

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

The Netherlands case study report 1 Linker: Behavioural problems with pre-schoolers

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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)
- Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona (Spain)
- Malmö högskola (Sweden)



Linker: Behavioural problems with pre-schoolers

1. Description

Country	The Netherlands
Title	<i>Linker: Behavioural problems with pre-schoolers</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-, Persoonlijkeids- 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 ages of four and six.

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

- The policy has to start from a theory based vision. This vision has to be based on a theoretical basis so that effectiveness can be optimised.
- It is necessary to perform a well-grounded screening.
- The policy has to consist of universal and selective prevention programmes aimed at the whole population or at groups from the population based on risk factors.
- Depending on age different strategies have to be used.
- Evidence-based working is recommended but with enough attention for ‘good practice’ to meet the needs of every child and family.
- Working ecologically is a surplus 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. This how the project *Linker* was set up by the partners.

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 does not develop any further.

1.3 How does Linker work?

Linker works according to three principles:

1. It works ecologically

This means that the different contexts of the child are 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* (The rose of axes) (Cuvelier, 1998) and the *Interactiewijzer Jonge Kind* (Interaction guide for the young child) (Verstegen and Lodewijks, 2003). The teacher tries to integrate social skills in the daily class practice. Schools inform parents about the training so the approach can also be followed at home.
- Pedagogical support and training for the parents:
First of all parents had to be involved. Parent involvement and participation was reached by offering 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 there are problems. 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 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 intended for all pre-schoolers and pedagogical activities for parents.
- On the second level actions are intended for the pre-schoolers who already have problems. This problem behaviour can be manifested at home or at school.
- On the third level actions are intended for when problems keep existing 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 way so especially levels one and two are developed.

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. They enter the project together with the other partners. The steering group follows the process of the project and evaluates if goals are reached.

The steering group exists of the partners that are investing in *Linker* either in financially 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 is present at 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 realised.

The steering group meets 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 consists of 5 part-time members. One of them is the 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. In June 2006 the project co-ordinator and one member of the team end their

task. The members of the team have the following qualifications: a clinical psychologist, a health psychologist and an ortho-educationist.

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

The other members organise the trainings for the teachers (how to organise a social skills programme in the classroom, how to give a parent training, 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 met every two weeks until January 2006 and from then on monthly.

3. The field workers

The field workers are recruited out *CLB's* (Centres for pupil guidance) (Flemish situation) and out *RPCZ's* (Regional Pedagogical Centres Zeeland) and the *GGD* (Common Service of Health) (Dutch situation). 14 *CLB's* and 5 *RPCZ's* and 7 *GGD's* participated.

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

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

4. The participating schools

The schools determine and integrate the project in their schools.

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

In Flanders 21 schools (13 in East-Flanders and 8 in West-Flanders) participated. In the Netherlands 9 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 possibilities of the project.

5. 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 the Netherlands are discussed.

1. First evaluations

Fieldworkers, together with the school, filled in a list in which they described how things were going. Despite the slow start (because GGD and RPCZ were not used to working together), the project runs smoothly in the schools. Preliminary conclusions are the following:

- *Linker* is obviously present in the participating schools
- The field workers report a pleasant co-operation between participating organisations, RPCZ and GGD.
- Important contacts were established which were a basis for following co-operation. (Before the project the two instances did not work together and were not supposed to be compatible).
- Every school worked with a programme for social skills in group 1 and 2.
- In most of the schools a parent training session was organised. Some schools chose to organise thematic mornings or evenings.
- If the child was trained, the parents were followed up individually.
- Contacts were established with other instances and they co-operated more.

2. Second Evaluations

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

Pedagogical support:

- The way the support was offered was different in each school. Lots of schools used the offer of the GGD.
- Some schools worked on reinforcing parent involvement at school.
- There were some schools where there was no need for parent training.

Pedagogical climate at school:

- Schools worked intensively on the climate.
- Most schools have a 'social-emotional development' method. This method was complemented by a method offered by *Linker* (*Interactiewijzer Jonge Kind*, Interaction guide for the young child). In this method a preventive and curative method are combined.
- Some parents learned about the method and used it at home, so transfer was made.

Handling children with difficulties:

- The co-operation between GGD and RPCZ was appreciated by the schools. It was possible on the one hand to work individually with the child, the teacher and the parents and on the other hand it was possible to get help in finding a general approach for groups of children and parents.
- The co-operation between child, parents and teachers was a positive experience.

When the specific approach is not sufficient:

- When the approach of Linker was not sufficient, a referral was made.
- When schools experienced support from the head teacher, they committed faster and more. Support from the entire team was a condition to let the project succeed.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations are arranged according to the different prevention levels.

1. Prevention level one

- Pedagogical climate in the classroom:
an inventory should be made of the different aspects of the climate 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 behavioural problems is needed for this level. It is important that participants are able to offer this kind of handling. It is also important to co-operate. On this level it can be important to follow courses.

3. Prevention level three

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