D5.3 Internet survey among staff working in formal and informal (education) sectors in ten European Countries

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ISOTIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This staff survey among over 1,000 professionals across ten European countries revealed 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. The main findings will be discussed in the following sections.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BELIEFS, PRACTICES, AND POLICY

The results showed two main concepts regarding professionals' diversity beliefs. The first one was labelled *multicultural beliefs* which involved being sensitive, appreciative, and respectful towards cultural differences, while at the same time focusing on the similarities and intercultural contact. The other aspect was labelled *multilingual beliefs* which valued the use of the heritage language at home and at (pre)school and support for the development of the heritage language in (pre)school. Although the results supported these two factors for the full sample, it appeared that in some countries the multicultural beliefs concept showed less internal consistency. The items that were measured in this scale reflected beliefs on a continuum ranging from assimilationist to more neutral (colour-blindness) or positive multiculturalist views. These items were included to reduce the potential risk of social desirability. However, this could also have resulted in a more heterogeneous construct, which in a few countries resulted in lower internal consistency of the scale.

Overall, professionals scored higher on multicultural beliefs compared to multilingual beliefs. Although there appeared different patterns of results across countries. Professionals from Italy scored comparatively higher on multicultural and multilingual beliefs, whereas professionals from Czech Republic scored comparatively lower. Professionals from England showed the highest support for multilingualism, especially compared to professionals from Germany and the Netherlands. However, the professionals from the participating countries reported differences in balancing their multicultural and multilingual beliefs. In some countries, such as Czech Republic, France, Italy, and Portugal, the expressed levels of multicultural and multilingual beliefs were about equal. However, in other countries the support for multiculturalism was stronger than for multilingualism, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, whereas professionals from England, Greece, and Poland reported the opposite pattern. These findings illustrate the complexity of professionals' attitudes towards cultural and linguistic diversity and reveal that professionals may emphasize different aspects, which probably partly reflects country differences in migration flows, integration policies, and the political and societal discourse on migration and diversity. Next, professionals reported on their actual practices and the organizational policy towards diversity. Professionals from England appeared to take diversity into account the most in the implementation of daily activities and practices, both at the (classroom) practice level and at the wider (school) organizational level, whereas professionals from France reported the lowest implementation of diversity practices and policy.

A comparison between professionals working in the different types of provisions revealed that professionals working in ECEC held more positive beliefs towards multilingualism compared to professionals working in after school care, whereas no differences were found for views on multiculturalism. Professionals working in ECEC provisions also scored higher on diversity policy in the organisation. Moreover, managers held more positive views towards multilingualism.

There are moderate relations between reported beliefs, on the one hand, and practices or organizational policy, on the other hand. Professionals with more positive views on multiculturalism and multilingualism also reported to implement more diversity practices in their daily work. For managers there was a positive relation between their views on multilingualism and the extent to which there was a policy on diversity in the organisation they work in. Interestingly, these relations remained after controlling for the actual level of diversity in the work environment of professionals, suggesting there is a link between professionals' beliefs and practices.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The current study 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. The parent-professional relationship was found to be the multidimensional, but the different dimensions could not be reliably distinguished in an equivalent manner in the different countries. There might be two possible reasons for this. The first one concerns the small sample size in some countries in combination with the fact that samples consisted of different types of professionals. The nature of the relationship with parents may be different depending on the age of the children (ECEC vs after school care) or type of provision (care vs formal education). Thus, the relationship between professionals and parents could not be defined as a multidimensional concept in a similar way for all countries, so rather a descriptive and more comprehensive approach was taken.

Overall, the results show that professionals rate the relationship with parents as neutral, but oriented to positive. Although, the sometimes small and/or heterogeneous samples do not allow for generalization of the findings, there appeared some different trends in the way professionals from different countries reported on their relationship with parents. Professionals from England scored, on average, more positive on the parent-professional relationship, whereas professionals from other countries scored lower. A more in-depth analysis of the differences between countries in the nature of the parent-professional relationship showed that professionals from England scored higher on all aspects. Professionals from the Netherlands and Norway, on the other hand, scored particularly higher on the reciprocal contact with parents, but reported lower levels of shared beliefs about children's behaviour and achievement. Professionals from other countries reported, on average, lower quality of relationships with parents. There also appeared differences between professionals working in different settings. 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.

Several topics can be addressed in the contact between parents and professionals. The results showed that, overall, the child's behaviour and relations with peers were the most frequently discussed topics, followed by the child's development and (pre)school related issues. Although, the sometimes small and/or heterogeneous samples do not allow for generalization of the findings, there appeared some different trends in the way professionals from different countries and professionals working in different settings in the topics they addressed in communication with parents. Professionals from the Czech Republic and Germany reported discussing (pre)school related issues and home (learning) activities more frequently, whereas professionals from England and Greece put relatively more emphasis on parent support. In general, the child's home situation and parent support were the least frequently discussed topics, especially in France and Norway. Also, there are differences between professionals working in different provisions. ECEC professionals reported discussing more about the child's behaviour and development as well as the home situation. Professionals in ECEC or after school care also reported talking more about organizational issues.

The results showed associations between the parent-professional relationship and the frequency at which certain topics are discussed with parents, which holds especially for professionals working in ECEC settings. Professionals with a positive relation with parents more often discussed the child's behaviour and development, but also the child's home situation and parent support. Professionals working in the social work sector with positive relations with parents also reported talking about the child's home situation and support for parents more often. For after school professionals a positive relation was mostly associated with discussing the child's behaviour and development. For professionals working in formal education few associations were found with the frequency at which they discussed certain topics with parents.

Lastly, contact with parents was also examined at the organizational level. Following Epstein (2001), the following aspects were distinguished: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *decision making*, and *collaborating with the community*. The most prominent form of parent contact was reflected in the communication with parents. Communication with parents most often concerned face-to-face meetings and one-way communication in newsletters, which occurred on a regular to often basis. Collaboration with the community of parents and involving parents in decision making also occurred on a regular basis, whereas supporting parenting and involving parents in volunteering were the least frequent. Although, the sometimes small and/or heterogeneous samples do not allow for generalization of the findings, there appeared some different trends in the way professionals from different countries reported on parent communication. Professionals from England and the Netherlands scored higher on communicating with parents on most aspects. Professionals from Germany and the Netherlands showed the most support for parenting and engaging parents in volunteering activities. Likewise, professionals from the Netherlands and Poland emphasized parental decision making comparatively strongly. Lastly, professionals from Germany, Italy, and Poland showed higher levels of collaboration with the community by means of organizing events for parents and children.

There also appeared differences between professionals working in different settings, showing that professionals working in after school care settings reported lower levels of collaborating and communicating with parents compared to professionals working in formal education. Volunteering

activities were the most common in formal education compared to the other settings. Also, involvement of parents in decision making was the least common for the social work sector.

Another aspect that was studied, concerns the collaboration between different organisations. Following the theoretical framework of Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, and Tollefson (2006) several stages of collaboration were distinguished ranging from no communication and collaboration to a high level of commitment and communication and consensual decision making. For the current study we looked at a minimum level of collaboration at which information is exchanged between organisations, but decisions are made independently. Each organisation indicated the extent to which they collaborated with a range of organisations, such as health care services, educational services, and (local) law enforcement. 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%). There appeared some differences between countries showing that collaboration with health organisations was the most common in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Greece whereas a collaboration social services mostly occurred in the Czech Republic, England, Italy, Poland and Portugal. Collaboration with community services was most evident in England, Greece, whereas collaboration with volunteering organisations and law enforcement was more common in Italy, Poland, and Portugal.

Several goals were mentioned as reasons for collaboration with other services, including 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. Although all goals were mentioned as important across countries, there also appeared some country differences. For instance, professionals from the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent also professionals from Norway, scored lower on the goal of reducing discrimination and segregation compared to professionals from other counties. Likewise, the goal of learning from other professionals appeared less important for professionals from Italy and the Netherlands. Lastly, professionals working in ECEC and after school care more often mentioned that improving child outcomes was an important goal compared to professionals working in formal education.

STAFF AND THEIR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Professionals working directly with children as well as service managers reported about several aspects of their work environment, including job satisfaction, organizational climate, self-efficacy, support needs and professional development (PD) activities. Overall, professionals reported to be satisfied with their work and to evaluate the organizational climate positively. This holds especially for professionals from Norway and the Netherlands, whereas professionals from Germany and Portugal rated these aspects lower. Moreover, ECEC professionals showed higher levels of job satisfaction and more satisfactory organizational climates compared to professionals working in other settings.

For self-efficacy, a general level of self-efficacy and self-efficacy related to dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity were distinguished. Overall, professionals from Norway and the Netherlands reported the highest level of self-efficacy, whereas professionals from Italy and Portugal the lowest levels. Professionals from Poland reported the lowest level of cultural and linguistic self-efficacy, which may reflect the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity in their work context. Professionals from Germany reported lower levels of general self-efficacy, but higher levels of cultural and linguistic self-efficacy, which may suggest that they are more aware on working with these target groups. Overall, it appeared that increased diversity in the work context was associated with higher levels of cultural and linguistic self-efficacy, at least for the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, which may suggest that a certain level of diversity in the work context is required to develop competences to work with culturally diverse groups. The exception is Poland, where more linguistic diversity in the work context was related to lower perceived general self-efficacy. This may reflect that linguistic diversity is rather new and professionals have not yet developed enough experience and competences to work with this target group. A comparison between the different types of professionals showed that professionals working in the social sector reported the lowest level of general self-efficacy compared to other professionals. For cultural and linguistic self-efficacy professionals working in after school care scored the highest, followed by professionals working in formal education and ECEC. Managers also reported on their feelings of self-efficacy in supervising and supporting their staff, maintaining contact with parents, and in general management tasks and reported relatively high levels of competence. This was particularly the case for managers from Greece and England, whereas managers from France, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Portugal scored the lowest.

Professionals also reported on their support needs. The results showed that professionals 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. Professionals from Germany and Greece indicated the strongest need for support, whereas professionals from the Netherlands reported the lowest need for support. Overall, managers reported higher levels of support needs in comparison to professionals working directly with children, except for German managers who showed the opposite pattern. In general, the pattern of support needs is comparable between professionals working across sectors, but professionals working in formal education indicated a higher need for support and social workers reported the lowest need for support.

Professionals engage in a variety of professional development (PD) activities. Discussing and evaluating individual children that need extra support and reflecting upon practice with colleagues were the most commonly mentioned PD activities that occurred, on average, almost every week. Using an online platform for exchange and reflection on practice was the least common activity reported by the informants. The overall pattern of provided PD activities was quite comparable across countries, but there were a few differences. Overall, professionals from Greece reported the highest engagement in PD activities, whereas professionals from Portugal reported the lowest engagement. In England, Norway, and the Netherlands professionals reported being involved in regular cycles of planning, evaluating and adapting their work as frequently as discussing individual children, whereas all other countries mostly focused on evaluating individual children.

Professionals from England also more frequently engaged in exchange and reflection with professionals outside of their own organisation.

Professionals also listed a top three of PD activities that they valued the most, which appeared to be in line with the actual participation in PD. The most valued activities included discussing individual children who need extra care, reflecting upon the educational and pedagogical practice, and reflection and exchange with colleagues. Professionals were asked to indicate which features of the top three PD activities made these activities effective. Concerning the content of the PD activities, professionals valued a focus on skills, followed by knowledge. Attention for beliefs and attitudes was valued the least. There was quite some consensus concerning the combination of theory and practice as important for all PD activities. Also, the use of reflection as PD strategy was highly valued by professionals.

Furthermore, 74% of the professionals reported that they attended in-service training, conferences or workshops in the past two years. For the training they considered most valuable, professionals also listed information on delivery mode and duration. In 31% of the cases it concerned a one-off workshop or training, whereas in 41% of the cases the training lasted for a longer period of time, ranging from a couple of days (reported by the majority) to several weeks or months. Online courses or webinars were rare (only 3% listed this as example of valuable training). When comparing the countries, two patterns became evident. Professionals from the Czech Republic, England, Greece, France, and Poland mostly attended one-off workshops or conferences, whereas professionals from Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Germany listed in-service training more often. Online courses or training were only mentioned in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway. Regardless of the type of PD, it mostly concerned a team-based training (63%).

Lastly, differences between professionals working in different settings were investigated. Overall, the pattern of results is quite comparable between settings, but after-school professionals generally reported lower engagement in PD activities. Another difference concerns the fact that ECEC professionals more often use observation as a means to learn from one another, and to provide and receive feedback compared to professionals working in formal education and after-school care. In terms of what professionals value, it appeared that professionals working in formal education less often mentioned that regular cycles of planning, evaluating and adapting is an effective PD activity. Discussing individual children who need more care and observing colleagues to learn from them, on the other hand, appeared to be highly valued in formal education. Using reflection in practice was more often mentioned by professionals working in ECEC and after-school care.

CONCLUSIONS

The results highlight that more positive beliefs towards multiculturalism and multilingualism go hand in hand with more culturally sensitive practices and better parent-professional relationships. Although, the sometimes small and/or heterogeneous samples do not allow for generalization of the findings, there appeared some trends in the what professionals from different countries reported. The findings from England and to a lesser extent also Italy and Norway, seem to point

to, overall, more culturally sensitive practices in this regard. Interestingly, professionals from the Netherlands and Norway also evaluated their working conditions and their own competences the most favourable. Although, professionals attached the least value to a focus on attitudes and beliefs in PD activities, the positive relations between reported beliefs and practices might suggest that an emphasis on beliefs could be an important addition in PD.

Further, the results show that ECEC professionals tend to have more positive views on multilingualism and to have corresponding policies in place more often at the organizational level. However, there appeared no differences in diversity practices between the professionals working in the various settings. Moreover, ECEC professionals reported better relations with parents and were able to discuss a broader variety of topics with them, including the child's behaviour and development as well as the child's home situation and support for parents. Interestingly, ECEC professionals also reported better work conditions and less need for support in comparison to professionals working in formal education. Although, the differences in engagement in PD activities between professionals were small, ECEC professionals indicated more emphasis on reflection and use of observation to learn from one another in comparison to professionals working in formal education.

ISOTIS

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY

ISOTIS