

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Belgium/Flanders case study report 2 Tackling Behavioural Issues with Pre-school Children

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November 2008

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London
- Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
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Tackling behavioural issues with pre-school children

1. Description

Country	BELGIUM, Flanders
Title	<i>Tackling behavioural issues with pre-school children (Linker)</i>
Funded by	Euregio Scheldemond 'Interreg III'
Action implemented by	
Partners	<p>Arteveldehogeschool</p> <p>VCLB Regio Gent</p> <p>Interstedelijk CLB</p> <p>CLB van het Gemeenschapsonderwijs</p> <p>Departement lerarenopleiding van de Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen</p> <p>Vakgroep Ontwikkelings-, Persoonlijkheds- en Sociale Psychologie van Universiteit Gent</p> <p>Regionaal Pedagogisch Centrum Zeeland</p> <p>Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst Zeeland</p> <p>Seminarium voor Orthopedagogiek regiokantoor Zeeland</p>
Cost 2006-2007	
Where did it operate? Local, regional, national ...	<p>Regional:</p> <p>Belgium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - East-Flanders - West-Flanders <p>Netherlands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zeeland
Target group (theme, or other)	Pre-schoolers between 4 and 6 years
Theme (of 7 strands)	Ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities, religious minorities, indigenous minorities, socio-economic disadvantage, gender, disabilities
Duration from	May 2004
to	December 2006

1.1 Rationale for action

Scientific knowledge and research has shown that behavioural problems have a bad prognosis if they are not dealt with at an early stage. The project wants to prevent the persistence and escalation of behavioural problems by intervening between the age of four and six.

The prevention policy of *Linker* wants to meet certain standards:

- The policy has to start from a theoretical founded vision.
- It is necessary to perform a screening.
- The policy has to exist out of universal and selective prevention programmes aimed at the whole population or at particular groups, based on risk factors.
- Depending on age, different strategies have to be used.
- Evidence-based working is recommended.
- Working “ecologically” is an added value. Involving the context of the child is very important according to this vision.

The question was raised to set up a prevention policy that meets these standards.

1.2 What are the aims of Linker?

Linker is a preventive, ecological approach to behavioural problems with pre-schoolers between 4 and 6 years. The project wants to intervene at an early stage so “problem behaviour” from pre-schoolers doesn’t develop any further.

1.3 How does Linker work?

Linker works according to three principles:

1. They work ecologically:

This means that the environment of the child is mapped so the complexity of the problem behaviour can be understood and adequate interventions can be planned. According to this principle the project works with the child, the parents and the teacher/school

- Social skills training for the children:

Two programmes are used for the training: the *Axenroos* (Cuvelier, 1998) and the *Interactiewijzer Jonge Kind* (Verstegen and Lodewijks, 2003). The teacher tries to integrate social skills in the daily class practice. Schools informed parents about the training so the approach can also be followed at home.

- Pedagogical support and training for the parents:

First of all parents have to be involved. Parental involvement and participation were ensured through information evenings and other activities such as school festivities, teacher-parent contacts, etc. It is important to have a good relationship with the parents at all times, not only when problems are presenting. Training can be offered to the parents on the first or the second level. Individual guidance is given if necessary.

- Tips to create a positive and safe climate in the classroom for the teacher.

Linker also tries to make all these actors work together to make integration possible.

2. They work on several prevention levels:

- On the first level, actions are meant for all pre-schoolers and pedagogical activities for parents.
- On the second level actions are meant for the pre-schoolers who already have problems. This problem behaviour can happen at home or at school.
- On the third level, actions are meant for when problems persist and no change is noticeable. In this case, a referral is made to a specialised organisation or the action plan is revised.

Linker works in a preventive manner, so the focus is on intervention at level one and level two.

3. *Linker* works according to the principles of “action directed diagnostics”:

- Different phases that result in a useable advice towards child, parents and teachers are followed systematically.
- On the second level, an action plan is made according to the principles of “action directed diagnostics”.

1.4 How is *Linker* organised?

To make sure the project succeeds many tasks and responsibilities have to be fulfilled. The people working together are:

1. The steering group

The steering group is involved directly from the start of the project. The steering group follows the process of the project and evaluates if the goals are reached.

The steering group exists out of the partners that are investing in *Linker* in a financial way or with manpower. The seven institutions are *VCLB regio Gent*, *Interstedelijk CLB Gent*, *CLB Gemeenschapsonderwijs Gent*, *Euregio Scheldemond*, *Regionaal Pedagogisch Centrum Zeeland*, *Gemeenschappelijke Gezondheidsdienst productgroep Jeugdgezondheidszorg* and *Arteveldehogeschool COMPahs Leraren & Scholen*. The project co-ordinator participates in the meetings of the steering group.

The main task of the steering group is to guard the progress of the project. The plans of the project team are evaluated and if necessary adjusted. The steering group has to make sure the aims are reached.

The steering group gathers every three months.

2. The project team

The project team is responsible for the daily organisation during two years. The project co-ordinator has the final responsibility.

The project team exists out of 5 part-time members. One of them is project co-ordinator and one of them is responsible for the administration. One of them works in the Netherlands, the rest of them work in Flanders.

The main task of the project co-ordinator is to make sure that the project runs fluently and to ensure the goals are reached. They also lead on meetings. They are the contact person for external organisations. They also have to write a scenario detailing all the steps of the project.

The other members organise the trainings for the teachers (how to organise a social skills program in the classroom, how to give training to a parent, how to communicate with the parents if there are problems with their child, etc.). They support the schools and the field workers. They write the project book and are responsible for courses.

The project team gathered every two weeks until January 2006 and from then monthly.

3. The field workers

The field workers are recruited of *CLBs* (Centres for pupil guidance) (Flemish situation) and out of *RPCZs* (Regional Pedagogical Centres Zeeland) and of the *GGDs* (Common Service of Health). 14 *CLBs* and 5 *RPCZs* and 7 *GGDs* participated.

The field workers have an important role in the project. They are the contact persons between the school and the project team and transfer all information. Their task is to guide schools. They have to transfer knowledge, follow courses, coach teachers, give parent training, give social skills training, attend field workers meetings, etc.

The field workers are assisted by the project team. They gather monthly.

4. The participating schools

Field workers select the schools. Schools have to be motivated to get involved in the project because a time investment is asked.

In Flanders, 21 schools (13 in East-Flanders and eight in West-Flanders) participated. In the Netherlands, nine schools participated. The schools make a leaflet for the parents of the pre-schoolers and organise a parent evening to present the project. At the parent evening the method of the project is explained.

The schools ensure that there is a social skills programme in the pre-school. The teacher can also contact the parents and inform them about the opportunities offered by the project.

5. The advice group

Diverse external organisations take part to the advice group.

The advice group can give advice or suggestions about the content of the project.

2. Results

In this section, only the evaluations from Flanders are discussed.

1. First evaluations:

How:

Half of the evaluations at the end of the first year of the project were oral evaluations, the other half were written evaluations. The following items were evaluated:

- courses
- social skills programme at school
- parent participation
- other initiatives

Findings:

1. In most schools the project worked quite well.
2. Every school started with the implementation of a social skills programme in one or more classes. Schools were very creative in the way they implemented the programme. Pre-schoolers reacted enthusiastically.
3. 19 out of the 21 schools offered a parent training. Some schools opted for a parent training for all parents, other schools opted for a more intensive training meant for parents of children with problem behaviour. Most of the trainings were organised during the evenings and concerned about 5 sessions. Parent trainings were free or a small contribution was asked.

Schools with non-Dutch speakers made efforts to offer pedagogical support for those parents as well. Most of these meetings took place during the day. There was a translator present and there was day-care for the children. A lot of parents were reached.

A lot of the schools organised a second training because there were so many parents interested.

Sometimes it was difficult to reach the parents that needed the training the most.

4. Other creative efforts were made as well. Some schools informed the media or made an article. Material was developed.

The project asked a great time investment from field workers and schools but had a great impact on the attitude towards behavioural problems. The co-operation between school and *CLB* also benefited from the project.

2. Second Evaluations

How:

The second evaluation at the end of the second year was done in writing. A standardised file was used.

Findings:

- + most of the schools continued with the project
- + parents were very satisfied with their training
- + *CLBs* observed that talking about behavioural problems with parents was easier and less threatening
- + Parents went to the *CLB* if they had problems
- + The social skills programmes will be continued and extended
- + The co-operation between schools and *CLBs* benefited from the project

- + Schools exchanged experiences and material
- More time is needed to implement
- Implementation should be more systematically

3. Recommendations

Recommendations are ordered according to the different prevention levels:

1. Prevention level one:

- Pedagogical climate in the classroom:

A mapping should be made of the different aspects that are eligible for change: which means are available, which methods are used, which pedagogical style does the teacher have, are there any children with behavioural problems?

- Practice social skills in the classroom:

The time needed for this aspect of the training is measured in time. A differentiation between following the course and implementing the course should be made.

- Pedagogical support for parents of all children:

If schools want to offer pedagogical support to parents in an effective way it is necessary that parents are involved in the school.

2. Prevention level two:

A specific way of handling is needed for this level, which may require some training. It is important that participators are able to offer this kind of handling. Co-operation is important.

3. Prevention level three:

Co-operation between school, home and guidance is needed to have an optimal result. This is why building a network is so important.