory and practice. Thus, professional development should be actively guided by an expert who can help professionals in understanding and applying new and/or situated knowledge into daily practice. Overall, it requires the willingness and ability to reflect on one's own beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills and the interrelatedness of all these components. Professionals' openness and readiness for change are key to initiating change for the better and need to be explicitly addressed by the expert guiding the professional development activities.

Professional development is especially important for professionals working in non-formal settings, as also reflected in the work at the European level. To improve quality, professionals in non-formal setting should be provided with opportunities for exchange and peer learning at the national and European level to support further development of intercultural and global competences in the work with children from diverse backgrounds.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest and support professionals' engagement in continuous professional development activities, which includes providing them with ample time and attention, and ensure that time is used for this purpose, for reflection and enactment to raise their intercultural awareness and practices that will benefit child outcomes and improve equity.
2. Ensure that professional development addresses the whole range of competences, including professionals' knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs in view of changing their behaviour and practices in the daily context in working with children or families using a variety of different strategies. Providing professionals with ample opportunities for reflection and inter-collegial exchange, especially between professionals working in different contexts, are essential in raising professionals' awareness of their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes, thus providing an important first step in changing behaviour and practice.
3. Develop concrete guidelines at the national, regional and organizational levels, that clearly set the boundaries on the goals when addressing diversity and promoting inclusiveness in view of improving child outcomes and enhancing equality in order to strengthen alignment across all levels, including practice. Compliance with these guidelines should be monitored and mechanisms for steering detected deviations should be in place.

## PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Organisations should develop a clear vision with an articulated coherent set of goals that is aligned with general policy levels (regional or national). Continuous monitoring of the organisations' (and its professionals') practices alignment with its vision and goals is of paramount importance.
2. Particular attention should be devoted in guaranteeing that new professionals are aware and share the organisation's vision, goals and strategies. This seems to be of additional importance for non-formal settings and/or organisations that work with volunteers, for which there are no mandatory training requirements that ensure a core set of shared values and strategies.

## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Research on cultural and socio-economic diversity should further explore the relations between the coherence (or lack thereof) between different levels, namely the macro policy levels (national, regional), the organisational level and the professionals working in diverse contexts to enhance our insights on how daily behaviour and practices are shaped by the wider context.
2. Research on both formal and non-formal settings is needed, since unique challenges and characteristics seem to apply to each setting. Particularly, the role of volunteers and generally more precarious jobs in non-formal settings seems to bring additional challenges for PD in comparison to formal settings.

### 3. INTRODUCTION

One of the teams of researchers within ISOTIS was devoted to identifying effective strategies for professional development (PD) that considers new approaches to professional learning, i.e. virtual learning and team-based models of learning, with a particular focus on increasing cultural and linguistic awareness among professionals in their work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. A related aim was to identify characteristics of the centres and schools at the organizational level that could support or hinder professionals in dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity, social justice and in creating an inclusive, positive climate in the classroom, centre, and school. In this report we focused on the main lessons learned throughout the tasks and we articulated them in a set of coherent recommendations for policy and practice in order to foster PD on the topics of multiculturalism, multilingualism, social justice, and inclusiveness. First, we will briefly summarize the main tasks that were conducted, followed by an integrated discussion of the main recommendations based on this work.

#### 3.1. REVIEW OF PROFESSIONALS' ATTITUDES

The ISOTIS work started with a brief review of the literature on professionals' attitudes and practices concerning cultural and linguistic diversity in their work in a diverse context and which aspects contributed to these attitudes and practices (D5.1, Slot et al., 2017). At the micro level, this review focused on professionals' background and characteristics of the children or families they work with as well as features of the organization they work in. At the meso-system level, the relationships with parents were included with an emphasis on establishing partnerships with parents, whereas the exo-system level highlighted the importance of the wider community, such as health, social or community services, and collaboration with professionals working in these organizations. This first review informed the development of the conceptual framework for PD that was used as basis for the next task: the inventory of promising practices

#### 3.2. INVENTORY OF PROMISING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Next, we conducted an inventory and review of current professional development models employed in different European countries that were considered examples of good practices, including also the role that ICT can play (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017). This report introduced the conceptual model of PD that guided further work focusing on three main components relating to the *who*, the *what* and the *how* of PD situated within the larger (organisational) context, see Figure 1.1. The first component (*who*) encompasses the characteristics of the professionals and the context they work in. The second component includes the content of PD (*what*). Lastly, the third component focuses on the strategies and delivery modes (*how*) that are used to implement PD. In this transactional model, professionals' knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs are hypothesized to have a bidirectional relation with behaviour and practices, which is facilitated by enactment (the translation of new beliefs into action) and reflection.

A total of 81 interventions were identified across 10 countries, which highlighted some important aspects for PD, such as the importance of reflection; targeting professionals' beliefs or attitudes in addition to their knowledge and skills; a team-based approach, and the potential of ICT besides a face-to-face component. The outcomes of the inventory (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017) were used to design the next task: the internet-based staff survey.



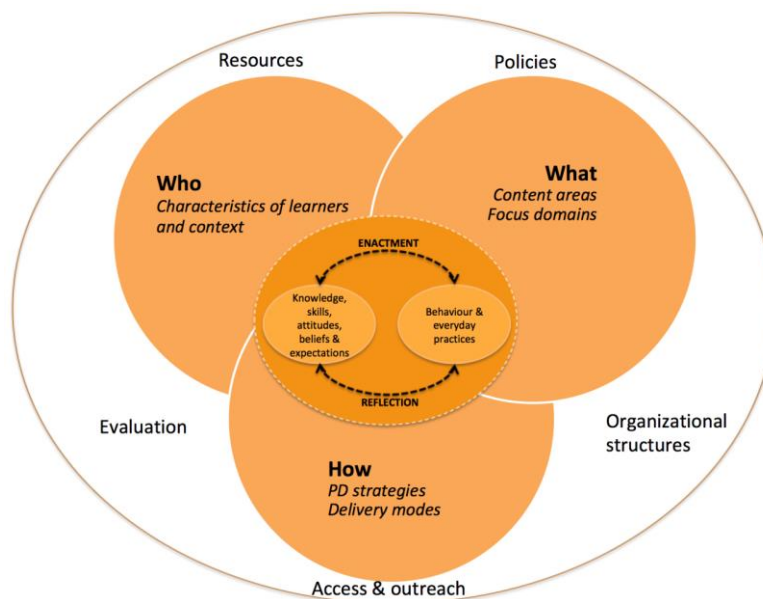


Figure 1.1. Conceptual model of professional development.

### 3.3. STAFF SURVEY ON BELIEFS, PRACTICES, RELATIONS WITH PARENTS, AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Next, we conducted an internet-based survey in ten countries among different staff working with children and families in formal and informal settings to identify the needs and obstacles (para) professionals face in their work with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families and to examine the characteristics of organizational culture and structure that can support professionals in this work (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). Data was collected from over 1,000 (para)professionals across the ten countries revealing interesting and relevant information on three core topics: i) cultural and linguistic beliefs, practices and organizational policies, ii) relations with parents and other stakeholders, and iii) staff's work environment. A wide range of professionals were involved, including teachers, specialists, managers and social and family workers, working in a variety of settings, such as early childhood education and care (ECEC), formal education, after-school care and the social work sector.

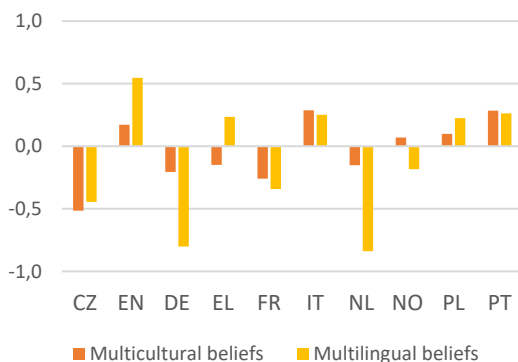


Figure 1.2. Standardized mean scores for professionals' beliefs per country.

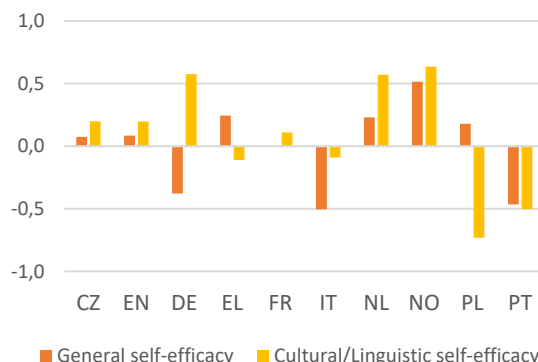


Figure 1.3 Standardized mean scores for professionals' general and cultural/linguistic self-efficacy

Overall, professionals scored higher on multicultural beliefs compared to multilingual beliefs, see Figure 1.2. Interestingly, professionals reported higher levels of general self-efficacy compared to self-efficacy in dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity, see Figure 1.3. Further, the results showed that professionals rate the relationship with parents as neutral, but oriented to positive. Note that we adopted a comprehensive view on the relations between parents and professionals, encompassing both the shared understanding between parents and professionals, and several aspects of the parent-professional communication. ECEC professionals reported higher quality relations with parents compared to other professionals, which was particularly evident in higher reported levels of shared beliefs and understanding and communicating with parents not only in case of problems. Professionals also reported on collaboration with other services in view of improving child and family outcomes, increasing equity and accessibility, early detection and support of family needs, and stronger continuity of services and alignment of work, and shared vision and professional development of professionals. Collaboration with health, child care, and education services were the most common across countries, occurring on average in 80% of the cases, followed by social and public services in around 60% of the cases. Collaboration with community-based and volunteering programs and law enforcement was the least frequent (ranging from 43%-47%).

Concerning the staff's work environment, professionals reported to be satisfied with their work and to evaluate their organizational climate positively. Professionals also reported on their support needs. The results showed that professionals in all countries experience a clear need for more time to support children. More time to communicate with parents or concrete guidelines to deal with cultural tensions were the least reported needs. Lastly, professionals reported engagement in discussing individual children who need extra support and reflecting upon practice with colleagues most frequently, whereas the use of an online platform for exchange and reflection on practice was the least frequently.

Overall, the results highlight that more positive beliefs towards multiculturalism and multilingualism go hand in hand with more culturally sensitive practices, stronger diversity policy at the organizational level and better parent-professional relationships. Further, the results show that ECEC professionals tend to have more positive views on multilingualism and that ECEC centres more often have corresponding policies in place at the organizational level. The results of these tasks were all used to inform the development of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the PD intervention.

### **3.4. TRANSFERRABLE MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT USING ICT**

Lastly, ISOTIS involved the development of a transferrable model for professional development using a virtual learning environment (VLE). The PD intervention followed a contextual approach, which highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability from the professionals involved as well as the researchers guiding the process and resulted in unique interventions in the four countries. In Portugal, the work was conducted in primary school settings with school teachers, whereas in the Netherlands the work was carried out in preschools with preschool teachers and all supportive staff (managers, pedagogues). In Italy, the work was conducted in a primary school

and preschool (located in the same building). Lastly, in France the intervention was conducted in an informal setting, namely a community centre with social workers and volunteers that aimed at improving the relation between (mainly immigrant and disadvantaged) parents and their children's schools.



Figure 1.4 Example of the multilingual log in page of the Virtual Learning Environment.

The VLE proved to be a rich resource on several topics, including cultural diversity, multilingualism, second language learning, intercultural competences, family-school collaboration, economic inequalities, and social justice with a repository of video clips, narratives, concrete examples from practice, and dilemmas for professionals to reflect on. Further, it provided examples of concrete activities for both professional development and activities with parents or with children in the classroom, supporting professionals in enacting their competences.

The design-based process followed a number of phases from the exploration of the context, the co-design, implementation and evaluation of the intervention. The exploration of the context appeared very important to get a better understanding of the local needs and desires of professionals and how these professionals function within the larger organization. Moreover, this phase also functioned to establish trust and to build positive relations with the professionals, which proved to be essential for the

success of the intervention. Overall, the assessment of the intervention revealed changes in professionals' intercultural competences based on their own reflections and self-evaluation forms as well as on the ISOTIS researchers' assessment.

Generally, most changes occurred in professionals' awareness on multiculturalism, intercultural sensitivity, multilingualism, social justice and to a lesser extent on parent-school relationships and parent involvement (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019).

Following our theory of change, professionals' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills showed bidirectional relations with their behaviour and practices. The emphasis on reflecting on one's beliefs and attitudes and on how these were enacted in the classroom, appeared strong facilitators of this underlying mechanism. The VLE played an important role in supporting professionals by providing videos, narratives, dilemmas, and concrete examples from practice to reflect on. Also, the exchange between professionals across countries was considered interesting and valuable in enhancing multi-perspectivity. Moreover, the suggestions for (classroom) activities encouraged professionals to enact and apply newly required knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, or skills in their own context.

## 4. KEY FACTORS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE MACRO LEVEL

Professional Development (PD) is essential in supporting professionals' lifelong learning. Although, PD has been viewed mainly from an individual's perspective, the ISOTIS work conducted on professionals and organizations has highlighted the importance for factors in the context (e.g. at the macro or organizational level) as prerequisites for successful PD (see for more information [D5.2](#), Slot et al., 2017; [D5.3](#), Slot et al., 2018; [D5.4](#), Slot et al., 2019). These structural conditions support the implementation and sustainability of PD, and thus are important to consider when designing and implementing PD.

### 4.1. PROFESSIONALS NEED DEDICATED TIME TO ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The results of the staff survey revealed great variation within and across countries on how frequently professionals engage in PD activities, which also depended on the type of activity ([D5.3](#), Slot et al., 2018). On average, professionals reported discussing individual children and their needs and inter-collegial exchange as the most frequently conducted activities, whereas being observed or discussing literature with colleagues or exchange via an online platform were the least frequently reported activities. Moreover, the interventions that were carried out in four countries highlighted the lack of time as obstacle for (more) engagement in PD.

*Recommendation 1: National, local, and organizational policies should guarantee (i) time for professionals' continuous development, as well as (ii) that the allocated time is used for the intended purpose.* All of the work pointed to the importance of continuous PD processes as a means of sustained improvement of practices. This requires that there are certain structural conditions in place, first and foremost dedicated time for PD. The ways in which time (or the lack of it) significantly determined professionals' engagement in PD became evident across the interventions. Therefore, to guarantee a continuous PD process, it seems crucial to provide the institutional support for it, namely through the allocation of dedicated time for it. However, it is important to keep in mind that merely reserving time for PD does not necessarily guarantee that the time is well used for PD activities. Thus, preferably there should be a plan in place specifying how the dedicated time will be used to engage professionals in PD in a meaningful way.

### 4.2. CLEAR GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED TO ENSURE COHERENCE BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

The results of the staff survey conducted in ISOTIS illustrated variation both within and across countries on professionals' attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as their practices and the extent to which there were organizational policies in place to address diversity in practice.

*Recommendation 2: Clear and more concrete guidelines are needed on how to address the topics of social justice, multiculturalism, and multilingualism.* Throughout the ISOTIS studies, it was clear that there was considerable variation across and within countries (and sometimes even within organisations) regarding the way these topics were addressed (or even *if* they were addressed).

For example, in some countries the (national) curriculum appears to more explicitly address diversity acceptance than in other countries (D5.1, Slot et al., 2017). Also, the European inventory of professional development interventions referred to the importance of establishing a shared vision and common understanding towards the way in which “ISOTIS” topics are tackled (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017). As mentioned, the results of the staff survey also noted different patterns of practices and organizational policies towards diversity, yielding a very wide range of practices and policies within and across countries (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). Moreover, the intervention work in the four different countries/contexts showed considerable discrepancy in practices at both the individual as well as the organization level (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019). This discrepancy appeared connected to the lack of explicit and concrete guidelines at the regional or even national level on the one hand and sometimes also lack of clear guidelines at the organizational level on the other hand. For instance, some professionals openly questioned the need for multicultural education and/or the need to check materials for racial/ethnic (or other) biases. Furthermore, it became evident that some settings engaged with these topics for the first time and/or might have not addressed them if it were not for the ISOTIS intervention. Given the importance of the topics of social justice, multilingualism and multiculturalism for building a more equitable society and equipping children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the high degree of freedom that is given to organisations and professionals should be carefully reviewed and boundaries to what is and what is not negotiable should be set.

## 5. PROFESSIONALS’ INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL COMPETENCES

The initial review indicated that professionals feel ill-prepared to deal with cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity (D5.1, Slot et al., 2017). The results of the staff survey conducted in ten countries indeed indicated that they feel less efficacious in dealing with diversity as compared to more general feelings of self-efficacy in addressing children’s behavioural and educational needs (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018).

Global competence refers to the ability to examine local, global and intercultural issues in order to understand and value the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open and constructive dialogue with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development (OECD, 2018). In addition, multilingualism is viewed as a resource with potential benefits for individuals and society, as proposed by the Council of Europe (2014) resulting in a broad concept of intercultural and global competences used in the ISOTIS work.

*Recommendation 3: There is a need for more professional development focusing on multiculturalism, multilingualism, and social justice/economic inequalities.* Professionals find it challenging to work with a diverse population (D5.1, Slot et al., 2017; D5.3, Slot et al., 2018), as indicated by their lower perceived self-efficacy in addressing these topics. More importantly, professionals might not even be fully aware of the extent to which PD is needed to improve their intercultural competences. For instance, the staff survey results showed some inconsistencies in professionals’ attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity with coexisting positive or neutral views towards diversity in the classroom with (implicit) negative beliefs and/or assimilationist

beliefs or approaches (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). Congruently, in all of the four country intervention studies — both in the exploratory and during the intervention phase — ISOTIS team members generally identified several difficulties faced by professionals when dealing with these issues (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019). More strikingly, negative and stereotyped visions of cultural minorities and economically disadvantaged groups were also detected.

*Recommendation 4: Professional development should be targeted at professionals' knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs as these are interrelated aspects of professionals' competences that direct their behaviour and actions in daily practice.* Although, PD commonly addresses professionals' knowledge and skills (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017; D5.3, Slot et al., 2018), the intervention work (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019) highlighted the importance of professionals' beliefs and attitudes in affecting their knowledge and skills and, consequently, their actual behaviour and practices. Even though it might not be feasible to reach agreement on professionals' thoughts or feelings, it is necessary to support professionals in gaining awareness on their beliefs and attitudes and how they affect their behaviour and practices. Despite potential differences in professionals' beliefs or attitudes, consensus should be reached on achieving a shared (organizational or classroom) practice

## **6. NEW APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DELIVERY AND STRATEGIES**

Traditionally, professional development (PD) includes a top-down training approach, sometimes with a reflection or coaching component (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017). However, the work conducted in T5.2, T5.3 and particularly T5.4 strongly suggests a change of direction in which PD should be viewed as contextual, continuous and dynamic with a strong embeddedness in the organizational culture and structure. Several issues stand out.

### **6.1. CONTEXTUAL APPROACH**

*Recommendation 5: PD should be adapted to the local needs of the professionals and their daily context which may be characterized by change depending on the children, families and aspects of the organization among others; consequently, this context should be explored as part of PD.* This should not be confused with tailoring the PD to what the professionals want to learn, as they may have a blind spot on what is actually needed to make a change for the better. Results of the staff survey, for instance, revealed that professionals need more time and resources to carry out their work appropriately, which indeed is an important factor, but providing staff with more time and resources will not automatically lead to changes in their intercultural practices. This would require addressing their beliefs, values and expectations as well. Thus, it is important that PD meets professionals' explicit needs to a certain degree, but it also requires that more implicit needs are addressed. This relates to another aspect, also referred to professionals' readiness for change.

*Recommendation 6: PD is most effective when professionals acknowledge they need to make a change in their practice and that the PD will help to realize this change; thus, it is essential to assess professionals' readiness for change.* Changes in someone's knowledge, skills, beliefs,



attitudes or expectations will not occur without a person's openness to change, as the intervention work in France, Italy, Portugal and the Netherlands (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019) has illustrated across different contexts and countries. Therefore, PD should devote sufficient attention to understanding the professionals' willingness to change and whether the suggested PD activities will support the professionals in achieving this change.

## 6.2. DYNAMIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

*Recommendation 7: Support reflection and enactment as key drivers of PD.* The different tasks highlight the importance of moving beyond 'training focused on transmission of knowledge' as main vehicle of PD. Instead, the findings point to a stronger role of dynamic forms of PD including reflection and enactment for professionals. This will raise awareness on the implications of their actions and behaviour and seeing the positive results of their changed behaviour will allow them to easier adopt new or alternative ways of acting in daily practice.

*Recommendation 8: PD should connect recent theoretical knowledge with professionals' practice to strengthen evidence-based work.* Professionals need to keep their knowledge up to date and should be encouraged into understanding their daily practices through the lens of new knowledge and supported in translating and implementing new knowledge into their everyday work to improve their practice. Furthermore, the connection with the everyday context seems to be key to engage, motivate and interest professionals in PD processes.

## 6.3. COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

Community of learners are groups of new and experienced professionals who gather together to gain and exchange knowledge, reconsider and reflect upon previous knowledge and beliefs and build on each other's ideas and experiences in order to improve practices (Brajković, 2014)

*Recommendation 9: New approaches to professional development should consider (international) communities of learners as they hold high promise.* Literature on PD has highlighted the importance of communities of learners as an important tool for PD (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017). The survey of professionals showed that learning from others, namely peers, is one of the ways that professionals regard as most effective for their professional growth and development (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018). The interventions in four countries confirmed that professionals valued the possibility of exchanging experiences and learning from others (D5.4, Slot et al., 2019). Although, the literature underlines the importance of communities of learners, these commonly refer to communities of learners from the same (or similar) context(s) (e.g., the teachers within a school or teachers from a schools' geographical cluster). However, the ISOTIS interventions, illustrated that the opportunity to engage with professionals from different contexts, in particular from other countries reflecting different educational systems boosted professionals' interests and opportunities for development. Confronting views, exchanging activities and feedback with professionals from another milieu, as well as getting to know other countries' systems, policies, and practices, were strong enablers of professionals' reflections about the different levels of the systems within which they operate and expanded professionals' realm of possibilities on how to address the challenges of social justice, multiculturalism, and

multilingualism.

## 7. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM AN ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Professionals face increasing challenges in enhancing equality, promoting inclusiveness and providing better opportunities for children and their families. This calls for a stronger collaborative and joint effort of different professionals working within and across settings (D3.5, Anders et al., 2019; D4.5, Aguiar et al., 2019; D6.4, Barnes et al., 2019), in which professionals are viewed as inherently part of the organization that shapes their everyday practice. This marks a shift of the individual professional ‘who knows it all’ towards an autonomous professional embedded in an organization who can benefit from the knowledge and expertise available within the organization and the wider network.

### 7.1. EMBEDDEDNES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Traditionally, professional development has been addressed from the individual professional's perspective aimed at enhancing his or her competences with the ultimate goal of improving practice. However, as the staff survey and intervention study have illustrated, professionals are part of an organization (and wider systems) that provides the (structural) preconditions, which shape their practice and opportunities for PD (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018; D5.4, Slot et al., 2019). This shifts the focus of PD towards the organization and all professionals working at different organizational levels (i.e. from assistants through the management level) strengthening the PD efforts, increasing effectiveness and promoting sustainability in the long run. There are several aspects to consider in this regard, which seem especially important for organizations that seem less formally structured, such as informal community settings.

*Recommendation 10: Invest in team-based PD.* Some PD activities might be easier to develop and implement for the whole team, such as joint reflection, than others, but investing in exchange between professionals even in case of individual training or coaching can induce spill-over effects and promote inter-collegial and peer learning.

*Recommendation 11: There should be a shared mission and vision that is aligned with the collective goals of the organization and eventually with the local or national policies.* The vision, mission and collective goals provide the starting point for the implementation in practice, which should be actively guided by the key figure(s) in the organization (e.g. manager or pedagogue). This requires a translation of the vision, mission and goals into guidelines or a (pedagogical) policy plan specifying concrete strategies, actions or practices in the daily context to support the professionals working directly with children or families (e.g. teachers or social workers). This does not necessarily imply a (complete) top-down process, but rather explicit agreement from all professionals on the mission and ways to achieve it, which supports professionals in the implementation into their daily context. In addition, the organization's vision, mission goals and policy plan for implementation should be regularly evaluated and adapted according to changes in the context.



*Recommendation 12: PD for professionals should be aligned with the vision, mission, goals and organizational policy plans and should be implemented and evaluated within this frame.* Although, individual professionals might have different needs or different competences to develop further, the PD activities should be developed and evaluated from the broader organizational perspective to make sure that individual initiatives fit in with the broader organizational goals.

*Recommendation 13: From an organizational perspective it is important to endorse different PD strategies to support professionals' lifelong learning and ideally, these should be part of a concerted, overall PD policy.* This would require developing a cyclic PD process in which there is attention for design, implementation, evaluation and redesign of PD activities throughout the year. In addition to individual performance interviews, it is important to have regular team meetings to discuss and (re)evaluate the organizational vision, mission, goals and the translation into the daily context

*Recommendation 14: Leadership or the role of a key figure is essential to guide PD in the organization.* There should be a person (e.g. manager or pedagogue) in the organization who has an overview of the overall organizational vision, mission and goals, while considering the daily context in which professionals work, and to support and align this with on-going PD in the organization.

## **7.2. COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

In line with the findings and recommendations formulated in other ISOTIS work the role of parents should be strengthened (D2.5, Broekhuizen et al., 2019; D3.5, Anders et al., 2019; [D5.3](#), Slot et al., 2018). Professionals play a crucial role in children's and families' lives, but more effort is needed to establish and promote parent-professional partnerships based on equality and acknowledgment of the families' strengths and resources. In addition, interagency or intersectoral collaboration provides opportunities for addressing more complex needs or challenges and promoting equity and inclusiveness as it brings together professionals with different expertise (D6.4, Barnes et al., 2019).

*Recommendation 15: Invest in establishing and maintaining parent-professional partnerships on the basis of equality and building on the families' strengths and resources.* Take the time to build trust with parents, especially with parents who feel marginalized or discriminated, based on the shared goal of the child's well-being and the best interest of the child as the parent study highlighted the importance of professionals ([D2.4](#), Pastori et al., 2019; D2.5, Broekhuizen et al., 2019). The results of the ISOTIS work with professionals showed that the relationship with parents encompasses different aspects, including a shared understanding between parents and professional, similar beliefs on the child's behaviour and achievement and an active and open approach of professionals is communicating with parents. Overall, the professionals rated the relationship with parents as neutral and oriented towards positive, more so for ECEC professionals. More investment in this relationship is clearly needed to promote child outcomes.

*Recommendation 16: Seek collaboration with professionals from different fields and sectors, such as health, welfare, education, childcare and community services to address inequality.*

Collaboration between different types of professionals has been addressed across several work packages of ISOTIS. The ISOTIS work on family support (D3.4, Ereky-Stevens, 2019) highlighted the important role of professionals working in informal settings, the ISOTIS work in classrooms (D4.4, Pastori et al., 2019) refers to the team around the teachers and the ISOTIS work on interagency mentions intersectoral collaboration as important for improving practice. The results of the staff survey (D5.3, Slot et al., 2018) indicate that there is room for improvement of this intersectoral collaboration (D6.4, Barnes et al., 2019 for more detailed information on success factors). Altogether, the findings point to the need for a concerted effort in improving outcomes for children and families

## **8. USE OF ICT IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

ICT has potential as part of PD and is increasingly used for a variety of purposes, such as e-learning courses and activities, video-based reflection, online exchange of practices and online tools for self-reflection (D5.2, Slot et al., 2017). The ISOTIS interventions have developed a virtual learning environment (VLE) with a particular focus on the professionals' local needs and challenges in their daily context. The results of this intervention highlighted some important insights.

*Recommendation 17: A VLE should provide different types of resources, such as videos, narratives or research, focusing on state-of-the-art knowledge and connecting that to everyday practice in a way that encourages reflection on beliefs, attitudes and values while providing concrete suggestions for enactment in practice.* A VLE can be a particular well-suited tool to bridge between theory and practice and support professionals in implementing more evidence-based practices. The work in T5.4 illustrated that professionals valued these different resources and functionalities of the VLE. Especially the combination with (new) knowledge presented in an easy and accessible way (e.g. videoclips on particular topics) contributed to enhanced understanding of the topic at hand and the suggested activities (either for PD or with children/parents) supported professionals in applying this knowledge into their daily practice.

*Recommendation 18: A VLE should provide up-to-date knowledge and information to address pressing issues in society and education, such as inequality, social justice, multilingualism, cultural diversity and inclusion.* In a fast-paced changing society, professionals often struggle with insufficient preparation to address these emerging, but important and pressing issues. While this renders PD even more necessary, it also brings pressure to (the science and practice of) Professional Development as a field that needs to quickly provide practitioners with opportunities for their development regarding these specific issues. Within this context, a VLE seems to be an adequate — if not indispensable — tool to reach out to and engage a wide community of learners around topics for which professionals feel (and are) ill prepared.

*Recommendation 19: Developing and working with a VLE requires the guidance of (one or more) experts or key figures to guarantee the quality of the content and exchange, as well as to identify and address implicit needs.* A researcher or knowledgeable expert can support the exchange of

knowledge and practices and help professionals in the translation to their own daily context. It is important to have someone guiding the usage of ICT, such as a VLE, in order to monitor the quality and implementation in practice. Preferably this should be someone close to or from the organization who can play an active role as it not sustainable nor feasible to have one overarching person responsible across different contexts and eventually countries. Furthermore, as already stated, Professionals are not always aware of their implicit needs; for this reason, an expert could be crucial to help in the identification and responding to these needs.

*Recommendation 20: A VLE should contribute to creating and sustaining a community of learners. Furthermore, context diversity seems to bring added value to professionals' development.* ISOTIS revealed that the VLE has great potential in fostering inter-collegial exchange within and across organizations or even across countries. Having a shared platform in which professionals can observe and reflect on other professionals' experiences can enrich their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes and provide them with suggestions for improving their practice. An additional characteristic that was observed to have a positive impact on professionals' development was the exchange between professionals from different countries. The opportunity to discover how other educational systems respond to the topics with which professionals are struggling with seemed to widen professionals' realm of possible tools to address the challenges.

## **9. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NON-FORMAL SETTINGS**

All of the aforementioned recommendations are also important for professionals working in non-formal settings. However, it is important to take into account the conditions of professionals working in non-formal organizations, as these may bring additional challenges and opportunities. Unlike formal education, quality standards and educational qualifications for staff are less developed in non-formal education (European Commission, 2015). Therefore, there is a concerted effort at the European level to build capacity in non-formal education (European Commission, n.d.). For example, the European Commission has developed important programmes, platforms, and resources aimed at (inter)national exchange of good practices, training among others. The European Training Strategy also includes taking stock of research and other initiatives and disseminating these findings to develop learning for policy, research, practice and (youth) communities. The findings of the ISOTIS work can contribute to this body of knowledge.

For instance, guaranteeing sufficient time and opportunities for PD might be particularly crucial in non-formal settings where specific credentials and pre-service qualifications may be very broad or even lacking. Furthermore, when organisations rely (up to a certain extent) on volunteer work, as it is often the case in non-formal settings, this aspect becomes even more crucial. A closely related aspect is the need for clear guidelines to ensure coherence between macro (policy) levels and organisational and practitioners' practices.

*Recommendation 21: PD in non-formal settings should take stock of the latest developments in research and practice at the national and European level to increase opportunities for exchange and peer learning.* ISOTIS work and also prior initiatives at the European level highlighted the importance of exchange and peer learning, which seems especially relevant for (para)professionals reflecting different (educational) backgrounds.

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Figure 1.3. Standardized mean scores for professionals' general and cultural/linguistic self-efficacy

Figure 1.4. Example of the multilingual log in page of the Virtual Learning Environment.



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