

Erasmus+

PEDAGOŠKI INŠTITUT



# START

**A good start for all: Sustaining  
Transitions across the Early Years**



vbjk

Vernieuwing in de  
Basisvoorzieningen  
voor Jonge Kinderen



The Project is funded  
by the European Union



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

IL PRESENTE MATERIALE È RISERVATO AL PERSONALE DELL'UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA E NON PUÒ ESSERE UTILIZZATO AI TERMINI DI LEGGE DA ALTRE PERSONE O PER FINI NON ISTITUZIONALI

# BACKGROUND

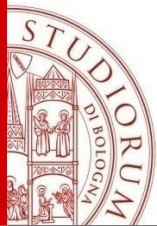


- Council Conclusions on Education and Training 'ET2020': [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/index_en.htm)
- Studies funded by the European Commission on the role of ECEC in tackling Early School Leaving (Rimantas, Peeters, Hayes et al., 2014)

Thematic Working Group on ESL (Final Report, 2013):  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf)

- Increased academic attention on transitions, but different perspectives:
  - School-ready children or children-ready schools?
  - Educational continuity, strong and equal partnership, pedagogical encounters...





# Where does the project come from?

## Shared concerns...

...the difficulties children experience over transitions have a long-term impact on their well-being and learning trajectories...

**SMOOTH AND INCLUSIVE TRANSITIONS**

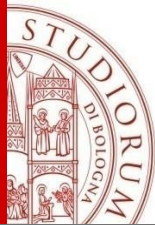
Fragmentation of pedagogical approaches and practices (SPLIT SYSTEMS - ECEC/CSE)

**SHARING MEANINGS AND NEGOTIATING PRACTICES BY INVOLVING ALL ACTORS**

...children who do not speak the dominant language and whose families come from different socio-cultural background are the ones experiencing more difficulties in this process...

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

→ Children are required 'to be ready' and to 'adapt' to what comes next (kindergarten, school...)



# ...and will to change perspectives...



## School readiness

- Learning in ECEC is functional to what come next (and ultimately the goal of schooling is to prepare responsible workers for labour market) - HIERARCHY
- early intervention for disadvantaged children
- Schoolification / pre-primary approach to early education (formalised learning, narrow curriculum approach)

OMOLOGATION

## Strong Equal Partners

- Each educational level is equally important, based on the acknowledgement that children learn in different ways at different times in life
- Interplay between continuity/discontinuity - COMPLEMENTARITY
- Inter-institutional cooperation respecting the pedagogical identity of each setting
- Mutual exchange re: approaches & methods

## Vision of a meeting place

- Dialogic perspective and shared vision - COMPENTRATION
- Negotiated values and pedagogical assumptions (image of the child, vision of learning, understanding of diversity...) -
- co-construction of educational contexts valuing multiple way of learning ('100 languages')
- Extended collegiality & shared reflection on practice and approaches

ETEROGENEITY

# The countries involved

Corby, UK:

- Pen Green Centre & Research Base
- Rockingham Primary
- Our Lady of Walsingham

Belgium /Flanders (Ghent & Aalst):

- VBJK
- Mezenestje childcare centre
- Sint Maarten kindergarten
- Mensen vor Mensen (AP)



Slovenia (Ljubjana & Tisina):

- Educational Research Institute
- OSTisina (pre- and primary school)

Italia, RER:

- Bologna University
- DD Vignola (pre- and primary school)

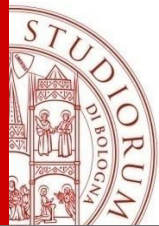




# Our partners...



UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA



# ...how? *Ricerca-formazione*

Participatory research approach involving all stakeholders (multiple perspectives): practitioners/teachers, children, families, community groups

Sustaining the empowerment of all actors involved starting from their needs and aspirations (what matters to them about transitions?)

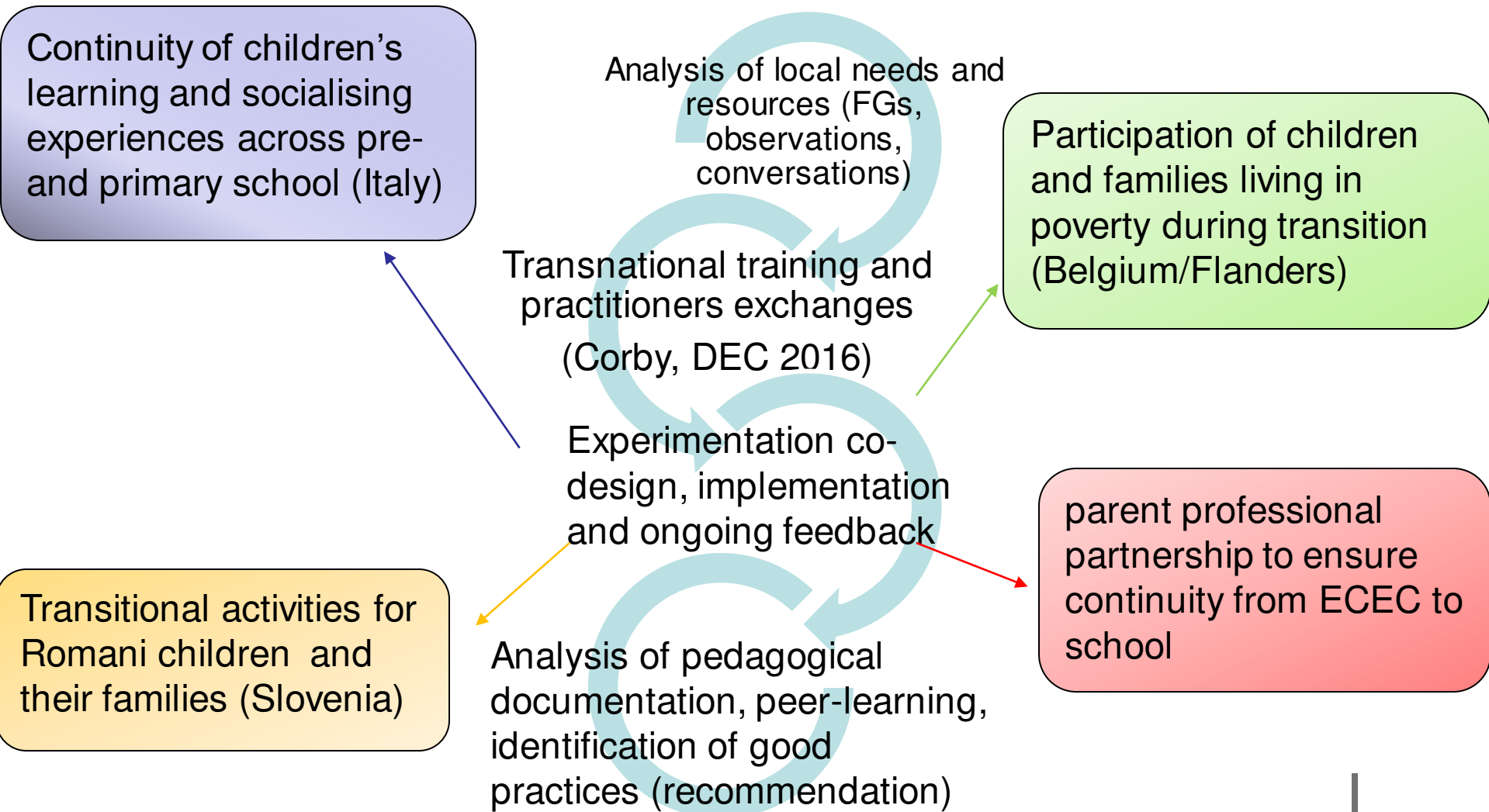
Recursive interaction between research and experimentation, between theory and practice

Peer-learning and reflection in groups  
Pedagogical guidance

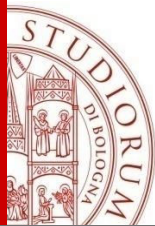




# *Participatory action research* as shared framework







# The Italian case study

- ✓ **Background:** from a split system (childcare and early education) into a unitary ECEC system (0-6) + vertical curriculum 3-14
- ✓ **Focus on DD Vignola:** starting from existing good practices to research-lead experimentation
- ✓ **Methodology:** generating change by combining practice-based research and action-training sustaining teachers' collective reflection on their practices
- ✓ **Sustainability over time:** from experimentation of continuity practices to educational innovation

# Policy background (I)

## MOVING FROM A SPLIT SYSTEM...

- *Nido* (childcare centres): attended by children aged 0-3
  - *Centri per bambini e genitori, spazi lettura, centri gioco* (so called 'experimental services'): attended by children 0-6 and their families
- under the **Ministry of Welfare, regulated at Regional level** (children's attendance 30% in E-R but great regional disparities)
- *Scuola dell'infanzia* (Kindergarden) children aged 3-6
- under the **Ministry of Education, regulated at National level** (children's attendance approx. 95% on national average)

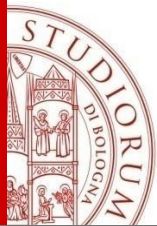




# Policy background (II)

**TOWARD A UNITARY SISTEM of 0-6 services** → from Law Proposal 1260 (advocated by *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia*) to Law Decree 65/2017:

- ✓ *Nidi* fully recognised as educational services under the **Ministry of Education**
- ✓ **Funded with the State contribution** (in addition to local, regional funding)
- ✓ **Integration of education and care along the continuum** of children's development from 0 to 6
- ✓ Diversification of provision to increase **accessibility** and **inclusion of diversity** (*Poli per l'infanzia*)
- ✓ **National curriculum for 0-3 services**
- ✓ ECEC staff professionalisation: **Bachelor in early childhood** compulsory for educators, **pedagogical coordination** extended to state pre-schools, as well as compulsory **ongoing professional development**



# Policy background (III)

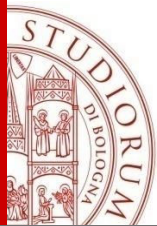
- LEARNING ALONG A CONTINUUM** → continuity of EDU-CARE approach beyond the 0-6, influencing primary school?
- School-ready for children perspective VS risks of school readiness:
- ✓ National curriculum 3-14
  - ✓ Comprehensive school institutions: pre-schools, primary and lower secondary schools
  - ✓ Initial professional preparation of pre- and primary school teachers at Master level (Scienze della Formazione Primaria, including specialisation for special needs teachers)



# The school context:

## Direzione Didattica di Vignola





# Starting from existing good practices...

**Joint planning of continuity projects** run every year (*ad hoc committee involving pre- and primary school teachers*)

**School visits** (older children as tutors) during which **joint activities / games** are carried out (*Sillaballando*)

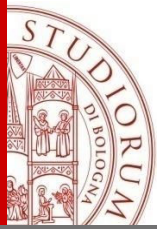
**Welcoming week:** children reporting their experience in preschool through artefacts (*libroni*)



Exchange of information about **children's learning pathways** involving pre- and primary school teachers (*documento di sintesi*)

**Documentation of transition processes** involving parents (collective meetings)





# ...to research-led experimentation

## Needs analysis

SEPT-DEC

- Children's experiences of transitions (drawings and observations)
- Parents' experiences of transitions (meetings with teachers and questionnaires)
- Teachers's experiences and expectations (collegial meetings)

## Action-based

### training

DEC-JAN

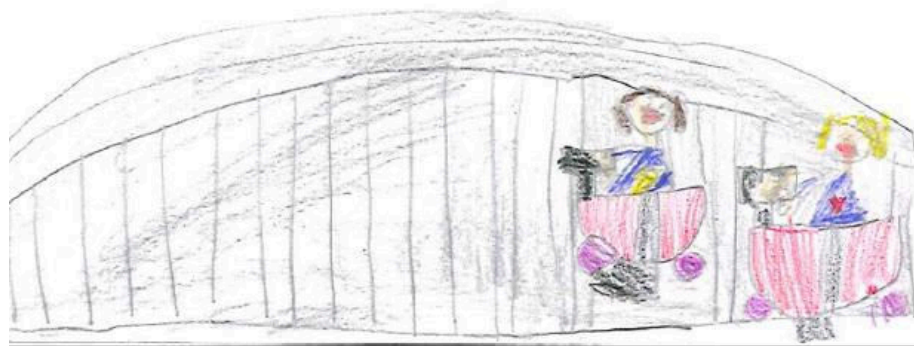
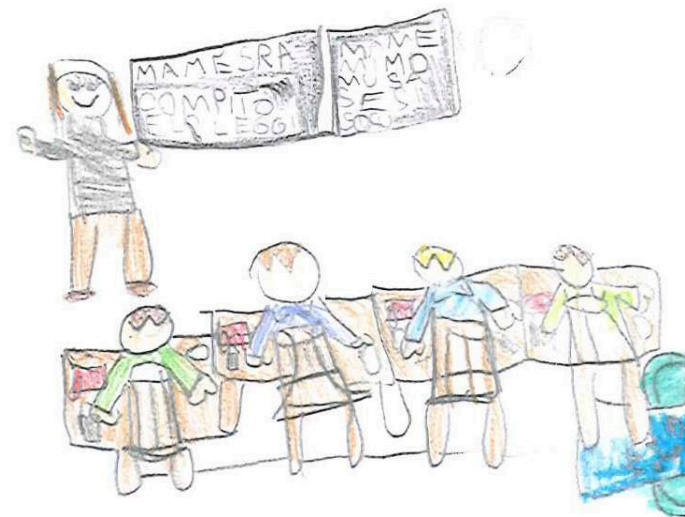
- More attention toward parents engagement (*'listening to parents' rather than 'talking to parents'*)
- Focus on children's learning experiences rather than activities (learning environment)
- Team learning among pre- and primary school teachers: reciprocal observation and joint reflection in team (researcher as a facilitator, supported by internal coordinator)

## Designing experimentation (A-R)

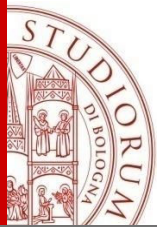
FEB-JUN

- Welcoming and giving voice to parents (open classroom for 2-days, individual meetings)
- Re-structuring classroom learning environment: circle-time, combining teacher-led and child-led activities (free-choice), more flexible organisation of time and space (tana della lettura)
- Support in planning, observation and coaching (researcher as a 'trainer', supported by coordinator)









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# CHILD

Why: To be re  
To be late

How: ① Organisations  
(entering times, process)

② Changes in scheduling  
(More Flexible, more up to the year)

③ Observations

WHEN Beginning of  
(After observation in different contexts)

# PROFESSIONALS

Why: 'professional culture' exchanges  
enhance reflectivity & professional growth

How: ① reciprocal observations in pre- and primary school settings focused on:

- the child - acknowledging their experience as point of departure
- the learning environment in primary expected from them in primary

② reporting in peer learning groups (obs tools) + feedback

③ reflections on videos (in pre documenting child)

WHEN: reciprocal observations starting in January  
preparation meeting with teachers

learning and discussion groups in whole duration of the project

① from the collective reflection on reciprocal educational & learning environment will in September

# FAMILIES

WHY Listening & understanding  
Engagement (meaningful)

HOW ① Questionnaires (open ended) what are their expectations? [multilingual translation]

② Documentation about their children [free choice, what they want teachers to know about their child/ren when they enter the school [primary]]

③ open day dedicated to parents and children in primary school (workshop for children, time for parents to talk to first grade teachers)

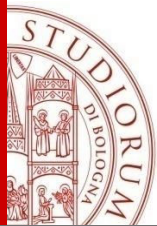
④ welcoming practices over the first two days of schooling, children & parents together at the entrance

WHEN: ① in pre school during parent meeting in February

② first interviews with parents in primary school (October)

③ at the end of school year (May)

④ beginning of primary school year



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# Looking ahead: from experimentation of continuity practices to educational innovation

- **Crucial role of coordinator in connecting research to school practices** (contextualisation, feasibility, coaching of teams, orienting school policies,...)
- Systemic conditions: **no-contact time available for practice-based research and reflection** (observation, collective meetings, ongoing training,...)
- **Creation of learning networks beyond the duration of the project** for the dissemination of good practices at local level (sustainability over time) -> **teachers as trainers!**



Check out the project website for updates:

<http://start.pei.si>