

# D5.4 A Virtual Learning Environment model of professional development aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusiveness

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Description of Action of Task 5.4 refers to the development of a transferable model of professional development using a virtual learning environment (VLE) considering the contextual and organisational characteristics and the needs and challenges of diverse professionals working in these contexts using a design-based approach. The VLE will prioritize the promotion of community bonds in multilingual, multicultural and socially disadvantaged (pre)school and informal settings among the main actors (practitioners, parents and children), and the promotion of global intercultural competence of individuals and communities by i) raising awareness and knowledge of multiple languages, cultures, human rights, discrimination mechanisms and promoting skills in multiple languages and in critical thinking and establishing shared understanding, ii) promoting agency of all stakeholders based on valuing their cultural background, resources and identity, iii) using the resources available in the form of diverse family languages and cultural backgrounds to innovate learning practices of children and professionals and to create rich learning experiences, and iv) sustaining communication and collaboration between stakeholders, encouraging and supporting networking between stakeholders. The task includes two aspects: i) the co-design and implementation of a VLE, ii) a professional development (PD) intervention supportive to both the design of the VLE and to increasing professionals' intercultural competences. The design and implementation of the VLE is a task that is shared with the work packages WP3 (parents) and WP4 (children in classrooms), and is regarding the technical part coordinated by WP4. The present report D5.4, therefore, focuses on the PD intervention to increase the intercultural competences of professionals working with children and families at risk of social exclusion and on the use of the VLE as support to the PD intervention. The design and technical development of the VLE is reported in D4.4.

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. One of the main differences between the four countries concerned the type of professionals and the setting they work in. 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. Another difference between Italy and Portugal on the one hand and France and the Netherlands on the other hand, concerned the additional involvement in T4.4. The work in T5.4 focused mainly on PD and improving professionals' competences, with use of the VLE whenever relevant, whereas the work in T4.4 focused on the work with children in the classroom and improving their competences. The Italian and Portuguese teachers were involved in both T4.4 and T5.4, thus allowing for more synergy in aligning the work conducted in both aspects of the intervention. The work in France and the Netherlands was initially mostly focused on professionals, but soon also developed to more concrete work related to daily practice with children and parents to strengthen the connection between theory and practice.

## INTERVENTION IN PORTUGAL

The Portuguese intervention involved two primary schools in the greater area of Porto and included both professionals working directly with children (e.g., teachers) as well as other staff (e.g., school board member, school administration member). Both schools have disadvantaged student populations from low income families, but particularly the school in site 2 is known for having several children from the Portuguese Roma minority (the larger and most discriminated ethnic minority within the Portuguese context). It is important to note that the professional development intervention (T5.4) was conducted in both sites in strict articulation with the development of the classroom and school activities under T4.4. Therefore, the focus was on the development of the T4.4 activities that could enrich their curriculum as well as getting the opportunity to learn from professionals in other countries and the PD activities were aligned with that. In site 1, the intervention mainly focused on topic of economic inequalities and social justice, whereas site 2 addressed multiculturalism education.

The professional development aspect of the intervention supported teachers in enactment and reflection on the classroom activities that were designed and implemented as part of T4.4. The teachers carried out student projects addressing socioeconomic inequalities and multiculturalism and were actively supported and supervised by the ISOTIS researchers. The VLE was actively used by the children in the classroom, but less frequently used by the teachers. As part of the professional development, the professionals were involved in multiple exchange activities with professionals from other countries. The teachers, for instance, worked on a welcoming kit for newly arriving children and exchanged the results of this project with Italian teachers. Also, the teachers exchanged experiences with Dutch preschool teachers on the book activity and the skin tones activity.

The Portuguese intervention showed that the teachers hardly had time allocated for professional development, thus the researchers decided to work on professional development while meeting with teachers in preparing and evaluating the classroom activities. The researchers actively supported the teachers in the classroom, which was highly appreciated and contributed to a positive and collaborative relationship. It required flexibility and adaptability from the researchers to maximize opportunities for professional development in this process. In the end, the teachers showed great appreciation and indicated they have further developed their global and intercultural competences.

## INTERVENTION IN ITALY

In Italy, the intervention included seven teachers from a preschool and primary school (located in the same building). The schools are located in a culturally highly diverse neighbourhood of the city of Milan with a significant percentage of the children coming from disadvantaged immigrant families (mainly Arabic and North African families, but not exclusively). A particular feature of the Italian PD intervention was the strong synergy with the interventions focusing on parents (WP3) and on classroom processes (WP4). Due to this characteristic the intervention focused on a) increasing teachers' awareness and knowledge regarding some of the central ISOTIS topics (e.g., multilingualism, second language learning, intercultural competences, family-school collaboration), b) promoting more positive and open attitudes towards linguistic and cultural

diversity within the school, c) supporting teachers' reflection skills, and d) increasing teachers' skills in dealing with multilingual and multicultural classrooms and in engaging in meaningful and effective dialogues with diverse families.

The intervention hinged around 5 main key-topics (i.e. knowledge on multilingualism and multiculturalism, ICTs, reflection skills, family-school collaboration, international exchange). Considering the central role that the VLE played in the Italian intervention (due to the synergy between the three WPs in Italy) the VLE was already introduced during the kick-off meeting and later presented more in-depth during the dedicated training meetings. The intervention combined different PD strategies, such as training, coaching, and reflection and was highly embedded in the VLE structure itself. The VLE is organized in different parts (namely, *did you know, observe and reflect, what can you do*) and these various parts provided opportunities to foster professionals' critical thinking and activity-designing skills (especially in the *observe and reflect* section). Moreover, one teacher engaged in a cross-country exchange and provided feedback on some of the Portuguese VLE activities which proved valuable for the Portuguese teachers and at the same time inspired the Italian teacher.

The Italian intervention was the most comprehensive and required the most extensive time investment of both the teachers and the researchers, which was mainly related to the involvement of Italy in all three WPs. The teachers were generally satisfied with the intervention, especially in relation to their increased knowledge and skills. They appreciated the professional development but were somewhat more critical towards the VLE for this purpose. It was children's enthusiasm that helped the teachers to better appreciate the potential of the VLE. Due to this complexity of the intervention (given the comprehensive approach) there were moments the teachers perceived the intervention as challenging and sometimes tiring. At the same time, the intervention was mostly focused on individual teachers rather than the team of professionals. Already in the exploratory phase, it appeared that there was a lack of strong team cohesion and collaboration at the chosen intervention site and the intervention did not succeed in improving that.

## INTERVENTION IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch PD intervention involved two locations of a large preschool organisation in the city of Utrecht and included both professionals working directly with children (e.g., teachers) as well as other staff (e.g, managers, pedagogues). Both locations are characterized by a highly diverse child population, with the majority of the children coming from low educated families or having an immigrant background (e.g., Maghrebian, Turkish, Indian, Polish). The aim of the intervention was to align the work as much as possible between the two locations, but still tailor the activities to the local context of each location. As a result, a kick-off meeting, VLE workshop and assessment meeting were combined for both locations, whereas the other meetings were held separately for both locations. Four cross-location goals guided the Dutch intervention focussing on a) enhancing awareness of one's own beliefs and attitudes regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism through reflection, b) expanding knowledge on the topic of diversity and inclusion, c) improving intercultural competences by exchanging (good) practices and knowledge between locations and countries, and d) reflection on and improvement of the relationship with parents and parental involvement.



The intervention mainly focused on the professional development of the organisation and staff. Therefore, each meeting focused on expanding professionals knowledge as well as reflecting on their attitudes and beliefs in order to raise awareness on their practice. A combination of the resources on the VLE, results of the T5.3 Staff survey and other findings in ISOTIS, and some additional theoretical models was used to expand knowledge and facilitate as a starting point for reflection. The use of the VLE as an online community of learners was addressed in two ways. Firstly, participants from the two locations were encouraged to exchange experiences and comment on each other's work via the online forum. Secondly, the VLE was used to facilitate cross-country exchange with Portuguese and Italian teachers. An activity concerning skin colour (conducted in Portugal) and a welcome kit (developed in Italy and Portugal) were shown to the Dutch professionals to reflect on the topic of skin colour and to raise a discussion about ways to welcome new children and parents to the preschool. In addition, a reflection activity on implicit messages in children's books (conducted in the Netherlands) was performed in Portugal as well, and the VLE was used to facilitate an exchange on these reflections.

The Dutch intervention showed that integrating such an intervention in the existing PD structure (e.g., allocating time and resources) is an important aspect both during the intervention as well as in view of sustainability in the longer term. Relatedly, a team-based intervention including managers and other supporting staff besides teachers, can enrich the discussion and strengthen the possibility for implementation and sustainability. At a more individual level, the intervention illustrated the importance of professionals' beliefs and attitudes in addressing intercultural competences and highlights the important role of reflection as a PD strategy in raising awareness of their (sometimes prejudiced) beliefs and attitudes, and how these are related to the professionals' actual practices and behaviour in the daily context.

## INTERVENTION IN FRANCE

In France, the task was carried out in a community centre in Paris involving the manager and seven professionals (of which four were volunteers). The centre was located in a diverse neighbourhood with a majority of low-income families and/or of (North) African or Eastern European background. The organisation's approach is based on the principle that professionals should support parents in developing the necessary competences to contact and collaborate (and if necessary confront) with the school and teachers, rather than act as a mediator between the school and the parents. In other words, the organisation should rather empower parents to approach school. It was therefore agreed to address family-professional's collaboration (also termed co-education). Consequently, the PD intervention aimed at the development of the staff's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and expectations, hereby advancing their competences to better fulfil the organisation's mission.

A crucial part of the intervention consisted of group-wise reflection about actual cases or situations that participants shared with the rest of the group. These cases were related to the co-education approach with the final aim of improving disadvantaged children's educational opportunities and were experienced as challenging. Complementary to the group reflection on the shared cases, the researchers also prepared a presentation of theoretical models and scientific research to augment the participants' knowledge on relevant subjects connected to the

main topics and objectives. A few of the VLE resources were used to enrich participants' knowledge as well. In addition, a cross-country exchange via the VLE was facilitated by providing the participants with narratives about the ideal day written by Dutch professionals, which helped them reflect on their own parent-professional relationship. Finally, the researchers supported the organisation in the development of a game that can be played by parents, children and teachers to enhance parents' knowledge regarding the French education system.

The French intervention showed that the (para) professionals expressed satisfaction with the PD meetings as it brought them relevant tools (skills) and ideas (knowledge) on empowering parents. Already during the exploratory phase it appeared that there was, within the organization, a lack of a clear-cut definition of the professionals' role in the relationship with parents, which caused confusion especially when parents solicited their help in a conflict with the school. This issue was addressed in the intervention but not fully resolved yet. Possibly, establishing an organizational policy in which the professionals' roles and functions are clearly stipulated and shared agreement on functions and roles is sought, can support the professionals in establishing and maintaining a professional identity. This seems especially relevant for non-permanent staff who work in the organization on a voluntary basis. The same holds for establishing clear guidelines on how to conduct the activities with children and parents.

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE VLE**

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. These resources were generally appreciated by professionals and contributed to enhancing their knowledge about specific topics. The joint reflection on one or more of these resources, which was part of the PD activities, supported professionals in reflecting on their beliefs and attitudes.

Another function of the VLE was establishing a virtual community of learners. Although most professionals gave this function a try, as this was facilitated by means of the cross-country exchange, the potential of this function has not been fully explored yet. This exchange was completely guided and supervised by the ISOTIS researchers, which appeared necessary also in view of tackling language barriers. Although the VLE was available in many languages and featured an automatic translation function, this did not always functioned well. Some nuances got lost in translation and sometimes the automatic translation created confusion among professionals. Therefore, it seems essential to have someone actively guiding the process of exchanging experiences.

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The PD intervention was contextualized and adapted to the needs of professionals in their local situation, while taking into account the organizational structures and policies, which resulted in different processes in the different countries and organizations involved in the intervention. However, this design-based process followed a number of phases from the exploration of the context, the co-design, implementation and evaluation of the intervention and all countries adhered to the general guidelines that were formulated. Altogether, this resulted in a process taking place over the course of more than one year.

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. The co-design phase was new for both researchers and professionals and relied heavily on a good collaboration and mutual trust. Especially the professionals experienced some uncertainty about the intervention and what it would bring them during this phase. In all countries, this led to a stronger connection to professionals' everyday work and to seeking for ways to integrate the PD work in the preparation of classroom activities. The implementation and exchange of activities, especially between professionals from different countries, supported the professionals in understanding the added value of the intervention and was highly appreciated.

## **MAIN CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING PROFESSIONALS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES**

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. However, there were some differences depending on the targeted competence (i.e. beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, skills, behaviour and practices). 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. These changes were reported by professionals in all four countries and were generally also appreciated by them.

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 cross-country exchange 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.

## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

Generally, the professionals were satisfied with the intervention. However, some professionals reported lower levels of satisfaction as their high expectations before the start of the intervention were not fully met. This was particularly related to the VLE and what they had expected of it and to a lesser extent also pertained to the newly acquired knowledge and skills, which in their view was lower than expected. Overall, the evaluation showed that most gains were made in the domains of beliefs and attitudes, which the researchers felt was a necessary prerequisite for changing behaviour and practices. Interestingly, there were examples in several countries in which professionals went beyond the scope of the intervention in initiating a change of practice. This seems an indication of change in professionals' beliefs and attitudes that set in motion a process of change in other domains as well, even though the professionals might not have been aware of it.

The work in the four countries highlighted that there are several aspects of the context (i.e. characteristics of the professionals, the (classroom) context and the organization) that were relevant for the success of the intervention. It appeared important that the intervention was tailored to this local context and adjusted to fit in existing policies and structures in the organization. Despite these contextual differences the overall design-based approach worked well and uncovered some similar findings and lessons learned across countries.

Related to the overall process, there are three points worth noting. The first relates to professionals' readiness to change, which is conceptualised as comprising factors at the individual and organizational level that reflect the extent to which people are inclined to accept, embrace and adopt a particular approach or plan with the intention to change the current situation. Secondly, guidance of the PD process by someone with the appropriate knowledge and skills (e.g., an external expert or a member of staff who is facilitated to guide the team) is critical to success. Throughout the PD interventions in all countries, an active role of the ISOTIS researchers appeared to be essential to guide the co-constructive process in which mutual trust and positive, collaborative relationships were crucial. Last, but not least, sufficient time for preparation and engagement in the intervention was essential too and lack of time appeared a barrier at some points, in some countries.

Concerning the VLE, five aspects seemed important. First, the content, structure and functionalities of the VLE should be customized to the wishes and needs of the professionals who are to use it. Second, the VLE should be viewed as a dynamic and continuously evolving platform adapting accordingly to the context and professionals, which is in line with the idea of continuous professional development. Relatedly, it is essential to have someone actively guiding this process from development through implementation and beyond, to establish a sustainable practice. In line with this active facilitation, a fourth point concerns the embeddedness within the organisation. The results indicate that integrating the VLE within the daily work in the classroom environment is important. Relatedly, in view of alignment and integration within current practice, this also calls for technical requirements to enable this.



## AIMS OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

In line with the Call *REV-INEQUAL-06-2016*, the research strategy of ISOTIS to address the challenge of reducing inequality and discrimination in European education is twofold. First, to analyse institutional, cultural and ideological mechanisms underlying inequality and discrimination, ISOTIS focuses specifically on the socio-economic and ethnic-cultural dimensions of inequality, which pertain to low-income native groups, major immigrant groups and the Roma (Description of Action [DoA], p.3). Focusing on these groups is especially relevant in view of current intercultural and interethnic tensions, increasing polarization and persistent segregation in many European countries that can be regarded as a major threat to inclusion and equity. In the DoA, ISOTIS stipulates, based on an extensive literature review, that “(...) in the context of increasing diversity, the social mobility of children of disadvantaged families not only depends on educational achievement, but also on social and cultural integration (...) integration and acculturation is an issue for native communities as much as it is for immigrant communities. There are tensions reflecting rivalry between groups, lack of inter-cultural contact and decreasing support for multicultural integration, undermining social cohesion.” (DoA, p.4). Second, to identify inclusive approaches to professional development ISOTIS adopts a broader orientation on several types of diversity and inequality as may commonly occur in classrooms and neighbourhoods. ISOTIS does not explicitly address the issue of race or colour, as in many European countries these dimensions are not part of the local or national policy discourses. Yet, awareness of the role race and colour may play is especially apparent in the ISOTIS studies among Roma families, whereas discrimination based on ethnicity and/or low socioeconomic status is a key topic in all interviews.

The overall aim of WP5 is to identify effective strategies for professional development that take into account new approaches to professional learning, i.e. virtual learning and team-based models of learning, and that focus specifically on increasing cultural and linguistic awareness among professionals in their work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. A related aim is to identify characteristics of the centers and schools at the organizational level that support or hinder professionals in dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity and in creating an inclusive, positive climate in the classroom, center and school. Task 4 concerns specifically the development, implementation and evaluation of a prototype of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in family, community and school settings to support and enhance research interventions in several contexts conducted in three intervention-study tasks (Task 3.4, 4.4, 5.4). Although, the VLE task was carried out in three different work packages, each with its own focus and target group (i.e. parents, children and teachers, and para/professionals and professionals in early education, primary education, child and youth care, family support and social work who are working with children and families), the VLE was developed from the same overarching conceptual framework in order to contribute to a coherent and comprehensive support system for professionals, children and families from different systems perspectives, and to encourage collaboration between sectors (e.g. early education and family support). This has also enhanced synergies between the three work packages. Therefore, part of the VLE was designed and developed for all target groups (a detailed description of this process can be found in the Section A ISOTIS VLE report by Pastori, Pagani, Mangiatordi, & Menegola, 2019), whereas other parts focused specifically on the particular stakeholder groups that were involved and on the specific objectives that were pursued in each VLE-related task, in this case (para)professionals. The specific aim of the current task,

as described in the DoA was to develop a transferable model of a VLE for professionalization with a focus on fostering professionals' multicultural and multilingual awareness and competences to create inclusive practices.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the theoretical models guiding this task as well as the overall ISOTIS workflow. The next chapters entail four country reports and provide a detailed description of the professional development interventions in Portugal (Chapter 2), Italy (Chapter 3), The Netherlands (Chapter 4), and France (Chapter 5). Each country report addresses the selection of the sites (Part I – Sites' selection and shared intervention agreement), the context of the intervention (Part II – Exploratory Phase), the design and implementation of the professional development activities (Part III – Implementation co-constructive process), and the assessment of the intervention (Part IV – Assessment). Chapter 6 focusses on the cross-country exchange. Overall conclusions and a discussion of the results are presented in Chapter 7. Lastly, several recommendations for policy and practice are suggested.

## 1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

European countries are facing increasing cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity with at the same time increasing societal inequality. Consequently, dealing with diversity is inevitable for professionals working with (young) children in institutionalized settings, such as (pre)schools, as well as local, community-based social services. However, professionals feel they are ill prepared to deal with diversity and multilingualism (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Michel & Kuiken, 2014; Van Gorp & Moons, 2014). Intercultural competence is essential in the relations between professionals and families in a diverse society. This is the ability to understand one another across and beyond all types of cultural barriers and is a fundamental prerequisite for making our diverse democratic societies work. Therefore, there is a need for a concerted effort to develop the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge that contribute to intercultural competence in the everyday practice of teaching and learning. It addresses the root of a range of issues our societies face: stereotyping, discrimination, and all forms of racism, which are exacerbated in times of economic difficulty.

The concept of intercultural competence is related to the concepts of identity, culture, intercultural encounter and competence, and can be broken down into attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills and actions (Barret, Huber & Reynolds, 2014). The attitudes involved include for instance valuing cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practice, respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from one's own and being willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives. The knowledge and understanding that contribute to intercultural competence include an understanding of the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups, an understanding of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations, and the socially constructed nature of knowledge. The skills involved in intercultural competence include skills like multi-perspectivity or the ability to decentre from one's own perspective and to take other people's perspectives into consideration in addition to one's own, empathy or the ability to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings, cognitive flexibility or the ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking according to the situation or context, the ability to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining. While attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills are all necessary components of intercultural competence, they have to be first acquired/possessed but they also have to be deployed and put into practice through action during intercultural encounters. The overarching aim of the current task was to support professionals in developing their intercultural competences.

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The ISOTIS *Virtual Learning Environment* (VLE) provides a set of functions, sources and suggested activities, but the main feature of the VLE implementation is initiating collaboration between researchers and research participants (teachers, other professionals, volunteering paraprofessionals, parents, children), who are invited to participate in creating contents and materials for the VLE. Co-creating the contents of the VLE, using the cultural and linguistic resources of families and communities for this purpose, is a key design-principle, with a twofold



expected outcome: (1) increased engagement and empowerment of stakeholders; (2) an enriched and truly intercultural curriculum. Initiating and supporting this process in selected study sites was the main task of three WPs for the period September 2018-September 2019, after a period of preparation, focusing on parents, classroom practices and professionals, respectively. This process of participation fits in well with the open and positive nature of the technology and reporting on this process – what can be learned for future implementations – is equally important as a technically working VLE. Documenting the process, evaluating process and outcomes, articulating the strategies developed throughout the process is a main outcome of ISOTIS and will be made available in addition to the VLE prototype as a deliverable. The current report focuses specifically on the *professional development* (PD) of professionals working with children and families at risk of social exclusion in formal settings, such as preschools and primary schools, as well as informal settings, such as after-school activities and care, using the VLE.

The selection of countries for the VLE across WP's 3, 4 and 5 is in line with the ISOTIS tasks and based on two considerations. First, countries were selected to represent relevant variation in national income level, structure of the education, welfare and support systems, and representation of the main target groups of ISOTIS. The selections included countries from the wealthy Northwest, post-communist countries from the East, and less wealthy countries from the South of Europe. Second, within the limits of the budget and in order to distribute the workload for the country teams evenly, while taking the expertise and capacity of the teams into account, not all countries could be involved in all WP's resulting in the following representation presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

*General Overview of the Three Workpackages and Participation across Countries.*

	WP3 Parent Support	WP4 Curriculum Innovation	WP5 Professional development
<b>Task leader</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>The Netherlands</b>
<b>Partners</b>	England		The Netherlands
		Italy	Italy
	NL Wise & Munro	NL Wise & Munro	NL Wise & Munro
	ISSA	ISSA	
		Portugal	Portugal
	Czech Republic	Czech Republic	
			France
	Germany	Greece	

In WP5 different types of professionals and target groups were included. In France the professionals worked in a community centre aimed to bridge the school and home environment. Following from this, the professionals worked mainly with parents in supporting their engagement in their children's school career. The parents were from a poor and disadvantaged area with a mainly North African migration background. In Italy a preschool and primary school (located in the same building) in a culturally highly diverse neighbourhood of Milan were involved. The

Netherlands involved a large preschool organisation in the city of Utrecht that provides preschool education in disadvantaged and highly diverse neighbourhoods. Preschool teachers and other staff working in the centres were included in the process. For Portugal two primary schools were chosen with a relatively high share of Romani and low-income families.

## **1.2. LINKS WITH PREVIOUS WORK IN WP5**

The current task explores new approaches to professional learning, i.e. virtual learning and team-based models of learning, focusing specifically on increasing cultural and linguistic awareness among professionals while considering the organizational level that support or hinder professionals in dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity and in creating an inclusive, positive climate in the classroom, centre and school. The task builds on the previous work that has been conducted in Tasks 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. Task 5.1 started with a first review of the literature on professionals' attitudes and the challenges they encounter in working with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families as well as characteristics of professionals and their work environment and how they relate to their attitudes and practices. In Task 5.2 we conducted an inventory and review of current professional development models employed in different countries that are considered examples of good practices, including also the role that ICT can play. Lastly, in Task 5.3 we conducted an internet-based staff survey in ten countries among (para)professionals working in informal and formal (education) settings to identify the needs and obstacles they 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. The results of these tasks were all used to inform the development of the VLE and the PD intervention. In addition, several theoretical models were used as will be elaborated on in the following section.

## **1.3. THEORETICAL MODELS**

The work for Task 5.4 has been guided by several theoretical models focusing on different levels of the process: a) the co-design and implementation of the PD intervention; b) the PD model that addresses the underlying mechanism of change and important preconditions that contribute to the effectiveness of the PD, and c) the level of professionals' global and intercultural competences. A brief description of these theoretical models will be provided below.

### **1.3.1. DESIGN-BASED APPROACH**

Design-based research includes operationalization of theoretical knowledge in concrete actions and materials, involvement of stakeholders, and repeated formative evaluations based on observation and interviewing. Design-based research is deemed essential for creating practice as concrete deliverables, but also, and foremost, for contextualizing scientific knowledge in relevant action contexts to generate practical knowledge that can bridge the theory-practice gap (Reeves, 2012). There are a number of key characteristics of this approach that makes it particular suitable for the current task. It is pragmatic and grounded in the real-world context in designing and conducting interventions in the dynamics and complexity of everyday practice. It is characterized by interactive and iterative processes between researchers and professionals. The

process encompasses iterative cycles of analysis, design, implementation and redesign, which take place in a collaborative exchange between researchers and professionals. The meaningfulness for professionals is central in this process. Also, it is a flexible and contextual process. The initial description of the intervention provides sufficient information for all participants to know what to do and why to do it, but not every detail is scripted, allowing room for flexibility and adaptability to the context. This process is carefully documented. Lastly, reflexivity of both researchers and professionals pervades the whole process and is a key aspect for PD.

### **1.3.2. MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THEORY OF CHANGE**

In the context of professional development, we follow the lifelong learning approach - all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (CEDEFOP, 2003). Competences are viewed as the combination of professionals' knowledge, skills and attitudes, resulting in everyday behaviour and practices.

Professional development (PD) is used as a means to improve professionals' competences or behaviour, as will be discussed in more detail in our theoretical framework. PD refers to all actions and activities focused at education, training and development opportunities for professionals (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). Following Sheridan et al. (2009), the ultimate goal of PD is improving children's developmental or educational outcomes. In the short term, PD can serve two main objectives related to the professionals who are involved. First, it is assumed that PD will advance professionals' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, skills, behaviour and (teaching) practices. Secondly, PD enhances opportunities for on-going professional growth in individuals and organizations, which can be viewed as important in the context of lifelong learning (European Council, 2007). The latter refers to an increasing understanding of the importance of establishing sustainable and continuous approaches of improving (teaching) practice in view of a rapidly changing societal context. This means that PD gradually moves from a more externally initiated or oriented process in which external demands are triggering professionals to engage in PD into a more individual and intrinsically motivated process of self-improvement resulting in a more dynamic attitude of a 'learning professional'. It also highlights a shift in agency in which professionals are perceived as active learners who shape their own learning process through reflective professional development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Following this development, different forms of PD (i.e. training, coaching or collegial exchange) targeting different domains (i.e. knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or skills) might be appropriate during different stages of this process. Although PD is commonly viewed from an individual's perspective, individuals are part of larger teams and organizations, thus aligning PD between individuals within an organization or even making it a joint and team-based effort might strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability in the long run. Therefore, it is important to target the individual professional as part of a larger team when considering a PD intervention.

The conceptual framework introduced in the report D5.2 (Slot, Romijn, & Wysłowska, 2017) has guided the work in this task, see Figure 1.1. At the core, this model shows how professionals' everyday behaviour and practices is shaped by their knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. Reflection and enactment are viewed as the key mechanisms of change. Secondly,

the three core components that can be distinguished relate to the *who*, the *what* and *how* of PD. The first component considers the features and background of professionals as well as the children and families they work with. The second component concerns the focus of the PD program in terms of specific content areas and focus domains (e.g., knowledge, skills, beliefs). The third component addresses the PD strategies (e.g., training, coaching, reflection, communities of learners) and the way the PD is delivered (face-to-face vs online and team-based vs individual-based). Finally, this model situates the professional within the larger (organisational) context that provides important preconditions that contribute to the effectiveness of PD.

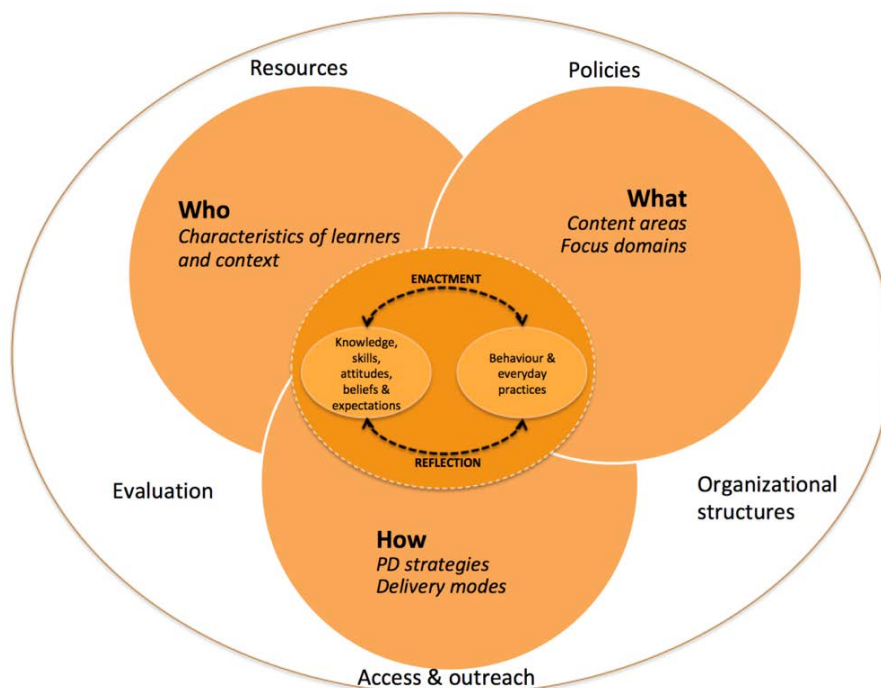


Figure 1.1. Conceptual model of professional development.

### 1.3.3. MODEL OF GLOBAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

As introduced in the Section A of the report on Task 4.4 (Pastori et al., 2019), the human rights perspective serves as the main underlying framework that guided the work across WPs. Elaborating on our general professional competence model, we build on frameworks focusing on global competences that have been used by for instance UNESCO (2013, 2014) and the OECD (2018), and the framework of the Council of Europe (2014). Although there are some minor differences in emphasis, all these frameworks share a focus on knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and action from a basic human rights perspective while valuing cultural diversity as the foundation for *global competence*, thus placing our professional competence model into a human rights and diversity context. Following the OECD (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. Moreover, we include a view on multilingualism as a resource with potential benefits for individuals and society, as proposed by the Council of Europe (2014), resulting in the model presented in Figure 1.2. This model was central in the co-design and implementation of the professional development intervention and VLE.

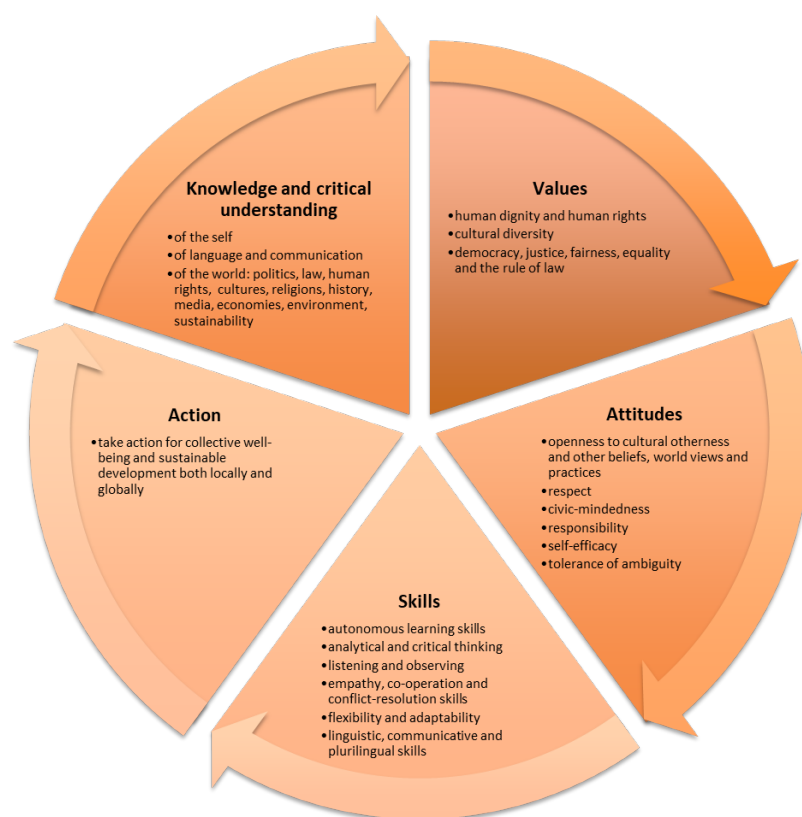


Figure 1.2. Conceptual model of global and intercultural competences.

#### 1.4. SHARED ISOTIS WORKFLOW

As detailed in the Section A of the D4.4 report on the ISOTIS VLE (Pastori et al., 2019), the VLE was developed to provide a set of functions, sources and suggested activities, but the main feature of the VLE implementation was initiating collaboration between researchers and research participants (teachers, other professionals, volunteering paraprofessionals, parents, children), who were invited to participate in creating content and materials for the VLE. Co-creating the content of the VLE, using the cultural and linguistic resources of families and communities for this purpose, was a key design-principle, with a twofold expected outcome: (1) increased engagement and empowerment of stakeholders; (2) an enriched and truly intercultural curriculum. This process of participation fits in well with the open and positive nature of the technology, and reporting on this process – what can be learned for future implementations – is equally important as a technically working VLE. The main features of the VLE are represented by:

- a **repository of resources**: such as information and guidelines for practices about various topics connected to the ISOTIS themes;
- a **social networking infrastructure**: tools facilitating communication and exchange through pages that adopt typical social media layouts, featuring multilingual support, and offering a shared collaborative work space for professionals, children and parents, fostering the creation of ‘communities of practice’;
- a **space for designing and documenting**: a professional can storage materials, applications she/he wants to propose or collect the documentation related to the activities implemented (in a classroom, in a group of children or parents, with a child ... )

The repository provides three main types of content. The first concerns informative and descriptive resources on the main ISOTIS topics such as equality, Human Rights, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. This information is provided via animated videos in different languages and theoretical background texts. The second aspect concerns concrete guidelines for observing and reflecting. It provides a ‘critical case’ designed to trigger reflection on the case and a short set of questions that can be used to observe children and/or parents and/or one’s own professional attitudes, behaviours and practices. A third component concerns concrete guidelines for action and activities with children in the classroom or for teachers as part of professional development.

The co-constructive nature of the design and implementation of the VLE implies that the development of the VLE was an ongoing process while working with the professionals on professional development. This process highlights the synergetic nature of this intervention in which questions, issues, challenges or needs of the professionals working in their own local context were used to inform the design of the VLE content, and vice versa, the content on the VLE that was already available could inspire the professionals in their reflection on their daily practice. As a result, the PD intervention was running in parallel to the development of the VLE following a cyclic process of design – implementation – redesign. Different phases can be distinguished in this process in which the first phase constituted an exploration of the local context and the challenges, desires and needs of the professionals working in this context. This was followed by a phase of co-designing the content of activities and resources as well as developing and testing the technical requirements of the VLE. In the next phase, the implementation phase, the professionals started working with the VLE, followed by the assessment and reporting phase.

The aim of Task 4 (see Section A ISOTIS VLE Report by Pastori et al., 2019) was to create a joint VLE with WP3 and 4, therefore there was agreement on a common workflow, while remaining flexible in local adjustments, to align the work and to maximize synergy across the three work packages, see Table 1.2.

Table 1.2  
*Overview of Shared ISOTIS Workflow*

Phase	Actions	Timeline
Phase 0: Setting the stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of organisations</li> <li>• Definition of the problem</li> <li>• Ethics and timeline</li> </ul>	January – April 2018
Phase 1: Exploratory phase and co-construction of needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of the context (e.g., interviews, focus groups).</li> </ul>	April – July 2018
Phase 2: Co-design phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-design of PD activities</li> </ul>	September 2018 – January 2019
Phase 3: Implementation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of PD activities</li> </ul>	February – June 2019
Phase 4: Monitoring and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection and assessment</li> <li>• Reporting</li> </ul>	July – September 2019

#### 1.4.1. PHASE 0: SETTING THE STAGE

The main goals of Task 5.4 are aligned with the ISOTIS goals of promoting equality and inclusiveness. Depending on the local context, this resulted in differences in emphasis and choices that were made in the four countries and respective sites, but all fit well into this overall framework. At the site in Portugal the focus in one site was on social justice, whereas the other site in Portugal and the two locations in the Netherlands focused more strongly on cultural diversity. The organisation in Italy targeted multilingualism more explicitly, which was shared with the locations in the Netherlands. The site in France specifically addressed the relationship with parents and home-school connections, which was also included in the work in Italy and in the Netherlands as part of the focus on cultural and linguistic diversity.

Given the focus of ISOTIS the selection of sites in the four different countries followed a number of criteria:

- Presence of one or more ISOTIS target groups
- Located in one of the main ISOTIS study sites (involved in the staff survey and the parent study)
- Willingness to participate and commit to the professional development intervention for the duration of the task at all levels of the organisation (from the director level to the level of the professionals working in daily practice) and all participants (professionals and parents when required)

Overall, this resulted in sites that differed in type of organisation (formal vs informal), and the socio-economic and cultural background and age range of children these professionals worked with, but shared a common focus on promoting equality and inclusiveness, see Table 1.3. More specific information on the organisations will be given in the respective country chapters.

#### **Shared general ISOTIS collaboration agreement**

In the phase of recruiting organisations for participation in the intervention, we explained the ISOTIS project, goals, general philosophy, and established a shared collaboration agreement. This agreement implied knowledge of the overall process — the exploratory phase, which would culminate with the co-construction of the needs and, at least in broad lines, also the “how” of the intervention — and willingness of organizations to participate and commit to the whole intervention spanning a period of about a year.



Table 1.3

*Basic Characteristics of the Sites who Participated in the Task.*

	Portugal	Italy	The Netherlands	France
<b>Organisation</b>	2 primary schools	(pre)school	Preschool	Community centre
<b>Age range children</b>	7 classrooms (school 1) 7-10 and 12-14 years (school 2) 7-10 years	1 classroom 3-6 year 3 classrooms 9-10 years	2 classrooms 2-4 years	School age
<b>Area</b>	Greater area of Porto	Milan	Utrecht	Paris
<b>Target group</b>	Low-income, Roma	Culturally diverse (Maghrebian, Filipino, Peruvian)	Low income, culturally diverse (Turkish, Indian, Maghrebian, Polish)	Low-income, (North) African, Eastern European
<b>Number of professionals</b>	7	9	12	8
<b>Type of professionals</b>	Teachers, school board member, school administration members, school coordinator	Teachers	Teachers, managers, special needs supervisor, pedagogical coach	Community centre workers, manager, volunteers
<b>PD Topics</b>	Cultural sensitivity, social justice	Multilingualism and reflection	Cultural sensitivity, multilingualism, parent-teacher relations and parent involvement	Relations with parents and empowerment of parents

#### 1.4.2. PHASE 1: EXPLORATORY PHASE AND CO-CONSTRUCTION OF NEEDS

In this phase the context of the organisation is explored by conducting document analyses, and having interviews and/or focus group discussions with the participants. If deemed relevant, observations (e.g., classroom practices) could also be carried out. The main aim is to enhance our understanding of the starting point concerning the local socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic diversity in the context and how professionals shape their everyday practices in the classroom and with parents, as well as the needs or challenges they encounter. Among others, the organizational policies and practices concerning diversity, multilingualism and parent-professional relationships were investigated. In addition, this exploratory phase was used to better understand the organisational structure and existing policies regarding the team of professionals, team professionalization, and organisational support with the aim to adapt and integrate the intervention in the ongoing organisational practices in the best way possible. The outcomes of this exploratory phase and professionals' needs were expected to feed into the co-construction



of the intervention and development of the VLE and remain an important point of reference throughout the whole process. By acknowledging the active contribution of all professionals as experts in their field we aim to support their feelings of ownership and empowerment.

#### **1.4.3. PHASE 2: CO-DESIGNING PHASE**

The co-design phase built on the information and knowledge that was gained in the exploratory phase and focused on the development of PD activities that were targeted at the local needs in each country. It required a reciprocal process in which the researchers introduced new theoretical knowledge and connected this to professionals' everyday practices and challenges through a process of reflection and enactment. This process combined a bottom-up approach based on professionals' actual experiences with a top-down approach of providing new information and knowledge on certain topics (e.g. multilingualism or social justice) to foster meaningfulness and authenticity for the professionals. This phase is characterized by an on-going and cyclic process in which the development of PD activities and experiences in each meeting was based on the experiences of the previous one, thus highlighting a flexible and progressive process that was adapted in content and pace to the local context, while keeping in mind the overall goals of the intervention at each site.

#### **1.4.4. PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION PHASE**

In the implementation phase several PD activities were carried out using both the VLE and team meetings. Although the professionals from the four countries worked in different contexts, they expressed an interest in each other's work; thus, an explicit goal during this phase was fostering cross-country exchange of information and practices via the VLE. During this phase, researchers guided the exploration of the VLE and supported the implementation of activities in the classroom or with parents.

#### **1.4.5. PHASE 4: MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT**

The assessment of the process was done following a common framework (Common Monitoring & Assessment Procedures, see Table 1.4) in which four main domains were assessed: a) staff' competences/skills, knowledge and beliefs/attitudes regarding the aim of the intervention; b) organizational and collaboration practices, i.e., the impact that the intervention had/is having on the organizational climate of the institution as well as the collaboration and team working between the professionals that are participating in this task; c) the VLE usage, usefulness, satisfaction and further usage; and d) the intervention process. Additionally, 3 different "informants/actors" will evaluate the intervention: a) the teachers/practitioners involved; b) other key figures, such as the organization leaders or pedagogues; and c) we as researchers. The idea is to have three different perspectives on the intervention. The evaluation process was done retrospectively in the case of the teachers/practitioners and key figures/leaders through interviews, focus groups and/or more informal conversations. In our case (i.e., the researchers), a critical reflection on how the process went was done with explicit reference to the field notes and observations made during the process.

Table 1.4

Common Monitoring and Assessment Procedures T5.4.

What	When	By Whom/How	Common set of questions
<p><b>STAFF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction</li> <li>• Competences/skills</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Beliefs/attitudes</li> <li>• (Content: e.g., intercultural competences, relationship with parents, etc.)</li> </ul>		<p>Teacher/practitioners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Conversations</li> </ul> <p>Key figures/leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Conversations</li> </ul>	<p>Satisfaction with the intervention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you (not) like? (what did you like the most? What did you like the least?)</li> <li>• What was (not) useful? (what was the most useful features? The less?)</li> <li>• Given the time and investment required, how and why would you rate your satisfaction level with this experience?</li> </ul> <p>Do you feel, or not, that you have gained/changed [what applicable, i.e., <b>what</b> the intervention was aiming at, namely in terms of competencies, knowledge, beliefs] on [what applicable; e.g., Intercultural competencies, social justice]?</p>
<p><b>ORGANIZATION &amp; COLLABORATION PRACTICES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational climate</li> <li>• Team work/collaboration</li> </ul>	<p>Post phase</p>	<p>Researchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	<p>Do you think this intervention [includes PD activities + VLE] has had any impact on the organizational climate, and/or the way you work(ed), or not, as a team and collaborate amongst yourselves? [if not given, specifically get info on the impact that both “parts” might have played, as follows]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the PD activities have prompted further/other meetings between professionals, for example for joint discussions or reflections and/or have had any impact on the organizational climate?</li> <li>• Did the VLE activities/usage have prompted further/other meetings between professionals, for example for joint discussions or reflections, and/or have had any impact on the organizational climate?</li> </ul>

<p><b>VLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage</li> <li>• Usefulness</li> <li>• Satisfaction</li> <li>• Future use</li> </ul>			<p>Use and satisfaction with VLE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often did you use the VLE (namely outside the meetings with ISOTIS staff or planned...)?</li> <li>• For what purpose did you use the VLE?</li> <li>• What was (not) useful?</li> <li>• What did you (not) like?</li> <li>• What do you think could/should be improved in order to make it more useful?</li> <li>• Do you think a tool as the ISOTIS VLE might be useful for you in the future? Do you think you will use it? How so?</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTERVENTION PROCESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership ISOTIS researchers &amp; professionals</li> </ul>	<p>Post phase; but referring to whole process, i.e. pre, during and post phase</p>	<p>Teacher/practitioners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> </ul> <p>Key figures/leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Conversations</li> </ul> <p>Researchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Critical reflection</li> </ul>	<p>Critical reflexion on our part of all the process, since its beginning to its conclusion. Aspects that we should cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance and feasibility of the Aims (WHAT) that were set at the beginning</li> <li>• What was the initial reaction of the professionals involved (eager to participate, resistant, etc.). Why?</li> <li>• Were professionals engaged during meetings and did they prepare meetings when asked too?</li> <li>• Were there changes, regarding interest and participation, during the process?</li> <li>• What were the main difficulties and challenges found? How were they met?</li> <li>• What were the main positive aspects and why?</li> <li>• Lessons learned: what would be, in a future intervention, the key aspects to change and the key aspects to maintain?</li> </ul>

## 2. COUNTRY REPORT: PORTUGAL

**Authors:** Gil Nata, Sofia Guichard, & Joana Cadima

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## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This country report provides an overview on the main topics and problems that were addressed in the Portuguese case. It addresses the selection of the sites (Part I – Sites selection and shared intervention agreement), the context of the intervention (Part II – Exploratory Phase), the design and implementation of the professional development activities (Part III – Implementation co-constructive process), and the assessment of the intervention (Part IV – Assessment).

### 2.1.1. DEFINITION OF THE MAIN TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Portugal focused its work on two different settings, both involved in T5.4 and T4.4 (which focus primarily on inclusive curricula, pedagogies and educational practices). Different topics and approaches were chosen, according to the specificities of each setting, and in respect with the guiding principles of ISOTIS in general and this task in particular, namely the flexibility of the process and respect to the contextual characteristics and needs. It is important to notice that the professional development intervention (T5.4) was conducted, in both sites, in strict articulation with the development of the classroom and school activities under T4.4. To be sure, although specific PD activities were carried out in both settings, teachers did not start by identifying any particular need to which PD activities could respond to (more on this below); rather, teachers did agree to participate highlighting that the collaboration with the ISOTIS team in the development of the 4.4 activities would be enriching to them, as well as the opportunity to learn what professionals from other (ISOTIS) countries were doing regarding each one of the topics. Furthermore, in each site the goal of the development of the VLE was made clear, namely its potential as a source of information and resources about the ISOTIS topics and as an access to a tool where professionals can communicate and create communities of learning and sharing.

On **site 1**, we focused on economic inequalities and social justice. On one hand, given that this is a school that puts a strong emphasis on democracy, responsibility and autonomy, as well as social justice in general, with an active student participation in the school life, we intended to document and share school practices regarding social justice and democratic education. On another hand, we planned to co-develop and implement activities for children with teachers, taking advantage of the VLE platform. These activities aimed to introduce the concepts of fairness, justice and interdependence, recognizing global and local social and economic inequalities and providing students with a pathway to action towards a just world.

On **site 2**, we addressed multiculturalism education. As teachers and children were not involved in any form of intercultural training/education at the moment of the intervention, we aimed at increasing teachers' cultural awareness and intercultural competencies, valuing children's and families' unique characteristics and making cultural differences visible in the school, while constructing a sense of belonging to a multicultural community and providing a pathway to action to favour inclusion. In a nutshell, the main objective was to make multiculturalism (awareness, recognition and appreciation of cultural differences) an important and declared value of the school's teachers and community. The ISOTIS intervention at this site seemed particularly relevant if one takes into account that this school is known for having several children from the Portuguese Roma minority, the larger and most discriminated against ethnic minority within the Portuguese context.

## 2.2. PART I: SITES SELECTION AND SHARED INTERVENTION AGREEMENT

The first part of this country report provides some brief information on the process of selecting the participating organisation. First, we will explain which organisations were selected for participation and why. Second, we outline the most important actions undertaken for realising the collaboration with the participants.

### 2.2.1. SITE AND ORGANISATION SELECTION

In a first phase, through document analysis and expert consultation, several schools were identified as possible partners for T5.4 (and T4.4, since schools were screened to simultaneously participate in both tasks). From the outset, we aimed at recruiting two organizations/schools, one with which the intervention would focus on social justice and economic inequalities, and another that would focus on multiculturalism, two of the main ISOTIS key topics. Furthermore, regarding each one of these topics, we searched for contexts/organizations that might be particularly interesting to work with for two set of reasons. First, because the school might face particularly demanding challenges within the Portuguese context, regarding the intended topics, namely a significant proportion of ethnic minorities or low income students. Second, because the school might already have a record of potential good practices when addressing these challenges; as ISOTIS in general, and the VLE construction in particular, are collaborative and international in nature, we aimed at sharing inspiring and promising practices with other VLE users.

After schools were identified through document analysis and expert consultation, a first contact with the schools was made. In total, seven schools were approached. From these, four schools showed interest in further exploring the possibility of collaboration. Subsequently, the ISOTIS project, including intervention aims and scope of both 5.4 and 4.4 tasks, as well as the collaboration principles and procedures were presented to school directors and, in some cases, also to teachers. One of the four schools did not show interest in participating and being involved in the project. Another school, that was initially identified as facing challenges due to a considerable proportion of Roma children was found to have, at a closer look, very few Roma children (or children from other ethnic or migrant minorities), and was not, for this reason, considered for the intervention. This phase ended with the selection of two sites.

**Site 1** is a highly regarded school in the Portuguese context for its democratic practices and innovative pedagogy. The first contact with the school, in May 2018, was mediated by a known expert. Subsequently, a meeting was held at school with the ISOTIS team, the expert, a member from the school administration and two teachers interested in the topic. In this meeting, the ISOTIS project was presented in more detail and teachers shared some school practices on social justice and democratic education. The school agreed to participate.

**Site 2** was selected due to its student characteristics, specifically for including Roma students in the school cluster (2.25% considering the entire school cluster population). Although there is no data available for the percentage of Roma students in this particular primary school, this

percentage is most certainly higher<sup>1</sup>. The school cluster administration was first reached by the ISOTIS team in June 2018, by e-mail and telephone, through which the project was presented and information about the intervention aims and procedures was given. The contacts were followed by a meeting in August with the school cluster's administration, the school cluster's psychologist and a school coordinator, where they expressed their willingness to participate in the project. In October it was decided that the intervention would occur in a pre and primary school, chosen by the school director to participate in the intervention. The shared intervention agreement resulted in the working with 4th grade classes (please see below).

### **2.2.2. SHARED GENERAL ISOTIS COLLABORATION AGREEMENT**

In both of the selected sites, meetings were held with the school administration and/or teachers with the objective of agreeing on the main purposes, work flow, and core principles of the intervention. More specifically, ISOTIS focus on multiculturalism and/or socioeconomic inequalities was highlighted, as well as its strong commitment to value participants as partners in the co-construction of the intervention and the collaboration to enrich and take advantage of the VLE potential. Coherently, ISOTIS team members would actively engage with participants/teachers so that PD activities would reflect professionals felt needs, as well as their perspectives on the usefulness of different PD strategies to answer those needs. Furthermore, this would allow the intervention to be more flexible and responsive to the availability of the teachers to engage in the development PD activities and the VLE.

After the school's administration consent, the team and professionals agreed upon a first exploratory phase, through which the team would get to know the school and teachers better, so that the perceived needs and opportunities for PD could be identified and discussed. This phase implied studying the documentation available on-line, and, if felt as necessary, conducting observations within the school.

On both sites a written protocol and agreement between the school and the research team was signed. Regarding the specific work with teachers of T5.4, consent forms were handed to all the participant teachers, and signed. The ISOTIS project and the consent forms were approved the Ethical Commission of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016-2017, 45% of Roma students in Portugal were in primary school (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2017).



## 2.3. PART II: THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

In this second part we documented what activities were undertaken in the exploratory phase of the intervention. The exploratory phase focused on gathering information regarding both sites with the overall purpose to formulate learning needs. We first describe how and when relevant data was collected. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the context of the organisations based on the collected data. Third, the characteristics of both sites and its professionals are provided. Finally, the overall focus of the intervention is formulated based on the learning needs of both locations.

### 2.3.1. METHODS AND PROCEDURES USED FOR THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

In order to gain a deep understanding on the (PD related) macro contextual levels within which each school and professionals are bound to operate, key experts in the field of teachers' professional development and relevant documents were consulted. In both sites the documentation from school was analysed to extract significant information about the context, regarding each school's educational principles, mission, policy and structure, regular activities, as well as described challenges and opportunities, with a special focus on the T5.4 scope (i.e., democratic, social justice and multicultural education, as well as ICT/VLE usage).

On **site 1**, after an initial comprehensive analysis of relevant documents found, we conducted two meetings with teachers, eight fieldwork visits for observation of school activities with relevance for the project due to their aims and scope (i.e., activities on social justice and democratic education), and one interview with a member of the school's board specifically focused on the organisation's Professional Development policy and practices. An initial meeting was held with teachers to introduce the ISOTIS project and to get to know the school structure and overall school functioning.

The following documents were analysed: Internal Regulation (Site 1<sup>2</sup>, n.d.), Autonomy Contract (Site 1, n.d.), Educational Project (Site 1, n.d.), and Improvement Plan (Site 1, n.d.), the student's defined profiles by the end of each project nucleus (initiation, consolidation, and deepening centres<sup>3</sup>; Site 1, n.d.), the school's evaluation report from the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Inspeção Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2013), and the school's assessment report by a special independent commission mandated by the Ministry of Education (Comissão Externa de Avaliação do Projecto, 2003).

Following this analysis, a second meeting was held with teachers to collect information on school's activities, confronting data collected through the document analysis with teachers'

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<sup>2</sup> For anonymity reasons, any information that may lead to the schools' identification is redacted.

<sup>3</sup> To put it simply, the initiation nucleus comprises children between 6 and 10 years old, generally corresponding to the first and fourth years of schooling; the consolidation to children between 10 and 12 years old, roughly corresponding to the fifth and sixth years of schooling; and the deepening to children between 12 and 15 years old, corresponding to the seventh, eighth and ninth years of schooling. For ease of reading, we will, throughout the report, refer to the group of 6-10 years old (and so on), or simply to the group of the young children. The consolidation will be referred to as the group of 10-12 years old, or the intermediate age group. The deepening nucleus will be designated as the 12-15 years old, or simply as the older group.

perspectives, particularly focusing on the role of teachers and their preparedness to conduct school activities or strategies that explicitly aim or indirectly can promote social justice in students, as well as their use and value of ICT.

Eight fieldwork visits were planned for observations of school activities that were deemed relevant and linked with the ISOTIS intervention: observation of school assembly meetings (in three visits, one concerning the swearing-in ceremony), observation of the initiation project centre regular routines and activities (in two visits), observation of regular civics activities with the older aged-group (in two visits), and observation of the group of responsibility focused on solidarity (in one visit). In some of these visits, more than one member of the ISOTIS intervention team was present.

Following every visit, all members of the ISOTIS team met in order to share and discuss the conducted observations; at the same time, the feedback from the observations carried were shared and discussed informally with the teachers involved. Lastly, one interview meeting was held with a member of the school's board focused on the organization's professional development policy and practices. See Figure 2.1 for an overview of the procedures for site 1.

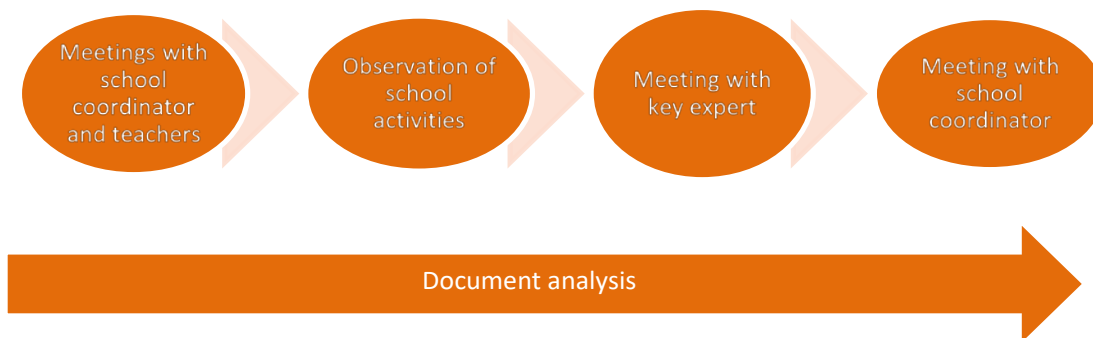


Figure 2.1. Procedures for exploration phase on site 1 regarding PD.

On **site 2**, we based our context exploration on document analysis and five meetings with teachers and/or the school cluster's administration. After an initial meeting with the school administration to get to know the school cluster's overall functioning and characteristics, the following documents were analysed: the school cluster's educational project (Site 2, n.d.), the school cluster's activities plan (Site 2, n.d.); the school cluster's internal regulation (Site 2, n.d.), the school cluster's TEIP report (Site 2, n.d.), the school's improvement plan (Site 2, n.d.), the school cluster' self-assessment report (Site 2, n.d.); the "Acamp'Arte" Project blog (more detail below); the school's training plan (Site 2, n.d.); the school's evaluation report from the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Inspeção Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2016).

After the document analysis, a meeting was arranged with the coordinator of the school chosen for intervention (by the school cluster's administration). In this, the main activities developed by the school were discussed, as well as the main challenges and opportunities and the school's policy for professional development. After this meeting, we analysed the Ministry of Education's official curricula for Portuguese, Mathematics, Environmental studies and ICT, from 1st to 4th grade, to find links between the described goals and contents and the ISOTIS proposed activities.

A document was created with the integration of the ISOTIS intervention in the school project and references to the elementary school curriculum throughout the description of the activities. Then, a third meeting was held, in which we discussed the document created and which group of teachers to involve in the project. In the fourth meeting, we discussed with the chosen group of teachers the specific objectives of the ISOTIS collaboration and educational challenges in their perspective. The school coordinator was present in all of the meetings of the exploratory phase. The last meeting was held with the school coordinator to discuss the organization's professional development policy and practices. See Figure 2.2 for an overview of the procedures for site 2.

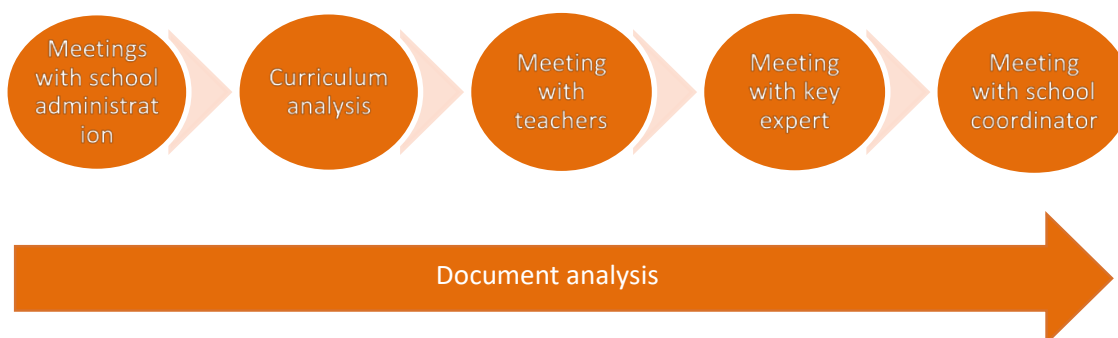


Figure 2.2. Procedures for exploration phase on site 2 regarding PD.

On both sites, the fieldwork visits to schools occurred between May 2018 and January 2019. In each visit to schools, field notes were taken concerning the observations of activities and conversations with children and school staff. Recent Portuguese legislation in Education was also consulted to contextualize the project intervention with national policies currently shaping education settings, namely the Decree-law 54/2018 (concerning Curricular autonomy and flexibility and Citizenship and development education), Decree-law 55/2018 (regarding Inclusive Education), Regulation 6478/2017 (concerning the Profile of the students at the end of Compulsory Schooling), and Decree-law 22/2014 (related to Teachers' Professional Development and Training).

### 2.3.2. RELEVANT CONTEXT FOR PD INTERVENTION

The following sections provide an overview of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. First, the macro context is discussed. Second, the need for professional development regarding education for multiculturalism and social/economic justice is described.

#### 2.3.2.1. MACRO CONTEXT

Generally speaking, Portuguese teachers are required to engage in PD courses in order to progress in their professional career. To be sure, for a teacher to access a higher level in the career path, he/she has to achieve a defined set of training credits. The number of credits is set by dedicated legislation. Teachers are free to search for any workshop, course or other activity that they feel interesting, as long as it is accredited by the Ministry of Education's national agency (named "Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua", i.e., Scientific-pedagogical Council of continuous training).

There is a wide variety of institutions and centres that offer a prolific set of credited training options for teachers. Some of the most common are Higher Education institutions (namely institutions that also engage in teachers under or post-graduation study cycles and/or Educational Sciences), teachers' unions, private training centres, as well as dedicated training centres that are created by groups of schools. Usually, these will be schools that are within a common geographic area. Nevertheless, these geographic areas can be rather dissimilar. For example, it is possible to have several training centres within a city and a training centre that aggregates schools from several (smaller) cities. School clusters start with the development of a training plan, ideally after discussing with teachers their needs and to integrate it in the professional development strategy of the school cluster. The training plans from the associated school clusters (i.e., the school clusters that integrate the local training centre) are further combined and a selection of the desired training opportunities is submitted to the national agency. Local training centres may also submit concrete proposals of workshops/courses (either credited or for credit), that seek to address the identified training needs. The national agency will then decide on the training workshops/courses that are to be accepted as part of the training plan. Furthermore, the national agency ruling will result in the financing of some of the training opportunities (and the non-financing of others).

Although one may, from the description above, get the impression that teachers are encouraged — to say the least — and provided with the opportunities for professional development within the Portuguese context, the picture that resulted from the interviews and conversations with teachers and leaders from the participating schools, as well as with key national experts regarding teachers PD, is more nuanced. Moreover, there are similarities but also differences between the two sites.

From our interviewees' perspectives, teachers generally engage in PD courses or workshops in order to have the necessary credits for career advancement, which seems to be related to the fact that there is no time slot allocated to such courses within the regular teachers' schedule. Consequently, PD courses have to be taken during teachers' spare time, particularly after classes or on weekends. Coherently, one can easily testify that credited courses or workshops for teachers are usually scheduled at the end of the day or on Saturdays. Another important related issue has to do with the cost of such training opportunities. According to the interviewed teachers, directors and experts, as PD courses are mandatory for career progression, teachers generally consider that these should be free of charge, a position that is commonly shared by teachers' unions.

Nevertheless, and despite the fact that the above mentioned factors are transversal to the teachers within the Portuguese context, we did find substantial differences between the two participating sites at an organizational level (see Section 2.3.2.2).

#### 2.3.2.2. PD IN EDUCATION ON MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL/ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Education for multiculturalism and social justice in the Portuguese context is framed by educational policies that, to some degree, influenced the ISOTIS intervention in both settings. Citizenship and participation received a new attention in past years through legal and curriculum diplomas. Particularly relevant are recent changes in the curriculum, set in 2018 (Decree-law 55/2018), that have requested that primary school teachers should include Citizenship and Development

Education as a cross-curricular component, that should be integrated with other subjects (as Portuguese or Mathematics). In middle and secondary education, schools can choose if they provide Citizenship and Development Education as an independent curricular component or concerted with other contents and subjects.

In addition, a new emphasis on inclusive education emerged also very recently (in 2018, Decree-law 54/2018) that clearly highlights the importance of responding to the diversity of the needs and potential of each and every student (and not only those with a disability), considering also students from diverse socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds. It is also worth mentioning that, although the Portuguese education system is highly centralized, recent shifts (Decree-law 55/2018) towards school autonomy have been also putted into place, giving the opportunity for schools to manage the curriculum up to 25%. However, there is a lack of clear, intentional and sustained pedagogical guidelines with clear links with curriculum contents to support teachers' work and adjust to these recent changes in legislation.

To sum up, Portuguese legislation makes it explicit that schools have to address the issues of multiculturalism and social/economic inequalities. Nonetheless, the way schools and teachers should do this is not addressed by the legislation, leaving a wide margin for interpretation and implementation within each school. If this can be an opportunity, it can pose a challenge to teachers, as past research has shown that teachers often feel unprepared and unsure in the way they should approach these issues both nationally (Afonso, 2004; Maciel, 2012; Pintassilgo & Mogarro, 2004; Reis, 2000) and internationally (Goodwin, 2010; Nenadal & Mistry, 2018).

### 2.3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITES

As mentioned above, both schools that were enrolled in the ISOTIS intervention were, at several levels (including the PD context), quite different. Generally speaking, site 2 is, as far as any generalisation can apply, a "regular" school, with an organisational structure, policy and mission similar to those of the majority of other schools within the Portuguese context. In contrast, site 1 is a school renowned for its original forms of teaching/learning and of structuring itself. For this reason, and in order for the reader to gain a clearer insight of the organisational context, we will describe site 1 in some detail, under the heading *a school that differs in so many ways*. For both sites, though, an analysis of the context for PD will be presented.

#### 2.3.3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF SITE 1

##### **Site 1 context**

Site 1 is a Portuguese public school, located in the North of Portugal (Santo Tirso, Porto District). Given its special character, the school attracts parents from distant neighbourhoods and even some far away cities (e.g. from Porto, that is 35 km away). Founded in 1976, this school covers education for children from 3 to 14 years old, from preschool to 9th grade. The school has usually between 150-200 students enrolled. Despite this, the school's overall population can still be considered generally disadvantaged, according to the official statistics (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Inspeção Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2013).

Regarding ICT facilities, (class)rooms are usually equipped with few computers and some have interactive white boards. Furthermore, laptops are available upon requisition for students' assignments. Tablets are also available upon students' requisition to take home. Nevertheless, and despite the general encouragement and support from teachers for the use of ICT observed by the ISOTIS team, students sometimes struggled with getting access to the internet due to technical issues (i.e., not because of their lack of competencies nor support from teachers).

#### **A school that differs in so many ways<sup>4</sup>**

The school's educational project is based on an inclusive and cooperative school philosophy, inspired and oriented by values of autonomy, solidarity, responsibility and democracy. Students are responsible (under the guidance of a teacher/tutor, that in this school are referred to as educational supervisors) for their learning experiences management (namely, planning, learning and evaluation), as well as the management of school spaces, resources and materials. Furthermore, students actively contribute to decisions with impact in school life, through different school structures (described in more detail below). Another significant difference from other (more "conventional") schools is the extent up to which parents (and the parents' association) are involved in the school's life and in school structures with concrete power over the way the school operates.

Instead of traditional classes organized by grades and ages, the school privileges project methodology and is organized in 3 project *nuclei*, that constitute pedagogically coherent and articulated units of learning and development. As referred above, these are called (i) the initiation, (ii) the consolidation, and (iii) the deepening (but please see footnote 2). Students generally work independently in an open space around round tables, supervised by teachers. Older children can be called by the teacher to help younger children who are acquiring basic competences. All students have a tutor that is also responsible for supervising the student's individual evaluations and for mediating the relationship between families and schools. Tutors develop a closer relationship with students from their tutorship group (and with their parents), but teachers, overall, declare to and seem to know all students' names and peculiarities, being involved in their learning paths and development.

Another interesting feature of the school, that illustrate how children actively live school as a democratic learning space and how this school can be considered in itself a democratic organism, is the school assembly. The school's assembly is a main structure composed by all students, meets weekly (approximately one-hour duration) and is led by a group of students, elected annually by all students. Competing lists for heading this body have to ensure the presence of students from all three *nuclei* (all ages) and sex parity. Meetings are entirely led and managed by students, always beginning by reading the minutes from the last meeting (and approving them) and finishing with a time for teachers, parents and visits to intervene. In between, students discuss and reflect on school functioning and vote on decisions, present school works or activities, and read a story or poem.

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail on the school's environment and these structures, the reader is kindly suggested to see the Portuguese country report in the Section B ISOTIS VLE report (Pastori, Pagani, Mangiatordi, & Menegola, 2019).

Other structures in which teachers and students engage to foster students' responsibility and autonomy are called "grupos de responsabilidade" (literal translation: "responsibilities' groups"). At the beginning of the school year, students and educational supervisors, according to their preferences, are organized into these groups. These groups involve each a specific topic. For example, there is a group responsible for waste, recycling and ecology, a group focused on managing work spaces and that can choose the music that students listen to when they work, etc. One group of particular interest to the ISOTIS themes, is a group of responsibility focused on solidarity. One main action of the group is to collect and provide donations to the families and children in need from the school. Tutors and the parents' association continuously assess students and families' social needs and the group organizes donations in school (of food items, clothes and shoes, toys, etc.). Then, the teacher that leads the group introduces to children the specific needs of families. Given this information, children collectively prepare a bag with the items they need.

Yet another distinctive feature of this school, aimed at promoting social justice within the school is the provision, by the school, of the necessary materials to all students. Students can use materials stored in the school (paper, coloured pencils, staplers) and are given personal equal materials to use during the school year (a backpack, a pencil case, a file to store sheets, a pen...). Furthermore, families do not need to buy school books<sup>5</sup>, since they are available at the school for all children. This is intentionally thought by the school to attenuate socioeconomic differences between students. Holiday decorations and presents are also built in school by students for the same reason. Students can also request books or tablets to take home.

For older students, there is a specific citizenship education class, where students debate human rights and social issues, as proclaimed in the Portuguese legislation (Decree-law 55/2018). As observed, in these meetings, around twenty students get together with a teacher (weekly, during a school term). The teacher provides a stimulus for discussion (usually a video) and students debate a topic (for example, human rights, racism, dating violence, gender inequalities) with the teacher's mediation. If they want to learn more about a specific topic, they can conduct individual or group projects throughout the week(s).

### **Site 1 professional development context and policy**

One of the first things relevant for the characterization of the PD context that should be highlighted relates to the daily environment in which teachers conduct their work. To be sure, this is a key distinctive feature of the way teachers generally work in Portuguese Schools. It is far more common for teachers to have assigned a specific classroom, with which the teacher works *alone* on a daily basis. Occasionally there might be joint activities with other classes and/or other teachers, but this will be the exception. In sharp contrast, teachers on this school work collectively within the same space; "their" classroom is therefore an open classroom, where the teacher is permanently observing other teachers work and being observed, where, according to the school documents, teachers doubts and fears are immediately shared with other teachers in an environment of support, since the teacher is never alone. Furthermore, project-based learning is a preferred methodology for engaging students in the learning process. It is crucial to underline

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<sup>5</sup> In Portugal, parents are required to buy each year the set of school books for each curriculum area.



that, as referred in the school's main documents and also observed by the ISOTIS team, this feature, in conjunction with the above described autonomous work carried out by the students, allows for teachers to be available when necessary for the students that can benefit from extra time with a teacher (i.e., one-to-one time). In fact, as teachers do not need to “stop the class” in order to pay attention to those that are not able to keep up with the “average” student, teachers’ time can be allocated on an as needed basis. In this way, teachers dedicate one-to-one time to each student for individualized feedback and instruction several times if needed without interfering with others’ work.

This seems to be an important unique feature that structures teachers work as being collaborative in nature. The feature is described in the school documents, but was also observed by the ISOTIS researchers and highlighted in the interview specifically conducted with a member of the school board about the school’s DP practices and policy. Besides this aspect, referred by the interviewee as “training within [the school’s] project”, three key “*dispositifs*” were underscored as the main structures for PD or teachers’ support system within the school: the regular meetings of the (i) the project council; (ii) the curricular dimensions, and (iii) the *nuclei*. The three existing *nuclei* were already mentioned above. Teachers from each *nucleus* meet “almost every week”. Within each nucleus—and across all of them— there are, according to the school’s internal regulation, six curricular developmental dimensions defined: (i) linguistic; (ii) logical-mathematical; (iii) naturalistic; (iv) identity; (v) artistic; (vi) personal and social. Teachers that belong to same nucleus are expected to integrate the work aimed at the different dimensions. At the same time, teachers from different nuclei but responsible for the same dimensions are expected to articulate their teaching practices in order to ensure the coherence and quality of the students’ learning paths. The meetings of the curricular dimensions *dispositif* takes place every two weeks. The project council is the school’s body for pedagogical coordination and orientation and it is composed by all of the school’s educational supervisors. It convenes approximately once a month.

Generally speaking, these are the structures that were considered as important for teachers’ PD, in particular for newbies. It is within these meetings and by observing how experienced teachers work that new teachers learn how to “get into the school’s spirit”. In fact, throughout the interview, as well as with the conversations with teachers, required/mandatory PD training associated with the necessary credits to ascend in the professional career were not highlighted as crucial for professionals’ development. In this sense, schools from both sites seemed similar and reflective of the comments from the expert on Portuguese PD policies (please see above the “The Portuguese (macro)context for teachers’ PD”).

Another source of information about each site’s PD policies comes from the Ministry of Education’s schools’ evaluation reports. In 2013, the school has been subject to a regular evaluation of the Ministry of Education<sup>6</sup> (as all schools have). It is noteworthy, in the context of this report (i.e., regarding PD), that the (over 10 pages) reports provided by the Ministry of

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<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Education has, so far, conducted 2 cycles of assessment, within which all of the public schools in the Portugal (excluding the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira) were subject to an external evaluation. The first cycle begun in 2006 and was completed in 2011. The second cycle begun in 2011 and was completed in 2017. The Ministry of Education foresees the beginning of the third cycle in 2019. In this report, we refer to the more recent report available for the two enrolled schools.



Education follow a template that devotes no more than one paragraph to PD. Furthermore, the information provided is somewhat general and vague. Specifically regarding site 1, the report reads that the professionals search, either individually and/or at the school level, and whenever possible in articulation with the local training centre (for more detail on these centres, please cf. the macro context for PD heading above), to adequate the training according to the identified areas by the different school bodies and structures. It then concludes that given the visibility of the project, the professionals are often invited to participate in congresses, seminars and similar events, and that the participation in these are privileged ways of self (and others) training.

### **Site 1 research participants and working group**

On site 1, the main participants were two teachers: one teacher of children between 7 and 10 years old (second to fourth grade) and one teacher of children between 12 and 15 years old (seventh to ninth grade). All are from Portugal and speak Portuguese as a first language. Teacher #1 was present in all meetings with the team, since the beginning of the project. She is 40 years old, has a degree and post-graduation degree in Teaching Mathematics and 11 years of experience as a teacher (overall and at this school). Teacher #2 (of older students) joined the project by suggestion of the other teachers involved in the third meeting. He is 36 years old, has a degree in teaching Physics and Chemistry and 11 years old experience (overall and at this school). As he leads learning activities concerning citizenship and human rights education, he was interested in joining the ISOTIS project. Together, these teachers are responsible for seventy-nine children, all involved in T4.4, namely fifty-nine children from 7 to 10 years old and 19 children from 12 to 14 years old (the vast majority of which are Portuguese, although a few come from migrant families).

A third teacher was only partly involved in the intervention, namely in the discussion dilemma (see below). Given his limited participation, he did not participate in the assessment focus-group. Additionally, other teachers did also engage in the intervention, though not as directly and systematic as the aforementioned two. To be sure, the majority of the ISOTIS supported activities under T5.4 (and in close articulation with T4.4) with the younger group of children were carried out in the context of wider group, involving all the children and all the teachers. Therefore, although teacher #1 usually headed the ISOTIS related “classes”, the other teachers of the group were present and assisted with the activities. One of this teachers, teacher #4, did show a vivid interest in the project and the activities, having even directed one of the sessions, as also participating in some of the brief meetings at the end of each activity between the teacher(s) and the ISOTIS team members. Thus, up to a certain extent, it can be said that this teacher was also a part of the intervention. Also, a member of the school board, responsible for elementary school grades/ages, was present in the initial meetings and continually supervised the process.

Although not having directly participated in the intervention phase, the school administration member (that also teaches the younger group) accompanied the project very closely. She has 61 years old, a degree in Early Childhood Education and a masters' in educational sciences, 40 years of experience as a teacher and 22 years of experience at this school. All teachers involved are all from Portugal and speak Portuguese as first language. Moreover, all teachers feel comfortable in using ICT and use ICT platforms/tools in their practice (e.g., Khan Academy).

### 2.3.3.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF SITE 2

#### Site 2 context

Site 2 is a Portuguese pre and primary school, with 410 children from pre-school to fourth grade. This school belongs to a school cluster<sup>7</sup> located in the North of Portugal (Paredes, Porto District), composed by seven preschools, three schools (with pre- and primary education) and one middle school, that includes vocational education as an option for older students. This school cluster is targeted by the national compensatory education programme from the Ministry of Education, known by its acronym TEIP — “Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária”, which translates as Educational Areas for Priority Intervention. TEIP is a nationwide programme designed to reduce the effects of socioeconomic disadvantages on school outcomes and to promote equity and social inclusion from an early age<sup>8</sup>. In 2013-14, approximately 45% of students’ families from this school cluster benefited from School Social Support (“Ação Social Escolar”<sup>9</sup>). This school cluster includes 53 Roma students (approximately 2.25% of all students) from surrounding Roma communities that live in social housing and self-built slums covered by the cluster’s geographical area. The school cluster’s staff is composed by approximately 150 teachers, predominately with ages between 40 and 50 years old, operational and technical assistants, professionals focused on social mediation and sociocultural animation, and one school psychologist. The school follows the regular Portuguese curriculum, organized in different subjects (e.g., Portuguese, Mathematics), predominantly delivered by one teacher to its respective class.

Regarding ICT facilities, children have ICT classes at school (1-hour weekly classes), conducted by their main teacher, with limited resources (few computers, outdated and slow, with battery problems). However, within the school cluster, there is a school, very close to the target-school, with an ICT room with more recent computers and video production materials. This room is managed by a teacher who teaches ICT to children from 5th to 9th grade. Although this room and materials are available for teachers from other schools to request them, we learned that teachers from the target-school never conducted activities there.

#### Site 2 professional development context and policy

Generally speaking, the school’s coordinator opinion was very much in line with the perception that the consulted experts on the PD Portuguese context had expressed (please see above). For the school’s coordinator, the overwhelming majority of teachers’ training is done due to its mandatory character for career progression; in fact, “99.9% is [about it]”.

The analysis of the school’s proposal of training courses for crediting for the current year reveals a collection of several (somewhat disperse) training suggestions (31 to be exact). More precisely, there are courses on sculpture, theoretical subjects (e.g., the importance of leadership on the academic performance of students), on teaching methodologies (e.g., active teaching), specific

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<sup>7</sup> With a few exceptions, Portuguese public schools are organized in school clusters, namely due to its geographical proximity.

<sup>8</sup> School clusters covered by the TEIP Programme benefit from extra financial and human resources, such as more teachers, assistants and specialized staff (e.g. social workers, psychologists). An external expert advises school clusters based on their needs and then schools develop their own strategies, actions and set their goals to address the specific needs of students and families.

<sup>9</sup> “Ação Social Escolar” is a measure from the Ministry of Education that provides a financial contribution for meals, school insurance, transportation or other specific needs of eligible families.

software (e.g., excel, geography related software, movie making software), citizenship, life support techniques, laboratorial science, etc. In the context of the ISOTIS focus on multiculturalism, it is relevant to highlight that training about citizenship education, notably on the recent Decree-law 55 from 2018 that includes intercultural education (for more detail, please see above), is amongst the school's proposals.

Another aspect that should be underlined regarding PD relates to the school's enrolment in the TEIP programme, which implies the access to consultancy with an external TEIP expert (funded by the Ministry of Education). This consultant meets with teachers and the school board in order to assess with them how well the strategies set to achieve the objectives outlined in the TEIP annual plan are working, as well as the necessary adjustments.

As with site's 1 school (and all the schools in Portugal), the school in site 2 was also subject to the regular assessment from the Ministry of Education in 2016. Specifically regarding site 2, it states that the workers' PD is, in itself, an objective of the educational project. The training plan of teachers and non-teachers staff was built in alignment with the diagnosed needs, as well as the needs that come from the educational project. Additionally, it states that by resorting to internal and external teachers, several areas are responded to. Lastly, it concludes that in the case of the non-teacher staff, training is neglected (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Inspeção Geral da Educação e Ciência, 2016).

To sum up, although there are training opportunities for professionals and a training plan (called capacitation plan), these are better understood as a consequence of the demands from the Ministry of Education rather than felt needs and/or an intrinsic valuing of PD. In fact, this was expressed by the national expert, the school's coordinator, as well as in the several informal conversations held by the ISOTIS team with teachers. Furthermore, a careful analysis of the school's main documents and evaluation reports from the Ministry of Education also suggest a neglect of the PD importance. As an example and most notably, the analysis of the school's educational plan yields an absence of any explicit reference to PD needs or role.

Besides the above mentioned, there were no additional formal structures or meetings referred by either the coordinator or the teachers that were important for PD or support. To be sure, the professionals involved only revealed that they sometimes resort to colleagues, namely in case of doubts or difficulties, but this was done informally.

### **Site 2 research participants and working group**

On site 2, four fourth grade teachers participated in the 5.4 task/intervention (also in the 4.4, as already mentioned). Teachers are all Portuguese females that speak Portuguese as a first language and are between 40 and 60 years of age. They all have around 20 years of experience in teaching and have been in this school cluster for around 10 years. All of them have a Degree in elementary (3 teachers) and/or middle education (2 teachers). Together, these teachers are responsible for four different classes with 24, 22, 23 and 15 children each, with ages ranging from 9 to 10 years old. Classes have a few children from migrant families and Roma children.

Teachers shared that they feel relatively comfortable with ICT, although in different levels, with two of the teachers being more at ease with technologies (according to them). In addition, it is worth to consider that the school coordinator was present in some co-design meetings and together with some members of the school administration participated in the shared agreement and exploratory phases.

The fourth-grade classrooms and teachers were chosen, due to the children's age, (supposed) higher level of autonomy (comparing with other grades) and opportunities in the curriculum to explore multiculturalism.

#### **2.3.4. IMPLEMENTATION PD PROCESS AND SHARED AGREEMENT**

Below, both sites' shared agreement on what the PD process implementation would consist on will be discussed in detail. Nevertheless, one key aspect for the design of the PD process was common to both sites: the lack of dedicated time that teachers could devote to specific PD activities. As already explained, this constraint may be thought as belonging to the outer layer of the "Conceptual model of professional development" presented in the general part of this report. In fact, the policies currently in place for PD do not grant teachers any time for PD. In their turn, the organisational structures cannot force teachers to engage in PD training. In other words, time for PD is lacking as a resource within the Portuguese context.

Ultimately, this clear restriction from both sites, determined that the bulk of the PD process would have to be done in relation with the T4.4 process, consisting on the development and implementation of a process to foster students' knowledge, awareness and engagement with economic inequalities (site 1) and intercultural issues (site 2). Therefore, the ISOTIS team would act as a facilitator for teachers' reflections about the development and implementation on the classroom (or extra classroom) activities conducted under T4.4. These (brief, due to the time restraints) reflection moments would take place between the 4.4 activities, as depicted in Figure 2.3. Furthermore, ISOTIS members would also provide support for teachers' enactment, either through the preparation of materials and/or some activities per se, as also through directly assisting teachers in the implementation of the activities with the students.

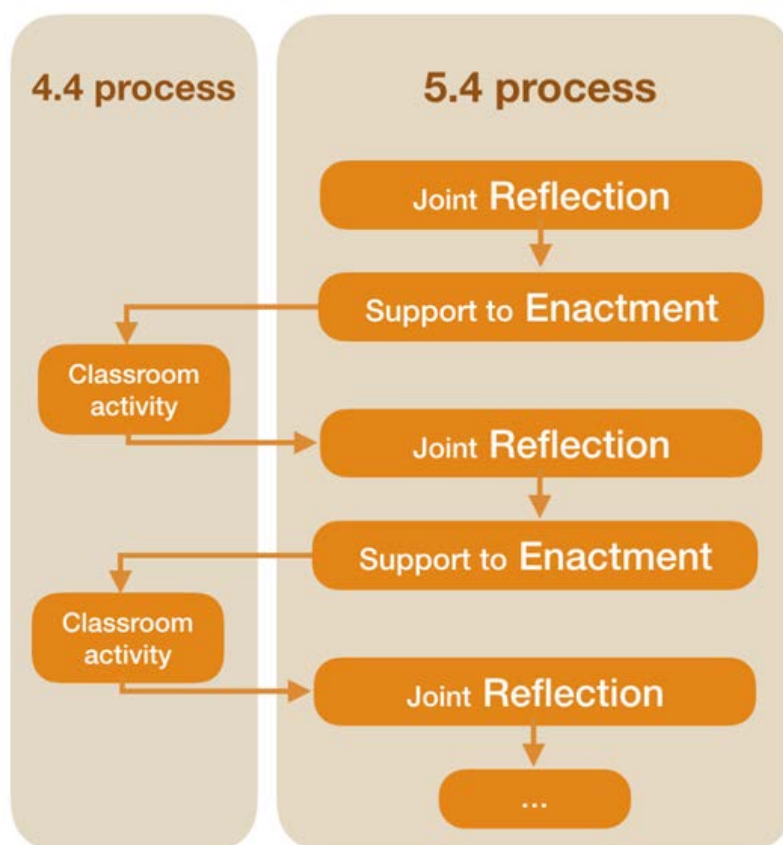


Figure 2.3. Articulation between the 5.4 and 4.4 processes.

#### 2.3.4.1. SITE 1

Regarding the focus of the ISOTIS intervention in site 1 (i.e., social justice and socioeconomic inequalities), teachers and the school board referred that education for social justice was embedded in the school's everyday life, as for example in the existence of common and equal materials for all of the school's students, the assembly or the solidarity group. More than learning about social justice, students, we were told, "live in a social justice environment". Furthermore, topics related to social justice (in the wider sense) could also be explored in more detail depending on children's interests and motivations. According to teachers, there was a weekly moment at the beginning of the week where children could talk about global or local news and social justice topics could arise in the conversation. There have also been debates at the school assembly about social justice topics (namely, the refugee crisis).

However, the observation and analysis carried out by the ISOTIS team yielded that, although teachers considered exploring social justice at school important, there was not a specific time and place planned to discuss and learn about social justice contents. For example, although the solidarity responsibility group is involved in actions promoting social justice at school and in the wider community and children actively participate in these actions, discussions around the causes of poverty and inequalities were not reported by teachers or observed by the ISOTIS team.

While recognizing the point of view of the ISOTIS team, it is relevant to stress that neither the teachers nor the school board member felt that this represented a caveat or something that *needed* to be addressed. Instead, it was an interesting topic and a possibility, amongst many others, for students to engage with. Another important related aspect is that teachers did not voice any felt needs (nor the school board member). On the contrary, teachers generally felt they were capable of teaching about the topic, although the collaboration with the ISOTIS team was seen as potentially beneficial.

Furthermore, in alignment with the school's philosophy and how teachers and students were accustomed to function, two interrelated aspects were also agreed upon: first, the interest and extent to which the topic would be explored would have to come from the children; (ii) the intervention would be processual by nature and would not consist in a predefined set of activities. Instead, ISOTIS members and teachers would engage in a collaborative process, in which one set of activities would be dependent upon the results of the previous set. Due to the already mentioned time restraints, the articulation would consist of short informal meetings at the end of each activity implementation.

Still, the school teachers and board insisted that activities should not be restricted to the younger children, and that the older students might begin to study the subject and could later develop activities to be carried out with the younger students. In fact, 3 teachers from the three different age groups expressed their interest to engage with the project (although teacher #2, responsible for children between 10-12 years-old, only engaged in the dilemma discussion). The older students' teacher #3 explicitly related his readiness to participate due (i) to his personal interest on the topic and (ii) because the topic neatly fitted within the discipline he was responsible, i.e., civic education class. The implementation would start with a proposition to students to engage in a project focused on social justice and economic inequalities.

Despite the time restraints, teachers also accepted to participate in one session to discuss a dilemma. Furthermore, teachers involved expressed significant interest in exploring, through the VLE, how other schools and professionals—that were taking part in the ISOTIS 5.4 and 4.4 tasks—worked, as well as in contributing to the VLE, possibly—depending upon the students' interest—by documenting what the school had already in place to address the socioeconomic disparities (equal materials, the solidarity group, and the assembly) and/or by uploading the description of the activities developed during the ISOTIS implementation phase.

Lastly, the teachers and the school coordinator agreed on taking part in an assessment interview/focus group at the end of the project.

#### 2.3.4.2. SITE 2

In the exploratory phase, we encountered a school cluster's administration interested in promoting activities related to multicultural education, especially given the new policies that arose in the last year in Portugal (namely, Decree-law 54/2018 and 55/2018). Despite the positive emphasis on citizenship education and inclusion at the macro-level, as by the school administration and the educational project, it clearly resulted from the exploratory meetings that teachers felt unprepared

to respond to this and didn't seem to have the resources or training to face these changes in their current practices (namely, introducing contents related to multi or interculturality and citizenship in their classes). Regarding the Roma population at this school, and although the school performance of Roma students is still a concern, no major needs were identified by the coordinator<sup>10</sup>.

According to the school's coordinator, teachers were not involved in intercultural education or citizenship education with students nor in PD training concerning those topics. The school coordinator revealed that there would likely be difficulties in involving elementary school teachers in PD or other projects (as also in the T4.4). Namely, she shared how teachers feel pressured to cover and deliver curriculum contents in the required time frame. Furthermore, as previously stated about the Portuguese PD macro-context and reaffirmed to the ISOTIS team by the school's coordinator, the lack of dedicated time-slots for teachers' PD made teachers generally resistant to collaborate in extraordinary activities, especially those which require time beyond their regular schedule. From the point of view of the school's coordinator, this would imply extra care in choosing the group of teachers to collaborate with the ISOTIS project. It was this concern that ultimately dictated the choice of the four teachers that were responsible for the 4th grade classes at the school.

The first meeting held between the ISOTIS team and the four teachers was also attended by a member of the schools' cluster administration, the school's cluster pedagogical coordinator of the first studies cycle (comprising school years from 1st to 4th), and the school's coordinator. The ISOTIS team highlighted the project as an opportunity to collaboratively develop and implement activities that could help teachers cover some parts of the curriculum<sup>11</sup> rather than overloading them with more tasks.

Ultimately, teachers accepted to participate in the project, but did voice their lack of preparation to develop and deliver activities related to multi- or interculturalism. Additionally, two of the four teachers did disclose difficulties in working with ICT. Other than that, participating teachers didn't reveal additional needs or concerns with their practice. For this reason, it was agreed that the ISOTIS team would start by presenting a proposal for a first activity to be evaluated and adapted according to the teachers' input.

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<sup>10</sup> The coordinator shared a positive evolution in the involvement of the Roma in school activities. According to her, school absenteeism and drop-outs, especially in what concern Roma students, had a positive evolution in the last years, with students attending school more regularly. When students are absent, the school psychologist intervenes, but this is happening less frequently. Moreover, the school has a new generation of Roma students who are children of former students and, thus, have a closer relationship with the school. She stated that, due to the specificities of these children and families, attending school is an important achievement in itself.

<sup>11</sup> For this objective, the team conducted an analysis of the 4th grade curriculum, that revealed several opportunities to introduce multicultural issues, that were presented to teachers, as follows:

- **In Portuguese:** contents and learning goals related to reading and writing;
- **In Mathematics:** contents and learning goals related to organizing and processing data;
- **In Environmental studies:** contents and learning goals related to migration fluxes,
- **In Citizenship and development (transversal unit):** contents and learning goals related to interculturality and human rights;
- **In ICT (transversal unit):** contents and learning goals related to digital citizenship, investigating and searching, communicating and collaborating and creating and innovating.



As in site 1, it was not predefined how many sessions or activities there would be in total, but teachers did agree on partaking in at least one specific PD session, that might consist of the discussion of a dilemma or on sharing a PD activity with another member of the 5.4 ISOTIS task. From the onset, the ISOTIS team stressed the relevance of the VLE development and usage. It was agreed that the ISOTIS team and teachers would try to conduct some activities through the VLE, including the activities done with the children, as well as the PD activity(ies) in a stricter sense conducted directly and exclusively with teachers. Additionally, teachers agreed that the activities made would be registered and uploaded to the VLE. Lastly, teachers and the school coordinator agreed on taking part in an assessment interview/focus group at the end of the project.

#### 2.3.4.3. RELATION TO THE GENERAL WP5 FRAMEWORK

By taking into consideration the time concerns of the two involved sites, we were responding to the macro and school-contextual variables that frame PD opportunities. Namely, we were responding to the national PD policies that do not allocate crucial resources (foremost time) to PD activities, but that at the same time do expect that schools (and their teachers) engage in projects such as ISOTIS. The organizational structure (school) has therefore an interest in participating in such projects, but does meet some resistance by teachers, since this generally means more work without any tangible compensation (bear in mind that only credit training gives counts to career advancement, which is usually not the case in projects that aim to intervene in the school and in teacher's practices, as ISOTIS aimed).

In what the characteristics of learners are concerned, the two sites differed. On the one hand, site 1 did not voice any particular PD need. Joining ISOTIS meant in essence an opportunity of collaboration in which teachers felt they might learn something, namely by knowing how other professionals in different countries worked on this and other subjects. On the other hand, site 2 teachers did express to be unprepared to create and/or implement activities related to interculturalism. Furthermore, two of the teachers explicitly stated difficulties when working with "new technologies".

The planned strategies and delivery modes were similar in both sites. First, through the close collaboration in the creation and implementation of activities with children (that can be thought of as a combination of coaching, expert consultancy and peer learning). Second, through the discussion of a dilemma and/or the sharing activities and ways of work (via the VLE) with other participating countries/peers in the ISOTIS project.

Taken together, these activities aimed at increasing teachers' knowledge and skills, both by enacting the development and implementation of the project with their students with the support and collaboration of the ISOTIS team, as well as reflecting upon their practices, attitudes and beliefs, either through the discussion of a dilemma closely related to the focus domain and content areas that were being covered in each school, or by sharing the way other peers developed and implemented similar projects and activities.



## 2.4. PART III: IMPLEMENTATION CO-CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

In this third part we documented what activities were undertaken in the implementation and co-construction phase of the intervention. We first describe the overall lay-out of this phase and discuss relevant procedures. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the co-constructive process of both sites.

### 2.4.1. PROCEDURES

As explained above, the ISOTIS 5.4 intervention in Portugal was, up to a great extent, thought of and implemented as a process in close articulation with T4.4. Therefore, and without prejudice for dedicated PD activities (e.g. the dilemma discussion, sharing of activities with other professionals), the bulk of the ISOTIS 5.4 intervention consisted in the collaboration with and support of the teachers involved in the process of designing and implementing the activities being developed under T4.4. Concretely, this meant that the ISOTIS team would have to adapt and respond to the needs and requirements of the teachers involved as the process unfolded. This also meant that the process was idiosyncratic and dependent upon each teacher's (and his/her respective students) characteristics, interests, values, expectations, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses. The intervention generally followed a pattern that consisted in supporting teachers to reflect upon the activities that were implemented, as well as in the design and preparation of the following. Additionally, ISOTIS team members were always available as T4.4 activities were conducted within the classroom context, supporting teachers on the basis of their needs in enacting the planned activities, and observing the overall interactions and processes in the classroom. Furthermore, underpinning all this process was the ISOTIS team intent to increase teachers' awareness for the potential and possibilities of the VLE usage and the commitment to its enrichment through the sharing of the resources and developed activities within it.

From the outset, it was agreed that the implementation should be a process, meaning that the results of one activity influenced the next one, based on children's and teacher's participation, interests and feedback. Furthermore, the shared agreement for the intervention and exploratory phases enabled us to adjust the intervention to the schools' and teachers' characteristics, requirements, expectations and assessed opportunities and needs. As expected, this resulted in two considerably different interventions for each one of the sites. Below, a more detail description of these processes is given, with concrete examples from each site and the teachers involved in this process.

#### 2.4.1.1. SITE 1

As explained, the intervention on site 1 was based upon two different but complementary threads. On the one hand, teachers would engage in the development and intervention process with students about the topic of socioeconomic inequalities. On the other hand, teachers would engage in one or more activities about the same topic, where teachers—and not children—would be the more direct focus. Specifically regarding site 1, teachers accepted to participate in a dilemma discussion to be promoted by the ISOTIS team. Although initially, teachers did show interest in exploring further the VLE, namely to access other teachers' and schools' way of functioning and eventually to engage in exchange practices with other teachers, time constraints

were decisive in the non-materialization of these expectations and desires. Figure 2.4, drawing on the general 5.4 theoretical framework, depicts the main factors related to site's 1 PD process.

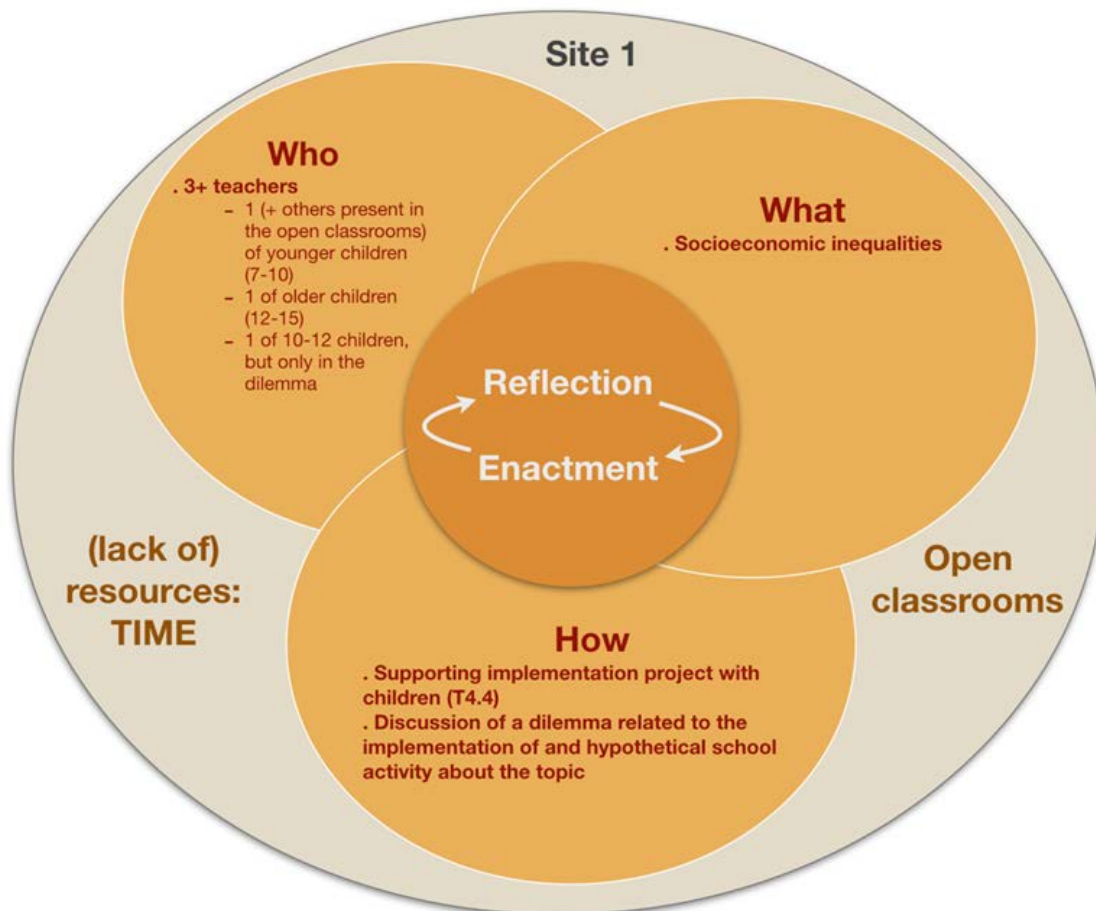


Figure 2.4. Site 1 agreed process according to the 5.4 theoretical framework.

#### 2.4.1.2. SITE 2

Similar to the intervention on site 1, the process on site 2 was based upon two different but complementary threads. One thread related to teachers' work on the topic of multiculturalism with their students. Another thread related to teachers' exclusive (i.e., not with the children) involvement in specific activities about the topic. Specifically regarding site 2, teachers engage in exchanging activities with other ISOTIS 5.4 participating countries, namely the Netherlands and Italy. This exchange consisted on exploring and providing feedback on partners' T4.4 implemented activities (and reversely, in receiving feedback on their own developed activities). Furthermore, the exploration of a children's book, aiming to increase teachers' intercultural awareness, was carried out by teachers on site 2, as well as by a group of Dutch teachers. The answers and comments were later shared between both groups of teachers. The VLE played a crucial role in facilitating the exchange between teachers in the two countries. The intent was to test the platform as an enabler of a (ISOTIS) community of learners. Figure 2.5, that draws on the general 5.4 theoretical framework, depicts the main PD processes and activities that occurred in site 2.

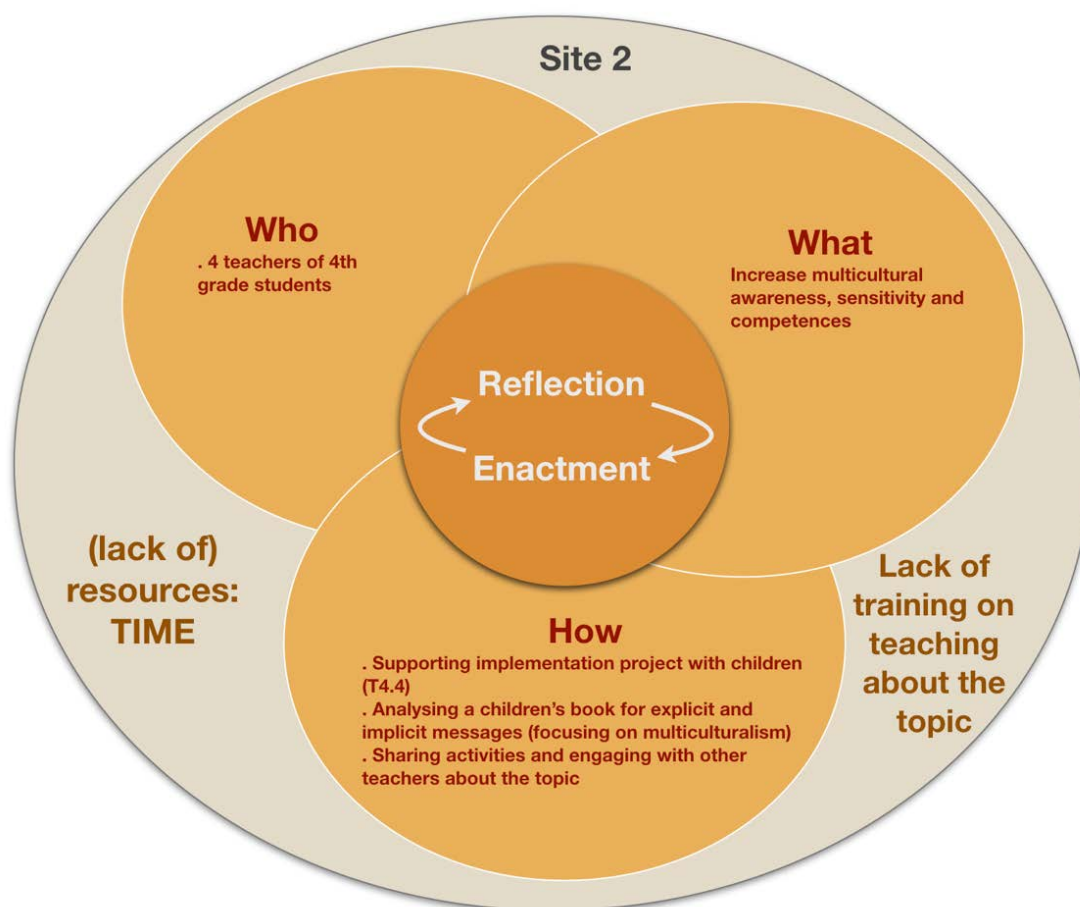


Figure 2.5. Site 2 agreed process according to the 5.4 theoretical framework.

## 2.4.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The following section will provide a more detailed overview of the professional development intervention of both sites.

### 2.4.2.1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS SITE 1

#### Supporting teachers to enact a students' project about socioeconomic inequalities

On site 1, it was decided that teachers and students would focus on social inequalities. This was felt by the school's leaders and staff as a crucial topic, that was a part of the "school's DNA" (please cf. the organization context description above). The topic has been a school's keystone since its inception, and the school had already several tools in place to enhance social justice and to diminish the impact of social inequalities (for more detail, please cf. above the exploratory phase). Leaders, staff, and the ISOTIS team members agreed that it could be interesting and useful to document and share these existing mechanisms through the VLE. In fact, the possibility of sharing practices, namely the prospect to access how other schools involved in the ISOTIS VLE task worked, was regarded by the teachers as motivating and one of the reasons to collaborate on the ISOTIS 5.4 (and 4.4) tasks.

From this process, it resulted that the three teachers (each from a different age group) would start to present the ISOTIS project to their students, introducing the topic of economic inequalities and social justice, and see if students would be curious to learn more about it and, eventually, how were they interested in pursuing it. Subsequently, teachers #1 and #3, respectively of the younger and older groups, and after their students had shown interest in the topic, asked for help in deciding what might constitute a good stimulus situation in order to incite their curiosity about the topic and to assess their interests and desires in what to further explore and learn about. Teacher #2, responsible for the students with ages ranging from 10 to 12, did not get back to the team after participating in the dilemma discussion (described below) and did not engage in further activities.

Therefore, for the two participating age groups, the ISOTIS team was responsible for searching meaningful and adequate videos to introduce the topic. A selection of possible videos was sent to each teacher via email, so they could assess their pertinence. In the younger group, the list was discussed during the nucleus meeting, a teachers' team meeting where they decided which would be shown. The older group's teacher also decided on the video for his students. From this common onset, the two groups of students and teachers developed, as expected, different interventions. A brief presentation of each will now follow, focusing on the support for teachers' enactment and reflection processes.

**Younger children's group**

Table 2.1 provides an overview of the enactment and reflection support for the T4.4 activities for the younger age group.

Table 2.1

*ISOTIS Team Enactment and Reflection Support for the T4.4 Implementation (Site 1 – Younger Age Group).*

4.4 Activity	5.4 Enactment and Reflection support for teachers' implementation of T4.4
<p><b>#1</b> 22/02/2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting teachers by pre-selecting videos for the stimulus situation. ISOTIS team members were also present during "classroom" activities, participating in the discussion with children.</li> <li>Joint (brief) reflection on how the children reacted and possible activities for children to further pursue their interests.</li> </ul>
<p><b>#2</b> 25/03/2019 05/04/2019 29/04/2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting teachers with the activity about the origin of food and inequalities and classroom discussion with children (3 sessions).</li> <li>Teachers expressed lack of confidence (knowledge) when answering students. Reflection and discussion on how activities present in the ISOTIS VLE might respond to teachers and students doubts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>#3</b> 05/05/2019 06/05/2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting teachers by conducting the activity in the VLE about inequalities in trade (2 sessions). Joint reflection on how to close the learning project about socioeconomic inequalities. ISOTIS team would prepare feedback to class about "fair" distribution and real world distribution, prompting a discussion on how to act towards a fairer world.</li> </ul>
<p><b>#4</b> 17/05/2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting teachers by providing feedback to the group about the activity of inequalities in trade. Collaboration with teachers in the discussion with children about how to act for change.</li> <li>Joint (brief) reflection on how the session went.</li> </ul>

Regarding the **initiation** (younger children), teacher #1 usually took the lead, with the other teachers from the nucleus observing and focused on behaviour management and punctually intervening. ISOTIS team members were always present and assisted teachers in the implementation of each activity, following or answering children's questions, ask new questions or reflections, as well as helping to summarize and conclude the activity. The reflection about the activity (#1) held at the end, yielded that children engaged with the videos and expressed interest in finding out more about the origin of other foods and the living conditions of its farmers. Following on students' feedback, it was decided that students would be challenged to search at home, with help from their parents —and with a short script provided by the teachers— the origin of a food that students would pick, the main producing countries, as well as if the worker/farmer of that food was or not fairly payed.

The presentations that resulted from the students' autonomous search started approximately one month later, and took three sessions to finalise (activity #2). Teachers did not require support from the ISOTIS team in the preparation for this activity<sup>12</sup>. During the brief reflection held at the end of the session, teachers highlighted that, although children often stated that the farmer was not payed fairly, it was not clear what they thought to constitute a fair payment. More importantly in what PD is concerned, teachers (and in particular the teacher that led the activity) expressed difficulties concerning the knowledge required for the activity, namely as to the distribution of the farmers' incomes or the distribution of the payed price for a certain good amongst different entities (farmer, transporter, distributor). In fact, this was, at the same time, a doubt voiced by students that teachers could not answer with complete confidence. In response to this need, the ISOTIS team proposed as a next step an activity that aimed at increasing teachers' knowledge about the topic, while simultaneously responding to the doubts expressed by students, taking advantage of the VLE potential. The activity (#3) consisted on distributing a certain amount of money by the intervening groups, as the farmer, transporter, etc., and would be done simultaneously in the ISOTIS virtual setting and with real coins and cards representing each part involved in the process of trade (due to the children's age).

Again, while teachers felt that this was a coherent and interesting way to proceed, they felt unable to properly prepare the activity on their own, due to time restraints and an already full teachers' schedule. Consequently, the ISOTIS would support teachers by articulating with them and conducting the activity with small groups, minimizing any disturbance of the regular "classroom" activities. Furthermore, the ISOTIS team would prepare a presentation to show the group (incl. teachers) the answers given by the children, as well as the "real world" distribution (i.e., the proportion that each one of the participating entities receives). Teachers voiced that the activity and consequent feedback would allow them to get to know the children's perspective in more detail as well as the real distribution, and to further discuss how can children take action based on their own perspective of what should be the fair distribution.

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<sup>12</sup> Teachers decided to put a world map on the nucleus wall, and, as each student presented orally his/her research to the other students under the guidance of teacher #1, two other teachers connected the food's drawing or picture (made by the student) with a wool yarn to the main producing countries. During these three sessions, teachers did not require much assistance from the ISOTIS team members. For detailed information about the activities conducted, please refer to the 4.4 report.

The closing activity (#4) of the 4.4 intervention on socioeconomic justice started with the presentation to students and teachers, prepared by the ISOTIS team, of the average “fair distribution” indicated by the students and its comparison to the real distribution. After, teacher #1 and members of the ISOTIS team collaborated in discussing with children how one could take action and diminish inequalities. Teachers’ overall assessment was very positive (more detail about the teachers’ assessment on the next section).

### Older children’s group

Table 2.2 provides an overview of the activities and meetings with the teachers of the older children. Regarding the deepening nucleus (older children), one ISOTIS produced video was first presented to students (activity #1), about the interconnectedness of all humanity and of human actions and the pervasive and increasing inequalities all over the world. The video was presented resorting to the ISOTIS VLE platform, thus taking advantage of its potential as well as making the platform more familiar to the teacher involved. The videos worked as a prompt for a discussion about the focused topics. The teacher’s feedback was twofold. One aspect related to the fact that the students were not as aware, sensible, and knowledgeable about these subjects as he expected. To be sure, it was even discussed with the students that they were much more prepared and aware about environmental issues or gender related topics; these themes were in fact recurrent in the school’s life and in “classes”. In contrast, the subject of economic fairness and inequalities had not been, according to the teacher, directly and consistently approached. This also related with the second aspect identified by the teacher, specifically that he also expressed to experience more difficulties in discussing this issue. The fact that this teacher is particularly open and frank with his students, allowed him to explicitly discuss this with the class, as well as to (sometimes) directly ask the ISOTIS members present to intervene.

Table 2.2

*ISOTIS Team Enactment and Reflection Support for the T4.4 Implementation (Site 1 – Older Age Group).*

Activity	Outline of activities and meetings with older children’s teachers
#1 28/03/2019	Activity – Stimulus situation (visualization of video in the VLE platform) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief feedback and co-design meeting with teacher</li> </ul>
#2 04/04/2019	Activity – Children learn more – Discussing social and economic inequalities between countries using charts available in the VLE platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief feedback and co-design meeting with teacher</li> </ul>
#3 02/05/2019	Activity – Children learn more – Co-design meeting with children and experiencing activity about inequalities in food available between continents using the VLE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief feedback and co-design meeting with teacher</li> </ul>
#4 09/05/2019	Activity – Children prepare for action and to share what they learned – Co-design meeting with children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief feedback and co-design meeting with teacher</li> </ul>
#5 30/05/2019 06/06/2019	Activity – Children take action and share what they learned – implementation of activities with children from the Consolidation nucleus (students from 10 to 12 years old; 2 sessions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief feedback and co-design meeting with teacher</li> </ul>



Consequently, it was discussed that the next activity could consist of the exploration of concrete data about economic inequalities, namely by visualising some charts about relevant data through the ISOTIS VLE. This would, on one hand, provide concrete data and hence increase the students' and teacher's knowledge about it; on the other hand, work as a prompt for a group discussion and reflection on the subject. The teacher was very interested and motivated to pursue this path. The selected data by the ISOTIS team was subsequently shared (via email) with the teacher who agreed to it. This constituted activity # 2. The activity was assessed by the teacher as being very positive, for both the students and himself. In detail, the teacher referred to having concrete "real" data allowed for a much more informed discussion about the topic. Regarding the next steps, it was decided that students could and should also engage in this decision, i.e., on how they wanted to proceed and take action. This became the bulk of activity #3.

Briefly, when confronted with this challenge (activity #3), students responded with some apathy, showing some difficulty in coming up with ideas. The teacher suggested to do some activities with some of the younger students and several activities were explained with the active engagement of the ISOTIS members. Furthermore, one activity was experienced resorting to the VLE, where it was available. Finally, students decided what activities to conduct with the younger group.

Consequently, activity #4 consisted on the preparation of the implementation of the selected activities. Two members of the ISOTIS team and the teacher worked with the students. At the end, the teacher highlighted that it was very positive that he was supported by two members of the ISOTIS team, allowing for a much more intensive supervision of the students' work.

In activity #5, students implemented the activities with the students from the consolidation nucleus (ages 10-12), with the help of the teacher and two members of the ISOTIS team, which took two sessions.

### **The discussion of a dilemma about social justice and economic inequalities**

By discussing a dilemma, teachers are provided with an opportunity to reflect on their current practices, by linking the content of the dilemma to their daily experiences. Professionals can reflect together and share ideas with their colleagues, gaining awareness about their own (as well as their peers') beliefs and assumptions.

The dilemma that was posed to the 3 participating teachers was thought to be in direct connection to the proposed theme and focus of the ISOTIS intervention at the school, i.e., social justice and economic disparities. The activity aimed to provide an opportunity for teachers to engage in a collaborative (guided) reflection about a dilemma concerning a students'/school activity related to economic unfairness and inequality.

The dilemma was carefully designed to, on the one hand, look plausible and possible to occur within the school's context, and, on the other hand, to stimulate teachers to think about the underlying principles of economic (un)fairness and how these, as well as (some) of the proposed solutions, can be challenged. Also, we strived for teachers to consider different points of view and perspectives on the subject, as well as to find links between the content of the dilemma and the way they would enact when confronted with a similar situation. Therefore, this activity aimed at

increasing teachers' awareness of (some of) their beliefs, attitudes and expectations about this topic, as well as on the connection between these aspects and their behaviour or the school's practices. The dilemma discussion occurred right at the beginning of the implementation process. Box 2.1 presents the description of how the activity went.

**BOX 2.1. Description of the dilemma discussion in site 1.**

**Dilemma about economic fairness and inequalities**

The group of teachers was invited to read the following dilemma: "At school, a group of students learned data about social inequalities, a pressing theme in today's globalized society. They learned about the journey of chocolate: from cocoa plants to the grocery store. After sharing and discussing the living conditions of the workers and the wage differences between all of those involved in the process (planters, transporters, traders), they decided to act and organize a Fairtrade market. However, a few days later a group of parents wants to talk to the teachers. They oppose the realization of the Fairtrade market. They say that the measure reflects a particular political perspective and that the school cannot embody a political party."

First, teachers discussed about what they would do in this case, considering the specificities of the context where they teach (i.e., "would this happen at our school?"). Then, they started sharing their assumptions about the topic (i.e., "is Fairtrade a viable solution for diminishing economic inequalities? I don't know") and how they would teach it (i.e., "I would show both perspectives: the perspective of a fair market and the perspective of a free market", "I would debate the pros and cons"). Then, they linked the topic to other themes. For example, they suggested that they would be more confident in opposing a discourse or attitude conveying a racist belief and referred that they wouldn't tolerate racist comments or assumptions in their school. They described economic inequalities as a more complex topic to discuss both with children and parents. While one of the teachers shared that it was her/his first time to think about the topic of Fairtrade and economic inequalities, the remaining two argued that they have sometimes discussed the topic with each other. However, they shared that there are always opportunities at school to discuss social and economic inequalities with students and that teachers should approach this topic with students whenever possible. Also, they stressed that there are fundamental values in education (namely, democracy and equality), that don't depend on personal perspectives or opinions. At the same time, they struggled with finding an equivalent stance (i.e., a general principle such as racism is just not acceptable) regarding economic inequalities that would allow for an unequivocal defence of a concrete solution (such as Fairtrade).

To finalise the session, teachers were asked to assess the activity. Generally, they found it to be useful for thinking about the topic and reflecting with more depth about it, referring that reflections and discussions at the school are usually more superficial and concern practical issues and problems that they have to respond to at the moment. Additionally, one teacher suggested that it was a useful opportunity to analyse school practices, stating that conclusions and reflections about this dilemma are easily transferable to similar situations they face at school. Despite the positive feedback, time constraints did not allow for the arrangement of other similar activities. The activity template, as well as the description on how it went were shared in the ISOTIS VLE platform (see [VLE](#)).



### 2.4.2.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS SITE 2

#### Developing and implementing a students' project about multiculturalism

In site 2, the ISOTIS implementation was meant to focus on promoting intercultural sensitivity and to engrave multiculturalism as part of the schools' values and mission. The implementation phase kicked off with a general reflection meeting to prepare the stimulus situation for children as well as to share an overall framework that could structure the implementation. As previously agreed (and mostly because teachers had voiced their difficulty with such a topic), this session was led by the ISOTIS team. The overall framework was presented: (i) a stimulus situation would serve as a first moment to involve children and elicit their interest in the proposed theme; (ii) based on the children's feedback and interests, teachers and the ISOTIS team would gather to decide on the subsequent activities to be implemented; (iii) these activities would then be steered in order for students (and teachers) to "take action", i.e., to take concrete steps so that children from all cultures in the school would feel respected and cherished. An outline of the activities and meetings are presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

*Outline of the Activities and Meetings with Teachers Held in Site 2.*

4.4 Activity	5.4 Outline of support to enactment and reflection moments
18/01/2019	Meeting with all teachers to agree on a guiding (meta) structure and the stimulus situation.
<b>#1</b> 25/01/2019 26/01/2019	Stimulus situation (4 Classes). Teachers and ISOTIS team members worked jointly within each classroom.
14/02/2019	Presentation of the content analysis (made by the ISOTIS team) about the children's interests, as well as several possibilities to pursue them
<b>#2</b> 27/02/2019	Meeting with each class (children and teachers) to reflect on how to proceed
<b>#3</b> 11/03/2019 12/03/2019 25/03/2019 26/03/2019 02/04/2019	Support for the implementation of the different activities by the 4 classes. Particular assistance was given to teachers in the implementation of the VLE activities.  Several brief reflection meetings with each teacher were held along this process.
08/04/2019	Meeting with all teachers: Co-design of final steps
<b>#4</b> 03/06/2019 04/06/2019	Support in the video production through the elaboration of the video script involving all the participating classes. Assistance of the department coordinator (not part of the ISOTIS intervention) that was responsible for filming.
<b>#5</b> 18/06/2019	Showing the video to teachers and students. Brief feedback meeting with teachers

Providing teachers with a guiding (meta) structure for the whole intervention, while discussing with them the benefits and strengths of possessing such a framework, was intended as an important reflection moment to increase teachers' awareness of the importance of thinking on the implementation process as a whole and not as a mere collection of discrete activities. Shortly, it aimed at developing teachers' meta-reasoning about the project's development and implementation. To be sure, the intent to make teachers aware of —and to reflect upon— each activity's relation with and place within the overall framework and objectives was present throughout all the 5.4 support to teachers' enactment thread.

The proposed stimulus situation consisted of an activity to be conducted in groups within each classroom. Members from the ISOTIS team and each classroom teacher would work with each group on a story —prepared by the ISOTIS team and presented on a cardboard. Each story depicted a child facing integration challenges to a new context/school (e.g., a refugee child that did not know anyone and had language difficulties in the host country's school) and gathered children's comments on what could be done to make that child feel better, as well as on the students' interests about the story/topic (i.e., about what do they wanted to learn more). The analysis of the children's interests would later fuel the discussion on how to proceed.

After the stimulus situation was implemented in the four classrooms (classroom activity #1), a (brief) content analysis of each class' interests was carried out by the ISOTIS team and presented to teachers, so that children's perspectives were used as the basis for the next steps. Furthermore, an array of activities connected to the children's manifested curiosities was also presented. Supported by the ISOTIS team, a discussion between teachers ensued, namely about what would be the activities that would better suit each group of students (class) and their respective teacher, in order to accomplish the project's objectives. It was then decided that children should themselves be involved in the choices for the next steps. Hence, a class meeting followed (classroom activity #2) and each group separately decided on the activity(ies) to realise.

This process led to diverse paths for each class, according to their interests. Nevertheless, the ISOTIS team guided teachers in thinking on how to ensure the coherence with the overall framework and project objectives. Through this reflection, it was decided that the activities carried out by each class should contribute to a welcoming kit, with the objective of welcoming newcomers to the school, with a clear message that all cultures and languages were valued and nurtured at the school. At this point, several possibilities on how to concretely combine the different activities were discussed (e.g., a general welcoming activity that the school would realise at the beginning of each new year containing and/or using the resulting products of the activities; a video that would document all the activities and stress a positive multicultural message).

Additionally, it was also discussed on how to take advantage of the VLE possibilities and several activities were thought in connection to each class' interests and chosen paths.

It is worth to point out that teachers progressively showed more autonomy throughout the implementation process. Nevertheless, the support and assistance required from teachers differed substantially. To be sure, some teachers were able to pursue some of the chosen activities with a great deal of autonomy, whilst others required the presence of members of the ISOTIS team to conduct the activities. Furthermore, the differences in autonomy were not only patent between teachers, but also across activities, with the most striking example being the activities conducted through the VLE. Concretely, although some teachers did actively engage with the VLE in order to support their students, it should be noted that the design of the VLE activities, as well as the preparation, were done by the ISOTIS team members.

In order to assess how the activities went, as well as to take final decisions on how to close the implementation, a meeting with all the teachers was held. Together, teachers reflected on the more and less positive aspects of the activities that each class pursued. Lastly, a discussion was

held on how to articulate the paths undertaken by each class and the resulting products into a coherent welcoming kit, that, at the same time, encouraged children to take action, as they anticipated in the adopted guiding framework. The decision fell on the realisation of a video, in which children were to present the ISOTIS project implementation. Teachers reasoned on how this video could simultaneously document all of the process undertaken and portrait the school as a multicultural school, that respects and cherishes cultural and linguistic diversity.

After the making of the video (“classroom” activity #4), a session took place to show it to the teachers —since it was a teacher that had not been involved in the ISOTIS implementation phase that was responsible for filming and editing— and students (activity #5).

### 2.4.2.3. VLE ACTIVITIES

Generally speaking, teachers from site 2 were very enthusiastic about sharing with and receiving feedback from teachers of other ISOTIS participating countries on the activities they had conducted (with their students, for the 4.4 task). Additionally, they were also interested in getting to know how other teachers worked and how they approached a similar topic.

Since seeing and hearing from other professionals can be one of the most effective ways of learning, the ISOTIS 5.4 team tried to facilitate the exchanges between professionals from different participating countries, taking advantage of the potential of the VLE. In the case of Portugal, several exchanges took place (see Figure 2.6). First, Portugal and the Netherlands conducted a similar PD activity, that consisted in a group (within site) discussion about a children’s book. The description of the comments and reflections were then translated and uploaded into the VLE by the ISOTIS team of the respective countries. This then enabled the professionals to access the other group comments and reflections, which motivated new reflections and insights. Second, another exchange happened with professionals from the Netherlands, specifically focused on one of the activities carried out by the teachers under the 4.4 task (called “There are multiple skin tones!”) that raised interest on the part of the Dutch professionals. Third, Portuguese and Italian teachers also shared several activities conducted under the 4.4 task, providing and receiving comments, reflections and questions from each other. Below, each one of these three exchanging moments are briefly described.

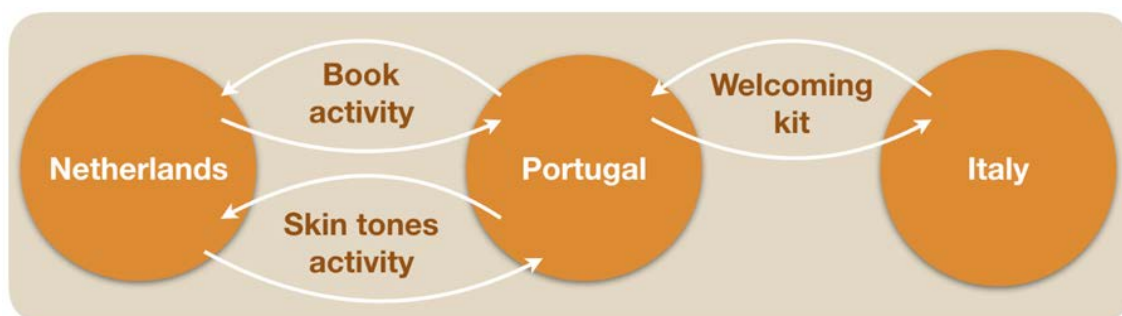


Figure 2.6. Exchange activities between Portuguese teachers and ISOTIS partners.

### Discussion about a children’s book

As already said, both professionals from the Netherlands and Portugal explored the same book for children (“We’re going on a bear hunt” by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury) and followed the same guidelines (for the PT reflection script, see [VLE](#)). It is worth mention that, in itself (i.e., even without any sharing), this activity can be valuable as a PD strategy, since professionals reflect on the implicit and explicit messages that the chosen materials (in this particular case a book) convey, and the impact that these can have in children. In the Portuguese case, the reflections about the book<sup>13</sup> are presented in Box 2.2 and were uploaded by the ISOTIS team to the VLE (see [VLE](#)).

#### ***BOX 2.2. Portuguese teachers’ reflections about the selected book.***

##### **Exploring the book**

Professionals started by exploring some implicit messages in the story. First, a teacher shared that just as in the bear hunt, in real life, obstacles cannot be avoided and, like the family in the book, we move forward. This reminded her of the journey refugees make from their home countries to a new life. Then, another teacher mentioned that the bear hunt represents the fear of the unknown and the challenges faced in life. When asked about the values and norms that the book conveys, teachers described universal values of “courage”, “bravery” and “confidence”, that “the world is tough” and “life is full of obstacles”. Also, they highlighted the climate of mutual help in the family, mentioning, for example, that they sometimes walk holding hands. A teacher mentioned “motivation” (in the story, to find the bear) and made a parallelism with the students’ motivation to learn and achieve academically, the obstacles students face, and the role of the teacher in that process. One teacher mentioned that every character has the same skin colour and that they all share the same culture. Concerning cultural diversity in books, this teacher highlighted that, sometimes, in their schoolbooks, a photograph of a child from a minority group is included, but that this appearance is (most of the times) disconnected from the content of the schoolbook. She mentioned that including children from different cultural origins in schoolbooks is not enough and that, in her opinion, it is important that photographs and illustrations included in textbooks are combined with contents related to multiculturalism.

In order to facilitate the exchange, the equivalent description from the Dutch professionals — available through the VLE— was translated into Portuguese and uploaded to the VLE (see [VLE](#)). Subsequently, another session<sup>14</sup> was held, in which the Portuguese teachers discussed the Dutch teachers’ thoughts and reflections on the book activity. It is relevant to highlight that the reflections and comments from the two groups of teachers were somewhat different. Whereas the Portuguese teachers emphasized the metaphors underlying the story, the Dutch teachers highlighted the monocultural emphasis portrayed in the pictures. This fact is important to understand why this sharing activity was considered by the PT teachers as meaningful, since they stated that “it is important to know other opinions” and “to see with different eyes”. Furthermore, one of the teachers acknowledged to pay too little attention to multicultural aspects when choosing materials for the class.

<sup>13</sup> The meeting with all the teachers took place on the 20th of March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> On the 8th of April of 2019.

## Feedback from the Dutch teachers on the activity “There are multiple skin tones”

All of the activities conducted under the 4.4 intervention were briefly presented to the Dutch teachers, with the intention to see if they were interested to have an exchange activity about any (or more) of them. The professionals were curious to know more about the activity called “There are multiple skin tones” (see [VLE](#)). After exploring the materials uploaded to the VLE, they commented and posed some questions to their Portuguese peers (see [VLE](#)), also through the VLE. The questions posed prompted a discussion by the Portuguese teachers, that was immediately fruitful and conducive to changes regarding awareness and knowledge about the topic. For example, as teachers were discussing if they should be proactive or reactive regarding the topic of racism and skin colour (a question asked by the Dutch teachers), they agreed that they should be proactive, and that one can, for instance, approach the subject through a book. Nevertheless, they then shared that they knew few (if any) books with stories that featured black or Roma children. One of the teachers then started to search online for such books, sharing the results (and links) with the others, that seemed very interested in it.

## Portuguese and Italian teachers sharing

Another fruitful sharing activity occurred between the Portuguese teachers from site 2 and one teacher from Italy (see Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.8<sup>15</sup>).

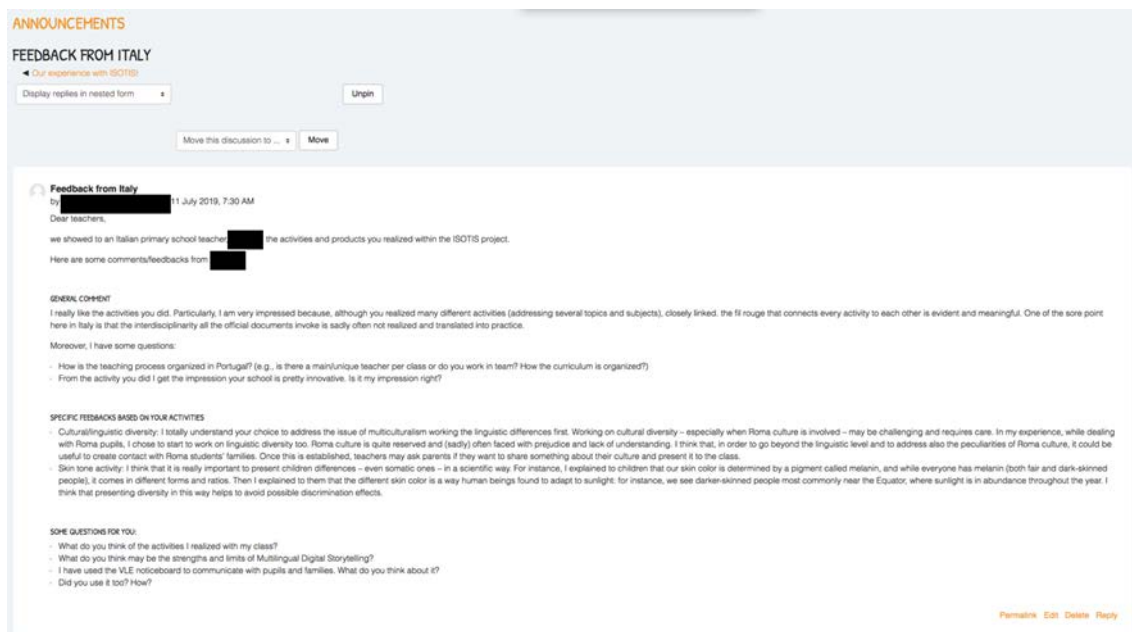


Figure 2.7. Picture of the interchange between Professionals – “Feedback from Italy”.

The Italian teacher watched the final video that described all the 4.4 activities that took place in the Portuguese school and was eager to comment. Specifically, the teacher asked questions about the Portuguese educational system, the school and the activities. Moreover, she made suggestions about a particular activity, sharing with the Portuguese peers one way she used to approach the topic of the different skin colours, since this was not present in the Portuguese

<sup>15</sup> Due to privacy issues, the link to this specific forum is not included, but pictures of the VLE forum are provided with the identification of the participants blotted.

activity that dealt specifically with the skin colour<sup>16</sup>. Lastly, the Italian teacher also asked questions about what were the Portuguese counterparts' thoughts on the activities she had carried out with her students.

With the support of the ISOTIS team, the Portuguese teachers were able to access all of the comments and questions posted on a VLE forum by the Italian teacher. The former were very enthusiastic about receiving feedback on the activities and were particularly interested in the suggestion made by their Italian colleague, which they said they had never thought about it in that way, while simultaneously thinking the proposed approach would really be an improvement on the activity. In fact, they concluded by saying that they would definitely considered introducing the Italian teacher's procedure in future actions.

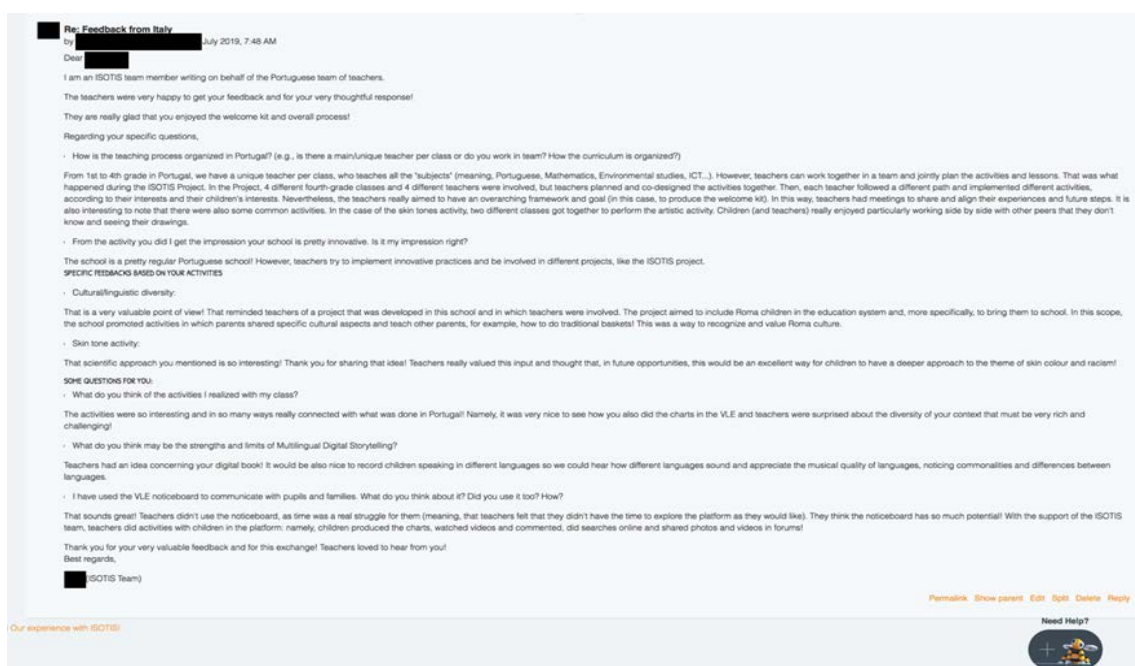


Figure 2.8. Picture of the interchange between Professionals – “Re: Feedback from Italy”.

The Portuguese teachers found that learning more about the Italian activities was really interesting and inspiring, voicing that there were really original ways of promoting multiculturalism amongst students. Furthermore, they also contributed with suggestions to the Italian colleague. Lastly, they showed increased awareness (and surprise) about the Italian context, namely while observing the number of languages that were present in the Italian teacher classroom, expressing that it must be rather stimulating but, at the same time, extremely challenging for teachers.

In general, exchanging experiences and building communities of professionals willing to learn with each other was a powerful catalyst for the professional development of the Portuguese teachers. It is crucial to highlight that the communities of learners were possible due to the existence of a platform through which teachers were able to access activities, comments, as well as to meet and interact with one another.

<sup>16</sup> Concretely, the Italian teacher shared that she included a “scientific component” when addressing the skin colours issue, teaching the students about melanin.



## 2.5. PART IV: ASSESSMENT

The fourth and final part is dedicated to the assessment of the professional development intervention. The methods for assessment are described and the most important outcomes concerning staff, organisation, the VLE and the overall process of co-construction are pointed out. We conclude this country report with a short discussion on the main lessons that we have learned during the intervention.

### 2.5.1. ASSESSMENT OF DOMAINS AND PROCEDURES

As explained in the general section of this report, the assessment of the process in both sites was carried out through several mechanisms. Specifically, in both sites the professionals and school leaders participated in dedicated interviews/focus groups.

In site 1, the member of the school board (BM) who accompanied the ISOTIS project since the beginning voiced her preference for participating, due to time restraints, in the same focus groups than professionals. The presence of the two ISOTIS members that took part in the assessment focus group, this did not seem to affect the professionals' answers. The two teachers that were part of the ISOTIS project since the beginning (plus the member of the school board) were the participants of the focus group. Although we indicated that, if possible, the other teachers that took part in the project by being involved in classroom activities could also participate, we were told that this would be difficult due to time availability. The same happened with the teacher that only participated in the first meetings and the dilemma discussion. The focus group with the three members took approximately 50 minutes.

In site 2, separate interviews with the school coordinator and focus groups with the participating teachers were conducted. Three teachers participated in the focus group; one of the teachers could not make it, due to health issues. The interview with the coordinator took approximately 40 minutes and the focus group one hour.

The interviews/focus groups were recorded, transcribed and a qualitative (thematic) analysis was performed, bearing in mind the four proposed main categories of analysis: gains/changes relating to (i) staff (competencies, beliefs, etc.), (ii) organization and collaboration practices (Organizational Climate; Team Work/Collaboration), (iii) VLE (Usage; Usefulness; Satisfaction; Future Use), and (iv) the intervention process.

Furthermore, the observations (and respective field notes) and informal conversations made by the ISOTIS team members were also taken into consideration in the assessment. In fact, a reflection from the ISOTIS team members about the whole process was carried out.

Lastly, some items for the teachers to self-report, retrospectively, the gains/changes related to some of the intervention goals were also administered. As the focus of the intervention was not the same in both sites, the items were adjusted for content and coherence. Thus, the administered items varied in content and number across schools. The self-report evaluation questionnaires for site 1 (regarding social justice) was comprised by 6 items, covering the following 3 dimensions: **Global Competence** (1 item: "I can raise awareness for social inequalities amongst the

children”); **ICTs** in teaching-learning process (1 item; “I use ICT regularly to improve the teaching-learning process”); and **Professional Development** (4 items; e.g., “I am aware of how my norms and values influence my actions in my professional practice”). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale, with the following answers: worsen a lot, slightly worsen, no changes, slightly improved, improved a lot.

The self-report evaluation questionnaires for site 2 (regarding multiculturalism) was comprised by 17 items, covering the following 6 dimensions: Teaching efficacy in **diverse classrooms** (3 items; e.g., “I can deal with problems and conflicts which result from cultural difference”); **intercultural sensitivity** (3 items; e.g., “I can offer many opportunities to engage in other cultures in class”); Strengthening **classroom community** (3 items; e.g., “I can organize joint activities to strengthen the classroom community and make children learn to cooperate with each other”); **Reducing prejudices** (2 items; e.g., “I can contribute to reducing mutual prejudices between the children”); **ICTs** in teaching-learning process (1 item; “I use ICT regularly to improve the teaching-learning process”); and **Professional Development** (5 items; e.g., “I am aware of how my norms and values influence my actions in my professional practice”). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale, with the following answers: worsen a lot, slightly worsen, no changes, slightly improved, improved a lot.

To ensure clarity and transparency, an effort was made throughout the text in order to indicate the source of the statements (if the interview, observations, self-reported evaluation, etc.).

## 2.5.2. RESULTS

The main findings of the collected data will be divided into four topics. The first topic, *staff*, concerns the overall satisfaction of the professionals and to what extent they thought their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes were changed through the intervention. The second topic, *organisation and collaboration practices*, concerns the organisational climate and team work. A central question here is to what extent the intervention impacted the collaboration within the organisation and if the PD activities prompted further discussion in the organisation outside the planned intervention meetings. Third, we present the results on the *virtual learning environment*. This concerns the usage, usefulness, satisfaction and to what extent professionals are interested in future use of the tool. Lastly, the intervention’s *process of co-construction* will be evaluated. For all four topics the (self)evaluation of the professionals and the observations and reflections of the researchers are used to highlight the most important findings.

### 2.5.2.1. STAFF

#### Site 1

The ISOTIS intervention was generally assessed as very positive by the professionals and the BM. In fact, a relevant indicator of the intervention’s perceived success is the openness, by all interviewees, to further collaborate with the team in the near future.

More specifically, professionals from site 1 explicitly acknowledged, during the focus groups, that they had experienced gains due to the intervention. P1 — “There were several things that were



presented there [during the sessions] that I had a notion, but didn't have a [clear] perception of the reality (...) [about the topic of economic inequalities]". P2 — "we also got more informed". P1 — "I got a much clearer perception of reality that I did not have; I thought that I had it, but that didn't match the reality; I think that had a positive impact". P1 — "me also; although we have a very generic idea about what is happening in the world and its consequences, this [meaning the "classroom" activities] implies from our part [i.e., the teachers] some investment and research (...); this made me to be more aware and more attentive to this topic (...); I think this inevitably brings something for our personal and professional lives". It is interesting to notice that both teachers highlight the gains related to knowledge about the topic in questions (economic inequalities in site 1's case) and subsequently with the ability to teach about the topic (skills), although this last quote from P1 does point to more broad changes, specifically relating to the general awareness and impact at the personal level (attitudes).

The quotes above are corroborated by the observations and numerous brief meetings (held after each session) and informal conversations with the teachers in question, in particular with P2. To be sure, P2 frequently referred how some of the suggested activities/discussions were eye-openers and that the data and/or arguments were unexpected. Moreover, it was patent the genuine interest and excitement of this teacher during the whole process.

It is also noteworthy, and coherent with what was voiced by the teachers, that the ISOTIS team did in fact observe that both teachers were not always sure what to answer to children, and sometimes actively sought support from the ISOTIS team. Nevertheless, it is also relevant to stress that both teachers are generally very resourceful and proficient in their usual teaching practices and show an open attitude towards new knowledge.

The self-report evaluation questionnaire also confirms this general impression: only in the question related to the changes in the use of ICT one has reported no change, while the other has reported a slight improvement. All the other items were answered as having either slightly improved or improved a lot, the latter being "I am aware of how my norms and values influence my actions in my professional practice" in both teachers, plus "I am able to increase my student's awareness about social inequalities" and "I can have a critical look over my actions, think about their causes and in alternatives" in one of them.

To sum up, teachers from site 1 felt challenged by the topic of economic inequalities. The intervention, as reported, observed and through the self-evaluation report, had a clear impact on their knowledge and feeling of confidence to teach about the topic. Moreover, self-evaluation questionnaire indicates that professionals felt they had increased their awareness over their own actions over the course of the intervention.

## **Site 2**

In general, the ISOTIS intervention was assessed, by both the school coordinator and the teachers involved, as extremely positive. Perhaps the best indicator of the overall satisfaction is the clear manifestation of their willingness for the intervention to continue in the subsequent year and to extend the project to all school teachers and students. Furthermore, the impact was felt beyond the teachers (and students) that participated, since the coordinator "had feedback from

colleagues that were not involved in the project and maybe not even identify with the way of work [i.e., project-based methodology], and said ‘oh it’s so nice [referring to the visible outputs of the project, such as the video or the paintings from the skin colour activity], it was a pity it wasn’t also us’”. It is noteworthy that this statement points out to an effect of the intervention on non-participating teachers, namely on their willingness to be part of projects such as ISOTIS, even when, due to the fear of more workload, teachers are generally suspicious of outside interventions. In their turn, the participating teachers were unanimous in voicing their satisfaction with the intervention (e.g., P1: “I learned a lot”; P2: “I liked very much to have worked with you in this project, I think it added value to me and to the children”).

There are several reasons highlighted for this satisfaction. According to the school’s head, the main reason was ISOTIS success in using what should be the standard pedagogical approach when working with children, i.e., project-based methodology, since traditional teaching methodologies are “a routine that is more practical, but it is yielding very bad results”. Nevertheless, “not everyone [every teacher] identifies with that way [of teaching], because it is more demanding, implies organizing, previous work, we have such a heavy workload”. In line with the school’s coordinator (SC) perspective, teachers also voiced that desired changes in their pedagogical practices were severely constrained by the workload required: P1 — “the group work, that we do, but not with the frequency that we would like, we do little of it, because it gives [too much] work”. In relation to this caveat, both the SC and teachers seemed to agree that the systematic and consistent support of the ISOTIS team was crucial for the implementation of such a methodology at the school (i.e., the 4.4 process): SC — “[teachers] realised that it wouldn’t be another workload [as with other projects], your systematic presence was very important, your stop overs, working with them, here in the activities, that was crucial, because otherwise, maybe, we wouldn’t get any result”; P1 — “I learned a lot (...), the sharing that we made here with you [referring to the ISOTIS team], your work, like I said in the last day, you did not let us go, that was very important, because in the quantity of work that we have to do (...), one really needs someone around that says ‘look, let’s do this’”. In essence, the key aspect that is valued by both set of interviewees (i.e., teachers and school head) is related to the implementation of the 4.4 task and the correspondent instrumental support.

In relation to the PD activities where teachers were the exclusive focus, a less enthusiastic assessment was showed, with a more nuanced picture. To start with, the book activity did not seem to have fully achieved its goals. At the time of the activity (see description above) teachers discussed the book without a clear focus on a multicultural lens, emphasizing what would be the intended messages of the book: to surpass the obstacles, to face your fears, to do things with the family, etc. Only a few short comments were in line with the activity’s intent, i.e., to promote awareness of the underrepresentation of cultural diversity in materials that are used with children for learning and/or playing. Therefore, in the subsequent exchange with the Dutch team about this activity, there was an effort from the ISOTIS to be more directive and guide the discussion towards the desired objective. Furthermore, the content of the Dutch teachers’ comments that were shared with the Portuguese teachers were much more aligned with the overall activity’s purpose. Nevertheless, teachers’ final assessment interview seems to indicate that the main goal was not perceived. P3: “Because that [meaning the suggested book] did not suggested anything to me (...) I think the book had nothing to do with multiculturalism”. P2: “what it showed [in the

book] is that it is very subjective, what I was seeing I noticed that the other colleagues were not seeing, (...); if the book is or not adequate for the project, I don't know, I could not make the connection (...), when I was told it had to do with the skin tones [referring to the fact that one of the ISOTIS members highlighted the fact that there was only 'one' skin tone represented in the book] I thought, ok, I must be off track". Although the first participant (P1) said to have a more positive perception of the activity, the reasons given were not consonant with the desired ends, but rather because her students [since she and P3 took the book to be read by the students] found the book interesting: "they saw all kind of things, they thought the book was interesting".

When prompted about concrete examples on changes/gains, only P1 referred to the exchange with the Italian counterpart and that now she will "approach these subjects [racism and skin colour] in another way, (...) there's a greater easiness for me to that with the following groups that I may have, (...) it was another way of approaching the subject, reaching more the essence of the issue". Additionally, when asked about changes relating to intercultural competencies, knowledge, attitudes or beliefs, P2 blatantly states: "if there were changes, relative to me? To me no, I still think and am as I was, there is nothing new (...), because I still have the same ideas, the same way of thinking, of acting, there wasn't so much difference, now, that I liked to pass this kind of information to the students, I did (...), but, is it going to change my practice? No".

Nevertheless, the self-report evaluation questionnaires depict the overall intervention as having an impact on teachers' competencies. The three teachers did vary in their assessments with one reporting slight increases in all but two of the 17 items used in site 2 (plus one marked as "no changes" and another as having improved a lot). Another teacher reported slight gains in 12 of the items (with the remaining 5 items showing "no changes"), while the third teacher reported slight increases in "only" 6 items, big increases on one, and no changes on the remaining ten. All teachers reported increases on the items related to competencies in dealing with (cultural) diversity in the classroom. Furthermore, at least one item of each assessed dimension showed a slight increase (or more) for all three teachers (the exception being one teacher that reported no changes in all 3 items relating to "Strengthening classroom community").

To sum up, the participants' level of satisfaction with the intervention was very high, particularly due to the valued support for enacting the 4.4 activities on multiculturalism. In relation to the activities that were exclusively centred on teachers, evidence is not totally congruent. In fact, in the focus group, teachers reported that some of the activities (though not all) contributed to knowledge acquisition and competences for enacting teaching activities about multiculturalism with children, though none is said to have contributed to changes in their beliefs, attitudes or expectations. Nonetheless, self-evaluation questionnaires yielded (generally slight) gains across dimensions, including in teachers' values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations.

#### 2.5.2.2. ORGANISATION AND COLLABORATION PRACTICES

##### Site 1

Despite P2's reference that "it was also due to this project that an opportunity to articulate between the different *nuclei* [age groups]", the general assessment of the intervention's impact on the organization and collaboration practices made by both teachers and the member of the school

board were rather neutral. In fact, they agreed that time constraints and general work overload (for which the many projects that the school embraced also contributed) did not allow for the desired preparation and articulation. P1 — “we had a year completely overloaded by projects (...); inevitably, the articulation becomes more difficult”. BM — “it could have been beneficial [for a better articulation and preparation of activities between teachers]; but we could not do it”. P2 — “it was too much” [referring to the working overload].

Again, the perceptions voiced by the interviewees are in essence corroborated by the ISOTIS members’ observations and field notes. Nevertheless, it is relevant to contextualize this finding, stating that this school has already in place, as described above, a strong culture (and associated mechanisms) of articulation of the work between teachers. For example, the reference above made by P2 —that the project allowed for the articulation between different age groups— should be read in light that it is common in the school for the different age groups to do joint activities, or for one group to present something to others. The fact that the school is, relatively to this dimension (and others), an example of good practices, explains why no needs (in this area) were either felt or observed during the exploratory phase.

#### **Site 2**

According to the school coordinator, the project has strengthened the collaborative practices that were already in place — “I think it [the project] strengthen, (...) this group [of 4th grade teachers] works together since the 1st grade (...) they try to work as a team (...) because they know each other and they have established trust (...); I think (...) it [referring to ISOTIS] came to strengthen even further”. Nevertheless, teachers instead refer that the project did not impact the way they work as a team: P1 — “no, we already worked as a team”; P3 — “no”; P1 — “it was not this [the project] that made us more united, no, we usually do that, help each other, share”; P3 — “work groups”; P1 — “we work everything in group, I think that [the project] did not facilitate it a lot, it came as a continuity, to bring continuity of the work [already done]”; P2 — “that’s it”.

Both views need not to be seen as contrasting, though. In line with what was observed by the ISOTIS team, the intervention did provide an opportunity for the teachers to collaborate in a project, as they already had been doing, but this does not mean that regular organization and collaboration practices were changed.

### **2.5.2.3. VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Site 1**

It was difficult for the team to get teachers to directly engage with the ISOTIS VLE in site 1. In effect, the VLE was used by the children in both age groups (i.e., with both teachers) during the intervention phase, but it was generally up to the team to directly engage with it and/or to assist the children when conducting activities through the VLE or using its resources. The explanations for this, according to the teachers, relates to the effort needed to learn the platform, specifically time. P1: “as it was not mandatory that we used it to develop the [ISOTIS] project, we tried to implement it without having to dedicate time to it [i.e., the VLE]”; BM: “there isn’t any [referring to time to engage with the VLE]”.

Consequently, the feedback about the ISOTIS VLE was necessarily vague, though both teachers and the board member do generally value virtual platforms. In fact, the three interviewees already sometimes use several platforms to support their teaching practices. P2: “I imagine myself in the future resorting to the [ISOTIS] platform, not being with you in the project, if a discussion on a related subject arises”; BM: “as you sometimes resort to other [platforms], right?”; P2: “as I sometimes resort to others, searching for an answer, an image, a video, that helps me to respond to a need that came up in the group [of students]”; P1: “In this case, we were searching in you [referring to the interviewers] the answers”.

Nevertheless, teachers and the board member stated that the introduction of the VLE and the team support for using it were necessary steps for a future use of the platform. BM: “Imagine that you did not do it [referring to the fact that were the ISOTIS members that directly engaged with the VLE] and told us to engage with the platform, when you have difficulties [you can come to us] (...)”; P1: “no [implying it wouldn’t work]”; P2: “It would die [meaning they would not use it]”.

From the ISOTIS team observations, it was possible to confirm that both teachers were skilful in using ICT and resort to them. Nevertheless, as (the lack of) time was a key structuring factor of the whole intervention, it was not possible to convince teachers to invest their own time for exploring the VLE.

## **Site 2**

Although the school coordinator hasn’t been involved with the VLE, she thought “that it brings added value”. Nevertheless, it is crucial, in her view, that it “should have some continuity [meaning that the project and the VLE training should continue], not to end now, otherwise they’ll forget, it was this group, forgot, other things come, they forget”.

Teachers refer to the lack of time to justify their non-engagement with the platform (P2: “we don’t have the time”; P1: “I would need more time to use it”). To be sure, none of the teachers clearly recalled having signed in the platform on their own, i.e., without the ISOTIS team’s supervision/support. Nevertheless, they did state that the VLE brings “added value” and spontaneously referred to elements related to the sharing activity with the Italian counterpart (e.g., to know better the educational systems and schools of other countries).

### **2.5.2.4. PROCESS OF CO-CONSTRUCTION**

#### **Site 1**

According to all the interviewees, the beginning of the intervention wasn’t without difficulties. BM: “I think that in the beginning we were a little bit lost here”; P1: “yes, yes”. The reasons mentioned were twofold. First, there “was a difficulty to articulate the project with our own practices” (BM). This is, as we were told, a general characteristic of the projects. “There is always [referring to projects in general] that initial moment because it [the project] was not born here, it didn’t come from a necessity that the school felt (...), it is something that came from the outside and the first exercise (...) is if this can be interesting for us”. Second, it was not clear for the school what would they were committing to, given the fact that the initial proposal to the school wasn’t, coherently with the co-constructing nature of the ISOTIS intervention, a pre-defined set of activities or simply

a proposal on a theme that the school would then develop (on their own). BM: “[the] second difficulty is up to what extent are we responding to the objectives of the project”. At the same time, the school does not value pre-defined intervention projects. P2: “This doesn’t mean that we want something closed, that happens in other projects, we also don’t want that”; BM: “exactly, exactly”; P2: “there are those that come to us and say, we want you to do this this way with that class (...)”.

A feature of the intervention that was stressed as being crucial to its success refers to the consistent and close support provided by the ISOTIS team. P2: “I think that it was very important the question of, your presence during the sessions, that input that you were giving, ‘I know this or have a graph or even know a video that might be useful, starting from what they [the students] have already brought to the discussion’”; BM: “oh yes, that is nice”; (...) P2: “those five minutes at the end of the sessions, that may seem not that important, were crucial. ‘look, that kid said that, what if I brought an image or a video to continue the discussion’, I think those five minutes were really very important”. This valuing of the teachers’ support in the development and implementation of the 4.4 activities was constantly felt by the team along the process. In fact, according to the team’s assessment, this feature was responsible for the growing appreciation and trust that the teachers appeared to experience during the process.

After the initial difficulties, the remaining part of the process went smoothly and it was assessed as being very positive. Again, the only caveat was less related to the project itself, but with the lack of time to carry the project further. In relation to this, all interviewees agreed that it would have been beneficial if the project had been introduced to the school before the beginning of the school year, allowing for a better articulation and maximization of the project’s potential.

## **Site 2**

From the School’s coordinator perspective, there was an initial fear of the teachers’ reaction to the request to participate in the project: “in the first meeting (...) [with the teachers and the ISOTIS team], I asked the [school cluster] director, that all board members would be present, to make this more formal, because I know if I were to arrive to the [teachers’] group and said ‘let’s develop this [meaning the ISOTIS project], I know that one or another would say no”.

As stated, a consistent and systematic support was the main ingredient to overcome the initial resistance. In fact, it was very clear for the ISOTIS members that teachers gradually got more involved and excited with the project. As said, the cornerstone of the success seems to be the consistent support throughout the development of the project: P3 — “but it was different [from other projects] because you were always interconnected [with the teachers], P2 — yes, we felt your help (...), P3 — and we worked a lot with you, right? That was something that made us comfortable”. To be sure, answering the questions if there had been difficulties felt along the process, teachers answered: “P3 — no; P2 — “we did not feel [difficulties] because you were always there to help”; P1: “you were always present”; P2 — that is the difference we felt; P1 — if you had not been [there], we would have felt difficulties; P — comparing your project with other projects that are imposed on us, we managed a lot better on this one and liked it because you are there; P3 — with ideas”. Passed the initial resistance, the intervention developed smoothly and without any major relevant obstacles.



### 2.5.3. DISCUSSION

Time for PD was a structural/contextual limitation for the intervention. Success in building an excellent work relation came because ISOTIS completely aligned with the organizational and structural strains and intensively (instrumentally) supported teachers in the 4.4 implementation. Hence, initial resistance (in both sites) disappeared and the collaboration was felt to be highly positive and beneficial. Furthermore, the amount and type of support given was differentiated according to the felt needs of the professionals involved. Generally, teachers from site 1 showed a highly developed sense of autonomy, regularly taking the lead on the creation and implementation of the activities to promote social/economic justice awareness and sensitivity. In site 2, teachers generally relied more on ISOTIS team proposals and lead in the development and implementation of activities. Moreover, within site 2, the level of support and leadership was adapted to the different professionals, since the group was heterogeneous. At the same time, this alignment was not possible when conducting PD activities focusing exclusively on teachers, which required time and availability. The pressure to keep this type of activities to the minimum and/or short was generally felt by the ISOTIS team in both schools.

Changes in organization and collaboration practices seem not to have been achieved. It is nevertheless relevant to keep in mind that they were not directly sought. The possible reason is that teachers already reported high levels of collaboration. In addition, it is possible that improvements at this level would require: (i) aiming directly at it; (ii) to be felt as a need; (iii) longer and more frequent activities involving children and teachers of different classrooms. Most of the activities were conducted within each class and although there were meetings involving several teachers, it appears that the support felt as the most beneficial by the teachers was the one within the classroom – while conducting the activities with children, or right after each activity with children, moments in which only one teacher was present.

Regarding the VLE, time was clearly a crucial issue. In fact, despite the fact that all participants considered the VLE as adding value to their practices —namely the possibility of using its resources, as well as sharing experiences and feedback with peers— the lack of time severely hindered the professionals to engage with the platform. Although this was certainly true, if one looks at it from a more processual perspective, a more nuanced picture surfaces. The (initial) teachers' non-involvement with the VLE might lead one to reason that the amount of time required to start to operate with the VLE has to be minimal and teachers need to feel that the invested time pays off in a very short term. This points to an additional difficulty when one is —as is the case with this ISOTIS task— seeking the professionals' collaboration to develop the platform in a co-constructive process, rather than presenting it to teachers as an ended and ready-to-use product. To be sure, co-constructing the/a platform requires time from professionals, while gains seem to be less immediate. On the other side, there is no guarantee that if the platform was presented to teachers in a ready-to-use fashion, the teachers would actually have used it (more). In fact, it seems that teachers valued the active co-construction of the activities, given that this process allowed an alignment between the resources/exchanges in the platform, children's interests, and teachers' felt needs throughout the process. As the activities were being conducted, new interests from the side of the children arose, which created new “needs” on how to proceed from the side of the teachers. Furthermore, as teachers saw the potential of the VLE, particularly by exchanging with peers from other ISOTIS participating countries, their interest seemed to increase.

This evolving nature of teachers' involvement and interest was not confined only to the VLE, but seems also applicable to the whole PD intervention process. If, at the beginning of the process, teachers started to engage in the activities related to the ISOTIS T4.4 process (i.e., the activities with children), they seemed less interested in learning more about the topic or to reflect on their attitudes and beliefs. As the process unfolded, classroom activities, children's interests and the gradual process of building a community of learners through the VLE, resulted in the arising of newer needs and renewed interest in continuing with the process.

Furthermore, and based upon the ISOTIS team reflections, it is curious to note that both teachers from site 1 are the ones that reported to have gained and personally benefited the most from the intervention, not only in terms of knowledge, but noticeably in terms of awareness of their beliefs and attitudes. Nevertheless, this seems to be at odds with the fact that these professionals already showed more competencies to autonomously work and engage their students in a learning process about the chosen topics. This apparent contradiction might in fact be an indicator that the willingness and availability to inquiry into one's beliefs and attitudes—in other words, the readiness to change—is in itself a sign of PD and a predictor of the intervention's success. This further raises the question on how one can promote professionals' readiness—or perhaps better, willingness—for change.

Although it seems important not to underplay the role of contextual constraints, foremost the lack of time, we think that there is a deeper lesson to be apprehended, one that speaks of the evolving character of the participants' felt needs.

The development of a positive collaborative relation, through a careful adaptation of the intervention to the teachers (felt) needs, starting from their interests to develop "classroom" activities with students and providing close and respectful support, through the systematic presentation of several proposals—also addressing the time pressure felt by teachers—from which teachers ultimately chose, was fundamental to the assessment of the intervention as successful.

The topics addressed by the ISOTIS intervention—social justice/economic inequalities and multiculturalism—and the competencies required to foster students' development on them escape the conventional training curricula of today's professionals. By first engaging with the classroom activities related with these topics, teachers started—even if not totally aware—to walk a learning path of their own. As the process evolved, more personal and deeper layers of the professionals seemed to be within reach for development. Furthermore, the professionals that seemed to be ahead on this path, were the ones more open to and engaged with PD activities. Reaching the stage of being ready for change might be a necessary condition for the ultimate stage of Professional Development: the willingness for change, i.e., the embracement of learning as a permanent attitude.



### 3. COUNTRY REPORT: ITALY

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### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This country report provides an overview on the main topics and problems that were addressed in the Italian case. It addresses the selection of the sites (Part I – Sites' selection and shared intervention agreement), the context of the intervention (Part II – Exploratory Phase), the design and implementation of the professional development activities (Part III – Implementation co-constructive process), and the assessment of the intervention (Part IV – Assessment).

#### 3.1.1. DEFINITION OF THE MAIN TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

In Italy, a peculiar feature of the ISOTS VLE intervention was the strong synergy among WP3, WP4 and WP5. Due to this characteristic and, at the same time, consistently with the specific WP5 theoretical model, the intervention focused on the following main goals and topics:

1. increasing teachers' awareness and knowledge regarding some of the 'hot-topics' and most actual challenges – also central within the ISOTIS framework – the Italian school is currently facing, such as how to:
  - a. give visibility and value to multilingualism;
  - b. promote second language learning;
  - c. foster intercultural competence;
  - d. encourage family-school collaboration;
2. promoting more positive and open attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity within the school intended as a resource for pupils and professionals;
3. supporting teachers in the acquisition of a critical, reflective stance (Schön, 2017);
4. increasing teachers' skills in dealing with multilingual and multicultural classrooms and in engaging in meaningful and effective dialogues with diverse families.

### 3.2. PART I: SITES' SELECTION AND SHARED INTERVENTION AGREEMENT

The first part of this country report provides some brief information on the process of selecting the participating organisation. First, we will explain which organisation was selected for participation and why. Second, we outline the most important actions undertaken for realising the collaboration with the participants.

#### 3.2.1. SITE AND ORGANISATION SELECTION

Due to the synergy among WPs, we decided to realize the VLE intervention within the school context. This choice ensured a common context where the intervention could be implemented in a coordinated way, using the VLE as a shared key mediator and tool in the work with professionals, children and parents. The main criteria that guided the site selection process were:

- classes with a significant presence of **children with a diverse cultural and linguistic background**;
- availability of an adequate **ICT equipment** (e.g., Wi-Fi connection, whiteboards, PCs or tablets...);
- **motivation and availability** to participate to the research.

The choice fell on one *Istituto Comprensivo* (i.e., comprehensive institute, indicating a grouping of primary schools, lower secondary schools and pre-primary schools managed by a single school manager) in Milan (the biggest city in the North of Italy), that comprises a preschool, two primary schools and a lower secondary school, and met all the above mentioned criteria. Another *Istituto Comprensivo* (IC), located in Milan and characterized by a high presence of students of Chinese origin, was also considered. Even though also this IC met all the criteria, this option was dismissed. In fact, at this early stage (2016), we were not sure if the VLE would have been able to support the specificity of the Chinese language.

### 3.2.2. SHARED GENERAL ISOTIS COLLABORATION AGREEMENT

An early connection was made during the application phase of the ISOTIS project with the principal of the selected *Istituto Comprensivo* and his two closest collaborators, A. and F. (the two teachers in charge of coordinating the teaching staff respectively of the preschool and of the primary school where the intervention would have been then implemented), who all stated their high interest in participating in the research. The aims of the project and the selection criteria were discussed, and a copy of the ISOTIS project was shared to let them take their time to read it thoroughly.

An initial letter of intent was signed in January 2016. Meanwhile, the principal contacted the teachers of the 4 classes he considered could be involved in the intervention and negotiated their participation to the study.

Afterwards, a formal meeting with the principal, the professionals of the selected classrooms and the complete IT team of researchers was held on the 1st of February 2018. Aims of the meeting were: a) to introduce the research (aim, goals, methodology, timing); b) to motivate the teachers by describing our work and its impact for the school-setting; c) to present our methodological proposal to the teachers (for both the exploratory and the intervention phases) and negotiate it with them if needed; d) to assess teachers' interest and motivation in taking part in the research. The teachers expressed their interest in the study, and agreed upon the methodology and the time schedule proposed. Only one teacher, D., showed her concern in being involved in the research since the intervention would have overlapped with another project in which her class was involved. Although we accepted her position and reassured her regarding her right to freely choose whether to get involved or not in the study, the principal assumed a stern stance on the issue, minimizing D.'s worries and suggesting that it could be a pity not to seize the opportunity offered by this project. As a result, also D. decided to participate to the intervention.

Considering the high level of investment of time and effort demanded of the teachers (especially due to the WPs overlapping), we agreed with the principal to give professionals a remuneration as symbolic recognition of their participation.

### 3.3. PART II: THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

In this second part we documented what activities were undertaken in the exploratory phase of the intervention. The exploratory phase focused on gathering information with the overall purpose to formulate learning needs. We first describe how and when relevant data was collected. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. Third, the characteristics of the organisation and its professionals are provided. Finally, the overall goal of the intervention is formulated based on the learning needs of the organisation.

#### 3.3.1. METHODS AND PROCEDURES USED FOR THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

For the exploratory phase, we:

- consulted the *Istituto Comprensivo* PTOF (i.e., Three-year Educational Offer Plan), the official, public document that illustrates the school educational offering;
- conducted ethnographic field observation (May 2018). We spent a couple of weeks in each classroom to better observe:
  - teachers' pedagogical approach;
  - relationships between colleagues, between teachers and pupils, and among children;
  - teachers' practices in dealing with multiculturalism and multilingualism;
  - if and how ICTs were used in the teaching-learning process.
- interviewed all the teachers involved in the intervention (May-June 2018). The participants teaching in the same classroom<sup>17</sup> (namely, A. and B., and D. and E.) were interviewed together.

#### 3.3.2. RELEVANT CONTEXT FOR PD INTERVENTION

The following sections provide an overview of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. The macro context, organisational context and professional development approach are discussed.

##### 3.3.2.1. MACRO CONTEXT

The Italian school context is characterized by high linguistic and cultural diversity (over 200 ethnic groups and an unknown number of languages) (MIUR, 2019) that, however, is neglected by a pervasive monolingualism of the curriculum and of the teaching practices, weak political endorsement and no central economic investments (Bettinelli, 2013; Cantù & Cuciniello, 2012;

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<sup>17</sup> In Italy, at preschool level, there are generally two teachers per class. They share at least some classroom hours throughout the school day (co-presence), co-teaching together or dividing the class to work in small groups. At preschool (3-6) and primary level (6-11), the curriculum is defined through the National Guidelines for the curriculum (*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo*, renewed in 2012). The subjects taught during the 5 years of primary school are: Italian, English, history, geography, mathematics, sciences, technology, music, art, physical education, and Catholic religion (optional). There can be only one teacher (*insegnante unico*) teaching all the subjects, or two (sometimes more) main teachers per class covering all the different subjects (generally, one teacher teaches humanistic subjects, and his/her class colleague deals with scientific ones). Moreover, there is a Catholic religion teacher (and in some cases also an English teaching is assigned to a dedicated teacher) who works with children across several classes. This type of organization (two main teachers plus a Catholic religion teacher) is the one enforced at the IC involved in the intervention.

Luatti, 2015; Minardi, 2012; Sordella, 2015) . As a result, mother-tongues are generally invisible in the school context (with the sole exception of few languages considered ‘valuable’, such as English or French), and the richness of children’s whole linguistic repertoire is often not considered and, consequently, valorised. Moreover, also the level of foreign languages (nearly exclusively English) teaching is low (often not even reaching the EU 1+2), especially in the preschool and primary school segments.

Teachers frequently do not have information and specific (pre- and in-service) professional development opportunities on the topics of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and do not know how to deal properly with the linguistic and cultural diversity that increasingly characterized Italian classrooms. They are also challenged by communicating with parents with migrant background and involving them in the school life.

Another common sore point regards Italian teachers’ relationship with ICTs. They generally have scarce familiarity with technology and, even when they utilize ICTs in the teaching-learning process, their use is often limited to a basic level without seizing the full potential that ICTs may offer.

### 3.3.2.2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The organization of the *Istituto Comprensivo*, comprising different school levels managed by a single principal, is quite common in the Italian school system. The principal (*dirigente scolastico*) is the legal representative, and is responsible for the management of the school’s financial and material resources and the results of the school. The principal has independent powers of management, coordination, and use of the resources, and should promote actions aiming at guaranteeing the quality of the PD processes. As mentioned above, the IC selected is quite large (including a preschool, two primary schools and a lower secondary school) and is attended by over one thousand pupils (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1  
*Istituto Comprensivo Organization – PTOF 2016/19.*

	Number of classes	Number of children enrolled
Preschool	5	113
Primary school #1	20	525
Primary school #2	12	263
Lower secondary school	15	327
Total	52	1228

This characteristic constitutes a factor of complexity in the IC management – especially considering that the principal is assigned as vicarious manager also of another comprehensive institute. Thus, the principal is assisted by one teacher (among which the teachers A. and F. that were involved in the intervention) in each of the schools that compose the IC, who help him especially in the task of coordinating the teaching staff.

Moreover, there are teachers with specific tasks within the school overall management, the so called *Funzioni Strumentali* (i.e., Instrumental Function). The *Funzioni Strumentali* are appointed by the principal, with the approval of the teaching body, to those teachers who have applied for it and who, according to their curriculum, possess particular skills and abilities in the areas of intervention identified as crucial to implement the objectives stated in the PTOF (for a detailed description, see Pirola, 2015). In the IC selected, the five areas addressed by a specific *Funzione Strumentale* were:

1. inclusion and special educational needs (i.e., Bisogni Educativi Speciali, BES);
2. multi-media technologies and communication;
3. students' welcoming and intercultural education;
4. educational continuity and student's support in the transition to high school;
5. educational continuity between preschool and primary school.

There are several collective bodies that represent the IC:

- the overall institution (*Consiglio d'Istituto* – institute council, responsible for decisions relating to the balance sheet and the organisation and planning of school activities);
- the overall teaching staff (*Collegio docenti* – teachers' committee, responsible for the educational planning and the elaboration of the PTOF - Three Years educational Plan - and for the periodical review of the overall teaching activity to ensure that it conforms to the planned objectives);
- the teachers of the classes at the same grade (*Consiglio di interclasse* – interclass board);
- the teachers of the single class (*Consiglio di classe* – class board).

These last two boards formulate the educational and teaching plans for the classes, assess classes' teaching and discipline, organise innovation remedial and support initiatives, and carry out the periodic and final assessment of pupils.

Italian school grants parents' participation in school life through their membership in the *Consiglio d'Istituto* and the presence of one parents' representative in the *Consiglio di classe*. Moreover, in this IC parents' initiative is very strong and proactive, since parents (nearly entirely the Italian ones) manage the school Intercultural Committee and a Cultural Association. The Cultural Association superintends the after-school educational offering (e.g., music classes, chess classes, sport courses). The Intercultural Committee organizes initiatives and events to raise awareness of the value multiculturalism and multilingualism and provides services to facilitate the participation of all the families to the school life (e.g., making available a service of linguistic mediation, providing the translation of some official documents in different languages). Among others, one remarkable initiative organized by the Intercultural Committee is the *Open School Saturdays*: off-days in which the school is open to everybody with a rich program of events, such as book readings, workshops, free classes for children and adults, photo exhibition, music shows.



As stated in the PTOF, the *Istituto Comprensivo* considers as crucial aspects of its educational offering and mission:

- the promotion of each child's potential;
- the valorisation of the professionals, recognizing their individuality and competencies;
- an open, constructive collaboration with families;
- the possibility for everyone who enters the school – whether they be pupils, professionals or parents – to feel welcomed as a person and as a carrier of resources and enrichment for others;
- students' development of awareness and skills in the use of the ICTs;
- the continuity and coherence of the educational offering across school levels and grades;
- the valorisation of pupils' linguistic competencies in both L1 and in L2.

### 3.3.2.3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

As stated in the PTOF and in line with a recent national Law (Law 107/2015), in-service training is considered a crucial and essential aspect of teachers' profession. The PD opportunities offered directly within the IC as part of the three-year general professionalisation plan are presented in the PTOF. In addition, the PTOF establishes that teachers can adhere to several further PD opportunities, both formal (e.g., participating in research projects, courses organized by accredited external agencies, conferences) and informal (e.g., art exhibitions, concerts, cultural events).

Other effective PD opportunities – such as coaching activities, supervision, regular meetings with the principal or among teachers aimed at sharing experiences and reflections – are not mentioned in the PTOF and we did not observe them. In fact, even though teachers have many opportunities to discuss with their colleagues since class and interclass boards meetings are scheduled quite frequently, these meetings are generally task-oriented, leaving limited (or no) space for joint reflection.

Conversely, during the exploratory phase (and subsequently during the implementation of the VLE intervention), we noticed that the IC relied heavily on the participation in various projects as a resource for its teachers' PD. On the one hand, this could be stimulating for the teachers; on the other hand, however, it contributed to create disorientation and fatigue due to the frequent, not coordinated overlapping of many different projects involving the same teachers (as emerged from the field observations and from informal conversations with the teachers).

### 3.3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOCATION

In the IC selected, the preschool and the primary school (#1) involved in the ISOTIS VLE intervention are located in the same building (where also an infant-toddler centre was hosted) in a culturally highly diverse neighbourhood of Milan. As mentioned above, a specific feature of the *Istituto Comprensivo* is the super-diversity of its population that encompasses a significant percentage of disadvantaged immigrant families (mainly Arabic and North African families, but not exclusively; see Table 3.2) and very few middle-class Italian families.

Table 3.2

*Istituto Comprensivo Demographic Data - School Year 2018/19.*

	Preschool	Primary School
Number of children enrolled	113	525
Number of non-Italophone children	69	327
Percentage of non-Italophone children	61%	62%
Main national origins	Egypt, Philippines, Peru	Egypt, Philippines, Morocco

### 3.3.3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The VLE intervention involved in total 4 classes and 7 female teachers (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

*Classes and Teachers Involved in the VLE Intervention.*

	Classes	Teachers	Children's age	Number of children
Preschool	1	A & B	4- and 5-year-olds	23
		C & G	7-year-olds (2 <sup>nd</sup> grade)	24
Primary school	3	D & E	8-year-olds (3 <sup>rd</sup> grade)	22
		F & G	10-year-olds (5 <sup>th</sup> grade)	22

**Teacher A.** was the main teacher of a preschool class. She had had managerial responsibilities within the *Istituto Comprensivo* for over 15 years (being the preschool coordinator and, since April 2019, the main assistant principal). She considered multilingualism as a resource, and was among the promoters of the Mother Tongue Week. She had also taken part in several training courses and action-research projects addressing topics such as multilingualism and intercultural competences. Her experience and training made her one of the most prepared teachers of the IC, but also determined a sense of overconfidence in her knowledge and competencies;

**Teacher B.** was a special education teacher with a supporting role in many classrooms, including A.'s one. She had a close, positive relationship with A. based on mutual respect and a shared pedagogical approach;

**Teacher C.** was the main teacher of a 2nd grade class. She taught Italian, history, English and physical education. She studied Biology at undergraduate level and did not have specific training to become a primary school teacher. She had been teaching in primary school since 1997 and in the current school for two years. She believed that cultural and linguistic variety is a great resource but, at the same time, she had the sensation of not knowing how to promote this resource in daily educational practice. She did not have previous experience of intercultural and plurilingual tuition, but she was open to learning new teaching approaches and to acquiring new knowledge and attitudes. She was very enthusiastic about the VLE intervention that she considered as a precious PD opportunity, and always appeared motivated, proactive and eager to learn. This attitude was not limited to the project participation, but characterized every facets of her professional role (teaching activities in the class; relationship with colleagues, pupils and parents...), and made her unpopular with her class colleagues that did not support her initiatives and often made her feel isolated within the school. Due to the tense working climate, at the end

of the School Year 2018-2019 she applied for and obtained a transfer to another school;

**Teacher D.** was a Math and Science teacher in her 50s and worked in a 3rd grade class. She considered multilingualism as a resource for pupils, but also a possible obstacle to their learning. During the VLE intervention implementation, her class was also involved in another big project (focused on promoting Romani children's integration in the class), and D. feared that the participation to these projects could 'steal time' to the educational programme and obstacle its completion;

**Teacher E.** was a young teacher in her early 30s who worked in a 3rd grade class where she taught Italian, History, Geography and English. She had a positive, constructive (and maybe slightly dependent) relationship with her class colleague, D., that she considered as her mentor having supported her at the beginning of her teaching experience. She shared D.'s concerns about the overlapping of the VLE intervention with the other projects involving her class and the subsequent possible detrimental effects on the teaching programme completion;

**Teacher F.** was the main teacher of a 5th grade class. She taught Italian, history, and geography. She also worked as vice-principal of the primary school for the last 3 years. For this reason, she had 6 hours per week of her working time accounted for managerial tasks. Her role as vice-principal seemed to absorb her, leaving little time and energy for educational and teaching planning, for attending interclass and class board meetings, and for taking care of her students. She did not give great value to multilingualism, giving little consideration especially to certain languages (such as Arabic which she considered useless), and asking her pupils not to speak their native languages at school. She resigned in April 2019 due to contrasts and tensions with the principal;

**Teacher G.** taught the Religion in two of the classes involved (2h per week in each class). She was appointed by the principal as *Funzione Strumentale* responsible for welcoming newly arrived pupils, especially those with culturally diverse background. She was also responsible for some extracurricular initiatives, such as the 'homework support service' on Saturdays. Her teaching approach valued the co-construction of knowledge through dialogues and exchanges, and she considered crucial to build on children's direct experience. In fact, in teaching history of religions she started from children's and families' experiences, and promoted peers' mutual exchange and listening to each other's opinions.

The principal, despite expressing a high interest in his IC participating in the research project, did get involved in the intervention only marginally. Absorbed in the managerial task of the two ICs he represented, he was little present in the school we worked in, delegating many responsibilities initially to F. and then to A.

### **Pedagogical approach**

The research team observed that primary school teachers' pedagogical approach was quite 'traditional', relying mainly on frontal lectures and on a *monologic* interactional style with students. This was especially evident in the 'main subjects' teaching (Italian, History, Geography, Mathematics, Sciences); while for the 'secondary subjects' (Art, Music, Religion) active approaches, class conversations and hands-on opportunities were more frequently observed. Only one teacher, C., stood out for her consistent use of active methodologies, peer-tutoring and cooperative-learning techniques. Preschool teachers were less directive and more prone to enhance children's active participation.

### **Relationships with children and families**

Overall, there were positive, warm relationships between teachers and their pupils and among peers. The classes were characterized by a general serene atmosphere and by collaboration and mutual support among children. No episodes of discrimination or dynamics of exclusion were observed. Preschool teachers described parent-school collaboration as generally positive and fruitful, declaring that many families were highly engaged in the activities proposed by the teachers. Instead, the relationship with parents was reported by most of the primary school teachers as more challenging. Cultural diversity was often assumed as the main (or only) reason behind communication difficulties and the scarce involvement and investment in school activities showed by some families. Some teachers (for instance, D., E., F.) complained about that or even overtly criticized parents in front of their students.

### **Attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism**

According to its PTOF, the *Istituto Comprensivo* considered its educational offering, investing in the promotion of non-Italian speaking children's second language learning (e.g. by organizing specific classes for newcomers who do not speak Italian or Italian courses for foreign parents). However, despite stating in the official documents (PTOF) its intention to value pupils' linguistic competencies in *both* L1 and in L2, the team observed the presence of monolingual teaching practices and curricula, and a general scarce attention given to the mother tongues.

In the primary school, many teachers, although having a positive attitude towards children with immigrant background, took multiculturalism and multilingualism for granted, considering them merely one of the particular features of the school they work in, not a valuable resource that should be enhanced. Several teachers still embraced the idea that native languages, once acquired, do not need to be reinforced and nourished, or, at least, that first language maintenance is not the school's responsibility. Therefore, even though they let bilingual children act as linguistic mediators to help newcomers during their first days at school (e.g., translating teachers' instructions or assignments, helping new children settle), this practice was intended as an initial support for the newcomers, and not as a strategy to promote mother tongues. A minority of teachers (such as F.) allowed this practice only during the first stages of the newcomers' arrival, and, still because of the misbelief (expressed in the interview and observed *in vivo* by the researchers) that speaking L1 slows down L2 acquisition, forbade children to talk in L1 once Italian could be used as the language of communication at least at a minimum level.

At the preschool, teachers generally had a more open attitude towards multilingualism and multiculturalism. They conveyed the idea that speaking another language is a form of cultural richness, and suggested that parents continue to speak their L1 at home. Every year at the end of February, they also organized the Mother Tongue Week. On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, the preschool teachers involved immigrant children's families in sharing traditional songs, dances, stories, rhymes, games from their countries of origin, presenting them to the classes in their L1. Although this occasion represented a precious opportunity to cherish diverse linguistic repertoires and to value cultural diversity, it remained an isolated event that did not affect the daily life and the established monolingualism that pervaded the curriculum also at this educational level. In fact, despite the great experience and training regarding these topics that B. and especially A. professed to have, we did not observe them put this knowledge into

practice in their daily activities with children.

### Attitudes towards ICTs

Despite the IC offered an adequate ICT equipment (e.g., the whole building was covered by Wi-Fi internet access, and each primary school class was equipped with a laptop and a whiteboard), most of the primary school teachers had scarce familiarity with technology and their use of the whiteboards was limited to a very basic level (e.g., showing children pages of the textbook digital version; showing their classes images retrieved on the web). Some teachers expressed their need to receive more training in using ICTs in the teaching-learning process. Preschool teachers A. and B. were more familiar with and competent in their use of ICTs. However, they generally did not avail this technology in their activities with children.

### 3.3.4. IMPLEMENTATION PD PROCESS AND SHARED AGREEMENT

The data collected in the exploratory phase (field observations, interviews with the teachers, analysis of the PTOF) offered us an overall picture of some of the most relevant PD needs (even the implicit ones) and wishes of the professionals involved in the intervention. In a kick-off meeting held on the 10th of September 2018 with all the research participants, we presented and negotiated with them a proposal for the cross-WPs VLE intervention. The proposal, with specific regard to the WP5 framework and objectives, hinged around several topics and actions (see Table 3.4). All these element are summarized and represented in Figure 3.1, following the conceptual framework introduced in Report 5.2 (Slot, Romijn, & Wysłowska, 2017).

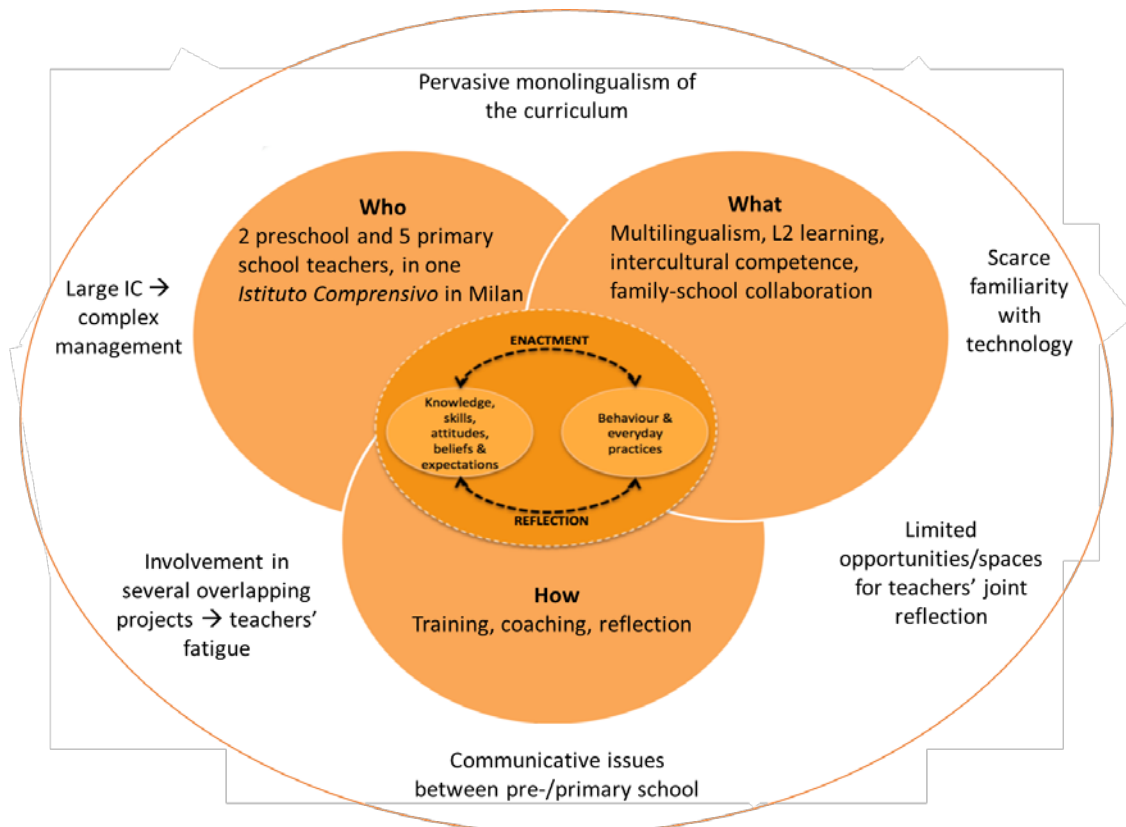


Figure 3.1. Professional development context of the Italian PD intervention.

Table 3.4

Overview of the WP5 VLE Intervention Proposal.

Key topic	Teachers	PD strategy	Delivery modes	Objectives	Timing
<b>Knowledge on multilingualism and multiculturalism</b>	All the teachers	Training	7 face-to-face plenary meetings with the teachers	Increasing teachers' <b>awareness, knowledge and skills</b> and promoting more positive <b>attitudes</b> regarding the following key topics: language awareness, bilingualism, intercultural competence, family-school collaboration	October 2018 - March 2019
<b>ICTs</b>	All the teachers	Training	5 face-to-face plenary meetings with the teachers + assignments on the VLE	Increasing teachers' <b>knowledge and skills</b> on how to use ICTs and the VLE in their activities and communication with pupils and parents	October 2018 - March 2019
<b>Reflection skills</b>	All the teachers	Reflection	6 face-to-face reflective meetings per each class, also exploiting the reflective opportunities offered by the VLE	Supporting teachers in the acquisition of a <b>critical, reflective stance</b>	October 2018 - May 2019
<b>Family-school collaboration</b>	All the teachers	Training, coaching, reflection	Face-to-face meetings aimed at the organization of a video-cued focus group with parents at the end of the school year	Supporting teachers' <b>skills</b> in dialoguing with parents and promoting more positive <b>attitudes</b> towards diverse families	May-June 2019
<b>International exchange<sup>1</sup></b>	A., B., C	Reflection	Face-to-face reflective meetings with the teachers of each class separately	Supporting teachers in the acquisition of a <b>critical, reflective stance</b> through the exchange of experiences, practices and reflections with teachers of other countries	June 2019

<sup>1</sup> This activity was not planned at the beginning of the VLE intervention, but was presented as a possible PD opportunity *en route*.

### 3.4. PART III: IMPLEMENTATION CO-CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

In this third part we documented what activities were undertaken in the implementation and co-construction phase of the intervention. We first describe the overall lay-out of this phase and discuss relevant procedures. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the professional development activities.

#### 3.4.1. PROCEDURES

Since the agreed intervention implied a set of structured meetings and activities, during the kick-off meeting held in September 2018 we drew up a first draft agenda for the plenary meetings planned for the whole school year with the teachers (see Table 3.4 in the previous part). Some changes to the agenda were subsequently introduced to better meet the needs and concomitant commitments of the group of teachers.

The planning of the meetings dedicated to co-design and reflection and the meetings aimed at organizing a video-cued focus group with parents was agreed on *in itinere* with the teachers of each of the 4 classes involved. Each class was also assigned a researcher contact, who, in the role of 'coach', was able to follow more closely and accompany the teachers of that specific class during all phases of the intervention cross-WPs. During the implementation of the intervention, the possibility of participating in an exchange with professionals from other countries involved in the project emerged. This opportunity was presented to all the teachers involved, offering them the possibility to evaluate whether or not to participate based on their own interest and availability.

Considering the central role that the VLE was to play in the Italian intervention (also in virtue of the strong synergy between WPs that characterized it), the VLE was already introduced during the kick-off meeting and later presented more in-depth during the dedicated training meetings (see Section 3.4.2.2). From the first VLE training meeting, teachers were provided with personal user accounts to explore the tool both during the training and autonomously. Furthermore, we tried not to limit the use of VLE to dedicated training meetings only, but to make it as salient as possible also in the other PD activities, to encourage the teachers to familiarize themselves and 'touch' its functionalities and potential.

#### 3.4.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The overall intervention hinged around 5 main key-topics and as many activities, that are described in the following sections. The intervention combined different PD strategies, such as training, coaching, and reflection and these strategies are elaborated on in the next sections. Moreover, the contribution of the IT team to WP5 is embedded in the VLE structure itself, precisely designed to support professional development. In fact, each VLE section is organized in different parts (namely, *did you know, observe and reflect, what can you do*) providing opportunities to foster professionals' critical thinking and activity-designing skills (especially in the *observe and reflect* section) (see Section A ISOTIS VLE report by Pastori et al., 2019).



### 3.4.2.1. KEY TOPIC 1: KNOWLEDGE ON MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

#### Main goals

- Increasing teachers' **awareness, knowledge** and **skills** regarding the following key topics: language awareness, bi-/multi-lingualism, intercultural competence, family-school collaboration
- Promoting more positive **attitudes** towards culturally and linguistically diverse pupils and families.

#### Timing

October 2018 – March 2019

#### Professional development activity description and implementation

To increase teachers' knowledge and awareness on some key topics, seven face-to-face plenary meetings were organized. The meetings relied mainly on training as a strategy for PD, and also provided several occasions to enhance teacher's reflection. They addressed several themes (language awareness, bi-/multilingualism, intercultural competence and family-school collaboration; see Table 3.5 for an overview of the topics covered) and were held by experts in these respective fields.

Table 3.5

*Overview of the Topics Covered in the Plenary Meetings.*

Key Topic	Meetings	Contents addressed
<b>Language awareness</b>	2	Educational doubts and dilemmas regarding multilingualism; multilingualism as a resource; language policy in multilingual educational contexts; main Italian and European documents about multilingual and intercultural education; pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures; how to foster language awareness at school
<b>Bi-/multi lingualism</b>	2	Language and culture; language and identity; L1-L2 relationship; stages of L2 acquisition; factors that influence L2 development; how school can foster L2 learning; why and how school should support L1 maintenance
<b>Intercultural competence</b>	2	What is intercultural competence; ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism and cultural decentering; stereotype and prejudice; stages of intercultural sensitivity; culturally inclusive curriculum, diversity and human rights; how school can promote intercultural competence
<b>Family-school collaboration</b>	1	Teachers and parents in multilingual educational contexts; raising children between two cultures: challenges and vulnerabilities; family language policy; family-school communication: obstacles and opportunities; how to foster family-school partnership

Each 2-hour meeting was held in the afternoon, at the end of the regular teaching day on the premises of the school in a classroom equipped with an interactive whiteboard or in the computer

lab to allow access to the VLE. In addition to presenting the most recent evidence on the issues in question and their implications on teaching, during the meetings teachers were invited to share their experiences and to reflect on concrete cases.

The meetings also included a parallel exploration of the VLE. The VLE, in fact, offered additional resources (theoretical insights, cases to reflect on, proposals for activities to be carried out in class) for each of the key-topics addressed in the training. These resources were partly viewed together during the training meetings. For instance, during one of the meetings dedicated to multilingualism, the trainer presented the case “CZECH OR RUSSIAN? – I NEEDED HIM TO READ CZECH” (see [VLE](#)) and invited teachers to reflect on this episode focusing both on the case and on their own experience (following the guiding questions presented on the VLE). Most of the teachers actively participated in the following discussion, sharing their opinions and giving examples from their teaching practice.

Due to time constraints, it was not possible to present most of the resources on the platform. However, teachers were invited to explore them after the meetings to continue and deepen their training in a flexible and targeted way according to their interests and needs.

### **Results and assessment**

On the whole, almost all the teachers involved took part in the plenary meetings in a constant way, actively participating and asking questions. F. showed little interest in training, which she attended in an inconsistent and occasional way. C. was the most involved and enthusiastic participant, taking notes at each meeting, raising doubts and questions to speakers or colleagues, contributing to discussions with reflections and examples taken from everyday educational practice. She also expressed the desire to put what she learned during the theoretical training into practice and within the general intervention (in synergy with WP3 and WP4) she elaborated and proposed some activities for linguistic enhancement for children and parents.

During the meetings, the difficulty in communication and relationships between the pre- and primary school teachers became evident, which did not encourage exchanges between colleagues from these two school levels. The relationship between the two ‘subgroups’ appeared rather formal and cold. Preschool and primary school teachers rarely acknowledged each other or built on the comments and reflections advanced by the other ‘sub-group’. This ‘communicative fracture’ did not seem, however, limited to training, but emerged as a more pervasive and distinctive trait of the dynamics present within the IC. For example, during one of the meetings, A. shared how Mother Language Week was organized. Some primary school teachers were not aware of this event and heard about it for the first time on that occasion.

From the final interviews with the teachers, different and sometimes conflicting opinions emerged regarding the effectiveness of the plenary meetings. Some teachers (D., E., G.) highlighted the difficulty of being present at training meetings, having to reconcile them with other didactic commitments or with meetings planned for participation in other projects. D. and E. believed that the meetings focused too much on theory, and they would have preferred a greater focus on practical repercussions. This contributed to making some of the topics covered not relevant for their professional development because they were already familiar, as D. stated: “*not due to a*

*lack of humility, but for those who teach, like it or not, these issues must necessarily be addressed, so all the talk about bilingualism, and ... could be a little reduced, and you could give more space to the practical part*". A similar observation was also made by A. and B. with particular reference to the meetings on multilingualism and multiculturalism. In both cases, however, these statements clash with what was observed during the exploratory phase, namely the absence of concrete actions in daily teaching regarding this knowledge (the reason that initially led to the inclusion of these issues in the training meetings). A. and B. also pointed out that a course carried out with smaller groups (the training meetings were targeted at the whole group of seven teachers taking part to the intervention) and *"according to the level of the school"* would probably have been *"less dispersive"* and more useful, because it would have been closely linked to the different ages and characteristics of the children.

G., on the other hand, while agreeing that perhaps the timing and methods of training could have been better calibrated, judged the meetings to be relevant, since they increased her awareness of the issue of multilingualism and led her to reflect on and change her practices, thinking of mother tongues spoken in the class as a resource for the school: *"The part dedicated to promoting linguistic awareness was also very important, full of food for thought and work input"*. The teacher was able to recognize that enhancing the mother tongue can involve more students and parents by recognizing their skills, their background and their wealth, not only from a cultural point of view but also from a linguistic one. C. also considered the training very useful, hoping for the spread of this type of training on a large scale, especially in schools with a high density of cultures and languages. According to C., it is necessary for all teachers to become more aware of the importance of valuing mother tongues and more capable of designing an intercultural curriculum: *"Surely a weakness is due to a lack of knowledge of new studies on bilingualism in schools. Too many prejudices still hinder correct pedagogical practice indicated by the new studies. In class, although I shared with the team [of colleagues who work with her in class and who did not take part in the intervention] the concepts of multilingualism that I learned in these two years of the project, I found many obstacles in passing on the message that welcoming dialogue [between children] in their mother tongue during free time is a good practice that has multiple psychological, pedagogical and didactic effects"*. C. judged the training to be effective also in terms of professional development. In fact, as reported in the initial self-assessment questionnaire and in the interview, before the intervention C. felt that she did not have enough knowledge or tools to deal with the high linguistic and cultural diversity of the class. This feeling significantly improved after the intervention. As she stated in the final interview, thanks to the training meetings, she was able to plan the multilingual valorisation activities implemented in class (WP4), feeling more confident about her competences. Moreover, the training activity allowed C. to have scientific references on which to base her professionalism and renewed her interest and motivation towards training in general: *"Certainly the activity has increased my pedagogical skills in the multicultural field. From the project I learned a lot about studies on bilingualism and this allowed me to operate with pedagogical correctness with respect to the needs of foreign children. Personally, I had already used the foreign children present in Italy for many years as mediators with the newly arrived children and having confirmation (...) of having implemented a good practice has comforted me with respect to the different opinions that circulate at school (...). I am very happy to have participated in this activity that has allowed me to give new life to my knowledge in a scientific way"*.

### 3.4.2.2. KEY TOPIC 2: ICTS

#### Main goals

- Increasing teachers' **knowledge** and **skills** on how to use ICTs and the VLE to enhance their teaching practices and their communication with pupils and parents

#### Timing

October 2018 – March 2019

#### Professional development activity description and implementation

To help teachers understand the functionalities and potential offered by VLE, 5 face-to-face plenary training meetings were organised (see Table 3.6). The meetings, each lasting 2 hours, were held in the afternoon, after the end of the regular teaching activity, and were held in the IC's computer lab so as to allow teachers to have a PC to access the VLE. Many teachers preferred to bring their own laptops or tablets to the meetings, so that they could follow more easily. During the meetings the overall structure of the VLE was presented with the three main sections (MY SPACE, CONTENTS, and TOOLS) and the main functions offered (for example, Beeba's functions of machine translation, speech synthesizer and multilingual keyboard; the ability to import activities in your personal space, edit and share them with the class; the use of forums and noticeboards to communicate with children and families). The trainers did not conduct the meetings with a frontal methodology, but preferred to engage the teachers directly, encouraging them to put the notions learned into practice and use some of the functions of the VLE not only during the training meetings but also in their daily teaching activity.

Table 3.6

*Overview of the Topics Covered in the VLE Plenary Meetings*

Meeting	Contents addressed
#1	Getting to know the VLE: its structure and main session
#2	Beeba's functions
#3	How to use the VLE to communicate with colleagues, children and families
#4	VLE activities: how to import, edit and share activities with the class
#5	Resources offered by the VLE for documentation and reflection purposes

#### Results and assessment

Overall, the training meetings dedicated to VLE were positively received by the teachers who actively participated and considered them useful and interesting, as is clear from the words of D. during the final interview: *"Those were, in my opinion, the most productive, most interesting lessons, because they brought you directly into play. You stood there and clicked and got it wrong, from there you understood how to go on. So there it was more pleasant, that's it"*. Several teachers (C., D., E.) also stated that they would have liked more hours to be devoted to training on the use of VLE *"to learn how to make the best use of all the functions and be able to bring back, in this way, benefits in class"*. Only F. showed little interest, participating in a few meetings and rarely entering the platform.

The trainer's invitation to try to use some of the functionalities made available by the VLE in the daily teaching activity was welcomed by most teachers. A. and B., although they declared that

they were not in favour of using ICTs in preschools and that they had never used them in activities with children, appreciated the possibility of using the platform to manage communication with families and to document projects carried out at school with the children. To this end, they used the notice board to send notices and communications to parents and created thematic notice boards where they collected the documentation (photos, drawings, videos, transcripts of observations and conversations carried out in class) from the activities carried out with the children within the ISOTIS project (WP2 Children Study and WP4). Through the thematic bulletin boards, the teachers tried to encourage parents to actively contribute to the proposals, curiosities and solicitations that emerged from the children regarding the theme of multilingualism during the activities carried out in class (WP2 Children Study and WP4), obtaining, however, only the participation of some parents. They also kept the Digital Reflective Diary available on the VLE; D. and E. also kept the Reflective Diary and used the notice board to send notices to parents and report the tasks assigned to the children. They also created a notice board where they collected the documentation from the activities carried out in class (WP4) to show to the parents;

C. stressed that thanks to the training, she developed new skills and knowledge on ICTs that allowed her to feel more competent and to use different functionalities on the platform (not only on the computer, but also on her smartphone), in particular to:

communicate with researchers, writing private messages in order to have explanations and information;

- communicate with parents using a dedicated bulletin board, requesting collaboration, participation and transmitting information on the activities carried out at school by the students;
- communicate with children using a dedicated bulletin board, encouraging the use of the platform from home for both completing tasks and communicating between peers;
- share information, videos, texts or input considered interesting from a didactic/educational point of view with the class;
- keep track of the activities carried out and personal reflections through regular entries in the Reflective Diary, integrating the written texts with audio, video and photo collages;
- translate some content using 'Beeba'.

The training activity produced a change in C's teaching practices. In fact, after participating in the training, C. brought the children into the computer classroom for the first time ever. Although the approach to the computer room was initially difficult for C. because the children were particularly excited and she struggled to keep their attention, she continued to use the computer room in the following months in order to put into practice what she had learned during the training activity. This change in practice in turn generated more competence in the use of VLE, a greater awareness of the potential of the use of new technologies in the classroom and consequently a general more positive attitude towards the ICT in educational use in the teacher: "*Although I used the technology in the past and the whiteboard in this class, I would not have thought that it was possible to introduce the use of the computer at such an early age [7-8 years], nor would I have ever thought that this approach to the computer could produce motivation and enthusiasm towards writing and reading as happened (...). I never thought of having these second graders, with all the difficulties in this class, write using the computer. It was a revelation that amazed and excited me and then I saw that it was received by the children, too, in an excellent way. So much*

so that they wanted to write at home".

The teachers of the fifth grade used the VLE very little (F. took a marginal part in all the activities of the cross-WPs intervention even before resigning; G., on the other hand, stated that she did not feel very competent in the use of ICTs and that she had a certain fear of using them). Even though G. recognized "*the use of digital technologies in a positive and intelligent way*" as a strong point of the intervention, the research team observed that she did not improve her attitudes and competences in the use of ICTs. The students in the class, however, used the VLE with the researchers (WP2 Children Study and WP4) and proposed to create a special notice board for direct dialogue with the school principal. When the principal was asked to interact with the children from that class through the platform, he said that he would gladly accept the invitation, since he was "*curious to explore the platform and to answer all the questions posed by the students*". Although he never participated in the training activities, the principal did not encounter any difficulties in using the VLE. He viewed all the video messages and letters from the students and responded to each of the proposals put forward by them, attaching a message for the whole class group. This use was appreciated by the principal (who, working on several schools, does not spend so much time in the IC and had few opportunities for contact with the students) because it gave him the opportunity to make direct contact with some of the students at his school and to get feedback on the well-being and sense of inclusion from the point of view of the children themselves.

### 3.4.2.3. KEY TOPIC 3: REFLECTION SKILLS

#### Main goals

- Supporting teachers in the acquisition of a **critical, reflective stance**

#### Timing

October 2018 – May 2019

#### Professional development activity description

During the year, the teachers were involved in further meetings dedicated to:

- given the cross-WPs nature of the intervention, accompany them in the co-design of the activities to be carried out in class with the children (WP4) and parents (WP3);
- support teachers throughout the project in reflecting on what was done in a critical and generative way.

Those meetings were not plenary, but were held in parallel class by class (the research contacts assigned to each class met the professionals they supported separately). To better 'tailor' the activity to the specific interests and commitment levels of the professionals involved, the activity took different forms and modalities in each of the classes involved and professionals were engaged in reflection through the use of different tools/proposals, such as keeping a reflective diary, discussing observational cases, reflecting on the connection between theoretical training and educational practice, discussing the video-feedback provided by the researchers. Table 3.7 provides an overview of which proposals/tools were implemented in each class.



Table 3.7

*Activity Modalities and Teachers Involved.*

Modality	PD strategy	Teachers involved			
		Pre-school	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	5 <sup>th</sup> grade
<b>Reflective Diary</b>	Reflection	A., B.	C.	D., E.	-
<b>Video-feedback</b>	Reflection	A., B.	-	-	-
<b>Observational cases</b>	Reflection	-	C.	D., E.	-
<b>Reflection on the connection between theoretical training and educational practice</b>	Reflection, coaching	A., B.	C.	D., E.	G.

### Implementation, results and assessment

**Reflective Diary:** it was proposed to teachers to keep track of the activities they were performing in the overall intervention in a personal reflective diary to be compiled on the VLE. Almost all of the teachers accepted this proposal by filling in the diary which was also the subject of discussion with the researchers. The regular compilation of a diary that collected the documentation from the activities carried out and their own reflections was considered by some teachers demanding and even tiring. However, they all agreed that this practice was useful in terms of professional growth ("*a great effort that helps, though*"), to the point that the use of the diary sometimes extended to other activities not related to the ISOTIS project. Recounting in a written text what was done and how it was carried out allowed teachers not only to leave a trace of the experience but also to reflect on the experience itself. In this regard, for example, A. said: "*[Writing in the diary] forces us to reflect, to take time to reflect and also to make what we do systematic and to leave a trace. For example, even the fact that we changed the path a little, we probably wouldn't have noticed it if we hadn't left a trace. Because in the end we do a lot of post-programming, in the sense that we work and then in the end we document what we really did. Instead, leaving a trace of the fact that we have changed our minds, of the fact that we modified it, is also interesting*". According to C., the use of the diary also helped increase her ability to observe in the classroom, as well as to collect documentation that could then be shared with colleagues, students and families.

**Video-feedback:** teachers were asked to document some of the activities carried out in the classroom (WP2 Children Study and WP4) using video. The videos were made by the researchers and shared with the teachers. The videos produced therefore represented a material from which to start a joint reflection with the researchers. A. and B. evaluated the use of video recording positively, not only as a documentation tool, but also to encourage reflection and trigger processes of revising their educational practices ("*When you look at the video, you can grasp nuances that escape you while you act*"). This tool is not usually used in a systematic way ("*without the platform, we would not have produced these videos*"; "*there is often no opportunity to film..., because we are usually alone and therefore we are involved ... Filming the discussion and recording is something that we do not actually do. Maybe we take notes, which we inevitably select and finalize to what we have to do*") and allowed them, as stated in the final interview, to:

- keep memory of the experience ("*to have more elements, because the synthesis that we are forced to make, when we note, is always reductive ... we forget and lose pieces*");
- carefully observe the children;



- review one's own behaviour and interventions and critically question oneself ("*While I ask for something, I neglect one aspect of what the child told me, because maybe I have in mind to ask for something else and so he is telling me something and I ignore it, in the good sense, that is, I am already beyond. And then if I listen to it again I say 'Ah, but I could have asked...' (...) And then you lose opportunities, but then you see and you can also recover later and deepen*").

**Observational cases:** the original idea was to propose teachers to discuss some of the observational cases present on the VLE with the researchers. However, the proposal was received with little enthusiasm by some teachers (A., B., F., G.), while in the other classes professionals (C., D., E.) appeared more interested in reflecting on 'real, concrete' observational cases, rather than on the VLE cases. Due to the co-constructed nature of the intervention, we decided to follow this lead and engage C., D. and E. in discussing cases taken from the observations made in their respective classes. These moments allowed closer analysis of the way in which the children participated in the class and reacted to the activities proposed by the teachers (within the project - WP4, but not only). As highlighted in the final interview and in the diary, this allowed the participants to critically reflect on their roles and attitudes, recognizing some possible limits of their educational practices, and to plan future actions to encourage the involvement and enhancement of each child in the classroom. These, for example, are some of D.'s reflections: "*I don't think I'm a bad teacher who never takes into account their origin [of the children], on the contrary I think do, but more consideration on the fact that maybe I could value more, add more elements that recall their origins... it's certainly something I hope I can do... and not get caught up in: 'I have to do that...' [the curricular activities planned] I hope to be able to give more space to the children, and to grasp more messages that perhaps, at times, they send and that we, preoccupied only by what needs to be done, miss them...*".

**Reflection on the connection between theoretical training and educational practice:** during the co-design and reflection meetings, the researchers tried to guide teachers to grasp the connections between the theoretical knowledge presented in the training meetings (see PD activities 2.1 and 2.2) and the possible spin-offs and applications at a practical level. The teachers, in particular, were assisted in the planning of activities to be proposed to the children, starting from a reworking of the content learned during the training, so as to adapt them to their educational methods, curriculums and the characteristics of their classes. This activity was generally appreciated and considered useful by the teachers. G., for example, considered it stimulating to reflect with researchers to find different and innovative ways of working on intercultural competence in the classroom and considered co-designing moments a valuable opportunity that "*opens the mind*", helping to develop a new look at the classroom and at one's own didactic and pedagogical methods (an example is the recognition of the importance of making room for the enhancement of multilingualism at school).

#### 3.4.2.4. KEY TOPIC 4: FAMILY-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

##### Main goals

- Helping teachers to **reflect** on and identify new modalities of dialogue and discussion with parents;
- Supporting teachers in acquiring new **skills** in dialoguing with parents;
- Promoting more positive **attitudes** towards diverse families.

##### Timing

May 2019 – June 2019

##### Professional development activity description

Preschool teachers described parent-school collaboration as generally positive and fruitful, declaring that many families were highly engaged in the activities proposed by the teachers. Instead, the relationship with parents was reported by most of the primary school teachers as more challenging. Cultural diversity was often assumed as the main (or only) reason behind communication difficulties and the scarce involvement and investment in school activities showed by some families. Some teachers (for instance, D., E., F.) complained about that or even overtly criticized parents in front of their students.

Family-school communication emerged as one of the IC sore points during the exploratory phase and a valuable PD topic to invest in. Especially at primary level, family-school relationship was considered challenging by teachers – particularly when linguistic/cultural diversity was involved. Teachers mainly complained about the scarce involvement and investment in school activities showed by some families with immigrant background and their limited participation to family-school meetings. Therefore, we proposed an activity to the teachers that could contribute to empowering dialogue with parents. The activity consisted of selecting and sharing some moments of their children's "life in the classroom" (e.g., video-clips drawn from video-observations made by teachers, materials produced by children...) with parents as a starting point for discussions with families about relevant educational themes.

As in our previous research and professional development courses, the use of these untraditional stimuli can contribute to creating a less structured setting for teacher-parent meetings. Teacher-parent meetings often see teachers in the role of experts and parents in the role of listeners. Even when teachers are attentive to ensure a more dialogic exchange, the conversation does not generally go beyond talking about curricular or behavioural topics. In depth, sustained discussion on children's education-upbringing issues are rarely shared between teachers and parents. This change can facilitate the constructive exchange of viewpoints and allow for a dialogical setting. Moreover, it can contribute to motivating even those parents who are generally more reluctant to be actively engaged in the discussion.

This activity was initially proposed to teachers during the kick-off plenary meeting held in September 2018, and was specifically explained and discussed afterwards during dedicated, individual co-design meetings with the teachers of each class.

## **Implementation, results and assessment**

All the teachers decided to share some materials taken from the documentation (photos, videos) of the activities carried out in the classroom and the products made by the children within the project (WP2 Children Study and WP4) with their parents. However, the organization of the meetings and the involvement of teachers differed in the 4 classes.

**Preschool class:** A. and B. were very enthusiastic about the meeting, considering it an opportunity to give parents feedback on the experience and ask for their opinions and assessments of the work done. However, it was not possible to plan the meeting with the teachers because of the absence of A. for health reasons. B., also because of her role as special education teacher, did not feel able to manage the organization and conduct the meeting, so it was entirely handled by the team of researchers. At the beginning of the meeting, attended by a good number of families, a video was shown featuring clips of a circle time led by teachers with the children on inclusion at school and the subsequent implementation of some of the ideas suggested by the children (WP2 Children Study). After watching the video, a focus group was set up where the parents actively participated, underlining their satisfaction with what was proposed to the children at school (one mother defined the project as "a turning point", another "great opportunity"); judging that it was very enriching - not only for the children, but also for the families themselves - for the children to get closer to the themes of multilingualism and multiculturalism; they shared some reflections on the choice of maintaining the mother tongue at home. B. was very satisfied with the meeting, considering that it contributed to enhancing the image of the school and the work usually done by teachers in relation to the issues of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the eyes of parents ("It has made what we have been saying for a long time concrete and visible");

**2nd grade class:** this activity was planned during the co-planning meetings with C. and G. (G.'s presence, however, was discontinuous due to other concomitant school commitments). C. was excited to have a discussion with parents on issues of interest to the research and eager to ask them some questions. The questions were negotiated with the researchers in order to avoid being overly indicative or evaluative. To invite parents to the school-family meeting, C. prepared a digital leaflet that was published on the VLE on the bulletin board of the 'class group'. The meeting was held on the occasion of the final class party, thus ensuring the participation of at least one parent for each child. The meeting started with the children, supported by C., showing the work done within the ISOTIS project (WP4) and they shared their impressions of the whole experience (both in Italian and in their mother tongues). A PowerPoint presentation with photos and videos illustrated what the children were saying. Afterwards, there was discussion and dialogue led by C. (G. was only present at part of the meeting because of other school commitments), during which almost all parents had the opportunity to speak. The possibility of organizing and leading the meeting in person further increased C.'s involvement and motivation. During the final interview and from the diary, C.'s evaluation was very positive, because:

- it fostered dialogue and discussion between teachers and parents, increasing knowledge and awareness about multilingual practices and the use of ICT in the family;
- it stimulated many reflections on the involvement and importance of parent inclusion in the school context and on the importance of recognizing the cultural identity of families from migrant backgrounds;
- the presentation of children's work acted as a trigger for discussion and proved to be

effective by helping to make parents feel directly involved.

**3rd grade class:** D. and E. decided to share some of the documentation produced within the project (WP4) with the parents. This activity was planned during the co-design meetings and the teachers invited the parents to the meeting by publishing a notice on the VLE (as well as sending a written note in each child's personal diary). However, the teachers preferred to leave the organization of the meeting to the researchers and the children, stating that they were too overburdened (with other overlapping projects) to handle it themselves. The meeting began with the children, supported by the researchers and teachers, showing the parents some videos and final products made during the year, followed by a moment of feedback and discussion also directly involving the children. Subsequently, a focus group with the participation of parents and teachers was led by the researchers. About half of the parents in the class took part in the meeting and almost all of them contributed very actively to the discussion (only a few mothers with a migrant backgrounds expressed themselves to a lesser extent because of the greater difficulties with Italian, even though they contributed with significant and incisive interventions). For the parents it their first opportunity to with the teachers some reflections matured during the year regarding maintaining their mother tongues and to request, clearly and explicitly, the integration of L1 in the curriculum. During the final interview, D. and E., while sharing these reflections proposed by the researchers, nevertheless minimized the effectiveness of the activity judging that, however interesting, not all parents participated or made significant contributions to the discussion, and especially none of the 4 parents of the Italian children in the class were present at the meeting, perhaps they felt less directly involved, given the focus on the theme of multilingualism;

**5th grade class:** although a meeting with the families took place, it was entirely designed by the researchers and the children (as far as the choice and the presentation of the content) without any contribution from the class teachers (F. no longer worked at the school; G. instead was not interested). Some families participated in the meeting, but their participation was not particularly active. F. commented on this fact considering it a (further) manifestation of the lack of interest on the part of the parents in the activities carried out at school that has always characterized this class ("A class where... there has never been a great deal of involvement, a great deal of stimulation. That's how they are"). However, the teacher did not seem to realize the fact that the difficulties in communication and the relationship with the families, confirmed by this meeting, could also depend on the attitude of the teachers themselves, who, despite the great enthusiasm shown by their students to organize the meeting, did not get involved.

### 3.4.2.5. KEY TOPIC 5: INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

#### Main goals

- Supporting teachers in the acquisition of a **critical, reflective stance** through the exchange of experiences, practices and reflections with professionals of other countries.

#### Timing

June 2019

#### Professional development activity description and implementation

Due to the lack of occasions (both formal and informal) for joint reflection within the IC, we offered teachers the opportunity to connect with professionals from other countries. The aims of this international exchange were to share experiences, ideas and reflections and to foster mutual feedback on their own educational practices. Specifically, we considered presenting the activities and products developed by the Portuguese professionals since they addressed similar topics to those which the Italian teachers were working on (namely, multiculturalism and multilingualism in the school setting and children's active participation).

Three of the teachers involved in the overall intervention, A., B., and C., were interested in participating in the exchange. Due to serious health problems of A. that occurred towards the end of the school year, the planned meeting with the teachers of the preschool was unfortunately cancelled. Therefore, only C. took part in the exchange. The meeting was held at the University in June, at the end of the school year. C. was introduced to the activities and products carried out by Portuguese teachers (sent to the researchers via e-mail from the Portuguese team) and asked to give general feedback on the course followed, as well as to answer some questions and reflections formulated by the Portuguese colleagues.

#### Results and assessment

C. was enthusiastic about the exchange with the Portuguese teachers. She told us that she was very interested in seeing what had been done in other countries, and was available (and eager) to connect to colleagues from Portugal in order to exchange ideas or get inspired. C. judged the exchange to be very enriching at different levels.

First of all, the exchange was an opportunity to ask oneself critically about one's own practices and to reflect by analogy and contrast on the path taken in one's class, as well as on the organization of the curriculum in the Italian school: *"I am very impressed because, although [PT teachers] realized many different activities, addressing several topics and subjects, they are all closely linked. The fil rouge that connects every activity to each other is evident and meaningful. [...] One of the sore points here in Italy is that the interdisciplinarity that all the official documents mention is sadly often not realized and translated into practice". [...] I was surprised more than anything by the way that we have, of always having to bind ourselves to a prototype of a program that in my opinion is questionable"*.

Secondly, the exchange offered some ideas for the realization of activities that C. intends to propose to her class next year. In addition, C. reflected on the possibility of showing the materials produced by the classes of other European countries to the children. If, in fact, the sharing and

the joint reflection on the activated processes is an aspect that closely touches and can contribute to the growth of teachers above all, the sharing of products between classes would trigger a virtuous circle of mutual learning and strengthen the teaching: "*children really have to deal with the schools from the rest of the world and then there is an exchange that is not on paper. You see it. (...) At that point there is a beginning, a chain of ideas that improves practices*". C. was so enthusiastic about the exchange ("*So I really liked this thing. It was really exciting. I feel like crying*") and eager to continue the virtual dialogue with the Portuguese colleagues in a more direct way that she proposed to create a space on the VLE for uploading their respective materials and exchange reflections and feedback, not only on the disciplinary content, but also on the pedagogical-didactic methodologies and the organization of the school system in other countries.

During the year of the project, this teacher had already expressed her desire to create a virtual space ("*a space for teachers who want to share and dialogue, a sort of Forum*") on the platform - considered a safe, protected, non-dispersive space supported by a scientific framework – for sharing information and experiences related to the themes of multilingualism, interculturalism and ICT, with colleagues from other countries: "*It is clear that the platform offers many opportunities for knowledge and exchange within the classroom, but it would be nice to have a place to exchange experiences and knowledge with the classes participating in this project from all over the world.*" C. stressed that the exchange between teachers is a fundamental resource not only to learn from each other but also to foster a relationship for confrontation between peers, a support system between similar professional figures. This space was created and the materials produced by C. and her feedback to the Portuguese colleagues were uploaded and used by the Portuguese team to present the course conducted in Italy to their teachers. The exchange developed further – with the PT teachers answering C.'s comments and questions – increasing her satisfaction.

### 3.5. PART IV: ASSESSMENT

The fourth and final part is dedicated to the assessment of the professional development intervention. The methods for assessment are described and the most important outcomes concerning staff, organisation, the VLE and the overall process of co-construction are pointed out. We conclude this country report with a short discussion on the main lessons that we have learned during the intervention.

#### 3.5.1. ASSESSMENT OF DOMAINS AND PROCEDURES

The monitoring system we relied on comprised different assessment instruments and addressed several dimensions/topics, as shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8  
Overview of the Monitoring System.

When (time)	How (instruments)	What (dimensions/topics)
<b>Exploratory Phase</b>	Observations in the classroom and field notes	Teachers' pedagogical approach; Relationships between colleagues, between teachers and pupils, and among children; Teachers' practices in dealing with multiculturalism and multilingualism; ICTs use in the teaching-learning process
	Interviews with teachers (audio-recorded and fully transcribed <i>verbatim</i> )	Teachers' pedagogical approach; Relationships between teachers and pupils, and among children; Teachers' beliefs/attitudes towards and practices in dealing with multiculturalism, multilingualism and intercultural competence; opinions on ICTs use in the teaching-learning process
	Teachers' reflective self-evaluation questionnaire	Teaching efficacy in diverse classrooms; Intercultural sensitivity; Strengthening classroom community; Reducing prejudices; Multilingualism; Parent-teacher relationships; Global competence; ICTs in teaching-learning process
<b>Implementation Phase</b>	Qualitative documentation, including observations in the classroom and field notes; short interviews/conversations with teachers; pictures and audio/video-recordings	Opinions and formative assessment on activities; Impact of the intervention on PD (changes in competencies/skills, knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, practices)
	Teacher's diary	Opinions and formative assessment on activities



<b>Post-Phase</b>	Interviews with teachers and with the principal (audio-recorded and fully transcribed <i>verbatim</i> )	Satisfaction; Impact of the intervention on PD (changes/gains in competencies/skills, knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, practices); Impact of the intervention on organizational climate and collaboration practices; Assessment of the VLE (usage, usefulness, satisfaction, future use); Intervention process and partnership with ISOTIS researchers
	Teacher's diary	Satisfaction; Impact of the intervention on PD (changes/gains in competencies/skills, knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, practices)
	Reflective self-evaluation questionnaire	Teaching efficacy in diverse classrooms; Intercultural sensitivity; Strengthening classroom community; Reducing prejudices; Multilingualism; Parent-teacher relationships; Global competence; ICTs in teaching-learning process

### 3.5.2. RESULTS

The main findings of the collected data will be divided into four topics. The first topic, *staff*, concerns the overall satisfaction of the professionals and to what extent they thought their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes were changed through the intervention. The second topic, *organisation and collaboration practices*, concerns the organisational climate and team work. A central question here is to what extent the intervention impacted the collaboration within the organisation and if the PD activities prompted further discussion in the organisation outside the planned intervention meetings. Third, we present the results on the *virtual learning environment*. This concerns the usage, usefulness, satisfaction and to what extent professionals are interested in future use of the tool. Lastly, the intervention's *process of co-construction* will be evaluated. For all four topics the (self)evaluation of the professionals and the observations and reflections of the researchers are used to highlight the most important findings.

#### 3.5.2.1. STAFF

Overall, the teachers who participated in the project gave a positive assessment of the intervention, believing that it contributed to their professional development and increased their knowledge and skills in dealing with highly diverse classes.

C. declared she was satisfied overall, pointing out that "the project offered great opportunities for personal growth to the children and to me as a teacher" (diary) and gave her greater "pedagogical security" especially in planning activities to be carried out in class with children (final interview - "*The studies on multilingualism [presented during the training, see PD activity 2.1] reassured me regarding old taboos according to which in order to learn Italian, children shouldn't speak in their mother tongue. This led me to reassess the importance of valuing the children's native languages.*")

*During class, for example, I asked foreign children to translate a story created in the classroom into their own language. The children asked to sing Happy Birthday in their own language more spontaneously. The reflections on their languages encouraged them to act spontaneously as interpreters for newcomers who did not speak Italian"). From the observations and the final reflective self-evaluation questionnaire, greater awareness and more attentive attitudes towards the themes of interculturalism and multilingualism and their enhancement in the classroom emerged.*

D., E. and G. highlighted above all how the intervention contributed to increasing their knowledge and sensibility on the themes of multilingualism and interculturalism (D.'s questionnaire: *"For a long time I underestimated linguistic issues; it was thanks to the PD training that I re-evaluated my preconceived ideas on the subject of multilingualism"*) and it *"aroused curiosity by acting as an input or generator of ideas for future educational activities"* (E.'s diary).

In the final interview, A. and B. initially stated that the experience had not improved their knowledge and skills (*"Nothing really innovative (...). We weren't new to this (...), we've done a lot of work before"*) but it did give them confirmation of established practices (*"It was a confirmation of what we did in the past... it reinforced us in this sense. We said we were on the right track"*). However, during the interview, they acknowledged that, although they had also dealt with multilingualism and multiculturalism in the past, the fact that they had worked systematically throughout the school year on these issues made them more attentive to the theme of multilingualism, with positive repercussions on their daily educational practices (*"If there had been no such project, probably, beyond the initiatives at certain times of the year, we would not always have focused our attention on the theme of bilingualism and therefore it allowed us to keep the focus throughout the year, while perhaps in previous years it was intense at the beginning, but then no... Maybe this is what we gained, that it is not a moment that starts and stops, but it can really be focal point from the start to the end of the year, to always keep in mind. And also the fact that children need this topic to be raised daily, so that it really becomes part of their lives"*).

### 3.5.2.2. ORGANISATION AND COLLABORATION PRACTICES

The exploratory phase already highlighted some difficulties in communication and collaboration between the IC teachers (e.g., poor communication between pre- and primary school; the relative isolation of C. from other teachers working in her class). The intervention did not seem to impact on this, and also the exchanges between teachers of different classes were very limited. As reported by D. and E. in the final interview:

*D. – Sometimes I spoke with C., to understand what she was doing... but no...*

*E. - Neither did I.*

*D. - ...no, because we are in different inter-class groups, different floors, so we rarely meet...*

*E. - That is, what we knew about those people remained. Nothing changed...*

C. perceived the lack of cooperation from colleagues in her class (those who did not participate in the project) as a strong limitation: *"The work with ISOTIS was successful. If it had been accepted, if the modality had been accepted also in the other hours [of my colleagues], there would have been a huge gain.... Talk about winning the lottery!"*

### 3.5.2.3. VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

On the one hand, the teachers expressed a rather critical opinion about the VLE, perceived as *"unintuitive"*, excessively complex and fragmented in its functions (A.: *"We just needed a 500 and you gave us a Ferrari"*) and aesthetically unattractive (E.: *"In my opinion it could have been coloured differently, (...) instead it was all grey and orange and white"*). On the other hand, however, the platform was viewed positively, especially as a tool for communication and sharing between teachers and children and between teachers and families (C.: *"It is clear that the platform offers many opportunities for knowledge and exchange within the classroom"*); as well as for dialogue between teachers from different countries. All of the primary school teachers also noted the great enthusiasm that the students expressed about working on the VLE (WP4), noting how the use of VLE increased the children's interest and motivation (G.: *"Surely it is a strong point to work on the platform, because they are extremely fascinated by this"*; D.: *"I could see every single student was motivated also by the group and personal curiosity about the digital and computer support that the Isotis platform provided"*) and it had positive repercussions on cohesion and inclusion within the class group (E.'s diary: *"[The activities on VLE] aroused the children's curiosity and made the class group more cohesive, moving towards a common goal that still took into account the cultural diversity that was an element of enrichment, integration and never of exclusion"*). Overall, their assessment seems to suggest that the VLE has a good potential, offering interesting and valuable functions. Nonetheless, it is crucial to improve its interface to make it more intuitive and straightforward.

The VLE strengths induced the Principal and A. (as the assistant principal) to extend the use of VLE to the whole school starting from the next year. C., who will be teaching in another school next year, was also so pleased that she proposed the use of VLE to the Principal of her new school.

Table 3.9 provides a synthesis and highlights the main results regarding the use of the VLE in the Italian intervention.

Table 3.9

*Overview of the Italian Professionals' Assessment of the VLE*

Use and appreciation	
<b>What did the teachers explore?</b>	<p>The exploration of the VLE was guided and supported by the researchers. Specific training meetings (Key Topic 2.2) were dedicated to introduce teachers to the VLE and discover together its functionalities. During the meetings the overall structure of the VLE was presented with the three main sections (MY SPACE, CONTENTS, and TOOLS) and the main functions offered. Moreover, to deepen the exploration of the VLE, some VLE specific activities were presented and used as a joint 'class exercise' also during the face-to-face thematic plenary meetings (Key Topic 2.1).</p> <p>Each participant received personal login credentials since the beginning of the intervention to continue the exploration on their own.</p> <p>Due to the nature of the VLE intervention in Italy and the close synergy among WPs, the participants used different features of the VLE, mainly in the MY SPACE and CONTENT sections. The ones that more directly addressed PD purposes were:</p> <p><b>CONTENT section:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to increase knowledge regarding some key topics (language awareness, bi-/multilingualism, intercultural competence...) (e.g., ISOTIS VIDEOS, sub-sections DID YOU KNOW?);</li> <li>• to get ideas/inspiration for some possible activities to be experimented in the class (e.g., sub-section WHAT CAN YOU DO?);</li> <li>• to sustain teachers' reflectivity (e.g., cases of the sub-section OBSERVE AND REFLECT); → PD aim: increasing teachers' awareness, knowledge and skills in dealing with multicultural/multilingual classes.</li> </ul>
<b>What did they use?</b>	<p><b>Notice boards and forums:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to send notices to parents and report the tasks assigned to the children</li> <li>• to share documentation with the parents;</li> <li>• to engage parents in school activities; → PD aim: experimenting new ways to communicate with parents; enhancing family-school dialogue and collaboration.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reflective diary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to keep track of and to document the activities carried out;</li> <li>• to report personal reflections throughout the intervention; → PD aim: increasing teachers' reflective skills.</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion board:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to exchange experiences, practices and reflections with professionals of other countries; → PD aim: supporting teachers in the acquisition of a critical, reflective stance.</li> </ul>

**What resources and functionalities did they appreciate most?**

More than the repository function, the participants considered interesting the opportunities for communication and sharing between teachers and children and between teachers and families. Moreover, they judged the VLE a promising tool to build a community of learners and to favour/scaffold the dialogue and exchange among professionals from different schools and even different countries.

**What didn't they like most?**

The teachers criticized the VLE mainly because it was perceived as unintuitive, excessively complex and fragmented in its functions. All these aspects made it quite difficult for the professionals to use – far less master – the platform in complete autonomy without the assistance of the researchers. Moreover, also its graphical interface was considered aesthetically unattractive.

**What potential did they see in the platform?**

Two aspects were considered particularly promising by the Italian professionals:

- the VLE was considered as a powerful tool to enhance family-school communication and collaboration. In fact, the use of the VLE contributed to defining more symmetrical relationship/negotiation modalities between teachers and parents and to enhance parents' levels of engagement and participation to the school life;
- the teachers considered that the VLE has the potential to build a community of learners and to favour/scaffold the dialogue and exchange among professionals from different schools/countries.

These strengths made the school principal decide to extend the use of VLE to the whole school starting from the next year; while C. proposed the use of the VLE to the principal of her new school.

**What changes would they suggest?**

Four suggestions were made:

- Making the VLE structure and its functions more immediate, intuitive and, overall, user-friendly
- Making the interface more attractive
- Enhancing and improving the opportunities for communication and exchange that the VLE can offer at various levels (between teachers and pupils, between teachers and families, between professionals)
- Developing the translating functions further

### **The VLE, the research process and the activity implementation**

**What role did the VLE play during the process of work and the activities?**

On the one hand, the VLE was used in relation to the WP3 and WP4 activities. In this regard, teachers particularly appreciated how the use of the VLE contributed to enhance family-school communication, and increase children's interest and motivation and cohesion within the class group. On the other hand – and parallelly, it represented per se an instrument for PD. Especially, it contributed to make teachers find and experiment new modalities to engage and communicate with families (one of the sore point they had pointed out in the exploratory phase) and to acquire a more critical and reflective stance (e.g., use of the digital reflective diary; opportunity for international exchange).

**What were the main challenges in the use of the VLE and what were the main advantages in using it?**

The main challenge dealt with the possibility to make teachers explore and use the VLE in a more autonomous and deliberate way. Although they experienced first-hand the opportunities offered by the VLE at various levels (PD, teaching-learning process, family-school communication), they often relied on the technical support of the ISOTIS researchers. The lack of familiarity of the teaching staff with ICTs and the time constraints played a role in that.

### Main lessons and recommendations

#### Summing up: points of strength and points of weakness of the VLE

Overall, the Italian professionals' assessment seems to suggest that the VLE has a good potential, offering interesting and valuable functions. Nonetheless, it is crucial to improve both its interface and its structure to make them more intuitive and straightforward.

The intervention highlighted some valuable lessons:

- it is necessary to make the overall structure and interface of the platform simpler and more intuitive, so as to favour a more active, gratifying and autonomous use by teachers;
- it will be important to work to enhance and improve the opportunities for communication and exchange that VLE can offer at various levels (between teachers and pupils, between teachers and families, between professionals) – especially considering that it is one of the aspects considered more promising by the participants;
- it is important to plan an extended time to let the professionals familiarize with the VLE. While it can be helpful to provide some demonstrations/tutorials to show them the possibilities that the VLE provides, it is nonetheless crucial to let them explore its functions at their pace;
- to overcome teachers' possible resistances towards ICTs, it could be useful to consider a parallel involvement of children. In fact, pupils can play a bridge role, helping teachers to approach and see the potential offered by the new technologies.

#### Lessons learned and recommendations

#### 3.5.2.4. PROCESS OF CO-CONSTRUCTION

From the observations made by the researchers and informal conversations with teachers, it emerged that the intervention, also by virtue of the overlap with other projects and the synergy between various WPs that increased its complexity, was a challenging and sometimes tiring experience for the participants. There were also moments of greater exhaustion and resistance or disinvestment by some teachers.

Overall, however, the teachers expressed a favourable opinion about the intervention, appreciating above all the concrete repercussions on the work with children and, albeit to a lesser extent, with families. They also assessed the collaboration with the researchers in a rather positive way, considering in particular their support during the various phases and tasks of the project (made more complex given the overlap between different WPs) and the support in using VLE: C. - interview: "*The work of the researchers in directing the co-design and their explanation of the use of the platform, as well as in solving technical problems that emerged was fundamental*"; E.'s diary: "*The help of the Isotis researchers who supported us during this project was fundamental and thanks to their digital skills it was possible to arouse great enthusiasm in the students and in some parents*".

A significant reflection regarding the intervention process regards the relevance to co-construct and shape it on the teachers' PD needs as they are perceived by the professionals involved themselves. While a co-constructive approach deeply informed the WP3 and WP4 intervention design, in the case of WP5 some activities were proposed by the researchers to address critical core issues observed by the researchers during the exploratory phase (e.g., increasing teachers' awareness, knowledge and skills bi-/multilingualism and intercultural competence, or improving family-school collaboration). The resulting activities were considered as possible answers to some of the participants' PD needs. However, the PD needs assessed by the researchers might not always coincide with the ones perceived by the professionals. For instance, during the exploratory phase, we observed that some of the teachers had biased conceptions about multilingualism or L2 teaching/learning process and how these were reflected in the professionals' practices. Therefore, we decided to provide training meetings on these topics. Unfortunately, this initiative was received rather coolly by some of the professionals involved, since the meetings were considered not relevant for their professional development since they did not perceive the need to deepen their knowledge on these topics nor to change their practices at this regard.

The misalignment between observed and perceived needs may be one of the possible reasons behind the lack of commitment and fatigue reported by some of the participants. It also suggests how it is crucial to take this dimension into account while projecting the intervention since the process critically influences the results. Another front of misalignment concerned the general method of working, rather than specific topics/ objectives of the PD path. Not all the participants wished to work through a process that entails shared planning, class observations, reflecting on educational and communicative practices. In this, the clarity of the collaboration agreement/alliance between the research team and the school may have played a part. We realized (only during the implementation phase) that, although we had presented a clear picture of the intervention goals and methods, and, consequently, the commitment demanded by the project, the IC principal had greatly minimized the actual effort required from each teacher. Some



participants based their expectations only on the principal's word, finding the effort required too burdensome.

The decision to provide teachers with remuneration for the effort required, guaranteed their continued participation despite the fatigue perceived at times. Nonetheless, it was not a decisive aspect in influencing professionals' commitment and motivation. This symbolic recognition of the time and effort dedicated to the intervention gratified and strengthened involvement of those participants already committed to the project goals. However, it did not trigger intrinsic motivation in those who did not already have a personal interest in the issues addressed by the project. Rather, in these cases, it represented a 'crutch' that fostered an only formal, extrinsic adhesion to the project and its goals.

### 3.5.3. DISCUSSION

Documenting and reflecting on the work done has allowed us to highlight some of the main lessons learned from this experience. First of all, in our experience within the IC, we observed how the general impact of the intervention profoundly varied for the different professionals involved. On the one hand, C., who since the beginning welcomed the project with high level of enthusiasm and personal commitment, regarded all activities as very enriching and positive. On the other hand, the other teachers, who presented lower level of personal motivation, were generally more critical. This observation seemed to suggest that the intrinsic personal motivation and the willingness of participants to 'get involved' can play a central role in the overall process. This may be even more relevant with regard to complex and articulated projects, which can be particularly demanding for professionals.

These considerations open up to two further reflections. Firstly, it is very important to align the intervention objectives with the PD needs as perceived by the professionals (or at least to work on changing/expanding those perceptions to be more in line with critical issues that can emerge from an external assessment), as leverage on participants' intrinsic motivation and, thus, as a precondition to guarantee their commitment. Secondly, it is essential to take care from the beginning (especially in a Design Based Research approach) of the clarity and sharing of the values and objectives of the project with all those involved, ensuring that the participants have a clear idea of the commitment required. Sharing a common attitude/method of working together – researchers and professionals – is another central aspect that should be agreed upon from the preliminary phases of the project and should be continuously nurtured throughout the entire process. These are crucial conditions to set up a fruitful collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and to stem possible resistance and intolerance that may arise especially when fatigue in the participants is felt more (not only for the demands inherent in the project, but also for the overlap with other concomitant commitments).

Furthermore, the organizational dimension cannot be underestimated. In fact, the maintenance of a project, especially if intense and complex, is closely linked to the coordination and cohesion within the organization. Without those elements, it is more challenging for the single professional within the organization to put aside personal difficulties and strains, conflicts with colleagues, or individual resistances, and to fully embrace the scope and values of the project, without losing

sight of them along the way. The lack of coordination that we experienced within the IC might have influenced the general impact of the intervention, that, as abovementioned, highly depended on the personal motivation of the individuals.

As far as VLE is concerned, the intervention highlighted how necessary it was to make the overall structure and interface of the platform simpler and more intuitive, so as to favour a more active, gratifying and conscious use by teachers. This is all the more relevant considering that in the Italian context, teachers are generally poorly trained and competent in the use of ICTs. In fact, the perception that the tool is too complex, "for insiders", risks becoming a deterrent to its use, obscuring the potential it can offer. Secondly, also with a view to future implementation, it will be important to work to enhance and improve the opportunities for communication and exchange that VLE can offer at various levels (between teachers and pupils, between teachers and families, between professionals) - an aspect that, more than the repository function, was appreciated by the participants. Another possible promise of the VLE that emerged from the intervention was the possibility it can provide to build a community of learners and to favour/scaffold the dialogue and exchange among professionals from different schools and even different countries. In our case, this opportunity was experimented only by one teacher, who exchanged thoughts, practices and questions with colleagues from Portugal. The international nature of the exchange made crucial the support of the researchers to overcome the linguistic barrier (since using English as lingua franca seemed too complicated at least for the Italian teacher involved). However, considering that the VLE already presents some translating functions, a possible, worthwhile path to follow for the future may be to develop these functions further, in order to enable professionals from different countries to exchange viewpoints autonomously, without external supports. This would make the VLE as a community of learners even more powerful and flexible.

The lack of familiarity of the teaching staff with ICTs also highlighted the importance of involving children in order to be able, through them, to approach and train teachers in the use of new technologies. Children, 'digital natives', in fact, can play a bridge role, closing the space, also reported in the literature, which still sees teachers as very far from the digital age. In the intervention implemented, for example, teachers greatly re-evaluated the VLE after having experienced the strong effects on children (in terms of increased motivation and interest, peer cooperation, enhancement of individual skills...) thanks to some educational activities based on the use of VLE.

This last consideration also introduces a further reflection on the importance, if we want to trigger a change at the level of beliefs and attitudes, of allowing professionals to 'touch' the repercussions that theories or 'supposed/suggested' good practices have concretely in class life. In the intervention, the feedback collected from the children on the value of the work done played a central role in motivating the teachers and allowed them to question established practices and beliefs. Unfortunately, in most of the cases, this feedback was collected – and thus resulted evident to the teachers – only at the end of the intervention, and we did not have the opportunity/time to engage teachers in a sustained reflection on this. Therefore, it did not translate immediately in changes in the professionals' attitudes and beliefs. However, the openness and willingness to question themselves that this feedback elicited seems a crucial trigger and leverage to work on with the professionals in order to pave the way to those changes.

## 4. COUNTRY REPORT: THE NETHERLANDS

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## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This country report provides an overview on the main topics and problems that were addressed in the Dutch case. It addresses the selection of the sites (Part I – Sites' selection and shared intervention agreement), the context of the intervention (Part II – Exploratory Phase), the design and implementation of the professional development activities (Part III – Implementation co-constructive process), and the assessment of the intervention (Part IV – Assessment).

### 4.1.1. DEFINITION OF THE MAIN TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

The Netherlands participated in the intervention as part of Task 5.4 and was therefore mainly focussed on the professionals and their development. Although several classroom activities were designed during the intervention, the main goal of these activities was to support the overall professional development of the organisation and staff, rather than to enrich the organisation's curriculum. Given this particular focus, the following goals and topics guided the Dutch professional development intervention:

- Enhance awareness on one's own beliefs and attitudes regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism through reflection;
- Expanding knowledge on the topic of diversity and inclusion;
- Improving intercultural competences by exchanging (good) practices and knowledge between locations and countries;
- Reflection on and improvement of the relationship with parents and parental involvement.

## 4.2. PART I: SITES' SELECTION AND SHARED INTERVENTION AGREEMENT

The first part of this country report provides some brief information on the process of selecting the participating organisation. First, we will explain which organisation was selected for participation and why. Second, we outline the most important actions undertaken for realising the collaboration with the participants.

### 4.2.1. SITE AND ORGANISATION SELECTION

In the Netherlands, a large preschool organisation from Utrecht was approached to participate in this intervention. Utrecht is an important site for the ISOTIS project:

- Data for both the quantitative ( $N=338$ ) and qualitative ( $N=20$ ) parent study were partly collected here (**WP2**, see Broekhuizen, Ereky-Stevens, Wolf, & Moser, 2018). Many parents were recruited via the preschool organisation concerned.
- Case studies on inclusive curricula and educational practices (**WP4**, see Aguiar & Silva, 2018) and case studies on good practices in interagency working with young children and their families (**WP6**, see Barnes et al., 2018) were conducted here.
- Data for the survey among staff working in formal and informal (education) sectors were partly collected here ( $N=59$ ) (**WP5**, see Slot, Romijn, Cadima, Nata, & Wysłowska, 2018). All professionals participating in this VLE intervention filled out the staff survey, which was collected before this intervention started.

This preschool organisation was selected because of two main reasons. First of all, this organisation is currently the largest ECEC organisation in the Netherlands and most important ECEC organisation in Utrecht, with 62 locations in this city. Second, Utrecht University has close ties with this organisation. They are not only an important partner for the ISOTIS project given their involvement in the WP2 and WP5 studies, but they also collaborated in previous studies from Utrecht University (see Francot, Broekhuizen, & Leseman, 2019; Henrichs & Leseman, 2016).

#### **4.2.2. SHARED GENERAL ISOTIS COLLABORATION AGREEMENT**

During the proposal phase before the start of the project in January 2017 the organisation already agreed on participation in the project with a letter of intent thanks to the close relationship with the research team and the frequent contact with both the management level and with different locations. In April 2018, the management of the organisation officially agreed to participate in the VLE intervention. After consulting the director, it was decided to focus on two different locations (hereafter, location A and location B). These locations were partially chosen based on the willingness of the organisations location managers to participate. Both location managers were interested in participating in the project and are in charge of several locations within the organisation. Location A was chosen by the first manager as this location was already involved in another project from Utrecht University, related to the implementation of a digital tool to improve the educational partnership between parents and preschool (Francot et al., 2019). Given the involvement in the ICT project for location A, and the multicultural characteristics (explained more in detail below) of the location, this location was asked to participate. Location B was selected by the second manager mostly based on demographics of the location (explained more in detail below) and the willingness of the staff.

In May 2018, a meeting with the location managers of site A and B took place. During the first meeting, the aims of the intervention were explained and a rough timeline was discussed. We furthermore discussed how many professionals would engage in the intervention. Location A is a relatively large preschool and it was decided that not all of their teachers would participate. The manager would discuss this matter internally and would decide on which teachers would participate. A selection was made based on the classrooms they work in, their duties within the team (some teachers received additional training and education and take on different responsibilities within the team) and willingness to participate. Location B only consisted of three teachers, which would all be involved in the intervention. Moreover, we decided that both managers, a special needs supervisor and the pedagogical coach of both locations would participate as well.

All professionals were already aware of the ISOTIS project and participated in the staff survey of WP5. Furthermore, individual meetings and focus groups were held to meet all professionals personally. During these meetings the goals of the intervention and overall project were shared and the general timeline was discussed (see Part II for more information). Each participating professional signed an informed consent form for participation upon meeting us and before any personal data was collected.

### 4.3. PART II: THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

In this second part we documented what activities were undertaken in the exploratory phase of the intervention. The exploratory phase focused on gathering information regarding both locations with the overall purpose to formulate learning needs per location. We first describe how and when relevant data was collected. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. Third, the characteristics of both locations and its professionals are provided. Finally, the overall goal of the intervention is formulated based on the learning needs of both locations.

#### 4.3.1. METHODS AND PROCEDURES USED FOR THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

A wide range of methods was used to collect data in this exploratory phase. Researchers engaged in observations, interviews and focus groups and conducted a document analysis. Moreover, participating professionals filled out an online survey to provide even more information on themselves and their work environment. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the data that was collected and the outcomes based on this data collection.

#### 4.3.2. RELEVANT CONTEXT FOR PD INTERVENTION

The following sections provide an overview of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. First, the macro context is discussed and provides a short overview of the structure of the Dutch preschool education system in the Netherlands. Second, the organisational context is described based on the results of the conducted document analysis.

##### 4.3.2.1. MACRO CONTEXT

###### **Preschool education in the Netherlands**

Since 2015, all Dutch municipalities are responsible for the whole range of care for children from birth to 18 years of age and families in need of support and assistance (Netherlands Youth Institute, 2017). The municipalities now manage a wide range of services for children and families, ranging from universal and preventive services to specialised - both voluntary and compulsory - care for children (Van Riel & Van der Kooij, 2016). Primary education starts at age four years when children enrol in kindergarten. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) provisions consist of full-day child care for children from birth until four years and of part-time preschools for children between two and four years. All ECEC provisions fall under the same statutory quality framework and have to adhere to the same quality regulations. Preschools are increasingly identified as local education policy priorities because of their low threshold, relatively low costs for parents and strong connections with local neighbourhoods. Extra efforts have been made to attract minority and low-SES children, with apparent success, particularly in inner city areas. Attendance at these settings is typically four mornings (or afternoons) per week, with an ensured teacher-child ratio of 1:8. Municipalities are obliged to offer targeted ECEC programmes to all children between 2 and 5 years who run the risk of a language deficiency or being educationally disadvantaged at a preschool or day care institution. Municipalities are further obliged to make agreements with the relevant institutions/organisations on reaching the target group, identifying the target group and regulating inflow in preschool education programmes.



Table 4.1

Overview of Location Contact and Data Collection during the Exploratory Phase.

April 2018		
Method	Participants	Aim and outcomes
Classroom observations	Two groups of both locations	Two groups of each location were visited by the researcher to observe the quality of care. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool was used to determine process quality of the location and provided insights into the emotional and educational support teachers provide. <i>Notes and scores of these observations were saved.</i>
Interview	Director of the organisation	Meeting in which results from other studies were also discussed. The VLE intervention was verbally introduced by the researcher by explaining the underlying thoughts and aims of the study. Director agreed to participate in this study. After explaining the aims of the VLE, the manager proposed two interesting locations for the intervention. She would contact the location managers to inform them. <i>Notes of this meeting were made.</i>
May 2018		
Method	Participants	Aim and outcomes
Interview	Manager location B	Meeting in which the general plans for the VLE intervention were verbally discussed. Location manager agreed to participate in the intervention and he would discuss this with the other location manager. <i>Notes of this meeting were made.</i>
Focus group	Manager location A&B and special needs supervisor	Focus group to explore the local context and to get some first ideas on the wishes and needs of the locations. Information was collected regarding 1) the structure of the organisation and roles within the locations; 2) vision of organisation regarding diversity and inclusion; 3) local context: neighbourhood and population; 4) needs and wishes of locations according to the managers. <i>Notes were made during the focus group and audio files of the discussion were saved.</i>
Document analyses	Researchers only	Document analyses were conducted using the internal (policy and strategic) documents of the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HGW Kader November 2016</li> <li>• Pedagogical Policy January 2018</li> <li>• EQF – HFQS – Monitoring inventory October 2017</li> <li>• Strategic plan 2016-2018</li> <li>• Utrecht Quality Framework 2015</li> <li>• Parent Policy 2016</li> </ul>

Also, other ISOTIS work has been reviewed to use in the current study:

- WP3.2: Cadima, Nata, Evangelou & Anders (2017). Inventory and Analysis of Promising and Evidence-based Parent- and Family- Focused Support Programs.

#### June 2018

Method	Participants	Aim and outcomes
Online Survey	All professionals location A&B	All professionals filled out the T5.3 Staff survey to provide us with up to date knowledge on their background, diversity beliefs and policies, multicultural practices, relationship with parents, organisation climate and professional development opportunities. <i>Quantitative data of the survey was saved and analysed. This data was included in the report on the D5.3 Staff survey.</i>
Focus group	Teachers location B	Focus group to explore the local context and to get some first ideas on the wishes and needs of the location. Information was collected regarding 1) local context: children and parents visiting the preschool, parental involvement; 2) professional development activities and supervision; 3) needs and wishes of the teachers. <i>Notes were made during the focus group and audio files of the discussion were saved.</i>
Interview	Pedagogical coach location A	Interview to explore the local context and to get some first ideas on the wishes and needs of the location. Information was collected regarding 1) structure of the location; 2) professional development activities and supervision; 3) needs and wishes of the teachers and coach. <i>Notes were made during the interview and audio files of the discussion were saved.</i>
Interview	Pedagogical coach location B	Interview to explore the local context and to get some first ideas on the wishes and needs of the location. Information was collected regarding 1) structure of the location; 2) professional development activities and supervision; 3) needs and wishes of the teachers and coach. <i>Notes were made during the interview and audio files of the discussion were saved.</i>

#### July 2018

Method	Participants	Aim and outcomes
Kick-off meeting	All professionals location A&B	First meeting with all participants to explain the VLE intervention and to gather some first ideas on the wished and needs of the locations. The intervention, general time plan and important concepts such as professional development and intercultural competencies were explained. Two vignettes from the staff survey were used to start a discussion in two groups that gave more insight in the attitudes and questions from the participants. <i>A power point presentation was used, notes were made during the meeting and audio files of the discussion were saved.</i>

#### 4.3.2.2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

##### Preschool organisation

This organisation was the single provider of preschool education in the municipality. They provide preschool education to approximately 2200 children in about 150 groups. Every neighbourhood has a preschool location with one or more groups reflecting the diversity in this neighbourhood. Each group has about 15 children that come two half days ('regular children') or four half days ('children considered at risk for developmental (language) delay') a week. They strive for mixed groups in terms of children's background and promote inclusion of children with special needs.

##### Professionals and the organisational structures

The organisation has a hierarchical structure in which all professionals have different tasks and duties (see Figure 4.1). The location manager falls under the direct responsibility of the director and his responsibility is pedagogical leadership over the overall process involving the group of children and the ECEC teachers. They are the main link between the organisation's vision, mission and objectives and the implementation of these in actual practice. They implement the overall policy at the location level, aligning this with the overall organisation's vision and mission and adapted to the local needs of the population. The manager of location A has the responsibility over 5 locations (with about 23 professionals) and the manager of location B has the responsibility over 7 locations (with 24 professionals). The managers stay informed about the pedagogical processes and progress and the children's functioning and development by two other types of professionals: the special needs supervisor and the pedagogical coach. The special needs supervisor supports the ECEC teachers in their work with individual children and their parents. They provide advice on how to work with individual children in case of concerns on the child's behaviour and development. They also support teachers in the contact with parents around these concerns. The pedagogical coach supports teachers in the classroom processes, which include making group plans and supporting educational quality in the classroom and supporting the use of the child monitoring system KIJK! (which translates as LOOK!) which involves child observations twice a year, and on their attitude towards their work. Both the special needs supervisor and the pedagogical coach work on multiple locations as well.



Figure 4.1. Organisational structure of the preschool organisation.

#### 4.3.2.3. ORGANISATIONAL POLICY AND EVALUATION

##### **Vision/mission of organisation and pedagogical plan and policy**

It is the mission of the preschool organisation to prepare all young children in Utrecht for formal education; starting primary school (in the Dutch case, kindergarten) without educational delay or disadvantage. Children are provided with optimal opportunities to develop their own qualities in a playful manner focusing on all domains of development. The vision of the organisation builds upon the theory that children develop through recurrent interactions with the environment. Therefore, a physically and emotionally safe environment is needed to provide these meaningful interactions. Professionals should be involved in these interactions and stimulate the play and activities of young children, hereby offering diverse activities and rich materials that correspond with the individual development of the child.

The pedagogical plan is grounded in the Dutch Child Care Act of 2005, which specifies that child care should contribute to children's development in four domains: i) physical and emotional safety, ii) personal competences, iii) social competences, and iv) transmission of norms and values. Concerning the first domain, there is attention for a safe and secure classroom climate in which individual children can develop in a playful way. Teachers encourage the child's autonomy, follow the child's lead and respect the child as unique human being with its own talents, interests, temperament and background. A wide variety of activities are provided to children to foster the child's development of personal competences, such as exploration, fantasy and pretend play, emergent numeracy, movement and dance, singing and music, and creativity. Children's social competences are encouraged through fostering their autonomy and supporting children in taking care of themselves, each other and materials in the group. There are also clear classroom routines that help children to know what is expected of them in the classroom. For the socialisation of norms and values the organisation works with the Peaceful Schools programme that focuses on democratic citizenship and supports children in seeing that everyone is unique and how to deal with differences.

In addition, their work is based on the Utrecht Quality Framework that was developed in 2015 in collaboration between Utrecht University and the preschool organisation (among others) and with the Utrecht Language Curriculum that strengthens the language education across pre- and primary school. The Utrecht Quality Framework is centred around three important levels: the group or classroom level, the team, organisational or community level, and the collaboration with parents. The classroom level refers to the general classroom climate, the pedagogical child-centred approach, support for play and provision of (pre-academic) learning activities. The team/organisational level refers to a collaborative and learning attitude within and across organisations (e.g. with school, other childcare organisations etc.). This focuses on promoting a reflective and learning culture with a focus on responsibility and 'ownership'. Another major pillar of their work concerns the partnerships with parents. This partnership involves mutual trust and transparent communication (e.g. about expectations). The Utrecht Quality Framework clearly specifies the need to be respectful towards families' social, cultural and language background. It further states that a good development of the first language and a balanced multicultural identity will support the Dutch language development, engaging in interethnic relations and successful functioning in school and integration in society. The organisation has adopted these aspects in their Parent Policy and also have a policy for multilingualism that is communicated to parents.

This policy entails that the Dutch language is the primary language that is used in the centres and in communication with parents and among parents while present in the preschool. Exceptions can be made if parents do not speak Dutch and then the help of someone speaking this language can be called in. The official policy further states that parents are recommended to speak their home language at home in engaging with activities with their children (reading, singing etc.) when their Dutch language skills are insufficient. To foster the relationship with parents, every child is appointed a mentor who serves as the primary responsible teacher the parent can reach out to. This mentor monitors the child development and he/she conducts the parent meetings to discuss how the child is doing. In addition, the mentor pays a house visit either during the acquaintance or after the child has adjusted and settled in. The basis for communication is reciprocity and dialogue in which parents and professionals are considered to be equal.

The monitoring of children's development is done with the observational measure KIJK! (LOOK!) focuses on four broad domains of development: language (receptive/productive language and emergent literacy), social-emotional (intrapersonal development, interpersonal development, self-reliance and independency, and development of play), numeracy (emergent numeracy and general cognitive development) and motor (gross and fine motor skills, creative skills). It is used as a method to monitor the development of the children, as a method to signal possible developmental delay, and as a tool to talk about the development of the child with colleagues, other professionals or the parents of the child.

### **Work in the classroom**

The ECEC teachers and other professionals work according to an 'action oriented' model ('handelingsgericht werken') following a four-step cyclic procedure. (1) observation, monitoring and registration of the children and the group processes. In case of concern for a particular child, the special needs supervisor will observe this child in the classroom so they can jointly make a 'plan of action'. The regular child observations are conducted every 6 months and result in a group-based overview. (2) Understanding the needs of the group and the children based on the observations to make a group overview of the children's developmental needs and the pedagogical practice. This overview is discussed in the team of teachers, the special needs supervisor and the pedagogical coach. (3) Formulation of new goals for the children and the group matching their needs. All group-based goals are elaborated in a thematic plan of activities (based on the educational programme used in the centre). In addition, an individual support plan is written for children with special needs. This individual plan is written by the preschool teachers, but supported by special needs supervisor. (4) Implementation of the goals in the activity programme that lasts between 4-6 weeks. During the implementation the teachers take notes on the children and on their involvement in play and activities using the child monitoring system KIJK!. These notes are used for reflection and (re)evaluation. The goals from the individual children's plans are implemented for a period of 8-12 weeks and evaluated and reported back to the special needs supervisor.

### **Quality monitoring and assurance**

The organisation uses the European Quality Framework (European Commission, 2014) developed by the EU to monitor and evaluate the quality of their work. This framework provides 5 key aspects for high quality: accessibility, staff and working conditions, curriculum, monitoring

and evaluation, policy and finance. There is a plan for monitoring and evaluating these aspects and formulating new objectives for improvement. Also, the municipal quality inspection is used to monitor and improve quality.

### **Professional development activities**

Professionals are provided with ample opportunities for professional development (PD). Each group has at least one teacher with a BA-degree in addition to the teachers with an intermediate vocational training (which is a local demand of the municipality). The teachers have weekly contact with the pedagogical coach, sometimes individually and sometimes with colleagues, to discuss the processes in the groups. As mentioned above, this also includes coaching on the job, where teachers are observed by the pedagogical coach and reflect and receive feedback on this. Preschool teachers who recently started working, receive additional training and supervision from the pedagogical coach. Furthermore, there are regular team-meetings per location, involving all teachers, the pedagogical coach, special needs supervisor and location manager (at least three times a year). The location manager, pedagogical coach and special needs supervisor also meet multiple times per year ('triangle-meeting'). The location managers of the entire organisation meet every two weeks and the pedagogical coaches and special needs coaches meet every month. There are also meetings with the primary schools, to ensure the continuity of education- and care policy between the preschool and primary school.

Alongside the regular meetings that provide opportunities for sharing experiences and reflection, a general professionalisation plan is developed per location per year, that focuses on specific PD activities as suggested by the locations themselves. Professionals can be trained in diverse topics, such as monitoring and observing young children with the monitoring system KJKI, learning about early childhood curricula such as Peaceful Schools, or following courses on first aid for young children, parent- teacher partnership or learning sign language for example. There are ten trainings-days reserved per school year for this professionalisation.

### **4.3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOCATIONS**

In total, 13 professionals (7 preschool teachers, 2 managers and 3 other professionals) participated in this intervention. Eventually, due to drop-out because of maternity leave and working at a different location, 5 preschool teachers completed this PD intervention.

#### **4.3.3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCATION A**

The preschool location from location A is relatively large and has eight groups. Around 120 young children (age 2,5 to 4 years old) visit the preschool for two to four half-days per week before their transition to the primary school. The preschool is connected to three primary schools located in the same building. Location A is situated in a multicultural neighbourhood in Utrecht. The neighbourhood is relatively deprived and two-third of the families living there have a non-Western migration background (Statistics Netherlands, 2018). Information from the focus group with the managers and information from previous studies have shown that the children attending the preschool and their parents have diverse backgrounds that mirror the multicultural neighbourhood: the more traditional migrant workers, such as Turkish and Moroccan families,

expat families, such as Chinese and Indian families, and refugee families from countries such as Syria. Only a few children with a native Dutch background attend the preschool. In general, parents, especially mothers, are lower educated. When children enter the preschool, their Dutch language use and language proficiency is often very low. The findings from the staff survey showed that about 75-100% of the children at this location has parents with low education levels and/or an immigrant background.

In total, 10 preschool teachers (all female) are working at the preschool in location A. The preschool teachers have an average age of almost 45 years, ranging from 26 to 63 years old. Most preschool teachers have a native Dutch background. Two preschool teachers have a Moroccan background and indicated Berber and Arabic as their home language. The average work experience within the field of education, child care or family service is 17 years. The average year of work experience within the current organisation is almost 6 years. Their average work week consists of 27 hours spread over 3 to 5 days, with the majority of the preschool teachers working part-time. All preschool teachers are qualified young child professionals, three of the professionals completed a higher professional education, the other professionals completed a second vocational education. This results in an average ISCED level of 5. In total, four preschool teachers started this intervention; the three higher educated professionals participated in the VLE intervention, with the idea that they could introduce the VLE and implement it location-wide after the intervention, and one preschool teacher who completed a second vocational education. It should be noted that the latter preschool teacher switched to a different location in the city during the VLE intervention, which means that she did not complete this study. Alongside the young child professionals, the location manager, special needs supervisor, and pedagogical coach (all female) also participated in the VLE intervention. These three professionals have an average age of 54 years, ranging from 54 to 55 years old, and have a native Dutch background. Their average work experience within the field of education, child care or family service is 26 years, with about 8 years of experience within the current organisation. All professionals work part-time, with an average of almost 30 hours spread over 4 to 5 days. All professionals completed higher education, which results in an average ISCED level of almost 7.

#### 4.3.3.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCATION B

The preschool location from location B is relatively small and has two groups, with around 35 children attending the preschool. Similar to location A, the preschool has a close collaboration with two primary schools to ensure a smooth transition for the children. This preschool is also attended by a diverse population, which mirrors the diversity in the neighbourhood. Around 60 percent of the neighbourhood has a native Dutch background, almost 30 percent of the families living in the neighbourhood have a non-Western background (Statistics Netherlands, 2018). It is a working-class neighbourhood, less deprived than location A, and parents are in general higher educated than in location A. The results of the staff survey revealed that the centre has about 50% of the children from low educated and/or immigrant parents.

Three preschool teachers (all female) work at the preschool in location B who all participated in this intervention. Two preschool teachers work together at location B for the majority of the week, while the third preschool teacher only works at location B one day per week. It should be noted



that this third preschool teacher went on maternity leave during the process, so she could not complete the intervention. The two professionals that work together for the majority of the week, have started working together one year ago. One professional has been working at side B for more than fifteen years, while the other preschool teacher started working at this side B one year ago. The preschool teachers have an average age of 40 years, ranging from 27 to 63 years old. All preschool teachers have a native Dutch background. The average work experience within the field of education, child care or family service is almost 16 years. The average years of work experience within the current organisation is almost 10 years. Their average work week consists of 29 hours spread over 4 to 5 days, with two out of three preschool teachers working part-time. All three preschool teachers completed higher education, with an average ISCED level of 6. Alongside these professionals, also here the location manager (male, age 44) and pedagogical coach (female, age 49) participated in the VLE intervention. Both professionals have a native Dutch background. Their average work experience within the field of education, child care or family service is almost 10 years, with 5 years of experience within the current organisation. Both professionals work part-time, with an average of 28 hours spread over 3 to 4 days. Both professionals completed higher education, which results in an average ISCED level of almost 7.

#### **4.3.4. IMPLEMENTATION PD PROCESS AND SHARED AGREEMENT**

The majority of the collected data (interviews, document analyses, classroom observations, etc.) focussed on providing the researchers with a clear picture of the needs and wishes of both locations and overall organisation structure. Though, the general goals and lay-out of the ISOTIS project, and specifically the VLE task, were addressed during the individual meetings, a shared agreement of the PD process was not yet discussed collaboratively at the end of June. Therefore, a combined Kick-off meeting was organized in July with both locations and all participating professionals (teachers, special needs supervisor, pedagogical coaches, and managers). The goal of this meeting was twofold. The main goal of this meeting was to communicate expectations. We presented the ISOTIS project and VLE task again and addressed the concept of co-creation as a method for professional development. Moreover, we discussed that this first Kick-off meeting was a combined meeting with both locations, but the following meetings after the summer would be organized individually per location, roughly once a month. The last meeting was set for February and would be organized collaboratively again to discuss the professional development intervention. The second goal of the meeting was to further elicit information on the needs and wishes of the professionals. Two vignettes on multiculturalism and multilingualism were discussed in small groups. Moreover, professionals were asked to formulate vignettes themselves which reflected every day challenges they encounter.

The outcomes of the discussions in the Kick-off meeting, combined with previous collected data in interviews and observations, were used to formulate the final needs and wishes of both locations. These needs and the overall goals and focus of the professional development intervention are presented in the following sections.

#### 4.3.4.1. NEEDS AND WISHES OF LOCATION A

Based on the results of the interviews, questionnaire and kick-off meeting, a total of four professional development needs could be formulated for location A:

- **Superdiversity of the population:** the professionals stated that the continuous changes in the population are challenging for the preschool teachers. For a long time, the preschool was mainly attended by families with a Moroccan or Turkish background. However, over the years, expat-families (mainly with a Chinese or Indian background) and refugee-families (mainly from Syria) came to this neighbourhood, hence, the diversity in the preschool increased. Professionals stated: 'We knew how to interact with Moroccan and Turkish parents, but these other groups call for a different approach!'. Especially the group from India is challenging, according to the professionals.
- **Parent-preschool partnership:** Also noted in earlier contact with this location, the preschool experiences some difficulties regarding the partnership with parents. From the viewpoint of the professionals, parents show a low involvement in their child's education: many parents do not, or rarely, participate in activities (such as field trips to the library of petting zoo) or meetings (regarding the progress of their child). Moreover, the professionals explicitly stated that they would like to see that the parents took advice from them or used the suggestions the preschool teachers provided. This is advice regarding enriching the home learning environment for the children (e.g. reading certain books or talking about certain topics), but also regarding child rearing (e.g. watching less TV or stimulate the independence of the child). It was mentioned that the preschool teachers wanted to see results from their efforts.
- **Knowledge on multilingualism:** It was stated that the preschool teachers would also like to receive some training or instruction as part of this intervention, especially regarding the latest scientific insights on certain topics. One of these topics is multilingualism, an important factor within this location. Given the superdiversity around the preschool, it is very challenging to incorporate all different languages in the daily practice of the preschool. Therefore, the question was how to do justice to the richness of all languages used within the families? Moreover, professionals stated that the preschool teachers would benefit from more information on multilingualism: How do children acquire two languages at the same time, and how can preschool teachers stimulate this language development?
- **Reflection skills:** It was mentioned by the pedagogical coach that the preschool teachers would benefit from improving their reflection skills. Although they frequently give each other feedback on their practices, the preschool teachers find it challenging to take a critical look at each other and their own practices. 'They are too nice for each other', the pedagogical coach stated. Therefore, reflection would be an important professional development strategy for them.

#### 4.3.4.2. NEEDS AND WISHES OF LOCATION B

Based on the results of the interviews, questionnaire and kick-off meeting, a total of three professional development needs could be formulated for location B:

- **Inclusive practices:** Although the population from location B is somewhat different than the population from location A, the professionals from this location also mentioned the

challenge of working in a superdiverse environment. However, they also state the diversity in terms of cognitive development: How to stimulate all children, also the fast developing children? Or how to include children that have a language disorder?

- **Exchange information and practices with other locations:** It was a clear wish from the preschool teachers from location B to have more contact with the other locations, to share experiences and learn from each other.
- **Involvement of parents:** The location manager stated that, although the contact with parents is experienced as warm and very positive, it is possible to involve the parents more in the daily practices of the preschool. The parents could be seen as a resource to bring more multicultural knowledge into the classrooms.

#### 4.3.4.3. OVERALL NEEDS AND GENERAL GOAL OF THE PD INTERVENTION

In general, both locations indicated a need to learn more about multilingualism and how to deal with this in the classroom. They also shared an interest in other cultures and how this may affect parenting practices or children's development. The managers of both locations highlighted the importance of reflection skills and location managers stated that they would like to see that the preschool teachers would *enhance their awareness* on what their own norms and values are and how this influences their practices (e.g. contact with parents or attention for other languages). This also refers to raising awareness on why professionals act the way they do, which could contribute to more conscious and intentional practices. One of the managers referred to "shifting from being unknowingly competent to being consciously aware of your competence".

Furthermore, the parent-professional relationship was identified as an interesting topic by both locations, although the professionals in location B did not necessarily identified this as an area for improvement. Regarding this topic, there appeared an interesting contrast based on the interviews with the professionals. The professionals from location A reported to find the relationship with parents challenging sometimes and they indicated that they felt parents were not as involved as they would want them to be. The professionals from location B on the other hand indicated few problems with parent involvement and the relationship with parents. Thus, this appeared an interesting topic for exchange between the professionals from both locations, to learn from one another.

As there were some commonalities between the two locations, but also differences due to the local context, the design of the intervention was based on the local needs, but with the aim to align the work as much as possible between the two locations. Based on these local needs in combination with the overall WP5 framework, four cross-location goals were set:

- Enhance awareness on one's own beliefs and attitudes regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism through reflection;
- Expanding knowledge on the topic of diversity and inclusion;
- Improving intercultural competences by exchanging (good) practices and knowledge between locations and countries;
- Reflection on and improvement of the relationship with parents and parental involvement.

#### **4.4. PART III: IMPLEMENTATION CO-CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS**

In this third part we documented what activities were undertaken in the implementation and co-construction phase of the intervention. We first describe the overall lay-out of this phase and discuss relevant procedures. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the co-constructive process of both locations.

##### **4.4.1. PROCEDURES**

The following section addresses the procedures that were used to carry out the intervention. We will address the planning and timeline, the co-construction and designing process of the meetings and the use of the VLE.

###### **4.4.1.1. PLANNING**

We aligned the start of the implementation phase with the start of the new academic year. Initially, we agreed upon a programme of half a year, September 2018 to February 2019, with a face-to-face meeting of approximately two hours, roughly every month. Whereas the Kick-off meeting before the summer was a meeting with the two locations combined to function as a collaborative starting point, the meetings in this phase were held separately for both locations. A combined closing meeting was planned in February. As the VLE was still being developed during this period, we realized by the end of 2018 more time was needed to implement the tool and learn about its opportunities for PD. Both locations were interested in prolonging the implementation phase to the end of the academic year, though the possibilities for planning additional meetings were more limited for location B. We decided to keep the February meeting a combined meeting, though with a different focus: opportunities for exchange between the locations and a collaborative VLE workshop. A new combined closing meeting was scheduled for July. This resulted in a total number of six individual meetings for location A. The number of individual meetings was smaller for location B. The second meeting was supposed to take place in October, but was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. Moreover, during the academic year the organisation was faced with a decrease in child numbers. This was especially apparent for location B and the location is forced to downsize after the summer of 2019. For that reason, spring was an uncertain time for the professionals as they were to be relocated to other locations after summer. As a result of the uncertain atmosphere at location B, the opportunities for prolonging the intervention after February were more limited for this location, ending up in a total number of four individual meetings. A timeline is presented in Figure 4.2.

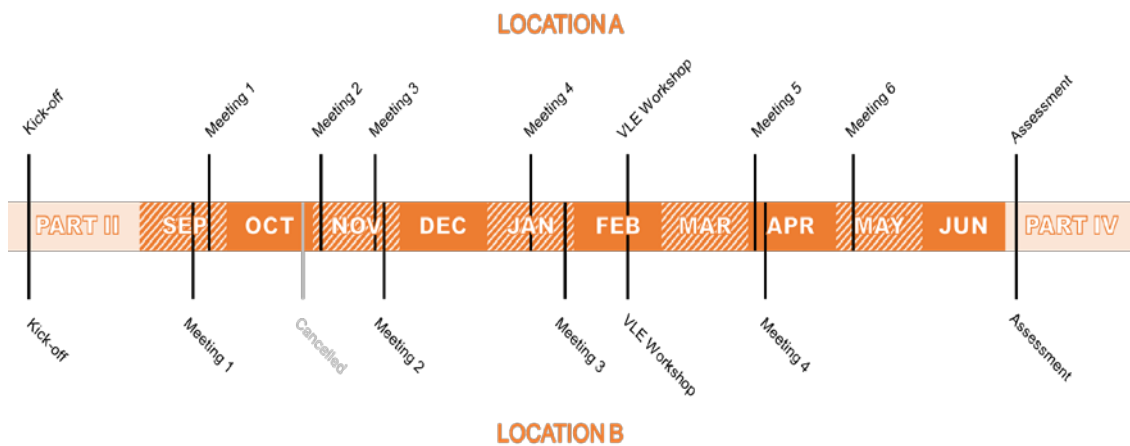


Figure 4.2. Timeline of Part III for the Dutch case.

#### 4.4.1.2. CO-CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN OF THE MEETINGS

The implementation and co-construction phase followed a design-based approach (see Section 1.3.1). This means that general goals were formulated on beforehand for each location based on the needs that were formulated during the exploratory phase, but sub goals and PD activities per meeting were designed along the way. Observations, reflections and activities of a meeting guided the design of the following meeting. Sometimes we introduced a topic or activities and expanded on this in the next meeting. Other times we felt more time and attention was necessary to meet a goal and the same topic was addressed again in the next meeting using different professional development activities. At the end of each meeting, the researchers and professionals briefly evaluated the meeting and discussed whether the newly provided information led to new questions or needs that could be addressed in the following meeting. Afterwards, based on notes and observations the researchers proposed an agenda for the next meeting on which the professionals provided feedback. The agenda was altered or complemented if necessary. In addition, at the beginning of each meeting the collaboratively agreed upon agenda was presented and always started with a short recap of the previous meeting. We briefly reiterated what was discussed during the previous meeting and how we will expand on that in the current meeting.

Furthermore, each meeting consisted of a variety of PD activities addressing different (intercultural) competences (see Section 1.3.3). The reflection on one's values, attitudes and beliefs was at the core of each meeting as this is an important key in facilitating change. This reflection was mostly facilitated via (guided) discussions or individual reflective assignments. Second, as knowledge is essential in critically evaluating your beliefs, we devoted some time on providing new knowledge for the professionals during every meeting. This was usually addressed within short presentations of the researcher on specific topics. Lastly, change in professionals' actual behaviour and practices is a transactional process between knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, skills on the one hand and behaviour on the other hand which is not only facilitated by reflection, but also through enactment (i.e. the translation of new beliefs in to action). Therefore, each meeting specifically addressed how the newly obtained knowledge, skills and changes in beliefs could be acted upon in actual practice. This was often facilitated by (co)designing a (classroom)

activity that professionals could implement in daily practice after the meeting. This activity was discussed and evaluated in the next meeting. In the next section, when we provide a more detailed overview of the meetings, the addressed competences are listed per sub goal.

#### 4.4.1.3. USE OF THE VLE

The design and construction of the VLE tool also occurred during the implementation phase (for a detailed description, see Section A ISOTIS VLE Report by Pastori et al., 2019). As a result, the VLE has been introduced and presented in parts during different meetings. During the Kick-off meeting some first designs of the tool were shown. In the individual meetings, the structure of the VLE was presented, some activities were demonstrated and the value of the tool was discussed. Moreover, several activities were tried out in the meetings and later uploaded onto the VLE platform for others to use. In the beginning of 2019 the VLE tool was largely up and running and professionals were provided with personal user accounts to explore the tool autonomously. During the combined meeting in February professionals logged in for the first time under our guidance. Privacy issues were discussed and the professionals were able to practice with the skills necessary to work with the VLE. In groups they explored several functionalities and tried out some of the activities. In the three individual location meetings after the workshop, the VLE was used during the team meeting and professionals were asked to work with the tool autonomously. Moreover, exchange between countries was facilitated within these last meetings. In the next section, when we provide a more detailed overview of the meetings, explicit attention will be devoted to the use of the VLE.

#### 4.4.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The following section will provide a more detailed overview of the professional development intervention of both locations. In each box we listed the goals for that specific meeting and indicated to which competences and focus domains these goals were related (see Section 1.3.2 and Section 1.3.3). The professional development activities and strategies that were used to meet these goals are described second, followed by some of the most important observations and reflections during the meeting. Finally, to provide some insights into the cyclic nature of the process, each box presents a short assessment with information on how the outcomes of this meeting are used as input for the next meeting. Furthermore, specific attention is devoted to the different VLE activities that have been tried out during the intervention.

#### 4.4.2.1. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS LOCATION A

##### **BOX 4.1. Location A; Meeting 1; September 25, 2018**

###### **Goals**

From the needs analyses and joint kick-off meeting, we designed an outline for the first meeting for location A. The central theme that evolved from the needs analyses was parent involvement in the multicultural setting of the pre-school. Therefore, we decided to explore this concept using all components of the intercultural competences model.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To reintroduce the concept of co-creation and the main goal of the ISOTIS VLE task – enhancing intercultural competences (*knowledge & expectations*)
- To become aware of one's own beliefs and values about parent involvement (*values & attitudes*)
- To understand the concept of parent involvement from different perspectives (*values & attitudes*)
- To introduce a theoretical model for understanding parent involvement (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To share outcomes of ISOTIS research on the relationship with parents through the eyes of professionals (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To collaboratively design an activity in which a new way for parent involvement can be tried out (*action & skills*)

###### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** short discussion on the concept of co-creation, what it means and its role in this professional development intervention.
- **Exploration** of the concept parental involvement from the role of the professional in the organisation and from the perspective of parents and children. Two work forms were chosen for this; in the first round, participants would write down and discuss their own ideas with the group. In the second round, a more active form supported the exploration; participants were asked to indicate and explain where in the classroom parent involvement was evident for them as teachers, but also for parents and children (using post-it's in different colours).
- **Presentation and discussion** of Epstein's (2001) model of parent involvement, trying to link the types of parent involvement from the model to the values and current practices of the professionals.
- Short **presentation and discussion** on ISOTIS WP5.3 staff survey results with a focus on parent involvement.
- **Co-designing** a concrete activity to increase parent involvement together, which could be tried out before the next meeting.

###### **Observations and reflections**

The group is pleased to hear that we acknowledge their experience in a multicultural setting and that the concept of co-creation means we will collaboratively help them in developing their expertise even further. However, the responses of the professionals towards the concept of co-creation indicate that they are used to a more monological model of learning/professional development (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). The group is used to following and implementing a ready-made programme, rather than taking part in a joint process of developing PD activities addressing the specific needs/questions in their context. This approach was new for the professionals and therefore raised some questions (e.g., *what will we learn?*, *what will we have achieved in the end?*). We expressed that this model of PD is relatively new to us as researchers as well, and that because of this we will carefully evaluate the process at the end of each meeting.

When discussing what parental involvement entails for the participants, several values come forward. The group expects a rather active role of parents when it comes to parental involvement: parents are expected to take the initiative, to actively approach the teachers, to



ask questions about their children, to actively participate in out of school activities and to stay in the morning and play with their children in the classroom. There is one pre-school teacher who mentioned that parent involvement does not necessarily mean that parents participate in the pre-school setting. She indicated she also has experience with a mother who she considers very involved in the learning of her child, even though she hardly participates in classroom activities due to work obligations. As a result, we discussed to what extent there is a difference between the concepts of parent involvement and parent participation.

Next, we asked the professionals to describe parental involvement from the perspective of the parent or child to see whether parental involvement might entail different things for different stakeholders. Most professionals described the same values and beliefs again, but from a different perspective, i.e., *as a parent, involvement means that I often talk to the teacher to ask how my child is doing or as a child, my parent is involved when they play with me in the classroom in the morning*. They again indicate that parent involvement means being active and involved in the pre-school setting, participating in classroom activities and actively approaching the teacher. During the discussion we challenged them to think about the involved, but not participating mother again and ask what parent involvement would be through her eyes. This question did not seem to lead to any new takes on the topic.

To make the discussion more concrete, we continued the discussion in one of the classrooms using post-its. The group was asked to indicate where they think parent involvement takes place in the classroom (e.g., by the door, near the digital schoolboard, in the circle time area). They are again asked to shift perspectives and think not only from their role as a professional, but also from the views of a parent and a child, using different colours post-its. After a few minutes we collaboratively looked at some of the indicated areas and asked professionals to elaborate on why this area entails parental involvement. For instance, professionals indicated parental involvement takes place through the small window near the door as they often use this spot to let children welcome their parents or say goodbye to them. It provides a connection between the parents waiting in the hall and the classroom. We noticed that all three colours of post-its (i.e., the professional, the parent, and the child) are placed in all indicated areas. When we confront them with this observation, the conclusion of the professionals is that parental involvement consists of similar activities for all three stakeholders. In line with professionals' comments in the previous discussion, this might indicate that taking different perspectives on the concept of parental involvement is not an easy thing to do.

We continued with a presentation on the results from the ISOTIS staff survey and used these results to present Epstein's (2001) model of parent involvement. The group reacts enthusiastically and is particularly interested in how the results of their location relate to those of other organisations. As we are unable to provide this information, we discuss to what extent they feel that they can relate these results to their own practices. The professionals seem to recognize themselves in these results in general. Next, the Epstein model is introduced in order to broaden the concept of parent involvement. It shows six types of parent involvement, and adds the organisational level (which type of parent involvement does the organisation focus on, what does the organisation do about it) as a new view. During the discussion of the model, we noticed that the teachers focus on what parents should do, while the special needs supervisor, pedagogical coach, and the location manager more critically reflect on their own behaviour towards parents and the way they communicate their expectations to parents (as an organisation).

There is not much time left for the last activity: to co-design a concrete activity to increase parent involvement that can be tried out by the teachers in the upcoming period. We challenged the professionals to think of an activity that focuses on a change in their own behaviour rather than a change in behaviour on the side of parents. The activity the participants decide on, *meaningful interaction through photos*, is aimed at promoting more interactions between the parent and the teacher when parents bring their children to the pre-school, by using the pictures that are already shared in the WhatsApp group of their classroom. They will show these pictures when parents bring or pick up their children and use them to start a conversation with parents. The available technology in the classroom (e.g., digital schoolboard, iPad, smart

phone) will be used for this. The group is asked to keep track of their experiences in their journal, and to reflect on what they feel before, during and after the interactions with the parents.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

During this meeting it became clear that the group is experiencing barriers and limitations in their relations with the parents of their children. Reflecting on what parent involvement means, the professionals expressed they expect a very active role of parents. We also noticed that changing perspectives and thinking about parent involvement from the perspective of the parent or even the child is not easy to do. As this is important for understanding the behaviour of parents, we will continue with this topic in the next meetings. The designed activity (*meaningful interaction through photos*) will provide the main input for this in the next meeting.

The concept of co-creation left the professionals with several questions on the goal and added value of this process. We realized that it is important keep evaluating the joint design and implementation of PD activities as important part of the intervention throughout the process.

Lastly, we noticed how interested the group was in results from the studies conducted in the ISOTIS project and how they tried to link these results to their own experiences. We therefore decided to include more ISOTIS research output in the next meetings as well.

#### **BOX 4.2. Location A; Meeting 2; November 1, 2018**

##### **Goals**

Goals for this meeting were:

- To introduce and explore methods for reflection on experiences in the classroom (*knowledge & skills*)
- To actively reflect on experiences during the *meaningful interaction through photos activity* (*action, skills & values, attitudes*)
- To share outcomes of ISOTIS research on the relationship with parents through the eyes of the parents (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To collaboratively investigate issues related to influx of a new group of immigrants in the pre-school (*knowledge & attitudes*)
- To share the first design of the VLE (*expectations*)

##### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** short recuperation of the previous meeting.
- **Joint reflection** on the activity (*meaningful interaction through photos*) that was tried out, from different reflection perspectives (first focus on own experience, then relating it to the model of parent involvement (Epstein) and third linking experience to model of intercultural competence).
- **Presentation and discussion** of ISOTIS research, from the WP2 structured interview study with parents.
- **Exploration:** discussion on the influx of children from India and the challenges regarding this group.
- **Presentation:** short show case of the VLE, to briefly demonstrate the development of the VLE and to expose the professionals to the outline of the VLE

##### **Observations and reflections**

Previous to the meeting, one of the teachers mentioned technical problems they encountered using the digital schoolboard to show the pictures shared via WhatsApp. We supported them in fixing the problem and suggesting other ways to include the photos in their interactions with parents. During the meeting, we started the reflection on this activity with a round of sharing experiences. The teachers mentioned the practical problems they encountered that prevented them to extensively experiment with the activity. Some of them tried to overcome these problems (e.g., use the mobile or tablet to show the picture). Others were unable to (take the time to) find other ways to shape the activity, when the technology failed. Teachers focussed

on the use of the technology rather than on the underlying goal to increase the interaction with the parents during walk in.

Despite these technological issues, the teachers had several experiences to report on, in which they tried to more consciously engage in interaction with the parents during drop-off and pick-up moments. One teacher presented a clear example of an interaction. She showed a picture of a school trip (an autumn walk with the children in which some parents participated) was on the digital screen, when parents brought their children in the morning. One parent and her child enthusiastically approached the photo and started talking about it, with the child pointing to parts of the photo. The teacher approached the parent and child and participated in the conversation. This parent usually stays only very briefly in the classroom when bringing her child. During the interaction the parent explained that she felt shy to stay in the morning, because she was not sure about her ability to speak Dutch with the teacher. The teacher seized this moment to compliment the parent, telling the parent that she could understand her perfectly fine. After sharing her experience, the teacher reflected on it and realized that she had interpreted the action of the parent (her not staying) as not being involved with the pre-school and her child. She had never considered that there could be any other explanations for this behaviour. This realization made her reconsider the way she looked at other parents, but also made her more aware of how her own interpretation of the actions (or lack of actions) of the parents influenced her own behaviour. She realized that now she knew about the insecurity of the parent with regard to her ability to speak Dutch, she could help the parent by complimenting her, reassuring her and approach her more actively to provide opportunities for the parent to practice her Dutch in conversations with the teacher. In the group discussion following this example, the group agreed that becoming more aware of one's own interpretations of parent behaviour could help in keeping an open mind and being more active towards all parents to find out the underlying reasons for parents' behaviour.

We used two models (Epstein, 2001; ISOTIS Intercultural competences, see Section 1.3.3) for defining reflection questions. Using these questions in the reflection on experiences was a challenging process. Sharing stories of experiences is a time and energy consuming activity, and taking this to the next level by reflecting from a distance using new concepts is not easy. We primarily discussed the six levels of parent involvement from Epstein again. Teachers indicated that the model and how this is linked to professionals' actions became clearer now that the teachers had experienced how they could initiate meaningful interactions with parents. The manager indicated that they will continue this discussion in the next team meeting, critically evaluating how the organisation presents itself and their expectations to parents.

After this extensive discussion, some research results from the ISOTS WP2 structured interview study with parents were presented. The focus was on the topic of the parent-teacher relationship from the parents' perspective. A subsample focusing only on the results from Utrecht was used for analysis and the presentation. The wish to see the results of this subsample was expressed by the professionals during the previous meeting. The group recognized the results and was pleased to see that the parents indicated they were happy with the relationship with the pre-school teachers.

We decided to postpone the exploration of the influx in Indian families to the next meeting, to be able to show some screen shots of the VLE. As the VLE tool was still heavenly under development at this moment, screen shots were shown in a power point to illustrate the structure of the tool. We explained about some design principles (e.g., the multilingualism of the tool and other usability functions). The groups' first reaction was positive and curious, but also hesitant regarding how such a tool could be useful for them. We explained that we would come back to this question, when the tool would be readier for use. Moreover, they indicated that they were very interested in seeing what was done in other countries or to be able to connect to teachers from Portugal or Italy via the VLE, in order to exchange ideas or get inspired.

### Assessment and next steps

During this meeting, one of the goals was to experiment with reflecting on experiences of a purposefully designed activity to increase interaction with parents during walk-in time. The focus of this reflection was on the teachers' behaviour or actions, not on their expectations of the parents. Sharing experiences, telling each other what had happened (stories) is a time-consuming process, and it proved to be hard to regulate the discussion. The use of (external) models (Epstein, 2001; ISOTIS Intercultural competences, see Section 1.3.3) was helpful in regulating a more systematic reflection though this also proved to be difficult for professionals. Epstein's model of parent involvement appeared the most useful to better understand how the organisation, and the behaviour of the teachers elicits or supports certain kind of parent involvement. This aligned well with what the teachers experienced as a result of their own actions (approaching parents more actively, using photos to initiate conversations about the child's development).

Technology used in this activity, and the malfunctioning of it, appeared a large distraction from the underlying goal of the activity. This should be considered when we start working with the VLE. We learned that the group was very interested in the international aspect of participating in the ISOTIS project, looking forward to seeing what other countries are doing and we decided to align this interest (or need) in the further introduction of the VLE.

For the next meeting, exploring barriers and needs concerning the new influx of Indian families was one of the main points on the agenda since we postponed this topic during the current meeting. Furthermore, we wanted to follow up on discussions planned in the general team meeting concerning parent involvement and organisational policies on this.

### BOX 4.3. Location A; Meeting 3; November 19, 2018

#### Goals

Based on the assessment of the last meeting and some wishes expressed by the manager, we decided to introduce the role of ICT in parental involvement by further introducing the VLE and presenting results from a pilot study that had taken place in location A on this topic: U-VLO. We furthermore addressed the topic of the influx of Indian families.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To concretely formulate which behaviours or situations concerning the Indian families are seen as barriers by the professionals (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To discuss why these behaviours and situations are considered problematic by the professionals (*attitudes, beliefs & values*)
- To exchange possible solutions for these experienced barriers: what can the professionals change within themselves, their behaviour and attitudes that might affect the behaviour of families (*actions, beliefs, attitudes & expectations*)
- To share outcomes of the U-VLO research project on the use of technology in enhancing parental involvement (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To introduce the ISOTIS virtual learning environment and how it can support professional development and exchange concerning the topic of intercultural awareness and competences (*knowledge & expectations*)

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Presentation:** we presented conclusions from the U-VLO project on the use of ICT to enhance parental involvement. We discussed the opportunities that are provided by ICT as well as the encountered barriers. Moreover, we reflected on what we could learn from these findings concerning working with the ISOTIS VLE.
- **Guided discussion** on the barriers professionals are experiencing by the influx of Indian families.
- **Presentation:** we presented the overall structure of the virtual learning environment and specifically explained how this environment can provide them with new knowledge on the

topic of intercultural practices and how it can enable professionals to exchange practices with each other.

### **Observations and reflections**

The overall research design of the U-VLO project was presented by both the researcher and the two pre-school teachers involved in this project. Within this project, it was explored whether the educational partnership between parents and the preschool could be improved by introducing a digital tool, that would provoke mutual communication and exchange. Though the use of ICT in the project provided new opportunities for interaction, it also proved to be an important barrier (for more details see Francot et al., 2019). The other professionals, including the manager, found it interesting to hear the results and implications. Especially the recommendation on ensuring a warm welcome for new parents and children and managing the expectations of both the parents and professionals, led to discussion. The professionals concluded that they themselves do not have a clear framework of their expectations for the parents; how the parents should behave and what the do's and don'ts are. They stated that this is a point of attention for the organisation: If they have a clear idea in mind of what type of parent involvement they would like to see and how this should be expressed by the parents, then this 'framework' can be transferred to the parents.

The professionals already discussed the barriers they encounter with the Indian families during one of their internal team meetings as preparation. To guide the current discussion, Schein's (1992) model of culture and the ISOTIS model on intercultural competences were first presented. During this discussion, the problem with the Indian families appeared to be twofold. Some behaviours that bother the professionals is the extent to which children are independent or autonomous. For instance, children are unable or even seem unwilling to move their chairs when asked, put on their own jackets and shoes or eat independently. When we reflected on why this behaviour occurs and why it bothers them, they indicate that it might be due to some differences in values concerning good parenting. They indicate that within these communities one is perceived as a good parent when they are (physically) taking care of their children. So feeding your child instead of letting them eat themselves is considered good parenting, while the professionals value support of autonomy as good parenting. They indicate that the reason this behaviour bothers them is because they are convinced it is better for the child's development to develop independence. Moreover, they stress that it bothers them because they would rather spend their valuable time on helping children develop other skills (such as Dutch language proficiency) instead of autonomy. We furthermore discussed that you cannot change the behaviour of parents, but you can change the way you interact with them in order to elicit certain behaviours. The team suggests to better communicate their expectations from parents explicitly instead of implicitly expecting certain behaviours.

A second reason they experience barriers with this group of families is due to the nature of their immigration. These families are often high educated expats and for many of the children it is uncertain how long they will live in the Netherlands. As a result, many children are enrolled in international schools after preschool and parents value Dutch proficiency skills less. The team indicates that this is a difficult issue for them, because to some extent it makes them question the relevance of their work: if these children move in two or three years, then why are we investing all this effort in them learning the Dutch language? No concrete solutions for this problem could be formulated. Nonetheless, professionals indicated that it was nice to discuss this issue, to formulate the problem as a team and to see that other professionals experience the same difficulties.

As a final part of the meeting we presented the progress on the VLE. We demonstrated the overall structure of the VLE again and showed them how the VLE provides additional information on topics as well as concrete activities to try out in the (pre)school context. Though the professionals were enthusiastic about the tool, it also raised many questions. In line with the reaction during the previous meeting, these questions mostly concerned the use of the VLE in actual practice and how it could be used after the professional development intervention was finalized.



### Assessment and next steps

The professionals indicated already in the exploratory phase of this professional development intervention that they need guidelines for working with Indian families as they experience many barriers with this group. Actively discussing this topic, formulating these barriers and trying to explain where they come from was an important first step in this process. As one of the proposed solutions to elicit certain behaviours was better communication on expectations, we decided to continue with this topic. The professionals were asked to think about what behaviour they expect and how and when they communicate this (both in personal communication as well as in the organisation policies).

Secondly, we will continue to present the VLE and will spend more time on helping them understand the tool as well as its added value and how it can be used in practice in a durable way (even after the project ends).

### BOX 4.4. Location A; Meeting 4; January 15, 2019

#### Goals

Goals for this meeting were:

- To understand the relationship between organisational policy and personal views and practices (*knowledge, attitudes & beliefs*)
- To present ISOTIS research results on intercultural practices (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To experience the power of narratives in creating shared stories of an ideal world (*beliefs, skills & action*)
- To practice with reflection from two content models using stories of the ideal day (*skills & attitudes*)
- To further introduce the virtual learning environment and how it can support professional development and exchange concerning the topic of intercultural awareness and competences (*expectations*)

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** short recap of the previous meeting
- **Exercise:** the group is presented with three different policy statements on parent involvement. One is from their own organisation. We were interested to see whether they recognize the point of view of their own organisation and discussed how is it related to their personal views and practices.
- **Presentation and discussion** of ISOTIS research results from the staff survey, focussing on intercultural practices
- **Small group activity:** the group is divided in smaller groups and each group is invited to create a shared story of an ideal working day concerning parent involvement, exploiting in this the power of narratives. These stories will form the basis for a round of reflection, in which the group will reason backwards: from ideal to what is needed in terms of learning to get there. We will use two models (Epstein, 2001; ISOTIS Intercultural competences, see Section 1.3.3) that are by now familiar to the professionals.
- **Extensive presentation** of the VLE as preparation of the next joint VLE meeting

#### Observations and reflections

The group is presented with three policy statements with respect to parent-pre-school partnership, and asked which on belongs their organisation:

A. *As a parent, you are the expert when it comes to your child. The teachers add on to this with an educational curriculum and a professional view on your child's development. Parents are of great importance in the upbringing and development of the child.*

B. *The teacher is the educational professional and knows the child best as a student. The teacher is therefore responsible for the education of the child. Parents are experts by experience, they know their child best and the longest. They are responsible for the upbringing of their child.*

*C. We ask parents, when bringing and picking up their children, to come as little as possible to the school grounds and the school. The school is the place where the children learn to take responsibility away from the influence of home.*

The group immediately recognizes the policy statement of their own organisation (A). The collaborative approach to parent involvement that is described in the statement and the acknowledgement of the important knowledge on the child that comes from the parents is something that all professionals seem to have internalised. When discussing the other policy statements, of which one stresses the role of the teacher and the other one stresses the importance of children to have a place where they can develop apart from their parents, the group constantly comes back to the joint responsibility of both parents and teachers and their aim of working together with parents. This viewpoint asks for continuously trying out of (new) ways, practices and activities to involve parents.

When we relate the policy statements back to Epstein's (2001) types of parent involvement, and ask in what way these policy statement lead to practices to involve parents, also on the level of the organisation and its policies, the topic of the parent committee comes up. One of the teachers has recently taken over the responsibility to set up and organise a number of meetings per year with the parent committee. The parent committee is an obligatory part of the organisation in which representatives of all parents are invited to think about policy issues in the organisation. The teacher explains that it is not easy to shape this committee in a way that it entices parents to become and stay active. The group actively tries to help her in finding new ways to engage these parents in the tasks the parent committee is set out to have. Again, we see that the expectations of the teachers and other professionals do not always match with the expectations of the parents (e.g., expecting parents to represent the other parents vs being interested primarily in wellbeing of own child), and we challenge the group in rethinking their own values. We arrive at a point in which the group concludes that they might not be clear enough towards the parents about what is expected and that acknowledging the wishes from these parents more might be a nice step forward.

After this discussion, new research results from the staff survey are presented. The focus of this presentation is on intercultural practices. Several practices are discussed, and the group is very engaged. They recognize themselves in the presented results.

There is not enough time for both planned activities, so we decide to focus on the VLE. The group is curious, and we feel that it is good to prepare them for the next joint VLE workshop by showing them the state of the art of the VLE at that moment. We show them in what way the VLE is set up, what are design principles and choices that are made and how working on it might look like. During the next meeting the group will experience and explore the VLE themselves, going through some of the resources and activities.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

During this meeting it became clear that the subject of parent involvement has been discussed extensively in the last couple of meetings and the group is ready and eager to go online and see how the VLE can contribute to their continuous learning process around intercultural competences. They became even more curious after we showed the outline of the VLE, and the topics that were already presented on the tool. One of the main points of interest of the group was to learn from other countries and what was being done there. The group also expressed an interest in finding ways to interact with teachers from other countries. One concern that was raised, was if there were enough topics and activities for their children's age group (two- and three-years-olds). We will take this into account by engaging in online activities for this age group or by helping the professionals reform the activities into a version that is feasible for their age group.



#### BOX 4.5. Location A; VLE Workshop; February 19, 2019

##### Goals

A joint meeting with both locations was organized to get familiar with the VLE and acquire some hands-on experience in navigating through the tool. For this meeting individual, yet anonymous accounts were created. These accounts were activated during the meeting and could be used later on to explore the VLE individually.

The concrete goals for this meeting were:

- To understand the overall structure of the VLE (*knowledge*)
- To be able to navigate between the main structures of the tool: content/resources, tools and my space (*skills*)
- To become aware and try out some of the functionalities of the VLE (e.g. Beeba) such as text-to-speech translation, switching between different languages, using the google translate function, posting and responding in fora and discussions and downloading content to my space (*knowledge & skills*)
- To explore the possibilities of engaging in online in professional development activities (*skills, action & beliefs*)
- To discuss the opportunities of the use of the tool for their own organisation (*beliefs & expectations*)

##### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** short recap on the overall goal of the VLE (across WPs) and how the tool is designed for children, parents and professionals.
- **Presentation:** Interactive presentation of the overall structure of the VLE and its functionalities. Professionals logged in with personal devices and one of the researchers guided the professionals through several functionalities of the tool.
- **Activities on the VLE:** the group was divided into four sub groups, who each explored a different part of the VLE. Each activity was guided by one of the researchers. One activity consisted of watching a video on second language development (see [VLE](#)) and discussing it. A second activity, *the ideal day* (see [VLE](#)), asked professionals to discuss their ideal day with each other via the online tool (two groups participated). The third activity concerned responding on a critical incident on a forum<sup>18</sup>.
- **Joint reflection** on the activities and having a discussion on relevance of these activities.
- **Short assessment** of the VLE and discussion on how to proceed with this in the upcoming meetings.

##### Observations and reflections

We started with a short explanation of the goals of the VLE. Since the professionals already received several introductions of the tool in the previous meetings, we only briefly discussed this. We then asked the professionals to log in on the platform. Every professional received their own personal login: username and initial password. Since they logged in for the first time, they were immediately asked to change their password. Hereafter, they were presented the privacy policy in. Professionals had no questions regarding this and accepted all the terms and conditions.

We wanted to do a short tour through the VLE, but we noticed that the participants were only given access to one resource, instead of all eight. We told the professionals that we would correct this and would give them full access to the resources. To be able to continue with the tour, the researchers logged in onto the VLE with their personal accounts for the professionals to use. Professionals were guided through the resources and the usability functions of Beeba. They were most interested in the videos and recognized some of the content that was already presented during the previous meetings (for example the ISOTIS intercultural competences model and the book activity of location B).

<sup>18</sup> Due to privacy issues, a link to the specific forum is not included in this report.

Next, the four subgroups engaged in the three different activities. The first group watched an English video on the stages of second language learning. They were provided with the Dutch video script on paper. The professionals responded enthusiastically to the video and came up with several ideas/strategies for professionals to support children at each stage. They also provided us with ideas regarding the use of sign-language, something that is not on the VLE yet, but it might be an interesting resource. Two other groups engaged in the *ideal day* activity where each group had to write an 'ideal situation' regarding contact with parents and post it on the VLE. The two groups liked that they could respond to each other and noticed that even although they picked the same situation, they described the situation differently and had several questions regarding this. The last group discussed a 'critical incident' that was provided by the Czech team and that was translated in Dutch and uploaded onto a forum. This group tried out all possible ways to respond to a forum: they uploaded documents, pictures, made and uploaded a video and an audio-file. Though all professionals were able to execute the activities according to plan, we encountered some small bugs in the tool. For instance, the use of the browser affected to what extent some content was visible or not and for some of the fora a bug accounted for a mismatch between what was typed on the keyboard and shown on the screen.

At the end of these activities every subgroup explained to the rest of the group what they had been doing and what they thought about the activity and the VLE in general. We got some positive feedback on the use of fora and the use of multimedia responses. The professionals liked the use of videos as a way of receiving information more easily. They hope that more visual examples, such as pictures of good practices in other countries, will be uploaded soon. Since we are the only country that focuses on professionals with children in such a young age-range, the participants expressed the wish to easily find suitable activities for their target group. A clear age-range provided for each activity or even the possibility to search (via the search function) for activities was suggested. Furthermore, we discussed what was going on in the other WP5 countries and where we can see some overlap or interesting exchange possibilities. The professionals were eager to learn more about the other countries.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

Since the professionals acquired some basic skills needed for navigating through the VLE, we decided to provide them with the opportunity to explore the tool themselves. For location A, two more meetings were scheduled. The use of the VLE would have a central role in these meetings. We further explored the topic of intercultural awareness and competences and would facilitate exchange between countries using the VLE actively during the meetings. Moreover, we challenged the professionals to get more acquainted with the tool by autonomously exploring its possibilities.

#### **BOX 4.6. Location A; Meeting 5; April 2, 2019**

##### **Goals**

After the joint VLE meeting of February 19<sup>th</sup>, the group spent some time on their own on the VLE. As a result of this the manager sent an email with some comments and questions to address during the meeting: "the layout causes some confusion; the information stands far from our daily practice; English and Dutch are used interchangeably; a different professional language is used; concepts do not match the concepts we use; staff indicates that there is no room in the busy range of tasks to really get started with VLE; my space cannot be opened to see a post there". In general, they were searching for an answer to the question: what does the VLE provide us with and how does it become possible to use this in our daily practice?

The main general question related to the recurrent issue related to professional development and learning: do we become active only after we are convinced of the value of the professional development intervention or are we creating our own value by becoming active and trying out new things? We decided to address these issues not by discussing them, but by providing opportunities to be active on the VLE and interact with the materials that were on there, finding the answers as a result of that.

The concrete goals for this meeting were:

- To further examine the VLE by doing activities on it (such as short discussions, watching video clips, reading texts, seeing what other countries have been doing on the VLE) (*skills & action*)
- To present activities of other countries and investigate their relevance for the Dutch context (*expectations, values and attitudes*)
- To share results of ISOTIS research on interventions in kindergarten (*knowledge & beliefs*)

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** looking back at the joint VLE meeting and presenting our suggestions for the next two meetings.
- **Activities on the VLE:** the activity around skin colour developed in Portugal was taken as starting point and combined with a blog from the Early Years Blog to construct an activity on the VLE (see [VLE](#)). This activity consisted of: reading a blog and reflecting on it from your own context using the discussion board, watching a video and reading about what the Portuguese team did with regard to this topic.
- **Joint reflection** on the activities and having a discussion on relevance of activities from other countries.
- **Presenting and discussing** qualitative ISOTIS research on interventions in the kindergarten.
- **Co-designing** a homework assignment with the VLE.

#### Observations and reflections

During the introduction and short recap of the previous meeting, we acknowledged the comments and questions on the value of the VLE for the group and shared with them our idea on how to proceed with this (providing more opportunities to actively work with the VLE). They agreed that this would be an interesting way and consented to putting their hesitations aside and dive into the VLE these last two meetings before coming back to the issue of its value.

From previous meetings we learned about the interest of the group in hearing about (and seeing results of) activities from the other countries, so we explained that we catered this curiosity by creating an activity that would allow the group to see what was happening in Portugal. We also showed them that one of the activities that was done in the other Dutch location was already shared with the Portuguese team and that the Portuguese teachers had done the same activity (intercultural reflection on books).

The first step was to login to the VLE again and with some help they succeeded. We challenged them in finding a post of the manager placed on the notice board, in which she asked peoples' initial ideas on the VLE. They all responded to this online in order to practice some of the skills needed to understand the interactive components on the VLE. We then guided the group to the prepared activity in the 'my group' space. First, they read a blog about the question whether young children notice differences in skin colours and act on this. In the blog text, a video was inserted about an old American experiment that shows how young children approach dolls with different skin colours. Some professionals were already familiar with this video. For others this was new and quite impressive. Then, the group discussed what they saw and how they interpreted this for their own classrooms. Concerning the topic of skin colour, teachers indicated that they interacted with children about this in a reactive rather than a proactive way; only if the children mentioned something about skin colour, it was addressed. Within the discussion, several comments were made that expressed a colour-blind perspective. The group is not really convinced that their children are aware of and act according to already developed beliefs on skin colours. They also indicate that they are not convinced such a topic should be addressed proactively.

We encouraged them to check out the Portuguese activities on the VLE. This was an activity inspired by an art project – *Humanae* -, in which teachers purposefully addressed the issue of different skin colours with the children and children made large self-portraits trying to create their own skin colour by mixing paint. The group read a brief report of this activity on the VLE, and saw pictures of the self-portraits made by the children. This activity was done with children

age 8-9 years. During the discussion afterwards, the group reacted on this activity highlighting the large age gap they noticed between the children involved in Portugal and their very young children. They revealed low expectations regarding their children's abilities for successfully completing such an activity. The teachers predominantly shared their experiences with how basic activities have to be with this young group of whom many only spoke a little Dutch. According to them, even learning to recognize different colours or learning to paint is a challenge. The step to include skin colour and differences in skin colour would be too complex to understand for these children. Some of the other professionals, however, were more inspired by the activity and tried to find ways to make this possible in their pre-school. This difference in reaction between the teachers and other professionals (location manager and special needs supervisor) was again apparent in this meeting.

Next, we presented some results of the more qualitative ISOTIS research in the kindergarten of a primary school, in which teachers designed and executed activities around the topic of skin colour. We showed them how these young children (4 years) already could be engaged in these activities and even be challenged to express their ideas and theories. The teachers were not convinced this level of interaction could also be reached with their children. Nonetheless, the painting activities did inspire them to some extent and they considered making (simple) self-portraits with their children. We concluded that many of the activities on the VLE were aimed at older children.

The final part of the meeting we discussed the assignment we wanted to propose to investigate the content of the VLE more thoroughly: each group member will investigate one specific topic/section on the VLE and will systematically go through the content of this section. Two questions will guide this exploration: 1) what inspires you for your professional development and 2) what activity could be interesting to adapt to your classroom context? The group agreed and topics were divided based on preference.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

Although the group had expressed some genuine concerns regarding the usefulness of the virtual learning environment, they were very willing to actively participate in further exploration of the VLE. Approaching this exploration by conducting a hands-on activity on a topic that enticed a lot of discussion, appeared a good way. Learning to navigate and using the different features was not treated as separate task, but integrated in learning about the content of the VLE. In developing the activity, we connected with their interest in international exchange of experiences and activities and this worked quite well. However, we also uncovered a clear need for the VLE to make it more attractive for this group: more activities for younger children (age 2,5-4). Most of the VLE activities are aimed at older children or at teachers working with older children. Learning to translate these activities to fit their age group is something we decided to address in the next and final meeting, besides sharing results of the groups' systematic exploration of all the content on the VLE.

#### **BOX 4.7. Location A; Meeting 6; May 7, 2019**

##### **Goals**

Previous to the meeting, the professionals shared short conclusions of their investigations on the VLE via email. During this meeting we would discuss their finding, but also continue on the path of sharing what was happening in the other countries.

The following goals were set for this last meeting:

- To get an overview of all the content on the VLE (*knowledge*)
- To share activities from other ISOTIS countries (*knowledge & action*)
- To understand how they can use the VLE as source of inspiration for professional development or for classroom activities (*knowledge, skills, action & expectations*)

##### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Presentation** of the investigation on the VLE by the participants. Although we collected professionals' experiences via email, we asked the professionals to explain the section

they had investigated to their colleagues to promote ownership among the professionals. In this way, not only results or conclusions were shared, but every group member would get an overview of what could be found in all of the sections.

- **Sharing and discussing** the activity *welcome kit*, done in Italy and Portugal (see [VLE](#)), and discussing how this is linked to the welcome folder available in the Dutch organisation.
- **Small group activity** in which one group would address the question what topic from the VLE would be suitable as topic for further professional development and one group would try to redesign an interesting classroom activity to fit their age group
- Short look forward towards the assessment meeting.

### Observations and reflections

The first part of the meeting was spent online, on the VLE. All participants logged in again, and one by one they guided the rest through the topic they addressed. They pointed each other towards interesting videos or texts and commented on activities. Some topics appeared more interesting or easy to relate to than others. They also concluded that majority of the content was in line with what they already knew (e.g., about second language learning), but that especially the videos added something extra. They discussed if they could use some of the videos in conversations with the parents, for example as illustration of (second) language learning. We asked them if they had already used some of what they learned through the VLE in their daily practice and one of the teachers explained that she now more confidently looks at children who are quiet and do not speak much, because these children could very well be in the silent phase (one of the four stages of second language learning). Instead of immediate action, the teacher now observes the child, seeing if the child is still active and involved in class, allowing the child to stay silent and having the confidence that the child will eventually start to speak. She explained that the information on the VLE suited very well the knowledge she acquired during another professional development course. She even explained that the silent period can take much longer than was stated in the video on the VLE.

Several layers could be recognized during the discussions about the different topics on the VLE. For some of the topics the discussion was more on an organisational level (e.g., social justice and human rights) regarding how these topics are represented in the organisation. Other topics were discussed related to the teachers' professional development (e.g., second language learning), and for some topics the discussions focused on what was needed in order to give this a place in the classroom or in activities with the children (e.g., intercultural sensitivity). The group also discussed how the information on the VLE could be used with parents. The multilingual features of the VLE were tried out extensively, for instance to see how the videos could be made available in different languages.

We pointed the group towards an activity that was carried out in Italy and Portugal: developing a Welcome Kit for new children/parents. The different classroom activities that were done in Italy and Portugal were presented as well as some of the pictures of the end results. This was linked to a Dutch welcome brochure made by one of the other pre-school locations to prepare parents of what was custom in the pre-school. The group explained that they used to have a brochure like this, with a lot of pictures in it, but that they did not see much (positive) results of using it. During the discussion we notice that there are still tensions between what parents do and what the organisation (especially the teachers) expect of them. A vivid discussion on healthy birthday treats made clear that one of the pitfalls of being in a highly multicultural environment is that you are inclined to explain all tensions between parents and the organisation in terms of *cultural* differences, while some of them could have different origins (e.g., pre-school promoting healthy foods, while parents like to please their child in making a festive treat).

There is no time left for the small group activity, but we do discuss the upcoming assessment of the whole professional development intervention. The manager suggests that they will make a top 5 of most valuable lessons learned. They will discuss and present this as a group rather than individually. The top 5 will be shared during the final assessment meeting and will function as a starting point for further assessment.



### Assessment and next steps

There remains a tension between the wish for ready-to-use (classroom) activities and content that connects perfectly to needs or questions the professionals have on the one hand and the reality of a virtual learning environment as a source of inspiration that requires an active part of the professionals in using it (e.g., translating an activity to fit a younger age group) on the other hand. This issue has been addressed in several meetings, but it remains challenging for the teachers to translate activities to their local context. To facilitate the teachers further in this, two research interns compiled a list of the presented activities on the VLE along with information on how these activities should be adapted to be used with younger children. This information will be uploaded onto the VLE.

Involving the group in thinking about a set up for a constructive assessment of this intervention is important in a co-creational learning process. The idea to create a group-based top 5 of valuable lessons has an added value and provides a good starting point for further assessment. Also, the process of creating this top 5 together as a team helps them to become aware of what the added value of this intervention was for them.

#### 4.4.2.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS LOCATION B

##### *BOX 4.8. Location B; Meeting 1; September 18, 2018*

### Goals

From the needs analyses and joint kick-off, we designed an outline for the first meeting for location B. The central theme that came out of the needs analyses concerned enhancing awareness. Location B expressed that they currently do not have pertinent problems or challenges in their work. The focus of the professional development intervention was therefore to help professionals shift from being 'unknowingly competent' to being 'consciously aware of their competence'. Enhancing awareness and reflecting on their (intercultural) practices to further enhance their intercultural competences was the primary goal of the meetings with location B.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To reintroduce the concept of co-creation and the main goal of the ISOTIS VLE task – enhancing intercultural competences (*knowledge & expectations*)
- To introduce a new model for understanding culture, intercultural awareness and developing intercultural competences (*knowledge*)
- To become aware of how values and beliefs play a key role in understanding culture (*knowledge & values*)
- To become aware of own beliefs and attitudes towards (cultural) practices (*values & attitudes*)
- To collaboratively design a group activity for the children in which the new knowledge on cultural awareness could be applied (*action & skills*)

### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Short discussion** on the concept of co-creation, what it means, how we will use it in this professional development intervention.
- **Presentation:** Using a concrete dilemma – proposed by the professionals prior to the meeting – to explain three models of culture (Schein, 1992), intercultural awareness (Bennett & Bennett, 2002; Nunez, Nunez Mahdi, & Popma, 2017) and intercultural competence (ISOTIS Intercultural competences, see Section 1.3.3). The dilemma that was used concerned a boy who wanted to dress up in a princess dress during play time and was made fun of by another boy who recently started preschool.
- **Guided discussion** to reflect on the information presented in the three models with examples from the teachers' practices and experiences.
- **Guided discussion** to reflect on one's own attitudes and beliefs regarding the dilemma and how this affects their professional behaviour.

- **Design** of a very concrete activity for the classroom for the teachers to consciously practice their intercultural competences.

### **Observations and reflections**

The group is pleased to spend some time together to actively discuss their experiences of working in multicultural settings and further develop their expertise on this subject. At the beginning of the meeting, it is indicated that it is still unclear for some of the professionals what the goal of this professional development intervention is. We suggest to devote some extra attention to this during the meeting and ask them to let us know if the goals are still unclear at the end of the meeting.

We started by asking why the dilemma of the boy in the dress can be considered a (cultural) dilemma. Professionals indicated multiple layers to this dilemma: dressing up as a boy (especially wearing a princess dress) is not widely socially accepted. The professionals indicated that from a developmental perspective it is important that children – boys and girls – use role play and dressing up to develop several skills. The situation raises questions on how to support both children – the boy in the dress as well as the boy laughing – in this situation, though all professionals indicate they would talk with both children about the event, telling them that dressing up as a boy is fine as well. The professionals indicated that this dilemma becomes much more complicated when we take the parents into the equation. It creates tension if parents have different values and are not in favour of the dressing up. Professionals are then faced to choose between suiting the parents needs or the needs of the child (in their view).

After this small discussion, we showed Schein's (1992) onion model of how culture could be seen as a multi-layered concept (involving artefacts and symbols at a more shallow level, as well as a deeper layer of implicit and explicit values and beliefs) and asked the professionals to relate the dilemma of the boy in the dress to this model. We discussed that though we can see the outer layer of culture (symbols and artefacts) we need to engage in a discussion with someone to learn what values and beliefs lie underneath. One of the professionals stated she is aware of the fact that she sometimes falsely interprets parents' values and beliefs based on the shallow symbols and artefact she sees.

We continue by presenting a new model of intercultural awareness and explained that depending on your goal for intercultural awareness, different kind of activities are necessary. If you strive to full integration and inclusion of different cultural values and norms, this means one should also critically reflect on one's own values and norms instead of (implicitly) considering your own values and norms as superior. We explained that therefore reflection plays a crucial part in this professional development intervention and we introduced our model of intercultural competences. The professionals indicated that problems occur when you do not see eye to eye with parents or other people at the deepest level of culture. Is inclusion even possible if you do not agree on basic assumptions such as 'all people are equal'? We further discussed that this model does not suggest that you need to agree with other values to strive for inclusion, but that it is about taking a different perspective on your own values and those of someone else. The professionals explicitly stated their values are equally important as the values of parents. However, some of their comments indicated that at an implicit level, the professionals see their own values and beliefs – to some extent – as superior.

There is not much time left to design a concrete activity and given the stated unclearness of the goals of the intervention, we decided to spend some additional time evaluating this meeting. All participants indicated they liked the discussion, but there is some concern on how to translate this new knowledge to actual practice. One professional indicates the goal *and* the added value of this intervention remains unclear. She indicated that she and her colleagues have no developmental needs on the topic of intercultural awareness. Given the fact that everyone's time is a scarce resource, she indicated that she is not yet convinced this professional development intervention will be of enough added value for her. The manager explains that though the group is not facing any problems regarding the topic of intercultural competences, becoming more aware of one's competences can be of great added value.



### Assessment and next steps

A main point of assessment was to decide whether to proceed the professional development intervention with this location or not. As professionals' readiness for change plays a key role in this intervention, motivated professionals are necessary conditions for successful professional development. We therefore decided during the meeting that the professionals would internally discuss whether they wanted to proceed. The group decided to proceed, however, they stated that we should spend more time on explaining what they will learn from this intervention and the link to actual practice should be made clearer for them to see the added value of this process. This shows that the concept of co-creation in this process is hard for the professionals to grasp and they expect to receive a clear package to learn.

We started with a very broad discussion on the concept of culture to start a process of self-reflection on their own attitudes and beliefs. Though such a start might have been necessary with the complex topic of intercultural competence a very concrete link with practice was missing in the eyes of the professionals. We therefore decided to take a different focus for the next meetings. Instead of focussing on attitudes and knowledge and helping professionals understand how this affects (or can affect) their practices, we decided to focus on their knowledge and practices and helping them reflect on how their attitudes and values play a part in this.

### BOX 4.9. Location B; Meeting 2; November 20, 2018

#### Goals

Based on the assessment of the last meeting, we decided to focus on what intercultural awareness looks like in practice concerning classroom materials and the relationship with parents.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To become aware of explicit and implicit values and beliefs that are communicated with children via classroom materials (*attitudes & values*)
- To provide professionals with tools to either endorse favourable implicit/explicit messages or counteract on less favourable messages while working with children (*action & skills*)
- To share outcomes of ISOTIS research on the relationship with parents (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To introduce the virtual learning environment and how it can support professional development and exchange concerning the topic of intercultural awareness and competences (*expectations*)
- To collaboratively design an activity in which the professionals could further explore the implicit messages of materials in their classroom (*action & skills*)

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** Short summary of the models proposed in the last meeting and the overall goal of the professional development intervention.
- **Activity:** Using a children's book – proposed by the teachers – that is frequently read in the classroom; *we go bear hunting*. Collaboratively we read the book and discussed all the messages that were sent out by the book. Some of them were more explicit (stated directly in the text), others were more implicit (via images). We then reflected on whether these were the messages teachers want to send out to the children or not. Afterwards we discussed what the teachers could do next time they will read the book to the children to endorse more favourable messages and counteract on less favourable messages (see [VLE](#)).
- **Presentation:** We presented ISOTIS data from the staff survey 5.3 (from participating schools and preschools in the same site as location B) on the relationship with parents, both from the perspective of the parents as well as from the teachers and managers. We discussed to what extent location B can relate these results to their own practices.
- **Design** of a very concrete activity for the teachers to practice the skill of reflecting on the diversity of materials during the next few weeks.

### **Observations and reflections**

We started with open questions on reading (why do you read, what is your goal when reading, how do you choose a book, what do you find important when choosing a book) to help teachers reflect on how books not only have an educational impact on children, but guide their social development as well by the stories they are telling. Afterwards we started reading the book together to focus on all the social messages embedded in the story. In the beginning there was more focus on the more shallow (implicit) messages of the book, such as the skin colour and appearance of the characters, but gradually the discussion evolved to more moral or behavioural messages such as helping each other, having determination and fear and the role of pets in the family life. Afterwards we discussed whether all children could relate to this book and the implicit and explicit messages that are presented. One of the professionals for instance noted that going out into nature is something not all children can relate to and not all parents are very keen on their children getting dirty (they already experience this with playing in the sandpit at the preschool).

After the activity we evaluated with the professional whether such an activity – providing new skills to examine materials for cultural bias – was helpful for their everyday practice. All professionals indicated they liked the activity and learned new skills. One professional pointed out she saw immediate relevance in being aware of certain messages, but was not convinced that such an elaborate review on all their materials was necessary, especially concerning the cultural diversity. She indicated that during her education to become a preschool teacher, she learned that until the age of five all children are colour-blind, so for their age range it did not really matter what the characters in the book look like. We then took the time to discuss this assumption – young children are colour-blind – and asked whether they were familiar with the black doll/white doll experiment. The pedagogical coach stated she had seen this experiment and similar documentaries as well. Since the other professionals were not familiar with the experiment, we played a video of the experiment during the meeting. We then discussed how we, as a society, teach our children that some people are worth less than others via explicit and implicit messages in for instance the media, while engaging with others or in materials such as books. Not only do we send out these messages, children are able to pick up on them from a very early age. Even though the children in the video were probably never explicitly told that black people are worth less in this society, the majority of them assigned all the negative character traits to the black doll. Moreover, it shows that children are able at a very young age to categorize themselves why indicating which doll resembles them. The professionals were clearly impressed by the video and the professional who was convinced young children are colour-blind even stated that her mind was blown and that she was now feeling very enthusiastic about this professional development intervention.

We proceeded by sharing some results of the ISOTIS staff survey on the relationship with parents. We started with sharing how most of the parents are positive about their relation with the professionals, which the group considered a compliment. We showed that professionals in general feel the same about the parents, though the parent rate their relationship somewhat higher than the professionals. When considering the relationship with parents from an organisational perspective (based on the answers of managers about organisation policy) we discussed how their own policies relate to these results. The manager asked the teachers to what extent they were aware of the written policies the organisation holds concerning parents and proposed it would be good to internally discuss these policies during the next team meeting. The group indicated they were very interested in other results and especially in the comparison with other countries.

As we took some extra time to discuss the colour-blindness of children, not much time was left to present the virtual learning environment so we decided to postpone this to the next meeting. At the end of the meeting we discussed that the professionals would examine the books they were reading the following weeks in a similar way as we did during the meeting and they would make some notes on this for us to discuss during the next meeting.

### **Assessment and next steps**

Where there was still some doubt in the first meeting on the added value of this intervention, the relevance became very clear during this meeting. This shows that new knowledge and the

reflection on this new knowledge is important for professionals to adjust their paradigms and change their attitudes. The meeting was considered a success and we therefore decided to further expand on this topic by also reviewing other materials next time. In addition, the professionals expressed a wish to exchange knowledge and practices with other countries. We therefore decided to present some international results on diversity practices to be able to compare countries. Moreover, we decided to frame the introduction of the virtual learning environment within this need (professional exchange) as well.

#### **BOX 4.10. Location B; Meeting 3; January 29, 2019**

##### **Goals**

Based on the assessment of the previous meeting, we decided to focus on reviewing other classroom materials than books for cultural diversity. Furthermore, we addressed the topic of intercultural practices from an international perspective.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To evaluate what messages are frequently communicated to children in the books that are available in the classroom (*action & beliefs*)
- To become aware of explicit and implicit values and beliefs that are communicated to children via classroom materials other than books (*attitudes & values*)
- To provide professionals with tools to either endorse favourable implicit/explicit messages or counteract on less favourable messages while working with children (*action & skills*)
- To share outcomes of ISOTIS research on intercultural practices (*knowledge & beliefs*)
- To introduce the virtual learning environment and how it can support professional development and exchange concerning the topic of intercultural awareness and competences (*expectations*)

##### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Guided discussion** on the teachers' assessment of their books. Teachers took notes on this, which were sent around before the meeting and were used as a starting point for discussing the topic.
- **Presentation:** We presented international ISOTIS data on intercultural practices. We discussed to what extent location B can relate these results to their own practices and where they see differences with other countries.
- **Guided discussion** on cultural biases in other classroom materials. We asked the professionals to draw their classroom and discussed why it was designed and furnished like this. We focussed on the different developmental goals and purposes of different spaces and then looked at the classroom once more from a diversity perspective.
- **Presentation:** We presented the overall structure of the virtual learning environment and specifically explained how this environment can provide them with new knowledge on the topic of intercultural practices and how it can enable professionals to exchange practices with each other.

##### **Observations and reflections**

The professionals concluded that the books in their classroom lack diversity and that society is very 'white oriented'. They also already reflected on some of the other materials, such as the house corner and the lack of diverse foods and pottery there. Before further discussing this topic, we shared some knowledge on how professionals in other countries rate their intercultural practices.

The group recognized themselves in the Dutch results on intercultural practices. The professionals in the sample scored high on creating warm and inclusive environments and allowing for cultural wishes towards nutrition. However, they score rather low on presenting information to parents in multiple languages. The pedagogical coach indicated that she recognizes their organisation in this, since they have the explicit policy to put Dutch language proficiency first. The group shortly discussed how this is a dilemma in practice, since the organisation strives for both the inclusion of all parents (and recognizes the added value of

parents fully understanding information) as well as supporting the Dutch language (primarily for the children, but for the parents as well). Secondly, we showed the Dutch results split by educational setting (preschool versus primary school). The professionals were pleased to see that the preschools rate themselves higher on most practices, especially when it comes to the inclusion of parents and children with diverse backgrounds. They related these results to their policies on parent communication. One of the practices that is rated higher in primary school is the extent to which professionals organize activities to enhance the cultural knowledge of children. The professionals indicated that they believe this sort of activity makes more sense with older children. Finally, we discussed differences between countries concerning the specific topic of examining materials for cultural bias. We reflected on how all countries rate themselves higher on ensuring that there is diversity of materials for children to represent themselves during arts and crafts (different colour pencils for colour eyes, hair and skin) compared to examining materials such as books and toys for cultural biases. The group recognized this result and indicated they barely examined materials on this before the previous meeting. We furthermore discussed how not only differences between professionals, but also differences between policies could affect results (as the pedagogical coach already stated herself regarding the use of multiple languages).

Next, all professionals were asked to draw their classroom. Dutch preschool classrooms are generally divided in small corners with specific purposes for different kinds of activities. In this particular classroom there is a corner for role play (house corner), a corner for construction activities, a corner for reading and some tables for making puzzles or doing arts and crafts. The professionals indicate that the different corners have different educational purposes. The corner in which social development is very prominent is the house corner where children can perform role play and therefore this area of the classroom was reflected on most extensively. We discussed how role play allows children to play out fantasy stories as well as scenarios that reflect their everyday experiences (playing house, going to the supermarket or doctor). Especially for this last type of role play, children make use of materials they can relate to (for instance because they recognize them from their own homes). The professionals concluded that there is a lack of diversity in the materials and therefore it might be harder for some children to relate to all materials. As a next step, solutions were discussed to increase the diversity of materials. The manager and pedagogical coach indicated that they will investigate whether they can arrange some funds for buying new materials. Other solutions that the teachers proposed are asking parents to donate materials from their own homes or crafting materials themselves.

As a final part of the meeting we presented the virtual learning environment (VLE). We demonstrated the overall structure of the VLE and showed them how the VLE provides additional information on topics as well as concrete activities to try out in the (pre)school context. As an example, we showed how the activity of reading a book (activity that was tried out during the previous meeting with location B) was uploaded onto the VLE for other professionals to use as well. We furthermore demonstrated how the VLE consists of both public spaces and private spaces for groups to communicate and exchange information. The professionals indicated that the tool looked very interesting and impressive, though they expressed some worries regarding the English. It was demonstrated that part of the VLE (interface) has been translated in different languages (including Dutch) and that a google translate tool was built-in. The professionals indicated they were enthusiastic to further explore the VLE in next meetings.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

The professionals are clearly eager to exchange practices and learning experiences with other groups of professionals. We therefore decided to shift our focus towards the use of the virtual learning environment as a means to gain more knowledge and exchanging practices. For the professionals to effectively make use of the VLE, more knowledge and skills on the use of the interface of the VLE is necessary. We therefore decided to dedicate the next meeting to get acquainted with the tool. Since both location A and B are in need of this, we suggested to combine the meeting.

#### BOX 4.11. Location B; VLE Workshop; February 19, 2019

##### Goals

A joint meeting with both locations was organized to get familiar with the VLE and acquire some hands-on experience in navigating through the tool. For this meeting individual, yet anonymous accounts were created. These accounts were activated during the meeting and could be used later on to explore the VLE individually.

The concrete goals for this meeting were:

- To understand the overall structure of the VLE (*knowledge*)
- To be able to navigate between the main structures of the tool: content/resources, tools and my space (*skills*)
- To become aware and try out some of the functionalities of the VLE (e.g. Beeba) such as text-to-speech translation, switching between different languages, using the google translate function, posting and responding in fora and discussions and downloading content to my space (*knowledge & skills*)
- To explore the possibilities of engaging in online in professional development activities (*skills, action & beliefs*)
- To discuss the opportunities of the use of the tool for their own organisation (*beliefs & expectations*)

##### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Introduction:** short recap on the overall goal of the VLE (across WPs) and how the tool is designed for children, parents and professionals.
- **Presentation:** Interactive presentation of the overall structure of the VLE and its functionalities. Professionals logged in with personal devices and one of the researchers guided the professionals through several functionalities of the tool.
- **Activities on the VLE:** the group was divided into four sub groups, who each explored a different part of the VLE. Each activity was guided by one of the researchers. One activity consisted of watching a video on second language development (see [VLE](#)) and discussing it. A second activity, *the ideal day* (see [VLE](#)), asked professionals to discuss their ideal day with each other via the online tool (two groups participated). The third activity concerned responding on a forum on a critical incident<sup>19</sup>.
- **Joint reflection** on the activities and having a discussion on relevance of these activities.
- Short **assessment** of the VLE and discussion on how to proceed with this in the upcoming meetings.

##### Observations and reflections

We started with a short explanation of the goals of the VLE. Since the professionals already received several introductions of the tool in the previous meetings, we only briefly discussed this. We then asked the professionals to log in on the platform. Every professional received their own personal login: username and initial password. Since they logged in for the first time, they were immediately asked to change their password. Hereafter, they were presented the privacy policy in English. We provided them with a printout of the Dutch translation of the privacy policy and explained that there still might be some slight changes in the privacy policy, but that eventually the privacy policy will be fully translated into Dutch and be put online. Professionals had no questions regarding this and accepted all the terms and conditions.

We wanted to do a short tour through the VLE, but we noticed that the participants were only given access to one resource, instead of all eight. We told the professionals that we would correct this mistake and would give them full access to the resources. To be able to continue with the tour, the researchers logged in onto the VLE with their personal accounts for the professionals to use. Professionals were guided through the resources and the usability functions of Beeba. They were most interested in the videos and recognized some of the content that was already presented during the previous meetings (for example the ISOTIS intercultural competences model, 2018 and the book activity of location B).

<sup>19</sup> Due to privacy issues, a link to the specific forum is not included in this report.



Next, the four subgroups engaged in the three different activities. The first group watched an English video on the stages of second language learning. They were provided with the Dutch video script on paper. The professionals responded enthusiastically to the video and came up with several ideas/strategies for professionals to support children per stage. They also provided us with ideas regarding the use of sign-language, something that is not on the VLE yet, but it might be an interesting resource. Two other groups engaged in the *ideal day* activity where each group had to write an 'ideal situation' regarding contact with parents and post it on the VLE. The two groups liked that they could respond to each other and noticed that even although they picked the same situation, they described the situation differently and had several questions regarding this. The last group discussed a 'critical incident' that was provided by the Czech team and that was translated in Dutch and uploaded onto a forum. This group tried out all possible ways to respond to a forum: they uploaded documents, pictures, made and uploaded a video and an audio-file. Though all professionals were able to execute the activities according to plan, we encountered some small bugs in the tool. For instance, the use of the browser affected to what extent some content was visible or not and for some of the fora a bug accounted for a mismatch between what was typed on the keyboard and shown on the screen.

At the end of these activities every sub group explained to the rest of the group what they have been doing and what they thought about the activity and the VLE in general. We got some positive feedback on the use of fora and the use of multimedia responses. The professionals liked the use of videos as a way of receiving information more easily. They hope that more visual examples, such as pictures of good practices in other countries, will be uploaded soon. Since we are the only country that focuses on professionals with children in such a young age-range, the participants expressed the wish to easily find suitable activities for their target group. A clear age-ranges provided for each activity or even the possibility to search (via the search function) for activities was suggested. Furthermore, we discussed what was going on in the other WP5 countries and where we can see some overlap or interesting exchange possibilities. The professionals were eager to learn more about the other countries.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

Since the professionals acquired some basic skills needed for navigating through the VLE, we decided to provide them with the opportunity to explore the tool themselves. For location B, one more meeting was scheduled. The use of the VLE would have a central role in this final meeting. We further explored the topic of intercultural awareness and competences and would facilitate exchange between countries using the VLE actively during the meeting. Moreover, we challenged the professionals to get more acquainted with the tool by autonomously exploring its possibilities.

#### **BOX 4.12. Location B; Meeting 4; April 9, 2019**

##### **Goals**

After the joint VLE meeting of February 19<sup>th</sup>, the group was asked to spend some time on their own on the VLE. During the meeting we would evaluate their experiences and collaboratively carry out some of the activities posted on the VLE.

Goals for this meeting were:

- To further examine the VLE by carrying out some of the activities on it (such as short discussions, watching videoclips, etc.) (*skills & action*)
- To share results from VLE activities from other countries and reflect on them (*knowledge, attitudes & action*)
- To discuss how the VLE can be used as a source of inspiration for professional development or for classroom activities (*knowledge, skills, action & expectations*)

##### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Discussion** regarding the experiences of professionals on working with the VLE individually (this was asked of the professionals as preparation for this meeting).

- **Reflection:** The Portuguese teachers engaged in the same activity as the Dutch professionals regarding the reflection of cultural bias in materials such as books. The same book – *we go bear hunting* – was used by the Portuguese team as well for this activity. A summary of their reflection on the book was uploaded to the VLE. In a guided discussion the group reflected on this. The summary of the Portuguese team was only available in English (see [VLE](#)).
- **Activity:** We conducted another VLE activity that was designed by the Portuguese team. The activity consisted of a reading a blog with additional knowledge on the topic and discussing some presented questions as a team. Furthermore, pictures from the results of this activity from a Portuguese classroom were presented. This activity was available in Dutch (see [VLE](#)).
- **Short discussion** on the added value of the VLE as a means for professional development and a look forward towards the assessment meeting.

### Observations and reflections

When asking the professionals about their experiences with the VLE, all of them indicated they did not log on to the VLE individually to check out the content. The teachers indicated that this was mostly a convenience issue as the VLE is one of the many ICT systems they are using for work purposes (email, whatsapp, intranet, child development systems). For the manager and pedagogical coach the reason for not checking out the VLE was due to other priorities and a lack of time.

The professionals were enthusiastic about the exchange with Portuguese team about the book *we go bear hunting*. The language, however, proved to be a barrier. Since the Portuguese reflection was only available on the VLE in English, the google translate function had to be used for the professionals to read it. The professionals themselves were neutral towards this and did not state that the computer translated (and less than ideally formulated) sentences bothered them. Nonetheless, we did observe that the computer translation misled them in interpreting the information. For instance, one of the sentences described how a Portuguese teacher made a comment regarding children with diverse backgrounds and the computer translation led the Dutch professionals to believe that children with diverse backgrounds themselves engaged in this professional development activity. The professionals indicated that the Portuguese reflection of the book was on a different level (more about the moral meaning of the book rather than shallow characteristics). They stated that this could be explained by the ages of the children they were working with, and that therefore not all reflections were suited for the age of their children. Even though we corrected their assumption and explained this was merely a reflection of the teachers and no children were involved in the activity, they still attributed most of the differences in perspectives to differences in the age of children they are working with. As a result, they indicated that this exchange – though interesting – would have made more sense if they could exchange with other preschool teachers working with children in a similar age range.

As a second activity we encouraged them to check out the Portuguese activities on skin colour on the VLE. This was an activity inspired by an art project – *Humanae* -, in which teachers purposefully addressed the issue of different skin colours with the children, and children made large self-portraits trying to create their own skin colour by mixing paint. The group read a brief summary of this activity on the VLE, and saw pictures of the self-portraits made by the children. This activity was done with children age 8-9 years. During the discussion afterwards, the group reacted enthusiastically on this activity. In addition to one of the previous meetings where we discussed the black doll/white doll experiment, we started discussing how a so-called colour-blind perspective of teachers could have a negative effect on inclusive classroom practices. One of the teachers saw a parallel with a recent event in her group of a child that started crying due to the presence of a (new) dark skinned child. A discussion emerged on how to react to this. The teacher explained that she did engage with the two children to make them feel comfortable with each other without specifically addressing her personal reflection on how this could be related to the skin colour of the children. Her rationale for this approach and overall attitude towards the situation was that in her personal opinion skin colour is no more of an issue than the colour of someone's hair or t-shirt. She expressed that she feels indifferent towards skin colour and perceives herself as colour-blind by choice. As a result of this 'idealistic



colour-blindness', she indicated that she did not see the need to specifically address the issue (in general, not specifically related to this one example): *it should not be an issue in society, so I am not going to make an issue out of it*. The manager responded to this by indicating that though he understood her point of view, unfortunately it still is an issue in society and therefore it might be good to engage more often in activities that explicitly devote attention to the topic of diversity.

#### Assessment and next steps

We started a short discussion to prepare the professionals for the next meeting, which would be a final meeting devoted to the assessment of the intervention. We expressed our preliminary plans for this meeting and asked about their expectations and wishes regarding the assessment. We expressed that the goal of the assessment was twofold and we were both interested in their opinion of the professional development intervention as a whole, as well as their specific opinion on the use of the VLE as a means to professional development on the topic of intercultural competences.

#### 4.4.2.3. VLE ACTIVITIES

As described in the boxes above, the VLE was introduced gradually to both locations during this intervention. We followed a similar approach for both locations, though it should be noted that location A had a few more meetings (see Figure 4.2, Section 4.4.1.1) and therefore had more exposure to the VLE:

- **First introduction:** Explaining the aim and goals of the VLE, and explaining the rationale behind the outline of the VLE. The VLE was not displayed here, partly because of the work-in-progress state of the platform.
- **Second more elaborate introduction:** Displaying the VLE and introducing the professionals to the content: the different resources containing theory, reflection and concrete activities.
- **Preparing the professionals for the VLE workshop:** Explaining how they can use the VLE themselves for their own practices, repeating the structure and content of the VLE.
- **VLE workshop:** The professionals received their own personal account and together we explored the VLE, using concrete online activities.
- **Enriching (the use of) the VLE:** The last step was to stimulate the professionals to use the VLE outside the meetings and to exchange experiences and activities between different countries.

During the meetings, several activities, theoretical background, reflection cases and videos were (briefly\_ shown when presenting the overall structure of the VLE. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the VLE activities which were developed in the Netherlands and later on uploaded onto the VLE. Moreover, exchange between countries is explicitly mentioned.

Table 4.2

Overview of VLE Activities.

Name of VLE activity	Type and Location	Aims and outcomes	Links with other countries
<b>Second language learning - video</b>	Video with script on SLL (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Raising awareness on children learning a second language. After watching the video together, the content was discussed offline. Professionals were inspired and came up with strategies to support the children at each stage in their own practice. For instance, they suggested to use more basic sign-language, as a way to communicate during the silent phase.	
<b>Ideal day activity</b>	Reflection activity with instructions (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Promoting intercultural reflection on the gap between ideal and existing parent-professional-partnerships in multicultural environments. After writing their scenario online, professionals reflected upon this scenario using the intercultural competences model and the parental involvement model. Hereafter, professionals discussed each other's scenario on a forum, hereby asking and answering questions from each other.	
<b>Critical incidents activity</b>	Reflection forum <sup>20</sup>	Reflecting on a real-life situation in which there is a challenge arising from cultural differences. Professionals provided multiple solutions via the group forum, hereby exploring the possibilities of the VLE forum: they uploaded documents, pictures, created and uploaded a video and audio-file.	Example of critical incident from Czech Republic.
<b>Discussion on skin colour for professionals</b>	Reflection activity with instructions (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Promoting reflection on own thoughts regarding sensitive intercultural topics, such as skin colour. After reading a blog with theoretical background and watching a video, professionals were asked to discuss some questions (offline).	Combined with the example of the 'Skin colour' activity from Portugal. The Dutch professionals provided feedback on this activity for the Portuguese professionals.

<sup>20</sup> Due to privacy issues, a link to the specific forum is not included in this report.

<b>Discussion on skin colour with children</b>	Description of activity for in the classroom (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Providing tips and suggestions on how to discuss and act upon sensitive intercultural topics, such as skin colour, in the classroom with children.	Inspired by the 'Skin colour' activity from Portugal.
<b>Welcome kit for parents</b>	Description of activity for in the classroom (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Providing tips and suggestions on how to ensure a warm welcome for new parents with different backgrounds. Discussion on how to overcome language barriers and cultural differences between parents and preschool, in order to enhance the educational partnership. A concrete product (a parent-booklet from a different preschool) and the idea behind it was uploaded on the VLE and was discussed with the professionals offline.	Inspired by the 'Welcome Kit' for children by the Italian and Portuguese team. Ideas from these kits were discussed with the Dutch professionals.
<b>Book activity</b>	Reflection activity with instructions (see <a href="#">VLE</a> )	Stimulating intercultural reflection on the physical environment of the classroom. Exploring and reflecting on the (implicit and explicit) messages and assumptions within the material (here a popular child book <i>We go bear hunting</i> ). Discussing whether this book is inclusive for all children, and coming up with ideas how to enlarge the inclusiveness of the material.	Portugal conducted the same activity with the same book, their results were discussed with the Dutch professionals.
<b>Discussion on usefulness VLE</b>	Reflection forum <sup>21</sup>	Reflecting on how the VLE can be implemented in a useful way in daily practice. A discussion forum was created by the manager, professionals answered on this forum.	

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<sup>21</sup> Due to privacy issues, a link to the specific forum is not included in this report.

#### 4.4.2.4. VLE AS LEARNING COMMUNITY

One of the explicit goals of the VLE was to create an online learning community. In the Netherlands we addressed this objective in two ways. Firstly, we encouraged participants from the two locations to exchange experiences and comment on each other's work via the online forum. The first attempt to do this was during the VLE workshop in February when we divided the whole group into four smaller groups and let three groups explore the forum and its functionalities. This resulted in an online exchange on the forum, making and exchanging audio files and also some pictures and videos. As this was primarily meant to explore the possibilities of the VLE these exchanges did not address a particular content and all responses were deleted from the platform after the meeting. After the VLE workshop, the PD process continued for the two locations separately, but one of the managers initiated a new discussion on the forum about how the VLE could be used in daily practice. A few professionals participated in this discussion online, but the exchange was limited. For another activity called "Ideal day with parents" there was exchange between the two locations. The professionals from each location thought about their ideal day in interacting with parents and wrote a detailed narrative about this. These narratives were shared between the two locations and elicited questions and comments from professionals of one location to the other and vice versa. This exchange occurred online on the forum.

Another way that the VLE was used to promote an online learning community concerned the exchange between different countries (for a more elaborate overview of all the cross-country exchange activities, see Chapter 6). From the Dutch professionals' view there are a few examples worth noting. The first activity the Dutch professionals reflected on was the Skin Colour Activity conducted in Portugal (see Box 4.6 and Box 4.12). The Dutch professionals read the description of the activity in Portugal on the VLE. They visited the website of [humanea.org](http://humanea.org) and watched a little bit from the TED talk, which was new to them. We also used the Portuguese example to show the professionals what the possibilities of the VLE are, and how they can use the VLE as a source of information and inspiration. They really liked the Portuguese activity, loved the pictures and were impressed by the many different skin tones the children explored. They posed a few questions to the Portuguese teachers, such as:

- *How did the other professionals responded to this activity?*
- *Did it lead to discussions within the team?*
- *What is the reason not all professionals did this activity?*
- *Did this school have some experiences with negative comments on skin colour before this activity?*
- *What was the reaction of the parents to this activity?*

Next, the Dutch professionals started to think about how to transfer this activity to their own practices. The majority of professionals felt that this activity would not be feasible for the children in the preschool, since they are too young. According to the professionals, their children love to draw/paint, but then the children are focused on mixing all colours and just putting the brush on the paper than making a specific painting. They explained that, based on the low SES background of most of the children and the fact that many never use paint at home, usually the goal is to

provide opportunities for them to be creative with paint and develop related motor skills. This raised a few questions for the Portuguese team:

- *Does the Portuguese team have an idea how to do such an activity with younger children?*
- *Do they share the opinion of (some of the) Dutch professionals: only respond properly to this topic (skin colour, race) when it comes up?.*

The Portuguese teachers responded to the questions and feedback. They mentioned, for instance, that they indeed had some experiences with racism in the school which led the teachers to be very proactive in this regard. They were convinced it is better to address the issue of skin colour rather than ignore the topic, even with young children. They also shared some ideas of how the painting activity could be conducted with younger children, for example by drawing the children's hand and asking children to mix the paint and colour the hand rather than making self-portraits.

Another activity concerned the welcome kits that were developed in Italy and Portugal. These materials were shown to the Dutch professionals, which raised a discussion about ways to welcome new children and their parents to the preschool. Interestingly, the welcome kits were focused on children and welcoming them to the school and classroom. Important to note is that these welcome kits focused on older children who would enrol in primary school. The discussion in the Netherlands focused more strongly on welcoming the parents and explaining them what is expected of them and the children when they start preschool at two years of age. One of the professionals mentioned that they used a welcome booklet for parents in one of the other locations. This booklet showed pictures of the classroom and classroom routines and some simple text in Dutch and was used during the intake meeting with parents. They also shared that they used to visit the child at home before the child enrolled in preschool to meet in a safe environment for the child and parent. However, recently the organizational policy changed in this regard and focused on welcoming the parents and child in the centre instead, so the child and parents can familiarize themselves with this new setting.

## 4.5. PART IV: ASSESSMENT

The fourth and final part is dedicated to the assessment of the professional development intervention. The methods for assessment are described and the most important outcomes concerning staff, organisation, the VLE and the overall process of co-construction are pointed out. We conclude this country report with a short discussion on the main lessons that we have learned during the intervention.

### 4.5.1. ASSESSMENT OF DOMAINS AND PROCEDURES

Due to the cyclic nature of our design-based approach (see Section 1.3.1), the assessment proceeded in two ways. First, a short assessment was part of every meeting to be able to design the next meeting (see Section 4.4.2). Notes and observations from these small assessments during the process yield a lot of information on not only the overall process, but on the staff and organisation as well. Moreover, observations during the meeting were the VLE were actively used to provide useful information on the professionals' satisfaction regarding the use of the tool. Therefore, these observations during the professional development intervention will be included in the result section.

Second, a more formal assessment took place in July 2019 at the end of the intervention (see Figure 4.2, Section 4.4.1.1). All professionals (e.g., teachers, managers, pedagogical coaches, special needs supervisor) of both locations were invited to this assessment meeting. Two teachers, one of every location, were unable to attend the assessment meeting. Their opinions are included in the results though, as they were communicated to us via either email or other colleagues. During this formal assessment meeting, we collected data in several ways. Prior to the meeting, the professionals were asked to fill out a short questionnaire on the usability of the VLE. At the start of the assessment meeting, professionals were asked to fill out a second questionnaire concerning a self-evaluation of their skills and competences. Professionals were asked to judge their skills and competences prior to the intervention (in hindsight) and after the intervention. They were asked to score 26 items divided into 6 topics: *teaching efficacy in diverse classrooms*, *intercultural sensitivity*, *reducing prejudices*, *multilingualism*, *parent-teacher relationship*, *professional development*. Next, a focus group discussion was held to gather more in-depth information on these topics, as well as on the use of the VLE. Afterwards, both locations presented what they learned from and liked about the intervention as well as points for improvement. Lastly, professionals were asked to give an overall rating on a 10-point scale for the intervention. At the end of the meeting, we shortly presented some preliminary findings (i.e., what we learned so far as researchers) and discussed further steps concerning the use of the VLE and opportunities for dissemination of the project.

### 4.5.2. RESULTS

The main findings of the collected data will be divided into four topics. The first topic, *staff*, concerns the overall satisfaction of the professionals and to what extent they thought their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes were changed through the intervention. The second topic, *organisation and collaboration practices*, concerns the organisational climate and team work. A central question here is to what extent the intervention impacted the collaboration within the

organisation and if the PD activities prompted further discussion in the organisation outside the planned intervention meetings. Third, we present the results on the *virtual learning environment*. This concerns the usage, usefulness, satisfaction and to what extent professionals are interested in future use of the tool. Lastly, the intervention's *process of co-construction* will be evaluated. For all four topics the (self)evaluation of the professionals and the observations and reflections of the researchers are used to highlight the most important findings.

#### 4.5.2.1. STAFF

The professionals demonstrated mixed feelings of satisfaction. While some features and activities of the intervention were experienced as interesting and relevant, others were experienced as a burden. All professionals indicated they were most satisfied with the new knowledge that was provided by the researchers and how this led to more awareness on some of the topics. For location A this for instance concerned awareness on how to explicitly communicate implicit expectations they have for parents. For location B this concerned the lack of diversity in their materials and the realisation that young children's experiences are shaped by this. In fact, the professionals got so excited after the first guided activity in which they reflected on a book they read to children that they decided to proceed with reflecting and evaluating more books and other classroom materials and they shared this experience with other professionals from other locations as well.

The main point of dissatisfaction of the professionals concerned a mismatch between their expectations of the intervention and the actual activities. On the one hand, this concerned the overall process of co-construction (see Section 4.4.1.2) and the use of the VLE (see Section 4.4.1.3). On the other hand, this represented a mismatch between the areas in which professionals experienced versus expected growth. The overall aim of this professional development intervention was to improve practice via improving the intercultural competences of professionals. As our model of intercultural competences (see Figure 1.2, Section 1.3.3) demonstrates, beliefs, values, and attitudes play a crucial role in facilitating change in practice. Hence, reflection on one's values, beliefs, and attitudes was at the core of each meeting. The researchers observed several changes in attitudes and beliefs during the intervention and these changes were also confirmed by the professionals themselves during the formal assessment meeting. For instance, the manager and a teacher from location A indicated that they became more aware of their own prejudices towards parents and tried a more open approach when discussing problems with parents. They stated that they tried to stop rehearsing such discussions in their head, as this means that you are already biased towards how you think a parent will react to your message. Instead they tried to keep in mind that parents experience these conversations with their own beliefs and expectations. Professionals in location B indicated that they became more aware of the added value of actively addressing the topic of diversity. Before the project they were very focussed on promoting equality and avoiding an explicit focus on diversity (colour-blind perspective). During one of the meetings it appeared that this colour-blind perspective was derived from a misconception on whether young children see diversity or whether they are colour-blind. One of the teachers was convinced of the latter, thus highlighting that there was no need to address the issue as young children 'don't see colour'. After seeing a video on how children perceive colour and respond to colour (experiment with white and black dolls) she acknowledged



that children do see differences. However, there was still discussion in the team about the necessity of addressing this. The teacher said: “for me colour is not an issue, so why should I make it one?”, but the manager clearly pointed out that it is an issue in society at large and thus that it is their professional responsibility to address this issue. At the end of the project they indicated that they are striving to make diversity more visible and accepted in the classroom for both children as well as their parents. This change in attitudes was also underpinned by professionals from location A.

Though the professionals are thus self-aware of their changes in beliefs and attitudes, they demonstrate less awareness on how this affected their practice. Though we believe that at least some changes in practice are there (an example will follow below), it might be that they are too subtle to notice for the professionals. Professionals thus experienced much growth in this area, though they might have expected this in other areas (knowledge and skills rather than beliefs and attitudes). A clear example of this mismatch is demonstrated by location A and their needs concerning the influx of Indian families. The professionals indicated they were in need of an expert who would tell them ‘how it works with Indian parents’ (knowledge) and what they should do (skills) to change the behaviour of these parents. Instead we used reflection to help them understand that you cannot change someone else’s behaviour but merely your own behaviour and the way you communicate your expectations. Moreover, we provided them with skills to investigate why parents behave in certain ways and discussed how similar behaviours of parents might derive from very different underlying values and beliefs. The professionals from location A demonstrated they gained more awareness on this during the formal assessment meeting. One of the teachers indicated how she is now asking parents why they behave in certain ways when she visits them in their homes and she noticed that even though all parents are Indian, they all have very different stories and backgrounds. Nonetheless, the professionals did not value the knowledge and skills they learned as it did not match their expectations (perhaps they expected clear-cut guidelines or answers in concrete situations or ways to tackle cultural problems), leaving them with an overall sense of dissatisfaction concerning this topic.

In addition, the quantitative self-evaluation professionals filled out showed some interesting patterns. A first finding is that the teachers reported much less growth compared to the other professionals (managers, pedagogical coach and special needs supervisor). Teachers indicated on average that they experienced growth on 3 out of 26 items, whereas this average was 11 for the other professionals. Results from Task 5.3, the staff survey, revealed that the Dutch teachers showed the highest levels of self-efficacy (in comparison to teachers from other countries), which may at least partly reflect the findings in the current intervention study (Slot et al., 2018). A second finding was that the professionals from location A rated their competences before the start of the project much higher ( $M=3.9$ ) than the professionals of location B ( $M=3.2$ ). Overall, growth was mostly reported on the topics of *intercultural sensitivity*, *reducing prejudices*, and *multilingualism*. Interestingly, despite the extensive focus on parent involvement in location A, none of the professionals from location A reported growth on this topic, except for the special needs supervisor. For location B, where we extensively focused on how classroom materials can help in *reducing prejudice*, all professionals indicated growth on this topic.

In conclusion, all professionals indicated that this intervention supported their professional development. However, due to a mismatch with their expectations most professionals stated that they were expecting to learn and develop more (or other skills) during this year and some were questioning whether the time and effort was worth their experienced limited growth. Despite these somewhat mixed reflections of the professionals themselves, the ISOTIS researchers could see the change over the course of the intervention, but the majority of the change occurred at the level of professionals' beliefs and awareness, which may have been less visible for the professionals. In fact, as one of the managers stated at the beginning of the intervention that he wanted to strive for more awareness in professionals about why they act the way they do, the intervention appeared to be successful in raising this awareness and sharing and exchanging this within the team of colleagues.

#### 4.5.2.2. ORGANISATION AND COLLABORATION PRACTICES

The professional development intervention affected the organisation in several ways. The organisation is already characterized by intensive collaboration among professionals, therefore discussing work related issues with a mixed group of professionals working at one location was not new for these professionals. Nonetheless, during the intervention the added value of this mix of professionals (teachers, manager, pedagogical coach, special needs supervisor) was further demonstrated. First, different types of professionals provide various views on topics, which enriches discussions. For instance, managers and pedagogical coaches are supervising several locations and teachers and thus have the knowledge to enrich discussions by sharing how other pre-school teachers deal with similar situations. Second, a mixed group allows a larger outreach of certain realisations. For instance, in the case of location A, teachers are the ones who are confronted with parents on a daily basis and who were most in need of a better parent-professional relationship. Nonetheless, the other professionals deal with parents sometimes as well, mostly when the parent-professional relationship is problematic. A joined perspective on how to deal with such situations, how to communicate expectations, and what to expect from parents in general influences the parent-professional relationship throughout the entire location instead of being limited to only the classroom context. Third, including managers in the intervention creates more opportunities for actually acting upon new insights. For instance, in the case of location B, after the professionals collaboratively realized a clear lack of diversity in classroom materials, the manager indicated during the meeting that he would immediately try to arrange some funding to purchase more diverse classroom materials. All professionals seemed to share the opinion that it was helpful to discuss issues with a mix of professionals. In addition, the pedagogical coach of location A added that it would have been even more valuable if all teachers of location A could have been included.

Though the professionals collaborate intensively with others working in the same location, exchange between locations is more limited. This exchange is mostly facilitated via managers and pedagogical coaches who supervise multiple locations. Direct exchange between teachers of different locations is scarce. All professionals were pleased with the overall lay-out of the meetings in which there was both the opportunity to exchange practices in the joined meetings as well as individual location meetings to tackle context-specific needs. During the formal assessment meeting, both managers elaborated on how they have been working on sharing new

insights from the project with other locations (not participating in ISOTIS). The manager of location B explained that he carried out the book activity (see Box 4.9) with several other locations. The black doll/white doll experiment was shown to these other locations as well and elicited similar discussions as the one with location B, which enlarges the outreach and wider implementation of the message within the entire organisation. Moreover, the manager shared how teachers of one location stated that a book was very neutral and did not yield any (implicit) messages. He was able to reflect on this and helped the teachers understand that they take some messages for granted as the truth, leading them to believe that there are no (implicit) messages at all. As a result, more diverse materials are being purchased for several locations. The book activity was also shared with location A and one teacher indicated that as a result of this an intern enriched the house corner in their group with several materials, some of which were borrowed from parents. She shared that parents and children responded very enthusiastically to this. Children showed recognition of some materials and started playing with them. Moreover, the teacher noticed that other children were copying their play and also interacted with the new materials and with each other.

#### 4.5.2.3. VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The short questionnaire on the usability of the VLE, which was filled out by the professionals before the formal assessment meeting, was only briefly discussed during the -meeting, though the professionals referred to the VLE multiple times during the meeting, given that it was an important part of the intervention. The assessment focused on the following experiences with the VLE: how the professionals used the VLE, what features they enjoyed and what they did not enjoy, whether the VLE is something they will use in the future and the overall usability of the tool.

##### **Exploration and use**

Almost all professionals indicated that they explored the *Resources* section (including the videos, theoretical background, observation and reflection cases and the activities) and the *My Space* section (both the notice board and projects & materials). Interestingly, many professionals also stated that they explored the *Tutorials* section, though this is something that we did not demonstrate nor use during the intervention. This could either mean that the professionals explored this by themselves, but a more likely explanation is that it was not very clear what this section in the questionnaire meant and that the professionals thought they actually explored it while they did not. Furthermore, some professionals used the assistance of BEEBA the bee. All functions were explored during the meetings, though only the Google translate function was regularly used by the professionals. During the assessment meeting it was stated that the professionals of location B did not explore the VLE outside the meetings. The professionals from location A did explore it by themselves, but it was part of the practical assignment of one of the meetings (see Box 4.7). Results showed indeed that location A explored the VLE more, (i.e. explored more possibilities and functions of the VLE) than location B.

### **Strong points**

The assessment showed that, regarding the VLE content, professionals liked the videos and the theoretical background provided by the platform. The videos were a nice introduction to the different themes according to the professionals, and gave concrete tips and suggestions: *'There were useful tips to use when talking to parents'*. All professionals had already some knowledge regarding the themes, but the theoretical background did provide some new knowledge for them. As one professional stated: *'it put questions from the daily practice into a broader perspective'*. Some professionals indicated that they really liked the exchange of experiences and activities with other countries. This gave them new ideas and they liked the fact that other professionals could learn from them as well.

### **Points for improvement**

Three main points to consider for improvement derived from the assessment. The first point concerned a mismatch between the expectations of the professionals and the actual tool. The teachers from location A indicated they were expecting a fully operative tool that could be used on weekly basis, full with activities that are specific to their context and could easily be implemented. Most classroom activities presented in the VLE, were not suitable and concrete enough for the young children in this preschool-context according to the professionals. This feedback emerged on several occasions during the intervention. We tried to demonstrate the usability of the activities by discussing them and showing how to adapt these activities to fit the younger age group. However, it turned out that it was rather difficult and time-consuming for the professionals to make these adaptations themselves. As one professional stated: *'It does not have enough connections with my daily job'*. Another professional stated: *'I had different expectations at the beginning. I understood that I would receive an enriched databank/app, full of direct useful information. Now I needed to adapt many things myself to the level of my target group'*. Though the researchers communicated on several occasions that the VLE served as a prototype to inspire professionals rather than it being a clear-cut program, professionals were still to some extent disappointed the tool did not meet all their expectations.

A second point concerned language, which was sometimes experienced as a barrier. Although it was very helpful that the interface of the platform, the videos and the own designed activities were translated into Dutch, the other content of the VLE was not. Google Translate was to some extent helpful, though it should be noted that the grammar and vocabulary used at the platform should be simplified in order to improve the translations provided by Google Translate. Furthermore, by the use of automatic translations it is possible that subtle nuances disappear, which can lead to a (slightly) different interpretation of the activity or theory (see Box 4.12).

A final point concerns the long-term implementation of the tool. It turned out that the professionals did not or only rarely looked at the VLE by themselves outside the meetings. At the end, most of them stated that they still viewed the platform as *'an extra task, not a helpful tool to work with in daily practice. The VLE was too distant from the reality to use it daily in the group'*. It should be noted that the organisation already has several other online platforms to communicate with each other. This strengthens the idea of seeing the VLE as *'an additional task or environment'*. Therefore, we should consider the possibility that the VLE can only be thoroughly used during meetings and to incorporate it in trainings for professionals, as a tool to search for enrichment

during professional development trainings and to facilitate exchange between professionals, rather than as an independent tool for professional development. Another solution could be investing more in a long-term implementation, in which the professionals receive more guidance (by training, observations and reflection) in how to use the VLE in their daily practice, rather than only using it during the meetings. This will help the sustainability of the VLE, although this is of course time consuming.

### **Usability**

Regarding the usability of the tool, we did not find differences between the two locations or between professionals. Most professionals thought the VLE was unnecessarily complex, and do not think that they will regularly use the VLE. Items focusing on the content and functions of the VLE (e.g., *I found the various functions in this system were well integrated*) were on average scored around 3 on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *disagree* (1) to *agree* (5). One professional indicated that she would require the support of a technical person to be able to use the VLE, whereas many other professionals indicated that this was not necessary. Related to this, most professionals did feel confident while using the platform. This indicates that although the professionals found the platform rather complex, they feel equipped enough to use such an online platform. At the end of the questionnaire, two summing up questions were asked: Whether they would use the VLE again and whether the professionals would recommend the VLE to another colleague. The last item is called the Net Promotor Score, which is an overall indicator of satisfaction of the platform. This was answered on a 10 point scale, ranging from *No, definitely not* (1) to *Yes, definitely* (10). All professionals scored between 2 and 5, indicating that the (NPS) was relatively low and that the professionals in our context would represent detractors. One professional stated that *'It was innovative, but not so easy to use. I'd rather have personal conversations with my colleagues or parents, or use well-known systems such as WhatsApp or mail to communicate'*.

#### **4.5.2.4. PROCESS OF CO-CONSTRUCTION**

The concept of co-creation was used to inform the design and implementation of the intervention, both in developing the VLE as a tool, as well as in the design of the content of the interventions. The co-creational nature of the design and implementation of the VLE, implied that the development of the VLE was an ongoing process while working with the professionals on professional development. This process highlights the synergetic nature of this intervention in which questions, issues, challenges or needs of the professionals working in their own local context were used to inform the design of the VLE content, and vice versa, the content on the VLE that was already available could inspire the professionals in their reflection on their daily practice. As a result, the PD intervention was running in parallel to the development of the VLE following a cyclic process of design – implementation – redesign.

The concept of co-creation also informed how the professional development meetings in both locations were designed, executed and evaluated. The meetings were therefore set up in a collaborative way; all participants of this heterogeneous group (researchers, pre-school teachers, manager, pedagogical coach, special needs supervisor) could contribute from their own expertise, but at the same time could learn from each other. The ultimate outcome of such a

process is that the group develops new and relevant knowledge together. In this process, the researchers did take the lead in proposing an agenda for each meeting, but the specific content of this agenda was based on what happened during the previous meetings and a short collaborative assessment at the end of each meeting, which resulted in some questions or activities for the next meeting. From the second meeting on, some recurrent activities can be seen on the agenda. One example is that in each meeting there was a slot in which the researchers shared the latest results from the ongoing ISOTIS qualitative and quantitative studies. We came to understand that the participants really valued this information, because it matched their idea of what constitutes learning: that of knowledge transfer. This immediately makes clear that a co-creation inspired process is not without tensions, and that these tensions relate on the one hand to the way participants are used to learn new things in their work environment, and - related to this – to the expectations that the participants had on beforehand.

During the assessment meeting the co-creational set up of the PD intervention was discussed extensively, and these two sources of tension became clearer. The participants had never participated in such a learning process before, and from the start on many felt some confusion about what it was that they had agreed to take part in: were they participating in research as participants to be observed by researchers or in a learning process that they were supposed to learn something new and useful. For location B, this confusion already came to light in the beginning, and was addressed in the group in a number of discussions. During the assessment, the participants indicated that because of this, they felt they were able to adjust their expectations, and more importantly, they had influenced the process in such a way that the remaining of the meetings were seen as more relevant. For them the practical relevance of what was discussed was seemed especially important, and through designing more hands-on activities, the participants indicated this need was met in a good way.

In Location A, the uncertainty about what co-creation actually was, was not as obvious as in location B. The concept was only discussed once, during the first meeting at the location. While evaluating the whole process, participants of location A however indicated that they had expected more knowledge transfer and a more training-like set up of the meetings. *“We expected to be able to get more from you (i.e., the researchers)”*; one of the pedagogical coaches indicated. As the intervention unfolded, they came to see that the process was more about mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences, and through reflection, coming to a better understanding of challenges and barriers in multicultural contexts. Although they indicated that the discussions and the practical activities during the meetings were interesting, the fact that they had to contribute their own expertise felt like they were not actually learning anything new.

How they valued the whole professional development intervention was very related to their expectations of the VLE. Here also, there was a difference between participants from location A and B. For location A, the VLE was seen as the central part of the professional development intervention, they had agreed to. One preschool teacher indicated: *“I expected to be taught a complete new system, that would help me in my day-to-day activities with the children and parents”*. The pedagogical coach explained: *“I thought the VLE would be an information source, where we could find anything.”* The fact that building the VLE was also considered as a co-creation process, in which participants or users of the VLE contributed to the design of the VLE,



was difficult to grasp. Participants thought the VLE would already be completely ready, and became a somewhat impatient when it took some time before they could actually start using it. These expectations of the VLE also influenced how they then approached the content on it; they hoped to find many relevant and ready-to-use information and activities. When it became clear that before being able to make use of these resources, they also had to use their own expertise to adapt it (e.g., for the appropriate age group), their perceived value of the VLE (again) decreased.

For location B, the VLE was considered less important, and this also shows in the fact that after the joint meeting in which the VLE was explained and used for the first time, their interest in using it again was only limited. In evaluating the professional development intervention, participants from location B also hardly mention the VLE.

When asking the participants how this co-creation process could be of more value for them the next time, their feedback consisted mostly of taking more time to understand expectations from the participants and to better explain what it is that is aimed for in such a professional development intervention. Participants from both locations gave ample examples of how their attitude, knowledge and behaviour had changed as a result of the professional development meetings, and this clearly indicates that some important learning took place. The participants themselves, however, remained very persistent in their message that expectations they had before the intervention were not (entirely) met and that they could have learned more if they had been given more new knowledge. The expectations from the participants did not seem to change as a result of what they experienced and what they came to do differently. So, how to see these two almost opposite findings in the light of the concept co-creation? Co-creation asks more input from all participants in the process, sharing their expertise and building knowledge and understanding together. What probably should be part of such an intervention is to take stock on a general level from time to time, to allow for participants to consciously become aware of all the learning or changing that is happening. By being more aware of the relation between what is being done in this co-creation process and the learning that takes place, expectations will probably also become more related to what is actually going on, instead of to what is expected beforehand. During this professional development intervention, there were not enough moments for taking stock at this general level. In evaluating each meeting, we probably stayed too close to the individual meeting, and not discussing the overall learning.

#### **4.5.3. DISCUSSION**

The whole intervention with the preschool organization was interesting and informative. Many of the lessons that we have learned fit well into our theoretical PD framework. In general, the findings illustrate both the role of the organisational context as well as individual factors and professionals' readiness for change as important preconditions that contribute to the success of the intervention.

At the organizational level, the intervention aimed to integrate within the existing structure for PD, which was seen as an important positive aspect both during the intervention and also in view of sustainability in the longer term. Professionals had time allocated for PD and this time was used for the current intervention. In spite of these relatively good working conditions, the professionals



felt that participation in the intervention was time consuming. The majority of work was carried out within the dedicated time and the amount of time professionals had to spend on preparing the meetings were therefore aimed to be minimal. This leads us to believe that such an intervention would probably not have been possible without compensation of hours. Another benefit of integrating the intervention within the PD structure of the organization concerns the involvement of all the different professionals working in a preschool location (i.e. teachers, the manager, special needs supervisor and pedagogical coach). The PD intervention was team-based, thus strengthening the possibilities for implementation and sustainability, also in the longer term. The presence of the manager and other pedagogical support staff helped the teachers to feel understood and supported in the complexity of their daily work. It was also an opportunity to discuss and align the policy and practices of different professionals within the classroom and in interactions with parents. Moreover, professionals could indicate where they experienced barriers for changing practices or could indicate the need for additional resources. Foremost, this long and in-depth team-based intervention had set in motion a process of growing awareness, at different levels of the organization, on how to work in a culturally and linguistically diverse environment with parents from different backgrounds. This was, for instance, reflected in initiatives of the managers, who worked in other locations as well, and used some of their experiences from the intervention to address similar topics in other locations (e.g. the reflection and assessment on the cultural appropriateness of books and classroom materials). It seems that the intervention has indeed set in motion a continuous and on-going process of increasing intercultural awareness and competences and, consequently, the manager now has a key role in continuing this work beyond the intervention. As the manager, and also the pedagogical coach and special needs supervisor, all took part in the intervention, the chances that they will be able to sustain and continue at least part of the work is more promising than in cases where only teachers were involved.

At the individual level, the intervention illustrated the importance of professionals' beliefs and attitudes in addressing intercultural competences. Reflection as PD strategy played a key role in raising professionals' awareness of their beliefs or attitudes and how these were related to their actual practices and behaviour in the daily context. Despite the importance of raising awareness through reflection, the intervention also used enactment as an important strategy as it was felt that professionals needed to act and see the results of their actions in order to better understand the importance of these actions. At a certain point, the professionals mentioned that they appreciated reflecting on these topics, but that it did not help them in developing concrete skills or actions that would actually contribute to changing their practice. This illustrates the need to combine reflection with concrete work to be implemented in daily practice. This relates to another finding of the current study. It appeared that professionals were hungry for knowledge but at the same time wanted to know how this knowledge would help them in their daily work. Thus, a combination of theory and practice was salient for the success of the intervention.

Overall, the design-based and co-constructive approach that was taken in the current intervention was new to the professionals as well as the researcher and led, especially in the beginning, to some uncertainty about where this intervention was going. It appeared that the professionals preferred a 'top-down intervention in which the researchers were clearly the experts teaching them new skills', which created some tensions along the way. It should be noted, that this is the

dominant model in Dutch PD. However, a one-size-fits-all intervention would not work with such a value-based and complex topic as cultural and linguistic diversity. As the staff survey (Slot et al., 2018) already illustrated that professionals' beliefs and attitudes on cultural and linguistic diversity are not all positive, this had to be part of the intervention as well before one could even consider changing behaviour or practices. This requires an intervention that is flexible and can be tailored to the context without losing sight of the overall goal, which calls for a close monitoring and guiding of the process. The researcher has a crucial role in this process and has to invest ample time and effort in establishing a trusting relationship with the professionals in order to foster the professionals' openness to change.

The usability and potential of the VLE in PD has not been fully explored yet, but here are some first indications that such an environment can support PD. Firstly, the availability of high-quality resources structured on topic was of great value. Also, the translation on how to use these resources for reflection and actual (classroom) activities show potential. The main pitfall of the VLE was that we did not manage to integrate the platform into the professionals' daily work, thus it was felt as something distant and too far outside of the scope of their work. In the Dutch case, professionals work with a variety of electronic or communication tools or devices both in the classroom and in contact with parents. To be more valuable the development of a VLE should be integrated or compatible with existing tools or applications (such as 'social schools' or whatsapp groups) and should work on different devices that are used by teachers and parents (e.g. mobile phones, digital school boards etc.). Moreover, more time and support is needed to help the professionals in gaining knowledge and confidence on how to work with a VLE. Based on our experiences it seems that this requires a guided process in which the professionals gradually learn to work with the VLE while being supervised and supported by experts.

## 5. COUNTRY REPORT: FRANCE

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## 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This country report provides an overview on the main topics and problems that were addressed in the French case. It addresses the selection of the sites (Part I – Sites' selection and shared intervention agreement), the context of the intervention (Part II – Exploratory Phase), the design and implementation of the professional development activities (Part III – Implementation co-constructive process), and the assessment of the intervention (Part IV – Assessment).

### 5.1.1. DEFINITION OF THE MAIN TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

The French education system has historically built a distance between parents and schools (Corre, 2014; Feyfant, 2015; Kherroubi, Garnier, & Monceau, 2008). But the progressive interweaving of the school in society has changed the expectations of the various actors regarding a common objective: the educational success of the child. Related to these changes there are several circulars stressing the importance of involving families more closely in activities carried out in or by the schools. The role of parents in the school is included in the Education Act of 1989 and the decrees of 2006. A few lines are devoted to them in the text of the 2013 Orientation and Programming Act for the Refoundation of the Republic's School, referring to a revitalization of the dialogue between schools and parents, local authorities and the community services sector (NGOs) and states that "the promotion of coeducation is one of the main levers for the refoundation of the school". Coeducation regards the recognition that education is a shared mission involving schools and parents. It is also stated that cooperation "must take the form of increased parental participation in educational activities in the interest of the success of all children". It is now widely accepted that it is necessary to consider complementarities and to encourage porosity between all educational spaces and times, namely by mobilizing all the actors in the system, including associations (community services) and, above all, parents, who play a key role.

It can be observed that the discourse on coeducation is more prevalent in schools and neighbourhoods where difficulties persist, particularly for families from disadvantaged or immigrant backgrounds (MEN, 2016; Payet, Rostaing, & Giuliani, 2010). Thus, the school's opening to parents was linked to the rapprochement with the community services sector, as well as with the development of several initiatives by teachers in the classroom (pedagogical differentiation), in the school (personalized assistance), in the priority education network (RASED<sup>22</sup>), in the framework of urban policy (PRE<sup>23</sup>), and in the framework of local contracts to support schooling (CLAS<sup>24</sup>).

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<sup>22</sup> RASED stands for *Réseau d'aides spécialisées aux élèves en difficulté* which is a network of specialized teachers and school psychologists to support school teams, with the aim of preventing and resolving school failure in primary schools (pre-schools and elementary schools).

<sup>23</sup> PRE stands for *Programme de Réussite Éducative* which consists of individualised care from the age of 2 (up to the middle school level) for children in difficulty, most of the time identified in schools on the basis of multiple criteria. The system is based on the idea of a global approach to the difficulties faced by children and a twofold desire to put the family at the center of the intervention and to encourage the various actors in the field of education to cooperate.

<sup>24</sup> CLAS stands for *Contrat Local d'Accompagnement Scolaire*. This initiative includes a series of actions aimed at providing, alongside the school, support and resources that children need to succeed in school but do not always find in their family and social environment. These actions, which take place in associations

As an operator in the field of supporting children and parents for schooling, the selected organisation is confronted with collaborating and communicating with parents from different backgrounds. The organisation is mandated to foster better relations between family, child and school when difficulties arise and is, therefore, regularly confronted with parents' difficulties in dealing with their child's school. The difficulties are mostly related to conflict situations (child abuse by another child, teacher's treatment of the child that is considered humiliating by the parent, such as poor explanation for a negative evaluation or punishment) and sometimes the progress of the children at school.

The organisation's approach is based on the principle that professionals should support parents in developing the necessary competences to contact and collaborate (and if necessary confront) with the school and teachers, rather than to mediate between the school and parents. In other words, the organisation should rather empower parents to approach school, than to mediate between the school and the parents. However, professionals and volunteers in the association face some obstacles in achieving this goals, namely: (i) Professionals say they lack time to effectively address the needs of the parents because of work overload; (ii) Some professionals seemed to be judgemental about some parents' values (as uncovered in the exploratory phase; more detail is provided below); (iii) Some professionals reported that they feel unprepared for dealing with the parents' difficulties and would benefit from learning effective methods and resources for empowering parents; (iv) Professionals and volunteers also reported some confusion about their role since parents either see them as counsellors, supporters, friends, evaluators, etc.).

It was therefore agreed to address family-professional's collaboration (also termed co-education). In the French context, this term refers to parents, teachers and other extracurricular staff. It requires the recognition of parents as being first and foremost responsible for their children's education as a precondition. In addition, it requires intercultural competences. The concern is about how to bridge the gap between the family environments, the school environment and other pre- or after-school education, or social care environments, in the overriding interest of the child's intellectual, moral and emotional development. These environments are distinct and operate according to their own rules, which can sometimes be in conflict with each other, especially in the case of children with migration background and children from low-income families. In fact, these children's cultural capital in most cases is not shared by teachers and other professionals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970).

It is the professionals' responsibility to play a leading role in the process of cooperation with parents. In this sense they need to develop and implement tools and methods to support parents. The central question of the PD is how to facilitate the collaboration between parents and school professionals, while taking into consideration the experiential knowledge and cultural background of the parents. In a nutshell, the overarching aim of the intervention is to foster competences in the organisation's professionals to better support and empower parents facing difficulties regarding their children's schooling through a combination of (knowledge) training and reflection.

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outside school hours, focus on homework support and the cultural support necessary for academic success. Among other things, it involves supporting parents in monitoring children's schooling.

## 5.2. PART I: SITES' SELECTION AND SHARED INTERVENTION AGREEMENT

The first part of this country report provides some brief information on the process of selecting the participating organisation. First, we will explain which organisation was selected for participation and why. Second, we outline the most important actions undertaken for realising the collaboration with the participants.

### 5.2.1. SITE AND ORGANISATION SELECTION

For ISOTIS T5.4 we aimed at working with one organization. Nevertheless, during the recruitment process, 3 organizations were approached: Site A, a community centre based in Paris (the one selected, and described in detail below); Site B, a community Centre<sup>25</sup> in la Plaine Saint-Denis; and Site C, a NGO for intercultural education<sup>26</sup> based in Paris. Primarily, the 3 sites were approached during the WP2 structured interview study<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, these were also the organisations that participated in the T5.3 (Internet staff survey).

The selection was based on the perceived affinity between the ISOTIS' objectives and the mission and activities of each organisation, namely the extent to which they provided support activities aimed at improving the children's and parents' experiences in and with school, for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Maghreb and low-income families). Other important criteria were: (i) the organisation's cooperation level in the aforementioned ISOTIS tasks; (ii) their availability and interest to participate in the current task, and (iii) the number of staff members. To be sure, in anticipating the possibility to conduct relevant PD (group) activities, we took into consideration the number of professionals working in the site (for example, one of the associations worked with only three professionals). Based on these criteria, site A was selected.

It is relevant to highlight that, in step 4 (June – July 2018), we asked the manager about the organisation's plans for staff' PD, as well as on the actions he thought necessary and useful to improve/develop the activities delivered by the organisation. We also explored which and how the plans and activities development expectations matched the topics of ISOTIS, i.e., improving the capacities of professionals working in disadvantaged areas to foster disadvantaged parents' and families' engagement in their children's schooling.

Figure 5.1 presents a diagram depicting the main steps from contacting the organisations, until getting the selected organisation's staff agreement to participate.

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<sup>25</sup> The social centre is a service of the territorial community that offers the inhabitants of the district a variety of activities based on the popular education approach with the final goal of promoting human dignity, solidarity and democracy.

<sup>26</sup> The NGO is mainly interested in exploring and developing innovative methods to facilitate intercultural communication, collaboration and adaptation. Among other activities, the NGO provide training for social workers, and activities for primary school children.

<sup>27</sup> In the WP2 interview study we focused on the immigrant population from the Maghreb living in the urban area of Paris and its surroundings. Several organizations working in this area and in contact with the targeted participants were approached.



Figure 5.1. Overview of main steps in contact with organisation for participation.



## 5.2.2. SHARED GENERAL ISOTIS COLLABORATION AGREEMENT

The agreement for the collaboration was framed in June 2018 with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and finalized in September 2018. The MoU served the purpose of formalizing the informal agreement to participate, while also detailing the consensus previously reached about the intervention implementation. While providing a reference framework for the activities that were to be implemented, it allowed sufficient flexibility for accommodating the needs that could emerge in the course of the implementation phase. Two phases were outlined: the exploratory phase and the implementation phase. The Exploratory phase specified that more in-depth analyses would be conducted on the organization's context, mission and activities, so intervention could be better tailored to the organization and its professionals' needs. All these procedures were crucial in identifying and documenting the main issues to be addressed in the PD activities. Although the overall process (i.e., throughout the exploratory and implementation phases) was intended to be co-design/constructed, with the input and feedback of participants being actively sought and used to align the objectives and activities of the intervention with the participants' changing needs, the exploratory phase explicitly foresaw a formal moment (with the manager) of co-construction of the main topic, objectives, as well as the strategies to pursue them. Furthermore, part of the kick off meeting with the professionals also aimed at co-constructing the intervention process.

The MoU also included ethical rules to be followed in the process, in line with the ethics requirements of ISOTIS. For instance, it was important that participants understood what it meant to participate in the research, responding to their requests for information in accessible language so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. First, a letter was sent through the manager to the professionals presenting in very clear terms the purpose of the research and the activities, what would be expected of the participants (including the time required for participation), as well as possible risks and benefits. The letter also mentioned that the PD was a collaborative process and as such participants' voice and input would be crucial for the process. It was further specified that participation was free and voluntary and that the participant could withdraw at any time without undue consequences. Additionally, it was explained how confidentiality would be protected.

Moreover, the MoU specified the profile of the members who could participate to the activities, including permanent staff as well as volunteers. The agreement plus addressed data communication and publication issues, stating that each stakeholder (UPEC and selected organization) could freely use the study results for its own research purposes<sup>28</sup>.

In addition, it specified the responsibilities of both participants and researchers (e.g., the researchers had the responsibility to create the conditions for reflective practices, help participants to develop critical thinking on their activities and support them in the development of a tool for parent-professional interactions). Lastly, it included a calendar registering the steps already taken as well as the planning of activities as agreed upon with the participants.

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<sup>28</sup> The agreement was later revised and adjusted to be in line with ISOTIS data processing agreement.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of the agreed schedule. Concerning this schedule, it was agreed to start the implementation phase in September 2018 with a kick off meeting with the professionals. This meeting was mainly devoted to validate the participants' consent and co-construct the main goals and strategies to achieve them. Moreover, the project was explained in detail. As it was agreed to use group reflection as a main PD strategy, professionals were told that the quality and success of the PD activity depended very much on their involvement and respect for each other's opinions. It was also stressed that the process was collaborative and co-constructive in nature; therefore, it was open to adaptations, namely from needs or requirements that emerged within PD sessions. PD meetings were planned from October to April (1h30 each time). Follow up meetings were also programmed with the manager every month. A final evaluation during the last reflection meeting, as well as the presentation of the report in September 2019, were also foreseen.

Based on the exploratory phase (more detail below), it was agreed that the professional topic to be addressed was parent-professional relationships, more specifically promoting co-education. To be clear, the association's view on this issue is that the organisation should not mediate between parents/families and/or children and the school, both because it does not have the authority to fulfil that role (i.e., schools are not in any way obliged to "listen" or even receive the association) as well as it believes that by doing so parents will not develop their autonomy. Rather, the organization tries to achieve its goals by supporting parents/families to reach out to the school, fostering their empowerment. Consequently, the PD intervention aimed at the development of the staff' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and expectations, hereby advancing their competences to better fulfil the organisation's mission.

Table 5.1  
 Overview of the Agreed Schedule.

	2018												2019						
	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP
<b>Exploratory phase</b>																			
Presentation of the project																			
General discussion on the project																			
Desktop data collection																			
Gathering meaningful information to derive the needs of the professionals																			
Needs analysis																			
Co-construction of the main topic, objectives and strategies																			
Defining the activities methodology																			
Memorandum of understanding																			
Staff consent																			
<b>Implementation phase</b>																			
Kick off Meeting with the professionals (incl. co-construction)																			
Meetings - reflection, dialogue and exchanging experiences																			
<b>Assessment phase</b>																			
Follow-up meetings with manager																			
Feedback seminar																			
Assessment																			
Development & implementation of parent's empowerment resources (staff)																			
Restitution of reports																			

### 5.3. PART II: THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

In this second part we documented what activities were undertaken in the exploratory phase of the intervention. The exploratory phase focused on gathering information with the overall purpose to formulate learning needs. We first describe how and when relevant data was collected. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. Third, the characteristics of the organisation and its professionals are provided. Finally, the overall goal of the intervention is formulated based on the learning needs of the organisation.

#### 5.3.1. METHODS AND PROCEDURES USED FOR THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

Several procedures were used for the exploratory phase, namely desktop research, exploration of the organization annual reports, a series of meetings with the manager, participant observation in some activities, as well as formal and informal interviews with the manager and members of the staff. During the whole process of needs' assessment, the researchers engaged in several informal one-to-one conversations. These brief encounters were meant to gather meaningful information related to the professionals' needs. At a later stage, the informal conversations helped the researchers to probe the beliefs and attitudes of the professionals toward the targeted groups and topic. Table 5.2 details the procedures/events that took place, their aims and results.

Table 5.2  
*Overview of Data Collection for Exploratory Phase.*

June 2018	
<b>Procedure</b>	Meeting with manager to discuss PD needs. Participant observation and informal interviews with the staff (also encouragement to the staff to complete the T5.3 Staff internet survey before the deadline).
<b>Aim</b>	Discussions on ISOTIS PD model. Identification and discussion on priority needs in terms of professional and organisational development. Identifying and co-defining the intervention objectives. (Discussion on preliminary results on WP2).
<b>Results</b>	Manager agreed to participate in the intervention and that the focus of the PD activities would be on staff's competences relevant to support and empower parents for co-education. The second meeting was scheduled to continue the discussion and preparations.
July 2018	
<b>Procedure</b>	Meeting with the manager. Participant observation and informal interviews with the staff.
<b>Aim</b>	Gathering information on the organisation's activities relating to the defined topic. Discussion on the structure of the PD activities (group sessions). Tentative schedule of the PD activities.
<b>Results</b>	Agreeing on the group session structure. The Community centre will be working on a parallel activity to develop parents' participation (a support group) and the sessions can also be used for staff's reflection on the process. Adjusting and agreeing on the schedule of the activities. Informal discussions with some members of the staff.

<b>Procedure</b>	Desktop research.
<b>Aim</b>	Gathering relevant elements on the macrosystem and mesosystem of the organisation and main topic.
<b>Results</b>	Notes on the macrosystem and main topics (synthetized below): community education; territorial educational policy and projects; socio-demographic data on the organisation location; etc.
<b>Procedure</b>	Exploring the organisation's annual reports
<b>Aim</b>	Gather information on organization's previous achievements, mission and orientations.
<b>Results</b>	Notes on the organization mission statement, activities and achievements.
<b>September 2018</b>	
<b>Procedure</b>	Meeting with the staff.
<b>Aim</b>	Presenting ISOTIS goals; informing participants about the data that will be collected and how this data will be used, as well as what is expected from them and what might be the benefits for them. Schedule of the PD activities. Responding to any doubts.
<b>Results</b>	Eight members of the staff agreed to take part. Agreement on the schedule. Sharing notes on the focus domain. Four permanent members of the staff and 3 volunteers did not agree to participate.

### 5.3.2. RELEVANT CONTEXT FOR PD INTERVENTION

The following sections provide an overview of the context of the organisation based on the collected data. The macro context and organisational context are discussed.

#### 5.3.2.1. MACRO CONTEXT

One of the many criticisms made on the French educational system relates to its difficulty in accommodating the most disadvantaged children and families and in developing collaborative relation with all parents concerning their child' schooling. Historically the French educational system is known for having built a distance between parents and the school<sup>29</sup>. But the situation has changed in recent decades and continues to evolve with several official documents stressing the importance of involving families more closely in preventive actions at school. From 1989 to 2013 several laws and decrees have highlighted the importance of revitalising the dialogue between school and parents, local authorities and the associative sector. Thus, school actors are encouraged to achieve co-education through increased parental participation in the interest of (disadvantaged) children's educational success.

Nevertheless, this (formal legislative) process of opening up contrasts with the processes observed on the "ground", which are seriously affected by "persistent difficulties in relations with users who are culturally furthest from the school" (Périer, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, the modalities of this collaboration remain unclear and dependent on the individual abilities of head teachers and

<sup>29</sup> In fact, the Republican school ignores the social status and more generally the diversity of pupils in the name of the principle of equality. This does not facilitate the relationship between the school and the students' families.

teachers. Although laws, decrees or circulars encourage more parental participation in schools, difficulties persist and ideas converge to say that it is up to professionals to create the right conditions for the establishment of reciprocal trusting relationships, bidirectional communication, and collaboration in general.

Cooperating with parents and school partners is one of the ten skills that teachers must master (MEN, 2016). However, teachers' training policy does not emphasise, to say the least, school-family collaboration. In fact, training addressing this type of collaboration basically takes the form of courses focused on the transmission of knowledge about its institutional framework, its challenges and good practices (Larrivée & Garnier, 2014), without targeting professionals' representations, beliefs or attitudes (See *Figure 1.2*, Section 1.2.3), which seems to be a keystone to effectively tackle this issue. A report submitted to the National Assembly in July 2014 describes school-parent relations as asymmetrical and distorted (Corre, 2014), marked by a lack of dialogue or one of poor quality. In many cases, the relationship between the school and parents is limited to occasional/circumstantiated information from the school to the parents. Among school counsellors and teachers, the predominant discourse places parents in a secondary and even negative position, with teachers generally talking about the absence of parents or their lack of investment (e.g., not attending appointments or debriefing meetings) (Asdih, 2012).

It would appear that parents' commitment to their children's success is underestimated and that the development of partnerships with families remains an important issue in the development of the education and educational professionals. Professionals tend to focus on the deficits of the target audience (children and parents) and do not see themselves as part of the solution. In the opinion of still a large number of professionals, the lack of parental involvement and communication is due to cultural differences, namely when the parents are of migratory descent (Akkari & Changkakoti, 2009). Indeed, diversity is seen from the outset as an obstacle to collaboration and a deviation from the norm that must be corrected if collaboration is to take place. To overcome these problems, the educational system has long called on partners to bring specific skills to the education of pupils, alongside teachers. This partnership is based in a privileged way on the richness of the associative network. There are about one million active associations in France, regularly declared in accordance with the 1901 law on the contract of association. Since 2007, the educational partnership with associations has been strengthened by the implementation of educational support, with the reception of students after class. The role of the associative sector, in complementarity with the school, is affirmed in the report annexed to the Orientation and Programming Act for the re-foundation of the school in 2013. The associations participate in the majority of programmes that have been put in place to reduce the difficulties encountered in schools.

Among others, we can mention PEDT (Projet Éducatif Territorial), PRE (Programme de Réussite Educative), CLAS (le contrat local d'accompagnement scolaire), CEL (Contrat éducatif local). These programmes are funded by the State, the local authorities, and CAF (Family Allowance Office).

### 5.3.2.2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The selected organization is a community centre, created in 1966 and located in the 20th district of Paris (South-Est Paris). This community centre is part of the popular education movement, aspiring an inclusive society that guarantees everyone the exercise of full and complete citizenship.

In its neighbourhood there are seventy nursery and elementary schools, twelve secondary schools, six high schools and ten private schools. The NGO provides support to families and children in case of any school difficulties. These difficulties are mainly related to conflict situations (violence against children, treatment considered humiliating by the parent, contested explanation in case of a negative assessment, students' punishment) and sometimes to the child's progress in school.

The organization's scope is quite wide, offering an array of activities for children, teenagers and parents, with the activities covering several areas and varying in nature (e.g., educational, cultural, leisure, social training, in order to support citizen initiatives). More specifically, relating to school-families partnership, the organization offers school support to children facing difficulties in school, while also providing specific activities for adults who can be parents of a child attending some of the organization's activities. Particularly, the Adult space is a specific unit to address requests made by the parents. In addition, the community centre provides, reception, information, orientation and training spaces for adults and young adults, including workshops to learn French, Computer and multimedia workshops and sewing workshops throughout the year. In 2019, in parallel with the scheduled PD activities, the community centre intended to develop a discussion group for parents (more details are given below).

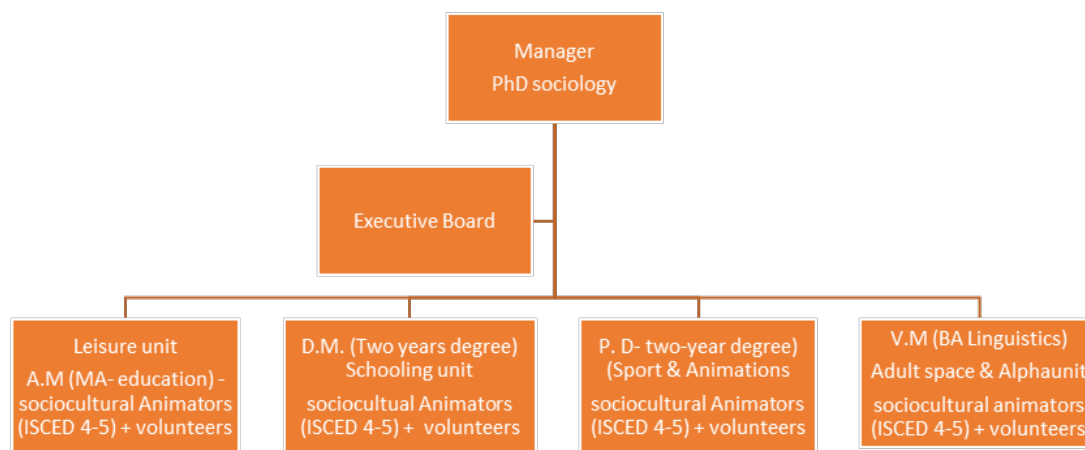


Figure 5.2. Organigram of the organisation structure.

The organization is co-financed by the (public) Family allowance fund, CAF, the municipality, association membership subscriptions, and budgets for implementing specific programmes. In Figure 5.2, an organigram of the association is presented. As can be seen, the organization structure is simple, with four main units/departments placed under the direct supervision of the manager. As this is not a big organisation and each unit is headed by one professional, professionals usually work in projects of several units at the same time.



In the mission statement of the Community centre it is mentioned that its purpose is: (i) to promote popular education, through the physical, intellectual and moral training of children, adolescents and adults of both sexes and through the useful occupation of leisure activities; (ii) to create, administer and support social work. Furthermore, the community centre is committed to fulfilling its mission in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles of Salesian pedagogy.

The organisation also has as a core value to consider all users (i.e. children and parents) full members of the educational team. As such, they are encouraged to get involved in the life of the association, their opinion is sought and they are encouraged to participate in the development and implementation of activities.

### 5.3.3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

The district where the organisation is based has approximately 200.000 inhabitants (i.e., roughly 9% of the overall population in Paris), who are mostly young and active workers. The poverty rate is 21,9% (compared to 16,2% for all Paris). According to INSEE statistics, the 20th district is also the youngest district of Paris. In figures, roughly 16% of the population is aged between 0-14 years, 21% is aged 15-29 years old, and 26% is aged 30-44 years. In the district there are more people under 30 years than in any other district of Paris. Among this population, 39,5% of the inhabitants are couples with children, while 20% are single mothers with children. It is also important to mention that roughly 22% of the inhabitants have a low income. This high rate of low income families can partly be explained by the unemployment rate, that reaches 16,8%. In terms of educational level, 24,9% of the population living in the district are ISCED 2, 11,7% are ISCED 3, 15,1% are ISCED 4, 48,3 % are ISCED 5 & 6. In terms of ethnicity, the district is characterized by having considerable proportions of inhabitants originally from Maghreb countries, tropical Africa, Eastern Europe (according to a document from the municipality, 27% of the inhabitant in 2011 were immigrants), but also from the centre of Paris, as well as from the countryside.

Part of the inhabitants of the district are people experiencing social, economic and cultural difficulties. Some neighbourhoods in the district are identified as urban renewal zones. This implies that they are targeted by specific social support programmes. The major aim of this policy is to reduce urban inequalities and exclusion between geographical areas and inhabitants by providing them support in several dimensions (housing, schooling, economic development incentives, employment, local safety and prevention).

The people attending the activities offered by the community centre are aged between six and ninety-three years old. Some approached the community centre by themselves, others through hearsay. The younger people in particular reach the community centre either through their parents or within the framework of partnerships established between the association and the schools in the neighbourhood. According to its annual report, last year the community centre estimated that support was provided to 330 families, the majority of which were families with a migrant background (about 30 different nationalities) and/or with a low-income. In the adult-oriented activities participants are mainly women.

The community centre operates in partnership and complementarity with other organisations and schools in the neighbourhood. In this sense, the community centre is involved in local educational partnership programmes to support children facing difficulties. It also sometimes mediates between the schools and the children or their families. To be clear, it is important to stress that the organisation's view on this mediation is that the parents should be the ones to actually take action and contact the school, rather than to have the association to do it for them. This means that the organisation considers its main role to capacitate parents to engage with the school; thus, the organisation's professionals work primarily with parents and only seldom contact the school on parents' behalf.

Regarding PD, the documents of the centre do not mention explicitly any policy, plan or actions. However, the manager indicated that the centre's professional development strategy is based on exchange of practices among the team members during weekly meetings on Friday morning. The manager reported that he encourages the professionals to improve their qualification level through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition<sup>30</sup>. Timetable arrangements are made for professionals willing to engage in it. Besides, the professionals of the centre often attend conferences and workshops. Nevertheless, the manager highlighted that a major challenge for the organisation is to improve the capacities (professionalization) of the volunteers while keeping in mind that, by definition, they are not professionals. To address this challenge, the organisation resorts to tutorship, always pairing volunteers with a professional that supervises him/her. It thus appears that peer learning plays a key role as a strategy used by the organisation in order to bridge the gap of competences between the professionals

#### 5.3.3.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The community centre has 8 employees with different educational and cultural backgrounds (1 Portuguese, 3 native French, 2 Algerian, 1 Tunisian, 1 Malian) and who conduct various activities. The association also relies on a great number of volunteers (many are undergraduate and graduate students in various domains (Education, arts, social sciences, law, social works, etc.) and a few of them are people on retirement). The professionals, who are sociocultural and socio-educational animators, work full time and their education levels range from ISCED 4-6. Volunteers work part time according to their availability. The manager also plays the role of project manager.

As previously referred, the project was presented to all the staff members in the organisation and participation was voluntary. A total of 8 people, 4 professionals (1 Portuguese; 2 native French; 1 Tunisian) and 4 volunteers (1 French with Moroccan background; 1 native French; 1 Moldavian; 1 Senegalese) agreed to participate in the PD process. The educational ISCED levels of both professionals and volunteers was the same: in each group, 3 participants had an ISCED of 5 and one of 4. The manager, despite not being present in the PD sessions, was a crucial figure throughout the whole process.

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<sup>30</sup> The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) allows any person to obtain a professional certification by validating their experience acquired in a professional and/or extra-professional activity. The certification which may be a diploma or title for professional purposes or a certificate of professional qualification must be registered in the National Register of Professional Certifications (RNCP). PLAR is one of the means of access to professional qualifications, along with school and university education, apprenticeship and continuing professional training.

#### 5.3.4. IMPLEMENTATION PD PROCESS AND SHARED AGREEMENT

The need analysis of the exploratory phase indicated that the professionals were sensitive to intercultural issues and agreed with the goal of an inclusive education/society. However, things seemed to be less obvious when it came to translating intercultural knowledge into practice. In other words, staff members also seemed to hold some stereotyped views on migrants' parents and to place the "blame and burden" of the co-education on the parents. Nevertheless, it also appeared that the professionals were willing to improve their individual and collective skills and become more successful in handling parent-school relationships.

Furthermore, professionals were sometimes confronted with demands from parents relating to interactions with the school of the child. The staff had noted that these type of demands usually arise when there is misunderstanding (conflict) between the teacher and the parent or when the parent is worried or feeling helpless about the child's education. The association had not established an intervention model/procedure to be followed and the end result is very much dependent upon professionals' personal experience and skills.

The general agreement on the objectives for the PD process were twofold. First, meetings would be used to facilitate reflection from professionals and volunteers about cases/situations with which they were confronted throughout their daily practices. At the heart of this approach is the idea that professionals can learn from each other and improve both their knowledge and practice. Second, key issues and needs identified during the exploratory phase were to be addressed by the ISOTIS team by means of selected literature to improve knowledge and to support the development of important skills.

It was particularly important for the researchers not to appear as experts who come to provide the right solutions or the right practices. The group was considered mature and the meetings viewed as a space for collectively developing solutions. The diversity of points of views was considered an advantage so that professionals could find solutions to solving the problem presented. As a climate of trust is key to the proposed methodology, participants agreed on operating conditions: participation was voluntary and everyone made a formal commitment to respect confidentiality about families or children discussed during case presentations and to adopt a non-judgmental attitude about the other participants' opinions and practices.

A brief follow-up meeting was held with the manager each month either via skype or face to face in order to discuss the progress of the PD activity and the progress on the parent support group that was to be developed by the staff. The PD meetings would be held on a monthly basis with a duration of 1h30 and would take place in the meeting room of the organisation. The first PD activity was scheduled in October and the last one in March<sup>31</sup>.

The collaboration intended to support participants' reflection on their partnership with parents and how to proactively engage them, as well as to strengthen parents' role and skills so they are better able to support their children's education and learning with respect to their experiences, values and culture.

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<sup>31</sup> In the implementation phase the meeting in March was postponed to April.

The researcher's role agreed on, was to:

- Guide the professionals in reflecting upon the cases (bring incentives for exchanges with and between professionals);
- Create conducive conditions for professionals to participate in activities where they could interact and co-construct their knowledge;
- Give feedback on the discussions and support/stimulate the dynamics of the discussion by offering the professionals a space to exchange freely, without fear of possible consequences;
- Encourage the emergence of experiential knowledge;
- Support the team in creating its own resources for the parents-support group<sup>32</sup>;
- Ensure follow-up and ultimately give feedback on the activity and on the report.

Furthermore, it was agreed that the professionals would engage in an exchange activity with other countries on the Parent-Professional Collaboration. The VLE was also envisaged as repository where participants could find inspiring resources to use for activities with the parents and children. Lastly, it was agreed that, possibly, the participants would develop resources to be shared on the VLE.

#### 5.3.4.1. RELATION TO THE GENERAL WP5 FRAMEWORK

The needs analysis showed that although some professionals lay the blame on parents, all participants are interested in supporting families, using their skills and respecting the experiences and values of these families. Despite the goodwill of professionals to facilitate the parent-school collaboration, they meet a few obstacles:

- Some professionals consider values of some parents incompatible with the mainstream values in France. The need was addressed at the level of beliefs regarding diversity.
- Some professionals reported that they were not fully prepared for dealing with the parents' difficulties and would like to acquire effective methods and resources for empowering parents. The need was addressed at the level of skills for dealing with parents.

The objectives of the professional development activities, therefore, were:

- To allow professionals and volunteers to confront and reflect on their different beliefs on families with a disadvantaged or immigrant background.
- To formalize and share their knowledge of experience about parents' support
- To collectively develop attitudes that foster parental collaboration.
- To collectively develop conflict resolution and communication skills between different social environments.
- To increase participants' awareness on the value the skills of parents.

Nevertheless, as the process was intended to be co-constructive, these objectives were to be adapted during implementation to address emerging/changing needs.

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<sup>32</sup> The organisation was planning on developing a new approach to parents' support and the ISOTIS meetings might serve as a reflection moment for this project.

## 5.4. PART III: IMPLEMENTATION CO-CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS

In this third part we documented what activities were undertaken in the implementation and co-construction phase of the intervention. We first describe the overall lay-out of this phase and discuss relevant procedures. Second, we provide a more detailed description of the professional development activities.

### 5.4.1. PROCEDURES

As previously mentioned, it was agreed that the intervention process would consist on a minimum of six (one-and-a-half hours) meetings. Both members from the ISOTIS team were present in all but one meeting, where only one attended. All participants that accepted to take part in the intervention attended the six scheduled meetings.

It is important to mention that, relating to the reflection processes in general, as well as reflection particularly on the cases that professionals would present during the sessions, the theoretical framework used by the ISOTIS team was a Rogerian one (Rogers, 1970), inspired on the humanistic paradigm, and coherent with the organisation's values. Briefly, the framework assumes that all persons have an internal self-actualizing drive, i.e., the capacity to grow and develop, and that, given the right conditions, change is almost inevitable. These conditions might be, applied to the group setting, stated as follows: (i) unconditional positive regard and acceptance, which means that the group members should be unconditionally accepted, able to express themselves freely, without any fear of judgment; (ii) congruence, which refers to the facilitators —i.e., the ISOTIS members, since in the Rogerian framework, the persons “conducting” the group are named facilitators due to their main role and position of authority of “only” facilitating each person's inner drive for change — matching their inner experience with the outer expression; and (iii) accurate emphatic understanding, meaning that the facilitators “give back” what was expressed by the participants, in order to assure and make them aware that their point of view was accurately understood.

In very practical terms, this requires that the facilitators abstain from making judgments or somehow indicate to participants how “it should be”. Rather, the safe environment in which one freely expresses oneself, while listening to others' perspectives is considered to be the most powerful mechanism to promote durable and consistent change.

The VLE was introduced during the fourth meeting with the aim to encourage participants to engage in using it. It was presented as a promising platform where participants could interact with professionals who have the same concerns as they do, find innovative resources to address inclusion issues in the activities implemented by the centre or create a space for exchange with parents. The Platform was not introduced earlier since researchers were still learning to master it and its development still ongoing, namely the translation of resources.

During subsequent meetings an exploration of the platform was made specifically on the videos, resources on the promotion of intercultural sensitivity and family-school partnership. Credentials were provided to 3 participants who volunteered to test the VLE. The number of volunteers was lower than expected and in order not to leave aside to preserve participation of other professionals

in the ongoing reflection process, the researchers and the manager decided that the VLE will not be used during the meetings. This made it very tricky to handle and monitor the clear role of the VLE in the PD process.

#### 5.4.2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

As explained in the shared agreement, a crucial part of the PD process would consist of group reflection about cases or situations that participants would share with the rest of the group. These cases should be related to the agreed topic of the intervention — i.e., the co-education development with the final aim of improving disadvantaged children’s schooling practices — and one that the participant thought interesting to be shared, particularly when it had been judged as challenging. Other than these, no constraints were imposed, and it was up to each participant to choose amongst their experienced cases/situations which one they would like to select for group reflection. Each participant would write down its case so it could be shared in paper format at the beginning of the session. This allowed the ISOTIS team to better guarantee the smooth running of the process, since it could ask in advance to see the case and provide feedback on it to the professional. The feedback consisted on questions and suggestions for appropriate wording, questions for furthers details on the context, the why and the how, so the researcher could edit it into a final version. Furthermore, to have the case written would also lead to a more careful preparation of the case by each participant. Therefore, before each session, the ISOTIS team would contact the participant that had committed to sharing the case so they could have access to it in advance.

Complementary to the group reflection on the shared case, the ISOTIS team would also prepare for each meeting the presentation of a theoretical model and/or scientific research that might augment the participants’ knowledge on relevant subjects connected to the main topic and objectives. The ISOTIS team had already selected literature to be presented judged as relevant based on the identified needs during the exploratory phase. Nevertheless, the team would remain attentive to the needs that would arise from the development of the PD process in order to respond to them accordingly. This meant that the process had an open character to it and that the selected literature for each session would rest upon an analysis on how the previous session went and where the group stood.

Below, each of the six meetings held, will be presented, specifying its input, goals, activities realised, its results and assessment. Additionally, the reasons for selecting topics and literature from one meeting to the other will also be described.

##### **BOX 5.1. Meeting 1, October 2018**

###### **Input**

As mentioned, the bulk of the PD process was thought to consist of the presentation of cases/situations by the participants. For the first meeting, two participants were asked to prepare one case each, but only one handed in the description on time. This first case was about a professional’s experience with a family. It took place in September 2017. The family had gone to summer holidays in Algeria with their child (class 6). And the end of the school year, in July 2017, a notice was sent to parents through the child. The notice stated clearly that classes would resume on the 4th September. But on this day, the child didn’t show up. So,



when she came back to school one week later the teacher summoned the parents to talk about the children's absence. Since the father was working and could not attend, it was the mother who showed up to the meeting.

One day later, as she came to accompany her child to the music activity in the association, she told the professional about what had happened. She was upset about this encounter because despite her explanations the teacher insisted that he had informed the parents that the start of the school year was on September 4 and that the mother should have informed him about her daughter's absence. On listening the story of the mother, the professional agreed with the teacher and told the mother that it is not okay to stay on holiday when school has resumed, that she gave more importance to the holidays than to her child's education, and that she was not giving a good example to her child. After this event the mother continued to take her child to the association but would leave and no longer report any event nor seek support. At that time the professional considered that she had acknowledged her mistake.

In order to develop critical and informed thinking on co-education and to better prepare the professionals for future reflections on ways to support parent's co-education, it was important to foster participants' awareness about their own assumptions and biases on parents' involvement, as well as to increase their knowledge about parents' involvement in school.

### **Goals**

Goals for this meeting were:

- To explore and jointly reflect on staff's view about co-education and the parents' role/responsibilities, as well as difficulties, in it. The underlying objective was to foster participants' awareness about their positive and negative assumptions on parents' relationships with the school environment and involvement in their children's education (*beliefs & expectations*).
- To increase the theoretical knowledge of the professionals about parents' engagement in schooling.
- To change professionals' insight through the application of the presented theoretical model to their own experiences (*knowledge & beliefs*).

### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Discussion** on participants' views and experiences prompted by the presentation of the prepared case.
- **Presentation** of family degree of parents' involvement in school activities based on the work of Erickson (2004) and the works of Mackiewicz (2010), and reflection about how the models might fit their experiences.

### **Observations and reflections**

The discussion on the case brought up many reactions and questions on alternative possibilities shared by participants. For example, some participants agreed with the professionals' attitude in the case saying that parents with an immigration background do not always respect the rules, etc. Other testimonies were reported and some professionals showed more empathy for the parents. For example, it was acknowledged by some participants that school functioning was complex and that communication towards parents is sometimes poor. Therefore, parents are not always accurately informed on the functioning of institutions and expectations, thus not all the blame should be laid on them. All in all, the majority of professionals believed that most parents with an immigration background are less equipped with the skills to be involved in their child's education and to attend activities organised by the school. They also believed that parents have high expectations for their child in school. A participant argued that the mother was seeking for support and understanding and found herself receiving judgemental feedback. The discussion of this point brought to light that summer holidays were a unique occasion for some families to see their kin who lived in the home country and other cousins and brothers who lived in other European countries and that some families travel later in order to benefit from cheaper air-tickets.



Additionally, professionals consider language barriers as an obstacle for collaboration with parents, expecting that migrant parents learn French in order to be able to interact with the teachers.

Parents are also expected to have standard attitudes, supposed to be indicators of “parents’ care about school success” (reading and signing the workbook, showing up for appointments, monitoring homework).

### **Assessment and next steps**

Oral feedback at the end of the meeting indicated that the participants enjoyed the session and found it to be useful. As observed, participants were in fact enthusiastic while reflecting on the presented case. Furthermore, they have showed interest in Erikson’s Model of involvement. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that ISOTIS members were not confident that the participants became aware of their own biases when thinking about co-education. Furthermore, it was observed that due to the enthusiasm of the participants to react to the presentations, the duration of one-and a half hour agreed on at the exploratory phase was not conducive for letting enough room for articulation case presentation, discussions and presentation of a theoretical model. Therefore, it was necessary to increase the duration of the subsequent meetings from 1h30 to 2h30.

In addition, these discussions brought to light diverse views. It became obvious that, for the majority of participants, parents with an immigration background did not meet the standards for parental involvement in their children’s schooling and were judged as reluctant to participate in school activities because they lacked language skills and did not share France’s social norms.

Besides, while questioning the participants on their beliefs, many participants agreed with another’s statement that among the Maghrebians there are commonly very high —sometimes exaggerated— expectations for their child in school. Even though this might be viewed as a positive belief given the ISOTIS objectives and showing parents’ valuing of the school, the problem here lies on the underlying belief that naturalises attitudes and abilities according to the ethnic origin of parents. Hence, parents were viewed through a stereotyped lens and not as unique individuals.

### **BOX 5.2. Meeting 2, November 2018**

#### **Input**

The second case brought by a professional was the narration of his own arrival and settling in France. The professional was born in sub-Saharan Africa and lived there until the fifth grade (1999). In 1999 his parents left the capital to return to the countryside. Personally, he didn’t want to leave, “because I felt like I was from there. I was born there, I grew up there, I had friends and everything. In the countryside, we needed a new life, we had to renew”. After high school, he left his country for France. He chose France because it is a French-speaking country too. When he came here he had no idea of France; until then he had only studied France at school (the 1789 revolution, geography, etc.). The first impression he had of France was that it was cold, because he arrived in the autumn: there were 9° whereas at home it was about 30°. But what struck him more noticeably was that people were too fast. He noticed it the day he took the subway.

Little by little he too became a man in a hurry. He thinks he was “contaminated”. This is how he gradually adapted to life in France. He reports he is constantly trying to make things his own from here. “They’re not going to understand you, it’s up to you to understand them. They don’t know anything about you, because it’s an opposite world. It is diametrically opposed. I mean, I tried to understand how people here are. That takes time too. You have to try to understand and... (...) as I said, is not at all easy, and... so I had to deal with it. Then we say, you have to express yourself, because you have to talk with them, you have to express yourself, you have to be in contact with them. It’s up to you to go to them. Since I’ve been here that no one... they don’t care. Everyone lives his life”. In his narrative, the professional indicates

that when one moves from one country to another, change is inevitable. When he returns home, he is called the French man or the Parisian. So, at some point, he didn't know which identity to take. In France he is an African and in his country he is French.

To address the identified issues from the first meeting, researchers suggested and with the agreement of the participants that the second meeting would focus—in addition to the reflection on the prepared case—on diversity and identity development in the host country.

### Goals

Goals for this meeting were:

- Increasing staff's knowledge about different types of integration attitudes by the host country and the "foreign" (*knowledge*).
- Increasing knowledge and awareness about parents' and families' diversity/multiple identity (*knowledge & beliefs*).
- Increasing perspective taking competences through thinking from the parents' perspective (*attitudes & competences*).

### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Presentation and discussion** of Berry's (2000) acculturation model.
- **Discussion** of the concepts of diversity and otherness (Jullien, 2012; Sartre, 1943).
- **Reflecting** and sharing on participants' own acculturation experience. As there are many nationalities in the staff, the participants own acculturation experiences were shared and reflected upon.

### Observations and reflections

The group seemed to appreciate Berry's model as many questions were raised, generating a participated and interesting discussion among the staff members. A few professionals concluded that it appeared that French schools' approach to migrant parents is assimilationist. After sharing its own experience, a participant reflected that migrants were not a homogeneous group and that there were as many profiles as life experiences.

Regarding parents–school relationships and according to one participant, one can identify 3 parents' profiles: (i) Compliant parents (trust the teacher and consider that he/she is doing his/her job); (ii) the demanding parent (hardly participates in activities led by the school, but has high expectations and demands from the teacher); (iii) the participative parent (who is willingly and actively involved in the school's activities).

### Assessment and next steps

The group showed a lot of interest in Berry's acculturation model, giving examples from their own experience while discussing it. The group also showed curiosity towards the acculturation experiences that were shared. It was the feeling of the researchers that the activity allowed them to better know each other, increasing staff's cohesion, and to better grasp the concept of multiple identities. Accordingly, comments pointed out the necessity of paying attention to individual specificities in dealing with parents. In this line, a professional stated that the activity led him to become aware of the importance of considering the personal relations that each parent has towards school and language. Observation and listening were referred by the participants as key resources to better communicate and relate to parents. Overall, participants engaged eagerly in the reflection process.

Although participants generally assessed the intervention as positive, researchers noted that staff were struggling with time constraints, and that the written preparation of the cases to be presented at each meeting were being felt as an additional (and unnecessary) pressure. At the same time, researchers were also struggling with the additional task of ensuring that participants wrote the case on time, which had required several contacts, as well as the commitment to provide feedback on the written case in time for editing changes before the meeting. Therefore, a joint decision was made to stop this assignment; from the next meeting onwards, cases or situations would be shared within a more flexible framework, allowing for any participant to decide on the spot whatever to share with the group.

### BOX 5.3. Meeting 3, December 2018

#### Input

In the previous meeting the group reached an important conclusion: parents with immigrant background were a heterogeneous group. This seemed to the researchers an important stance that should be further cemented, since it might be indicative of a departure from the previously held stereotyped belief on “immigrants’ characteristics”. Consequently, researchers suggested to the group that this (new) attitude towards parents implied that interactions should not emphasise cultural explanations of social behaviour, but rather focus on each person’s uniqueness and its idiosyncrasies. This change seemed, in itself, indicative of PD, but it additionally opened doors for other PD objectives and needs. Concretely, this (new) attitude would also require from professionals to deepen their knowledge of their interlocutors by being very attentive during interactions and by acknowledging each parent’s skills and experiences. In short, it would be crucial for staff to develop their listening skills and attitudes.

Parallel to the PD process, the group of participants were also engaged in the development of a new organisation’s endeavour that consisted of developing a parent support group. For a long time, the centre had been considering how to give voice to parents and better meet their needs. The implementation of the ISOTIS project was seen from the start as providing an opportunity to reflect upon it and hence support the development of this process (although the researchers would not directly be involved in this newly created group). The parent support group had been launched in October, with its first step consisting of recording video interviews with Maghrebian mothers about their collaboration and involvement experience with schools. For this reason, this PD session had a time slot scheduled for sharing experiences related to the support group.

#### Goals

Goals for this meeting were:

- To foster reflection about the centre’s current activities related to co-education, particularly the recently created parent support group.
- Increasing knowledge and awareness about different ways of listening (*knowledge & attitudes*).
- Increasing knowledge and awareness about the concept of participation and different levels of participation. Reflection upon the organization’s activities in light of these levels and the discussion that ensued, particularly regarding the parents’ support group (*knowledge & beliefs*).

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Sharing** the organisation’s and own practices related to support of parents’ participation, particularly in the parent support group.
- **Presentation and discussion/reflection** about Porters’ listening attitudes (Porter, 1950).
- **Introduction and discussion** about the concept and degrees of participation (Hart ,1992; Zask, 2011).

#### Observations and reflections

A participant exposed a case on a mother who wanted to change her child from the public school (to a private school) because she didn’t trust the school environment. The participant subsequently shared with the group how he reacted. Concretely, the professional queried the mother about her real experiences with this school, concluding that her perceptions were based upon rumours. He then added that he knew parents that were satisfied. The ensuing discussion between the group brought additional possibilities of enactment (e.g., “you could have suggested her to speak with parents from that school), expanding the range of actions to take when facing similar situations.

The listening attitude did not raise much interactions. However, the concept of participation raised a lot of questions and debate. The group showed interest specifically in the various levels of participation according to Hart (1992). Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation describes 9 levels ranging from manipulation (where users do not understand the problems at stake but

are led to participate in a process initiated by others [here the professionals]) to social mobilisation where users are well informed, feel really concerned by the underlying problem and even have a critical point of view on the underlying cause. Researchers asked them to reflect and identify the level of participation of the activities in which they were involved. Dominantly, it appeared that parents understand the objectives of the activities delivered in the NGO. They know who decides on their participation and on what basis. They volunteer to participate in the project, after an explanation of their role. Most of the participants appeared unsatisfied with the current level of participation. They target more participation characterised by “more participation of parents”, “more consultation” and “initiative from parents and more co-construction of activities”. This was not a surprise because the target is in line with the mantra of popular education. The researchers made a reassessment of the participants expectations. It appeared that they were expecting recipes, ready to use tools and recommendations from the researchers. It was then agreed to pay closer attention to the ongoing reflection in the organisation to support parents.

#### **Assessment and next steps**

Although there was debate and interest surrounding the reflection and discussion on the concept of participation, researchers judged the degree of participants’ engagement during the meeting as low. A more elaborate discussion on this aspect is provided in Box 5.4 as input for the fourth meeting.

#### **BOX 5.4. Meeting 4, January 2019**

##### **Input**

By the end of the previous meeting researchers felt a decrease in the interest and enthusiasm showed by participants, which manifested itself in a lack of engagement throughout the session. Feedback from the participants indicated that they were eager to draw benefits from the PD meetings in terms of developing their project on parent support. In other words, participants expected the PD process to be more closely connected with real projects carried (or to be carried) out by the organisation. This led the researchers to rethink the approach in handling the group activities and to suggest activities that could foster participants’ reflection about concrete activities that the centre might conduct or that were already in place. As previously reported, the organisation was developing a support group with parents and, it seemed, struggling with the direction it might take. So far, staff had conducted filmed interviews with parents and organised an event where an edited version of the interviews were projected, but now they felt stuck on how to proceed.

To respond to this need, the ISOTIS team suggested to participants an ideation activity about possible activities that might empower parents, while at the same time addressing the goal of parent-schools partnership. It is important to highlight that the proposed activity deliberately drew on the previous session discussion about the concept and degrees of participation that seemed to have caught staff’s attention. The intention was to guide the staff to imagine activities that might match the desired level of participation from parents. This type of reflection should, in the researchers’ opinion, increase the participants’ awareness on possible pitfalls of the current activities, namely the parent support group, and serve as a roadmap to action, unblocking the staff’s ability to enact with a clearer framework and goals.

Furthermore, as participants would try to envisage new activities, it seemed like an adequate opportunity to introduce the VLE, calling their attention to the potential of the platform, starting with the materials available (videos, texts, activity templates and descriptions on how they were implemented in other countries), but also to the opportunity to engage with professionals from other countries that were part of the ISOTIS network, which might constitute a valuable chance for peer sharing and learning.

##### **Goals**

Goals for this meeting were:

- Deepening staff’s reflection about participation and empowerment, namely in relation to the on-going support group (continuation of previous meeting).

- Encouraging staff's ideation about activities that might meet the desired level(s) of parent engagement (i.e., designing activities for promoting parents' empowerment).
- Introducing the VLE as a useful resource for participants.

### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Discussion and reflection** on participation and empowerment, eliciting a critical view from participants on how the centre's current activities (particularly the support group) were promoting parents' participation and empowerment.
- **Ideation activity:** reflection on activity with parent's active participation for parent support group using the brainwriting technique (Rohrbach, 1969). As the parent support group was fading, professionals expressed a desire to find something new to revive the group. Brainwriting seemed to be an ideal solution to achieve three objectives: (i) promote collaborative work among professionals in a friendly and educational atmosphere; (ii) foster creativity and generate a multitude of new ideas in a very short time without researchers' direct input; and (iii) to continue the PD implementation with a concrete activity from which results can be directly applied in practice (and beyond the meetings). The participants were first asked to share what they know and their opinion on the parent support group. As expected by the researchers, some participants focussed on the problem to be solved (i.e. improving the activities proposed in the parent support group in order to effectively address the parents' empowerment needs). The problem was then summarised and stated in a single question: how can we improve the activities for the parents' support group? Then, each participant was given 4 post-its and requested to write one idea on each post-it in a simple and straightforward sentence, in silence. After ten minutes two groups were constituted. The members were requested to present and discuss their ideas to one another, then to select the four most interesting ideas to present to the group. After about 20 minutes, the eight most interesting ideas were presented. It ranged from encourage parents to become volunteers with the association, organize cultural discovery workshops, to creating a learning game. In the final step, the participants were requested to group the ideas according to similarities and then to rank the group according to criteria of meaningfulness, interest and feasibility.
- **Demonstration** on/of the VLE.

### Observations and reflections

A participant presented a concrete experience from which he realised it was not the best solution to give ready-to-use solutions to parents. Throughout this case analysis, the concepts of empowerment and participation were discussed. The group agreed that instead of giving ready-to-use answers or interceding with the school on behalf of the parent, it is preferable to help the parents develop their autonomy, for example by helping to analyse the situation and take autonomous decisions.

During the ideation activity and on-going reflection about the participation and empowerment concepts (resorting to the discussed literature and models), the idea came up of designing a game that could also help the players to better understand the French educational system and the school environment.

Demonstrations on the VLE were made using a projector. The video on A Meeting At School | Teacher-Parent Relationships was showcased (see [VLE](#)). The possibilities offered by the platform were presented (management of the personal space, participation in discussions, the selection of resources for the personal space and the creation of content) followed by discussions on how they could be implemented in the activities conducted by the centre. At this stage most of the ideas on how to use the platform came from the researchers. A participant experienced navigating through the VLE while others observed (the projection).

### Assessment and next steps

Participants were enthusiastic and eager to collaboratively develop a game with and for parents. This represented a departure from the format that the staff had originally decided to give to the support group. Instead of continuing with the support group sessions, participants decided that it was better to change the nature of the activity and to instead concentrate on the game development.



Regarding the ISOTIS VLE, oral feedback from participants indicated interest in the platform. However, only three (out of eight) professionals were willing to explore the VLE on their own, presumably due to time restraints. Credentials for access to the platform were (later) provided to the 3 willing participants. After careful consideration, the researchers opt not to consider integrating the VLE in the PD meeting fearing that this would impact and undermine the participation, namely by those who had not expressed the desire to test the VLE.

### **BOX 5.5. Meeting 5, February 2019**

#### **Input**

During the previous meeting an idea for developing a new resource begun to take place in the group: a tool/game that might develop parents' capacities for co-education. Inspired by the presentations and discussions on participation and empowerment it was agreed to consider parents' participation and empowerment in the development of this tool.

Regarding the VLE, only 3 participants had expressed interest in using it. Hoping to win more willing participants for the VLE, the team decided to present the VLE resources and potential in more detail, while stressing the possibility for sharing activities/experiences amongst members of the ISOTIS network. Concretely, a sharing activity between the Dutch professionals and the group was to be proposed.

#### **Goals**

Goals for this meeting were:

- Further discussion on parents' participation and empowerment options/approaches in the current activities of the organisation, paying particular attention to the game development activity (support to enactment).
- Continuation of the presentation of the VLE. Engagement of the group in an activity exchange with Dutch professionals with the common interest on effective approaches to parent-professionals partnership.

#### **Professional development activities**

The following activities were planned:

- **Discussing** the evolution of the game design, with a particular focus on the ways in which parents might be involved, in order to foster their participation and empowerment.
- **Showcasing** the activity on VLE "Promoting multilingualism in the family" (see [VLE](#)). Emphasis was also laid on the opportunity to exchange views with Dutch professionals who were also interested in parent-professional interactions.

#### **Observations and reflections**

Regarding the development of the game, participants concluded that involving parents in the design process would be key to their empowerment; therefore, parents would have to be present in the game development rather than only be regarded as beneficiaries.

The VLE activity on Involving families in exploring linguistic repertoires (see [VLE](#)) was explored and participants were asked to figure out ways of adapting and implementing it to the organisation's context and aims. While reflecting upon this activity, the idea of involving some children in the development of the game surged. Participants figured out that the game they were creating in the parent support group could be designed in such a way that it could be played by parents' groups, children's groups, professionals/teachers' groups, or in any other combination between these (e.g., parents-teachers).

Regarding the exchange with the Dutch team, the interest of such an exchange was discussed. Emphasis was laid on the fact that it could be inspiring to see how professionals in other contexts approach the partnership with the parents. The activity would consist of building a narrative of what might be qualified as an ideal day with parents (see [VLE](#)). As participants agreed to engage in this exchange experience, 2 participants volunteered to prepare narratives of the ideal day to be shared on VLE.

### Assessment and next steps

Participants were very motivated while presenting the game and discussing arguments to show that it worked towards the empowerment of parents. Two participants were willing to prepare narratives to be shared with the Dutch colleagues through the VLE. The participants contributed enthusiastically in all phases of the meeting.

### BOX 5.6. Meeting 6, April 2019

#### Input

A key issue that appeared during the needs analysis was the fact that parents often resorted to the centre about general school concerns and especially when they had an overt or latent conflict with the school team. Because of this, the ISOTIS team suggested that reflecting about staff's conflict resolution knowledge and skills was crucial for their "professional toolkit".

Regarding the exchange activity with the Netherlands' professionals, it was agreed to discuss the activity conducted with the Dutch participants, regarding the ideal collaboration with parents, resorting to the VLE potential.

#### Goals

Goals for this meeting were:

- To foster professionals' knowledge and skills about conflict resolution.
- To read and comment on the description of the activity carried out by the Dutch professionals (see [VLE](#)).
- To prepare the description of an ideal situation (about an encounter of professionals with parents) to be shared with the Dutch team.

#### Professional development activities

The following activities were planned:

- **Discussion** on conflict resolution between school and parent (presentation and discussion of the related concepts of interest and needs).
- **Reading the narratives** on the ideal day from the Netherlands and comment on it on the forum on the VLE<sup>33</sup>.
- Selection of a real situation experienced by one of the participants (parent complaining of perceived racism) to be transformed into an "**ideal situation**" to be shared with the Dutch professionals. The selected situation relates to a young child that encounters difficulties in mathematics (poor grades, conflicting relationships with the teacher, etc.). The child is convinced that the teacher "does not like him" and his mother thinks that the teacher is "racist". The mother shares her feeling of injustice with the professional who starts a long discussion with her in order to decipher the situation and understand what she means by "racist". The main objective is to understand the situation by reassuring her about her child's academic success. As the student encounters similar complications in other subjects, general discouragement was noted by the family (not due to any case of racism). Following this discussion, the parents (father and mother) decide to meet the mathematics teacher with an understanding attitude. The teacher explains that the child, discouraged, no longer returns his homework and withdraws into himself and no longer participates in the classroom. She adds that she also planned to meet with them in order to understand the child's behaviour. As a result, it refers the family to the association, since the two institutions regularly work in partnership. She organizes a meeting with the professionals, the family and herself so that the young person can benefit from the school support system. In this perspective, the various associative actors (family-school-association) cooperate, aiming at a common objective: the educational success of the child. On the one hand, they work together towards the child's schooling, but they also contribute to his or her responsibility and openness to the world. It is a question of co-creating a new way of educating together, combining both personal and collective ambitions. However, this approach requires first of all to make the student aware of his or her situation, by interrogating him or her about his or her own behaviour towards others

<sup>33</sup> Due to privacy issues, a link to the specific forum is not included in this report.



and by confronting the various representations. The rules are collectively established, so that the child becomes motivated again.

### **Observations and reflections**

Participants shared their view on what could be a good practice in dealing with suspecting racism of school staff. A participant asked another professional why he didn't make contacts with the teacher when the mother reported the case. He admitted he could have but that he was not convinced it was necessary because he wasn't sure the teacher was discriminating the child. A participant argued that some teachers are indeed discriminative with migrant children, which split the group into those who agreed and those who disagreed.

Intercultural competences were explored as a professional spontaneously made a reference to the activity on diversity (see Box 5.2). In short it was discussed that due to diversity professionals, teachers as well as parents are confronted with a multitude of cultural context and need to develop intercultural competences to understand one another and to be able to collaborate satisfactorily.

Regarding the exchange activity with the Netherlands, the participants read and discussed the narratives about the ideal day provided by the Dutch professionals. The narratives described how an ideal partnership between teachers and parents in a Dutch multicultural context would look like. Although the exchange was meant to take place on the VLE, this was not the case, since not all the participants were willing to go on the platform. Participants were curious and surprised to notice that parents had an easy access to their children's classrooms in the Netherlands. As this was not the case in France, a discussion ensued about whether this was or was not a positive feature, with some members viewing it positively and others stating that parents "had no business" in the classroom. The discussion went on with no shared conclusion at the end.

The 3 participants that previously had committed to engage with the VLE were encouraged to explore it and carry out the activities individually; nevertheless, it seemed that they had still not entered the platform, although credentials had been provided.

No time was left to give an account on the development of the game.

### **Assessment and next steps**

All the participants agreed that the professional was right to elicit the mother's belief on the discrimination of her child. Also, the idea of collaboration between the teacher and the association was appreciated.

Almost all participants agreed that misunderstanding was the main source of conflict between parents and school and that communication skills were paramount to a smooth resolution of the majority of conflicts.

Many questions were raised about the narratives of the ideal day by the Dutch teachers. Participants widened their perspective on what the institutional relation of the school with parents might be, since they had not previously conceived/know that parents could so easily access a classroom. This was important as immediately some participants questioned the French system and a joint reflection ensued about the pros and cons of such features.

No further PD activity was scheduled, as it was usually the case, after this meeting. Despite that all the six scheduled meetings were held, these were, as agreed with the organisation's manager and with the participants, a minimum number to be met, and the expectations of both parties was for a longer collaboration, perhaps extending beyond the ISOTIS project termination. Although the large number of bank holidays in May partly explain this, a more complete discussion on the reasons is presented below, in the assessment section.

However, in one of the regular meetings held with the manager after the last session held the ISOTIS team was informed on the development of the organisation's support group (which had turned into the game development). The game was finalized in May and the two members of the ISOTIS team took part in the first test, that counted 4 parents, 3 professionals, 1 young child (10yrs old). It was really a success that the game was now ready to use and the team was ready to share it. It is intended to be presented and played with parents and children at home, parents and teachers, teachers and children, parents and professionals of the organisation. Combinations of parents, children and professionals are also possible and intended (see Box 5.7 for a description of the game).

### ***BOX 5.7. Intercultural Game Developed by French Organization***

#### **Game description**

The game is similar to the game of little horses and it is played with a dice. Participants can play individually or in pairs. According to the boxes reached, players might have to answer general culture questions on the education system and on France. Sometimes they have to reflect on some case (e.g. child crying when going to school, child complaining about other children, etc.). To play, you need one dice and 4 different coloured counters representing players or groups of players. Players have roles that correspond to their real role in everyday life (parents, children, teachers, community professionals). It is not mandatory that all roles are complete to play. The game is very flexible and can be played between members of the same category (professionals among themselves, parents among themselves, and so on). But the more the different categories are represented, the more interesting the game is, the more participants can learn about each other's perspectives. The game is very conducive for communication and mutual understanding. For example, general culture questions allow parents to acquire, update or confirm their knowledge of the French context and the educational system. A better knowledge of the system within which they are bound to operate is arguably an important empowerment lever. Conversely, some questions about family life allow the teacher to understand the condition of immigrant families. For example, housing conditions that may be more or less conducive to evening studies, activities with children (cinemas, media library, etc.) or even the languages spoken by parents.

There is no winner in the game. The game ends when all players have reached the last square of the course. The researchers observed that collaborative reflection on a case study was a very powerful way of encouraging dialogue between participants. It was also interesting to see how while confronting their views, participants collaborated to formulate proposals or solutions.

In brief, the game is made in such a way that participants get new knowledge in a playful way. At the same time, they reflect and confront their perspectives and experiences with other players.

## 5.5. PART IV: ASSESSMENT

The fourth and final part is dedicated to the assessment of the professional development intervention. The methods for assessment are described and the most important outcomes concerning staff, organisation, the VLE and the overall process of co-construction are pointed out. We conclude this country report with a short discussion on the main lessons that we have learned during the intervention.

### 5.5.1. ASSESSMENT OF DOMAINS AND PROCEDURES

As previously reported, the assessment procedures foresaw a focus group with all participants involved, on top of the researchers' observations, notes and reflections throughout the process. Nevertheless, as meetings ended without setting a specific date for the focus-group assessment session, researchers opted to conduct interviews with the dedicated participants (and the manager) early in September. Five participants (plus the manager) have been interviewed. Researchers were not able to interview three of the participants in time, since these are volunteers and their presence in the organisation is occasional. In addition, informal conversations between participants and the researchers were also taken into consideration in the assessment.

### 5.5.2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings of the collected data will be divided into four topics. The first topic, *staff*, concerns the overall satisfaction of the professionals and to what extent they thought their knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes were changed through the intervention. The second topic, *organisation and collaboration practices*, concerns the organisational climate and team work. A central question here is to what extent the intervention impacted the collaboration within the organisation and if the PD activities prompted further discussion in the organisation outside the planned intervention meetings. Third, we present the results on the *virtual learning environment*. This concerns the usage, usefulness, satisfaction and to what extent professionals are interested in future use of the tool. Lastly, the intervention's *process of co-construction* will be evaluated. For all four topics the (self)evaluation of the professionals and the observations and reflections of the researchers are used to highlight the most important findings.

#### 5.5.2.1. STAFF

It appears that the intervention has had an impact on the staff, both at the individual and collective level. In their assessments, the staff members expressed satisfaction with the meetings held since it brought them relevant tools (skills) and ideas (knowledge) on empowering parents.

At the individual level, participants reported gains in terms of new or alternative ideas and methods for the collaboration with parents. For instance, the feedback of the volunteer<sup>34</sup> indicated that there were a lot of interactions between parents and professionals that she was not fully aware of. She said to have understood that underneath the more immediate aspects of the interactions between professionals and parents, there was much more at stake. She reported that

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<sup>34</sup> The only volunteer who took part in the final assessment interviews.

these are situations that practitioners encounter every day in the NGO without having the time and/or moment to reflect upon them. The PD intervention not only made her more aware of these aspects, but also allowed her to better understand her role as a professional: *"It allowed me to understand how to act as a professional, what posture to adopt, for example not to see problems only in terms of victim - perpetrator, etc., try to understand what role I have to play and what I'm aiming for. It allowed me to understand in a way that the idea is not to act as a rescuer [...] It gave me ideas about what happens when a parent comes to see us with a complaint, how we deconstruct, how we act. It is important to understand because we think we know what parental involvement is, we think we know the right method, but in fact it is so inconsistent that it is good to discuss it"*. This quote suggests that not only did the PD activities change the participant's knowledge and attitudes, but also made her realise the necessity of a common shared ground of understanding within the team. Furthermore, the volunteer clearly expressed how the PD process impacted her beliefs on parental involvement/engagement: *"it made me understand that the parents were far from resigning, that they were completely concerned by the issue. We often say that families are lax, but we have seen that each family wants the best for the child and that there are misconceptions that are also conveyed"*. Another indicator of the positive impact of the intervention on participants is tangible in the words of another professional who has shown interest in continuing the PD sessions and learning more: *"I came out with a lot of things and new ideas that I hadn't thought of. I think there was not enough time, there were a lot of subjects where I wish we could have gone further. I think I still have a lot to learn about it"*.

In general, four of the five interviewed participants reported impacts of the PD activities on their knowledge and skills (e.g., "how to listen and interpret people", dealing with complaints). It seems that for the most experienced professional of the NGO, the meetings only had a confirmatory effect, corroborating things he already knew: *"The meetings reinforced my idea that we are all really in a popular education process. I think that parents must be actors in the process. It is important that parents be supported to become actors. Our role will be to really empower them, to make them aware. This is what we aim to achieve on a daily basis [...] the meetings reinforced my confidence in what I was [already] doing well"*.

All the participants appreciated the ideation activity and the subsequent work on co-creating a game, since *"it was completely related to what we wanted to do. And in meetings, everyone brought their own ideas"*. Also, the manager, in his feedback, expressed satisfaction on the outcomes of the sessions, particularly related to the game activity. To him, the intervention had a positive impact on the development of the Game, which is a new approach to empowering parents that attend the association. He intends to manufacture a prototype of the game and is looking forward to the possibility of sharing the game with a primary school, since, in his opinion, it can bring out the problems that children encounter, as it can be useful for teachers to better understand children's contexts (for example if the child goes to bed late at home at night).

### **Lack of clear-cut definition of the professionals' roles**

The association is often solicited by parents when conflicts arise between them and the school. During the exploratory phase, professionals reported that they do not always know how to handle this type of situation and that there seems to be confusion among the parents related to what to expect from the professionals (namely in case of conflict between the school and the parent). The

professionals (particularly the volunteers) reported a role confusion between counsellor, mediator, friend, etc. To address this need, meeting 6 (see Box 5.6) included a discussion on conflict resolution. At the end of the meeting it appeared that the professionals improved their knowledge on possible sources of conflict; however, it was not tangible if the professionals did gain any skills in uncovering latent needs, identifying desires and fears underneath parents' complaints, reframing the problem and then sharing and discussing ideas, addressing the problem, nor was it tangible that this activity helped the professionals to better identify their own role. In fact, we have come to realise that this need should have been dealt with at the organisation level. Therefore, we expand the discussion on this issue in the next section (organization and collaboration practices).

### **Addressing inconsistencies and professional biases**

The exchanges during the meetings often gave rise to the expression of professional biases. For example, when one of the participants got carried away by saying "in any case, we know that white teachers discriminate against the children of immigrants in the classroom. It's their face slamming." Or when - on the occasion of the first meeting - several professionals expressed assimilationist views on parents ("they" [always referring to immigrant parents] "do not seek to integrate", "do nothing for their children", "are illiterate", etc.). Faced with the expression of these professionals' biases, the researchers experienced difficulties in reacting and addressing effectively to them. Fearing that they would create discomfort and the risk of losing some participants, the researchers did not react when these biases appeared in the hope that other members of the group would do so and that the criticism would be more acceptable if it came from a peer. However, in hindsight, the researchers believe that it is precisely through this type of statement that the fundamental beliefs of the professionals are revealed. These were golden opportunities to put on the table and discuss these beliefs that are crucial to the professionals' attitudes in daily situations. Perhaps it would have been more effective — for changing these professionals' beliefs — to openly confront participants with their contradictions. In this sense, a point of caution prior to implementation would be to focus on building trust between participants and researchers and to establish benevolent communication from the exploration phase.

Also, related to this issue is the general position of the association and professionals regarding the parent-school relationship. It appeared, from the exploratory phase and the discussions that there was, in the association's approach a strong focus on parents and much less on the other stakeholder, the school. This could partly explain why some of the professionals have assimilationist views on parents. Future PD actions should also enable professionals to become aware of this type of bias and, for example, target skills in partnership development. In a nutshell, the researchers should have been more directive. Their neutrality (ethics) should not prevent them from having a social commitment to transform social and educational practices.

#### **5.5.2.2. ORGANISATION AND COLLABORATION PRACTICES**

##### **A clear mission, but a lack of clear guidelines on the activities**

The organization's general mission, as presented in the official documents, is to offer services to facilitate access to everyone's rights, especially for disadvantaged people. This mission is enforced through activities with specific objectives, towards children, teenagers and adults. The

association is inspired by the philosophy of Paolo Freire and by the Salesian pedagogy. PD activities have confirmed that professionals act in accordance with this approach. At least, they verbally justify their professional commitment with the will to work for the emancipation of the most vulnerable people.

However, it is striking to see that professionals lack guidelines on how to conduct the activities. For example, on conflict management: though the professionals do not intervene in the school to mediate in conflicts, they need competences in conflict resolution (perceived case of racism from a teacher towards a child in meeting 6, see Box 5.6). The researchers noticed that professionals are not provided with guidelines by the organization on how to address a parent's complaint about a (perceived) conflict with the school.

The discussion on this case allowed the researchers to better understand why professionals mentioned role confusion during the exploratory phase. Testimonies from two participants showed that the meetings of the professionals realized low levels of team cohesion. It appeared that for the participants what was identified as role confusion had to do with the mixed composition of the team (permanent professionals and volunteers). Precisely a permanent professional stated during the evaluation that *"the team at the NGO is rotating a lot. Even if it brings an external perspective, I realize that it doesn't help to stabilize a consistent work process"*. This awareness was triggered by the activities of PD since he tells us later that *"it was important to get up to date on the subjects we discussed and to be able to share our experiences with each other since there were people who had a lot of experience, others less, others who had very different experiences"*. It indicates that the PD activities were effective and useful in transferring knowledge among team members.

Nevertheless, and as discussed above, the intervention did not seem to have an impact on the felt role confusion. In retrospect, we think that the need was not appropriately targeted. In fact, the ISOTIS team realized that the association does not really provide a clear-cut definition of the roles. In addition, the confusion is probably accentuated by the mixing of professionals (supposedly trained and qualified) and volunteers (whose statute and professional commitment is looser). This is prone to confusion if a clear definition of roles and structured guidelines for conducting the activities are not provided beforehand. If the intervention was to be reproduced, the researchers would prioritize addressing this need at the organizational level, particularly by drawing the attention of the manager to the necessity to outline guidelines for activities and definition of roles. Such an approach would be more effective in eliminating the role confusion reported by the professionals during the exploratory phase. This, most likely, is not a unique situation since many NGO's operating in similar domains resort massively to volunteers in order to solve their human resources problems. NGOs need to be made aware of the impact of this practice on the professional identity of practitioners and especially on the effectiveness of the services provided. Their PD plans should not ignore organizational and structural constraints.

Overall, PD activities were judged to have had an impact on the working group. The manager reported that the professionals have *"become aware that collaboration with parents is something they encounter daily in many of the association's various activities without realizing it and they have also found solutions together"*. Later, he added that *"when solutions are found together, it*



*helps to raise people's awareness, but also to make the solutions richer and to be on the same page as a team". A (permanent) professional mentioned that the PD activities played a role in fostering collaboration and co-creation among the professionals: "The creation of the game gave us an additional boost. We were cheerful, so it also motivated us. There is a good atmosphere in the team".*

Besides raising awareness of team members on the need for a consistent work process, the meetings proved to be effective in raising awareness on issues related to parent-professional collaboration and in clarifying the issues discussed. For instance, a (permanent) professional mentioned that: *"It made me realize that in the team it's good to work together very often and to create things together. There are team meetings, but they do not allow us to go deeper into the issues, to discuss both individual and common solutions together. There are many volunteers, the oldest and most invested know a number of things, but these are not topics that are put on the table every day. Participation, for example, was not a clear subject. The meetings helped to clarify them for volunteers and even for myself".*

### 5.5.2.3. VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The 3 professionals that volunteered to test the VLE platform gave positive feedback on the VLE. *"It looks very nice", "It is very interesting to have a platform to share ideas and resources", "It is in line with the principle of popular education"* [particularly referring to the fact that people could share their ideas amongst each other].

Nevertheless, time seemed to be a crucial factor for lack of professional's engagement with the platform. One of the professionals explored the platform a couple of times and watched some videos in the resource section, concluding that she would still need more time to become familiarised with the VLE. Furthermore, she added that she had to do it on her personal time and that in the months preceding the assessment she did not have enough time to properly engage with it.

Alongside, she reported that, based on her exploration of the VLE, it was not obvious how she could use the VLE potential with the NGO's parents: what could be the role of the parents on an activity on the VLE, she asked herself. Besides the time factor, privacy concerns appeared as an important factor for one professional to engage with the VLE, since she reported that she did not contribute to the forum due to worries related to sharing her reflection on the cases (see exchange activity with the Netherlands, Box 5.6), stating that if she knew the participants could be people of the NGO's neighbourhood in a group with restricted access, then she would have done it.

Another participant that volunteered to explore the platform appreciated the fact that the resources were available in French (automatically translated) and generally gave a very positive feedback: *"It's impressive and very rich"*. For her the VLE could be very useful for providing new ideas and new tools to diversify activities with the NGO's users. To exemplify her feedback, she mentioned one activity — *Individual language story: how do we draw it?* (age range: 7+) (see [VLE](#)) — which she said could be very relevant for children attending the association. She had figured out a way of adapting and implementing it with group of children, referring that *"the activity*



*is ready to use and the instructions are clear*". She realised that the voice in one of the videos — *Two languages are better than one!* (see [VLE](#)) — was only in English, highlighting that the children may not pay attention to the script. Moreover, the professional also voiced some doubts and questions about the VLE during the assessment interview, showing that she is still in the process of appropriating the platform. This made us realise that time, in the sense of a prolonged process, is an important factor for making the use of the VLE effective.

#### 5.5.2.4. PROCESS OF CO-CONSTRUCTION

##### **Time management & temporalities**

The management of time during the process revealed to be a challenge. The researchers already knew that the implementation of T5.4 would be demanding in terms of preparation, implementation and reporting. But the articulation of meetings and activities with the availability of professionals is one aspect of which researchers felt to have very little flexibility. As mentioned above in the report, professionals often complained that they did not have the time to carry out all their activities, because the NGO is short of staff and conducts a large number of activities. This availability problem was particularly felt in the preparation of the case studies requested during the first meetings. As agreed, the ISOTIS team had to call the volunteers back to get the cases to be studied. The volunteers had to take time from their personal lives to do the requested preparations. For PD activities based on reflection and case studies, such as the ones foresaw in the current intervention, it would have been ideal if the time spent by the professional to prepare an activity or to carry out an exercise, even outside the sessions, were to be counted as effective working time. This would give more quality and consistency to the materials brought into the training by the professionals.

In addition, still related to time issues, the researchers would have liked to hold two sessions per month instead of one, so as to maintain a kind of learning dynamic. The gap that sometimes occurred between sessions did not favour this dynamic. Although participants did not withdraw from the meetings, the sequence of meetings did sometimes seem disconnected.

All this is not unrelated to another challenge that researchers had to face: the disparity between the temporality of the association and the temporality of the project. On the one hand, there was the temporality of the association, which is a slower, very versatile, subject to the vagaries of the influx of users and celebrations in the district — which, in addition to the multitude of public holidays, justifies why the meetings ended abruptly. On the other hand, there was the temporality of the ISOTIS project, which had a very structured agenda with clearly defined objectives. The challenge that the researchers had to face was to take this disparity into account and consistently try to articulate the two in a win-win logic for the NGO and the project.

These observations are validated by the feedback of the professionals on the reasons of the abrupt end of the meetings: *"there came the end of Ramadan and then came the sunny days with activities outside the walls"*.

In short, our conclusions point to the fact that time is a determining factor in a PD process. Indeed, in this process, it was possible for us to discern three ways in which time was a crucial determinant for PD: (i) time in relation to the availability of the participants; (ii) time in relation to the articulation of the different stakeholders' agendas; and (iii) time in relation to the process on maturation of learning, since the ability to adapt, to change one's beliefs, just as the transformation of skills, is a gradual process that can only take place over a long period of time (beyond the period in which PD activities took place). Therefore, it is our conclusion that future PD activities would gain to plan meetings for a longer period and schedule the evaluation over a longer timespan too.

### **Need for a more directive approach in carrying out the exercises**

Some of the proposed activities did not produce the effects intended by the researchers. This was the case, for example, when professionals were asked (at the 3rd meeting) to examine their dominant listening attitude and to consider alternatives to promote parents' expression. This was also the case at meeting 6 (see Box 5.6) when, after reading the case presented by the Dutch colleagues (in the exchange activity), of a situation where parents find themselves in their children's classroom (for more detail, please see above). Beyond a general reaction of surprise due to the fact that this seemed at odds with usual practices in France, two types of reactions were expressed: some argued that parents had no business in a classroom since this is the teacher's place, while others thought it was great that parents could go into their child's classroom and spend time with the teacher, taking part in the routine and thus getting an idea of the environment in which their child is developing. Despite the enthusiasm of these exchanges, the professionals did not make a real link with their own activity. For example, professionals inspired by this narrative could be expected to consider partnering with one or two schools in the neighbourhood to experiment with this type of practice.

Additionally, the difficulty in reaching the desired results also challenged the role of the researchers. It is now our conviction that the latter must sometimes be directive in the instruction and conduct of the exercises (in this case, for example, by asking participants to consider scenarios for experimentation with this type of practice), in order to enable the transformations desired by the PD activities.

## 6. CROSS-COUNTRY EXCHANGE

The simultaneous work in four different countries and different contexts on a virtual learning environment (VLE) provided unique opportunities for exchange and cross-boundary community building and learning. Already in an initial stage of the intervention the professionals from the different countries expressed an explicit interest in learning more about practices in other countries. Thus, after an initial focus on the local contexts the explicit aim for the ISOTIS team was to explore options for cross-country exchange that would fit well within the work in the local context and would enrich these experiences by providing different, cultural views, experiences, and practices. Table 6.1 provides a general overview of the exchange that was carried out in the implementation phase. It is important to keep in mind the differences in local context concerning the type of professionals and age range of the children involved. And, importantly the French context was unique as the professionals worked in an informal setting with both children and families providing a bridge function between the family and school. Despite these differences in context, the main topics that were addressed in the intervention were strongly aligned and therefore allowed for the envisioned exchange. Below we will briefly address the different activities that were exchanged between countries and highlight some of the main reflections and observations.

Table 6.1  
*Cross-Country Exchange.*

	France	Italy	The Netherlands	Portugal
France			Exchange on Narratives activity	
Italy			Exchange on Welcoming kit	Exchange on Welcoming kit
The Netherlands	Exchange on Narratives activity	Exchange on Welcoming kit		Exchange on Book activity & Skin colour activity
Portugal		Exchange on Welcoming kit	Exchange on Book activity & Skin colour activity	

### 6.1. BOOK ACTIVITY

The Dutch teachers were asked to choose a book that they liked to their children. This book was then used for reflecting on the implicit and explicit messages and assumptions related to the text, the pictures, or the underlying values expressed in the story (see [VLE](#)). More importantly, the professionals we're asked to reflect on whether all of the children could relate to this particular book. The professionals uncovered several implicit and more explicit messages embodied in the story and the pictures. Some of these messages were evaluated positive and in line with what they wanted to convey (e.g., adventures can be fun), but they realized with other messages that not all children would be able to understand or relate to it easily, because they were conveying a

(cultural) practice different than theirs (e.g., going on adventure with only the father present, hiking in nature, or the amount/type of physical contact between the family members). Besides these messages, the professionals also realized that the main characters in the book were displayed in the pictures as a Caucasian family, and that the clothes revealed a traditional gender pattern (all girls in dresses, only boys wearing shorts). Instead of dismissing the book entirely, they started to think about what was needed to make sure reading this book would engage all children. For instance, the professionals acknowledged that some things in the book might need more explanation or discussion with the children (for instance: the going out into nature-part might be new for these inner-city kids), they envisioned using roleplay to re-enact the story with the children opening up the characters to other family members (mother, uncle etc.), and they realized that they had to diversify the pictures used in the book to relate the book more to the multicultural composition of their group.

The Portuguese teachers, first reflected on the same book, revealing different observations (see [VLE](#)). The teachers more strongly focused on the narrative of 'an adventure in which obstacles cannot be avoided, just like in real life'. They supported the implicit messages of 'courage', 'bravery', 'confidence' and 'the world is tough'. One teacher mentioned that everyone has the same skin colour and that they share the same culture. Besides this one remark, not much attention was paid to the way the characters were represented in terms of skin colour, family composition or clothing. Next, the reflections of the Dutch professionals were shared with the Portuguese teachers, which they found interesting. The Portuguese teachers mentioned that they focused on different aspects of the book because of the difference in age range (i.e. they worked with older children), but a difference in cultural classroom context could have played a role as well. The Portuguese teachers worked in a less culturally diverse context compared to the Dutch teachers, which could mean that they were less focused on the issue of cultural diversity and representation in a book. The Portuguese teachers mentioned that it is important to hear other opinions and 'see with different eyes'. Regarding the cultural representativeness of classroom materials, they mentioned that now they will be more alert.

## 6.2. WELCOMING KIT

In Italy and Portugal (see [VLE](#)) children and teachers worked on developing a welcoming kit for newly arriving children, as part of T4.4. The PT teachers prepared a video to capture all the different activities that they carried out with children as part of the intervention (it included the skin colour activity, a map and signs of the school in different languages, a booklet with some words/sentences for social exchange in the main languages spoken in the classrooms, an activity exploring schools around the world). The aim was to use this to introduce the school and classroom to new children by highlighting the multicultural work that was carried out.

The Italian teacher was impressed by the integrated nature of all activities carried out in the intervention in Portugal. In Italy there is a national curriculum that includes a focus on intercultural education, but this is perceived by teachers as something separate and not integrated in their daily classroom work. They appreciated this integration in the Portuguese case and thought it makes more sense this way. The teacher pointed out that she found this to be challenging to implement in the Italian case. A more specific comment from the Italian teacher related to the

choice of the Portuguese teachers to focus first on the linguistic diversity in the classroom rather than the multicultural aspect, which she could relate to. Especially concerning Roma children, dealing with language is less challenging and less sensitive than addressing the culture of Roma children. She mentioned that the Roma culture tends to be quite reserved and subject to prejudice and lack of understanding. However, she stresses that addressing culture by involving Roma students' families is a good starting point.

When Portuguese teachers read this feedback, they acknowledged the importance of involving Roma families and mentioned that in another project they had asked parents to come to school and share some aspects of their culture. They, for instance, taught other parents to make traditional baskets. The Portuguese teachers also commented on the digital storytelling activity conducted in Italy. They suggested to record the children speaking in their home languages, so children could hear the musical quality of languages and notice differences and commonalities between languages. Moreover, the Portuguese teachers showed appreciation of the use of the notice board with parents in the Italian case. They thought this functionality had a lot of potential, but they weren't able to realize this in their context due to a lack of time. In the Portuguese classrooms, mostly the children made active use of the different options the VLE had to offer. They produced charts, watched videos and commented on them, they searched and shared photos and videos in forums.

The exchange between Italy and Portugal appeared interesting and valuable for professionals from both countries. They received feedback and suggestions on their activities and were able to see practices of other teachers, which provided them with new insights and ideas. Due to the exchange on the welcome kit, the researchers in the Netherlands also explored whether their professionals had something similar in place for their newly enrolled children and their parents. After some exploration it appeared that in one location that was not involved in the ISOTIS project, they worked with a welcome book for parents (so not focused on the children) in order to help them see what is expected from them. This book was translated into English and put on the VLE as well.

### **6.3. SKIN COLOUR ACTIVITY**

The Portuguese teachers conducted a classroom activity on multiple skin tones (see [VLE](#)) and these materials were made available to the Dutch professionals for them to reflect on the activity. For the Dutch teachers, it was part of a more comprehensive PD activity in which the professionals first reflected on whether young children can see differences in colour between people (based on a blog message) and how one should address this. They also watched a video on the experiment with white and black dolls. The discussion that followed raised a question about whether the topic of skin colour should be addressed proactively or only in reaction to events in the classroom or questions from children. Some teachers felt that their children were too young to address the topic, whereas others mentioned that you can talk about different skin colours the same way as different hair colours. They also wondered whether the Portuguese teachers had experienced any racism in the school. Lastly, they looked at the activity that was conducted by the Portuguese teachers and reflected on this. They generally appreciated the painting activity in which children made self-portraits by mixing paint to find the same colour as their skin a lot, but questioned

whether they would be able to do something similar with their young children. They argued that children at this young age are focused on mixing paint rather than making a specific painting (i.e. self-portrait). A description of the Dutch activity was made in which Dutch teachers asked some question to their Portuguese counterparts.

The questions of the Dutch teachers were interesting food for thought and resulted in a fruitful discussion with the Portuguese teachers. One of the main issues that was discussed concerned being proactive or reactive towards skin colour or racism. The teachers were very clear that it is essential to address the topic proactively in order to anticipate and prevent problems. One teacher mentioned that she changed children's seats every month to encourage contact between all children and to avoid that some children might be ignored or excluded (she mentioned that no one wanted to sit next to a Roma girl at some point). The teachers mentioned that it would be good to use a story or book to address the topic. At the same time, the professionals realized that they hardly knew any books featuring black or in the case of Portugal Roma children. They immediately searched online for some good books and shared these results with each other. In response to the Dutch query about racism they elaborated on some examples of segregation of Roma children in the school, such as during breaks, and children's curiosity when a student with a black skin colour enrolled in school and children wanted to touch his skin and made offensive remarks. Concerning the painting activity, the Portuguese teachers felt that this was also possible with younger children. They suggested some alternatives to make the activity easier (e.g. preparing different colours and asking children to match them with their skin, drawing their hand and painting this rather than a self-portrait) and mentioned that even for fourth grade children it was hard to find their specific skin tone.

The exchange between Portugal and the Netherlands highlighted the importance of having another (cultural) perspective on a certain matter and contributed to increasing awareness of the possible issues at stake in talking about skin colour. For the Portuguese teachers it not only raised awareness, but also in taking action by searching for books (which was elicited by a question from the Dutch professionals). The Dutch teachers were confronted with new knowledge (young children are not colour-blind) and other teachers' views on how to deal with this, which raised their awareness and gave some new insights.

Also, one of the Italian teachers provided feedback on the welcome kit, which included the skin colour activity. She suggested that addressing skin tone from a more scientific perspective could also be valuable. She explained how she talked with her students about how pigment called melanin determines people's skin colour. Although all people have melanin, the amount differs between people and has a biological function in view of adaptability to sunlight. People living near the equator with an abundance of sunlight tend to have darker skin tones than people living further away from the equator. The teacher believes that presenting diversity from this perspective helps to avoid possible discrimination effects.

#### 6.4. IDEAL DAY WITH PARENTS

In the Netherlands, the professionals were asked to write a narrative to describe 'their ideal day with parents' from the moment they brought their child to the preschool until the moment the child was picked up again. Professionals from both locations did this and exchanged their experiences and ideas on the VLE (see [VLE](#)). They asked each other questions about some of the choices that were made. For instance, in one location the teachers wrote that when the child and the parent enter the preschool they would greet them personally. The teachers from the other location asked how they greeted the parents (verbally or also shaking their hand), at which the professionals responded that they would respect any type of greeting depending on the preferences of the parent/child. Another example, concerned the pre-made choice of professionals as to where a child would play (in which play area, e.g. the puzzles at the table) together with the parents which raised a question from the professionals from the other location on why the child was not allowed to make that choice him/herself. The exchange between the professionals from different locations was quite detailed and aimed at better understanding why professionals acted the way they did. This led to some new ideas for other or better ways to involve parents in the preschool.

Although the professionals in France worked in a very different setting, they were interested in reading about the practices from the Dutch professionals. They showed surprise about the Dutch practice of parents entering the classroom and spending time there with their child. Some of the professionals argued that this was no place for a parent and that this is the teacher's place whereas other professionals greatly appreciated this way of involving parents in the child's preschool experiences. Despite, the enthusiasm that was expressed during the activity, the professionals did not apply this experience to their own relationship with parents nor did they consider partnering with parents in one or two schools in their neighbourhood.



## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section integrates the main findings of the work carried out as part of T5.4 across the different countries, followed by a discussion of the main conclusions and some lessons learned that feed into implications for policy and practices. The Description of Action of Task 5.4 refers to the development of a transferable model of professional development using a virtual learning environment (VLE) considering the contextual and organisational characteristics and the needs and challenges of diverse professionals working in these contexts using a design-based approach. The VLE will prioritize the promotion of community bonds in multilingual, multicultural and socially disadvantaged (pre)school and informal settings among the main actors (practitioners, parents and children), and the promotion of global intercultural competence of individuals and communities by:

- i) raising awareness and knowledge of multiple languages, cultures, human rights, discrimination mechanisms and promoting skills in multiple languages and in critical thinking and establishing shared understanding,
- ii) promoting agency of all stakeholders based on valuing their cultural background, resources and identity,
- iii) using the resources available in the form of diverse family languages and cultural backgrounds to innovate learning practices of children and professionals and to create rich learning experiences, and iv) sustaining communication and collaboration between stakeholders, encouraging and supporting networking between stakeholders.

The task includes two aspects: i) the co-design and implementation of a VLE, ii) a professional development (PD) intervention supportive to both the design of the VLE and to increasing professionals' intercultural competences. The VLE was developed as a set of functions, sources and suggested activities, but the main feature of the *VLE implementation* was the collaboration between researchers and participants (teachers, other professionals, volunteering paraprofessionals, parents, children) who participated in creating contents and materials for the VLE. This co-creation was at the heart of the process and a key design-principle with the aim of engagement and empowerment of stakeholders. This process of participation fits in well with the open and positive nature of the technology and reporting on this process – what can be learned for future implementations – is equally important as a technically working VLE. Therefore, a careful documentation and assessment of the process is a main outcome of ISOTIS T5.4 besides the development of a prototype of a transferrable model of a 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. One of the main differences between the four countries concerned the types of professionals and the settings they work in. 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.

Another difference between Italy and Portugal on the one hand and France and the Netherlands on the other hand, concerned the additional involvement in T4.4. The work in T5.4 focused mainly on PD and improving professionals' competences, whereas the work in T4.4 focused on the work with children in the classroom and improving their competences. The Italian and Portuguese teachers were involved in both T4.4 and T5.4, thus allowing for more synergy in aligning the work conducted in both aspects of the intervention. Moreover, this meant that the PD's main focus was on preparing teachers for the 'new' or adapted way of working in the classroom that was designed in T4.4. The work in France and the Netherlands was initially mostly focused on professionals, but soon also elaborated to more concrete work related to the daily practice with children and parents to strengthen the connection between theory and practice. Thus, generally, the PD was always closely linked to the context of the daily practice as the professionals' needs emerged from these contexts. These differences in professionals and the setting they work in played a role in the overall process of designing and implementing the VLE and we will address this issue. However, despite the differences in context, the interventions in all countries showed some interesting parallels. We will start by integrating the main findings following the conceptual PD model adopted in T5.4 (see Figure 7.1) and we will end with some general conclusions regarding the overall intervention process and the VLE.

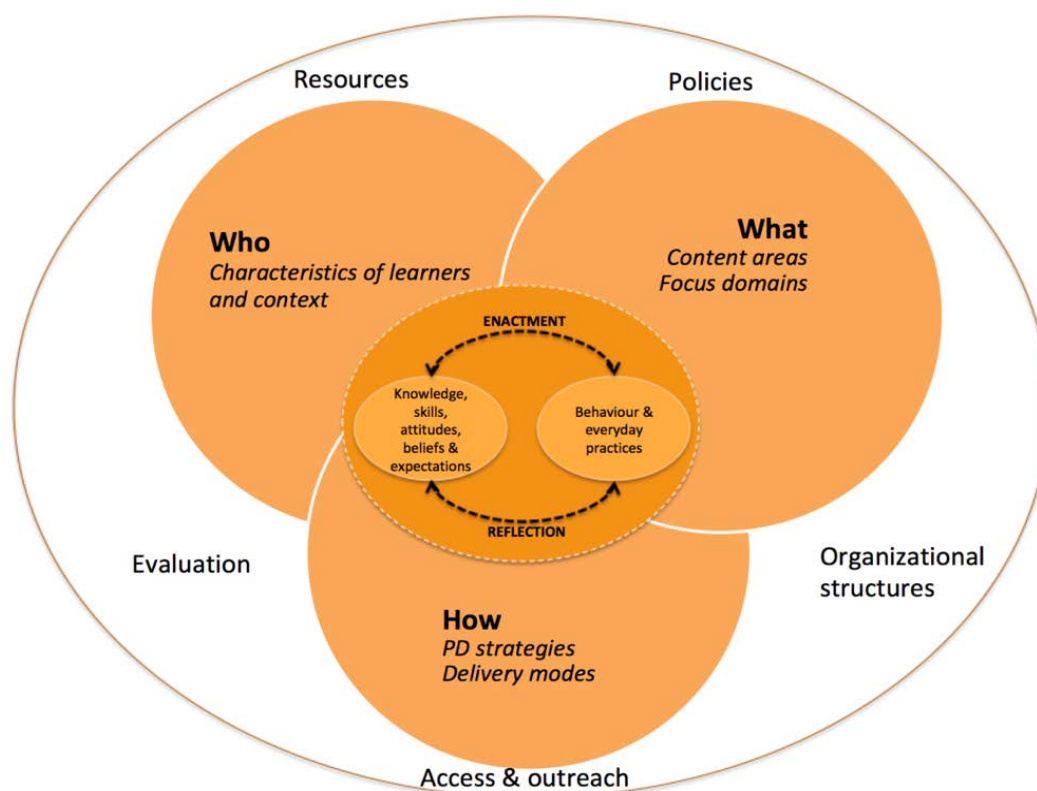


Figure 7.1. Conceptual model of professional development.

### 7.1. WIDER ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The model in Figure 7.1 highlights the theory of change underlying the professional development intervention and follows a contextual approach. The outer layer of the model presents different

aspects in the organizational and social context that are hypothesized to support or hinder an individual or group in developing (new) competences and translating these competences into actual behaviour and practices in the everyday context. The different interventions in the four countries highlight a few key characteristics at this level.

### **7.1.1. RESOURCES**

The available resources in the organization appeared important in enabling professionals to participate in the PD intervention and carry out the activities inherently part of it. Regarding the VLE, resources in terms of the ICT availability for professionals played a role. Technical difficulties or lack of equipment, such as a computer, played a (minor) role in the intervention as well. For instance, in the Netherlands, the teachers experienced technical difficulties with the digital blackboard that was available in the classroom, which limited them in exploring an activity with parents that was designed during the PD intervention. Also, not all professionals used a computer on a daily basis in their everyday work in most countries. For example, in France, the use of a computer was less incorporated in the professionals' daily work with parents or children, which appeared to be an obstacle in getting the professionals involved in the VLE. Some of the professionals lacked the (technical) skills to explore the VLE more thoroughly and were not supported in this sufficiently in their organization. In Italy and Portugal, who were also involved in T4.4, it appeared that the children showed more enthusiasm and engagement with the VLE than the teachers when using it for classroom activities.

One of the main obstacles mentioned by professionals in all countries was the amount of time available for them to be able to take part in the intervention, prepare for ISOTIS meetings and carry out activities either with their team or in the classroom. Some interesting differences occurred between the four countries. For instance, in the Dutch preschool the professionals have time allocated for PD and the ISOTIS meetings with them were scheduled within this time. This structural condition made it comparatively easier to conduct the meetings with the professionals in the Netherlands than in Portugal where professionals were not facilitated to the same extent. As a result, the Portuguese professionals showed higher interest in the classroom activities as part of T4.4 and the ISOTIS team had to align or integrate the PD part in these activities as much as possible. This alignment with the professionals' interests and desires was highly appreciated and made the intervention run smoothly. Moreover, all professionals (of all countries) had to deal with stressful circumstances at a certain point (e.g., a too high workload, organizational changes (relocation of professionals), tensions in the organization/team) and it appeared hard to keep up the work in the same pace sometimes. It should be noted that the work with the organizations was a long-term investment from both the professionals and the ISOTIS researchers over a period of more than one year.

### **7.1.2. EMBEDDEDNESS IN ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES AND STRUCTURES**

The context differed greatly between countries, not only regarding the formal (education) context versus a more informal (community) context, but relatedly also concerning the way these organizations functioned and the extent to which policies concerning pedagogy, education, and professional development were defined at the organizational level, which all played a role in the

PD intervention. The community centre in France was a non-formal setting in which there appeared few formal structures or policies concerning the work with children and families. Although, there was a mission statement and an annual report on the centre's achievements, there were no clear structures or policies on how the work with children or families had to take place. Before and during the intervention it appeared that the professionals sometimes struggled with their role (counsellor, friend, supporter or evaluator) indicating that they might not have developed a clear professional identity yet. In contrast, in the formal education contexts, there were clear Education/Pedagogical plans guiding the everyday work with children. Formal settings are more strongly subject to (national) regulation and inspection and these documents are often mandatory and publicly available. For example, in the Dutch and Portuguese sites, documents focusing on the internal (quality) regulation or (self)evaluation were researched during the exploratory phase.

The Dutch preschool organization also had a policy document on professional development indicating the priorities in terms of the topics they wanted to address in PD and also the types of PD they were engaged in. This included regular team meetings at different levels (i.e. within the location involving teachers, the pedagogue, special needs supervisor, and the manager; between the pedagogue, special needs supervisors and managers across locations), receiving coaching and feedback, and following courses. The existence of these organization policies is important when considering an intervention to change practices, as a stronger alignment with existing policies and procedures can increase participants' willingness and motivation to participate and can contribute to sustainable changes in the long run. Further, the study of existing policies and procedures was essential as part of the exploration of the context, but it is important to consider that there might be a mismatch between these formal documents and actual practices. Thus, it is essential to collect additional information by conducting observations and talking with the professionals.

In our work we distinguished different phases of work (i.e. exploratory, co-design, implementation and assessment phase) in order to align the intervention with existing practices as much as possible. In some cases, this resulted in a strong embeddedness in existing structures, such as the time allocated for PD in the Netherlands and building on the pedagogical policy documents, whereas in other cases it meant adapting to the contextual constraints, for instance in Portugal where PD was integrated in the work on classroom activities rather than a separate component. Interestingly, professionals in both countries expressed a lack of time as obstacle to be (more) engaged in the intervention.

### **7.1.3. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AS BASIS FOR COLLABORATIVE AND JOINT LEARNING**

Another part of the context that was deemed relevant, was the team of professionals working in the organization or (pre)school (Slot et al., 2018). The four country contexts presented different cases in this regard. We wanted to explore how a team-based intervention would work, so we aimed to involve the whole or, at least, a large part of the team, especially professionals working with children or parents directly and staff supporting them, such as managers or pedagogues. However, for several reasons this was not feasible in all contexts, which resulted in interesting

variation that can be assessed in relation to the PD intervention and how it worked out in these different contexts.

For example, in the French case the participants in the ISOTIS intervention included professionals (mainly social workers), volunteers and the manager of the organisation. Also, in the Netherlands different types of professionals were involved in the intervention, consisting of the teachers, the manager, the pedagogical coach and the special needs supervisor, reflecting all professionals that work with children on a daily basis or who support this everyday work. Likewise, in the Portuguese case multiple teachers of the school were involved, but other types of professionals were not as actively involved. The professionals in Portugal and the Netherlands already collaborated with each other in daily practice and by including all or many of them in the intervention strengthened the collaboration and will enable longer term sustainability as they can continue the process within their organisation. In France, the (para)professionals indicated that having time for joint reflection and discussion was considered valuable, especially since the team lacked stability. As the organization relies partly on volunteers, the team frequently changes over time, which makes it even more important to establish a more coherent work process, as one of the participants indicated. Given the diversity of the team in terms of cultural and language background and work experience, exchanging experiences and transferring knowledge among team members was considered effective. Moreover, the participants indicated that the intervention contributed to the team cohesion and atmosphere in the team. In Italy, the intervention was carried out with several teachers working in different classrooms in the (pre)schools, who did not necessarily collaborate or align their everyday work, which reflects a stronger individual approach. In the Italian case it appeared that preschool teachers worked very independently from the primary school teachers and they hardly shared their experiences or aligned their work within the ISOTIS intervention.

The VLE can play an important role in facilitating team-based PD initiatives, as it can function as online community of learners by facilitating reflection, exchange and discussion between professionals. Within organisations, it might allow for exchange with colleagues you may not collaborate with on a daily basis. The Dutch case is a good example of how teams from different locations exchanged experiences, which resulted in new ideas and altered practices. This online community of learners can even extend the organisation, facilitating exchange between organisations. The work carried out between the different countries illustrates how this could work (for more details, see Chapter 6 on cross-country exchange).

## **7.2. CONTEXT OF INTERVENTION**

Within the organizational context there are specific aspects that determine the design and implementation of the PD intervention. These aspects relate to the characteristics of the professionals taking part in the intervention and the characteristics of the context they work in, the topics that are addressed and their relations to the focus domains (knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations) and the strategies and delivery modes that are used for PD.

### 7.2.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS AND CONTEXT

The most obvious difference in context across countries appeared to be the type of setting the professionals worked in. Professionals from Italy, Portugal and the Netherlands all worked within a formal education setting. Although they shared a more structured working environment, for the Dutch professionals this concerned a preschool setting with two- and three-year-olds in comparison to a primary school context Portugal. In the Italian case, the intervention was carried out both in a preschool and primary school context. Nonetheless, the background of the children in the classroom differed between the three countries. In the Italian and Dutch context, it concerned a highly culturally diverse population of children, often confounded with low SES, whereas the children in Portugal were less diverse. The diversity here pertained to low SES or children with Roma background. The difference in context could be one of the reasons that professionals from the Netherlands and Portugal showed very different reflections on the same children's book (see Section 6.1 for a more detailed description). For the Dutch professionals the lack of cultural diversity represented in the book was one of the first observations they made, whereas the Portuguese professionals did not mention this at all and reflected more on the message of the narrative. Cross-country observations conducted as part of this activity were felt as an eye-opener in this regard.

In France, we collaborated with (para)professionals working in a community centre working with children and parents. The setting these professionals worked in was not characterized by the same structure as the (pre)schools and often concerned professionals working with parents (e.g. in parent support groups) rather than with children in a classroom setting. This had important implications for the design, implementation and assessment of the intervention, and thus required ample attention throughout the whole process. In all countries the intervention was tailored to the local context and adjusted to fit in existing policies and structures. In the French community-based organization, which has a more informal structure in comparison to formal education settings, there were less guidelines and policies in place that could be helpful to relate the intervention to. It rather appeared that besides a formal mission statement, professionals and for volunteers had few concrete guidelines to rely on in their work with children and parents. Also, professional development was not yet a common practice in the organization. The intervention illustrated that even though the social workers and volunteers relied on their role as professional, this role was not clearly defined or made explicit. Therefore, the intervention mainly focused on raising awareness and less on developing skills or changing behaviour.

Concerning the VLE, it appeared that the professionals from France showed the lowest levels of engagement with the VLE. Despite the presence of computers, the professionals were reluctant to engage with the VLE. Although, the (pre)school teachers were not equally high involved in all countries, they generally appeared slightly more open to using the VLE, especially when it could be used in classroom activities. One possible explanation could be related to the different organizational settings these professionals work in. In the more formal and structured (pre)school context, the use of computers is part of a more established routine for professionals. Professionals may use it for child monitoring and documentation, within the classroom for activities or by means of communication within the organisation. However, for the professionals working in the community centre the use of computers is not integrated into their daily work and the available computers are mainly used for courses as part of their provision of educational and



leisure activities for participants that come to the centre. Also, the potential benefits of the VLE were not fully explored due to other constraints in the organization, such as time constraints. Thus, the professionals were not yet in the opportunity to learn more about the potential of the VLE.

### 7.2.2. CONTENT AREAS AND FOCUS DOMAINS

The content of the PD intervention was based on the local needs and challenges that occurred from the exploratory phase in each country and setting. However, the overarching topics fit well with the ISOTIS goals of promoting equality and inclusiveness and focused on aspects of multiculturalism, multilingualism, social justice, and parent-professional partnerships. All interventions addressed professionals' intercultural competences, which involved their knowledge and critical understanding, values, attitudes, skills, and willingness to take action (see Figure 7.1) The first part of the intervention was mostly focused on raising awareness on issues of cultural diversity, multilingualism, social justice and how professionals interacted and collaborated with parents. To this end a lot of emphasis was placed on how to get a better understanding of professionals' beliefs and attitudes towards these topics, as this affects their behaviour and practices.

On the topic of parent-professional relationships it appeared that in France and in the Netherlands, professionals had high expectations for the parents' contribution in this relationship. They expected parents to conform to their standards for parent involvement. In the discussion with the Dutch professionals, the ISOTIS researchers made it clear that the intervention was with them and that the ISOTIS team could only work on changing their behaviour or practices, but as a result the parents' response would most likely also change. The Dutch professionals were invited to take an active role themselves and use photos in the classroom to engage in informal conversations with parents when they dropped off their child. The conversation with a parent who normally does not stay long in the preschool led to new insights as it appeared that this parent felt insecure about her Dutch language skills, which refrained her from initiating conversations with the teachers. In the French case, the professionals had high expectations of parents too. They mentioned already early on that they expected parents to conform to the French standards related to involvement in their child's school career, which meant that they were expected to read and sign the workbook, come to appointments, monitor homework and speak French. The assessment showed some changes in these views over the course of the intervention, but professionals still attributed the main responsibility of the parent-school relationship to the parents.

In general, all countries addressed professionals' beliefs and attitudes, especially during the first phase of the intervention, which informed the further design of PD activities. In the Portuguese case a dilemma on social justice and economic inequalities was used to initiate a discussion with teachers to raise their awareness and the connection between their attitudes and actual behaviour and practices (for more information see Box 2.1, Section 2.4.2.151). The dilemma described a group of students who wanted to organize a fair-trade market, which was welcomed by the teachers, but then parents intervened and opposed this idea as it would reflect a certain political perspective and they felt that schools needed to stay away from taking a political stance. The



discussion revealed some interesting perspectives, as some teachers pointed out that it would be easier to pursue an activity, despite parents' objections, if it would reflect universal and fundamental values in society/education, such as democracy or equality. They argued that they would not tolerate racism for instance and they would feel confident in addressing this issue with parents if it would come up, but in this case, they struggled with finding a similar justification to pursue such activity when parents would oppose it.

In Italy and Portugal there was a clear link with T4.4 focusing on classroom activities with children. Especially, for Portugal this link meant that the intervention was more centred around supporting the teachers in designing and implementing the activities in the classroom. The preparation and assessment of classroom activities were used by the ISOTIS researchers to foster professionals' reflection and awareness on the topics at hand. At the same time, the researchers were present during the implementation of the classroom activities and actively supported the teachers by engaging in classroom discussions and sometimes acting as a role model when teachers felt a bit insecure in the situation.

The connection with the VLE was clear for this aspect of PD. The resources section of the VLE was rich and included all the topics that were addressed in the different countries. The introductory videoclips were meant to provide the participants with some basic knowledge on a particular topic, which was followed by questions aimed at reflection to guide participants in thinking about how they think and feel about the topic at hand (beliefs, attitudes). Lastly, concrete suggestions and examples of activities (focused on PD or classroom activities for children) facilitated professionals in enactment in daily practice by supporting skills development and intercultural practice.

The courses and topics on the VLE were clearly related to the overarching ISOTIS goals, but the professionals of the different countries were able to make different choices in what they thought was interesting. This resulted in differences in usage of the VLE and can be at least partially an explanation for why the French professionals made less use of the VLE. Since a lot of the content was related to classroom activities or activities with children, which fitted less well with the target group in the French context (i.e. parents). Also, in the Dutch case where professionals worked in classrooms serving younger children, the professionals indicated that not all materials were suitable for their situation. Thus, the main lesson is that the content of the VLE should be closely aligned with professionals' interests, needs and related to their own practice.

### **7.2.3. THEORY AND PRACTICE**

We used different types of PD activities to address different ways of professionals' learning with an overall aim of connecting (theoretical) knowledge to daily practices and behaviour. Most professionals appreciated the input of new theoretical knowledge, which was also in line with their expectations of participating in a research-based intervention and collaborating with the ISOTIS researchers. For some professionals this theoretical knowledge proved to be a confirmation of the tacit or implicit knowledge they already had and that guided their everyday behaviour. For other professionals the presented knowledge was new or even contradicted what they knew or assumed (e.g., about multilingualism or about colour-blindness). However, the overall strength of the intervention lied in the connection between theory and practice and the opportunities for

enactment in daily practice. For instance, in the French case the professionals expressed a clear need for more links with concrete experiences at a certain point, which made the researchers decide to change the strategy a bit. This marked a shift from less focus on reflection on actual cases and experiences of professionals towards the development of a tangible resource that could be used in supporting parents to help them understand the education system and the expectations of parents in this system (i.e. the game about the French culture and education system, see Box 5.7, Section 5.4.2).

In Italy and Portugal, the professionals were also involved in T4.4, focusing on intercultural and multilingual classroom activities, which allowed for a greater synergy and strengthened the professionals' engagement in the PD activities. In the Netherlands and France, the intervention was carried out only as part of T5.4, but the need to address implementation of behaviour in actual practice became evident from an early stage. Therefore, the intervention specifically devoted attention to the development of activities that professionals could conduct in the classroom or with parents. This allowed the professionals to apply newly learned knowledge and skills, thereby strengthening their intercultural competences. This translation into concrete practices was highly valued by professionals and made the whole process more worthwhile as they could more easily see how the intervention contributed to improving their practice.

The role of the VLE was clearly to connect theory and practice. Each topic or course on the VLE started with a brief theoretical introduction and was then followed by suggestions, activities and guiding questions to link it to professionals' everyday practice. Also, the VLE facilitated exchange of practices by creating forum discussions, among others. Lastly, real-life examples from practice were used to create some of the VLE activities, which made them more authentic and easier to relate to for professionals.

#### **7.2.4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND DELIVERY MODES**

The set-up of the intervention was characterized by a co-constructive approach involving the professionals throughout the whole process in order to tailor the intervention to the needs and desires of the participants. As a result of this co-construction only goals and objectives for the intervention were formulated and some general PD strategies, such as reflection, were chosen to reach these goals. The design of the PD activities occurred in close collaboration with the professionals involved. This approach to PD is not yet very common, as interventions are often designed as highly structured, 'top-down' programmes with a predetermined outline of activities to be carried out in order to reach clearly defined and concrete goals, and implementation fidelity being regarded as of utmost importance to achieve these goals. Although there might be some flexibility for local adjustments, this approach is clearly a very different one from the co-constructive approach applied in the ISOTIS implemented interventions. The potential benefits are clear and relate to the adaptability to work on very context specific goals and integrating and aligning the intervention with the common work flow and daily practice of professionals. At the same time, this uncommon approach can pose some challenges to all participants involved, both the professionals and researchers. Already at the beginning of the collaboration with the organizations it occurred that this way of working was new to the professionals and they felt uncertain about where this intervention was going and how it was going to support them in their

everyday practice. Especially in the Netherlands and Portugal, the professionals expressed some concerns in the starting phase of the intervention. For the Dutch case this reflects the unfamiliarity with this type of PD. They appeared to be more comfortable, at least initially, with a very clearly structured intervention in which the researchers would tell them what to do and they would implement it. The professionals expressed during the assessment that they expected more knowledge and information as input from our side. Also, the Portuguese professionals mentioned some difficulty in getting started due to the uncertainty with such an approach, although they did not value pre-defined interventions either.

Another finding related to the co-constructive approach that emerged in the French and Dutch context was the professionals' desire to have clear-cut solutions for some of the issues they were struggling with and the expectation that the intervention would bring these answers. For the Dutch professionals this related to the recent influx of Indian ex-pat children and how to deal with these children and their parents, as the professionals encountered some specific challenges with this group. For the French professionals this concerned dealing with parents who experienced problems at school and reached out for help. The explicit aim of the intervention was to co-construct new knowledge, attitudes or skills, thus the ISOTIS researchers in both countries chose to address the issues in France and the Netherlands by supporting the professionals in reflecting on their own beliefs, expectations and behaviour, rather than providing them with 'the right answer'. Professionals' reflection skills were addressed throughout the process and there were signs during and also at the end of the intervention that professionals came to realize that many of the issues they were facing could not be solved with a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather required an individual approach in the relationship and interaction with every individual parent regardless of their cultural background. As a result, the professionals in both countries showed some awareness about their expectations and how these affected their behaviour and practices.

It seems that it was essential to conduct the exploratory phase in which both professionals and researchers got to know each other and the context the professionals worked in and the challenges or needs they encounter in their daily work. After having established trust and mutual agreement on how to proceed with the intervention, the collaboration and co-design of the intervention appeared to work better. Despite the somewhat uneasy feeling at the side of the professionals at the beginning of the process, the ISOTIS researchers feel that the co-design was essential for the success of the intervention. During the phase of co-designing and implementation it became clearer which issues the professionals were struggling with even when this was not always evident for the professionals. Rather than imposing knowledge or beliefs on the professionals, the PD strategy was to support critical (self)reflection in order to increase professionals' insights on diversity, equality, social justice and/or relations with parents.

Although most of the organizations provided several professional development activities and held regular team meetings, it appeared that reflection was not an explicit goal during these activities and therefore was considered to be a goal in itself for the professionals from France, Italy and the Netherlands. In fact, reflection and supporting professionals in (self)reflection was one of the main strategies in all countries. Although the exact context and topics for reflection differed between countries, there was a shared basis in the sense that reflection either occurred based on actual experiences that were introduced by the participants (e.g. in France and the Netherlands) or

based on carefully developed real-life experiences (e.g. Italy and Portugal). This allowed the professionals to relate to this experience, which was often formulated in the way of a dilemma or critical incident and to think about how and why they would respond in this way.

The role of the ISOTIS researchers was to guide this process and to help the participants in understanding their own thoughts and actions. They also served as a 'critical friend' who could confront them with their ideas in order to raise awareness and try and uncover the tacit knowledge that was available but not explicitly known to the participants. Sometimes this meant that the researchers directed the discussion to enable participants to increase their awareness on a particular topic, except for the researchers in France. In the French context, the researchers chose to adopt a Rogerian approach in which they refrained from directing the discussions but took upon a facilitative role and relied more heavily on the input from all participants to question or criticize each other's perceptions. However, retrospectively, the French researchers believe that the discussions could have been deepened if they would have taken up a stronger directive role. They believe that the change in professionals' beliefs was limited as they were not confronted with other or opposing thoughts, but rather confirmed in a particular view (in this case that parental involvement is low among migrant parents and that this is due to a lack of French language skills). Only after the French professionals encountered a very different perspective, in this case the exchange with Dutch preschool teachers that illustrated higher levels of parent involvement (with parents entering the classrooms), the discussion on parent involvement and the parents' role in the school was reflected upon from different perspectives (apparently parents are not expected to enter the classroom in France, so this was a very new perspective for the French professionals).

In France and the Netherlands (and also Portugal to some extent), reflection was a joint team activity allowing participants to exchange experiences and ideas. This provided participants with opportunities to learn from one another, to encounter differing perspectives and ideas and potentially different ways of addressing the issue at hand. These reflection sessions were thus intended as contributing to the creation of a collaborative, professional learning community in the organization. In France, this was aligned with the community centre's strategy of peer learning in the case of volunteers who are paired with professionals to bridge the gap in competences between the different staff members. In the Netherlands, the joint reflection sessions involved different professionals (teachers, pedagogical coach, special needs supervisor and the manager) who could introduce different perspectives based on their differences in background (e.g. education level) and work environment (working directly with children in the classroom, supporting individual children and families in case of difficulties and problems, supporting the teachers in their daily work in the classroom). The pedagogical coach, special needs supervisor and manager also worked in other preschool locations and could thus share experiences from other teachers and classrooms as well. In the French case, the participants involved both professionals (e.g. social workers) and volunteers (e.g. students, retired people) from diverse cultural backgrounds who could introduce different experiences and perspectives.

Given the co-constructive nature of this task, the VLE was developed during the intervention. This meant that the ISOTIS researchers and professionals collaboratively worked on developing resources, materials and activities for the VLE. As a result, the VLE was built, rather than a ready-

to-use platform at the start of the intervention. At some points, especially in the beginning, this raised some tensions for the professionals as it was hard for them to see what the VLE would look like, how they would be able to use it and how it would help them improving their practice. At the same time, the development of the VLE was done jointly for WPs 3, 4, and 5 addressing different target groups (parents, children and professionals) and different topics, trying to reconcile differences in local contexts and participants' needs. Altogether, this resulted in a collaborative process with a strong and important role for the ISOTIS team. For T5.4, it was clear that professionals showed the most engagement while being actively supported and guided by the ISOTIS researchers. Professionals mostly used the VLE during the organized meetings with the researchers or under their supervision and appeared less inclined to explore the VLE independently.

### 7.3. INTRA-INDIVIDUAL PROCESSES

The underlying theory of change of the intervention involved a transactional process of knowledge, skills, beliefs and expectations on the one hand, which in turn, affect professionals' behaviour and actions, on the other hand, and vice versa. Reflection and enactment are viewed as the key vehicles driving this process. Therefore, reflection and enactment played a major role in all countries. A careful documentation of the intervention process in each country illustrated how the interchange of knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations worked.

Overall, it was important to address professionals' beliefs and attitudes. During this process it appeared important to enrich the discussion with professionals to get a better understanding of why they believe the things they do. Sometimes, this in-depth discussion revealed that professionals' beliefs were based on false knowledge. This happened for instance in the Dutch case when professionals were discussing the need to provide classroom materials (e.g., books and toys) that reflect the diversity in society by reflecting on the implicit messages of one of their frequently read books (for more information see Box 4.9, Section 4.3.3.2). Although the teachers indicated such a reflection on materials is relevant in general, one of the teachers indicated that she was not convinced that a review of all their group materials was necessary, especially concerning cultural diversity. When asked to explain further, she claimed that children at this age (2 to 4-years-old) are colour-blind and cannot tell the difference, for instance when it comes to skin colour. So, her beliefs and attitude were based on her knowledge that children are colour-blind. This led the ISOTIS researchers to show the team a video of the dolls experiment (see Box 4.12, Section 4.3.4.2) in which it became clear that children do not only see the difference, but also value skin colours differently. This was a clear eye-opener and provided the professional with clear evidence that contradicted her prior knowledge and thus provided her with an opportunity to re-evaluate her beliefs and attitudes. This led to an assessment of the classroom materials that apparently lacked cultural diversity, which resulted in the decision to enrich their materials and represent more cultural diversity. However, the interplay between knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes later on proved to be more complex. In one of the final meetings, the need to talk about skin colour with young children (for more information see Box 4.12, Section 4.3.4.2) was addressed. The Dutch professionals felt quite strongly about avoiding the issue and only addressing it whenever it came up as a problem or issue in the classroom. The teacher that previously believed that children are colour-blind, mentioned that *'skin colour is really not an issue*

*for her, so why would she make it an issue then?* Moreover, she expressed that she believes it should not be an issue in society and that therefore teachers should act colour-blind to demonstrate to children that skin colour should not be an issue. This shows that on the one hand this teacher used the knowledge that young children already value skin colours differently to justify a change in her beliefs about the relevance of diverse materials. On the other hand, she used that same knowledge to justify her colour-blind beliefs when it comes to actively discussing diversity (i.e., skin colour).

Another example of the interplay between knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes comes from Italy in which a teacher mentioned that learning more about research on multilingualism and the fact that supporting the home language is not a barrier for learning a second language enabled her to re-evaluate the importance of children's native languages. This, in turn, led her to change her classroom practices by encouraging children to use their home languages in class, which then resulted in children's initiating the use of their home language, for instance in singing Happy Birthday. These examples clearly show how knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs are inter-related and how these in turn affect professionals' actions and behaviour. More generally, we noticed that in all countries the findings in other parts of the ISOTIS project raised interest among the professionals and provided up-to-date input to the development of their beliefs, attitudes and knowledge. This concerned, for example, the parent interview study on parent-teacher relations and parents' appreciation of a respectful multicultural classroom and school climate, and also the survey among professionals in 10 European countries on multicultural classroom practices.

Professionals' beliefs were also targeted in the other country contexts, but in the case of France it seemed that professionals held quite strongly to their beliefs concerning parent involvement and co-education. They viewed parental involvement mainly from the perspective of the parents, but did not take into account what the teacher's role was or could be. Their work was mainly focused on supporting parents to adapt to the French education system and take up the role they were expected to take. According to the ISOTIS researchers in France, the professionals did not become aware of their own bias towards parental involvement during the reflection sessions. When the French professionals were confronted with a very different practice (from the Netherlands where parents were allowed to enter the preschool classroom), some professionals were interested in this practice and open to discuss this, but others held strongly to their own conceptions of the place of parents (not belonging in the classroom). As their beliefs and attitudes did not change much, this was also not translated into change in behaviour or practices. They did invest more in parent support by setting up a parent support group (outside of the scope of the intervention though) but the way they approached this support group was mainly from a focus on supporting parents' adaptation to the French education system. However, at a more general level there appeared a small change in professionals' beliefs in France. Although they had a particular view on parents and their involvement in their child's schooling, it appeared that more in-depth reflection on Berry's (2000) acculturation model did allow professionals to identify individual differences between parents. This was an important step as it raised awareness about looking at each parent and each relationship with a parent from this individual standpoint.

In Portugal, enactment played a very large role in the PD intervention. The Portuguese professionals had very limited time available for dedicated PD activities and showed the greatest



interest in activities that could be implemented in the classroom with the children. Given the major (hypothesized) role of enactment in changing professionals' behaviour and practices, the ISOTIS researchers chose this as main strategy in the intervention. They carefully guided the process of designing and implementing classroom activities by having an active role in the preparation and assessment of each activity. For each activity, moments of discussion and reflection were used to support the teachers in developing their intercultural competences that would support them in the implementation of the classroom activities. The professionals greatly appreciated the support and guidance from the researchers and expressed that the added value for them were the concrete suggestions and ideas for working with children on important topics as cultural diversity and social justice. Through the discussions and reflection with ISOTIS researchers they also gained more understanding on the complexity of the issues at stake and how beliefs and attitudes of different stakeholders are related to these topics.

The VLE played an important role in providing professionals with knowledge, supporting them in reflecting on their beliefs and attitudes, and providing suggestions for concrete actions in everyday practice. As such, the VLE was supportive in the underlying mechanism of changing professionals' intercultural competences. In particular, the resources section was used most frequently, with ISOTIS teams contributing to professionals' knowledge. Although, there were several options on the VLE to engage in exchange and discussions, this potential of a community of learners was not fully realized during the intervention. The development of the VLE with all its challenges and technical difficulties showed to be time-consuming and the remaining time to learn how to work with the VLE was limited and therefore not all options of the VLE were fully explored.

Overall, the assessment of the intervention revealed changes in professionals' intercultural competences based on their own reflections and self-evaluation forms. However, there were some differences depending on the targeted competence (i.e. beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, skills, behaviour and practices). Generally, the 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. These changes were reported by professionals in all four countries and were generally also appreciated by them. However, for the Dutch professionals it seemed that they were less aware of the changes in their beliefs and attitudes as they did not mention this explicitly during the evaluation session but referred to increased awareness several times during the discussion.

Also, professionals in most countries agreed that they gained new knowledge, especially concerning multilingualism and social justice. The teachers in Italy and Portugal also felt more confident in teaching on these topics in class, indicating enhanced skills. The French professionals indicated gains in knowledge and skills as well and reported on having new ideas for collaboration with parents. However, it is unclear whether this changed anything in their practices and behaviour. For the professionals from the Netherlands there appeared a mismatch between the professionals' prior expectations of the intervention and what it brought them in terms of gains in knowledge and skills. This might be an indication that gains in knowledge and skills are easier to detect in comparison to changes in beliefs or attitudes, whereas the latter can be an important prerequisite. The gains in the Dutch professionals' beliefs/attitudes were evident and even resulting changes in practice (e.g. increasing the representation of diversity in classroom



materials) were visible, but perhaps not as clearly or explicitly for the professionals.

Concerning the different topics that were addressed it appeared that the professionals reported the least gains on parent-professional relationships in comparison to the other topics. A plausible explanation could be that all other topics (i.e. intercultural sensitivity, multilingualism, social justice) were related to the children or classrooms practices, which might be easier for professional to address and take responsibility for. The relationship with parents or parent involvement assumes a part for the parents as well. In the discussions with both the Dutch and French professionals it appeared that they attributed a large part of their unsatisfactory relationship to the role of the parents. As the intervention was not targeted at parents, this could not be fully addressed in this task, leaving the professionals with a feeling that there was hardly any change in this domain, except for a greater understanding of their own role in the relationship with parents.

## **7.4. MAIN LESSONS LEARNED**

We end this chapter by highlighting the three main conclusions of this PD intervention, namely professionals' readiness for change, the role of the ISOTIS researchers, the importance of time and the main lessons learned concerning the VLE, followed by some recommendations for policy and practice.

### **7.4.1. READINESS FOR CHANGE**

Although the intervention was explicitly set up to address the needs and challenges of the professionals involved, this did not automatically result in changes in professionals' intercultural competences (i.e. knowledge, skills, beliefs, expectations, behaviour, and actions). One important explanation could be professionals' 'readiness for change' (Holt & Vardaman, 2013). Readiness for change is conceptualised as comprising factors at the individual and organizational level that reflect the extent to which people are inclined to accept, embrace and adopt a particular approach or plan with the intention to change the current situation. Initially, we encountered professionals who mainly sought to make external changes (i.e. changing parents' behaviour and practices) rather than opening to the idea of changing their own role and behaviour or any organisational aspect. Readiness for change requires not only a positive attitude towards change, but also the inclination to act in the immediate future. A positive attitude towards change is based on the premise that one considers there is a need for change, that the suggested change is appropriate and that there is support for and value of the change both individually and organizationally.

The professionals in the four countries and eventually different settings within countries differed in their 'readiness for change', which was evident already in the exploratory phase. The Dutch case provides an interesting example in this regard. Two different locations of the same organization participated in the intervention, but the interventions differed in a number of ways. First, it was clear from the beginning that location A met certain challenges in everyday practice and expressed certain needs that could be addressed in the intervention, whereas for some professionals in location B there did not appear to be a clear need that could be addressed in the intervention. Although the managers of location B did see room for improvement of practices, the

teachers mentioned that they did not experience any difficulties working in a culturally diverse classroom and therefore did not know what the intervention could bring them. This became clear during the first PD meeting with the professionals and the ISOTIS researchers realized that imposing an intervention on people who did not see any need to change was not desirable. Therefore, they recommended all professionals of this location to meet as a team and discuss whether they wanted to continue with the intervention or not. They decided to continue but wanted to understand better what they could learn from this intervention and they wanted to have a stronger connection between the intervention and their everyday practice, which was addressed in the following meetings. When seeing the potential benefits in the next PD meeting, as the professionals reflected on a book they like to read to children, they were convinced and ready to commit to the intervention (i.e. 'ready for change'). Another example from France illustrates that even when there is desire for change and professionals seem open to address a particular challenge or problem, they may not be ready to act upon this yet when this requires a change in their own behaviour or practices. This may very well have been related to their beliefs/attitudes that had not changed (yet), which is an important aspect of 'readiness for change' as well.

The readiness for change also applies to the VLE. Even though most professionals, at some point, were open to the idea of changing their behaviour or practices, they were not unequivocally convinced that the VLE was providing them with the solution. On the one hand, this was related to the fact that in the beginning of the intervention the VLE was to be co-designed and constructed, which made it hard to grasp for professionals how the VLE could have added value for them. On the other hand, the limited experience with ICT and the fact that this was not an integrated part of their everyday work were additional challenges for working with the VLE. The fact that the cross-WP VLE resulted in a very large and broad platform to accommodate the different target groups and topics made it more difficult for professionals to navigate on the platform and find the information, resources or activities that were suitable for their particular context.

Altogether the experiences with the PD intervention and the VLE illustrated the relevance of professionals' readiness for change. This raises an important question on how to proceed when (not all) professionals appear open for the intervention. Based on the experiences in the current study it appeared important to invest in establishing trust and positive relationships with the professionals. Moreover, the current experiences highlight the importance of flexibility and adaptability of an intervention to better meet the needs, interests and desires of the professionals. In some of the cases the professionals did not express clear needs to beginning of the intervention and the ISOTIS researchers dealt with this situation in different ways. In Portugal, for instance, the researchers more strongly aligned the PD activities with the classroom activities, whereas in the Netherlands the researchers invested more time on reflection to explore whether the professionals might be maybe unaware of their needs. Both examples appeared effective in the respective contexts.

#### **7.4.2. ROLE OF ISOTIS RESEACHERS**

This intervention was carried out over a longer period of time, usually more than a year. This meant the both researchers and professionals had to commit strongly and invest heavily in this

process. ISOTIS researchers spend a lot of time on building and sustaining trusting and positive relationships with the professionals. It was exactly this relational aspect that appeared important in the success of the intervention given the sensitivity of the topics that were addressed. Societal issues like diversity, inequality, discrimination or exclusion touch upon personal norms values, beliefs, and attitudes that sometimes remain under the surface. Therefore, the intervention focused strongly on raising professionals' awareness on how they think and feel about these issues. In order for professionals to open up and honestly reflect on their personal views it is essential to have established a trusting and safe environment.

The co-constructive nature of the intervention had some implications for the role of ISOTIS researchers. After conducting the exploratory phase in which the overall objectives were formulated based on the needs and questions that emerged. Thus, the researchers had to keep in mind these overall goals while being flexible, sensitive and open-minded to changes of direction or emphasis as the process with the professionals evolved, besides dealing with different types of other challenges in the context, such as the amount of time that could be dedicated to the intervention and professionals' availability. As the process was new for the researchers as well as the professionals there sometimes appeared tensions in keeping the professionals engaged in the process, especially related to the use of the VLE, while keeping in mind the overall goals of ISOTIS. For instance, in France the researchers chose to limit the use of the VLE when professionals indicated that they were not interested and rather focused more strongly on the PD components to be able to complete the intervention according to plan (in this case the 6 planned meetings). And for Italy, where the professionals were involved in all three WP's, thus demanding substantial investment of time and effort the professionals were given a remuneration as symbolic recognition of their participation. It should be noted that the professionals in Italy engaged in much more plenary and face-to-face meetings in comparison two professionals from other countries.

In Portugal the role of the researchers was more strongly related to the support teachers needed to conduct the classroom activities as part of WP4. They had to adapt their role in order to align with the possibilities and preferences of the professionals and were more strongly functioning as facilitators being present in the classroom to support the teachers when needed in the implementation of a classroom activity. They had to integrate the PD activities within this approach as the professionals did not have any time allocated for PD meetings outside of their work in the class. In France, Italy and the Netherlands the professionals had time dedicated for PD meetings, thus the way the researchers worked in these settings differed from Portugal.

Also, for the VLE the continuous support and guidance of the ISOTIS researchers was inevitable. Especially in Italy and to a lesser extent the Netherlands, the professionals were actively trained and encouraged to use the VLE. In these countries, the professionals appeared more active in using the VLE independently, whereas in France and Portugal the professionals were overall more reluctant to do so. In all countries, the professionals needed explanation and guided exploration on the VLE to discover the many options and functions it had to offer. The VLE was not sufficiently self-explanatory, especially given the relative inexperience of the professionals involved. Although the teachers in Italy had five face-to-face plenary meetings with hands-on experiences exploring the VLE, the teachers responded differently in the use and evaluation of

the VLE. Most teachers appreciate it the training sessions as explores further use of the VLE either in the classroom with the children or in maintaining contact with the parents. However, one of the teachers appeared reluctant and felt incompetent in using the VLE, despite the enthusiasm of the children in her classroom. These children initiated direct interaction with the principal using a noticeboard, which the principal gladly excepted and participated in, despite the fact that he had not been part of the intervention or the training sessions.

#### **7.4.3. IMPORTANCE OF TIME**

Time appeared an important structural feature that impacted the PD intervention and VLE work. This relates both to the length of the trajectory as well as the amount of time available to take part in the intervention. The whole intervention took place over the course of more than a year from the initial contact and exploration of the context up until the assessment and evaluation of the PD activities and implementation of the VLE. This required substantial efforts and investments from both the ISOTIS researchers as well as the professionals involved, which at some points showed to be challenging for professionals. At the same time this lengthy trajectory was needed to better understand the needs of the organization, establish trust and build good, collaborative relationships with the professionals. Moreover, there was a strong emphasis on reflecting on professionals' beliefs and attitudes in view of changing their behaviour and practices, which is a process that takes time. Thus, an intervention with a longer duration has better chances of enabling this process of change.

Another aspect of time concerned the availability and amount of time the professionals were able and willing to participate in the PD meetings and the VLE intervention. It should be noted that only the Dutch professionals could use their regular time for PD to take part in the intervention, thus their structural conditions were better compared to the professionals from the other countries. However, they still felt that lack of time was hindering them in stronger engagement with the VLE. It is clear that providing professionals with sufficient time to learn to work with the VLE and allowing them to incorporate it into their daily work is conducive to adopting change. Expecting professionals to explore such a new platform in their own time does not seem realistic, but was basically the case in France and Portugal, which may be an important reason for their relatively limited use of the VLE for PD purposes. The overall time investment was highest for professionals in Italy as they engaged in many plenary and face-to-face meetings during the process (at least three times as much), which appear to be an obstacle for sustained involvement throughout the process and was mentioned as the main challenge during the evaluation. It highlights that ample time and also good guidance and support is needed to facilitate professionals in working with a VLE.

#### **7.4.4. MAIN LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE VLE**

As the previous section highlighted, the ISOTIS VLE has potential. First of all, it is a way of building, collecting, storing and sharing rich resources either grounded in theory or based on practice, which has great value for professionals in the field. It can provide them with up-to-date knowledge on important topics in an easy and accessible way. The evaluations with the professionals confirmed that they indeed appreciated and valued the resources section.

Especially, the mix of easy-to-understand videos, concrete narratives and examples from practice accompanied by questions for reflection and suggestions for activities in the classroom were very appealing. Secondly, this work began to show the potential of establishing an online community of learners, which was appreciated by the professionals as well. Having the opportunity to see how professionals in other countries in other contexts deal with similar issues concerning equality and diversity provided them with acknowledgment that their work can be challenging, but it also gave them the opportunity to learn from each another and see different approaches to tackle these challenges. The cross-cultural exchange was seen as enriching and provided professionals with new ideas. Although both functionalities of a VLE (i.e. database of resources and an online community of learners) show potential, there are a few aspects one needs to consider when developing or implementing a VLE as part of professional development. We highlight five aspects – customized and contextualized, VLE as continuous PD, active facilitation and support, embeddedness within the organisation, and technical requirements – and address how these aspects relate to both functionalities of a VLE.

First, the content, structure and functionalities of the VLE should be customized to the wishes and needs of the professionals who will use it. In the current project we aimed to develop a VLE that could be used by different target groups (i.e. parents, children and professionals) working in different types of formal and informal settings, which made the platform large and complex with many different topics/courses. Some of the professionals, especially the Dutch professionals working with younger children, had difficulty navigating on the VLE and finding the resources, information and activities that were applicable in their particular context. Therefore, it seems essential to develop a VLE that is specifically targeted at the professionals and the context they work in. It should be noted that the VLE did you have options to disclose or hide particular courses for the professionals, which were decisions to be taken by the ISOTIS researchers. Obviously, this could make the visible parts of the VLE less complex for the participants, but at the same time this would mean that the researchers had to make choices on what was considered relevant for the particular participants. In the Dutch case it was decided together with the participants that they were granted access to all of the courses so they could explore what they thought was interesting.

Second, the VLE should be viewed as a dynamic and continuously evolving platform, which is in line with the idea of continuous professional development. As the context professionals work changes over time, depending on the composition of children in the classroom, the diversity of parents one works with or even the staff members who are employed within the organization, the VLE needs to be adapted accordingly. Thus, the VLE should be seen as a living platform rather than a static environment. This not only concerns the resources section that need to be revised or updated regularly but applies even stronger to fulfilling the function of a community of learners.

Relatedly, it is essential to have someone actively guiding this process from development through implementation and beyond to establish a sustainable practice. Merely having a platform will most likely not have the desired results as it requires a continuous and sustained effort to use, revise and update such a platform. Therefore, it is also important that someone within or outside of the organization will take the lead and responsibility for the continuous and proper use of the platform and the quality of the content. At the same time, it is essential that there is a shared understanding

and commitment to using the platform within the team. Such an active facilitation may be even more essential when using a VLE to build a community of learners. Our results indicate that professionals are more likely to exchange with others when there are clear goals on when and where to interact, and about which topics. Continuous investment of all people involved is most likely to occur when this interaction is actively guided by someone within the organisation.

In line with this active facilitation, a fourth point concerns the embeddedness within the organisation. The results indicate that integrating the VLE within the daily work environment is important. This will increase the likelihood that professionals appreciate the added value of the VLE and will make (more) active use of it. Often professionals already make use of different resources, methods, programmes or curricula for child monitoring, classroom practices or professional development and adding a new learning environment can be perceived as overly demanding. Therefore, to maximize usability and sustainability it seems important to customize and integrate a VLE into the existing work environment. This embeddedness is important to establish when implementing a VLE as a database of resources as well as using it as a community of learners.

Relatedly, in view of alignment and integration within the current practice, this also calls for technical requirements to enable this. For example, the possibility to use the VLE on different types of devices, such as computers, smartphones, tablets/iPads, or digital school boards, and different types of applications or websites, such as WhatsApp groups, social (school) apps or curriculum websites, is essential to enable the easy access and use both in- and outside of the classroom. This requires sophisticated technical functionalities that need to be tailor made or adjusted to the local context. Furthermore, when implementing a VLE as an *international* database of resources or online community of learners, another important technical requirement concerns the use of multiple languages. Automatic translation software (e.g., Google translate) shows potential in enlarging the outreach of a VLE (compared to manually translating information). However, our results indicate that the use of such software can also be a barrier, especially when it comes to facilitating interaction between professionals. Building a community of learners requires a somewhat dynamic form of interaction, providing professionals with the opportunity to reflect on each other and share such reflections. The language that is used in such communication often holds some subtle nuances, which can get easily lost in translation. Such a loss in nuance was for instance demonstrated in the Dutch intervention when Portuguese reflections on the book activity were shared. The automatic translations led the Dutch professionals to interpret the Portuguese reflections in a different way, which complicated the process of joined reflection on a topic. Such technical difficulties should therefore not be overlooked when implementing a VLE.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Develop a VLE while taking into consideration the targeted users' needs and the context they work in as well as the goals one wants to reach with the VLE. Close collaboration with one or more of these targeted users is essential to customize and adapt the VLE and promote ownership among the users. Moreover, consider the VLE as a dynamic and constantly evolving platform that supports continuous professional development.
2. Ensure good guidance, quality monitoring and expert supervision throughout the whole process of development, implementation and usage of the VLE and make sure to integrate the VLE within the existing way of work to enhance sustainability.
3. Dedicate sufficient time for the development, implementation, evaluation and refinement of a VLE and allocate time and support to guide this process to enhance sustainability.
4. Ensure that the VLE is user-friendly, technically well-functioning and demonstrating compatibility with other devices or applications in a way that is aligned with the intentions for usage and make sure that professionals are sufficiently trained to use the VLE.
5. When using a VLE as part of professional development consider the use of different types of resources, such as videos, narratives or research, focusing on state-of-the-art knowledge and connecting that to everyday practice. To this end, the VLE should encourage reflection on beliefs, attitudes and values and should provide concrete suggestions for enactment in practice.
6. The use of a VLE to build and sustain a community of learners requires the guidance of an expert, who has access to recent research findings on critical issues (e.g., multilingual development, parents' aspirations, parent-school relationship). Merely providing a platform for exchange does not guarantee that the exchange reflects the current state-of-the-art and can even reinforce unfavourable beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, the active guidance and supervision of an expert is essential if this community of learners is to contribute to enhancing practice.
7. In view of increasing global and intercultural competences it is essential to address all components, including professionals' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, skills and actions and behaviour in the daily context as all aspects are important and interrelated. Reflection and (support for) enactment are the key mechanisms that can support the development of global and intercultural competences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL, LOCAL OR NATIONAL POLICY

1. In a view of fostering professionals' global and intercultural competences there is a need for policies at the organizational level, but preferably also at the local or national level, to establish a shared understanding and agreement on how to address diversity and promote equality and inclusiveness in the daily work with children and families.
2. Also, (national) curricula can benefit from an explicit focus on addressing diversity and promoting equality and inclusiveness.
3. Alignment between the policies and work in formal and informal settings can further strengthen a united and integrated view and shared practice on promoting equality and inclusiveness.



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