Lessons learnt from case studies

TOOLBOX OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Outcome of the TRACKs project[1]

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Authors	Lucia Balduzzi, Arianna Lazzari, Chiara Dalledonne Vandini, Lara Furieri, Valentina Migliarini, Magdalena Ślusarczyk, Monika Rościszewska-Woźniak, Urszula Majerska, Paula Pustułka, Sofie Verschaeve, Jan De Mets
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1. Introduction

The project *Transition Children and Kindergarten* (TRACKs) is funded by the Erasmus+ European program and it is carried out in partnership with different institutions in three partner countries: Poland, Italy and Belgium. The University institutions are the Jagiellonian University of Krakow in Poland, the University of Bologna in Italy, and the University of Ghent in Belgium. Other local educational organizations collaborating are Artevelde University College in Belgium, the Komensky Institute in Poland, and the Cooperativa Assistenza Disabili Infermi Anziani Infanzia (CADIAI) in Italy. The purpose of our project is to focus on the voices of practitioners – such as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals currently working with children aged 1 to 6 years old – and future ECEC professionals, such as early years educators and pre-school teachers still in training. The project's foundation rests on the dynamic exchange of knowledge and practice between the two target groups in the three countries involved in the project. This transnational exchange between the ECEC professionals across the three European Member States is intended to improve quality of learning, assuming that the international contexts can feed into each other, exchange solutions and practices and respond to shared challenges.

A further essential purpose of the project is providing high quality learning opportunities and nurturing environments for all children, especially those coming from multiply marginalized backgrounds, and those that are experiencing social inequalities, poverty and racism. Drawing on the method of video-coaching and video-analysis, the project encourages high-quality interaction of ECEC professionals with children (Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Fukkink & Tavecchio, 2010; Fukkink, Trienekens & Kramer, 2010). The research teams and professionals from the different countries observe the video recordings collectively, or in one-to-one sessions, and reflect on the interactions between professionals and children and among children. This report will shed light on the contextual conditions where such tools and methods were implemented and how. The purpose is to show how the video-coaching methodology can be implemented in different ways in relation to diverse contexts ('no one model fits all'). This will also facilitate reflection by trainers/pedagogical leaders/coordinators who might want to use this methodology in their services/with their teams on how to develop context-appropriate procedures and tools that make it relevant to the settings/professionals within which/with whom they are working.

The report is organized as follows: first we present the theoretical and methodological framework underpinning the project (*Ricerca-Form-Azione*); secondly we will illustrate in detail the case studies conducted within the respective partner countries and finally, in the conclusion, we will present a summary of the key success factors which emerged from the analysis of the case studies in order to identify operational pathways for sustaining practitioners' reflexivity and professional growth.

2. *Ricerca-Form-Azione*: ethical implications for conducting research with ECEC professionals

The present introduction to the toolbox explores the cultural and pedagogical dimensions of implementing video-analysis in ECEC services through '*ricerca-form-azione'*, a participatory action-research approach and professional development method (Asquini, 2018). As previously reported on by the Italian research team, the implementation of video-analysis through *ricerca-form-azione* seems useful in facilitating practitioners' critical reflection on educational practices based on equity and inclusion and empowering their role as agents of change within early childhood institutions. This methodology makes it possible to intervene into the arena of ECEC services through analysis of practices and educational contexts, experimentation of innovative actions and interventions often aimed at solving problems (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018). In this sense, such a methodological approach is mainly concerned with the need to devise in-service professional development courses aimed at supporting strategical educational planning intended to overcome critical situations, rather than with theoretical speculation.

2.1 Theoretical and methodological framework

Ricerca-form-azione is an action-research approach that has developed over the last decade within the Italian educational field. It stems from both empirical studies and theoretical reflections of a group of Italian academics, named as the CRESPI[2] research group. CRESPI is a Research Centre, funded in 2014 at Bologna University, with the aim of promoting innovative research methodologies to foster the professionalisation of teachers and early childhood practitioners. The *ricerca-form-azione*, or *action-research-for-professional-development* approach, strives to connect research (*ricerca*) with professional development (*formazione*) by engaging practitioners in the experimentation of innovative educational practices (*azione*). The main feature of this approach is the involvement of practitioners and teachers as co-researchers. They work side by side with academic researchers in shared processes of critical reflection aimed at generating transformative change in educational institutions. Such transformative change starts from situational analysis, data collection and interpretation and leads to joint planning, documentation and evaluation of experimental projects (Asquini, 2018).

The approach of *ricerca-form-azione* is informed by different theoretical frameworks, the first and most influential is Barbier's (2008) model of action-research. Additionally, *ricerca-form-azione*

[2] Centre for Educational Research on Teachers as Professionals: http://crespi.edu.unibo.it/centro

is informed – and inspired by – three other complementary approaches: critical action research (Davis, 2008), socio-constructivist research (Pontecorvo et al., 1995) and practitioner-oriented research (Schön, 1983). *Ricerca-form-azione* intersects with action research and design-based research, and their close relationship requires a more in-depth analysis of such processes, which has led to the development of many undercurrents, especially in its use within the educational arena. These undercurrents can be even very far from each other on the theoretical and empirical level, but they continue to be gathered under the common principle of research intervention. Thus, it is important to make explicit such scientific and cultural undercurrents characterizing the action research model.

Combining critical theory and critical action research, Davis (2008) highlights the importance of creating a collaboration between ECEC professionals, multiple educational stakeholders and researchers, to reflect critically not just on the content and the pedagogical practices, but also on the socio-cultural and ethical aspects of meaning-making processes. As described by Davis (2008):

> "The critical action research process turns the traditional power hierarchy between "professional" researchers and research "subjects" upside down and invokes a commitment to break down the dominance and privilege of researchers to produce relevant research that is able to be sensitive to the complexities of contextual and relational reality […]. This process empowers both the researchers and the research participants." (Davis, 2008; p. 139)

Davis's critical action research places particular emphasis on the relevance of social and political contexts in the processes of sharing knowledge, values and assumptions. Researchers following this approach acknowledge the ethical and political dimensions embedded within educational theory and praxis. In line with the critical theory paradigm, education cannot be seen as 'objective' or 'neutral': it is always the result of co-constructed processes involving researchers, professionals, children, families, and policy makers.

Such relational and intersubjective dimensions weave in the second theoretical framework influencing *ricerca-form-azione*, namely the socio-constructivist approach. Socio-constructivists postulate that "knowledge is a process in which the social and intersubjective dimensions are foundational" (Pontecorvo et al., 1995). Consequently, the way practitioners develop and implement educational practices is influenced by the assumption that knowledge is co-constructed within intersubjective and social processes, in which the political and ethical dimensions assume a particularly significant value and have a clear impact on the way practitioners develop and implement educational practices.

The last framework that has impacted *ricerca-form-azione* refers to practitioner-oriented research and development focused on enhancing professional reflectivity through action-learning (Schön, 1983). The empowerment of practitioners as 'agents of educational and social change' (Peeters & Peleman, 2017; Jensen and Brandi, 2018) stands at the core of this approach. Practitioners become co-researchers in analysing settings and contexts' specific needs, developing new theories, participating in the processes of data collection and interpretation, and in elaborating strategies to address problems and overcome challenges. The recursive interactions between theory and practice, as well as between reflection and action, become the salient features of such a research and development approach, which can be defined as truly emancipatory as it strives to 'give voice to' and 'share power with' all the actors involved in decision-making processes within ECEC institutions (Boog, 2003).

2.2 Scope, ethics and values of Ricerca-Form-Azione

The three theoretical approaches discussed above, connected to specific pedagogical visions, shed light on some of the core elements that we find in *ricerca-form-azione* and which, for our research group, have been influential in the construction, not only of the theoretical matrix, but also of the methodologies and tools used in the empirical research. Drawing from the intersection of the theoretical approaches presented, this introduction continues by exploring the scope, ethics and values of *ricerca-form-azione*, which are crucial in designing educational interventions. An aspect that distinguishes *ricerca-form-azione* is the focus on political discourse (Habermas, 1985). This vision allows a critical reflection that also includes the values and visions that underlie the collective dimension as themes of the pedagogical discourse. A second central scope of *ricerca-form-azione* is the institutional dimension of the educational contexts (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), allowing us to connect the macro-system with the more micro-system, so as to analyze the conditions within which educational policies and orientations are fulfilled formalizing themselves in practice and educational choices.

A further aim that characterizes *ricerca-form-azione* is the centering of the social and community identity within educational and training processes. Following this conceptualization , the identified priority of processes of *ricerca-form-azione* is producing emancipatory change through collective processes, involving a large group of people, specifically teachers, children and families (Boog, 2003). This implies assuming that the main foundation of *ricerca-form-azione* is that of sharing power within decision-making processes, valuing the participation of all subjects involved - and their aspirations – starting from sharing what is and is not relevant for the purpose of the research (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018).

In line with the purposes illustrated above, a first ethical aspect characterizing our approach to *ricerca-form-azione* (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018, p. 67) is that of encouraging the researcher to facilitate collective processes that will generate an authentic transformative action, based on democratic values. In order to activate the participation of all actors involved, it is crucial that they perceive their own agency in orienting the process of change. For this to happen, enabling contextual conditions - such as providing time and space for collective reflection - should be put in place. By creating a 'third space', where researchers and teachers/practitioners can critically reflect on existing practice and de-construct their underlying meanings, transformation becomes possible through a collaborative endeavour in co-constructing new meanings orienting practitioners towards innovative practice. From this perspective, *ricerca-form-azione* implies the active participation of all those subjects that tend to have less power in educational contexts (i.e. students, children and their families). Promoting emancipatory change in these spaces implies centering the voices of marginalized subjects who get excluded from the educational endeavor. Said differently, the researcher, the trainer and the teachers are not intended to be the only agents of transformative change.

Such an approach of *ricerca-form-azione* combines educational research which assumes a social, political and ethical connotation, and training which assumes communitarian and relational aspects, and it is inspired also by psychosocial values (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman, Jensen, 1977). The psychosocial values and ethics help in building researchers' consciousness of the dynamics that characterize practitioners' working groups, whereby the latter are active agents. Such values are also useful in transforming the researcher into a facilitator, whose main task is that of sustaining learning processes and elaborating new collaborative strategies that can lead to change in educational praxis (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018).

Finally, the values of interventions based on *ricerca-form-azione* can be found in the production of knowledge which overcomes the gap between educational theory and practices, the respect of the scientific nature of the research work and, finally, the periodicity of educational experimentation. In addition, ricerca-form-azione increases teachers' reflective skills based on their practices, which are no longer analysed and read in a technical way, but connected, in problematic terms, with the complexity of the educational contexts in which they are implemented. It allows for the proactive involvement of actors who, otherwise, would risk remaining marginal in the educational processes of which they are actually an integral part. The participation of children and their families becomes necessary to understand fully the educational and social context in which professionals are operating, and to allow the implementation of the results of educational interventions, not only within the school, but also in the communities in which the educational institutions are located (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018).

Having discussed the scope, values and ethics of *ricerca-form-azione*, the following section will focus more specifically on the positionality of researchers and practitioners within this approach.

2.3 Researchers' and practitioners' positionality within Ricerca-Form-Azione

A crucial aspect of *ricerca-form-azione* is that of being cognizant of the power relations characterising the research process, by contextualising decision-making as one of several processes involved in research. Being aware of this, the researchers participating in such an endeavour strive to 're-balance' power dynamics among all of the involved subjects by using transparent and shared decision-making procedures. *This implies changing the paradigm from doing research 'on' to doing research 'with' multiple educational stakeholders.*

The change of paradigm ultimately leads to a democratisation of research, presenting itself as diametrically opposite to the idea of research envisioning only teachers' participation as instrumental to achieve predetermined goals, established by either the researchers or the decision makers. Other educational stakeholders must become actors and co-researchers in the identification of needs, and in the interpretive processes (Balduzzi & Lazzari, 2018). In this sense, the purpose of research projects adopting *ricerca-form-azione* – like TRACKs – is to generate awareness with regards to shared decision-making processes and their impact on pedagogical practices. This is a necessary aspect to thinking about and designing change in praxis, according to the specific characteristics of each context. A researcher's intervention within *ricerca-form-azione* has a specific pedagogical value, as s/he becomes a subject who is socially and politically engaged in offering their contribution to producing change within existing educational practices (Bertolini, 2001).

The following sections offer examples of how the three partner countries in the TRACKs project has used *ricerca-form-azione* to implement video-analysis in ECEC services.

3. Overview of country Case Studies

In this section we will present the case studies of each of the partner countries within the TRACKs project. The aim of presenting the case studies is to illustrate how *ricerca-form-azione* has been tailored within the different countries' contexts: each case study will shed light on how practitioners' reflexivity and professional growth can be enhanced – both at individual and at team level – starting from the peculiarities of the contexts where professional practices are embedded.

The Italian case study was carried out in Bologna (Emilia-Romagna Region - with a strong pedagogical tradition but where inclusion of diversity as a challenge recently emerged), with two 0-3 and 0-6 integrated ECEC centres run by a CADIAI social cooperative; one of the services is located

in the context of socio-cultural diversity while the other is in a middle-class neighbourhood. The Italian Case study is focused on fostering a more inclusive educational approach by reflecting at team level (educators, pedagogical coordinators, researchers) on everyday practice enacted in the centre (daily activities, outdoor free play, storytelling etc.). The study tries to underline that video-caching and video-elicited discussions have the potential to shift the paradigm of practitioners' in-service education, and that these factors promise to become tools for documenting educators' practices in relation to issues of diversity, adult-child interactions and inclusion.

The Polish case study is an example of adopting the methodology to best address the main arena of interest for the TRACKs project, i.e. describing and combating inequalities in ECEC. With this broad framework, case studies in Poland were sampled on the basis of several criteria (distribution between rural and urban areas, the divisive nature of the financing/funding of the ECECs in Poland, which are split into publicly and privately funded entities; physical and mental disabilities). Research was conducted across different sites: two ECEC centres s located in two urban areas and four small kindergarten entities located in rural villages.

Based on the above, the case selection in Poland offers an intersectional perspective on the issues of spatial inequalities (urban/rural), the 'able-bodiness'-disability spectrum, as well as economic aspects (private/public ECEC provision).

In the Belgian case study the project team (Centre for Diversity and Learning, Ghent University and Artevelde University College) contacted the pedagogical services of both childcare and education of the municipality of Ghent. They ask for cooperation with: 1 childcare centre 'De Palmboom', working together with pre-school 'De Piramide' ; 1 pre-school 'De Piramide'; 1 pre-school 'De Feniks'; 2 'stibo's' (out-of-school care), each one working in one pre-school. These ECEC settings are all located in one specific neighbourhood in the city of Ghent, 'de Brugse Poort', with a large number of vulnerable families. The professionals involved within the Belgian case study are teachers, childcare workers and their coordinators. Also, the pedagogical guidance services were involved in the setting up of the project and in the follow-up to make it sustainable.

4. Italian Case Study

The Italian case study intends to rethink initial and in-service training tools, along with pedagogical supervision; the need to promote innovative educational practices within early childhood services using an inclusive perspective – i.e. promoting the active involvement of children and families from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds - is today recognized both nationally (Law Decree 65/2017) and internationally (European Commission, 2019). The need for rigorous research on the subject is made particularly urgent in Italy by the new legislation, Buona Scuola (Law 107/2015, art.1, paragraph 181), which emphasizes the continuity of pedagogical approaches and educational practice within an integrated perspective across 0-3 and 3-6 services and it is committed to defining common guidelines for ECEC services.

The empirical case study focuses on ECEC services that are located in an urban setting, one of which is in an area densely populated by migrant families. Building on a corpus of literature that focuses on video-analysis as a tool for professional development (Tobin, Davidson, 1990; Bove, 2009), and on successful application of video-coaching methodology (Fukkink & Tavecchio, 2010; Fukkink, Trienekens & Kramer, 2010), the Italian case study aims to shed light on the potential and challenges that practitioners encounter when using video as a means to promote active learning and practices rooted in the inclusive paradigm. The two main questions guiding the Italian case study are:

- What are the affordances of video-analysis to ECEC professional development?
- How can video-analysis be used to document and reflect on inclusive practices?

In this case study, we start by presenting the institutional and the local context where the project was carried out in Italy. This is followed by the methodology section, illustrating the research design and methods used to generate the data used in this case study. In the third section the main findings are presented in relation to the themes emerged from researchers' observations conducted within ECEC services, two video-elicited discussions with practitioners conducted by the research team (with the support of pedagogical coordinators) and from the follow-up questionnaires compiled by participating practitioners at the end of the project.

The main findings point out that video-analysis in ECEC services can be a tool to (1) promote educators' collective reflection on children's intentionality, (2) de-construct taken-for-granted assumptions through pedagogical guidance in teams, (3) improve enacted practices through action-research and experimentation.

4.1 The context: initial and in-service professional development of the ECEC workforce in Italy

As consequence of the recent reform *Buona Scuola* (Law 107/2015; Law Decree 65/2017), the split system between early childhood socio-educational services (*nidi*) and preschool (*scuola dell'infanzia*) was overcome by creating an integrated system of ECEC under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This reform introduced important changes, especially in relation to the initial training of early childhood educators (*educatori di nido*) and pre-school teachers (*insegnanti di scuola dell'infanzia*) and has opened up new fronts for reflection in relation to their continuing professional development.

University training is now mandatory at Bachelor's level for early childhood educators and at Master's level for pre-school teachers. Although the duration of degree courses for the initial training of educators and teachers differs, their structure follows the same guiding principles (Nigris 2004; Balduzzi, Pironi 2017):

- a multidisciplinary approach grounded in the field of educational sciences;
- an integrated curriculum combining theoretical and experiential learning (i.e.: importance given to workshops and practicum);
- a strong partnership between training institutions and local ECEC services/pre-schools.

The reciprocal interplay between theoretical knowledge and experiential learning characterising the curriculum content of both degree courses is considered to be laying the foundations of ECEC professionals' reflective *habitus*, which is to be further enhanced during in-service professional development. Continuing professional development in fact has become mandatory for both educator and teacher profiles and its compliance is entrusted directly to the ECEC institutions within which such professionals are operating: municipalities and social cooperatives for early childhood educators; municipalities and state-maintained institutions (*Istituti Comprensivi*) for preschool teachers.

Whereas there is a substantial body of literature affirming that the educational quality of ECEC services is closely connected to the professional competence of the workforce – and that the enhancement of professional competence takes place along a continuous process – research also shows that the provision of initial and in-service training per se is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition (OECD, 2012). Evidence from the CoRe study states that, in order to improve and sustain the quality of ECEC provision, not only is a competent practitioner required but also a competent system that feeds into the ongoing professionalization of staff in relation to changing societal needs (Urban et al, 2012). Regarding these matters , research gaps have been identified, especially in

relation to the content and delivery of professional development opportunities, as well as in relation to their effective contribution in addressing the current challenges faced by ECEC services (Eurofound, 2015). In the Italian context, this directly calls into question the function of pedagogical coordinators and their role in facilitating a participatory design of professional development initiatives by connecting the perceived needs of educators' and teachers' teams with ongoing research and experimentation with the aim of improving educational practices enacted within ECEC services (Lazzari, Picchio, Musatti, 2013). The Italian case study intends to address this research gap by shedding light on how such improvements could be achieved in the context of a collaborative partnership between ECEC providers and university institutions.

4.1.2 The local context: why CADIAI in Bologna?

We have decided to carry out the study in Bologna, partnering with CADIAI, an educational social cooperative which is already applying the integrated system, offering services from 0-6 years old. CADIAI has a long-standing collaboration with UNIBO for in-service training provision for educators, and they were willing to undertake experimenting with video-recording and video-analysis. Another significant peculiarity of CADIAI is that the pedagogical coordinators in their services have a leading role, and they are responsible for carrying out team supervision, professional development and crafting the pedagogical aims and activities for their services. Also, CADIAI had a specific interest on the issue of inclusion since its services are located in urban settings, characterized by a high number of children from migrant and lower social class backgrounds. Within the case study ECEC professionals from CADIAI assumed the role of co-researchers, as they themselves gathered the data and recorded the videos in their own settings. The analysis was done with the facilitation of the Italian research team, with a particular focus on inclusive practices.

4.2 Methodology

The methodological approach adopted by the research team for conducting the Italian case-study is Ricerca-Form-Azione (Balduzzi, Lazzari 2018). The combination of video-analysis and pedagogical guidance sustains practitioners' critical reflection on enacted practice and, ultimately, generates change toward more inclusive practice within the ECEC settings (Peeters, Sharmahd 2014).

The Ricerca-Form-Azione approach – developed over the last decade by a group of Italian educational scholars (Asquini, 2018) – strives to connect research (ricerca) and professional development (formazione in servizio), by engaging practitioners and teachers in experimenting with innovative educational practices (azione). Its main feature is, precisely, the involvement of ECEC teachers and practitioners as co-researchers working side by side with academics. They are engaged

in collective reflection processes aimed at generating transformative change within educational institutions starting from situational analysis along with data collection and interpretation. This leads to joint planning, documentation and evaluation of experimental projects. Given the participatory nature of the research process, a particular emphasis was placed on ethical issues for ensuring that the actions undertaken within the projects would be respectful of the intentionality of participants – namely practitioners and children – and contribute to enhancing their agency (Mortari and Mazzoni, 2010).

4.2.1 Research Design: operational steps

The project develops in three subsequent stages. In the first phase of the project, narrative observations of children in interactions with practitioners and peers were carried out by the researchers in order to familiarize them with children's and adults' everyday life experiences within each setting (Kalkman, Clark 2017). Field-notes were transcribed and analyzed thematically by the research team in advance of the meetings with practitioners where video-recordings were to be discussed. Parallel to this process, video-recording of relevant educational activities were carried out by practitioners' teams in each setting. Videos have to be short (lasting around 10 minutes), focus on adult-child interactions and based on educators' initiative. In some cases, educators and teachers were filming their colleagues during co-presence, in others, the pedagogical coordinator of the centre was involved in filming as well (service 1 made 10 videos, 7 have been used; service 2 made 12 videos, 7 have been used). After a certain number of video-fragments were collected, two collective meetings were held within each setting in order to select the most relevant ones to be shown and discussed with the researchers.

In the second phase of the project, the selected video-fragments were watched and collectively discussed within each team together with the researchers (four meetings in total). The role of researchers during these meetings – involving practitioners as well as pedagogical coordinators – was to facilitate the process of problematisation of observed situations, the elicitation of implicit assumptions underlying enacted practices and the co-construction of new meanings guiding pedagogical transformation (Bove, Cescato 2013; Bove, 2007).

In the third phase of the project we administered follow-up questionnaires to all educators involved in the project with the aim of better understanding their point of view on what type of research actions could be useful to increase professionals' reflexivity and growth. Starting from educators' views and suggestions, action-research plans will be subsequently elaborated by each team under the joint guidance of researchers and pedagogical coordinators in order to increase the

inclusiveness of ECEC practice within the settings involved. This final step will guarantee the sustainability of change generated by the project over the long term.

4.2.2 Professionals involved

The participants for the Italian case study, conducted as part of the TRACKs project, are educators and teachers (total number: 16) and pedagogical coordinators (total number: 2), selected from two ECEC services located in the city of Bologna. The educators and teachers have been working in the two services for a period varying between two and ten years, and the pedagogical coordinators have been working for ten or more years. The two services are located in two different areas of the city of Bologna: the first service (Service 1) is in a middle- and upper middle-class urban area, while the second (Service 2) is located in a working class inner-city area, densely populated by families at the intersections of race, migratory status, citizenship, lower socio-economic status and disability.

4.3. Actions implemented and main findings

4.3.1 First phase: Research Team Observations in ECEC Settings

As outlined in the methodology section, observations have been used during the research process to facilitate the emergence of teachers' actions, children's initiatives, and to give the researchers the possibility to familiarize themselves with the settings. For the Italian case study, observations within the CADIAI services have been used to triangulate data gathered through practitioners' video-recording (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). We consider the themes which emerged from the observations carried out in the two ECEC settings targeted, for the age groups 1-2 years old and 3-6 years old. Such themes have also been discussed during the second phase of the research process, constituted by video-elicited discussions, or focus groups with educators.

For the age group of 1-2 year olds, the most recurring theme has been attention to verbal and non-verbal interaction with non-Italian-speaking children. The research group has highlighted the importance for ECEC professionals to maintain their focus of attention on all children, paying particular attention to the responses to children's questions, how to look at them, and how to deal with their verbal and non-verbal interactions. The research group has also noticed the importance for ECEC professionals to facilitate children in respecting waiting times and taking turns in communication. Critical incidents in free play moments have also been noted, where educators were sometimes privileging a normative/individual approach to children's behavior rather than adopting co-constructive strategies which would have offered children tools to manage conflict autonomously (e.g. when two children fight to take the same toy).

For the age group of 2-3 year olds, one of the main themes that emerged was involvement or non-involvement of children in structured activities. The team has noted the need for educators to pay attention to the setting up of the educational environment and the facilitating of practices during free play and structured play time. The research team has noted that free play is only occasionally used as an intentional space to support the development of children's emerging communication and interaction competences: in this sense the role of educators during free play seemed to be more connected to supervision rather than to educational facilitation and mediation of children's initiatives.

Dealing with children's verbal and non-verbal interactions

Devoting attention to verbal and non-verbal interactions of children both during free play or structured activities has been one the most recurring themes from the observations. The research team witnessed that, during daily interactions, the educators were verbally interacting more and offering more detailed instructions to children whose home language is Italian. An example of such critical instances is described below, as reported in a researcher's observation journal:

> "Y. and B., both from migrant background, are sitting at the table together with the other three children and the educator, leading a playdough activity. Y. is sitting beside the educator whereas B. is sitting in front of her. All children are deeply involved in the activity and use a variety of tools to manipulate the playdough (shapes, rolling pins, knives). The educator leads the activity: she verbally describes to the children how the playdough can be manipulated and seeks to stimulate children to tell her what shapes they are creating. Her attention is particularly focused on T., the youngest toddler in the group, whose language (Italian as mother tongue) is emerging: 'What did you make, a ball? Tell me with your voice!' She waits for his reply a few second until the child repeats the word. Y. and B., whose mother tongue is not Italian, are less present in verbal exchanges with the educator although they are deeply engaged in the activity and observe intensively the actions of the educators and peers (in contrast with other children whose attention is mostly focused on the educator). B. calls the attention of the educator by making a sound and the educator asks her: 'What do you want to tell me B.?' B. is about to utter a word when educator's attention is caught by G. who calls her loudly: 'Look I made a snake!'" (Observation 2_Jan29_2019)

The lack of awareness of language and body interactions between the educator and the toddler, and of children's intentionality, can have negative consequences on the way in which children develop their language, their capacity to ask questions and to seek help. Through the verbal and non-verbal interactions depicted in the excerpt above, practitioners unintentionally devote less attention

towards emerging bilingual children: as a consequence they tend to provide these children with fewer opportunities for interactions compared to other children whose Italian language is also emerging as their mother tongue. In recent years, language has become one of the most charged and polarizing cultural practices embodied by (im)migrants: as such, it has become a tool for educators and teachers to establish inclusion or, rather, social and educational exclusion (Peleman, Vandenbroeck & Van Avermaet 2020). Therefore it become crucial to raise educators' awareness about how such un-intentional mechanism of exclusions could be counteracted by offering more attention and support to emerging bilingual children.

Involvement and non-involvement of children in the activities

During the observation process, the research team also concentrated on focus and proximity when engaging children who might lose attention during structured activities. In fact, parallel to structured group activities, free play also takes place starting from children's initiatives. It has been noted, however, that the latter is seen mostly as a peripheral activity which tends not to be exploited in its full potential for children's socialization, learning and linguistic development. The excerpt below offers an interesting example which supports this argument:

> "Three children play in the kitchen corner and try to interact with me [Researcher2], offering me something to eat and pretending to prepare coffee. A. [from a migrant background] makes various attempts to participate in their play through non-verbal communication (observing, getting close to the table), but several times the children playing in the kitchen corner tell him not to touch the toy cutlery on the table. When A. takes the coffee maker, with which M. was playing in order to catch her attention, a conflict starts. The educator asks A. and M. "What is happening here?", without waiting for an answer she immediately proceeds asking: "I didn't see, who had the coffee maker first?". Looking at the educator, A. leaves the coffee maker on the table and then he moves away with two little cups in his hands. Then the educator tells him repeatedly (from the distance) that the cups need to stay in the kitchen, they are not to be carried around. A. continues to wander around the classroom with the cups, like if he was looking for someone to play with, but the three other children in the room are busy in individual play […]. At this point A. starts playing on his own with soft construction, leaving the cups beside him, on the ground. Then the educator picks up the cups from the floor and, without interacting with A., brings them back to the kitchen." (Observation1, Jan 22_2019)

The episode reported above reveals the need for a more intentional educational mediation of child-initiated play, for the purpose of 'giving voice' to children's non-verbal communication

initiatives and scaffolding peer-peer relationships within the group through guided participation (Picchio & Mayer, 2019). This is the case for children from migrant background who often tend to be left at the margins when a group of children is involved in adult-directed learning activities.

All of these themes which emerged from the observations have been discussed collectively during the focus groups and video projections with educators and pedagogical coordinators of the two services involved. The following section demonstrates the affordances of video-analysis to specifically provide in-service educators and teachers with feedback in relation to these and other themes captured in the videos that they recorded.

4.3.2 Second phase: Video-elicited discussions

Following the period of observation by the research team, focus groups and video-elicited discussions with practitioners were held at the two services involved. The discussions (two per each service for a total of four focus groups), were organized through a partnership between researchers and pedagogical coordinators, once practitioners were satisfied with the collected video-recorded materials. It is important to note that the research team did not interfere in the decision-making process of which videos to share; the practitioners and pedagogical coordinators chose the videos that were more significant for them, in line with the general objectives of the project. This process gave practitioners the power to be purposeful in their reflection on the most relevant practices implemented in daily life within the ECEC services where they are working (see Tobin & Davidson, 1990).

This section will focus on two of the emerging themes from the discussions with practitioners, following the collective analysis of two videos. The first theme focuses on making ECEC practices inclusive by focusing on children's unspoken intentionality. The second theme focuses on how children's multiple identities and belongings can be legitimized and fostered through adult mediation, guiding the process of co-creation of collective meanings within children's groups. These themes are inextricably linked to some of those that emerged from the observations, which is why they were all discussed during the focus groups, with the research team mentioning what they had witnessed while in the setting. The following section includes some of the quotes from practitioners during three different moments of the analysis of the videos: after the first screening, after the second screening and after a third screening. Gathering practitioners' impressions after watching the videos several times, and discussing it collectively with their colleagues and research team, supported their understanding of the shift in their own attitudes towards children and their own implicit biases (Tobin, Mantovani, Bove, 2008; Bove & Mantovani, 2015).

From the margin to the center: making visible children's unspoken intentionality

The first video considered for the analysis presented in this case study was recorded by a practitioner in one of the services involved, during a sensory activity planned for children aged 1-2 years old. The video considered captures one of the educators of this age group taking four children to the sensory room so that they can be part of the nature workshop she has planned for them. With one hand he holds the hand of a child from a migrant background and, with the other, the hand of the youngest toddler in the group, who is not walking steadily yet. The video records the interactions of the children with natural unstructured materials within the sensory room, as well as the interactions between the children and the educator. According to the practitioners, the sensory room is designed for smaller children who are not yet ready for symbolic play. Practitioners shared with the research team this particular video because, given the young age of the children, they felt the necessity to structure activities in the sensory room in order to avoid children being left to wander around. Thus, the overarching objective of the activity filmed in the video that was collectively discussed was that of attempting to organize a structured activity for children to experience a sensory footpath within the room. The video-elicited discussion touched on important themes, such as the conceptualization of children's interactions with objects and their peers, how free the children are to express themselves in the sensory room, and what it means for a toddler to participate in an activity. Following the multiple viewings of the video, the discussion concentrated on how practitioners' attention tended to be more focused on the structuring of the activity itself, rather than on scaffolding children's intentionality in the use of the space and materials. This might contribute to reinforcing practitioners' biases around who is participating and who is not, and linking certain individual characteristics (i.e. being from a migrant background, being at an earlier stage of development) to the lack of participation in a structured activity. Video-elicited discussion has been beneficial in addressing practitioners' attitudes and beliefs about certain children and helping them to modify their approach towards children's intentionality.

The following excerpts offer examples of video-elicited discussion with the practitioners. The research team prompted the reflection by asking the practitioners why they chose to show this specific video. The educator (from now on Educator 2), who was recording the video, argued:

> "The sensory workshop, and any other gross- and fine-motor activities, are usually used with children at that young age. Very often we leave the children exploring the materials on their own and then, after the session is over, we take all the materials out. So, we recorded this video, in this particular workshop, because we wanted to show what happens when the activities and play time is a bit more structured, especially for children who are very young. So, the objective was really to give children more structured guidance on how to approach the materials, especially

> considering that they are small, and their attention span is not prolonged. Ehm there is F., who is very small and who needs always to be supported through the activity as he cannot seem to do things by himself, and he doesn't interact much with other children." (Educator 2_ Service 1)

The video was recorded to show what more structured activities with diverse children aged 1-2 can look like, instead of always leaving the toddlers to play freely in the workshop space. It seems particularly interesting how Educator 2 talks about the limited attention span for children in this group, but immediately singles out the migrant child, describing his lack of attention, need of support and independent attitudes almost as problematic. Such a view seemed to be shared, at least initially by the rest of the practitioners in the focus group, and Educator 2 continued her discussion focusing on the age differences of the children in the interaction that has been video-recorded and how these – along with cultural differences – impact on the way F. interacts. Particularly she affirmed that:

> "There are a couple of children who are older and two are younger. The first two they participate [following the sensory footpath], and they interact, the other two M. [the youngest child of the group] and F. [migrant child] they don't seem to [participate]… [it's]like if they are in their own world, they do not want to engage in activities. F. is always doing something different. He doesn't interact." (Educator 2, Service 1)

Educator 2 quote reveals a certain bias towards both of the children from another culture – whose parents speak different languages at home and who therefore might be confused in following instructions in Italian – as well as children who are in an earlier stage of development (younger children in the group). She seems to problematize the fact that the two children in question are independent and they do not always want to engage in a certain kind of interaction, which fits the norm in Educator 2's view. Thus, the intentionality of children who, in the video-fragment, manifested a shared interest for exploring and balancing a curved wooden block left on the floor, goes unnoticed as practitioners have predetermined expectations about what inclusive interactions are 'supposed' to look like.

By watching the same video, a second and a third time, and following the collective discussions of all the practitioners, pedagogical coordinators and researchers, it seemed as if the educators' bias towards the non-participation of F. and M. in the activity started to be gradually deconstructed. After the second projection, Educator 3 said:

> "I think F. is always present in the activity, but I feel he is in his own dimension"
> (Educator 3, Service 1)

Once again, this view of children as independent, and manifesting their own intentionality, seems to be perceived as problematic and their intentions devalued in the context of the group. Educator 2 continues to agree:

> "Yeah I don't see the interaction between children, I see the interest in the same object" (Educator 2, Service 1)

The only practitioner who disagreed was Educator 5 who said:

> "I disagree. I think that F. and M. feel safe and comfortable in these spaces. I think that they DO interact…" (Educator 5, Service 1).

After the third screening of the video, Educator 5 reinforces her disagreement and her view about the positive and comfortable interactions of all children, respecting their differences:

> "Sometimes you don't see the positive things or actions when you are busy in carrying out an activity…When you look at the videos, F. is actually doing some positive stuff, trying out the materials and such" (Educator 5, Service 1)

These tensions in the discussion generated by some specific fragments of the video highlight how video-analysis can be a powerful tool to promote ECEC practitioners' awareness of children's different approaches in interactions, and to reflect collectively on children's intentionality in order to understand children's actions and initiatives more deeply . Additionally, video-recording and video-analysis are extremely helpful in providing grounded feedback to in-service educators, who are often not aware of the effects of consolidated practices.

Reading as an inclusive practice: promoting diversity and legitimating identities

Educators in the two services considered for the case study have shown a significant interest in using videos to record reading activities, especially with children from older age groups. During the video-elicited discussions, practitioners shared that reading is an activity that forms a central part of the daily routine and one which is done even multiple times during the same day. Reading is particularly used in the service and the classroom with a high number of children from migrant backgrounds to help them achieve Italian language proficiency. For the purpose of this paper, we have chosen to report the analysis of a video filming a reading activity with children aged 3-6, whose objective was not only to promote language development but also diversity and inclusion via children's identification with the characters of the book in question, titled 'Children of the World'.

The video starts with Educator 1 sitting at the centre of a seemingly well-formed circle of six children. She started by sharing and talking about the book cover's illustration and reading the

title out aloud to the children. At times she interrupts the description of the book cover to remind the children about the rules of reading time, and she makes sure that everybody listens and sits down, so that all of the children can see. The children, on the other hand seem very excited about this book, and the reading activity. They started pointing at the book cover with enthusiasm recognising that the characters look like them. Such identification makes them extremely engaged throughout the whole length of the story. During the discussion after the video projection, the researcher prompted Educator 1 as to why they decided to record that specific activity. She stated:

> "This is an activity that we do every day with children, so seeing and analyzing how children respond, and how it is carried out, it's something that ehm it is interesting for us, if you compared to other activities we do here daily. This is an activity that we do even more than once per day. Then I think that when we read, we don't have a deep perspective about children, because we are busy reading or making sure that there is a good level of attention and listening. So, we miss a lot of things that can be captured through video. This for me helps reflecting about how a practice can be inclusive, and ehm the objective of the activity was reflecting on diversity, maintaining a dialogue with the book and with the children" (Educator1, Service 1)

Educator 1 puts an emphasis on how video-recording and video-analysis can be a useful means of providing feedback on a consolidated practice, such as reading, that can be used to create an inclusive environment, promote language development, but also address important issues such as diversity. From the outset of the discussion, Educator 1 shows a deep understanding of the importance of video for her development as a professional in her ECEC setting, recognising that the video has the potential to grasp what practitioners cannot capture while they are directly involved in the interaction with children. It can provide practitioners with insights on interactions that may go unnoticed, and which may lead to children changing their behaviour and attitudes, feeling that they are not given sufficient attention (Tobin, Mantovani, Bove, 2008).

Educator 1's preoccupation with how to carry out the reading activity, while being cognisant of the children's interaction and intentionality, was discussed for a fair amount of time during the focus group. With the prompts of the researchers, the educators understood that video-analysis can help practioners, not only to pay attention to children's intentionality, but also to reflect on the activity's objective: like in the case reported above, reading a book on differences increases the dialogue on difference. Video-analysis also helped practitioners in this case in understanding how to balance children's engagement and intervention with the actual reading of the story. During the focus group attention was given as to how the video solicited the practitioners' reflections about how to give everyone 'the floor' and to try and actively listen to the children.

Lastly, a further important issue that has been discussed by the practitioners relates to how videotaping reading activities has helped educators to understand what they could do better to further develop children's linguistic capacities, while enacting inclusive practices. The pedagogical coordinator of Service 1 speaks very clearly about this matter:

> "Our main objective when we started recording videos was to concentrate on actions that would make our practices related to language learning better. In one of our classrooms we have 99% children from a migrant background that need to learn Italian to be able to succeed in primary school. So, video-recording and video-analysis helped us understand what we can do better in our practice for teaching Italian but also […] focusing, not only on our attitudes, but also on the children's intentionality and interaction". (Pedagogical Coordinator 1, Service 1)

This account shows the potential of using video-analysis as a tool to provide pedagogical guidance to practitioners and which can assist them in their in-service professional development. Along these lines, it shows how it generates fruitful discussions among the educators and other professionals, assisting them in (re)thinking their consolidated practices. As Tobin and Davidson (1990) argue, what really counts in the video-cued polyvocal ethnography it is not the video in itself, but the discourse that is generated around it.

4.3.3 Third phase: follow-up questionnaires

After the focus groups we administered follow-up questionnaires to all educators involved in the project, with the aim of developing a better understanding of their experiences and points of view about the video-coaching process.

These questionnaires consisted of three open-ended questions which gave teachers the opportunity to express their thoughts on the process that accompanied this project. In particular, the questions we asked aimed to understand which aspects of this methodology represented an opportunity for growth and which represented a possible problematic issue. The third question, in particular, aimsed to bring out what were the elements that teachers considered essential to making video coaching a methodology that helped their growth and professional reflexivity.

The main goal of this phase of the project was to better understand key-success factors by focusing on practitioners' feelings and suggestions in order to improve the project itself.

Results from follow-up questionnaires

The main topic/themes that emerged from practitioners' answers to question 1 - *Thinking back at the way video coaching was implemented in the project, what did you find most useful for*

your professional growth?- are related to the **useful dimension of professional growth.** By answering this question, educators highlighted the positive dimensions of video-coaching by starting from their own experience of the project. First of all, they underlined the value of reviewing and analysing practitioners' behaviours and reactions that could facilitate their critical reflections. Second, they pointed out they felt more involved as professionals because watching videos could help them in the process of questioning their own educational practice. Third, they stressed the value of collective reflection on the actions for improving consciousness and professional growth. When answering the first question some educators argued:

> "At the moment, the strengths are: getting involved as professionals, having new insights from the working group [colleagues], share the way the group look at the situation, find a common way of acting in everyday educational practice" (educator of ECEC service).
>
> "When I saw myself more times I had the opportunity to ask myself questions about my attitude towards children" (educator of ECEC service).
>
> "watching the videos within the working group allows you to highlight critical issues and positive aspects (...) allows you to reflect on and getting involved on your educational actions in the context of the nursery, help you to improve and rethink your attitude towards children". (educator of ECEC service).
>
> "being able to observe oneself while interacting with children allows me to notice behaviours and attitudes of which one is not completely aware; being able to review a situation makes it possible to read the different levels of what happens, from macro to micro, to the detail that risks getting lost in everyday life; re-reading situations in groups, with people you work with on a daily basis (and year after year) allows you to better know and understand the actions of colleagues." (educator of ECEC service).

The main topics/themes emerged from practitioners' answers to question 2- *In your experiences, which were the critical issues and difficulties encountered in the use of videos?*- are related to the **critical issues and problems** that arose during the project. Specifically, educators underlined the technical problems related to the audio/video quality, time and availability of educators and sometimes the high number of children. Some educators also highlighted the problem of spontaneity in front of the camera closely related to the "performance anxiety" and to the fears of others' judgement. Most of the educators' answers to question 2 were presented by them in a 'list' format like the following answers:

> "children's attention to the camera, little spontaneity, performance anxiety, lack of people who could video-record the activity" (educator of ECEC service)

> "critical issues at a practical level: who makes the video, with what tools".(educator of ECEC service)

> "lack of spontaneity by the children and the educator, organizational difficulties." (educator of ECEC service)

> "technical issues: what I can frame and what I can lose (e.g. looks or context); audio and voice missing; (...) an initial embarrassment; attention to the judgmental dimension that could be created in some groups or with some colleagues." (educator of ECEC service)

The main topic/themes that emerged from practitioners' answers to question 3 - *In order to continue working with the video coaching methodology in your service, what kind of support do you think would be needed* - are related to the **support that practitioners think are useful to continue using this methodology.** In particular, practitioners demanded more collective moments to be able to reflect together on re-constructing a certain phenomenon by exploring the multiple meanings emerging from the team. To have more time for going more in-depth with a single phenomenon could help practitioners to re-think their intentionality and change their point of view towards children. During the reflexive process, educators and pedagogical coordinators understood the value of video-coaching in sustaining professional growth. For this reason, they asked to have systematic and scheduled meetings where they could discuss together and, because they could be working in their own teams, educators could learn from each other's experiences.

In the third question of the follow-up questionnaires educators also underlined the value of having appropriate technical support to improve the quality of video recording. The quality of a video could impact on the process of reflection that accompanied the work on the video itself. If the quality of the audio or the image was not good enough, practitioners could have troubles in analysing the phenomena. In answering to the third question, some educators argued that:

> "it would be necessary to have good video equipment, to have the co-presence between educators to be able to make the videos reciprocally; to create scheduled moments to be able to review the videos and to reflect on them in groups at multiple levels. A first vision of the videos in the section group and a second vision in an extended group together with the pedagogical coordinator." (educator of ECEC service)

> "to continue working with this methodology it would be useful you have a video camera with a good resolution and with an excellent audio. Especially have the opportunity to review the videos in groups in which you can discuss them between colleagues." (educator of ECEC service)

> "I believe that in order to continue to work with this methodology it is necessary to have a certain perseverance in planning the meetings in order to make this approach more and more familiar." (educator of ECEC service)

> "In addition to a tool appropriate for video shooting, it is necessary to have more moments of discussion to view and reflect together on the recorded situations in order to implement actions or otherwise [which are] more appropriate to the emerging needs of children." (educator of ECEC service)

The educators' answers and discussions helped us to focus on the dimensions that the practitioners considered pivotal for ensuring the growth of the service itself and of all the professionals involved. Those dimensions are the core of the key-success factors that we illustrate in the following paragraph.

4.4 Reflections on challenges and opportunities in using video-coaching: key-success factors

The Italian case study has attempted to show the benefits of video-elicited discussions and video-coaching that can be used as powerful tools to sustain the professional growth of in-service educators and pre-school teachers, through collective reflection and pedagogical guidance. Video-coaching could help professionals in reframing their educational objectives, as well as finding possible ways of focusing on children's needs and aligning these with their intentionalities. In addition, video-coaching helps in identifying specific moments in which the intentionality of the educators supersedes that of the children. Video-coaching and video-elicited discussions have the potential to shift the paradigm of practitioners' in-service education, and it promises to become a tool for documenting educators' practices in relation to issues of diversity, adult-child interactions and inclusion (Cescato, Bove & Braga, 2015). It also promises to become a powerful documentation tool for ECEC services. In this sense video-coaching could be pedagogically relevant when it becomes a useful tool for re-designing and re-thinking daily educational practices.

In this section of the Italian case study we will focus on the key success factors, which are those dimensions and actions that have allowed the project to promote the professional growth and inclusive practices of practitioners and settings.

Preliminary training for all the professionals involved (pedagogical coordinators, educators and teachers).

This initial training with all practitioners participating in the project (two meetings, one with the pedagogical coordinator and one with educators/teachers, followed by three follow-up meetings between researcher and pedagogical coordinators) was aimed to raise awareness among all of the educational figures involved in the use of video-coaching as a reflective tool capable of fostering the professional growth of the educational team of ECEC services. The goal of this preliminary phase was to create a common ground in terms of co-constructed objectives, shared values and mutual respect. This contributed to enhancing professionals' sense of confidence and safety within the group as attested by their willingness to work in groups and by their openness to question and challenge consolidated practice.

Role of the pedagogical coordinators.

The mediation role of the pedagogical coordinators has been crucial in every phase of the project. The pedagogical coordinator is in fact that professional figure capable of giving continuity to the 'external point of view' of the researcher and the 'internal point of view' of the educator. Through this ongoing mediation activity, the role of pedagogical coordinator became decisive in supporting the changes and the growth of all the professionals involved. Her/his mediation activity is not limited to giving continuity between 'external' and 'internal'" instances, but is also related to the professional competence to give a 'temporal continuity', able to take into account the history of the service (the *past*), the challenges that characterize its daily life (the *present*) and the directions of growth and improvement (the *future*).

Time and space for reflection on video data.

Another thing that also emerged from the results of the follow up questionnaires, one of the elements that can offer the greatest encouragement towards the success of video-coaching, is the possibility of having the space and time to devote to this activity. The professionals involved stressed how useful it would be to have this type of work systematically scheduled in, for analysing, watching es the same video several times, and having the opportunity of reflecting upon it. Practitioners also stressed the value of being able to have collective reflection among colleagues.

Reflecting and watching videos in a group dimension allows the generation of different points of view on educational practices and creates new perspectives of dialogue, mutual disagreement and debate between practitioners where the search for meaning is held open. As pointed out by Brennan (2009), having a piece of material providing 'a direct view of what's happening which is available for replay, re-experience and reflection' is perceived by practitioners as an advantage to be gained

for all concerned in being able to look at the video material together and discuss and debate what it shows and what any of it means (Hayward & McKinnon, 2013).

Have tools for the management of video coaching sessions in order to effectively stimulate a reflective approach in the analysis of video data in a collective way (i.e. toolbox).

These tools can help the professionals involved to adopt new ways of reading and interpreting the educational situations in which they find themselves and how they can act in different ways compared to their past practice. The aim is to focus the professionals' attention on children, on their intentionality (which does not always reflect that of adults) and on their different ways of communicating. The main goals of these tools are that they should be simple to apply, adaptable to the specificity of each context and usable by both the pedagogical coordinator and the educators. In the Italian case study, we used different tools within the different phases of the project (see *Toolbox: using video analysis and video coaching as a tool for professionalizing ECEC workforce and training future ECEC professionals*). In the first phase we used an **observation grid for guiding researchers' observations** in ECEC settings from which relevant themes, topics and challenges were extracted for sharing with the practitioners. In the second phase we **organized the video-elicited discussion into six main phases** that could guide the collective reflection processes. In this phase we also used an **item-table that could help practitioners and researchers in approaching and analysing the video data**. The table takes into account the 'communicative dimension' and the 'space proxemics' of the interaction, with the main goal being to give a comprehensive and systematic vision of what happens in the video. Finally, in the third phase, we administered the **follow-up questionnaires** with the aim to better understand practitioners' points of view about the research process.

Video data as a tool for constructing a shared heritage of practice for the service

In defining the dimensions that characterise a community of practices, Wenger (1998, 2010) emphasizes that the value of a culture of service is given by a set of knowledge, tools, methods and artifacts through which the 'memory' of a service is built. Video data, in this sense, s a useful tool to document the practitioners' practices and, consequently, is essential for the construction of a shared heritage of knowledges and experiences of each service.

5. Polish Case Study

The Polish case study is an example of adopting the methodology to best address the main arena of interest for the TRACKs project, i.e. describing and combating inequalities in ECEC. With this broad framework, case studies in Poland were sampled on the basis of several criteria. While two general cases were researched, the first encompassed selected two ECECs in two urban areas and the second meant studying as many as four small kindergarten entities in small villages. This has been driven by the following rationales:

- One of the defining characteristics of the Polish ECEC system is the uneven distribution between rural and urban areas. To account for this difference, one case has been localized across the largest cities – with two ECECs in Kraków and Warsaw. The remaining ECECs were merged into the second case, consisting of four ECECs in the peripheral rural areas of the Podkarpackie region (South-Eastern Poland).
- Another aspect relates to the divisive nature of the financing/funding of the ECECs in Poland, which are split into publicly and privately funded entities. From this arena, the TRACKs researchers have chosen a private, a public/commune-led and a mixed form of ECECs managed by the Project Partner – the Komensky Institute – together with local, as well as rural communes.
- Finally, as Poland is a homogeneous country with a majority population which is ethnically Polish and has low in-migration rates, different axes of inequalities had to be conceived than those which were most relevant for Italy and Belgium. In this realm, the TRACKs researchers decided to study ECECs recruiting not only able-bodied children, but also those facing challenges linked with various physical and mental disabilities. The two urban ECECs were explicitly known for this feature, though the difference between these two settings is to be found along the private-public axis.

Based on the factors above, the case selection in Poland offers an intersectional perspective on the issues of spatial inequalities (urban/rural), 'ablebodiness'-disability spectrum, as well as economic aspects (private/public ECECs).

5.1 Social and economic context of Polish ECEC

All discussions that attempt to tackle the realization of the TRACKs goals within the Polish educational system must first look at the system's social and institutional particularity. First of all, the educational system generally suffers from extremely high levels of instability, mostly rooted in the political realm of revolving governmental shifts. This affects education, wherein decisions are

politicized, often made ad-hoc and are taken unreflexively to show political distinction against the previous rulers, regardless of the systemic constraints. Instead of proceeding with due caution and care in developing educational policies over time, in timeframes that should optimally greatly exceed the electoral term, educational policies and reforms are a political battlefield (Ślusarczyk 2010). Secondly, the whole system has experienced an extended period of shortages and infrastructural and financial shortcomings over the last three decades. The present situation is therefore the results of the social and economic transformations taking place over the last 30 years, as Poland went through its protracted transition from being a Communist state to a Western-facing one, along with various crises and the significant avoidance of dealing with key problems in education as a key part of social life[3]. What is meant here is that education – especially ECEC in its nursery and kindergarten parts – suffers from the absence of sufficient funds, as well as various governmental entities shuffling the costs of changes (see also Plomien 2008).

The key dyad of competing power and disenfranchisement involved here was of course the national government and its local counterparts. However, society, understood as actors in the social system, was affected as well; the parents of small children must navigate the system of social protections and education without sufficiently understanding it and with no guarantees as to its stability. For example, there is an inherent expectation that teachers will engage in continuous education which is, on the one hand, essential for their career advancement and, on the other hand, not rewarded with any additional time or funding which would support the achievement of these required additional qualifications (np. Gołębniak, Krzychala 2015). At present, this is first and foremost observable in the fact that pursuing education became an almost obvious choice for young generations of Poles (Kwiek 2012, Mleczko et al. 2019).

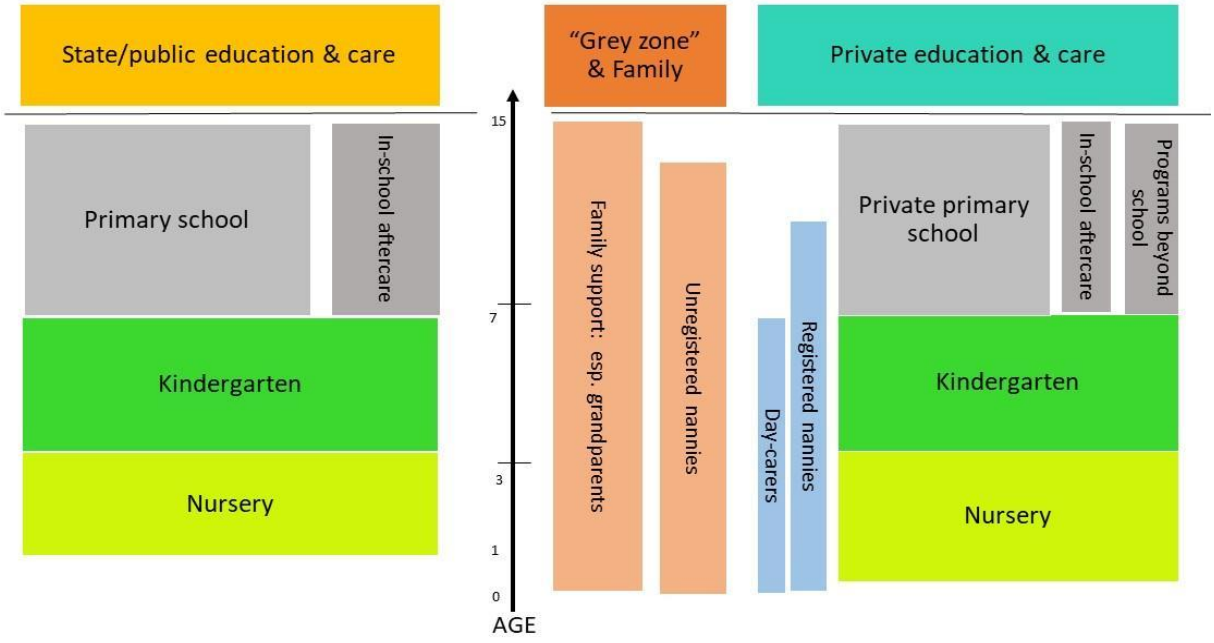
What is more, the desire to prevent lost educational opportunities means that parents begin to think about the best possible educational pathways for their children very early on, insisting that high-quality instructions and curricula must be present in kindergartens, primary school and middle-schools (see also Sikorska 2019). Simultaneously, the key role of ECEC was stressed in debates concerning educational and social inequalities. Correspondingly, the whole situation is conducive to more and more privately-run ECEC, which compete amongst themselves as regards offering more and more tailored and ambitious programs. Ironically, while catering to somewhat elitist expectations, some of these private sector ECEC settings also genuinely increase the access to ECEC and directly help the process of making educational chances more equal for all children. Also in the public sector ECEC provision, we face increasing expectations to look at children and their development holistically, alongside creating the supporting environment for all of them.

[3] More on this issue can be found in *Comparing ECEC across Italy, Poland and Belgium. Tracks Working Paper 1*.

To sum up, we can distinguish several significant changes in the making. These might be slow-going but they have been improving, and continue to improve the situation of ECEC availability and quality. The changes are occurring both in the context of the third sector (NGO), for instance with the work being done by the Foundation for the Development of Children (*Fundacja Rozwoju Dzieci)*. Many agents and agencies work tirelessly to decrease the evident problem of regional inequalities while also tackling the flaws of ECEC being organized on the state and local government levels. The most praiseworthy efforts are those which are invested in expanding the accessibility of ECEC and making children's access independent from their social status, able-bodiness and (dis)ability, ethnicity, religious identity and so on.

5.1.1 The structure and institutional background of ECEC in Poland

The ECEC system currently in place in Poland is marked by a certain dualism which pertains, not only to the usual institutional divisions, but also reflects the assumptions around financing, infrastructural requirements and conditions of employment for staff, as well as the supervisory body.



In the case of nurseries and children's clubs, as well as the so-called 'day-time carers', the crucial main idea behind them is **caring for a child** rather than the educational aspects. Simultaneously, the educational dimensions are often made explicit, as the care should follow pedagogical standards and fulfil an educational role. Under the present law, one carer/teacher can be responsible for no more than eight children. If a group has a child with a disability, a child needing special care or a child that is younger than 1, the maximum number of supervised children is set at five. In case of kindergartens, **education** is made explicit as part of these institutions' mission. This marks a difference between institutional bodies which provide assistance in the care of a child

(nurseries) and those that are conceived as agents of socialization and educational attainment in the longer-run.

From a legal perspective, kindergarten education might take place in public and private kindergartens, kindergarten divisions (year-zero) at primary schools and at many other provisions like kindergarten points and joint ECEC initiatives. For all kindergartens, the guiding premise for operations stems from the demands of accomplishing the core educational contents specified in the centrally issued documentation (curriculum)[4]. This is the legal act that regulates the kindergarten educational program is the Minister of Education Decree which encompasses the core content for kindergarten education, the core content for comprehensive primary education – including the curriculum for special educational programmes for pupils with significant or moderate intellectual disabilities – and the core content for lower secondary school (comprehensive education, education for special-needs school preparing for employment and schools preparing for secondary and vocational education (Dz.U. poz 977, ze zm.). Among the goals of kindergarten education we can find e.g.:

- developing social competencies that are necessary for children to establish appropriate relationships with adults;
- securing better educational chances for children by supporting their curiosity, activity and self-reliance, as well as shaping those messages and skills that are important for schooling and education;
- creating conditions conducive to shared and collaborative play and learning for children with discrepant physical and intellectual capabilities.

When considering access to education in Poland, and the barriers which prevent it, one has to highlight the main dimensions that transform into inequalities over time. The first issue is linked to the question of entry, access and the very opportunity of being able to participate in ECEC; this was extensively discussed in the *Comparative Report* mentioned above (see note 1). The second issue concerns everything that happens next, meaning the pedagogy, teaching and socialization that guide the work and education that the children receive; teachers' actions clearly have the power to either alleviate or reinforce inequalities. The pedagogical model currently dominating kindergarten education in Poland entails curriculum-based education. It is believed that this education should be institution-based, structured, and compliant with the national educational guidelines. Pedagogical qualifications and dedication of the staff also frequently reflect the economic and developmental distinctions.

[4] https://men.gov.pl/zycie-szkoly/wychowanie-przedszkolne/inne-formy-wychowania-przedszkolnego/inne-formy-wychowania-przedszkolnego.html.

The model of education, which is favoured by experts internationally, and encompasses a focus on a comprehensive and holistic development of the child, remains the least popular in Poland. It is only being followed as a pedagogic premise in elite kindergartens in major cities, often being driven by teams of (rightfully expensive) experts. The class axis means that high status parents , especially those based in urban areas, have the capacity to secure kindergarten education at a level that carries real-world implications (Gawlicz 2009). At the same time, this does not universally mean that public kindergartens fail to acknowledge recent trends or developments. On the contrary, in many places the teaching staff fantastic and dedicated to continuous education and high-quality care. The TRACKs Toolbox and Repository of Knowledge is really a part of this concept and aims to enrich the ECEC in more diverse and proactive forms of education and care, especially by relying on the potential of small and flexible initiatives organized and initiated in local communities.

|93% of ECEC staff are women. Only 16% of nursery employees have teaching qualifications (GUS 2019)

5.1.2 Local context – Cracow vs. Podkarpacie (South-East Poland)

The ultimate selection of the ECEC entities for research and video-coaching came down to pairing the project's goals with the decisions made by the Polish NGO partner, namely the Komensky Institute. Since 2012, the Komensky Institute has been cooperating with several municipalities in the Podkarpacie region, namely Zarzecze, Jawornik Polski, Przeworsk, Adamówka, Sieniawa (in Przeworsk poviat), as well as Rokietnica and Wiązownica (in Jaroslaw poviat). In these municipalities, a project called "Competent Kindergartners" is underway and has a main aim of securing equal access to early education for a minimum of 784 children aged 3-5. The specific goals of the project are:

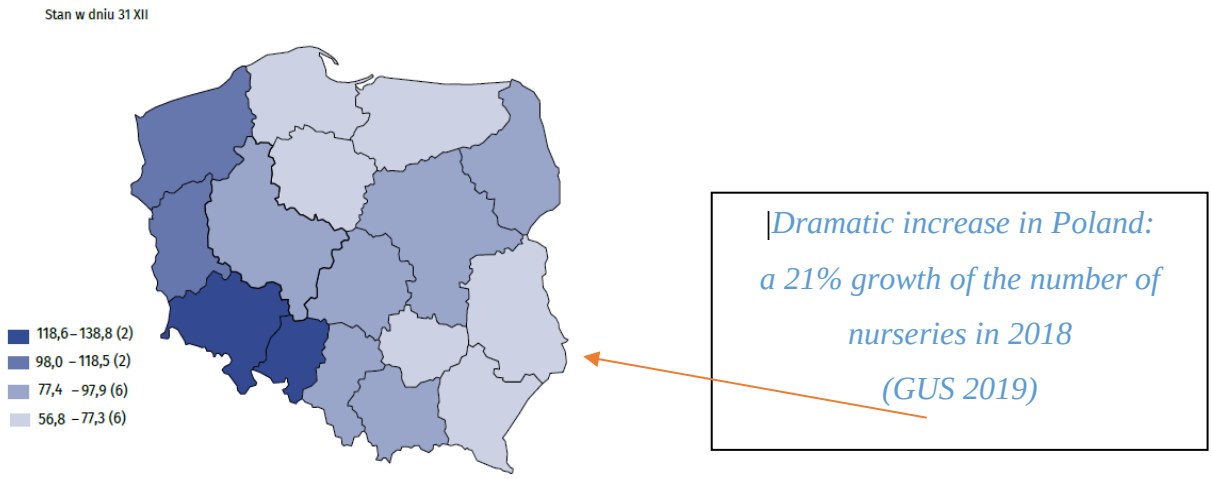
- to elevate and even out the educational chances for children in rural areas
- to provide equal access to high-quality education
- to increase the awareness of parents about the importance of kindergarten education
- to prepare parents for their roles in supporting educational pathways of children.

Within this project, classes and care for children are provided in 40 ECECs in the villages. The work is actively supported by parental engagement, as the mothers and fathers take part in workshops for parents, as well as operate as assistant carers based on a rotational predetermined schedule of operations in a given community. The development of children at these 40 institutions is supported by speech therapists and psychologists who conduct individual and group classes, as well as assisting parents and teachers. The specialists, teachers, professionals and other staff are overseen

by the Komensky Institute's experts who come in to carry out consultations, furnish content and method-related supports well as monitoring the standards of work with the children.

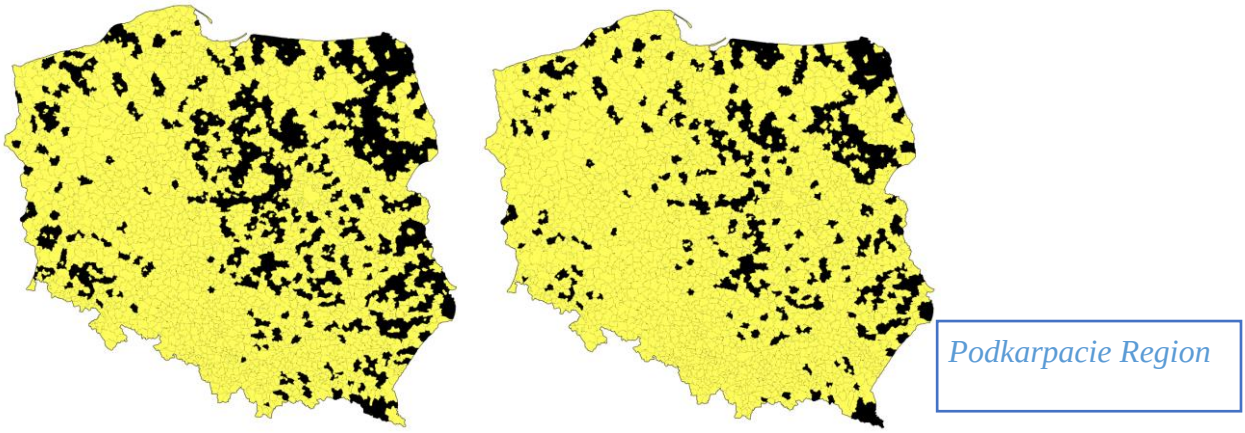
The geographical area encompassed by the project entails a region which is consistently underperforming when it comes to participation of children in ECEC. Even though the situation has been improving in recent years, Podkarpacie, especially when it comes to villages, remains very far behind in terms of places offered for children in nurseries (for children in ages 0-3, see Figure 2) and in kindergartens/daycare centres for older children (see Figure 3).

Fig. 2 **Children in nurseries aged 3 and under for 1000 children per region**



Source: GUS, Nurseries and children's clubs in 2017.

Fig.2. Municipalities without any ECEC institutions



2002 2015

Source: Herbst 2015.

It is paramount to note that the project led by the Komensky Institute's explicit focus is that the ECECs under its care are admitting children with disabilities. In that sense, we are discussing an intersectional overlay, whereas the dimensions of rural exclusion in an unfavoured and economically

struggling region, are exacerbated by the difficulties that may arise when working with children who have some kind of Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND). Some ECECs benefit from hiring a supporting teacher/special needs assistant, depending on the type and degree of disability, as well as the financial standing of the municipality.

Given that the ECEC entities mentioned above are coordinated and mentored by the Komensky Institute, the Polish research team had an advantageous position when entering the field. Moreover, it was possible to foster and navigate the collaboration from early on, with information being relayed to the selected ECECs from the inception of the s project, and the corresponding openness that followed on the parts of teachers, staff and parents. Another member of the Research Team made it possible to connect with a private, urban kindergarten in Krakow, which represents one of the biggest and best developed urban areas in Poland. This setting is a private, fee-paying provision for children in the age range of 2.5-6-years old. The institution is oriented towards the best possible quality of care and education, as well as being known for using innovative methods of pedagogy. In its practice, there is a focus on creating a friendly environment for all children. The ECEC has an inclusive and integration-focused character, meaning that children with disabilities are u frequently admitted. There is a given framework that proposes that each group in the kindergarten has its own main teacher, as well as a supporting teacher/teaching assistant. Besides the standard curriculum, all children receive extra classes in English language, social competence training, dancing and music lessons (using Professor Gordon's method and others). In addition, the children can access further scientific classes (in biology, chemistry and physics), sport activities, art activities, mathematics instruction, modern dance, logorhythmics, as well as additional instruction in foreign languages.

As one can imagine, none of these things are available to the children in the rural ECECs of the Podkarpacie region, this reflects the differences in the financial means which are available which are extensive for the parents in Krakow and highly limited in the rural ECECs which participated in the research. Therefore, the cases compare and contrast two very different worlds of early education which are regionalized, economy-dependant and strongly rooted in social class inequalities between the urban middle-classes and the rural working-classes.

5.2 Methodology

The research process relied on a qualitative methodology within the social sciences. Drawing on primarily sociological, , expertise in action-research, but also including pedagogical and educational studies, TRACKs implemented actions at a meta-team level, engaging both researchers and ECEC professionals in the process of researching and the fostering of social change formulated as improvements aimed at alleviating ECEC inequalities.

5.2.1 Research Design: operational steps

The first step was to share the assumptions behind the TRACKs project and its goals with the head personnel of the participating ECEC settings. After becoming familiar with these, including the research methods and the video-coaching expectations, the staff could voluntarily decide and consent to taking part. We then proposed and established a convenient schedule for meetings, interviews with groups and teachers, as well as ways of informing the parents in advance about the project taking place, seeking out further participants to interview. In both cases, the reaction was positive and enthusiastic but we also relied on supporting activities that were offered to teachers across all the settings (in both rural and urban settings the staff benefited from training directed at them being able to self-reflect about their work and pedagogical practice).

The second research step entailed conducting the field research in the form of individual and group interviews. These covered head personnel, teachers, supporting staff and parents. During each interview, we collected a range of rich data including, but not limited to, information about the:

- professional path of the respondent/participant
- the history and social context of the ECEC setting's operations, the number of groups and the total number of children per group
- infrastructure, financing, specificity of the kindergarten
- pedagogical methods and teaching ideologies
- social structure of families from which children at the ECEC come from, especially representation of children from underprivileged groups
- perceived inequalities, social problems and conflicts
- training and educational needs of the personnel, especially for children with particular needs or from devoured groups
- relationship between ECEC and a broader community – both in terms of children/parents as users, as well as locality/municipality.

While a variety of data and perspectives were gained from the different interviewees, in the case of parents we additionally asked about their perceptions of the institution, the significance of ECEC for children's development, their experiences with inequalities as well as the nature and availability of support (or the lack thereof) and extracurricular activities.

The third step was to conduct observations connected with video-recordings of the teachers involved in the project. In the subsequent step, the research team analysed the videos and made a selection of excerpts for video-coaching, as well as creating a list of scenario(s) for re-interviewing

teachers with the help of video material. Finally, revisiting the field signified the necessary step of discussing the recordings with the staff on video and fostering a reflexive practice, especially around inequalities. During those meetings, not only was a dedicated collaborative analysis of the recorded situation taking place, but meta-reflections on the general feeling towards video-coaching as a method were collected, including its strengths, weaknesses, usability and limitations.

5.3 Actions implemented and main achievements

5.3.1 First phase: Research interviews

The goal of the individual and group interviews was to better understand the characteristics of the ECEC settings selected for the case studies. This included official frameworks and the constraints of their operations, as well as the functioning of their daily routines and, on a more advanced level. of their pedagogy and the nature of their communities. In addition, we wanted to learn about the image of the ECEC setting as a place, and the kindergarten group, in the eyes of the head personnel, teachers and parents.

The role of the kindergarten

In the two selected localities, the first as an combined regional case of the Podkarpacie settings, and the second one the urban setting of Krakow, we had to tackle their very discrepant starting points. While in both cases the role of ECEC was linked to an **educational opportunity,** this seemed to be something that was more obvious for the urban dwellers. In that context, the parents in the cities were keen on choosing the **best possible kindergarten** that is aligned with both their needs, and their children's needs, and fulfilling their children's developmental potentials and ambitions. Conversely, in the case of the Podkarpacie villages, the ECEC settings started from scratch with no early years preschool infrastructure, as well as the challenging mentality and policies of some of the local government institutions. Additionally, the role of parental views, which were often rooted in the conviction that young children should be at home with their mothers, had to be challenged.

> 'The project was a chance of showing the parents of children aged 3 to 5 that kindergarten education actually exists. It was not available in the past or was only possible for those in bigger localities. If children had any chance at education, it was only for those who were at least 5 or older. So, five-year-olds being created next to primary schools. Children aged 3 or 4 – not to mention two-and-a-half-year-olds - had no way, education was out of the question (…) At the beginnings was definitely difficult because parents were not really familiar with it, did not know what it was about. They preferred leaving the children with a grandmother, grandfather,

somewhere in a small (family) environment. And we had to convince these parents. (Headteacher of one of the Podkarpacie ECEC settings)

For some children in the areas with a lack of , or no, preschool provision, the selection does not come down to the best or optimal choice, but rather reflects that there is usually only a single institution offering available ECEC places:

> R: So yes, [Teacher X] said that some children who come to this ECEC setting had never experienced holding scissors or even crayons in their hands…
> T: Yes, you can forget about scissors for some of them completely. Now the children go to the zero grade [daycare centre]. Look now, the 3-year-olds are good at cutting with scissors already. We draw some circles, other shapes… I like it when they draw various circles, squares, rectangles and at the end of the school year it is not even possible with some 4-year-olds because they do not know the colours at the beginning... So this year I went to teach grade Zero and I said, well, it has not been that many years, but these children, they are very different from how they were when they came (…) Now, for a 4-year old not to attend kindergarten, it's become something strange, especially since we now have two ECEC settings and someone not getting a place is very rare, single cases. So it is quite a large village so a four-year-old should be in [a setting]. Not to even mention the 5-year-olds. They all get a spot, nearly 100% of the children. (Teacher, village ECEC)

In a big city setting, the aforementioned selection of a kindergarten is typically a conscious decision of parents (Gawlicz 2009). This applies to three different groups of parents. The first group are those who have very high aspirations about their children's future and, consequently, tend to select ECEC settings with high numbers of various extracurricular activities. The second group relates to parents who have very specific ideas about pedagogical methods. For this group, the important criteria may be a certain alternative vision of education or an ECEC setting run by a religious community.

Average public nursery size: 70 children. Average private nursery: 30 children (GUS 2019)

Finally, there are parents who have children with disabilities who seek out institutions that can best support their children's special needs. In this case, there is a navigational dialogue of development and support opportunities. In our case study, we have collected evidence from parents representing all three types. However, the most relevant finding was the way in which the parents in the third group described their intention of assisting their children with their special needs:

> ‘I have changed the kindergarten because the teachers could not handle the admission of a child with documentation that said specialist teaching and education are required. This was above their skills and they have openly told this to me (…) I don’t really hold grudges or hold it against them, don’t feel regrets. But I knew that this was not a place for my child. The new one) I liked a lot. The teachers were smiling, very friendly, they’ve welcomed us very warmly and nicely. A talk with the headmistress, small groups and the higher numbers of teachers were important factors. There are more teachers, sometimes even three per group. Plus, children have their own activities, they leave and there’s rotation, but the overall landscape made it fit in with my expectations for where my child could be’ (Mother of a child with special needs, urban setting)

In the above case, a new choice of a kindergarten stemmed from searching for a solution when a child was not feeling good in a previous ECEC setting, while the teachers there were unprepared for supporting him and were also unable to handle and lead a group with a child who had special needs. In other situations, parents were underscoring from early on the need for finding an optimal educational environment:

> Mother: When she was two, she went to a kindergarten nearby, so she was just there for a few months so to reach the age where she could move to a kindergarten ’D’, so she started at the ’D’ place when she turned two-and-a-half from September that year.
> Researcher: Why did you decide on this change?
> Mother: Because ’D’ is known as an elite kindergarten, there are very good opinions about it that I have heard. Moreover, it’s an integration-type of a kindergarten and my child is disabled. So, I knew that she would get the best possible care if she goes there. From the beginning I knew she was going to attend that kindergarten.
> (Mother of a disabled child, urban setting)

Pedagogical frameworks of ECEC settings

The interviewed kindergarten personnel underlined that teaching methods should be well-chosen to ensure the best possible education. For instance, they use the project-method as a practice to address the goals set in the curriculum.

> I was inspired by this programme. Today we are big fans of working this way. Not on the basis of timesheets but rather major methods that we try to apply, at the tables and so on. The research projects method by Monika Rościszewska-Woźniak, the work programme is called ’A good start of the kindergartener’. Knowledge is the leading theme. Every local ECEC setting here works with this framework

> programme and this gives us a tremendous chance for development. I mean for us teachers (…) but also for the children. It gives us a great chance of giving children a huge amount of freedom, choices linked to what children are capable of at a given time, what they want, what their interests are and in which direction they are inclined to go on a particular day. So, we don't have a strict curriculum that we need to follow: a daily plan, from-to, fitting into this and showing off that we prepared and tried a lot but it's the children that have to find their way in this (Headmistress of a village ECEC complex)

What distinguishes the frameworks are not necessarily the commitment of individual teachers but rather the infrastructure and financial means available to them. A similar role is played by the social surroundings and accessibility of services in the spatial, geographical and local senses. To compare, the ECEC setting in Krakow has established cooperation with psychologists and further specialists like therapists, physiotherapists and speech therapists, alongside remaining in close contact with the relevant Pedagogy-Psychology Centre in the area. Conversely, the village ECEC setting had access to a psychologist, but this was a person who commuted to the setting. The absence of specialists on site was a commonly underlined problem, and so was the rare, just monthly, visits of the speech therapist. In that sense, access to support was limited. Moreover, the project work could be impeded by money shortages as well.

Finally, despite the shared framework of project work, it appeared that the qualifications and experience of individual teachers were much more important in the village setting. In this context, the learnt acceptance of lacking funds and specialists has led some teachers to being less inclined to recognize problems and ask for help due to worrying about this not bringing much change. In this context, it is vital to propose an ever-expanding programme of training and support that the teachers in local and rural areas can also access and use.

5.3.2 Second phase: Team Observations in ECEC Settings

Prior to commencing the recordings, each ECEC setting included in the project was subject to participant observation. The researchers were interested in how the day unfolds vis-à-vis the planning, as well as transitions between different stages and components of the plan, involvement and non-involvement of children in the activities, along with dealing with children's verbal and non-verbal interactions. Special attention was placed on how, on the one hand, teachers, individualise their work with children and, on the other hand, how they construct group cohesion. This was particularly important for the observed ECEC settings affected by inequalities; and for those where,

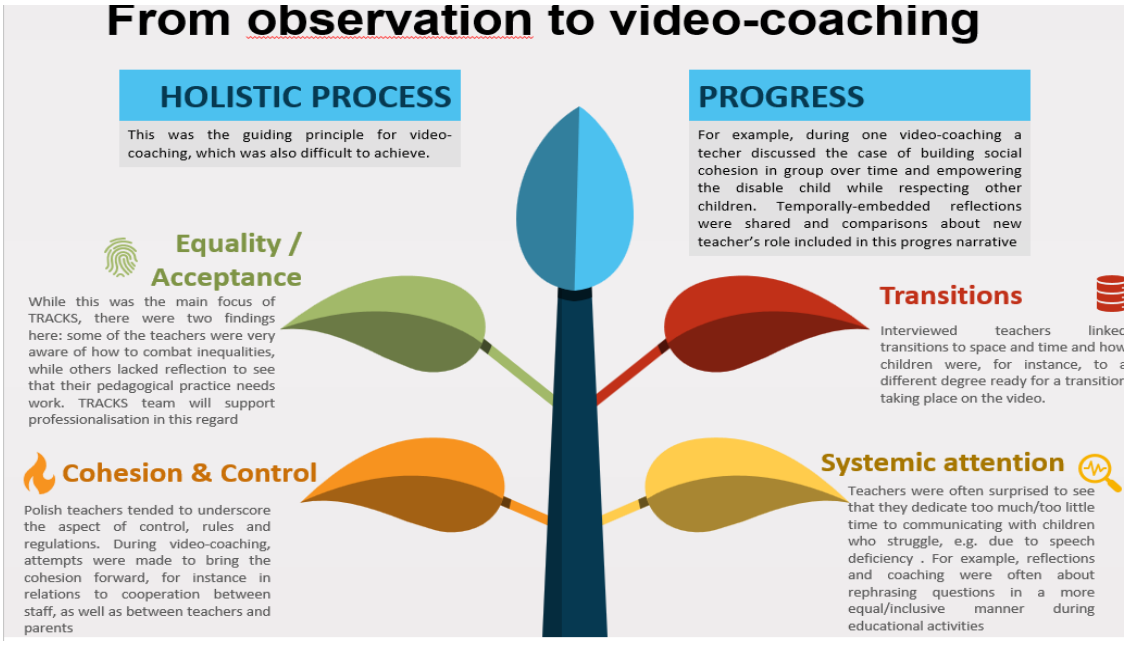
for instance, a child with SEND requirement was a member of the group. Once again, different levels of support and reflexivity affected the outcomes of this phase.

Quite clearly, in certain cases the team observations were easier to conduct and the differences between children were more easily notable. In such scenarios, the researchers could clearly demarcate the aspects of pedagogical practice mentioned above. However, some groups had fewer tangible discrepancies, for instance when a child has not yet been diagnosed or if there were subtle, yet noticeable, economic and/or status cues to be noted. In this context, careful observation and the appropriate questions needed to be formulated as part of the video-coaching dispositions.

5.3.3. Video-coaching and video-elicited discussions

This phase of the research was dedicated to carrying out both individual video coaching and its group variation. For the second variant, we had chosen this strategy if more than one person was included in the recordings and observations, and/or if the teachers themselves requested such a format. For example, in one ECEC setting a supporting teacher was hired between the two stages of the project and the two teachers included in the data collection/video recording stage asked her to take part in the video-coaching session as a way for her to become more familiar with the ECEC setting, but also for the sake of new methods training and professional development.

We also discussed the issue of dedicating attention and interactions around children's questions and communication. Further, the topics included time, acceptance, cohesion (both group and professional), spatial features, control and education. In that sense, we tried to understand the whole process in order to note progress in a multi-perspective and dialogical setting of children and teachers. This is shown on **Figure 4** below.



5.3.4 Third phase: follow-up questionnaires and interview

One of the most important reflections was the discovery of the holistic process, which is linked to the crucial potential of *freezing moments.* This means stopping and looking closer at a situation and/or a sequence of events. This let us notice and contextualize certain findings:

- Situational context/dynamics of relations between children
    - Linked to both systemic attention and acceptance of children's expertise in their understanding of situations. The teachers emphasised that only some distance, and looking at the situation from the sidelines/not being within, allowed them to **understand the holistic process** through the sequence of actions. They also found clarity on reasons or root causes of certain behaviours and the state of relationships between children, which they could not see when they were active actors in the situation itself.
    - "Ah! He was helping everyone and now he has trouble himself, he is angry. Oh, and now [child A] helps (…) It is looking very different when one looks at it from here."

- Observing somebody (child) or something (situation)
    - Linked to systemic attention and equality/acceptance, teachers were able to take note of the missed opportunity moments and being unable to react. This again is contextual and situational
    - "I could not have known this. A mother came in and I was speaking to her."
    - While this might be irrelevant at times, on occasion it may permit taking note of one particular child being <u>consistently</u> overlooked or that a child who has trouble establishing rapport has actually tried to communicate but was simply ignored for some reason, thus remaining 'invisible'.

- Successful action which was overlooked
    - Linked to the teacher's actions and professional reflection
    - "Wow, they were really interested for a long time. It seems like nothing much but they kept returning to it. And wanted still to continue discussion of this topic."

- Difficult moments
    - Mostly entail work around social cohesion, but may also revolve around management of spatial and temporal features during transitions

- "It is so loud here. But I am actually not surprised because they have to wait for others who are not done yet."
- Bringing attention to problematic dimension of unstructured actions and situations, especially transitions between points of the plan, or a situation when some children are faster than others and the transitions are more prolonged for them.

- Consequences of one's decision and action
  - Linked to making sure that children are seen as experts in their own right about their needs and skills and their intentionality is recognised:

    "When you did not try to push it, then K [a child with special needs] was coming back [encouraged to leave his hide-out and join the play] but then left again (…) Here I tried to force it, do it fast and so he escaped."

5.4. Reflections on challenges and opportunities in using video-coaching: key-success factors

Preliminary training for all the professionals involved (pedagogical coordinators, educators and teachers).

All persons who are supposed to take part in video-coaching training in Poland should be able to first access the relevant material and the toolbox so as to familiarize themselves with the main goals, conditions and traits of the method. A massive challenge in Poland is a **culture of judgement and criticism, which results in avoidance strategies.** For example, one teacher in Poland could not be convinced about the value of reflecting on the video evidence and consistently downplayed the issues. She disregarded visible prompts about inequalities and special needs that were evident from the video, being adamant that there were absolutely no problems in her group of preschoolers. Of course, the researcher could not react negatively but the consequence of this could be that children from disadvantaged background do not receive the assistance they need, especially in terms of support from professional services.

This is not about any personal unwillingness on the part of teachers but rather it highlights what is a systemic issue for teachers, especially those who are young, in the first few years of their teaching careers and in economically precarious areas, who may be feeling unsure about being evaluated during video-coaching, even if the coach assures them that this is not the aim of the method. It can be tied back to the Polish educational system being a product of the culture of achievement and competition rather than seeing learning as a process wherein mistakes naturally occur and should be used for furthering one's understanding of one's self and one's practice as a way of improving it.

For such cases, a solution could be to use peer-peer coaching wherein the participants are in equal roles and/or a teacher is asked to choose which sequences from the video they would like to

share and discuss. This would help – in certain cultural settings – prevent the sense of shame and a fear of being criticized. For this, teachers could start with 'empowering moments', moving on to more difficult examples in more long-term and trust-based peer-peer rapports and relationships.

Time and space for reflection on video data

As with other methods of professional practice, video coaching requires time, effort and opportunities to come back to the recording with unfolding reflections. This holds for both individual and group sessions. One of the lessons from the video-elicited discussions was that we first focus on what we do ourselves. This paradigm of 'Looking Small at Yourself' means that teachers were focused on their own actions, attitudes and decisions. This is a correct first step as it can encourage and develop reflection about their own pedagogy and behaviours. When taking the second step, however, teachers were able to shift their focus to a meta and holistic level of the process. Only then were they able to better understand the needs of children through the principle of 'Looking Small at Children':

> "When we watch the film for the first time we are not ready to see children really. We can just see what we think about them. We see our thoughts, impressions. We can concentrate on children`s needs and their actions only when we are aware of that." (comment from the group discussion)

Tools for the management of video coaching sessions.

In order to effectively stimulate a reflective approach in the analysis of video data in a collective way, we need a proper **tool box.** We assume that the tools prepared in the frames of the TRACKs project (see *Toolbox: using video analysis and video coaching as a tool for professionalizing ECEC workforce and training future ECEC professionals*) will be helpful for the following situations in teaching practice, learning and broader education:

- As a tool of self-directed work and self-reflection. This could be potentially expanded to the virtual setting and done online on the platform. Due to regional challenges and spatial distances, it would be ideal if teachers could upload their recording and receive video-coaching and support by people who are elsewhere (this also could alleviate the issues of fear around power and criticism).
- As a peer-review and video-elicitation discussion tool. Here we imagine being able to work together in a staff group of a given ECEC setting and/or with other professional networks
- Specifically for the Polish context, the tools could be used by teachers supporting others and those who oversee internships by graduates and new employees. This would be a

beneficial tool because it allows locating the structure in the system where the process of career advancement is universal and applies to all teachers. The tool could be advantageous as a platform for collaborative work for a supervisor and her/his learners/interns, as well as fostering mentoring relationships in the professional practice of ECEC in Poland.

6. BELGIUM CASE STUDY: video coaching in the City of Ghent (Flanders)

6.1 Introduction

The TRACKs project's general ambitions were to tackle social inequality and to strive for an inclusive ECEC practice by professionalizing practitioners, their coordinators and the teams in ECEC settings by means of video coaching. We based our trajectory on video coaching with the ECEC institutions on the outlines of Design Based Research[5]. In this type of research, the 'construction' is done with researchers and practitioners working together. During the process they construct the different stages and the required educational situations within specific contexts. In doing so both partners make a contribution to the establishment of the vision and theory, the innovative aspects and the optimisation of the ECEC practices. Design Based Research constructs bridges between the research and the practitioners' field, which guarantees a higher success rate in the implementation of the suggested educational reforms. With the Design Based Research ideas as our leading guide, we constructed three phases in the TRACKs project in Ghent:

1. determining the initial situation and goals
2. the design (or construction) of the video coaching
3. the evaluation.

6.2 Phase 1 – Analysis: determining initial situation and goals

The operational steps involved were as follows (analysis of exploration).

First step

The TRACKs project team (Centre for Diversity and Learning, Ghent University and Artevelde University College) decided to choose four ECEC institutions situated within the municipality of the City of Ghent and, if possible, ECEC institutions that are situated in the same district and/or are already cooperating with one another.

The pedagogical services of both the childcare centres and education of the municipality were contacted and asked for suggestions on this. They proposed cooperating with:

- 1 childcare centre 'De Palmboom', working together with pre-school 'De Piramide',
- 1 pre-school 'De Piramide',
- 1 pre-school 'De Feniks',

[5] Based on Mckenny, S., Reeves, T. (2013). "Educational Design Research". In: Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology: Fourth Edition. Springers Editions.

- 2 ‘stibos’ (out-of-school care), each one working in one pre-school.

These ECEC settings are all located in one specific neighbourhood in the city of Ghent, ’de Brugse Poort’, with a large number of vulnerable families.

The professionals involved are teachers, childcare workers and their coordinators. The pedagogical guidance services were also involved in the setting up of the project and in the follow-up to make it sustainable.

Second step

The second step was to contact these ECEC settings to explain the project and ask for their cooperation. We explained the goals of TRACKs , the methodology used, the outlines of the video coaching sessions, the principles and frameworks that we use, the informed consents that are needed, etc. All the suggested settings agreed to join the TRACKs project. Seven ECEC professionals agreed to actually participate in the filming and the coaching, in close collaboration with their coordinators. We then set up an agenda for the coming months.

Third step

The third step was the research interviews we conducted with all the participants and their coordinators, and with parents. These interviews were meant to capture insights, visions and opinions of the professionals on vulnerability, social inequality, professional needs. The interviews with the parents were meant to capture opinions on how they felt the ECEC settings were dealing with their concerns and needs in relation to social vulnerability). Unfortunately we were only able to speak with two parents, due to time problems at the level of the professionals, i.e. the ‘bridge’ between the researcher and the parents.

We present the recurrent themes in these interviews below:

In general

The out-of-school care, day care centre and schools work closely together. This is not evident in the Flemish context. It is the ambition of the Ghent city council to remove as many obstacles as possible to work on a parallel pedagogy (‘pedagogical continuity’), in the interest of the children. However, there still remains a kind of ‘implicit’ hierarchy in which the childcare workers are ‘subordinate’ to the kindergarten teacher.

Signals about vulnerability and social inequality

All professionals refer to very diverse ‘types’ of vulnerabilities, especially the signals that refer to poverty or exclusion being spontaneously narrated. They are aware that the school and institutions are located in a neighbourhood with various challenges. These are both the general

living conditions and - more specifically - the signals about housing, finances, food, health, etc. Moreover, the professionals 'read' signals about 'striking' behaviour of the children, and they carefully try to find out what causes these , preferably in consultation with the parents. Some interviewees indicate that a language barrier does not make it easy to make certain signals negotiable.

Approach

The professionals are aware of the complex mechanisms behind social inequality and poverty. Some have an extra (pre)education certificate or diploma besides the one for childcare or pre-school teacher. This extra expertise helps them in their daily contact with vulnerable families.

All partners refer to the attempts to develop trustworthy and good contact with the parents. They try to approach the parents in an unprejudiced way and without judgment and make it clear to the parents that. together with the school, they can look for solutions for specific needs.

The evolution in the policies of the institutions is striking: both recently recruited childcare workers and teachers are well coached in getting the ‘right’ perception on the families they are working with. First impressions and 'findings' serve as the basis for critical reflection on the vulnerabilities and for adjusting the approach (e.g. in communication with these families) towards basic values such as respect, openness and equality, and to a professional attitude of encouragement and positive/constructive treatment.

Professionalization needs

When asked about these needs, the answers vary from additional in-service training and ‘refresher courses’ to specific sub-themes of poverty and social inequality, to even more efforts to be made as a team for a common approach and also across the ‘border’ between school and *stibo.* Mentioned needs include: more cooperation with/for a group of children (co-teaching), smaller groups, the need for a mediator to link with parents, more consultation and alignment between school and out-of-school care, language development, support in co- and pre-teaching, more time to consult, time to discover what new didactic materials are available or can be created.

The professionals generally expected their institutions to give incentives and create a team culture so that there is a common vision and approach regarding social inequality, especially in learning to deal with prejudices, first impressions and judgments and stereotyping.

To conclude: we noticed very open-minded services and practitioners, teams that are open to gaining new insights on poverty, vulnerability and social inequality. At the same time, we noticed some generalisations, implicit prejudices and stereotyping; especially on these aspects, video coaching can make a difference.

6.3 Phase 2 – Design: the trajectory/process of video coaching

We worked with 'VerBEELDing' as a method for video coaching, developed by Artevelde University College (see *Toolbox: using video analysis and video coaching as a tool for professionalizing ECEC workforce and training future ECEC professionals*). 'VerBEELDing' is an accessible and appreciative professionalisation tool for childcare workers and teachers who work on high-quality interactions with children aged 0 to 6 years. Past experience has shown that **process-based, technical and motivational support** is very important to lower the threshold for professionals to work with video coaching. We continued to work on this within the TRACKs project process.

In the TRACKs project we added **two new elements** in relation to vulnerability and the joint pursuit of more equal opportunities:

1. in terms of content: the framework developed from 'VerBEELDing' was based on the NCKO quality monitor (2010)[6] but was translated into the children's perspective. Within TRACKs, we also integrated into this framework the insights of the Flemish 'Small Children Large Opportunities' project[7]. These insights focus on children who are more vulnerable, based on valuable research on the interactions between professionals and children.

2. at the process level: after the individual coaching sessions, we always planned a team moment to reflect together with the entire team. We thought together about our own views and ways of observing. This opens the way to growing together, collective learning and a more inclusive living and learning climate (see below for 'actions: steps in the process').

The first video images we shot were used as 'observations' of the general daily practice. The video-elicited discussions were meant to stimulate reflection and growth at the level of the individual professional in interaction with the children (in many cases two professionals together). A selection of video images was then used to observe and reflect with the team.

The **summary of the process**:

Step 1: powerful start together

Step 2: filming

Step 3: view and discuss video images (individually or in pairs)

(Repeating step 2 and step 3)

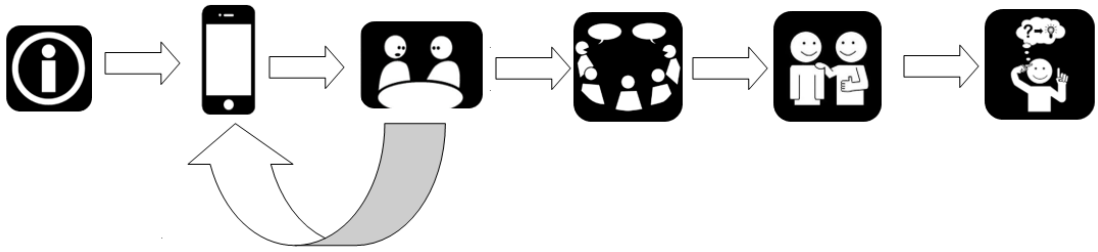
Step 4: view and reflect in team

[6] The 'NCKO kwaliteitsmonitor' (Quality Monitor) of the Dutch 'Consortium Kinderopvang' (Consortium Childcare, Gevers Deynoot-Schaub et al., 2009) is a scientifically-based framework with focus on Quality interactions. The framework used in 'VerBEELDing' is a translation of this NCKO-framework towards the perspective of the child (Bracke, Hostyn, & Steverlynck, 2014).

[7] www.grotekansen.be

Step 5: See opportunities in relation to parents or children

Step 6: Finish together with the participants



Step 1: starting Step 2: filming Step 3: coaching session Step 4: team refl. Step 5: opportunities Step 6: finishing

6.3.1 STEP 1 – Powerful start together: briefing meeting before the project starts

For whom: for directors/coordinators & participating teachers / childcare workers / team

How? Why?

Clarify together. Make appointments. We started with an information moment. In every school, out-of-school care and childcare, we made clear agreements about **the way we work** from the start. Together we looked for answers to the following questions: how many times will we film? who will film? at which moment? where and how long to film? which camera will be filmed with? when do we schedule the coaching sessions? where is the proper location for the sessions? who is involved in the coaching sessions? The answers were different per school/organization. In this way we could organize tailor-made sessions with those involved.

To give an idea of what video coaching is about, we watched this video with the participants from 'Klasse', the communication department of the Flemish Ministry of Education, on video coaching. Link (with English subtitles): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwvCtjRtYl4&feature=emb_logo.

From the very beginning, the 'why' of video coaching was focused upon: **growing as a professional, developing towards more equal opportunities, understanding childrens' behaviour.** Through video fragments, conversation sessions and reflection we see the strengths and opportunities in interaction with children. We want to grow as professionals and create more equal opportunities by working together on a more inclusive learning climate.

No means of evaluation! Creating security. From the beginning we made it clear to the professionals involved that video images and video analysis are **only used for growth and professional development,** in order to help them understand better how children behave and interact, to better understand their needs and worries. We did not want the professionals to have the feeling

that the images were used to ‘watch’ them. Instead we wanted them to be convinced that the use of the video images is to help them with observing children’s interactions, and that the coaching sessions were meant to help them interpret this behaviour and, from that point of view, they will get insights into what they need to sustain in their interaction with children and how they can grow as a professional in their interactions with children.

This helps to create the necessary feelings among the participants that the situation and the process is ‘safe’ for them to be part of. The images are not used for evaluation. The images give the opportunity to grow as a professional in interaction with the children.

> "They said it very clearly that the intention is not to be evaluated, but to name and support the positive things." (Childcare worker)
>
> “The threshold to get started, to be filmed: a positive and open atmosphere is needed to get something out of it to discuss about. You shouldn't have the feeling, ‘I'm going to get caught on this’, ‘my mistakes are going to be recorded.’" (Teacher)
>
> “The moment itself, during filming, was awkward. What does the coach think about that? What is going to be said about that now? But during the conversation it felt safe because it was not judgmental, but we actually looked at the children together and saw what they were looking for, what they need.” (Teacher)

Coaching attitude. As a researcher and coach, we worked from the first meeting on creating a relationship of trust with the professionals. We acknowledged their doubts, questions, thresholds and concerns about filming and about the coaching sessions. Anyone who agrees to be filmed makes him- or herself vulnerable in exposing daily interactions. As a researcher and coach, we responded sensitively and tried to understand the professionals.

> "Feeling trust, a click with the coach was a condition for me to participate." (Teacher)

Informed consent from the parents. Before the filming sessions we asked the coordinators to organise the signing of the ‘informed consents’ by the parents, as is necessary through the EU GDPR-legislation. In this document we used accessible language and asked the coordinators to conscientiously explain what was written in it (see informed consent reported in a *Toolbox*…

Informed consent for professionals. The professionals also signed an informed consent document. From the start we made clear agreements about the video material And ensured that the professionals understood that they **owned and controlled the images;**, he or she decides what can be done with the images.

Research-based framework for observation. Research shows that video feedback is more effective a *Toolbox*... Before the filming started, we explained the frameworks we would use during the video sessions. The framework clarifies how we look at the images together and it offers the possibility of using common language. The framework offers a holistic vision, but we focus on specific aspects during the conversations.

In consultation with the schools and services, we chose to focus on 'Quality Interactions', in particular the lever 'rich language' and the lever 'warm relationships'. We also suggested that participants watch the 'Klasse'-videos about these two levers:

{Link to the video on 'warm relationships' (with English subtitles):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2623&v=5Ljmr8HVw9s&feature=emb_logo
Link to the video on 'rich language' (with English subtitles):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=wsfxuU_VKqw&feature=emb_logo}

6.3.2 STEP 2 – Filming: making video fragments

> "You should not see filming as an assignment but as an opportunity!" (Childcare worker)

Who is filming? In consultation with the professionals involved, we agreed who would film: i.e. as a researcher/coach or a colleague, coordinator or pedagogical supervisor. In two settings we worked with an alternating combination: the first time the researcher filmed, the next time a colleague. It is important that the professional feels safe and agrees with who is filming. We respected the autonomy of the professionals.

> "The filming itself is sometimes a challenge: one colleague films the other, but in the meantime you've got to watch the entire group of children. So you need sufficient staff." (Childcare worker)

When to film? The professional takes the initiative in this. Together we looked for an interaction moment that the professional chose to be discussed. This could be: a group or individual moment, a circle conversation with the children, lunchtime, a transition or game moment. We respected the professional's choice (ownership in the learning process). Sometimes a professional did not know what to choose, and that was fine too.

Filming what? We always portrayed the children and professionals. We made images so that we could support the professional during the coaching sessions. We tried as much as possible to show the reciprocal interaction in the images (between professionals and children and children themselves). We also visualized transition moments because they are fascinating visual material.

> "It is nice to be able to decide for yourself what can be filmed, what not, what is being discussed. I think that ownership is important." (Teacher)

How long and how? We always filmed short fragments of **approximately 10 minutes** (no longer). We filmed with **simple equipment** such as a mobile phone because it is easily accessible and not at all 'impressive' as with distractingly large filming gear. We filmed as much as possible at the eye level of the children. We are not professional directors, we did not make close-ups, but kept a certain distance away. We focused on the reciprocity in the interactions, and, when necessary, we followed the interaction when moving. We mainly filmed horizontally because this has a wider view and you can better capture the interaction. We did not edit the images. We filmed **two to three times** per professional. After the filming (there could be some days in between filming sessions), the coaching sessions started.

> "With short images you can already see, discuss and reflect a lot. It seems feasible within our setting to work with video coaching in the future." (Coordinator)

Make contact, connect. As a researcher/coach, we gave the children and the professionals time to get used to the presence of the filmmaker. We tried to be present in an inconspicuous way. During the filming, the film-taker looked a lot above the screen in order to constantly connect with the professional and the children. We filmed with respect and feeling, respect for the fact that professionals were exposing themselves.

6.3.3 STEP 3 – View and discuss video images, individually or in pairs with a colleague or coordinator (coaching sessions)

1 – The coaching sessions

Practical. After each video recording we planned a video coaching session with the professional, individually, or in a duo with a colleague or coordinator. A coaching session lasted one hour maximum. The images were viewed together on a computer screen.

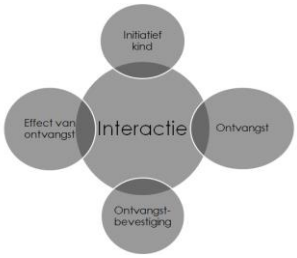
Coaching attitude. We created safety for the professionals. We did this by adopting an appreciative attitude. The coaching is based on the ideas of *'growth mindset'* (Dweck, 2017) and is focused g on the strengths of the professionals. We also used the insights of the 'self-determination theory' (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which states that people have three essential basic psychological needs: Autonomy, Involvement and Competence. When these needs are met, people feel motivated. These are necessary 'vitamins for growth' as a person and as a professional. That is why the researcher/coach was keeping these reflection questions in mind: Do I sufficiently respect the autonomy of the professional? Am I

working sufficiently on a relationship of trust? Do I ensure that the professional feels competent enough?

"My first fear was that I would not be able to be myself during filming and coaching, but because of the coach's attitude and questions, my fear disappeared." (childcare worker)

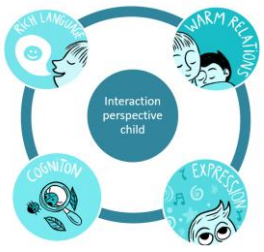
"The coach's questions are an added value in the process, especially the appreciative attitude." (coordinator)

Focus on the children, setting up micro-analysis and viewing the interaction from the perspective of the children. We made the micro-analysis by zooming in on the basic communication. We used a framework set up by the Flemish 'Video interaction guidance service' (2012)[8]. We looked at the *initiatives* that children took, how these were or were not *received*, whether or not they were *confirmed* and what the *result* of the interaction was. We used '**freeze and rewind**' for this (see a *Toolbox…*).



Bron. Steunpunt video-interactiebegeleiding (2012)

Looking at the interaction from the perspective of the children. Which initiatives do children take? What is it that the children do? What are they telling us? What are their intentions? How does it reflect their needs? By making use of the framework of high-quality interactions. (see 'Step 2 - How was video coaching used for reflection ') we 'gave language' to these initiatives, we worked on a common language to observe and to focus on them in the coaching sessions.



> "I experience the framework of high-quality interactions as concrete and positive to get started with. Very accessible for our field of work. It encourages critical reflection, individually and in the team. Every day, the professionals can indeed make the difference!" (Coordinator)
>
> "More attention to the quieter or more vulnerable children: by stopping the image and rewinding, you can see better what they need and how they come to play." (Childcare worker)
>
> "The advantage of being able to pause and rewind the image, is that I can now look at the activity from the child's perspective." (Childcare worker)
>
> "A toddler said: look at my sister on the playground. Me and the children looked and searched. Another child spontaneously responded to this and asked to find someone. Then I asked: 'do you see X?' It was nice to look and search together. I was able to

[8] www.steunpunt-vht-vib.be

> stimulate their language and thinking very spontaneously. It caused language opportunities for children who don't speak that much." (Teacher)

2 – The impact on the professional

Focus on the professional. Reflect on your own actions/practice. By focusing on the children in interaction, the professional also automatically looks at him/herself in interaction, which triggers reflection: do I notice a pattern in my own reactions and actions? What is going well? What am I strong at? In what ways can I grow? What do I find important as a professional? How do I want to be as a professional?

> "I was also surprised to mark my own expression and body language. I was also shocked by my own facial expression, my eyebrows rising in surprise, these were nice things to look at." (Teacher)

> "It is good to see yourself in the fragments, to see yourself speak, to hear, to see your own facial expression, how you interact, it's confronting but also instructive. It encourages you to think about yourself, who you are and how you appear." (Teacher)

We recognized **(1)** an **increased awareness and (2) an increased competence** among the professionals. Video coaching has both an impact on individual growth and on collegial growth/learning (see Step 6, on impact on team/organization). We describe quotes and examples that illustrate this in the section headed 'Vision on using video coaching as a means to professionalization' reported in the a *Toolbox...*

(1) Increased awareness by describing the interactions with the children.

> "It is nice to see that you immediately 'see' what effect a certain action has." (coordinator)

> "You could better see what a child actually needs, it increases your insight into the needs of a child, making adjustments possible.For eExample: I thought, 'she doesn't play, I give her other toys', but then I saw in the film that she actually had too much choice." (Childcare worker)

> "In this way, there are better opportunities for the quiet and quieter children, whom you might pay less attention to. These images are also a good medium for language and emotional support of children, to reflect on how to deal with that." (Childcare worker and coordinator)

"Through visual material professionals gain more insight into details, making careworkers more aware of the interactions and paying more attention to vulnerable children." (Coordinator)

"The coaching sessions are all about thinking on your ways of communicating with and reacting to toddlers, thus working on a warm relationship with them." (Teacher)

Through observation and reflection, the professional can become more aware of his/her own perceptions and nuance their thinking and practice more effectively.

”By seeing the video fragments, I was able to nuance my image about a certain toddler. I thought he was never involved, but I could see on the images that he does come and look at moments and participate.” (Childcare worker)

“I had experienced the activity as very busy and very chaotic, I felt that I was not in control. But by looking at the images, I could see it from the children's perspective. I think the children did not experience this as being as busy as I did. So I could change my view on this.” (Childcare worker)

“You see things that you would miss. For example: children who are sharing. I was surprised that the children also learn a lot from each other. I now dare to let go, I have gained more confidence.” (Teacher)

“It helped me to fill in my the follow-up documents which we use to document the development of the children. By filming you can see things that you would not have noticed otherwise. As a consequence you have better insights to help stimulate the children in their development. You start looking at children in a different way.” (Childcare worker)

(2) Increased competence by discussing the interaction through strengths (strength-oriented) and growth opportunities (growth-oriented).

Strength-oriented:

“I am a person who likes to give hugs and kisses. I saw during the coaching sessions that the children can go to me if they feel not so good or want attention. It was very nice to see this and it made me feel good.” (Childcare worker)

"You see yourself busy and that also reinforces the feeling that ‘apparently I'm doing well’, and that’s a nice experience. I am now doing even more of the things that went well. It gives me more confidence.” (Childcare worker)

“People come to new insights, to self-esteem and self-assurance, and that is very beautiful. It makes people grow and develop their talents. That way you also create a positive atmosphere towards the children.” (Coordinator)

Growth-oriented:

> "It is valuable to see that the childcare worker is given the opportunity to see and name her own learning opportunities, in which she can grow." (Coordinator)
>
> "The aim is to offer opportunities for a growth process and for more insights to arrive at that point, based on positive support: in terms of self-confidence, self-esteem, in terms of pedagogical skills: insight into children's needs, into the impact of their own behaviour on children, and get childcare workers sharing the same vision." (Coordinator)

Example of focus on the children, increased awareness and increased competence









When looking at the video fragments during a coaching session, we first focus on the children. The teacher immediately notices the initiatives of the boy next to her. He takes the **initiative** to say something by repeatedly tapping on her arm. (= *looking at the interaction from the child's perspective*). The boy would like to say something, but the teacher does not **receive** or **confirm** these initiatives. (= *making micro-analysis via basic communication*). The teacher now sees and **describes** this by looking at the screen, but at the moment of interaction she did not notice it (= *awareness increasing by describing the interaction*). Looking at the images, the teacher sees and 'gives language' to the boy's intention and need to speak. She interprets these initiatives of the boy using

the framework of '**high-quality interactions**' (see above), more specifically via the **lever 'rich language'**.

The teacher describes this as follows:

> "You see the boy sitting next to me tapping my arm three times, because he wants to say something, and I completely ignore him, I don't realize that. I didn't mean to ignore him, but that just happens because I'm busy ..."

After 'naming' the child's intention to speak, the teacher also reflects on her own actions. She calls it 'food for thought'. She reflects upon herself as a professional. She identifies the challenges and sees her opportunities for growth. She sees how she can make a difference for children who are more vulnerable, here: a boy who is vulnerable in terms of language (= ability increases by discussing the interaction.)

This is how the teacher describes her own growth focus: to actually see the initiatives the boy takes to speak, and to give him chances to speak:

> "I have to be able to pay attention to it, certainly because that boy is vulnerable in terms of language, I should let those children speak a lot. He does need it to be able to speak because last year he said nothing at all. And now he finally starts talking, so I should really let him speak."

Finally, we assured the professional that it is very normal not to have seen all the children's interactions. That would not be possible. Only a certain percentage of all the interactions can be seen. So not seeing all the interactions is no problem. It would only be a problem when specific children's initiatives are never seen all of the time. Video coaching is meant to see (new) interactions quicker, as was shown in this example.

6.3.4 STEP 4 – View and discuss video images in the team, reflect together (focus on the content of video coaching)

Before you work out step 4, it is best to repeat the two previous steps once, preferably several times.

1 – Scheme and key points

Scheme. In all settings we planned a team moment after the coaching sessions. The coordinator was the moderator. The role of the researcher/coach in the conversation was informative: talking about the TRACKs project, the process of video coaching, the filming, the frameworks. Some images were selected, shown and introduced by the professional.

The professional described what **she saw inD the images,** first focusing on the children and then on herself. The professional mentioned **new insights**, what went well / worked well and refers to the opportunities in the interactions. The meeting can be structured with target questions such as:

What do you see on the screen? Do you see other things than the professional who was filmed? How do you value this interaction? What is confronting, what is an eye opener? Do you recognize what the professional filmed mentions in terms of insights or action points? Do you see opportunities for growth?

> "You get more chance to grow by seeing yourself and getting feedback from others." (Teacher)

Autonomy, Involvement and Competence. As a coach, we kept the 'vitamins for growth' (Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2017, see also Step 3 above) in mind when asking these reflection questions. For example, we let the professionals decide autonomously which image fragments he/she wants to show and share with the team, which insights, which action points/opportunities to grow. We encouraged them to share positive fragments, in which you can see that something 'worked out well'. In that way they could feel competent and get spontaneous appreciation from the team. We could stimulate involvement and connection by observing together, making way for different perspectives (multi-perspectivity), learning together (collective learning) and growing. A nice side effect in this project is that there is also more connection between the childcare workers from the out-of-door care workers and the childcare workforce.

> "It was positive that you could choose the moments yourself and you could also decide whether or not to share the images." (Teacher)
>
> "I received warm reactions, they were involved." (Childcare worker)
>
> "I sometimes felt some uncertainty, 'am I doing it right?', but hearing my colleagues' reactions I felt better." (Teacher)

2 – Team reflection and collective learning

Collective learning. Becoming more aware and more competent together. Prevent small moments of exclusion together towards a more inclusive daily practice (less exclusion and more inclusion). The selected video fragments give way to reflection with colleagues on daily practices:

How inclusive is this? Where can children feel exclusion? On what else can we focus together?

They reflect on their own perceptions on children who are more vulnerable; by observing and thinking together in a team, unconscious patterns in the interactions can be discovered (e.g. assumptions or low expectations).

"This is a good way to professionalize your team, to make it stronger, and to give (more) opportunities to learn from each other." (Director)

"Colleagues recognized themselves in the fragments, and it led to a broader insight: 'we hadn't seen it that way yet'." (Childcare worker)

Link to quality interactions in the team and quality management in the setting. We tried to link the process of video coaching with existing processes or models in the organization and with the policy of our region (or country).

"I am positive about video coaching because we really noticed the change our colleague went through in this project, the change when observing and supporting the children. The professional really sets the team in motion. We also notice that we are reflecting more than before. The filming and coaching had its influence and we try things out. Filling in the quality documents is also easier linking them to the TRACKs frameworks. Video coaching works well when seeing fragments of children who are having a bad time. We can focus more on their needs and how we can support them. It is certainly also very useful for a quieter child, seeing what he says or does or what we would have missed." (Colleague of childcare worker)

"The method of video coaching is challenging us in looking for a balance between the exciting, the uncertain and the awkward, the vulnerable and the confrontational on the one hand, and the enormous opportunities for growth on the other. On the one hand the limited time you have got as a professional and on the other hand to create time and space to see things, gain insights." (Coordinator)

"Through video coaching we obtain lots of opportunities to fill in our quality documents in a more qualitative way. I can now write a lot more about the children through the insights video coaching explanation and training offered me [she refers to the levers of Quality Interactions]. Through better observation I get more insights in the development of the children. I try to integrate it into daily practices, I don't see it as something 'on top'." (Childcare worker)

"What I have experienced through video coaching is that you can offer every child more opportunities. By looking back you can help children better, support development better, see where there are still difficulties. And by helping one child, you can also improve the quality of the whole group." (Childcare worker)

Example of increasing awareness and competence as a team, collective learning and reflecting





During the team reflection we look at the video fragment. The childcare worker describes what she sees in the images. She mentions the boy's initiative: he is coming to show some waste package *(*= **focus on the children, interaction from the child's perspective**). She answers that he can throw this in the trash can and at the same time asks a question: 'are you going to put the trash can next to the red bin?' The boy does not respond to this (= ***making micro-analysis***). We rewind and review again (= *freezing and rewinding*). "He didn't understand my message, so I help him spontaneously. While watching the images, I realized how little the boy actually understands."

By helping the boy immediately, it is not clear which words and concepts he does or does not understand. The boy's need for this linguistic challenge in the functioning of his development is very clear. (= **framework for quality interactions, lever 'rich language'**). Through this interaction the childcare worker is becoming aware of this and of her own response (= ***awareness increasing by describing the interaction***). She expresses her own growth point / action point: "so from now on I will take this into account and give him short instructions, e.g. 'put the blue box in the hallway'." In this way she will give him language opportunities in understanding new words (e.g. colours) and concepts (e.g. spatial concepts) in daily contexts (= **competence increases by discussing the interaction, through seeing the growth opportunities of the professional**).

The childcare worker sees opportunities to make a difference and grow by realizing that this is important not only for this boy but also for other children who are more vulnerable in terms of language. She recognizes patterns in her own actions. "I always tended to give assignments to children who understand me well. Now I will try to give the children who do not understand me so well the assignments. I now realize that in the past I gave more assignments to the promising children, now I have become aware of doing this more with the other children, the children who are more vulnerable "(= **raising awareness and strengthening skills of how a professional increasingly can make a difference for children who are more vulnerable**).

A colleague with an immigration background is really upset. She also recognizes this pattern in her daily practices. She realizes now that she give more instructions to children who already have a good understanding of Dutch (the language of instruction), instead of giving instructions to children who need more language opportunities.

> "I did not think about it, I will honestly admit that I usually give the same children the opportunity for realizing tasks because they understand my instructions."

This is an eye-opener. Now she realises and understands her learning opportunities as a professional. Her colleagues also respond and recognise this. They talk and **reflect** on this: they would like to consciously give more opportunities to children who are more vulnerable in terms of, for example, linguistic interactions (**= becoming more aware and more competent as a team,** reflecting on each one's actions and ways of looking, making unconscious expectations explicit, discovering unconscious patterns of exclusion in daily interactions, jointly preventing the Pygmalion and Matthew effect, putting forward high expectations and a more inclusive living environment).

6.3.5 STEP 5 – Seeing opportunities in relation to parents or children

1 – Sharing video fragments with children

Describing children and reflecting. In two classes (small groups) we showed some images of the children on a large television screen and asked them to articulate what they saw. The toddlers each gave 'language' to the images. It gave them the opportunity to learn to think about the situation, event, interaction.

Opportunities for more dialogue and involvement of children. Looking together at specific fragments can increase their participation. It offers an opportunity to dialogue together and give the children a voice. For example, we filmed a group of children, after which we started a conversation: "what works well in the group?". We noticed that children could respond in clear words. "And what can we do to improve the situation?" We noticed that children can be a mirror to one another. So here one of the key elements is, again, non-evaluating, not 'indicating what bad behaviour is'.



"Children really enjoyed looking at themselves. Maybe it is an idea to film an event in the classroom and show it to them? I think they can become aware of things and learn a lot, to 'give language' to what they see or, for example, look for a solution together." (Teacher)

2 – Conversation with parents, warm reciprocal dialogue with parents

Parents see how their child really functions in the ECEC setting. Positive video fragments provide opportunities for a warm dialogue with parents. In a setting we showed short fragments to a mother. It was a fragment in which her son, who is very vulnerable in terms of language (due to a language disorder), still takes the opportunity to communicate and to make clear connections. The mother considered it to be incredibly valuable to see her son 'in action'. The out-of-school care worker was also present during this moment, and also for her this was a valuable moment to see how this child was functioning in the classroom.



"We showed the image fragment because we liked it so much. The mother is very worried about her son, about how his language development will be. She gets up in the morning worrying about this and goes to bed with it. When she comes to school she often hears things that are not so nice. But now she was so happy. The mother was not really aware of how things went in the classroom. She said, 'As a mommy you don't get many opportunities to see that, do you?' She was very glad. It pleased her a lot." (Teacher, emotional)

Parents of children who are more vulnerable are often invited to conversations that highlight less positive but rather problematic or worrying things. In our sessions we chose to work with positive video fragments. This opens the way to a warm, open dialogue with a focus on highlighting strengths and sharing concerns. And finally, working with video fragments also opens up opportunities for dialogue and connection between teachers and childcare workers from out-of-school care.

Other options of showing film fragments:

- When showing the ECEC premises to new parents, during 'open class' or information moments, images can give parents an idea of how an ECEC setting is organized, What 'a day in the life' looks like. This can have a positive effect on the parents, in particular relief and reassurance now that they can see what happens during the day. When parents have a question or are worried, the team can make a video to show how things are going.
- Images can be conversation openers with children and parents together.

6.3.6 STEP 6 – Finishing together: focus on the process of video coaching

> "Looking back at the video coaching project I see more self-assurance in my colleagues. As a coach and coordinator I give a lot of appreciation, but this method makes this even stronger." (Coordinator)

Focus group with the participants

The participants in the video coaching sessions in Ghent (pre-schools, out-of-school-care workers and childcare workers) came together to discuss the further implications of the video coaching method for their daily practices, as = individual professionals and as a team members. With their coordinators and directors, we exchanged the impact of video coaching on team reflection culture. The researcher/coach used train-the-trainer-methods to stimulate this exchange.

For this focus group we used the following questions to start the conversation, triggered by certain chosen photographs:

Warming-up: why would you recommend video coaching to another childcare worker, teacher, coordinator or director?

Question 1 - what made you grow as a professional?

Question 2 - what difficulties, opportunities do you see when using video fragments?

Question 3 - what kind of support do you need to continue video coaching? What do we need at team level? Any suggestions?

We also planned discussions with the pedagogical guidance services of the City of Ghent whom we spoke with during the start-up of the project. We organized a 'train the trainer' session for various pedagogical mentors and their coordinators. In this way we hope to contribute to strengthening professionalization at all levels and to closer cooperation between all professionals and services involved in the growth of young children.

6.4 Phase 3 – Evaluation: reflection on the trajectory / process of video coaching

In the final phase we reflected on the whole process within a focus group involving all the professionals and their coordinators who participated in the project. The interaction was initiated by three questions. We quote the participants' opinions.

Question 1: Looking back over the entire video coaching process, what do you think was most helpful in your own professional growth?

> "Three minutes of film immediately gave a lot of insight into the behaviour of a child, there was so much to see in such a short fragment."
>
> "You see things that in daily practice elude you. e.g: children who are sharing."
>
> "You can see better what a child actually needs, it increases your understanding of the needs of a child, so adjustment is possible. For example: 'I thought, 'she's not playing, I'd better give her toys', but then I saw in the movie that she actually got too much choice."
>
> "Surprised that the toddlers also learn a lot from each other."
>
> "You see yourself in your daily practice and that also gives me strength, 'I'm apparently doing well', and that is a nice experience. I now do more of the things that went well. It gives me more confidence."
>
> "I dare to let go now, I have gained more confidence."
>
> "I see more self-confidence in my team. As a coach/coordinator I give a lot of appreciation, but this video coaching method does this even more strongly. It is nice to see that you 'see' immediately what effect a certain action has."

Question 2. What do you think are critical points and difficulties when using video fragments?

> "The threshold to start, to be filmed. It takes a positive and open atmosphere to get something out of a video fragment to discuss. You should not have the feeling 'I'm going to be caught here,' 'my mistakes are going to be recorded."
>
> "Safety is necessary, which is still an issue for some colleagues."

"There are quite a few opportunities: people come to new insights, self-esteem and self-confidence, which is very nice. The video coaching method makes people grow in their talents. In this way you also create a positive atmosphere towards the children."

"It is nice to be able to decide for yourself what can be filmed, what not, what is discussed…I think that ownership is important."

"Filming itself is not always easy: one colleague films the other, but in the meantime you cannot pay attention to the entire group. So you need sufficient staff."

"Many opportunities to better fill in the follow-up administration of the child. By means of the video coaching explanation and training (the frameworks) I can now write much more about the children. Through better observation I learn to see the development of the children better. I try to integrate it into the daily operation, I don't see it as something 'on top'."

"In this way there are better opportunities for the quiet and quieter children, to whom you pay less attention. This is also a good medium for language support. And for emotional support for children (different emotions in children, how do you deal with that ...)."

"It is a search for a balance between, on the one hand, the exciting, the uncertain / uncomfortable, vulnerable and confrontational part and, on the other, the enormous growth opportunities of the methodology; on the one hand the limited time you have as a professional and on the other hand creating time and space to see things, gain insights."

About reflection in team:

"I hope that these kinds of insights can also grow at the team level."

"It offers the opportunity to see the positive sides of each other in the team."

"Nice that the coach in the team emphasized the positive, the appreciative,…"

"A positive side effect: more connection between out-of-care workers and preschool teachers."

Extra:

"This is also useful for showing some fragments to the children themselves. Children were surprisingly good in formulating what they saw, and how to change things which they see were not good. So, also with children, the method can be non-evaluative, not to be used to indicate 'what bad behaviour is'."

"In the past, the coordinator also showed images to parents – e.g. on an open class day. This also has a positive effect on the parents, especially relief, and feeling happy that the school is very open in this."

"Video fragments can therefore be a starting point for a conversation with children and parents."

"If parents have a question or are concerned, the team will now make a video to show how things are going."

Question 3. What support do you need to continue video coaching, both individually and at team level? What suggestions do you have?

"Compliments for the coach, she has reassured everyone well, has given confidence. The initial situation was clear: 'I am here to support, help you'."

"A reflection culture is needed within the team. Reflecting together is very valuable and powerful."

6.5 Final observations and recommendations – opportunities to have an impact on various actors in the ECEC setting

Overlooking the whole process, including the feedback and meta-reflections of the participants, coordinators and their pedagogical guidance services involved, we might suggest a few **recommendations** for whoever intends to start a similar project.

'Spacetime' for reflection as individuals and as a team

The focus group revealed the importance of creating a 'context' of mutual and collective learning, where peer visitation and team reflection can take place in a safe growth-oriented way, where professionals grow to become a 'reflective practitioner in a competent system', where they work together towards a more inclusive practice with less exclusion. So 'time and space' has to be created for these goals.

The team can use image fragments and photos for pedagogical documentation, e.g. a picture that is important for a professional to use to talk about interactions can also be used in a team to make collective learning visual.

The advantages for a team – if a reflection culture is created/established/maintained – in using the video coaching method are obvious: observing and interpreting images together as a team, looking at the same practices and yet seeing different things, having different perspectives and constructing a shared vision ... Multi-perspectivity as a key for dealing with diversity.

Through video coaching a team can share ideas and raise awareness as to how to work together on discussing quality interactions, how to create equal opportunities for children who are more vulnerable, how to create a more inclusive environment. This makes the organization sustainable, creating solidarity ("it is about the process and not about the product").

Cooperation between 'welfare' and 'education'

In Flanders there is a split system in the ECEC institutions: child or home care until 2.5 yrs (organized by 'welfare'), and pre-school (non-compulsory education, organized by 'education') from 2.5 yrs till 6 yrs old. Within the pre-school (and primary school) there is a system of out-of-school care (before and after school hours, midday care, on Wednesday afternoons and during school holidays). So children between 2.5 and 6 years old face different transitions:

- '*vertical*' transitions according to age: from child/home care to pre-school, from pre-school to primary school
- '*horizontal*' or '*micro*'-transitions during a day: from out-of-school care to pre-school class, several times a day.

In many situations – as in the municipality of Ghent – the professionals in all of these ECEC institutions try to work together, trying to work on a common mission and vision, focusing on the 'pedagogical continuity' for the benefit and wellbeing of all the children. Video coaching can be a strong method in supporting this.

The importance of appreciative coaching as a key factor

First of all, the ownership of images belongs to the professional who is being filmed and coached. He or she decides whether the images shall and can be used, which images, etc. This autonomy is an important aspect of the safety context, which is a condition to be created before filming and coaching. It is especially important when you want to share fragments with the team (knowing that the person responsible for the (performance) evaluation might be present).

Video coaching – as we have experienced it in TRACKs – should be with the coaching attitude and vision of appreciation, with a growth-mindset. And in doing so the coach 'lowers the threshold', so that professionals dare to be vulnerable in order to learn and grow (and not to be evaluated).

In this appreciative, growth-oriented setting, both the coach and the coached learn together, being amazed together as the start of gaining new insights. They both see opportunities in video fragments in interactions with children, in conversations with parents to build a warm reciprocal dialogue. They are looking together at what is going well in the interactions between professionals and children.

7. Implications for practice: Cross-national analysis

Starting from the countries' case studies presented in the previous section, it is possible to identify some recurring dimensions that can become extremely useful to ensure success in practice. In this final part of the toolbox we will try to offer a summary of these factors that could help in re-thinking initial and in-service training tools and pedagogical supervision for educators and pre-school teachers. By offering a summary of the aspects that should be taken into account, we particularly want to shed light on the possibilities and challenges that practitioners encounter when using video as a means to promote active learning and practices rooted in the inclusive paradigm.

Each case study has attempted to show the benefits of video-catching, video-elicited discussions and focus groups which can be used as powerful tools to sustain the professional growth of in-service educators and pre-school teachers through collective reflection and pedagogical guidance. Video-elicited discussions help professionals, reframing professionals' educational objectives, as well as finding possibilities to focus on children's needs and intentionalities , and align them with their own. In addition, video-elicited discussions help in identifying specific moments in which the intentionality of the educators supersedes that of the children.

First of all, each partner underlined the pragmatic **value of a preliminary training** for all professionals involved in the project for clarifying the goals and the main values of the TRACKs project. In each case study it was found that this initial training is extremely congenial to creating a climate of mutual respect. In particular the Polish case study highlighted how much this initial training is indispensable in preventing a culture of criticism and judgement. Creating opportunities for preliminary training helps the professionals involved to develop a climate of mutual trust that is essential to foster reflexivity and professional growth.

Each partner involved also underlined the **value of working in a team**. After creating a climate of reciprocal trust, professionals could increase their awareness and reflexivity thanks to the whole group of professionals. By working as a team, all professionals could share their personal and different points of view. Professionals could look at the same practice and yet see different things, have different perspective and multi-perspectivity could be considered as a key lever for dealing with diversity, something which is underlined by the Belgium case study.

Another dimension that could be unanimously taken into account is the importance of **having space and time for video-elicited sessions**. All professionals involved in each country have

underlined that video coaching requires time to return to the recordings with the main goal of stimulating reflexivity and professional growth. Having time and space for video-elicited sessions allows the bringing out of different points of view, new perspectives, a renewed attention to the children's intentionality. The group itself becomes a context of growth where sharing meanings that could help reflexivity and could stimulate new knowledge for re-interpreting educational relationships between adults and children, can take place.

The partners involved in the project also stress the importance of **having a proper toolkit** for the management of the entire research process and the video-coaching sessions, in order to stimulate reflexive approach in the analysis of the video data and during the daily life inside services. For this purpose, the toolkit elaborated within the TRACKs project (*Toolbox: using video analysis and video coaching as a tool for professionalizing ECEC workforce and training future ECEC professionals*) has the following characteristics:

- it is simple to apply
- it can easily be adapted to the specificity of diverse ECEC settings
- it can be revised and customized by the professionals who are engaging in the processes of video-analysis and coaching in different countries and ECEC systems.

Having a proper toolkit will guide trainers and coaches in facilitating practitioners' self-reflection and group reflection processes, allowing them to tailor the video-coaching methods to the specific needs of professionals working in each setting. Having a toolkit helps the professionals to adopt new ways of reading and interpreting the educational situations in which they find themselves acting. The aim is to focus the professionals' attention on children, on their intentionality (which does not always reflect that of adults) and on their different ways of communicating.

Finally, all partners involved agree that the video material can be a useful pedagogical documentation of the service, able to represent its history and the usefulness of working in a team.

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