



Working with multilingual children and families in early childhood education and care (ECEC): guidelines for continuous professional development of ECEC professionals

NESET Analytical Report, 2023

Summary

This report explores how continuous professional development (CPD) can support ECEC professionals in acknowledging and welcoming multilingualism in ECEC, as well as in fostering language development of multilingual children. It synthesises state-of-the-art knowledge on (early) multilingualism and CPD of ECEC-professionals and draws on two case studies and a consultation of experts to formulate research- and practice-based recommendations on how to develop high-quality CPD to support ECEC professionals in their practices in relation to multilingual children and families.

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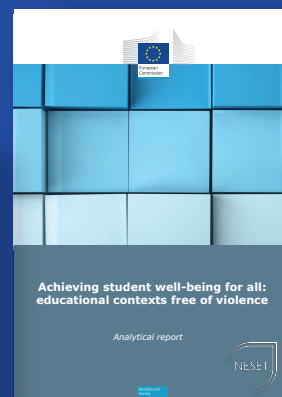
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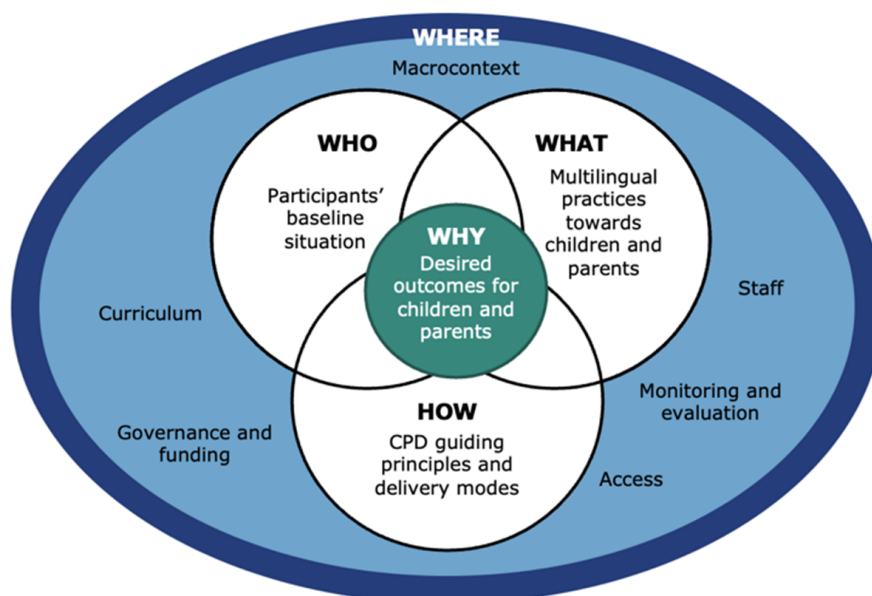
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Policy recommendations at European level, as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child advocate for language learning from a young age and promotion of multilingual education in ECEC. By positively approaching multilingualism, ECEC can contribute to a more inclusive society with equal opportunities for all. This, however, presents specific challenges for ECEC professionals. Educational practices are often geared toward monolingualism and many professionals feel an insecurity or lack of experience about approaching multilingual families.

The report

This report synthesises state-of-the-art knowledge on (early) multilingualism and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of ECEC-professionals. A five-component framework is used to unravel how effective CPD on multilingualism in ECEC can be developed and implemented. Two case-studies (from Germany and from Belgium) are presented as well. Lastly, the report includes the results of an expert consultation about working with multilingual refugee children and families in ECEC.



Key findings

As there are many ways in which a child grows up with its different languages, there are many ways to raise multilingual children and to support multilingual families. Instead of proposing one 'best' approach, an array of possibilities can be explored.

There is growing evidence that integrating home language(s) into ECEC supports institutional language development. Fostering home language(s) and institutional language(s) go hand in hand.

Children from multilingual families bring an added richness to the ECEC centre. Their full language repertoire is a resource for the child's own holistic development, and enriches the learning experiences of the other children.

Meaningful high-quality interactions support languages development of all children, including multilingual children. They can be created during ECEC daily routines, activities, etc.

An array of practices exist that can be used to actively integrate home languages into ECEC settings, help children to rely on their full linguistic repertoire and support parents in the multilingual upbringing of the child.

ECEC professionals often lack state-of-the-art knowledge on early multilingualism. There exist persistent beliefs and myths about multilingualism that are rarely discussed or questioned in ECEC teams.

CPD can positively affect language practices in multilingual ECEC contexts as well as the relationships between professionals and multilingual parents, when criteria for effective CPD are considered.

A menu-based approach to CPD is favored, by proposing various delivery modes which can be combined together for better adaptation to different contexts.

Recommendations

The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should:

- 1 Follow a step-wise design, in which the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families are defined in advance of selecting the targeted practices and CPD delivery modes.
- 2 Emerge from a positive vision of multilingualism and through collaboration with parents. It should draw on scientific knowledge, and also work well with existing policies.
- 3 Be tailored to the needs and capabilities of professionals. It should be adapted to specific contexts, and a range of practices and delivery modes should be put forward.
- 4 Be embedded within a sustainable, system-based policy on staff professionalisation.
- 5 Be integrated into an ongoing focus on quality within ECEC, and take into account all dimensions of the European Quality framework for ECEC.

Specific recommendations on CPD and on working with multilingual refugee children and families in ECEC, highlight the need to consider the particular legal situations of these families, as well as the extra stressors that influence their experiences, emotions and sense of belonging.

The full report and executive summaries in English, French and German are available online, free of charge at www.nesetweb.eu. Scan the QR code using your smartphone to access the report or enter the shortened link directly into your web browser: bit.ly/NESET-ML.