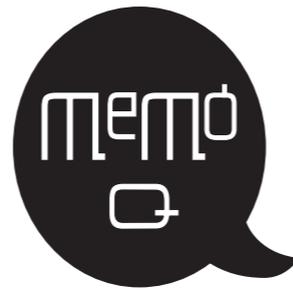




*Vertaling Nederlands-ENGELS van het 'Pedagogische raamwerk'.*

On the authority of **Kind en Gezin**



**MeMoQ** is a partnership between the **Department of Social Work and Social pedagogy of the university of Ghent** and the **Research Centre for Experiential Education of the university of Leuven**

**Measuring and Monitoring Quality in Childcare** for Babies and Toddlers

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# A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDCARE FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

Kind & Gezin

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# A number of concepts

## **Practitioner(s).**

The present pedagogical framework is intended for the broad sector of childcare for babies and toddlers, thus including both centre-based and family-based childcare for children younger than three. In this sector several names are currently being used for people who are directly or indirectly taking care of children. The more general term “practitioners” includes providers and managers, as well as the persons directly working with the children in the childcare setting, both female and male, both paid professionals and people who work on a voluntary basis or do an internship.

## **Parents and families.**

The present pedagogical framework frequently mentions “parents” or “families”. These terms refer to fathers and mothers and by extension also to other people who have a responsibility for the child’s education, like guardians, stepparents and grandparents. When using the terms fathers and mothers, we thus refer to all the people who are responsible for the child’s education. We prefer using the term “families” to refer to all the members of a family. If we want to make an explicit distinction between adults and children, we use the term “parents”.

## **Children:**

The present pedagogical framework often talks about “children”. We use this term to refer to babies and toddlers who attend childcare until they go to nursery school or Kindergarten at the age of 2,5 or 3 years. This includes both boys and girls. However, in order to keep the text easily readable, we refer to the child as “he” in the present text.

## **Flanders**

In the present pedagogical framework we mean by “Flanders” the Flemish region in Belgium and all the facilities in Brussels (19 communities) under the responsibility of the Flemish Community.

## **Pedagogical framework**

The term is a translation of the Dutch term “Pedagogisch raamwerk”. Pedagogisch in Dutch means education in its broadest sense and includes concepts of care and upbringing, as well as the social aspects of education.

# INTRODUCTION

## A pedagogical framework: what, why, for whom?



### What does this pedagogical framework involve?

The present pedagogical framework is a concise vision text on quality childcare. It clarifies what childcare means to children, families and society. The framework offers direction, a firm basis to be committed to. The dialogue about it with all parties involved, results each time in different practices, customised to the local context. This cooperation ensures that all parties involved inspire each other in shaping pedagogical quality.

The present pedagogical framework contains a best efforts obligation for childcare facilities, which is a commitment to work along the lines of the vision set out in the present framework. One is expected to make efforts to get going with the present framework.

This does not imply a obligation to achieve results. Quality will not be judged by measuring children's development or by examining to what extent one works together with families and external parties. However, one is expected to make an effort to that end.

The pedagogical framework does not prescribe what one 'should' do in everyday practice. It is not a manual. The use of this pedagogical framework depends on the environment in which one operates, the vision of the childcare facility, the neighbourhood, the parents' preferences, etc.

The pedagogical framework helps to realise the mission of Kind en Gezin, which is "to create as many opportunities as possible for every child, no matter where or how it is born and raised".

## Why a pedagogical framework?

The pedagogical quality of childcare is very important. Childcare of a high pedagogical quality has long-term positive effects on children's social, emotional, intellectual, moral and language development. These effects last well into school and are very important for all children. Childcare of a low pedagogical quality, on the other hand, may have negative consequences for children. Each day, a large number of people in Flanders put their backs into this pedagogical quality. That is why it is essential for a vision text to be available which explains what is meant by "pedagogical quality". International organisations, like OECD and UNICEF, also recommend having a pedagogical framework, which may serve as a general vision for pedagogical quality in childcare facilities:

- Because it describes pedagogical quality and acts as a source of inspiration.
- It is a guideline for one's personal actions or for everyday practice.
- It recognises the valuable practical work, which many practitioners already do on a daily basis. It demonstrates that childcare plays an important role for children, families and society.
- It also holds a powerful message for families, namely that they can be assured of pedagogical quality in the childcare facilities.

## Who is this pedagogical framework intended for?

Practitioners who are directly or indirectly involved in childcare will start using this pedagogical framework in both centre-based and family-based childcare.

Moreover, the realisation of pedagogically high-quality childcare depends on many factors. Apart from the knowledge and skills of individual practitioners or teams, quality childcare is also determined by aspects like pedagogical policy, partnerships, workforce, available pedagogical support, funding, and government policy.

Although this pedagogical framework formulates objectives for childcare facilities, the interaction between the different (quality) levels, ranging from practitioners to policy makers, is essential to make this pedagogical quality possible.

## How did the present pedagogical framework come into existence?

### Methodology

On the authority of Kind en Gezin, a research team from the universities of Ghent and Leuven did the groundwork for the present pedagogical framework. Drawing on basic legislative texts and their own expertise, the researchers analysed eleven existing frameworks from a large variety of countries. They consulted on this foundation for the pedagogical framework with a large delegation of representatives from the broad childcare sector and from parents, minorities and other stakeholders, like the Children's Rights Commissioner's Office, Kind en Gezin and the Flemish Care Inspectorate. Following these discussions the researchers wrote draft texts, which were discussed once again with all the aforementioned parties. This resulted in a pedagogical framework, which contains a jointly supported vision for quality childcare.

### The foundations of the present pedagogical framework

The pedagogical framework is grounded in four basic documents.

Firstly, it is based on the fundamental rights of each citizen in this country, as entered in the Belgian Constitution. In this context especially Articles 22, 22bis and 23 are important::

- Everyone is entitled to respect for his private and family life.
- Every child is entitled to respect for his moral, physical, mental and sexual integrity.
- Every child has the right to express his opinion.
- Every child is entitled to measures and services, which promote his development.
- The best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration in any decisions concerning the child.
- Everyone is entitled to a decent life (including the right to work, the right to social security, the right to decent housing, the right to protection of a healthy environment, the right to cultural and social development).

Another key orientation document is the **International Convention on the Rights of the Child** (ICRC), which also states that the best interests of the child should be of primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3). The principles of protection, provision and participation are the main priority in this context. Protection means that States commit to protecting children from harmful influences, like exploitation or neglect. Provision means that States commit to making sure that children have a sufficient provision of basic facilities, including nutrition, healthcare, education, and social security. Participation means that children are entitled to participate in social life and have a right to be heard in any decisions that concern them. In the case of the youngest children this means that we closely monitor their signals and take these into account. The ICRC is also very explicit about the right of each child to preserve his identity (Article 8). Article 5 stipulates that the States Parties will respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents, and Article 18 states that States Parties will render assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities.

The **Flemish Parliament Act on the organisation of childcare for babies and toddlers and the Government of Flanders Decrees on licensing conditions** are also important. They set out expectations for childcare. For instance:

“Article 3. Through childcare the Flemish Community aims to provide a service to families which has an economic, pedagogical and social function and which is qualitative, available, affordable and directly accessible for every child without any distinctions, in addition to the education of the child within his family, with respect for the child’s capacities, his home environment and the family’s freedom of choice.

Article 6. §1. The provider shall make sure his childcare location meets at least the following conditions regarding: [...]

3° the contact with the children and families, including as a minimum:

- a) respect for each child's physical and mental integrity;
- b) the non-discrimination of children and families;
- c) the pedagogical policy and pedagogical support with an eye to promoting the physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, communicative, creative and moral development of each child and to safeguarding the well-being and involvement of each child;
- d) the involvement and participation of families."

The Conclusions of the **Council of the European Union** are a final source of inspiration. These conclusions state that providing high quality ECEC for babies and toddlers is just as important as ensuring its availability and affordability, and sufficient attention needs to be devoted to issues such as environment and infrastructure, staffing, the curriculum (another name for pedagogical framework), governance and quality assurance.

### **Structure of the pedagogical framework:**

The pedagogical framework explains the vision, which serves as the basis for the development of childcare for babies and toddlers. Next, it clarifies what childcare can mean to children, families and society. This is the assignment of childcare. After that, the basic principles are discussed: what is our view on children, families and society? Next, it indicates in the section 'actions with regard to children' the main lines of what pedagogical action looks like in practice, elaborating in some detail the areas of experience that act as guidelines in creating a rich environment. Finally, the pedagogical framework presents the conditions which are necessary in order to realise this.



# VISION OF THE PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

While drawing inspiration from the aforementioned basic principles, the pedagogical framework is based on the following vision, which is in addition supported by all parties involved in the development of the framework:

“Childcare for babies and toddlers in Flanders helps to ensure that every child feels good about himself, is challenged and feels connected to the people and his surrounding environment. Childcare wants to shape children’s education together with the parents. At the same time it aims to support parents in their child-rearing responsibilities. A childcare facility wants to be a place where every child, parent and practitioner feels at home. In this way it helps realise equal opportunities for children, as well as for adult men and women. Embedded in warm relationships with others, childcare wants all children to be able to grow up into adults who are confident in life and contribute to a learning, democratic society, where people treat each other and their environment in a respectful and sustainable manner.”

# MISSION

## What childcare does for children



### 1. ENSURING THE WELL-BEING OF EVERY CHILD

The early childhood is a crucial period for a child's development, because this is the period during which his personality and identity are initially formed. To facilitate this development, childcare facilities have to make sure that every child enjoys being in childcare. To that end, attention and care should be given to the physical and emotional well-being of each individual child.

Well-being is the positive feeling a child has when the situation he is in fulfils his basic needs: this concerns physical needs, the need for love and affection, the need for clarity and security, the need for appreciation and respect, the need to feel able to do something by himself and the need to matter. When these basic needs are fulfilled, this indicates that there is positive interaction between the child and his environment and that the child is emotionally well. Well-being manifests itself in several aspects: when children have a good time, have fun and enjoy each other's company and the things around them. Children with high well-being radiate vitality and inner rest. They are spontaneous, open and receptive to their environment and they are not afraid to be themselves.

Ensuring a child's well-being implies devoting attention to both the emotional and physical well-being of every child. This includes promoting and fostering a healthy lifestyle and working towards safe childcare in dialogue with the family. Apart from that, loving, sensitive and caring interactions between the child and the practitioner are essential, as well as creating a predictable and stable environment. This allows children to build safe attachment relationships with one or more practitioners.

## What childcare does for children

### 2. OFFERING EVERY CHILD RICH OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Childcare offers children rich and varied development opportunities. Childcare facilities are places where children's interests, abilities and talents are picked up and fostered. They value the strengths of each individual child.

In addition, childcare facilities offering high pedagogical quality are places where children are given every opportunity to explore and discover, and to experience the world using all their senses. Here, children can act, play, explore, experiment, try out things, and experience failure and success.

As a result, children get a grip on reality and gain key experiences. These are experiences that play a key role in a child's development. They occur repeatedly and in a large variety of situations and lead to great satisfaction and involvement of children.

In a rich environment with people who believe in them, children are given the chance to gain key experiences in diverse areas of experience and to develop their potential to the fullest.

The pedagogical framework describes four areas of experience which are indispensable for developing a challenging environment which is aimed at children's overall development:

- "Me and the Other", because children develop their identities during early childhood in a world full of other adults and children;
- "Body and Movement", because during the childcare period the child's body undergoes remarkable changes;
- "Communication and Expression", because during the childcare period children learn to express themselves verbally and non-verbally, as well as creatively;
- "Exploration of the World", because during the childcare period children get to know and understand the world, both the world of objects and of people.

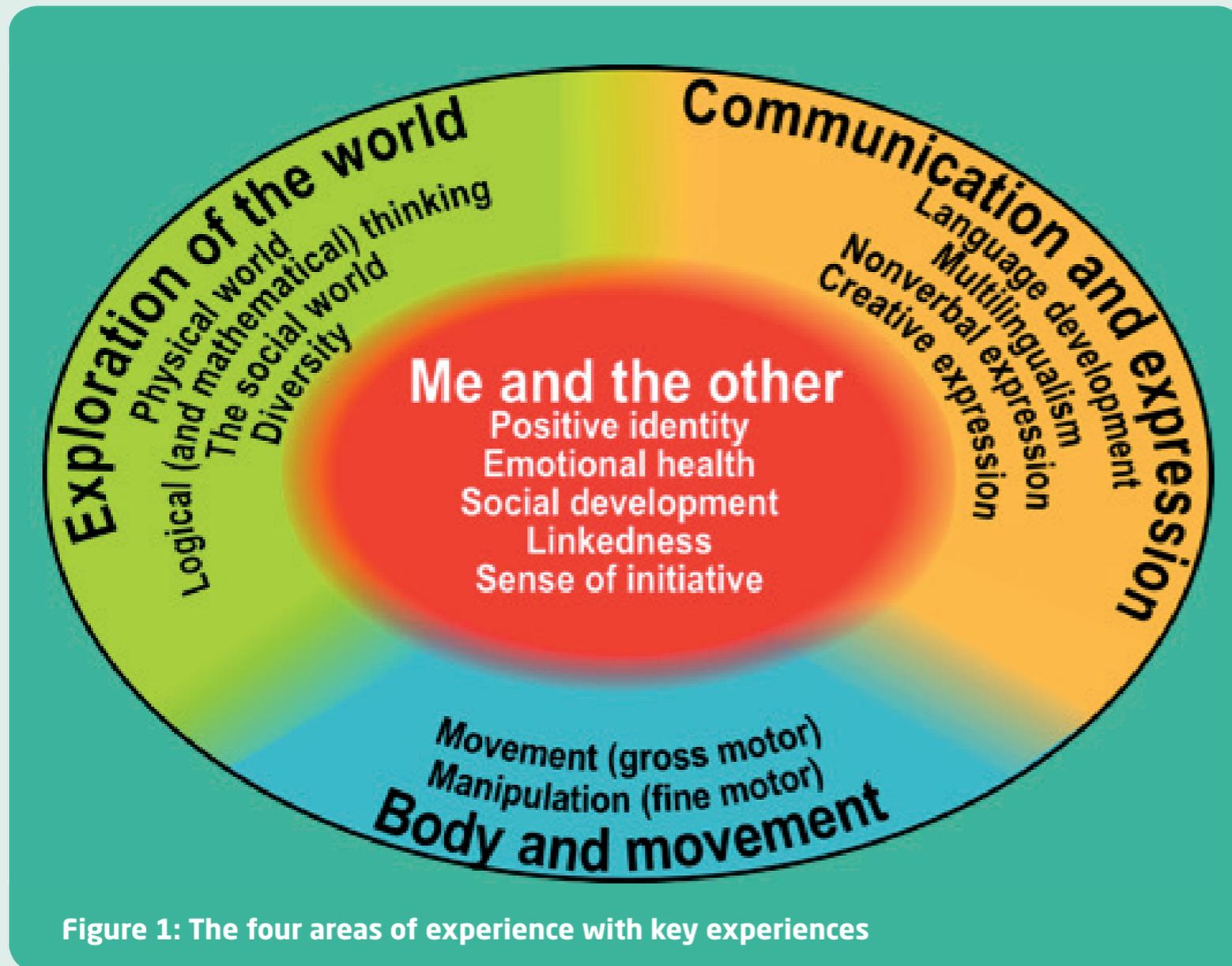


Figure 1: The four areas of experience with key experiences

With the areas of experience the framework sets the stage for an appreciative and challenging living environment, which respects each child’s individual pace, talents, individuality and initiative. Each application of the areas of experience remains subject to the core criteria of quality, which is for children to feel good and be captivated by what they do.

A balanced development requires a provision which intrinsically links together areas of experience, but also an adult who sees what a child can offer and takes it forward. Figure 1 shows how the areas of experience are closely intertwined.

At the same time attention is devoted to how each child develops in the areas of experience. Is there any reason for concern, and is it important to talk about this with the parents, colleagues and managers? It may be decided in consultation with the parents to involve external experts.

In the section “How to take pedagogical action?” the areas of experience are fleshed out in a way that provides a firm basis for practice.

## What childcare does for children

### 3. ACKNOWLEDGING AND PROMOTING CONNECTEDNESS

Development involves relationships from the early start onwards. As soon as they are born, children are in need of support and connectedness with other children, adults and the surrounding world. Positive, warm relationships help them feel emotionally safe. These are the relationships that connect. They give children the feeling that they belong and form part of a larger whole.

A childcare facility is one of the first places where children establish relationships with other children and adults beyond the context of their (extended) family. The remit of childcare facilities is to actively support these relationships by encouraging children to empathise and be respectful. This allows children to develop early friendships with each other.

The foundations of a basic attitude of connectedness are openness, care and a true willingness to respect others the way they are. In this context work can be done on the relationship of the child with the other(s) and the material and social environment, and on ecological awareness. These elements constitute the basis for democratic citizenship and sense of community.

## What childcare does for parents

### 4. JOINTLY SHAPING THE EDUCATION OF THE CHILD

Childcare respects the child's education within his family and continues it in mutual consultation. This means that practitioners invest in a constant dialogue with families, involving both fathers and mothers. This gives them an insight into the social and cultural context in which children grow up and allows them to take the family's perspectives into consideration in their pedagogical actions. The actions taken by practitioners cannot be separated from the parents' relevant views. Childcare facilities consult with parents about child-rearing ideas, questions and desires, so as to give shape to children's education together with the parents. This does not necessarily mean that childcare facilities do what parents want. They enter into dialogue with the parents on each other's views and try to align them.

### 5. BROADENING THE EDUCATION OF THE FAMILY

Childcare is a broadening of the family education. It is an educational environment where children gain other experiences than at home. It allows children to get to know the outside world, their peers, other adults, life within a group, sometimes also other languages, etc. Moreover, a childcare facility is a place where parents meet practitioners who know their child well and with whom they can share their concerns and questions. Here, parents see their children in a different light. Childcare is not just some type of material support for families, but can also offer information, and emotional and social support.

### 6. ENABLING SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Childcare allows parents to combine their family tasks with other activities by looking after their children. As a result, parents can take part in society in various ways (through work, training, in-service training, volunteer work, informal care) and can develop their potential. Childcare facilities are flexible in order to facilitate this social participation.

## What childcare does for parents

### 7. ACKNOWLEDGING AND PROMOTING CONNECTEDNESS

At the childcare facility parents get to meet practitioners, as well as other parents who have children of the same age. To many parents, these contacts are an important source of information and support and may lead to relationships of mutual exchange, connectedness and solidarity. They also allow parents to extend their network and integrate in the neighbourhood. Practitioners contribute to this connectedness. They take account of the experience of parents who are confronted with their own approach and their own view on the education of a child by learning the opinions of others. Parents may react differently to these opinions from others.

## What childcare does for society

### **8. PREPARING FOR SOCIETY**

Childcare prepares children for life in society. In the childcare facility children learn to play and live together. In this way, they learn from and with each other. In this mini-society they acquire democratic values and skills by participating actively and by learning that their contribution is taken into account. A childcare facility is an exploration ground for life and living together.

### **9. ENSURING INCLUSION AND SOCIAL COHESION**

The education of a child in a childcare facility is always connected to the society to which the childcare facility belongs. Here, children lay a strong foundation for shaping and maintaining social relations. It is a place where they deal with social diversity. Children and parents open up to other people and their way of life. As a result, they can experience that it is a place where they belong, irrespective of origin, disabilities, lifestyle, family structure, etc.

### **10. PROMOTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Childcare opposes the exclusion of disadvantaged groups and promotes social participation. On the one hand, by offering children the best possible development opportunities. On the other hand, by reducing the burden on families by sharing their care and child-rearing responsibilities. Childcare also contributes to giving men and women equal opportunities for social participation. Not all families have the same opportunities and needs. That is why extra attention is devoted to families that need it. To that end, these families should be able to be actually present in the childcare facility, which should be meaningful and valuable to them.

### **11. PROMOTING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS**

Childcare fosters ecological awareness, in other words, how to treat the environment in a respectful and sustainable manner. This kind of attitude aims to make children and practitioners feel connected to and co-responsible for their natural environment.

## What childcare does for society

### 12. PREPARING FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Many (natural, technological, economic, demographic, etc.) processes have a great impact on the way in which our society is structured. The (possibly) resulting societal changes make increasingly high demands on people's learning abilities. They can hold their own in a complex society, provided they are capable of meeting the changing demands. Quality childcare lays the foundations for lifelong learning.

# Basic principles

## How childcare looks at children

### 1. EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE

Each child is different and has his own interests, abilities and talents. This uniqueness also includes the social and cultural context of the family in which a child grows up. Childcare facilities respect these differences and use them as a starting point, without passing judgement. Each child develops in his own way and at his own pace. This has to do with the differences in the children's talents, character and temperament, as well as with the socially and culturally different backgrounds in which they grow up. There is no point in mutually comparing children, but only in comparing oneself with oneself throughout time. In this context the focus is on respect for and appreciation of what the child is like right now. Attention is paid to his strengths, talents and development.

### 2. THE WHOLE IS MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Children experience different things at the same time. Every game and activity of young children pertains to different areas of experience. What children learn is linked to where, how and with whom they learn. Children feel, move, do things together, explore, play, talk, are creative and think, all at the same time. They learn with their minds, hearts and hands.

### 3. LIFE WITHIN A GROUP INFLUENCES A CHILD'S PERSONALITY

From the moment they are born, children express themselves as social beings. By sharing experiences with other children and adults, by doing things together and through the accompanying communication, children give (cultural) meanings to their experiences. They discover a great deal by joining in and by contributing to life within a group or family. These experiences and relationships co-determine a child's personality.

### 4. THE CHILD HAS AN ACTIVE ROLE

Children participate actively in their environment. They are researchers and creators that shape their own development. Children have an inner urge to explore the world.



## How childcare looks at families

### 5. FAMILIES ARE COMPETENT

All parents want what is best for their children. Practitioners acknowledge this and build on the families' strengths. Parents share their child-rearing responsibilities with practitioners who also have an impact on their child's future. Practitioners are sensitive to parents and consider them to be the main educators of their child.

### 6. RELATIONSHIPS ARE MUTUAL

The education of a child in childcare facilities differs from the education of a child at home. In order to be able to jointly shape the education in the childcare facility, practitioners aim to establish a reciprocal relationship with families. This is a constantly on-going process during which practitioners and families have attention and respect for each other's experience, and the meaning they give to it. When parents feel recognised/acknowledged and safe, and open and honest communication is possible, they can work together towards meaningful childcare for everyone. Practitioners lay the foundations for this mutual relationship.

### 7. PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED

To many parents, the informal contact with parents who have children of approximately the same age is an important source of information and support. For parents, the childcare facility can be a place where they can establish such informal contacts.

## How childcare looks at society

### **8. RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY**

To many children, childcare is a major step, a transitional space from family life to community life. At the childcare facility children learn, through the interactions and relationships they have, how society looks at them and how differences are dealt with. These experiences have an impact on children's self-image. The childcare facility is a place that addresses prejudice and discrimination in an effective way and which enables children to adopt a positive approach to children and families who are different. Practitioners use the diversity of children and their families as the basis for the development of the childcare facility. They question their own standards and rules so that all children, families and practitioners can feel welcome and safe there.

### **9. BRINGING UP CHILDREN IN AN INCLUSIVE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY**

The education of a child in a childcare facility is always connected to the society to which the childcare facility belongs. Practitioners act on the basis of democratic values, among other things by involving children, parents and colleagues in any decisions that concern them. Here, children, parents and practitioners learn to jointly give meaning through consultation. The childcare facility also aims at an inclusive society where everyone feels welcome, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

### **10. BRINGING UP CHILDREN FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY**

The childcare facility is part of a society that focuses on sustainable development and which wants to meet the needs of the present generation, without compromising the capabilities of future generations, both here and in the rest of the world, to fulfil their own needs. This involves ecological, economic and social choices which help create a world that handles the Earth more efficiently and economically, as well as more consistently in the long term.

## How childcare looks at society

Childcare facilities may foster this by pursuing this balance in their relationships with children and families. It concerns ecological choices, like nutrition, the careful use of energy and other raw materials, waste reduction, the choice of sustainable materials for decoration and toys, an enhanced ecological awareness and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle in children. However, this balance is also partially determined by the choices made within the framework of social sustainability and a sustainable economy.

# How to act pedagogically in practice?

## Actions with respect to children



### 1. PRACTITIONERS ADOPT A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Practitioners adopt a holistic approach, which means they consider the development of children as a whole. In practice this means that caring activities and educational activities are inextricably linked, that areas of experience are intrinsically intertwined, and that affective, moral as well as cognitive aspects are addressed, among other things by using well-being and involvement as guidelines for pedagogical quality. Only in this way can childcare practitioners gain an insight into the breadth and depth of development processes that occur in children, and adequately respond to them. Childcare practitioners adopt an open and unbiased attitude and let themselves be surprised by the elements which children display in many different situations.

### 2. PRACTITIONERS MAKE SURE THAT CHILDREN FEEL EMOTIONALLY SAFE

An important precondition for children's well-being is that they can establish safe emotional relationships with the practitioner who take up responsibility for them. This is dealt with in a conscious manner, among other things through practitioners' attitudes and interactions, by supporting relationships with other children and by deployment of practitioners.

### 3. PRACTITIONERS ARE SENSITIVE

The practitioners' attitude reveals acceptance and understanding of children's feelings, perceptions and basic needs. Children are regarded as fully-fledged individuals and are taken seriously. Practitioners employing a sensitive mentoring style have an eye for what children think, want and feel. They take consideration of the children's needs for individual attention, recognition, confirmation and affection, and of how they see the world. In the childcare facility children experience sympathy for their emotional and cognitive concerns and receive help to cope with difficult experiences.

## Actions with respect to children

### 4. PRACTITIONERS FULFIL AN ACTIVE AND STIMULATING ROLE

As a result of their urge to explore, children gain rich experiences in different areas of experience. Keeping the pace and individuality of each individual child in mind, practitioners adopt an active and stimulating educational style to create a rich and varied (play) environment. Such a rich and varied environment contains all the elements necessary to encourage intensive play. Playing is essential to young children's development.

Practitioners respond to children's initiatives, and support them. They invite children to continue their exploration. They appeal to children in their zone of proximal development. This is the zone in which children feel challenged and explore the limits of their capabilities. This can be done at the children's own initiative, with the help from practitioners or with the encouragement from other children. This is how key experiences come into existence.

### 5. PRACTITIONERS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTONOMY

Allowing children to be actors requires practitioners to adopt an educational style which enables these children to assume an active role in the rich and varied Childcare environment. Practitioners acknowledge that children help shape their development. This reveals itself in interventions that respond positively to children's initiatives and encourage their input. Children are given room to experiment and to propose activities which appeal to them. Practitioners believe in children's ability to grow. When they take corrective action, they examine together with the children why they are permitted to do something or not.

### 6. PRACTITIONERS ADAPT THEIR APPROACH TO EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD

Practitioners who treat each individual child as a unique person demonstrate a fundamental respect for the child and his family. The Childcare practice takes the children's needs and their parents' opinions into consideration. Childcare practitioners try to gain the best possible understanding of each individual child. They do so by fully investing in a rich environment and in a supportive style that allow each child's capabilities to manifest themselves and be developed to the fullest. This is also apparent from the way in which the pace and individuality of each child (and his family) are respected.

## Actions with respect to children

This implies an obvious respect for the diversity of families, the people in charge of children's education, and family structures and cultures. Individualisation means taking action which is customised to each individual's needs.

### 7. PRACTITIONERS LEARN CHILDREN HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER

Childcare not only broadens the number of relationships a child has, but also deepens them: playing together, dancing, eating, sleeping, imitating each other, solving conflicts, ... This requires the necessary coordination and consideration for each other, which is not that easy. It is important for practitioners to help ensure that all children receive equal opportunities to mobilise their capabilities. The childcare group offers a safe place for practising democratic values and skills, like learning to share, learning to play together, learning to negotiate, deciding together and learning to settle conflicts. The presence of others provides the "training ground". However, especially the quality of the relationships makes the difference. In the daily practice of the childcare facility this means that great attention is devoted to group processes and the support of interactions between children. Children learn from and with each other.

### 8. PRACTITIONERS OFFER EACH CHILD INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FOUR AREAS OF EXPERIENCE

By specifying the four areas of experience ("Me and the Other", "Body and Movement", "Communication and Expression" and "Exploration of the World"), the pedagogical framework inspires practitioners to reflect on the environment they offer, become aware of possible gaps and proceed to action.

Everything that goes on in the childcare context is clearly aimed at offering key experiences in the areas of experience: the decoration, the provided materials and activities (both in indoor and outdoor spaces), the interactions between practitioners and children, the mutual interactions between children, the room for initiative that is offered, supporting rules and arrangements, the daily schedule and other organisational aspects. The areas of experience thus serve as a guideline for observation, documentation and optimisation of practice.

## Actions with respect to children

The following description of the areas of experience is based on a holistic approach to children. Some examples: once a child can move around without help, this fundamentally changes his opportunities to establish social contacts, and thus his interactions with others, as well as his intellectual development. If a child starts to express himself through language this will not just have a strong impact on his social and emotional development, but also on his moral development and autonomy. This process is different in each child.

## Area of experience “Me and the Other”

Children receive opportunities and are appreciated by the practitioners for showing the many aspects of their personality. In this way, children develop a positive identity.

Because practitioners, so to speak, hold a mirror to up to children, and highlight, recognise and appreciate differences (like a family wall display, music, pictures), children get the experience that they belong and that all aspects of their identities are appreciated. By noticing similarities and differences, they become increasingly aware of who they are and how they relate to others.

Children are given opportunities to develop well emotionally. Because they are appreciated by the practitioners and the practitioners articulate their emotions, children have a connection with themselves, truly experience their own feelings and feel good about themselves (for instance, verbal rather than material appreciation, respect for their individual pace, identification of and response to signs). As a result, children exude self-confidence and believe in their own abilities and in the others. They can cope with new and unexpected situations and, whenever necessary, are helped by the practitioners to overcome painful experiences (for instance practitioners offering closeness, comfort or compassion or showing acceptance for difficult experiences).

Children are offered opportunities to gain experiences that promote their social development. They enjoy the interaction with other children and adults, play together, know how to influence others and take their needs into account, negotiate in conflicts and succeed in acquiring a place within the group as an individual. They learn to put themselves in someone else's shoes: how someone feels, what he or she wants, thinks or observes. Practitioners create the necessary opportunities (for instance by means of material that encourages them to play together, by allowing children to make choices, or by organising space in such a way that they can separate themselves from the group in groups of two or three, which stimulates intense play between the children), and help children in this respect (for instance by naming the intentions of other children or mediating in conflicts). This lays the foundations for successful relationships with others.

## Area of experience “Me and the Other”

In childcare facilities children are given opportunities to develop a connectedness to others and be part of the group within the childcare facility. They also feel connected to the neighbourhood, society, the material world and nature by making trips, through parent participation, etc. They experience that they matter and are also encouraged to take care of others (for instance by having consideration for others, helping others, making them happy or comforting them), materials and nature. Gradually, they become aware of what an inclusive, democratic and sustainable society is.

In childcare facilities children receive opportunities to appeal to their sense of initiative and define their actions in relation to the environment and others. Children are recognised as entrepreneurs. Practitioners make sure children have sufficient freedom and opportunities to take initiative, so that they can discover what they want (for instance, because children have great freedom of movement, both in indoor and outdoor spaces, because they can choose their own toys or can take initiative during nursing moments). They can make choices, learn how to do things to achieve their goal, and do not give up. By receiving opportunities for autonomy, children can cultivate their curiosity and perseverance (for instance by challenging them with new materials or by creating an atmosphere in which they can play and explore for a longer period of time without being disturbed). Children assume an active role in organising their environment, which enables them to influence their own situation and experience the impact.

## Area of experience “Body and Movement”

During the childcare period the child’s body undergoes amazing changes. In the childcare facility children are given opportunities to discover their bodies in a variety of movement situations (both in indoor and outdoor spaces): rising to their feet, keeping their balance, crawling, walking, moving to music, dancing, etc. They gain experience in using (large) play equipment (balls, bicycles, climbing material, etc.) and spontaneously avail themselves of movement opportunities offered by their environment (stairs, steps, swing, gate, etc.) and in their daily routine (like dressing and undressing). They give free rein to their urge to move, while enjoying their abilities.

In childcare facilities children receive opportunities to strengthen their grip on their environment and refine it by handling materials. They use their hand and finger skills in practical situations, for instance when they take a dummy, pick flowers, eat, open and close zips, or wash their hands. They actively participate in nursing and eating situations. They enjoy being meticulously occupied with (play) materials, like (crinkle) books, stamps, play dough, clay, wool, paint, stickers and pencils.

## Area of experience “Communication and Expression”

Children are given every opportunity to communicate with other children and adults. This means, among other things, that they are in a challenging and language-rich environment. Practitioners address children personally in a language that is adjusted to their level, but which is also enriching. Children enjoy (picture) stories, singing, poetry, playing with language and picking up new words and expressions. They express what they perceive, feel, think and imagine, and are appreciated and supported for this. This “expression” increases their understanding of the world.

A rising number of children grow up in multilingual environments and have one or more home languages which differ from the language used at the childcare facility. In childcare facilities children are given every opportunity to play, listen, enjoy the diversity of languages and forms of expression. They experience respect for the different home languages of children, and multilingualism is appreciated.

Children also express themselves in non-verbal ways: physical and facial expressions are picked up and appreciated as forms of expression (like expressive gestures, pointing, or rolling their eyes).

Childcare facilities offer children opportunities for expressing themselves in many other creative ways. This is done by exploring a wide range of verbal and non-verbal forms of expression. They express their impressions and fantasies by drawing, building and painting, and through other visual expressions (like sand, water, foam, snow and clay), through dance and movement, by singing, making or listening to music and through role-playing. In this way they process experiences and share what they consider meaningful with others. They enjoy artistic expressions (prints, pictures, songs, etc.) and develop a sense of aesthetics.

## Area of experience “Exploration of the World”

In childcare facilities children receive opportunities to explore the physical world. They experiment using all their senses. Because they are curious, they discover the properties of materials (like the characteristic properties of water and sand, the stubbornness of clay and the feeling of grass), how things work and the broader world of technology (like kitchen material, household appliances, vehicles and tablets). They can come into contact with nature (like the life of plants and animals) and all kinds of phenomena (like changes in the weather, the melting of snow, the sun and the moon and the seasons).

In childcare facilities children are thus given opportunities to develop intellectually. While adopting an inquisitive attitude, they look back, discover connections and learn to assess what is going to happen. The structure of their daily schedule makes the environment partially predictable and understandable for them. They notice differences and similarities. They like patterns in their daily routine, in stories and in their play (like stacking things, assembling and dismantling things, putting things in a row, or grouping things). They also reason about time, space and quantity. They constantly ask (themselves) questions about the world around them and use the practitioners and other children as a sounding board for these questions. In childcare facilities children receive opportunities to explore new ways of dealing with the physical world and enhance their creativity (for instance by combining materials from the puppet corner with other materials or the outdoor playing area, by using all their senses when they eat (smell, taste, texture, etc.)).

In childcare facilities children are offered opportunities to explore the social world. They can develop awareness of the neighbourhood they live in and of the life there (like shops and traffic). They get to see how society is organised and try to orient themselves in it: all kinds of daily activities (like cyclists, fire brigade, the police, garbage pick-up, renovations), the world of trade and consumption (like shopping, going to the baker's, playing shopkeeper), healthcare (like hospital, doctor), and the media. They familiarise themselves with customs, values, rituals, celebrations and traditions (like Saint Nicholas and id-al-Fitr).

## Area of experience “Exploration of the World”

They discover a variety of child-rearing situations, people and relationships, like family, childcare workers, the extended family, etc. They become aware of the rules and of what is acceptable behaviour and they learn to adjust their actions accordingly.

In childcare facilities children are given opportunities to get to know a diversity of home cultures, languages, nutritional habits, family structures, etc. In this way, they position themselves within the group.

## Actions with respect to families

### 9. PRACTITIONERS AND FAMILIES GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Childcare facilities develop a mutual adaptation policy to allow practitioners to become acquainted with and get used to parents and their child(ren) and for parents and their child(ren) to become acquainted with and get used to the facility, the other children, and the practitioners and their work methods. This mutual process takes place before the childcare period has actually started. During this period practitioners inquire about parents' questions, wishes and concerns and explore their child-rearing habits. At the same time, parents get to know the daily routine at the childcare facility.

### 10. PARTICIPATION FROM AND SYSTEMATIC CONSULTATION WITH FAMILIES

Also after the mutual adaptation period, parents are still frequently given the opportunity to communicate their wishes, findings, concerns and questions. Sharing child-rearing responsibilities is indeed a continuous process of harmonisation.

Working towards reciprocity implies involving families and allowing them to participate in the facility's operation. To achieve optimal harmonisation between the approach and the needs of individual children, families are informed about this approach and about how their child feels about it.

Families are the primary educators of their children. They may have different child-rearing ideas and wishes than practitioners. Great differences may also exist between families. Everyone has his or her own idea about what child-rearing is or should be like. To handle this respectfully, practitioners have to display the necessary sensitivity.

A quality approach for each individual child can only be shaped on the basis of a democratic process and requires systematic consultation with and participation from each family.

## Actions with respect to society

### 11. ACKNOWLEDGING AND APPRECIATING DIVERSITY

Practitioners respectfully highlight the available diversity, and do thus neither ignore nor deny it. Practitioners acknowledge and confirm the individuality of every child and his family and work closely together with the parents and the neighbourhood (for instance participating in a party in the neighbourhood, shopping in a local shop, paying a visit to the local fire brigade, using the community infrastructure and services, like the library and park). Respect for human dignity and fundamental rights should at all times be the guiding principle in this.

### 12. WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHER FACILITIES AND SERVICES

By sharing the care for and education of children, childcare facilities make an important commitment with respect to children, families and society. Childcare facilities are aware that the life of children and families and society are partially shaped through their work and enter into partnerships to strengthen themselves for this responsibility. Depending on the needs of the children, families and practitioners, childcare facilities work together with other facilities and services, like creative specialists (musicians, sculptors), schools, parent support services, and therapists (like occupational therapist, speech therapist), but the latter always in consultation with the parents. Childcare facilities also cooperate with other care facilities, the local childcare centre, community services, the public centre for social welfare, the Child and Family Centre, Houses of the Child, the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency, welcome centres for newcomers, etc.

# What is needed to realise this?



## 1. REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS

Quality childcare requires reflective practitioners who are prepared to learn from and with each other, children, families and the neighbourhood. They integrate the different perspectives into their actions and reflect on their own practices. Such a reflective attitude is an essential part of the practitioners' professionalism.

## 2. SUPPORT FOR PRACTITIONERS

In order to remain critical of their own actions, practitioners can use pedagogical guidance to help support and stimulate reflection. In addition, practitioners feel that attention is paid to their well-being, participation, interests and talents.

## 3. LEADERSHIP

Quality childcare requires inspirational leadership. This leadership enables practitioners to meet the high expectations by creating a structured working environment which leaves time and space for observation, documentation, reflection, evaluation and adjustment of the practice, teamwork and planning and cooperation with parents and other facilities. Good leadership succeeds in motivating practitioners and in developing and implementing a supported vision. In smaller childcare facilities leadership can be understood as the management of the organization.

#### **4. A COMPETENT SYSTEM**

Childcare facilities have the necessary knowledge of and experience in working with children and their families. A competent childcare system is capable of adapting to changing requirements by allowing reflection on its own work methods. In a competent system practitioners and external partners work together on quality. By sharing reflections and discussing them with others (like colleagues, parents, external parties), a joint learning process comes about in which they aim to give a shared meaning to concrete situations.

#### **5. OBSERVATION, DOCUMENTATION, EVALUATION AND ADJUSTMENT**

Observation is one of the basic actions of practitioners. A focused observation makes it possible to quickly adjust and adapt practices. This willingness and orientation towards continuous and flexible adjustments in a constantly changing context are essential building blocks of a quality operation.

Observation also constitutes the basis for documentation and evaluation. A systematic and focused observation and documentation render the practice visible with an eye to reflecting on it, discussing it with each other and with the parents and making adjustments to the operation (including the pedagogical actions). They lay the foundations for (cyclical) self-assessment.

In the observations and documentation the central focus is on the efforts which childcare facilities make with respect to children, families and society. This includes, among other things, the targeted observation of children and their interactions with others and with the living and learning environment, the systematic mapping of children's experience(s), the pedagogical actions taken by practitioners with respect to children and families and the degree to which families are involved. In this way observations and documentation render life at the childcare facility visible and constitute a basis for dialogue with the parents.

Each evaluation is transparent and democratic and is discussed with the parties involved, either in team, or with families and/or other parties concerned.

# Composition of the working group “Pedagogical Framework”

The present pedagogical framework was created on the authority of the Child and Family Agency and is part of the project MeMoQ (Measuring and Monitoring Quality in Childcare Facilities for Babies and Toddlers).

Research management: Michel Vandenbroeck (Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, University of Ghent)  
Ferre Laevers (Research Centre for Experiential Education, University of Leuven)

Researchers: Hester Hulpia and Jeroen Janssen (Department of Education and Social Work, University of Ghent)  
Mieke Daems, Bart Declercq and Charlotte Van Cleynenbreugel (Research Centre for Experiential Education, University of Leuven)

Steering group: For Kind en Gezin: staff members from the divisions Childcare, Preventative Child Support, Family and Society and General Services and for the Flemish Care Inspectorate: Head of Division and Coordinator

Resonance group: The following organisations are represented:  
Kinderrechtencommissariaat, Minderhedenforum, Netwerk tegen armoede, Landelijke Kinderopvang, Femma, Vormingscentrum Opvoeding en Kinderopvang, dienst Kinderopvang Stad Gent, Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, Unieko, centrum voor volwassenenonderwijs Vormingsleergang voor Sociaal en Pedagogische Werk, Gemeenschapsonderwijs, Solidariteit voor het Gezin, kinderdagverblijf Pietje Pek, VoorZet, Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie, Pluralistisch Platform Jeugdzorg, Kinderrechtencoalitie, Vlaamse Diensten voor Opvanggezinnen, Onderwijs Steden en gemeenten, kinderdagverblijf De Ster, Vernieuwing in de Basisvoorzieningen voor Jonge Kinderen, Provinciale Commissie Buitenschoolse Opvang, Vlaams Welzijnsverbond, Zorginspectie, Vrij onderwijs, Thuishulp Reddie Teddy, Gezinsbond, Overleg Hogescholen Pedagogie Jonge Kind, Kind en Gezin.



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