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THE PROFESSIONAL ACTUATION OF PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION IN BELGIAN AND FINNISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SETTINGS

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Key words: pedagogical documentation, ECEC, pre-school education, staff perspective, current practices

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Data availability statement

Raw data were generated at Artevelde University College (Ghent, Belgium) and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (Finland, Helsinki). Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (I.H.) on request.

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ABSTRACT

The advantage of pedagogical documentation has been widely documented in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC). However, little research points out how and why professionals are using pedagogical documentation from the staff's perspective itself. Therefore, this research aimed to examine how pedagogical documentation is employed in their professional practice. The data for this descriptive qualitative study were collected by interviewing 56 ECEC professionals (heads of organizations, teachers and child minders) after their informed consent.

Three purposes in using pedagogical documentation were detected: 1/ to demonstrate facts and growth, 2/ to provoke further thinking; 3/ to facilitate adult-child interaction and interaction among adults. These uses were directed at children, parents, professionals, the neighbourhood, and the interactions across these groups.

The results show that staff uses pedagogical documentation in multiple ways, but not often as a tool for professional development. This yields future perspectives to support reflective professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Recent European research (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) emphasizes that continuous professional development is a crucial factor for increasing the competences of professionals working in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The study also shows that the professionalization of staff has gained substantial significance over the years. In 2009, continuous professional development was merely optional; more recently, it is considered a professional duty in most European countries (European Commission, 2014). Furthermore, the European CoRe Study points out that the pedagogical and educational quality of ECEC is determined by the reflective attitude and continuous professionalization of staff, and the cooperation in a learning team and competent system (Urban et al., 2011). In sum, it is clear that the professionalization of ECEC staff is an important European objective.

Early childhood education in Belgium and Finland

In **Finland**, ECEC is a service for children from 1 to 6 years and their families. The principle underlying pre-primary, basic, and upper secondary education is to guarantee basic educational security for all, irrespective of one's place of residence, language or economic standing. All children under school age (7 years) have a subjective right to ECEC, should their parents so decide.

ECEC is the responsibility of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. A revised Act on Early Childhood Education and Care was adopted in Spring 2015. Based on the new legislation, the Finnish National Board of Education became the national expert agency for ECEC in August 2015, and started the preparation of a normative National Core Curriculum for ECEC, which was released on August 2016.

The municipalities are responsible for arranging the ECEC services, and for their quality and supervision. Families can also opt for publicly subsidized private ECEC settings. The Finnish ECEC is based on an integrated approach to care, education and teaching, the so-called "educare" model. The new curriculum emphasizes the role of the Kindergarten Teacher in charge of the pedagogical approach, as staff consists of teachers and child minders in the child groups. Pedagogical documentation is a compulsory method for teachers from August 2017 onwards.

ECEC is primarily organized in municipality organized or private day-care centres, and in family day-care. Other forms of ECEC services include clubs run by the local parishes and other non-governmental organizations, and various forms of open early childhood education activities organized by the municipalities for children and their families. ECEC services have four perspectives: society, children, parents and staff. The content of all of the ECEC services is normatively guided by the National Core

Curriculum for ECEC. Every municipality must design their specific, practically and environmentally related curriculums based on the National curriculum, and must start this practice in Fall 2017.

The early childhood education in Finland is often mentioned for its high quality and well trained teachers and caregivers. On the other hand, it has been criticized for the differences in quality between individual staff members (e.g. Kalliala 2008, 2011). Care and education staff operating at day-care centres includes kindergarten teachers, special kindergarten teachers, social educators or Bachelors of Social Sciences, Bachelors and Masters of Education, practical children's nurses, kindergarten practical nurses and practical nurses (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2001).

ECEC services are free for low-income families in Finland (OECD, 2015, Table 1.1; OECD 2016). Children's development is monitored in all ECEC settings for all age levels on a continuous basis. The responsibility for monitoring is at the local level, and municipalities or local authorities decide on the monitoring practices. Monitoring is a common practice, but there is wide variation between municipalities as monitoring practices are not determined or regulated at the national level (OECD, 2015). Monitoring practices in Finland are, however, changing. According to the new Act on ECEC, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for evaluation in ECEC for national level (OECD 2016).

In **Belgium**, the responsibilities for ECEC are vested in the hands of three communities: the Flemish, French and German-speaking community. This study is conducted in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium. In Flanders, the ECEC system is split: childcare and education are organized separately. Between 0 and 3 years children can attend childcare in two forms: family-based childcare or centre-based childcare (Kind & Gezin, 2015). Between 2.5 and 6 years, children can attend pre-school education, which is a part of elementary or primary school. It is not compulsory and free of charge.

Childcare in Flanders is supervised by Kind & Gezin (Child and Family), under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister for Welfare, Public Health and Family. The Flemish government wants formal childcare to have an economic function, a pedagogical function, and a social function (Kind & Gezin, 2015). To guarantee accessibility, they give extra support to vulnerable families.

In family-based childcare, 1 person is usually taking care of maximally 8 children, mostly in their own home place. In centre-based childcare, where several childcare professionals are working together, the child-staff ratio is 1:8 when 1 person is present and 1:9 when more than one person is present.

Since 2014, a license is required for all persons taking care of babies and toddlers in paid childcare. The Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency is responsible to carry out on-site visits to inspect the quality of the childcare offered (Kind & Gezin, 2015). Also, in 2014 a new pedagogical framework was launched for the childcare of babies and toddlers (Janssen, Daems, Declercq, Hulpia, Van Cleynenbreugel, Laevers,

& Vandebroek, 2016). In this framework, a mission statement for high quality childcare in Flanders is defined, forming a strong basis to be committed to.

The framework mentions 12 actions to act pedagogically, ordered in actions towards children (with focus on four areas of experience), in actions towards families, and in actions towards society. Next to that, the pedagogical framework describes five 'motors' to realize high-quality childcare: 1/ reflective practitioners, 2/ support for practitioners, 3/ leadership, 4/ a competent system, and 5/ observation, documentation, evaluation and adjustment.

Following the new pedagogical framework, a self-evaluation instrument, a scientific measurement instrument, and a monitoring instrument for inspection were developed and launched in 2017 as part of the project 'Measuring and Monitoring Quality in childcare for babies and toddlers'.

As said above, Belgian children leave family-based or centre-based childcare settings between 2.5 and 3 years to attend pre-primary education. The Constitution guarantees parents the freedom to choose a school and the freedom to choose between a neutral official school and a free school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016a). Pre-primary or nursery education is non-compulsory, free of charge, and the teachers are Bachelors in pre-school education.

"In nursery education, pupils are usually grouped by age: 2.5 to 3 years; 3 to 4 years; 4 to 5 years; 5 to 6 years. However, the school's organising body is free to divide up the groups however it sees fit. Usually, the teacher does not remain with the class group when it goes up a year. Some schools make short-term or continuous use of the vertical division system, in which different age groups are brought together in the same year". (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016a) On average, there are 15-25 children per teacher.

In primary education, there are fixed attainment targets which should be reached. In pre-primary education there are developmental objectives: "minimum objectives in respect of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes the educational authorities deem desirable for a particular pupil population and which the school must strive to achieve in all its pupils by the end of nursery education". (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016b) The developmental objectives are formulated for five areas of learning: physical education, art education, Dutch, World studies, and mathematical initiation.

A specific method to monitor the children's development and growth is not compulsory, but every pre-primary school has to design a school policy plan, comprising a care policy in which they state how they will observe the children and follow-up their needs. A wide-spread method to document the children's development, more common than using authentic pedagogical documentation, is the

'child-follow-up-system' ('kindvolgsysteem' or 'KVS') focusing on well-being, involvement, competences of the class group as a whole and the individual child. However, schools are allowed to develop their own system suiting their particular needs.

The importance of pedagogical documentation

The years from birth to 6 have been recognized as crucial years for a child's development (Tilbury, Coleman and Garlick, 2005). Research confirms the importance of the early years to influence children in a long-lasting way. The value orientations of children are largely determined by the time they reach the age of formal schooling (UNESCO 2000).

Pedagogical documentation is a well-known and well-developed approach to focus on children in ECEC. It consists of an illustration of the children's learning by a collection of visible records such as photographs, audio or video recordings, quotes, written notes, products of children (Malavasi & Zoccatelli, 2013). In our study, the term pedagogical documentation, introduced by Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999), is used in order to discern a form of documentation that attempts to make development visible.

The term preserves the notion of the educator's task to study learning, in order to figure out how to educate a child. Pedagogical documentation is the educator's story of the child's development (Burrington & Sortino, 2004; Giudici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2001; Katz & Chard, 1996; Malaguzzi, 1996). It is originally and mostly used with a focus on the children's development, and as a personal pedagogical instrument to continuously support the further development of a child. Therefore, pedagogical documentation is an excellent method to monitor one's practice with children.

We define documentation as the "practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing through a variety of media the processes and products of learning in order to deepen and extend learning ... These physical traces allow others to revisit, interpret, reinterpret, and even re-create an experience." (Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, & Wilson, 2013, p. 74). "... Pedagogical documentation is a process for making pedagogical (or other) work visible and subject to dialogue, interpretation, contestation and transformation." (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007, p. 225)

Plain contents, such as photos, texts, videos, children's work or audio-like material, are not enough to make the documentation pedagogical (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). An essential part consists of the reflective discussions about the documents by colleagues, children, and their parents. Through the documenting process, the aim is to create an open pedagogical forum for different parties, where problems and issues are found, conclusions are drawn, common meanings are built, children and education become visible and create the basis for democratic education. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Rinaldi 2005; Turner & Wilson, 2010)

By documenting, adults can also reconsider their relationship with children and their perception as educators and teachers. It is also essential to utilize documentation in evaluating the suitability of educational activities, in recognizing the needs of development, and in consciously transforming the practices. (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence 2013; Rinaldi 2005; Turner & Wilson 2010) In addition, the documenting process can increase the understanding and awareness of the pedagogue about oneself, one's attitudes, activities and relationships with children, or conflicts between learned theories and practice, thus supporting and developing the professional growth and development of educational activities. (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Katz 1998; Oken-Wright 2001; Rinaldi 2005.)

Katz (1998) emphasises the following benefits of documenting: the expansion and deepening of children's learning, the sharing of events and experiences, and the parents' growing awareness of their children's daily lives. Pedagogical documentation also sketches a broader picture of a child's learning and development than standardized tests and checklists. Further benefits include the support of reflection and the possibility to repeat events, and the possibility to go through the documentation process alone or together with others. (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Katz 1998; Oken-Wright 2001; Rinaldi 2005.)

The role of the various parties involved in documenting can also be influenced by the style of documentation which is ultimately used in educational work. Rintakorpi (2016) examined the experiences and perceptions on the pedagogical documentation of Finnish kindergarten teachers. The documentation was most often mentioned in teachers' remarks as a supportive activity for professional development or the visibility of early childhood education. Teachers' views therefore seemed to emphasize the use of documentation in teacher's own learning, instead of focusing on the support gained by the child's consultation or participation. (Rintakorpi 2016.)

In a study by Reynolds and Duff (2015), parents were also using pedagogical documents. Parents felt that shared documents supported interaction and discussion with allied parties, and also with early childhood education staff. The documentation supports the transmission of information, contacts and understanding between the child's close relatives as well as the family and early childhood educators. (Reynolds & Duff 2016) Children too have the potential to utilize these documents as a source of discussion and interaction; most likely with adults, but also in the interaction between children (Eflström 2013: 205-206, Rintakorpi 2014, Rintakorpi & al., 2014).

Both Rintakorpi (2014) and Reynolds and Duff (2016) found out that the parents gained pride of their children when sharing and observing their children's documents in a care environment or at home. The illustration of children's performances and achievements, seemed to support a positive identity (Reynolds-Duff 2016). Also, in Swedish kindergarten groups surveyed by Holmberg (2015), children

showed pride when looking together at the documents in which they figured. They often consulted these documents and shared them with pleasure. Teachers involved in the study claimed that the children recognized their learning through the documents, and they were delighted to see themselves as part of a group of children. Holmberg considered the documentation to support the self-understanding and self-esteem of children. (Holmberg 2015: 92, 108, 121-122) According to Buldu's (2010) study, pedagogical documentation stimulates and motivates children to look back at their achievements and gain a deeper self-understanding. The research shows, therefore, that the documentation supported the awareness and understanding of the children themselves and of their development, which also provides a basis for future learning and action. (Buldu 2010)

Problem statement

The advantage of using pedagogical documentation has been widely and convincingly described in literature. So, it is not surprising that a lot of ECEC organisations adopt this method. However, little research points out how and why pedagogical documentation is used, from the perspective of the practitioners themselves. Therefore, this research's aim was to explore and describe the pedagogical and professional use of documentation by professionals working with young children (0-6 years). The central research question was: how and why are professionals working with young children (0-6) using pedagogical documentation in their professional practice?

METHOD

To answer the research question, a descriptive qualitative study was carried out in Finland and in Belgium. As was already pointed out, the organisation of ECEC differs in both countries. In Finland there is an integrated ECEC system for children between 1 and 6 years old. In Belgium there is a split ECEC system for children between 0 and 3 years old, and for children between 2.5 and 6 years old. The intention of this descriptive research was not to compare both countries with regard to the use of pedagogical documentation by professionals. Rather, the explicit intention was to collect data from two countries with different educational organisation and policies in order to broaden our understanding of the use of pedagogical documentation by professionals.

To deepen our understanding of the use of pedagogical documentation by professionals, we contacted ECEC organizations (schools and day-care centres) who were explicit about their use of pedagogical documentation in their professional practice and who were willing to talk about their professional practice. In Finland, the interviews were implemented in municipal day-care centres in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. In Belgium, the interviews were implemented in day-care centres and pre-schools in Flanders. In Belgium as well as in Finland, the focus was on centre-based child care (and not on family-based child care), as pedagogical documentation is more firmly integrated in the

pedagogical project of those settings, and because there are more similarities with Belgian pre-schools, where children are always educated in group.

Ethics

The organizations willing to participate were informed about the goal and the method of the study by an informative video clip and an information letter. In an optional telephone call or an on-site visit by one of the researchers, they could ask questions for clarification. Afterwards, informed consent from all participants was fulfilled.

Data collection methods

Data were collected by three research methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ECEC organization's heads. These organization's heads were responsible for the educational organisation, but also for the staff organisation of the ECEC organizations addressed. A large part of the interviews were conducted by bachelor or master students that were prepared for the interviews through a training by the researchers. Also, there were detailed interview guidelines in which the different questions were outlined. In all cases, the interviews were conducted by two persons in Belgium: one taking up the role of interviewer, the other taking up the role of making notes. In Finland, one person took on the role of interviewer. The duration of the interviews varied between 30 and 60 minutes. They were fully audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. To ensure the validity of the data, the data were immediately presented to the participant in the last part of the interview, by the person taking notes during the interview. Through this member check (Creswell & Miller, 2000), participants could comment on the accuracy of the data that were collected.

Second, focus groups were conducted with ECEC practitioners. A group of child minders or a group of teachers from one ECEC organization were interviewed together. There was a shared guidance for the focus groups in which the different interview topics were outlined with the questions to be asked and the methods to be used to stimulate storytelling by the participants. All focus groups were conducted by two persons: one taking on the role of moderator, the other taking up the role of making notes. The duration of the focus groups varied between 90 and 150 minutes. They were fully audio recorded and transcribed afterwards. To ensure the validity of the data, all focus groups were concluded by an immediate member check (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The person taking notes made a PowerPoint presentation on the spot with the data from the focus group itself and presented this to the participants. Staff members could thus give extra comments, suggestions to change or improve a particular statement, etc.

During the data collection, both in the 1-1 interviews as in the focus groups, the following topics, in link with the research question, were addressed: a general description of the use of pedagogical

documentation (types of documentation, ways of using documentation, ways of selecting data for documentation, reasons for using documentation), a specification of this usage for different target groups (children, parents, colleagues, neighbourhood), and the link with professionalization.

Third, the four researchers in this study maintained a shared logbook in which they carefully noted all observations and reflections after each interview or focus group. These logs served as field notes.

Research procedure

In the research procedure, it was agreed upon that the 1-1 interviews would start in Finland and the focus groups would start in Belgium. After interviewing 10 participants in both Finland and Belgium, a first shared data analysis was conducted by the researchers of both countries (for more information, see below). This resulted in a descriptive set of themes that were obvious in the data. Afterwards, the 1-1 interviews and the focus groups were further conducted in both countries until reaching a point of saturation in the data.

In sum, 56 professionals from 39 different ECEC organizations were interviewed in this study. This suits the ideal number of participants in a qualitatively grounded theory study, which is minimally between 20 and 30 according to Creswell (1998), or between 30 and 50 interviews according to Morse (1994).

29 1-1 interviews were fulfilled (N in Finland = 20; N in Belgium = 9). 27 practitioners (teachers and child minders) from 10 different ECEC organizations were reached through focus groups (N in Belgium = 15; N in Finland = 12). In this group, 10 teachers and 17 child minders were interviewed.

Data analysis

From an interpretative research paradigm, all reports from the interviews, together with field notes in the researchers' logbook were analysed according to the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During the data collection, the data were regularly examined critically by the researchers individually. After 10 interviews and 10 focus groups, the researchers worked together in collegial discussion on the data which benefitted validity and reliability. The data were examined with an open mind and closely connected to what was written in the reports, and with the research question as clear guidance. With paper and pencil, patterns and themes that were emerging from the data were searched for and discussed. As such, the data categories were originating from the data itself. Afterwards, the data were critically examined to decide whether certain themes could be combined in one overarching theme. One researcher initiated this process, the other researchers did a cross check of the data. All data were coded until a final data categorization and a point of saturation were reached.

Reliability during the data analysis was guaranteed by triangulation of the three data sources. As such, the use of pedagogical documentation was approached by three different perspectives (from the ECEC

organizations' heads, from practitioners working with the children, and from the researchers' observations and reflections). Also, investigator triangulation was guaranteed as during the data analysis the researchers worked individually first, and discussed their data themes afterwards in order to come to a final analysis of the data. Finally, students and an advisory board with experts from the ECEC field served as critical friends during this process of data analysis.

RESULTS

The data analysis resulted in three main categories which reflect how and why ECEC staff are using pedagogical documentation. These three categories are practices and/or purposes of pedagogical documentation in ECEC: to demonstrate, to provoke further thinking, and to facilitate interaction.

To organize the results within these three categories, an extra perspective was adopted during the data analysis which appeared to reflect the focussed use of pedagogical documentation by ECEC staff well. This perspective considers four target groups, mentioned more or less frequently, to which the pedagogical documentation is directed: children, parents/families, professionals and the neighbourhood.

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION TO DEMONSTRATE FACTS AND GROWTH

Practitioners use pedagogical documentation to demonstrate both facts and growth.

With regard to **children**, they demonstrate through different kinds of documentation what the children's talents or strengths are. For example, there is a booklet available in the living unit where all children are documented in their strength by a photograph or drawing, or they have a little talk with children around that documentation to emphasize their talents.

'We present and exhibit the documentation in the living unit to make the children clear that they are appreciated in the group. The children react on the documentation and that stimulates the staff to further document.'

In the interviews, staff members also mention the use of pedagogical documentation to show agreements to children. For example, they use pedagogical posters to show to children which materials can be used in a certain play area in the room.

ECEC staff also mention the use of pedagogical documentation to demonstrate facts and growth to **parents**. They want to show that their child has been seen, but also that their child has been developing. For instance, staff members use it as a tool to show recently adopted skills to parents, or their child's astonishment when discovering a new material or experience. Moreover, they

demonstrate their typical way of working through pedagogical documentation. For example, a day in the kindergarten is visualized by pedagogical documentation.

‘We use the documentation to show parents the functioning and the vision of our kindergarten.’

‘Through documentation comes a better understanding of the child, an awareness of what the child is able to do and how the development proceeds, some skills might disappear, changes can occur ... If not documented, you cannot follow the process.’

Professionals are using pedagogical documentation for themselves as **professionals** too. Pedagogical documentation is used to keep track of what they have been doing in their work with children. For example, a teacher documents in a booklet the different pedagogical activities during the week. Some also clarify in the interviews how pedagogical documentation advances between colleagues a connected way of working that suits the organizations’ philosophy.

‘The documentation shows our way of working to new colleagues.’

Some professionals also mention that they use pedagogical documentation to demonstrate their own professional growth, e.g. how they developed the reading ritual over the years.

In some ECEC organizations, pedagogical documentation is explicitly used to demonstrate the core of an organisation to the **neighbourhood**: ‘this is who we are as an organisation’. They present pedagogical documentation of typical activities to the outside world, in order to offer passers-by a demonstration of what happens inside the walls of the ECEC setting.

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION TO PROVOKE FURTHER THINKING

Our research presents the use of pedagogical documentation to provoke further thinking as a separate category to describe how and why staff members use pedagogical documentation in their practice. Pedagogical documentation has, according to them, the power to influence the thinking of the people that are addressed by the documentation. As they speak, they want to bring their audience of the documentation one step further in their thinking. They want to prompt new possibilities for children, parents, professionals, and the neighbourhood.

In their work with **children**, staff members use pedagogical documentation to encourage the children to look for new initiatives. By documenting certain activities, experiences, uses of materials, or other things, they hope to inspire their children to find or look for new or different possibilities in play.

‘I want to stimulate the independence of the children, their own initiative by displaying posters that show the possibilities to use the materials or the space.’

Pedagogical documentation is also used by ECEC staff so as to show to **parents** the importance of ECEC and the pedagogical aspect of their work with children.

‘I want parents to think about the importance of early childhood education by showing them photographs about the variation in activities we offer.’

This is linked with the purpose to offer inspiration to parents to (inter)act pedagogically with their children. They want to show how children develop in interaction with adults or when exploring materials, in order to induce or to convince them to organize similar pedagogical activities at home.

Using pedagogical documentation also serves the purpose to enhance further thinking of **professionals**. Through documentation not only inspiration but also concrete guidance for activities or pedagogical approaches can be given.

‘We take a glance at the documents of each other (colleagues) to get new inspiration for activities.’

‘We like to be a fly on the wall in a colleague’s classroom.’

Within the **neighbourhood**, pedagogical documentation could serve the purpose of provoking further thinking and offer inspiration to other organizations. No concrete examples were mentioned pertaining to this topic.

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION TO FACILITATE INTERACTION

The purposes of demonstration and provoking further thinking are unidirectional: directed from the ECEC staff towards the other partner. The third purpose of pedagogical documentation that was discerned consists of interaction in both ways. By using pedagogical documentation, ECEC staff facilitates interaction among a staff member and a child (influencing a child’s actions, the interaction between children, or the relationship between adult and child), but also among adults (staff members and parents). They use pedagogical documentation or experience the strength of pedagogical documentation to create a ‘feeling of togetherness’ and to enhance an atmosphere of (inter)acting together.

First, pedagogical documentation is used to facilitate the interaction of **children**. During the interviews, staff members referred to the child’s self-awareness. Pedagogical documentation yields the possibility to develop (a strong) identity in children. They see themselves in the documentation as developing persons. But also, pedagogical documentation facilitates the interaction between children.

‘It is nice to see how the children look at the books with pedagogical documentation together. Small moments of communication and interaction originate from that: ‘this child is doing this, this child is doing that’’

Second, the interaction of **parents** is also facilitated by pedagogical documentation. This was explicated on three levels:

1/ the parent-child interaction (e.g. parents and children discussing documentation together):

‘I want to offer children the possibility to talk about what they have done with their parents. I want to offer them opportunities for language.’

‘The digital frame is very important for the children. We have it in the corridor, so when the parent comes in to take the child home, they can take a look at the day’s activities together with the child and chat about the experiences.’

2/ the interaction between parents (e.g. parents discussing the pedagogical documentation that is displayed when they come to pick up their children);

3/ the staff-parent interaction (e.g. staff members and parents using the pedagogical documentation in their conversations).

‘We avoid saying ‘the day was fine’. We want to tell something that connects the parent to the child’s experiences during the day.’

‘We can tell the parents (supported by the documents): This is why we are concerned. How should we proceed together?’

Our data reveal that pedagogical documentation is also used to smoothen the interaction among **professionals**. The staff-child interaction is boosted by the pedagogical documentation when for example they examine the pedagogical documentation together with a (group of) child(ren). The interaction between professionals is stimulated by the opportunity to give feedback, but also to feel connected in their work.

‘The photos, the illustrations, the children’s creations that we distribute through the documentation mean a lot for us as colleagues working together, it gives us the feeling and the confirmation ‘we are doing this together’’

Lastly, pedagogical documentation was also mentioned to facilitate interaction in the **neighbourhood**. The concrete illustrations within the pedagogical documents offers possibilities to exchange (good) practices between organizations. Accordingly, international exchange and learning was described as a value of pedagogical documentation.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Main conclusions

As our results confirm, pedagogical documentation serves three key purposes: demonstrating, provoking further thinking, and facilitating interaction. These goals are crucial for professionals to feel confident about using pedagogical documentation in a professional way, as part of their professional practice. The importance of pedagogical documentation certainly differs for our four target groups: children, parents, professionals, and the neighbourhood. When professionals in early childhood education field learn to verbalize more explicitly the value of their profession and strengths of their pedagogical thinking, it will be more widely understood how important and demanding this profession is. This is linked to the purpose of demonstrating facts and growth to the neighbourhood and to society. The verbalization begins with sharing your thinking with colleagues, and widens up so as to share with other parties as well. From a pedagogical and ethical perspective, this will also provide the possibility for children and their parents to evaluate the day-care and have impact on the practices. As Malavasi, Zoccatelli (2013) and Buldu (2010) state, pedagogical documentation is a well-known and widely used method to support the learning process itself – to visualize the state of being, and also the developmental progress of the child. When teachers in early childhood education add their pedagogical thinking to this documentation, it becomes reflective, thus supporting professional growth, evaluation, and therefore enhancing the understanding of the demands of the profession itself.

Reflection on the research method and future perspectives

This is the first research on pedagogical documentation based on the perspective of staff themselves, which yields a broad image of the use of pedagogical documentation. This overview could also convince other ECEC staff to use pedagogical documentation in multiple ways, instead of using it in only one (already known) way.

This research is based on data from Belgium as well as from Finland, and integrates practices in a split as well as an integrated system. Although this symbolizes an intra-European interaction, it would definitely be interesting to increase the number of countries involved to get an even broader image.

Based on our qualitative data set, this research does not point out a quantitative image of the different purposes of pedagogical documentation. Sometimes staff members emphasized a particular purpose of their pedagogical documentation but we could not measure whether this purpose was used frequently or not. Our data consist of the staff members' opinions on this topic. In this qualitative

study, we have sketched an overarching view on different kinds of purposes and practices in using pedagogical documentation. For sure, this is inspiring for practitioners.

We interviewed staff members from organizations that were already using pedagogical documentation in a deliberate way and professionals who were willing to share their ideas on the research question. This could distort our conclusions in two ways: 1/ persons who are not using documentation are not included in this study 2/ it is difficult to distinguish whether participants only mentioned the real current practices or also intertwined their dreams or aspirations. Our data remain mostly verbal statements rather than observations of practices. However, people were eager to show their pedagogical documents to support their statements during the interviews.

The purposes discerned in this study are based only on the staff perspective (child minders, teachers, and heads), showing their intentions towards different target groups. Therefore, it could be a future suggestion to interview parents or neighbours as well, and/or to observe children in how they are experiencing and using pedagogical documentation.

Suggestions for further research

From our data, it can be concluded that pedagogical documentation serves the overall goal of verbalizing obvious but hidden ideas. However, the practitioners or the organizations' heads did not mention the next step in this process: to use pedagogical documentation as a tool for further professional development.

It is impossible to reflect on one's profession without the demonstration of one's pedagogical practice. Current research (e.g., Peeters et al., 2015) shows that the professional development of ECEC staff is considerably enhanced by reflection. Reflection can be seen as a method and also as a purposeful inter-subjective process, which causes transformation in our attitudes, beliefs and practical skills (see Lynch, 2000, 26.) As Dewey (1933) points out reflective learning is a complex, rigorous, intellectual and emotional enterprise that takes time to do well.

This clearly indicates that reflection with colleagues in learning groups is an important motor for professional development, as was also stressed by the European CoRe study. Similarly, the European Quality Framework for ECEC indicates the need for methods that stimulate reflective group learning of these professionals (Peeters et al., 2015). Secondly, following the principles of video-interaction guidance (Fukkink, & Tavecchio, 2010) and the results of the 'verbeelding' (imagination) research (Bracke, Hostyn, & Steverlynck, 2014), the daily work with children is an important starting point for professional reflection and development. The focus on children, their needs and interests, furthers the commitment of the staff and motivates them for further learning and development as a professional. Starting from concrete behaviours and situations in the own practice is a major asset to initiate

professional growth (Domitrovich et al., 2009; Pianta et al., 2008). Focused feedback on concrete situations in the own practice with children, time for personal reflection (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009) and child-free hours with the team (Peeters et al., 2015) seem necessary to create positive effects of professional development initiatives.

In sum, group reflection and reflective observation of daily practices with children is a great part of the development of the ECEC staff's professional knowledge (Mäkitalo et al. 2009). Practitioners need practice-oriented methods of enhancing reflection and professionalization, starting from the focus on children (the passion and daily work of professionals) and offering inspiration for immediate transfer to their practice.

The use of pedagogical documentation to continuously support the further development of professionals is less focussed in literature, research and practice. However, pedagogical documentation can be treated both as teacher research into children's thoughts and feelings, and as a method that yields major potential to design processes for professional development in a specific context. Pedagogical documentation is not only a means to register processes in working with young children, but also to reflect on this registration afterwards. It holds potential as a dialogical tool to demonstrate the own professionalism (PROUD!), and to communicate with colleague professionals. It holds potential to start from positive examples, an important issue in an appreciative way of working on professional development, to make them conscious about their daily behaviour and skills (making silent knowledge visible), and to invite them to further reflect and grow (making silent knowledge discussable). Or, as Urban et al. (2011, p. 27) state: 'documenting practice, critically reflecting upon it, and co-constructing pedagogy.' The concept of a pedagogical reasoning process made visible through reflection on pedagogical documentation helps child minders, teachers, and policy makers grasp the idea of the professional knowledge of ECEC staff.

Pedagogical documentation and reflective practice together have possibilities to make the ECEC profession visible and to create further professional development. By focussing on what we can learn from each other's pedagogical documentation, and building a common understanding of professional knowledge, we agree with Rogers (2002), Dewey (1933), and also Mezirow (2000). As the participants share experiences, establish interpretations and question different opinions based on their pedagogical documentation, it will generate changes in the professionalism of each participant. It will help conceptualizing a purpose of documentation as making pedagogical thinking visible, and sharing visible theories with others for interpretation and further development of ECEC practices.

Combining reflection and pedagogical documentation is an undeveloped topic in literature but a promising and innovative perspective for practice. The use of pedagogical documentation as a close-

to-practice tool for collegial reflection and professional growth needs to be further explored. Also, since little is known about the use of pedagogical documentation as input for professional development, it would be interesting to get insight in the current use of pedagogical documentation as a tool for professionalization. In sum, describing and using pedagogical documentation in ECEC as a resource to reflect and to develop one's practice through dialogue with other persons involved, remains an exciting and emerging area of interest.

As Peeters et al. (2015) and Sheridan et al. (2009) indicate, there is need for research that describes and specifies professionalization practices in ECEC to advance the understanding of professional development in ECEC. Therefore, practice-oriented research yields major potential to investigate together with practitioners how to build a bridge between the existing use of pedagogical documentation and the targeted use of pedagogical documentation as a tool for professional reflection and development, and to describe how this professional development process is working and which support is necessary for that. By practice-oriented research, the link between research and practice can be promoted, by which we fully answer the needs for research in ECEC that were pointed out by Sheridan and colleagues (2009).

As a conclusion, it is highly significant to investigate how ECEC professionals are currently using pedagogical documentation in their professional development, and which tools can be used to support the co-constructive discussion with colleagues based on pedagogical documentation. Referring to the above mentioned European policy framework, it would also be interesting to investigate how sharing foreign pedagogical documents supports the professional reflection and growth in collegial discussion. Thus, valuable insights can be developed on how to support the use of pedagogical documentation as a means for professional reflection and growth in ECEC, suiting the needs in research, policy, and practice.

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