



The VALUE learning path: pilot Antwerp (Be)

AIMS

Central aim of the VALUE-project is to create a strong vision on educare and make it happen in policy and practice.

Principal, care-coordinator, teachers and other persons involved in interactions with the youngest children and their parents (policy and practice) :

- recognise that toddlers aged 2 (childcare or at home) or aged 2,5 (school) need a lot of physical and emotional care.
- make a warm environment for children and parents (homely)
- work together as a team to realise an environment where they can offer emotional care next to physical care
- facilitate educare in the classroom (design of the room, equipment)
- recognise each other's strengths and weaknesses and support each other in educare. Strengthen volunteers (gain knowledge and skills), give volunteers more agency, (what can be their role in contacts with parents and contacts with teachers during moments of transition? How can they strengthen teachers and how can teachers strengthen them?)
- make care visible for parents
- recognise the importance of care for parents
- recognise moments of transition for children and the meaning of these moments for children

METHODS

- bring all persons involved together, give each other inside in own ideas and interactions with children and parents, give space to express and exchange perceptions on the own job, the job of other colleagues and responsibilities of the parents
- learning to know good practices and discuss possibilities of transfer to the own school context,
- discuss observations in the classroom, observations during contacts with parents, observation of moments of transition



- reflect on theory ('wellbeing, belonging' - well known in childcare, against 'learn to be independent' – goal in school), 'educare', 'being able to take care for oneself' as a goal or condition (prerequisite), school readiness or child readiness?
- Reflect on cases using WANDA
- Coaching (listening, questioning, give inspiration, confronting, give appreciation,...)
- create safe learning environments with small groups of peers
- discuss policy issues with policymakers (principal, care-coordinator): what are possibilities, choices to make?

PROCESS

Specific on preparation phase

In this phase the school principal, the care-coordinator and care-teacher were involved together with the trainers. The presence of the care-teacher was important to represent the school teachers. In total, there were 3 formal meetings to present the project, discuss their interest and expectations, the school context, strengths and weaknesses. Already in June 2018 we discussed the action plan, who should be involved, the building blocks and underpinning principles TOT. During a tour in the school and a tour in the neighbourhood of the school, the trainers met the trainees. During an informal moment (school dinner) the trainers learned to know the trainees. In a written report, the action plan was documented as well as the persons involved, ideas about methods that could be used, questions. Observations and reflection about teachers ideas were discussed in between the trainers (form of documentation).

This lead to activities: discussed methods were used in the learning and action phase. During the tour in the school neighbourhood, the teachers expressed their ideas about responsibilities of parents (also parents living in poverty). As a consequence, we discussed limitations in possibilities and also responsibilities of parents.

This lead to engagement: it was taking care of that persons who should be involved, could attend the meetings.

This lead to results: teachers, child care worker and volunteers (trainees) had confidence in trainers making observations. Volunteers showed understanding for parents who doesn't bring diapers etc.



Unforeseen was:

- a lot of good practices that already existed, were presented. In that way, the school expressed its engagement. We promised to give back these practices to the teachers and volunteers as a token of appreciation and to document these practices in the project.
- Teachers strong ideas about responsibilities of parents
- Strong idea of the school principal about Flemish policy. One of the core intentions of the principal is to show that educare is not possible without financial support and extra professionals.
- As the principal presented the project to the teachers and the trainees didn't have notice about the motivation of the teachers and volunteers, during the first meeting, there as a lot of attention for this.

! In the design of the project, building trust and learning to know each other (preparation phase?), further took place in the following meetings, as well as learning and action.

Specific on the learning and action phase

Design:

There are 6 meetings (every 6 weeks during 2h30).

The first meeting was a kick-off meeting. Here, the project was introduced and everyone involved, learned to know a good practice (visit to Hippo's Hof). We discussed the meaning of 'educare' and similarities, differences and opportunities for the own school context (policy and practice).

In order to analyse the needs and set the goals, we spend extra time to be present in the school and to listen to the teachers and volunteers. In extend, we made different observations and analyses and gave them back to the group.

In this phase of analysing needs, setting goals and gaining trust, we organised extra meetings to work separately with principal, care-coordinator and care-teacher (on policy-issue, on what we were allowed to engage trainees in). Because of the importance of a participatory process, they also attended the six weekly meetings.

The following 6 weekly meetings with the trainees were called 'learning-labs', as they are designed to explore and learn. There was input from observations and reflections (from trainers and trainees, internal and external), from different theories, presented by text, film, roleplay or explained by the trainees. To reflect on action, we used WANDA. Sometime, we worked in different groups: teachers and childcare worker in



one group, volunteers in another group. During meetings in between, we presented reports of every observation to the care-coordinator annex our own reflections and analyses (also of what happened during the learning-labs), we discussed these analyses, provided extra theoretical input and discussed the possibilities for the next learning-lab as well as for school policy.

Who is involved:

principal, care-coordinator, care-teacher, teachers (4) who are involved with the youngest toddlers, childcare worker (who is present for 9 hours every week), supervisors (4 volunteers) who are responsible for the children during pre- and after school time and during teachers lunch break. (Children can sleep in school. One of the volunteers is in particular responsible for those children).

The gym teacher enables the teachers involved in the process, to attend the group meetings. The children participate in gym classes during that time.

The aim of the school is to make this project a project for the whole school. Therefore, the process is frequently reported in teachers meetings.

Time schedule:

Trainers and trainees already met four times during learning-labs. Two more learning-labs are planned in May and June.

Trainers and trainees also met during a tour to learn to know the social services & family support services in the neighbourhood as well as the specific living conditions of families attending the school. They also met during observations in the school.

General content:

Cf. AIMS

In addition we discussed:

- differences between child care and school
- daily frustrations about diapers,
- involving volunteers and depending on them (quality issue, ethical issue)
- what does 'taking good care' means? What does it involve?
- children helping each other as an educational goal or as an answer to the lack of care of adults in the school context (too little professionals or volunteers are present)



Methods for reflection and discussion:

Cf. METHODS

Activities, specific output, ongoing results:

- Care-coordinator, care-teacher and teachers now know what volunteers do and respect this
- Equipment to change diapers is now present in every class room
- Volunteers can express the feelings of a child, the meaning of their interactions for the child.
- Volunteers know that they have an important role to report to the teachers what happened at the school yard (also special needs, feeling of the children)
- Volunteers know that they play an important role to parents (confidence) and consequently to children.
- Volunteers are very aware about the fact that some children don't need diapers at home anymore but changing conditions (going to school) make they need diapers again. They complain about parents who are in disbelief and don't want to bring diapers to the school. They can see that it also can be an financial issue.
- Friday afternoon, teachers change classrooms. As a consequence it's not the same person who needs to take care of the youngest children (with diapers).
- In the room where children can sleep, the volunteer who supervises the child, made an instrument where it is visible which child needs a bottle, a blanket, ..
- Although the presence of children with diapers in the school brings frustrations, the general idea is that those children can come to the school.

Documentation:

- Preparation of the meetings
- Written narratives about what happened during the meetings and what to discuss with the care-coordinator
- Photos that document the methods used and the result of processes during the learning-labs.

Unforeseen things that happened:

- Working with the volunteers was difficult, as teachers had no respect to listen to them and the volunteers had low self-esteem to speak up. We noticed a big difference in knowledge (language like 'wellbeing', 'belonging'). For volunteers it was difficult to express the meaning of their job. In the second meeting they had the intention to leave. In the design, content and methods in following meetings we made some adaptations.
- Although observations show that teachers tell parents to focus on potty training, that they give a lot of instructions about what they should do and what their child should do; the care-coordinator strongly believes in how the first contact with a child and his parents is organised.
- Since January, the school principal is absent and the care-coordinator is not taking up any decisions.
- Child care worker was absent during the last meeting. Next time, we will give here a prominent place.
- Care-teacher was absent during the two last meetings with the care-coordinator. Reason: when teachers are ill, the care-teacher has to take their place.
- The belief (care-coordinator, teachers) that there is not much to do because there's lack of finances and professionals, is strong. They shared some experiences that showed that Flemish policy is not taking care of educare.

CONDITIONS

In the document "VALUE professional learning path – draft framework" different conditions for supporting sustainable change are stated. At the transnational meeting in Denmark (March 2019) we would like to discuss some overarching themes that are related to these conditions. Please briefly describe the conditions that are crucial in your VALUE pilot and how you cope with them.

- The trainers discover the needs during the whole process. Still on-going.
- Strong leadership: the participative design chosen, worked well in the beginning. Also the open and trusting attitude from the principal and care-coordinator helped. We experienced that teachers were used to participate



and work together (kind of team spirit, recognize each other's burden and care for each other). We also noticed that volunteers were not used to participate before and felt not recognize. Set up a process in order to gain recognition for them was necessary. Now we can grow to a more collaborative approach between all ECEC-practitioners but we are unsure about how much agency is wishful for volunteers.

- Ownership is stimulated by the design of the project but the absence of the principal is a problem. Furthermore, the care-coordinator 'listens' to every frustration, idea, wish, but doesn't make any promises or motivates to gain actual change. The instrument for the children taking a nap is designed by the trainees themselves.
- Facilitator: knowing the language of the school context/ teacher, knowing group dynamics , coaching skills, knowing how to emancipate people, knowing how to work with people who have no schooling, little language to express themselves, analyse narratives, meanings that people give.
- Safe context: cf. adaptations mentioned.
- The local context and the needs of the ECEC-centre are taken into account:
 - o They will build a new school and gain a lot of inspiring ideas about the design (in and outdoors)
 - o There are a lot of families who don't speak the language of the school, aren't familiar with the school context, are poor. We motivate to reflect on what is needed, especially for those parents and children.
 - o Next to the school is a child care organisation. They already had contact. During the project we intensify the relationship. They are learning to know each other and exchange experiences and practices.
- What after the project? At this time, there are no ideas yet, about the process after this first year.

Stakeholders group

Stakeholders:

- gym teacher
- other teachers in the school (as this is a project of the hole school)
- parents



We didn't take up any action until now. We are not aware of actions taken by care-coordinator.

