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# EMPOWERING SCHOOLS

## EVIDENCE - INFORMED POLICIES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

*EENEE and NESET II Conference - Brussels, 23 November 2017*



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# Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward

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# Framework



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- **Competent staff in ECEC and in schools:** the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and of schools (which means **learning and wellbeing of children and families**) depends on well-educated and competent staff (European Commission, 2008; EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014).
- **Competent Systems (and Whole School Approach):** individual competences are not enough in this field. They need to be inscribed in a 'competent system' (CoRe → Urban et al., 2011; Vandenbroeck et al., 2016; Peeters et al., 2015; European Commission, 2015) – collaboration individuals, teams, institutions, governance.
- Need to invest in **initial training and in continuous professional development opportunities (CPD)** for the whole staff.



# Framework



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- **Multi-diverse societies** → no standardized solutions for all families/children.
- **Negotiation and reflection** are essential competences to be achieved by practitioners/teachers.
- Traditional forms of CPD (seminars, top-down approaches) need to be integrated with other ones, with a focus on the **active and democratic participation of staff** (Peeters et al., 2015).

→ **Still a challenge in Europe**



# NESET II Report



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**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** are an important answer in this direction

→ **NESET II report**



- *1) Definition of essential criteria for a PLC, together with concrete examples from different European countries.*
- *2) Providing 4 in-depth case studies from Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, Italy and Slovenia (ECEC and primary school)*



# PLC



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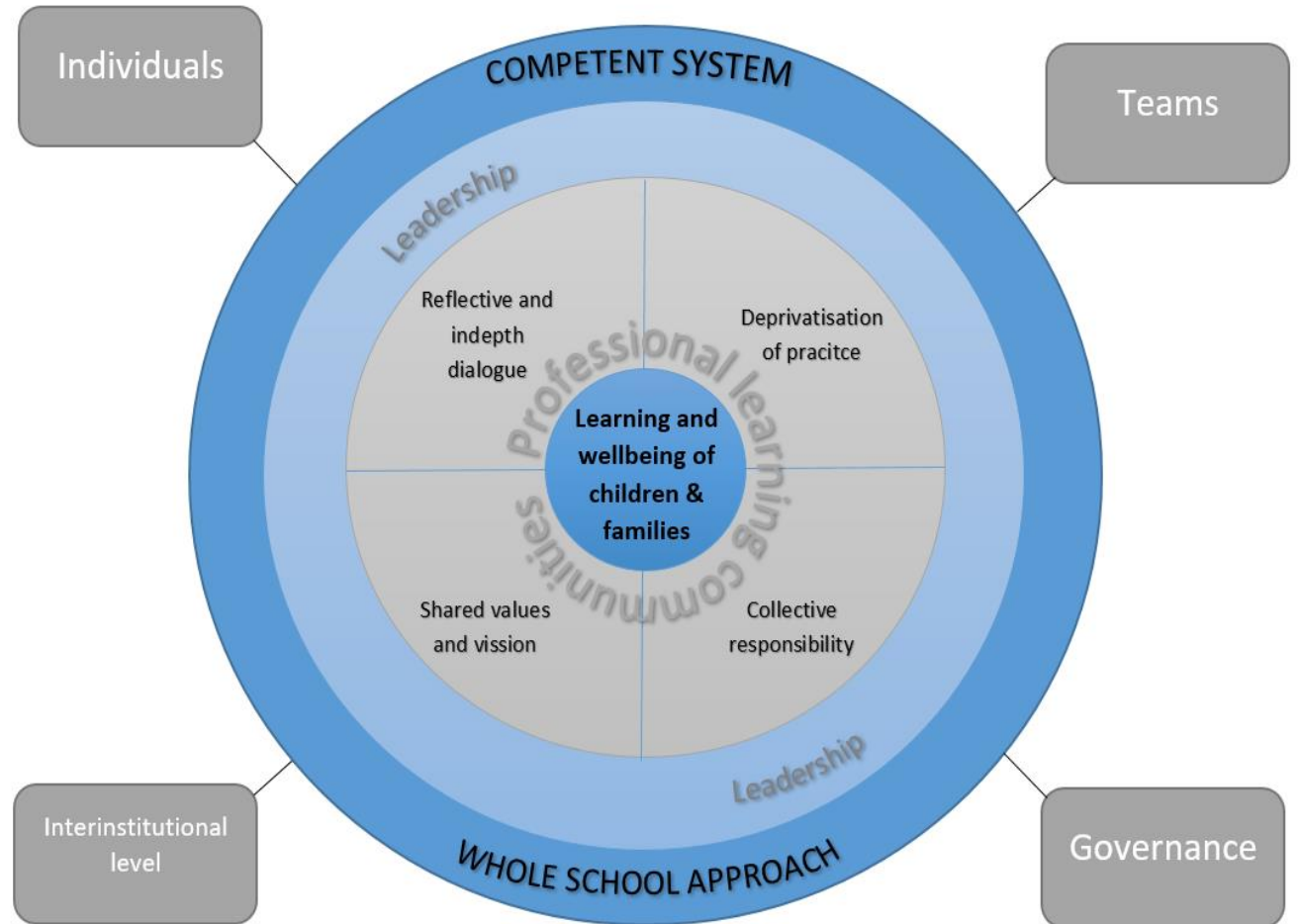
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PLC: 'a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way' (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 223).

5 criteria define a PLC.



# Key Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations



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## 1. *Need for 'reflective and in-depth dialogues' with colleagues*

- **Importance of co-reflecting on practice** (all case studies)
- **PLCs need to give all members the possibility to grow and learn:** directors, pedagogical coaches, practitioners/teachers, assistants etc. This means foreseeing a variety of learning methods (observations, supervision moments, team meetings, seminars, pedagogical documentation, job shadowing etc.) (Belgium; Croatia)
- PLCs benefit from the **connection of research and practice** (participative research) (Slovenia; Italy)



# Key Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations



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## 2. *Need of a 'de-privatization of practices'*

- **Observing each other's practice, planning together as team, having a dialogue with families and the neighbourhood**, support professionals in co-constructing meanings and practice and avoid the risk of isolation (all case studies).
- **European exchanges or job shadowing** are also interesting experiences in this perspective (Belgium; Italy).





# Key Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations



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## *3. Need to invest in 'collective responsibility'*

- **Bottom-up approach** (all case studies).
- **'Active participation' of staff in their learning process.** This increases their **motivation**. The latter is a key aspect in PLCs. Together with other aspects, related to the socio-economical recognition of the educational job, a strong motivation helps also avoiding staff turnover (Belgium, Slovenia).



# Key Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations



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## 4. *Need to focus on reaching shared values and vision*

- **PLCs need an open common framework of shared values and vision, based on children's rights and respect towards diversity.** The approach should be a **democratic and communitarian** one, in which the voices of families, professionals, children, the neighbourhood are listened to (horizontal and vertical continuity) (Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia).



# Key Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations



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## 5. Need to invest in 'leadership'

- Leaders (school directors, pedagogical coordinators etc.) can be drivers of change. PLCs in competent systems need **democratic leadership, capable of combining a top-down with a bottom-up approach** (all case studies).
- In order to be able to keep this balance, leaders need specific competences, and they cannot work in isolation → **specific trainings + support network** (all case studies).



# THANK YOU FOR



# YOUR ATTENTION

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