



Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and
Diverse Learners on the Early childhood Road

Report

Promoting the Wellbeing of Toddlers within Europe

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Introduction to the Report

The TODDLER Project focuses on one of the EU Commission's priority themes for 2009-2010 identified in EURYDICE (2009), by supporting early years' practitioners, teachers and students in their understanding of how to promote development of toddlers (aged 18 to 36 months) from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

“The policy challenge, therefore, is to (re)build (current) systems of early childhood care and education that meet crucial design features as outlined above, that provide high quality care and education for all children, that are integrated, attractive and affordable to all families regardless social class or minority status, yet that is sensitive to differing educational needs and to compensate early educational disadvantages” (EURYDICE, 2009:39)

The aim of the TODDLER Project is to develop reflective practitioners who can promote and improve practice to provide effective early years care and education for diverse and disadvantaged toddlers in reaching their full potential.

This report has been compiled using experiences and expertise from each partner country exploring the different contexts and perspectives of wellbeing that influences practice. These materials have been left verbatim, as far as possible, to maintain the context and originality of each country.

Each partner has been asked to provide a definition of wellbeing and to identify their country's underpinning legislation and research on wellbeing. This information has been compiled into a report/handbook which can be used as teaching materials in conjunction with the PowerPoint.

Contents include:

- Definitions of wellbeing
- Theoretical backgrounds
- Literature Reviews
 - Curriculum documents
 - Piece of National Research
 - Recommended Reading

These materials are photocopyable for teaching purposes.



Belgium – Flanders

Definitions of wellbeing

“When we want to know how each of the children is doing in a setting, we first have to explore the degree to which children feel at ease, act spontaneously, and show vitality and self-confidence. All this indicates that their emotional well-being is OK and that their physical needs, the need for tenderness and affection, the need for safety and clarity, the need for social recognition, the need to feel competent and the need for meaning and moral value in life are satisfied. Interventions that secure the well-being of children make them stronger and keep them in touch with their feelings and emotions.”

Reference:

Laevers F. (2005) *Experiential Education – Deep Level Learning in Early Childhood and Primary Education*. University of Leuven



Belgium – Flanders

Theoretical background to children's wellbeing

Belgium has a long history of a split system between education and care. Childcare for children from zero to three is under the auspices of the Ministry for Welfare, while children from 2.5 years of age attend kindergarten centres, which come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Vandenbroeck, Pirard and Peeters, (2009). Therefore both settings are described in their use of the concept of “well-being”.

Toddlers and well-being in CARE settings

As part of its policy to improve the quality of care provisions, Kind & Gezin [Child & Family] -the Flemish agency that supervises the care sector - took the initiative to develop an instrument that had to meet three requirements:

- (1) it has to serve as a tool for self-assessment by care settings;
- (2) it must take the child and its experience of the care environment as the main focus to look at quality and;
- (3) it must be appropriate for the wide range of care provision including care for the under three's in day care centres and family care as well as the out of school care for children up to the age of twelve.

The instrument has been developed by a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University – Belgium) under the supervision of Dr. Ferre Laevers. SiCs is based on a conceptual framework that has been developed during the last decades in the context of innovative work in pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education. Two indicators of quality are central to this ‘experiential’ approach: ‘well-being’ and ‘involvement’. Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to secure ‘mental health’. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development. SiCs is designed to help settings to get aware of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to create the best possible conditions for children to develop. Although heads of settings or coordinators are collecting most of the data through observation, every supervisor in the settings is actively involved in the procedure of self-assessment. The process of reflection and action is seen as the responsibility of the whole team.

Further information is available at:

<http://www.kindengezin.be/algemeen/english-pages.jsp>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AAMAUbFIE&feature=related>

Toddlers and well-being in educational settings

In the core curriculum for preschool education, set out by the Flemish government, the following goals are detected, related to the concept of well-being:

ME AND MYSELF

The pre-school children:

- 3.1 are aware when they are afraid, happy, angry or sad themselves and are able to express this simply;
- 3.2 are able to describe a situation which has recently happened and in which they were involved in simple language in a dialogue with an adult and say how they felt;
- 3.3 in specific situations reveal sufficient self-confidence about their own abilities.

ME AND THE OTHER

The pre-school children:

- 3.4 are able to recognise different ways of interacting in specific situations and talk about them;
- 3.5 are able to recognise feelings of anger, joy, fear and sadness in others, and empathise with that feeling;
- 3.6 know that people can experience the same situation in different ways and can respond differently;
- 3.7 reveal sensitivity to the needs of others;
- 3.8 are able to stand up for themselves by giving signals which are understandable and acceptable to others.

ME AND OTHERS: IN A GROUP

The pre-school children:

- 3.9 are familiar with and understand ways of interacting, rules and arrangements which are important for being together in a group;
- 3.10 are able to make arrangements in specific situations, with the help of an adult;
- 3.11 are able to check whether others are following the rules in an activity or game in a small group.

These goals are common for all schools in Flanders, private as well as public schools. Often the concepts of well-being and involvement (defined by the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University – Belgium)) are used to put these goals into practice. The Research centre developed ‘A Process-Oriented Monitoring System for Early Years’ as a tool for quality control in pre-school. This system focuses on the major indications for quality: well-being and involvement. Children are screened using a 5-point scale for both dimensions. For those who fall below level 4 practitioners are guided to more advanced observations. This approach gives a sense of purpose and efficacy: you get immediate feedback and can get to action without delay. Screening of the group four times a year has not only proven to be practicable but also most effective to raise levels of well-being and involvement in all children and improve achievements.

Further information is available at:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/english/index.htm>

<http://www.cego.be/en>

References:

Laevers, F. (2011): *Experiential Education: Making Care and Education More Effective Through Well-Being and Involvement*. Published online.

Laevers, F., Declercq, B., Colleen, M., Moons, J. en Stanton F. (2011): *Observing involvement in children from birth to 6 years*. CEGO Publishers NV, Leuven.

<http://www.averbode.be/observing-involvement-in-children-from-birth-to-6-years>

Laevers, F. (Ed.) (2005): *Well-being and Involvement in Care Settings. A Process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument*. CEGO, Leuven.

Agentschap voor kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming, Curriculum (2010): *Ontwikkelingsdoelen en eindtermen voor het gewoon basisonderwijs*. Brussel,



Belgium – Flanders

Literature Review

Curriculum Documents

Core curriculum for preschool education, Flemish government, Belgium

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National Research

Laevers F. (2011) *Experiential Education: Making Care and Education More Effective Through Well-Being and Involvement*. Belgium: Leuven University / Centre for Experiential Education,(Published online February 14, 2011)

Recommended Reading

Laevers F. Declercq B and Stanton F. (2011) *Observing involvement in children from birth to 6 years*. Cego Publishers NV

<http://www.averbode.be/observing-involvement-in-children-from-birth-to-6-years>