

Building Critical Learning Communities

in ECEC settings in the Netherlands

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Kompetent für Inklusion!

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Presentation

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- **The Netherlands:** ECEC provisions, qualification of staff, some challenges to equity and quality
- **Critical Learning Communities:** development of the method, vision, instruments, outcomes and conditions
- **Roles and competencies** of practitioners and coaches

Early childcare provisions in NL

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- Childcare centers 0-4 years
- Playgroups 2-4 years
- Kindergarten in primary school 4-5 year
- Afterschool centers 4-12 years

Qualification of staff

- Childcare, Playgroups and afterschool: 3 - 4 year secondary vocational education
- Kindergarten: 4 years secondary high school education (teachers diploma)

Early childcare provisions in NL

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Challenges to equity:

- Childcare services (0-4) accessible for working parents – limited access

Challenges to quality:

- No formal assessment of pedagogical quality.
- Strong recommendation of the implementation of Pedagogical frameworks: 0-4 years, 4-13 years, diversity and family care. (The national platform of pedagogues).

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How to incorporate the content of the pedagogical frameworks in childcare services?

How to monitor quality in childcare centers?

How to transform the initial training of practitioners?

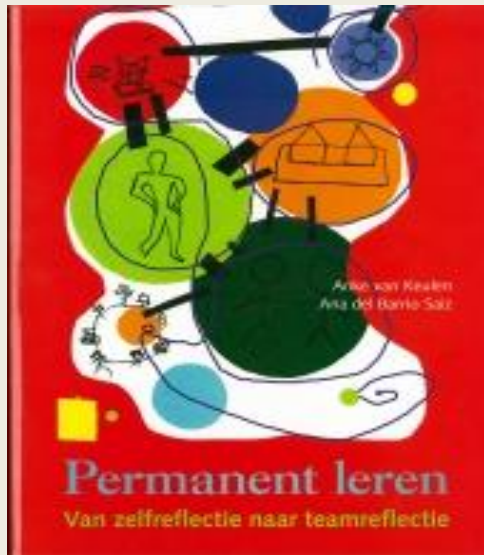
How to integrate different ECEC provisions in a way that support childrens development and an inclusive praxis?

Critical learning communities Method

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Action research, 2007-2008 (Bureau MUTANT):

To improve the professional quality of childcare services through critical reflection.



Initial questions:

How to create spaces for dialogue within centers and with respect for diversity?

How to create a critical learning community at all levels in ECEC settings?

Vision on learning



- Everybody is competent to reflect and has the right to participate
- Everybody is responsible for the learning process
- Everybody is both apprentice & teacher

Key elements

- Learning process at *all* institutional levels
- Critical reflection (self reflection and team reflection)
social change oriented

Vision based on theory and practice

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Learning from ‘within’: Focus on core qualities, reflection and life experiences

Korthagen & Lagerwerf , 2008

Critical Learning communities: 4 core aspects...

- Collaborative
- Inquiry oriented and dialogical
- Critical knowledge building
- Social change oriented

Mac Naughton, 2005; Urban, 2006; Whalley, 2002

How to become a professional critical learning community?

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How to create spaces for dialogue?

8 CLC-instrumenten

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1. Naming qualities
2. Asking critical questions
3. Keeping a learning process diary
4. Reflecting on thinking, feeling and willingness
5. Mapping the context of the childcare centre
6. Formulating a personal challenge
7. Co-operation with a colleague
8. Contract for a learning community



CLC- instrument

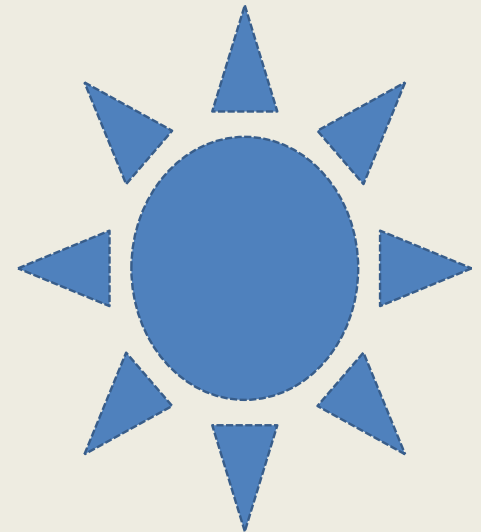
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NAMING QUALITIES

Naming, valuing and reflecting on
core qualities of children, families, colleagues

Enthusiastic, willing to support colleagues
Self confident

***any time is the perfect time
to focus on the qualities of children,
families and colleagues***



CLC-instrument

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ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Goals: Nurturing an inquiry-oriented culture:
learning to ask critical questions;
discussing experiences, values and knowledge.

?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?

*Why are we doing ...this?
Why are we doing it ...this way?*

***Which qualities do we value in parents and colleagues?
Which qualities do we not value in parents and colleagues?***

CLC-instrumenten

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Do we work with parents who do not meet our ideal profile?

What do we know about these parents?

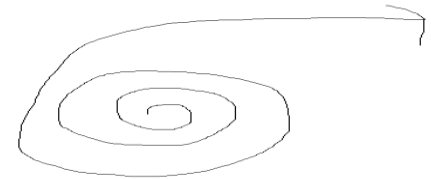
With which parents have we worked in recent weeks?

Are we alert to the wishes of (all) parents?

CLC- instrumenten

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FORMULATING A PERSONAL CHALLENGE



Goals:

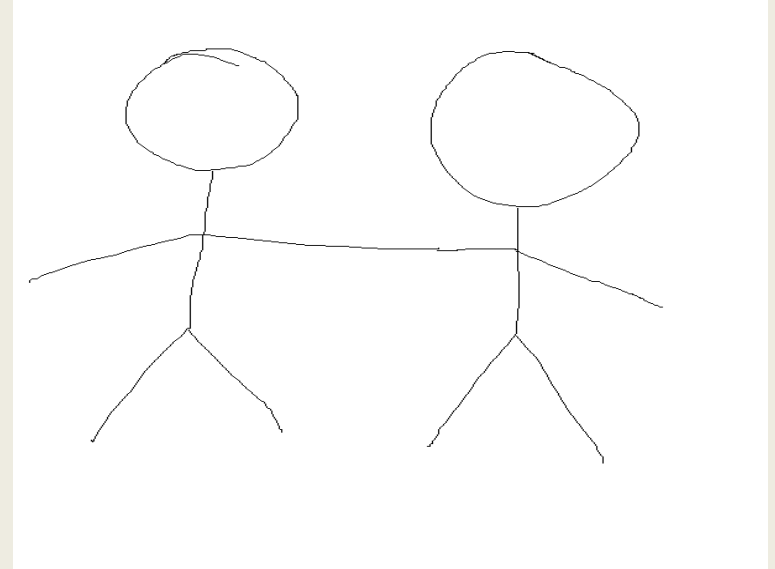
- To be aware of own dilemmas in working practices and to make choices and focus on the desired change situation
- To fine-tuning personal and professional goals with the objectives of the childcare center
- To use own qualities and develop new ones; to motivate and encourage commitment

CLC- instrument

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COOPERATION WITH A COLLEAGUE as a ‘critical friend’

- Mutual support and learning
- Learning from disagreements
- Development of a professional partnership: asking critical questions
- Cooperation on documentation



CLC-instruments

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LEARNING PROCESS DIARY

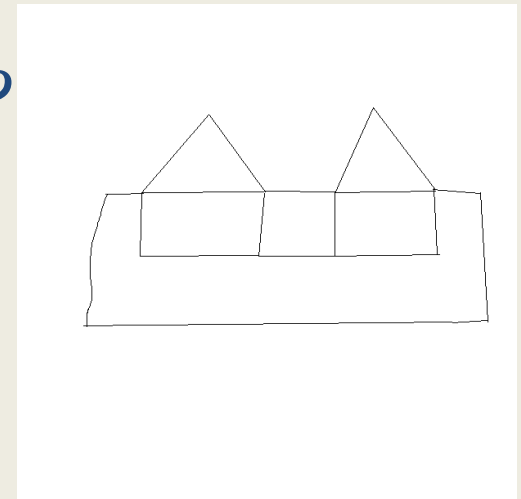


THINKING-FEELING-WILLINGNESS

Reflection on 3 knowledge resources:

What do you think / feel / want?

MAPPING THE CONTEXT OF THE CHILD CARE CENTRE

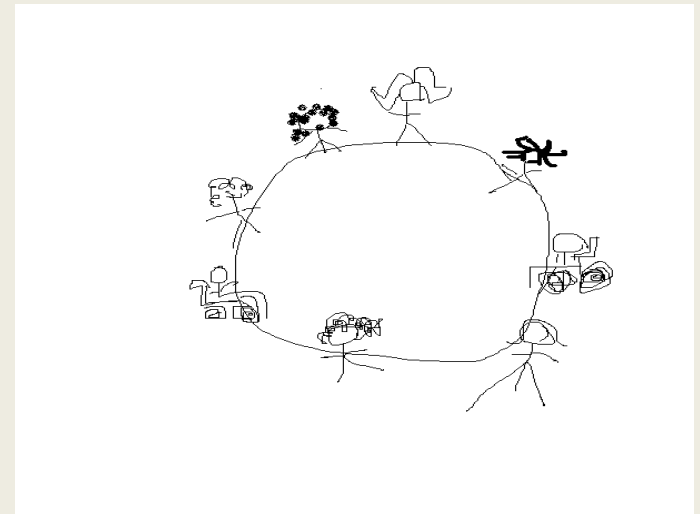


CLC-instrument

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‘CONTRACT’ FOR A LEARNING COMMUNITY

To create safety in teams,
developing concrete principles /
code of agreements which describe
how the team members want
to communicate with each other.



Everyone has a chance to speak
We all take our own responsibility
We respect each other
We encourage each other

Outcomes of CLC

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- More energy, enthusiasm, commitment
- More safety and collaborative relationships in teams
- Diversity is more valued: Recognition that everybody is competent and needed (interdependency)
- Increase of cooperation with a colleague as ‘critical friend’
- Increase of critical reflection on own role and praxis: individual and teams

‘For me the main features of this CLC- approach are:

The desire of practitioners to learn and that everybody is a teacher and a learner. You ask questions to each other, you encourage each other.’

‘As a team leader, I also pay more attention to personal circumstances of the practitioners, and I create more space to ask critical questions. Working in this way promotes their well being and therefore their professional well being.’

Childcare Manager

Challenges

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Institutional conditions for sustainable CLC

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Allocation of time for reflection

*To improve quality in early childhood institutions
without specific time for it,
is not possible'*

M.Whalley, 2001

Institutional conditions for sustainable CLC

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- **Structural differentiation** between regular staff meetings and meetings to learn through reflection
- **Transparent communication and tuning expectations** between practitioners, pedagogic staff and team management
- **Team coaching** aiming that practitioners and staff become reflective change agents

Which roles and competencies develop practitioners

by working as a critical learning community?

*‘We are no longer leading children into a future that is by and large already known by adults ...
... we all must learn to read new maps’*

M. Urban, 06

Roles and competencies of practitioners

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Roles as...

- Researcher
- Participative Leader
- Guide
- Democratic role model



**Action research:
'Childcare centers and schools
as spaces for democratic practice'
(Bureau MUTANT, 2009-2011)**

Publications (2013)

Roles and competencies of practitioners

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Role as researchers

‘Spending at least 5 minutes with each child and not with routines’
K. Smith, university of Melbourne

Research attitude: observing the practice, daring temporarily letting go own vision and securities, reflecting critically on themselves and their practice, learning from differences... developing collegiality and solidarity.

‘At first I was directive, then I could let go. I could ask more open questions... exciting! We realize now that young children can handle more than we expected, they can handle conflicts.’

Practitioner

Roles and competencies of practitioners

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Role as participative leaders

'It is important to listen to the real voice of children and parents without feeling that this directly threatens the own professional identity and expertise'

Mac Naughton, 2005

Role: Encouraging children, families and colleagues to participate and take new roles, not been afraid of loosing control or own authority; monitoring democratic interactions based on equality, recognition of been competent and the right to participate.

Role and competencies of practitioners

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Role as guide: Providing relevant information and insights to children and families, challenging stereotypes, not by punishing but by informing and inviting to reflect

2,5 years old: *I can't play with this doll, it is broken*
(doll had only one leg)

practitioner: *Try it a while and let me know*

Which kind of choices do we give to children?

Role and competencies of practitioners

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Practitioners as democratic role model (presence and attitude): Creating quite and safe moments, listening actively to children and families, being personal involved, recognizing children and families as competent partners, valuing diversity and working towards a ‘we-feeling’.

‘I realised that the children did not know each other names ‘

Practitioner

Role of trainers and staff pedagogues

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- **Coaching & monitoring the process:** focus on the practitioner as a person, build on her/his qualities and ideas, show a democratic attitude monitoring shared democratic values
- **Planning** regular reflecting meetings & **encouraging critical questions;**
- **Making time** for documentation and reflection;
- **Supporting the transfer to** the pedagogic policy of the center

Conclusions

- Practitioners have the capacity to create pedagogical and social change, if they are supported by their staff and institutions in a safe learning environment.
- Practitioners can develop a strong professional identity by engaging in critical learning communities.

'As a professional I see myself as the ambassador for the child and I hope that all professionals see themselves in this role'

Practitioner

*It is important that people feel valued
for what they are doing,
people must believe
that what they are doing is important
and that their contribution makes a difference*

Margy Whalley, 2001

Thank you for your attention!

