



Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review  
of European Early Childhood Education and Care



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CARE

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Report on “good practice” case studies of professional development in three countries

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents ‘good practice case studies’ of exemplary approaches to *innovative* in-service professional development of ECEC practitioners in three countries: Denmark, Italy and Poland.

The report is part of the project *CARE* “Curriculum Quality Analyses and Impact Review of European Education and Care”, a collaborative project funded by the European Union within the Seventh Framework Program, to address issues related to the quality, inclusiveness, and individual, social, and economic benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe.

The report reviews studies on innovative approaches to professional development, including the use of new technologies, peer learning, reflective practice and organizational learning, within the field of Early Childhood Education in Europe (T3.3, narrative literature review), and then presents the case study design, results and interpretations of findings from the three case studies on good practices of in-service PD conducted in three European countries. Discussions and implications from the three studies are described in the second chapter of this report. The three case studies are presented separately in the appendices section (A. Denmark: *The VIDA program. Innovative practices of PD on quality and child outcomes*; B. Italy: *ECECs as participatory city-laboratories*; C. Poland: *An innovative approach to the in-service PD of caregivers in the Łódź*), each including: a contextualization and description of the case, the research design and procedures, findings, limitations and discussion of results.

This multiple case study involved data collection on innovative approaches of in-service professional development in each of the three countries (Denmark, Italy, Poland) that were considered *good examples* of “innovative approaches to in-service PD” by local experts and researchers. Each case was identified on the basis of common criteria drawn from the literature review (T3.3) conducted in the first part of the study and presented in the first chapter of this report.

Data collected in each case include both existing and new data (interviews, focus groups and observations). Case studies were conducted within the “WP3, Professional Development: Impact and Innovation”, with the aim to explore new effective approaches to professional development aimed at enhancing education and improving workforce training strategies for early practitioners.

This multiple case study aimed at identifying common and culturally different key elements of innovation within in-service professional development practices in contemporary ECEC settings (i.e. sustainability, creativity and flexibility, participation of coordinators, sustained shared practices of learning within a group, reflexivity, etc.) and discussing them in a cross-cultural perspective. In each site, overlapping and connections with the WP2 multiple case study (D 2.3, Slot et al., 2016), are acknowledged and further described in the final part of each national case study report (see Appendices).

Findings revealed that there is a largely shared interpretation of *innovation* in the ECE field, despite the cultural, geographical, political differences that characterized these three different countries. We found this agreement within each case study, among stakeholders and practitioners, and between the three cases, and this is an interesting and partially unexpected result. The main findings regard the process of innovation and its impact on professional consciousness and motivation in terms of networking, participatory practices and the improvement of ECEC quality.

In depth and comprehensive insight in “good practice” models of continuous professional development and quality improvement based on the three case studies reveals the effects of dynamic factors (e.g. frequent feedback and regular team-based reflection sessions based on observation), the importance of time for reflection in job contract, the critical role of pedagogical leaders (coordinators, directors, managers, supervisors), the importance of inter-organizational networking within the locality and the facilitating role of collaboration with research institutes. All three studies provide evidence of the mutual benefit of collaboration between practitioners and researchers/experts, and underline the need to improve the practitioners’ network and possibility for working with communities of practices developed at the micro, meso, macro level.

Findings in brief:

- We found a widespread interpretation of innovation in PD connected to social participation, networking, exchange, collaboration, reciprocal learning from all professionals at different levels.
- Sustainability in PD, i.e. regularity, stability and PD choices which incorporate peer-to-peer strategies in training and a wide dissemination, implemented by regular and affordable resources, are considered to have a strong impact and have been effectively exemplified in various forms according to local traditions and ECEC organization.
- The interplay between research, education and practice, as already stated in the D3.1 (Jensen, et.al.2015) emerges as a main finding from the three cases.
- Many and different ways of connecting the micro-meso-macro levels and combining top-down and bottom-up approaches (or vice versa) emerge from the three cases.
- Experiential learning, workshops, knowledge-based and change-oriented pedagogical practices are emphasized as fundamental.
- The role of the coordinator or manager emerges as a key element.
- PD can have an impact on educational policies at local and national levels (VIDA, MIBA project, Reggio Emilia, Łódź).
- Involvement of practitioners when designing PD is important.
- The three cases point out the need to connect reflection to practice/actions, to foster critical reflection processes and practice analysis, and to translate knowledge into practice.
- Time, stability of the group of professionals and creativity are key components in promoting change in practices.
- Outcomes regarding children exist and can be measured (Denmark).
- ICT are important for documentation and to create virtual community of learners (Italy).

All described cases seem to have acted as “engines of innovation”.

More research is necessary within a qualitative/ethnographic framework in more EU contexts in order to shed more light on the specific forms and effects of PD practices and approaches and on how to transfer them within each country from one institution to another and, with the necessary precautions, cross culturally. The results from these three case studies could encourage new studies on how reflective practices and dynamic processes of reciprocal learning can promote and support educators

in developing an attitude of learning by doing, team work, discovering new opportunities and being more aware of the possible effects of their educational actions.

There is a need for further research on how innovation is effectively translated into renewed practices to promote children's well-being and learning. There is also a need for contact and exchange in the field and at the managers' level, to single out possible paths for innovation, so as to understand how they work and how they can be adapted culturally in order to inspire and contribute to the development of effective and culturally sensitive PD practices all over Europe.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Continuous professional development should be considered an essential component of the structural quality and the development of any good quality ECEC system. Pre-service, staff qualification progressively developing to a post secondary level, should be a common goal and a necessary premise for continuous professional development, to face the increasing diversity in children, family, organizations.

Innovation is situated and related to contexts and balance is needed between local practices, traditions, values and goals and a broader perspective. Innovative practices, to be effective, need to be culturally sensitive.

### ***Recommendations for policy:***

- Include PAID hours for PD in ECEC staff contracts
- Clearly define who is responsible [e.g. city, municipalities, ministry, research centers, etc.] for promoting and monitoring investment in and quality of PD
- Define local and general criteria for evaluating PD's impact, according to goals

### ***Recommendations for practice:***

- Encourage a better balance between knowledge-based PD and experiential-based PD
- Promote *situated-reflexivity* based PD anchored to «daily practices»
- Invest also in training of key-figures as «multipliers» (pedagogical coordinators, managers, directors ..).

### ***Recommendations for research:***

- Involve practitioners in research – research is a powerful PD mechanism
- Transform evaluation project-processes into formative PD opportunities [e.g. CLASS]
- Involve parents and children in PD projects to innovate curriculum