

BELGIUM (FL)

DISCUSSION PAPER

Transitions and *educare* in pre-service training for
future ECEC professionals



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1. Introduction¹

Transitions and role of ECEC

In the last years, more attention has been given to the acknowledgement that transitions across the home environment, early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings and compulsory school education (CSE) mark significant changes in the life of children and their families and communities (Balduzzi et al., 2019). Moreover there is an international consensus that positive experiences of transition can be a critical factor for children's wellbeing and for their future success and development, while negative transitional experiences can have lasting challenges leading to poorer educational performance, especially for societally disadvantaged children (Dumčius et al., 2014). Adopting a more unified approach to caring and learning (educare) across educational settings in order to sustain continuity of children's experiences over time, can significantly improve children's educational achievement and socio-emotional development. In turn, promoting inter-institutional professional learning communities of ECEC and primary school staff, as well as involving parents in the transition process, are considered to be key factors in ensuring successful transitions (Brooker, 2008).

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, because of the historical split between childcare and preschool education, transitioning to preschool can be overwhelming with a lot of emotional turmoil and stress for young children, parents and professionals. Having competent ECEC staff that is aware of the meaning and role of transitions in children's and families' life is then crucial. That is why, within a competent system (Urban et al., 2011), good quality in-service and pre-service training for (future) ECEC professionals are needed, with a focus on educare and transitions.

Transitions can be seen as 'rites de passages', that come with important rituals. In everyone's life there are crucial transitioning moments, such as birth, puberty, marriage/partnership, death. In between there are other transitions, which take different shapes in the life of each individual. A few examples: from home to childcare or preschool, the start of a school or student career, the first job, changes in relationships, moving (from one place/country to another), having children or not, pension... There are also transitions during the day, as children might experience in a preschool-context: from home to childcare/school every morning and vice-versa; from the playing room to the eating room; from school to out of school care etc.

Transitioning means going towards something (at least partly) new, but also saying goodbye, leaving something behind, which includes dealing with the notion of loss. When talking about preschool, this means that children and families need to find a (new) balance between the known and the unknown. This search can cause a mix of excitement and stress.

Transitions are important moments for parents too: going to childcare or preschool is also a 'rite de passage' for parents, who might feel that their life as a parent is changing. A new

¹ The introduction is partly based on the Intrans General Framework: <https://www.issa.nl/content/intrans-general-framework-what-are-warm-and-inclusive-transitional-inclusive-practices>

educational/parenting world is added alongside theirs, with its own rules, responsibilities, roles, functions. The practitioner or preschool teacher becomes an important new adult in their child's life and education. This can create ambivalent feelings for parents, which need to find a place and be understood.

The way ECEC conceptualizes and organizes transitions makes the difference on how children and families experience these moments.

When warm transitions take place in ECEC, several common threads are visible, like creating connection, inclusion, growth of self-confidence, with uncertainty about the future but confident in the fact that there will be support.

As Elizabeth Roses (2020, 133) writes: *"It is not the transition itself that is stressful, but the surrounding factors are"*. Stress is normally involved when you have little or no impact on how the transition is going, when there is no negotiation on the meaning of transitions, when you feel not listened to, when transitions are school-centred instead of child-family centred, when they are conceived and organized just as preparation to the 'next' system (pre-school prepares for primary, primary for secondary...).

In order to work on their transition-policy, ECEC centres can ask themselves: do we organize transitions from childcare or home to preschool 'the hard way', thinking that children will soon or later 'get used to it'? Do we put in place a clash between 2 systems: home vs school or childcare vs school? Or do we accompany a gradual and warm transition? How do children and families feel about this? How do we move towards a more child-family centered transition ritual? Do parents and children have a voice in this? Are they actively involved in their transition period, are they invited to make connections?

ECEC centres have an important impact on the conditions that foster warm, smooth and inclusive transitions. The InTrans-project aimed at studying and reinforcing that impact. As part of the InTrans project, this discussion paper aims at studying how transitions and educare are included and conceptualized in the curricula of the initial training institutions (selected sample) preparing future ECEC professionals (working in childcare and preschool) in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

Framework and contribution of the InTrans project

In the InTrans project we understand good transitional practices as favouring warm and inclusive transitions across the home, ECEC, and primary school environments. These practices increase the wellbeing and learning opportunities of a diversity of children, specifically vulnerable groups such as children living in poverty, and/or children with migration background, and/or children with special needs. The project supports the acknowledgement that by installing a professional collaboration across institutional and professional boundaries, ECEC professionals and teachers feel better supported to ensure warm and inclusive transitions for all children and families.

The literature emphasises that four processes are important for having all the elements to create smooth transition (Dumčius et al., 2014):

- structural continuity
- pedagogical continuity
- professional continuity
- continuity with the home and community

On the basis of these processes, the InTrans project disseminates and upscales at policy and training level the 'lessons learned' from other developed approaches/projects/researches that have worked on the above mentioned elements, with the aim of influencing the systemic conditions needed in order to implement good transitional practices on a wider scale in ECEC and primary school. The ultimate goal is to ensure that more children and families, especially the most vulnerable ones, can benefit from transitional warm and inclusive practices. To do this, InTrans upscales existing good practices, by working on three essential aspects of the competent system:

1. Level of policy/governance
2. Level of in-service training of ECEC professionals and teachers
3. Pre-service training of future ECEC professionals and teachers

This discussion paper focuses on the third point (pre-service training institutions).

Children are expected to step into a school-based system, while thoughtful warm and inclusive welcoming policies are not always in place. Although international policy institutions such as UNESCO and the European Council (Council of the European Union, 2019) emphasise the power of an integrated *educare* approach to care, play & learning, well-being, education and socialisation of young children, this integrated approach is not obvious in countries/regions such as Belgium (Flemish Community) with split systems between care and education. To raise awareness on the problems coming from these institutional splits and co-construct new transitional practices and *educare* approaches over the entire ECEC sector, it is important that future ECEC professionals are prepared in the fields of tensions that they will experience themselves when they start working as an ECEC staff member. Therefore we have developed this discussion paper on the place and implementation of transitions and *educare* in the pre-service training programs. Based on an analysis of a small sample of case studies, we have developed reflection questions and discussion points for early years pre-service trainers and trainings institutions.

1.1. Aim

The aim of this discussion paper is to provide insights on how transitions and *educare* are embedded in pre-service trainings for childcare workers, preschool teachers and pedagogues for young children in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

More specifically, within the InTrans project, the Belgian (FI) research team worked on the initial training for ECEC professionals with the aim of:

- 1) Raising awareness and starting a debate on pedagogical continuity and the importance of transitions in initial training institutions.
- 2) Exchanging inspirational examples on how to take transitions and educare into account in the initial training of ECEC staff.
- 3) Supporting initial training institutions in getting to know each other.

The leading research questions are:

- *How are transitions and educare taken into account in the curricula and in the teaching practice of the selected initial training institutions?*
- *Which methods are used to support students getting familiar with these themes?*
- *Which inspiring practices already exist in initial training institutions concerning transitions/educare?*

1.2. Method

To gain a deeper understanding on how transitions and educare are embedded in the pre-service training institutions, we have analysed curricula and/or courses of a selection of ECEC training institutions. Moreover, we have conducted individual interviews and focus groups with ECEC pre-service trainers and recently graduated ECEC students.

The lens of our analysis is the [Intrans research-based framework on transitions and educare](#).

In Belgium (FI), there are 16 University College programs for preschool teachers, 3 University College programs for pedagogues for young children, 132 upper secondary schools (*7nde jaar Kinderzorg*) and 25 adult educational institutions training future childcare workers (*CVO* and *Syntra*).

In order to initiate a debate amongst pre-service trainers on the implementation of transitions and educare, we have selected the following sample of training institutions:

- Artevelde University College (Ghent) – curriculum of PJK (Pedagogy of the young child) and of preschool education (2,5-6)
- Erasmus University College (Brussels) – curriculum of PJK (Pedagogy of the young child) and of preschool education (2,5-6)
- Karel de Grote University College (Antwerpen) – curriculum of PJK (Pedagogy of the young child) and of preschool education (2,5-6)
- One upper secondary school (7nde Jaar Kinderzorg – Vocational study preparing childcare workers)



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- CVO (Adult Education preparing future childcare workers)

The analysis has been carried out in the following way:

Artevelde University College (Gent)	Analysis of paper courses PJK and preschool education + interview with 2 lecturers PJK and 2 lecturers preschool education
Erasmus University College (Brussels)	Analysis curriculum and courses of PJK and preschool education
Karel de Grote University College (Antwerpen)	Analysis courses of PJK and preschool education + interviews with 2 lecturers PJK and 4 lecturers preschool education
7nde jaar Kinderzorg (Vocational study)	Analysis curriculum/courses (childcare)
CVO (Adult Education)	Analysis curriculum/courses (childcare)
SYNTRA	Analysis curriculum/courses (childcare)
One focus group has been organized with representatives of the responsables and lecturers of the analysed training institutions (9 people participated)	

Although this exploratory study cannot be generalised for all pre-service training institutions in the Flemish Community of Belgium, these curricula are illustrative examples on what kind of fields of tensions and questions arise from the implementation of transitions and educare visions.

The curricula/courses of the selected initial training institutions have been analysed through a grid elaborated within the InTrans consortium, taking into account the 4 continuities that create the framework of the InTrans project (pedagogical continuity; professional continuity; structural continuity; continuity with families and community) (General Framework Intrans, <https://www.issa.nl/content/intrans-general-framework-what-are-warm-and-inclusive-transitional-inclusive-practices>).

The results of this analysis have been discussed:

- 1) separately with some of the training institution involved, through interviews with a selected number of lecturers and responsables of those institutions, with the aim of better understanding how the courses is implemented in practice with the students (see table above);
- 2) with starting professionals that followed those initial trainings and that are now working in childcare and preschool. For this purpose, a focus group has been organised, aimed at



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exploring how the competences learned through the studies on transitions and educare are put in practice (4 people trained in different institutions took part in this focus group).

- 3) On the basis of the analysed documents and the above mentioned interviews, a first thematic overall analysis has been then developed and discussed during a mixed focus group with lecturers and responsables of the different initial training institutions involved (9 people took part to this focus group). This focus group served as research tool and as platform to raise awareness by starting a debate amongst different initial training institutions about the place that transitions and educare should have in their curricula. In this way we also supported the different institutions in getting to know each other.

Based on the analysed documents and interviews/focus groups, the researchers developed new thematic categories under the 4 continuity dimensions, and revisited the data according to these new categories. This document presents the results of this second thematic analysis and aims at raising questions and initiating the debate on how transitions and educare are and can be implemented in the pre-service training curricula.

It needs to be underlined that this document doesn't aim at providing a full scientific analysis of all courses of the selected training institutions. Moreover, due to time and availability, not all the training institutions have been involved in interviews. Our aim with this paper is mainly related to raising the discussion concerning the place of transitions and educare in the curricula of the initial training institutions, by exploring good practices and challenges present at the moment in the sector.

For a better understanding, in the next paragraphs we first give an overview of how ECEC is organized in Belgium (FI) and what are the profiles of the ECEC staff, before discussing the thematic analysis.



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2. Regulatory framework for ECEC pre-service training institutions

2.1. ECEC system in Belgium (FI)

Belgium is a federal state with 3 communities (Flemish, French, German Community) and 3 regions (Flanders, Walloon, Brussels-Capital) next to the federal level. Policy areas such as family services, childcare services, education, youth work and welfare are regulated at the community level. In this discussion paper we have focused on the Flemish community of Belgium. However, the discourse on transitions and problems that arise due to the institutional splits are rather similar in the other communities.



Belgium (FI) is historically characterised by a double ECEC split system, where childcare services for children up to three years of age (*kinderopvang*) and out of school care services for children from two and a half to twelve years of age (*buitenschoolse opvang*) are under the auspices of the Minister for Welfare, and preschool institutions (*kleuterschool*) for children from two and a half to compulsory school age (6) are under the auspices of the Minister for Education. Consequently we are dealing with a vertical transition (from home/environment to preschool environment) and an extra horizontal transition (daily transition from preschool to out of school care). These three types of institutions have distinct curricula, professional profiles and child–staff ratio.

[To gain a better understanding of the Flemish ECEC system in general and policy evolutions/issues in relation to transitions, please check this infographic.](#)

2.2. ECEC staff profiles and initial qualifying routes²

In the childcare sector (0-3) two types of professionals are deployed to work directly with children and families: 'childcare workers' (*kinderbegeleider*) and 'pedagogues for the young children' (*Pedagogie van het jonge kind - PJK*). In the preschool sector (2,5-6), two types of

² This paragraph is based on the SEEPRO report: Schreyer, I., Oberhuemer, P. "Belgium – Key Contextual Data". In Workforce Profiles in Systems of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer., to be published

professionals are deployed to work directly with children and families: preschool teachers (*kleuterleerkracht*) and childcare workers (*kinderverzorgster* or *kinderbegeleider*).

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, childcare (*kinderopvang*) for children from 0 to 3 years old is organised in two settings: *groepsopvang* ('group-based childcare') and *gezinsopvang* ('family day care'). For the purpose of this report, we will only focus on group-based childcare. The core practitioners working in group-based childcare are called *kinderbegeleider groepsopvang* ('childcare worker group-based childcare') or just *kinderbegeleider* ('childcare worker'). These professionals work in teams and provide childcare in separate settings.

In the 2014 'Decree on childcare for the 0-3 years olds' (*Decreet houdende de organisatie van kinderopvang van baby's en peuters*) it was stipulated that every childcare worker should have a qualification by 2024. There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to do the job. The minimum qualification requirement to work with 0-3 years old children is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (also ISCED 4), and it is the same for *kinderbegeleiders groepsopvang* as for *kinderbegeleiders gezinsopvang*.

Moreover, staff graduated in the 'pedagogy of the young child' (*Pedagogie van het jonge kind, PJK*), can coach childcare teams or, in some cases, work directly with children and families as well. This newly developed training program is a bachelor's degree (EQF level 6; ISCED 6).

Concerning preschool education, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the core practitioners are called *kleuterleerkracht* ('toddler teacher') or *kleuterleider* ('toddler leader'). They work in a *kleuterklas* ('toddler class') within a *kleuterschool* ('toddler school' = preschool) that is mostly situated at the same site as the school for children from 6 to 12 years old (*lagere school* or 'lower school' = primary school), with one director for both the preschool and the primary school.

All preschool teachers hold a bachelor's degree in preschool education (EQF level 6; ISCED 6, 180 ECTS credits). They often have additional support from a childcare worker (*kinderverzorgster*, 'child carer') for a few hours per week, depending on the number of toddlers and on their families' socio-economic situation. The childcare workers usually have a secondary vocational degree in childcare (*kinderzorg*) (ISCED 4). The deployment of these assisting practitioners is mostly framed as a support for the core teachers or as a mean to 'unburden' the core teacher. Childcare workers in preschools in the Flemish Community of Belgium are typically responsible for caring tasks for the youngest children (e.g. potty training and toilet moments, guidance during meals and snack time, supervising midday naps), while the teachers are responsible for the so called 'learning activities'.

Many preschools collaborate with out of school care services either within or outside of the school building. Out of school care workers organise the leisure time of children before and after school, and may also supervise the children in between educational activities and during the lunch break. Many hold a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 4). In addition, many staff members without any specific pedagogical or educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of playtime outside and lunchtime.



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PRECHOOOL TEACHER

Job title in Flemish Community:

Kleuterleid(st)er, Kleuterleerkacht, Kleuteronderwijzer, Leraar Kleuteronderwijs

Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional

Entry requirements: 12 years of schooling (general or vocational), upper secondary education school-leaving certificate. Applicants with vocational certificate: 1 extra year or equivalent qualification.

Professional studies:

3 years higher education institution affiliated to a university college (*Hogeschool*)

Award: *Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs*

ECTS points: 180

EQF level: 6

ISCED 2013-F:0112

ISCED 2011: 6

Main ECEC workplace: preschools /Pre-primary settings (*Kleuterschool*), A few also work in childcare centres (0 to 3 years) or in primary education (6- to 12-year-olds).

Table : SEEPRO, 2022

CHILDCARE WORKER

Job title in Flemish Community: *Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg*

Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional



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Entry requirements: 9 years of schooling

Professional studies: 3 years upper secondary level (vocational branch) plus 1 year specialisation

Award (1): Diploma (vocational secondary education)

Flemish Community: Kinderzorg

ECTSpoints: n/a

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2013-F:0922

ISCED 2011:4

Award (2): Certificate (adult education)

Begeleid(st)er in de kinderopvang

ECTS points: n/a

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2013-F:0922

ISCED 2011: 5

Main ECEC workplaces: Childcare centres (0 to 3 years), extra-curricular activities in childcare and out-of-school centres (3 to 12 years). Childcare workers also work in preschool education as auxiliary workers (mostly with the 2- and 3-year-olds) and youth activity centres.

Table: SEEPRO, 2022

PEDAGOGICAL COACH

Job title in Flemish Community: *Begeleid(st)er Kinde*

Profile: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional



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Entry requirements: 12 years of schooling (general or vocational), upper secondary education school-leaving certificate. Applicants with vocational certificate: 1 extra year or equivalent qualification.

Professional studies: 3 years higher education institution affiliated to a university college (*Hogeschool*)

Award: Bachelor pedagogie van het jonge kind

Flemish Community: Kinderzorg

ECTS points: 180

EQF level: 6

ISCED 2013-F: 0922

ISCED 2011: 6

Flemish Community: Begeleid(st)er in de kinderopvang

French Community: Auxiliaire de l'enfance

German-speaking Community: Kinderbetreuerin

ECTS points: n/a

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2013-F: 0922

ISCED 2011: 5

Main ECEC workplaces: Childcare centres (0 to 3 years), extra-curricular activities in childcare and out-of-school centres (3 to 12 years). A few also work in preschool education and youth activity centres.

Table: SEEPRO, 2022

2.3. Curricula for pre-service trainings

Childcare worker

In 2018, 15 competences for the profession of a childcare worker (*15 Beroepscompetenties Kinderopvang*) were legally defined as the professional qualification for a childcare worker (*Beroepskwalificatie Kinderbegeleider Baby's en Peuters*). These competences are:

A childcare worker:

1. Interacts in a positive, constructive manner with all babies and toddlers, parents, colleagues and others.
2. Observes the behaviour of the baby/toddler, individually and in groups, reflects on it and adapts his/her actions accordingly.



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3. Stimulates each baby/toddler in its development, uses his/her talents and entrepreneurial spirit.
4. Supports the baby/toddler in all the activities.
5. Encourages positive contacts between babies and toddlers and sets boundaries.
6. Recognises and responds to the social-emotional needs of the baby/toddler.
7. Provides a stimulating, safe, hygienic and healthy play environment for babies and toddlers.
8. Works with parents and recognises them as primary educators.
9. Cooperates with others in the care of the baby/toddler.
10. Cooperates, gives feedback and makes agreements.
11. Reflects on the functioning and contributes to the improvement of childcare.
12. Accompanies babies and toddlers at their arrival and pick-up time.
13. Prepares baby and toddler meals, organises and supervises mealtimes.
14. Organises moments of rest and exploring.
15. Cares for the baby/toddler according to his/her needs.

Although there is no legally defined educational qualification (*onderwijskwalificatie*) for childcare workers, this vocational qualification forms the basis of the curriculum within both the Centres for Adult Education and the Syntra Specialised Training Centres.

ADULT EDUCATION: 'CHILDCARE WORKER BABYES AND TODDLERS'

The adult education training focuses on pedagogical skills needed to guide and stimulate babies and toddlers in childcare. A very large part of the training is spent at a workplace. In terms of contents, the MeMoQ³ pedagogical framework guides the curriculum. Most Centres for Adult Education use the same structure for the training of 'Childcare Worker Babies en Toddlers'. The full programme consists of 18 modules:

1. Childcare and me (20 teaching hours)
2. First aid and life-saving treatment (20 teaching hours)
3. Basic principles of pedagogical work (40 teaching hours)
4. Communication skills in childcare (20 teaching hours)
5. Dealing with diversity in childcare (60 teaching hours)
6. Working with families and their contexts (60 teaching hours)
7. Team work and interdisciplinary work (30 teaching hours)
8. Basic care/nurturing (30 teaching hours)
9. Quality work in childcare (60 teaching hours)

³ In 2014 the Flemish government agency Upbringing (*Opgroeien*) published a Pedagogical Framework (MeMoQ Pedagogisch Raamwerk) to support high quality pedagogy in childcare centres, and a self-evaluation instrument (*MeMoQ zelf-evaluatie instrument*) which contains 6 dimensions to be explored (<https://www.kindengezin.be/kinderopvang/sector-babys-en-peuters/pedagogische-aanpak/memoq-pedagogische-raamwerk/>)





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10. Babies' and toddlers' play (80 teaching hours)
11. Care for babies and toddlers (60 teaching hours)
12. Feeding babies and toddlers (40 teaching hours)
13. Pedagogical work with babies and toddlers (60 teaching hours)
14. Time and space planning for babies and toddlers (30 teaching hours)
15. Supervised intervision 1 (10 teaching hours)
16. Supervised intervision 2 (10 teaching hours)
17. Supervised intervision 3 (10 teaching hours)
18. Internship (80 teaching hours)

In this workplace learning (which represents a large part of this training program), students are coached by a mentor from the workplace and by a coach from the study programme. The experience gained in the workplace is actively integrated into the lessons and vice-versa. Half of the entire programme consists of an internship in family day care, group-based childcare and out of school school care. Although workplace learning is integrated in all modules within the entire programme, four modules are explicitly aimed at the internship: 'Internship childcare worker babies and toddlers 1' (80 teaching hours), 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 1' (10 teaching hours), 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 2' (10 teaching hours) and 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 3' (10 teaching hours).

SPECIALISED TRAINING CENTRE (SYNTRA): 'CHILDCARE WORKER'

Just like the Centres for Adult Education, most Syntra centres follow the same structure for the 'Childcare Worker' course. This structure is very similar to the one of the training 'Childcare Worker babies and toddlers' within the Adult Education. The programme consists of 16 subjects:

1. Orientation in Childcare (32 hours)
2. First Aid and Life-Saving treatment (20 hours)
3. General Communication (20 hours)
4. Working with Families and their Context (28 hours)
5. Working with the Team and Interdisciplinary (20 hours)
6. Quality Work in Childcare (20 hours)
7. Pedagogical Work with Babies and Toddlers (56 hours)
8. Diversity and Inclusion in Childcare (24 hours)
9. Pedagogic observation of babies and toddlers (20 hours)
10. Feeding babies and toddlers (20 hours)
11. Caring for babies and toddlers (52 hours)
12. Time and Space planning (20 hours)
13. Babies' and Toddlers' play (40 hours)
14. Internship (150 hours)
15. Organisational management of a childcare facility (44 hours) + final test (1 hour)
16. Manager of a childcare facility up to 18 places (44 hours)



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In the Syntra training programme, 150 of the 610 hours are allocated to the internship of the students. This internship is spread over several periods throughout the year, when fewer lessons are scheduled.

SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: '7TH YEAR CHILDCARE'

In contrast to the initial training courses within the Syntra Centres and the Centres for Adult Education centres, the curriculum of the initial training course 'Childcare' within upper secondary vocational education is not based on the legally defined professional qualification 'childcare worker'. There is no legally defined educational qualification either. As a result, teaching content and timetables differ from school to school. Schools have great freedom in organising the curriculum.

Globally, students go through two modules which they have to pass: 'Guidance for young children' and 'Guidance for school-age children'. The theoretical part of these modules consists of 'General Education' and 'Vocational Training':

- 'General Education' is mainly offered at school. It consists of the General Subjects Project, French or English, Physical Education, Cross-curricular Secondary Education Attainment Targets and Worldview classes ...

- In 'Vocational Training', students learn what they need to be able to do as a starting childcare worker. Vocational training is partly covered during the internship periods and partly at school.

In most schools, the work placement takes about one third of a school year. This means that students in this programme have an internship of about 10 to 12 weeks in total. The internship is usually offered in blocks and takes place in group-based childcare, out of school care and preschool education.

Bachelor in Pedagogy of the Young Child

For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there is a legally defined educational qualification (*onderwijskwalificatie*). This means that the Flemish Government (Department of Education and Training) officially acknowledges the domain-specific learning outcomes of the Bachelor programme. For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there are 10 distinct learning outcomes, divided according to different fields of responsibility:

Responsibility for the children in the service:

1. The bachelor creates a positive, safe, healthy, hygienic and structured living environment with care for every baby and every child in the group. She/he also creates basic trust with each child by being sensitive and focused on fulfilling basic needs.
2. The bachelor supports the total personality development of every baby and every child, by means of stimulating interaction in a rich environment and by guiding an offer based on observation of their living environment and developmental needs.



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Responsibility towards families:

3. The bachelor maximises continuity between the home and the care environment by designing vision-based childcare together with the team, and in such a way that parents recognise themselves in it.
4. The bachelor builds a relationship of trust with the parents in the best interests of the child, and links his/her own professional expertise to the experiential expertise of the parent.

Responsibility towards one's own team and the facility:

5. The bachelor stimulates and motivates diversely educated staff to professional development in the areas of 'educating children', 'supporting children's development' and 'being a partner to the children's families', by fulfilling a model function, by giving and receiving feedback in an open manner and by creating a favourable professional development context for the staff.
6. Together with a team of diversely educated colleagues, the bachelor is responsible for the common socio-pedagogical project of the facility and actively creates the preconditions for this.

Responsibility towards the childcare sector and towards society at large:

7. The bachelor himself/herself works proactively in the local social context and takes the initiative to cooperate with external partners to this end.
8. The bachelor actively follows relevant developments in society, government policy, the field of study/expertise, and the international context to interpret the social relevance of his/her professional activity.

Two learning outcomes transcend this whole and are important for each role:

9. The bachelor builds up new pedagogical knowledge and integrates this into the policy of the facility. Together with the team, she/he collects, analyses and interprets relevant complex situations in professional practice, uses the results of research, and takes the initiative and responsibility to innovate the existing pedagogical practice.
10. The bachelor acts from an awareness of her/his own frame of reference with respect for identity of others (children, parents, team, external partners) and supports the identity development of children and their families.

Each of the three University Colleges that offer this Bachelor programme has its own emphasis and accents with regard to the curriculum. Nevertheless, there is regular consultation and exchange

between the different institutions. It is noticeable that the role of pedagogical coach is getting more and more emphasis in the curricula of the different University Colleges that offer the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child'. Moreover, internship is integrated in each of the three years of the programs of the three University Colleges, and it follows more or less the same structure. In the first year, the internship is explicitly focused on getting to know the childcare sector. Across the three University Colleges, the number of ECTS in this first year varies from 5 to 11. In the second year, students are stimulated to discover neighbouring sectors in which they can experiment with their role as coach. Here, the number of ECTS varies from 11 to 14. In the third year, the internship comprises almost half of the programme with ECTS ranging from 20 to 24. In this final year, students are free to choose for an internship in childcare or in another sector. The students are expected to adopt a reflective attitude and to monitor their own learning process by means of a portfolio. In addition, a mentor or supervisor from the University College is always appointed, as well as a mentor or coach at the work placement site.

Preschool Teacher

The integrated teacher training programs combine subject-specific, didactical and pedagogical/teaching components throughout the entire three-year study route for preschool teacher. The programs also focus on building capacity and experience in practice through extensive internships in authentic learning environments. The preschool route leads to a professional Bachelor degree in Education (*Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs*). The total course comprises 180 ECTS points (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours.

In 1998, and again in 2007, the first official professional profiles for Pre-primary Teachers and basic competences for new teachers were established, which assigned the profession ten specific roles, including an instructional role (*lerende*) and an educational role (*opvoedende*). The basic competencies for teachers set out the requirements that education and society place on newly qualified teachers. They are both a frame of reference for the curriculum development of teacher education programs, who have autonomy in this areas, and an individual assessment framework for each student in teacher education. The government sets the minimum quality criteria, so that parents and outsiders know what to expect from teachers. By specifically defining the basic competencies, the government makes it clear that a newly graduated teacher cannot be expected to perform at the same level of professional practice as a teacher with some experience. This indicates that 'being a teacher' is a process of lifelong learning.

These basic competences for a starting teacher start from the following premises: 'In the future, more than ever, a teacher will become a team player. Cooperation with other teachers and other actors in a school team is essential to ensure quality education. To participate fully in this, each individual teacher must possess certain competences, which he/she must be able to use both individually and together with colleagues'. The 10 Functional roles of a teacher are:



1. the teacher as facilitator of learning and development processes
2. the teacher as educator
3. the teacher as content expert
4. the teacher as organiser
5. the teacher as innovator - the teacher as researcher
6. the teacher as a partner of parents or carers
7. the teacher as a member of an educational team
8. the teacher as a partner of external parties
9. the teacher as a member of the educational community
10. the teacher as a cultural participant.

The following attitudes apply to all functional roles: decision-making ability, relational orientation, critical attitude, eagerness to learn, organisational ability, sense of cooperation, sense of responsibility and flexibility.

As for the Bachelor Pedagogy of the Young Child (see above), also for the Bachelor in Preschool Education, there is an official educational qualification with a framework of domain-specific learning outcomes. There are 10 distinct learning outcomes:

1. The bachelor supports toddlers in their learning and development in complex school and classroom contexts. Taking into account the starting situation of the class group and the perception of the individual child, he/she provides appropriate guidance, formulates general and concrete goals, selects appropriate learning content and learning experiences, adapted development materials, forms of work and grouping. He/she functions autonomously and uses Standard Dutch.
2. The bachelor creates a pleasant and challenging playing, learning and living climate in the classroom and at school, with an eye for the socio-emotional development and the physical wellbeing of the class group and the individual child. He/she uses a care wide approach and responds positively to the social, cultural and linguistic diversity within the class group. She/he promotes emancipation, individual development and social participation.
3. The bachelor has a thorough insight into the broad development of the preschool child and masters the basic knowledge - including at least the developmental objectives - regarding contents and skills from the learning areas Dutch, mathematical initiation, world orientation,





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music education and physical education, and cross-curricular themes. She/he uses an integrated and media-minded approach and follows recent developments critically.

4. The bachelor creates a safe, workable and stimulating playing, learning and living environment. She/he provides goal-oriented and child-oriented planning. She/he handles administrative tasks correctly.
5. The bachelor adjusts and innovates her/his functioning on the basis of a systematic, critical reflection on her/his own professional practice from relevant theoretical frameworks and insights from educational research.
6. The bachelor communicates discretely and in Standard Dutch or if necessary in another appropriate register with parents/carers about the child, the school, upbringing and education. She/he involves parents/carers in class and school events.
7. The bachelor works in a team-oriented way and takes responsibility in the school team for the implementation of school policy.
8. The bachelor establishes contacts and cooperates with providers of educational initiatives and other external partners.
9. The bachelor takes part in the social debate on educational themes and on the profession of the teacher and his/her place in society, also in an international perspective.
10. The bachelor thinks critically and with an open mind about developments in the socio-political, socio-economic, philosophical, cultural-aesthetic and cultural-scientific fields.

According to the guidelines of the Flemish department of education, the field-based component in the training program of future Preschool Teachers consists of at least 45 ECTS points. These 45 credits (usually more) are spread across the curriculum, and are progressive in volume and complexity. The work experience can be structured as a ribbon placement throughout the semesters (one day weekly) or in blocks of one, two or five weeks. University Colleges are free to implement their own system. These placements are mentored and evaluated by an experienced teacher in the preschool setting and by tutors at the University College. The mentoring role is taken on by motivated preschool teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.



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3. Transitions & Educare in the pre-service curricula

In the following pages we give an overview of the results of our analysis. These are first insights meant to stimulate a debate and reflection on the place of transitions and educare in the curricula of initial trainings preparing future ECEC professionals. The following paragraphs highlights the trends of the curricula concerning these themes, underline possible tensions and challenges and provide good examples that could inspire other training institutions. The analysis is not meant as scientific research, but rather as discussion paper aimed at stimulating a constructive discussion on these themes.

In order to provide a state of affairs on how transitions and educare are understood, used and embedded in the curricula and courses, we use the already mentioned framework of the OECD to understand different dimensions of transitions: pedagogical continuity, continuity with home environment/neighborhood, professional continuity & structural continuity. For each dimension, we have merged the analysis of the curricula and the perspectives of the interviewed pre-service responsables/lecturers and former students.

3.1. Pedagogical Continuity

Transitions

WHICH TYPE OF TRAINING FOCUSES ON WHICH TRANSITION?

In the analyzed curricula, the focus on transitions follows the logic of the educational system. This means that in all the pre-service trainings to prepare students to work in childcare (0-3 years old) (Upper secondary education, Adult vocational education, University College), attention is given to the transitions children and families experience from home to childcare, with a specific focus on familiarisation trajectories ('*wennen*'). The pre-service trainings (University Colleges) for future preschool teachers (2,5-6) and for pedagogues to work in childcare (PJK) pay attention to the transitions children and families experience from home or childcare to preschool. The importance of having a familiarisation policy for transition to preschool is also stressed in the upper secondary vocational training (*7nde jaar Kinderzorg*) for future childcare workers, and it is explained by referring to the collaboration with families on this theme, through dialogue and flexible planning. Students learn how to plan familiarisation moments and how to accompany children and families from childcare to preschool. It should be noted that the adult vocational training for future childcares (CVO) does not focus on transition to preschool as much. Furthermore, all the pre-service trainings for future preschool teachers also clearly focus on the transition to primary school.

In almost all University College trainings, transitions from home/childcare to preschool education are the subject of internships (developing a transitional trajectory) or bachelor theses. On the one hand this can demonstrate the importance of these themes, on the other hand we wonder whether students receive enough input of theories and inspiring practices to develop these challenging trajectories themselves, since often preschools and childcare centres are not sufficiently experienced in realising warm and inclusive transitions for all children and families. The question might be where do students find their inspiration and how can they, with a limited or non-existing professional mandate, introduce new practices that previously were not installed in an institution?

Some pre-service trainings manage to provide input on transitioning practices to preschools. To provide more coherent and strong information, maybe it could be interesting to collect all the works that the students have developed over the last years, critically examine them on their validity and, when considered inspiring, share them amongst all training institutions. In this way the pre-service trainings could further take up their role as actors of change in the subject of transition, and the students would receive more concrete input and inspiration to develop their trajectories.

TRANSITION AS A PROCESS OR ONE VERTICAL MOMENT IN TIME?

In academic literature, the transition to (pre)school is not described as a one-day event but as a 'process of continuity and change' (Bouchat, Favresse, & Masson, 2014; Brooker, 2008; Dumcius et al., 2014; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). There is a change of relationships, of ways of interacting with children, of environment and space, of time and context of learning. The transition period begins some time before the children start preschool and lasts until children and families experience a sense of belonging to the school, and the teachers recognise this sense of belonging.

When looking at the University College trainings, transitions seem to be considered as a process once the child enters the preschool, not just a 'one shot moment'. There is attention on how wellbeing and participation are related to a good familiarisation trajectory and on how to accompany children and families through this process. Familiarisation is framed as a crucial process to get to know each other (child, professional, parent) and set the basis for the future partnership. Especially the University Colleges preparing pedagogues to work in childcare (PJK) can connect this directly to the knowledge and experience in familiarisation trajectories from home to childcare.

In a two-hour workshop with second-year students in one of the University College trainings, students need to develop 'familiarisation plans' for different ages, meaning that, for example, one group of students works on the transition 'from home to childcare', another group works on the transition 'from childcare to preschool', etc. In order to adjust their familiarisation plans, there is also an exchange about the position of parents in these processes, based on case studies.

The familiarisation knowledge that historically has been developed longer in Flemish childcare than in Flemish preschool education, could also help inspiring the University Colleges preparing preschool teachers. The insights, theories and practices on familiarisation can indeed be applied in a

later age of the child as well, especially in cases when children have not yet been to a collective educational environment when entering preschool.

In one training institution (University College), students in childcare and preschool education follow the same module on educare and transitions. In this way, the information flow between these two types of transitions works quite well.

When exploring transitions in the curricula/courses, we can identify a tendency in which attention is given to transitions once the child enters preschool education. What happens before at home or in the childcare environment is not always taken into account. The questions here are: how can professionals support children and families in saying goodbye to the known environment and anticipating on a new one? Since transition is not extensively addressed in the vocational training courses for childcare workers, how can the latter be better prepared to support children and families emotionally and practically?

As one of the interviewed training institutions for future preschool teachers clearly underlines: 'attention has to be payed to what happens before, during and after the start of preschool'.

Another important point is that in most of the pre-service trainings, especially the vertical dimension of transitions is addressed, when a child between 2,5 and 3 years old starts to attend preschool. Less direct emphasis is put on the horizontal transitions throughout the day. It would be important to focus on how children experience these transitions and how professionals of preschool and out of school care can support them. Also what horizontal transitions from preschool to out of school care mean for children is not much addressed. However, some good examples can be inspiring.

One of the vocational training courses explicitly addresses the transitional moments during a child's day in childcare.

In University College students who are prepared to work in childcare can also follow an internship in out of school care, youth-organisations or preschool. This is a good start to explore transitions throughout the day.

In one of the University Colleges to prepare future preschool teachers, a specific focus on micro transitions (e.g. lunchtime) is addressed in the bachelor theses.

In the above mentioned common educare module for University College students in childcare and preschool education, action research projects are presented which also explore the subject of horizontal transitions or micro- transitions throughout the day.

MAKING CHILDREN SCHOOLREADY VERSUS MAKING ECEC CHILDREADY

Tensions concerning equal opportunities

In transition literature, two sides of a continuum can be identified in which children have to be made school-ready or schools have to be made child-ready (Tarrant, Kagan, 2010). By making children school-ready, the problem and the solution of a difficult transition experience is mainly placed solely on the shoulders of the child and the parents. They have to adapt or get ready in advance, regardless of their previous experience (whether or not they have been to childcare), language skills, socio-cultural capital and knowledge about preschool system in the Flemish community. This often leads to an unconscious assumption about what children need to be able to do in order to learn well in preschool, such as self-reliance in physical and emotional care, Dutch language proficiency albeit from a mother tongue perspective, and how the child best behaves in a group context. The problem with this school-readiness approach is that a one-sided focus can reinforce social inequality by marginalising even more certain groups of children and parents. Recent international research visions on a successful transition to preschool underline that school-readiness cannot be reduced to a characteristic of the child, but that it is the environment in which the children live that has to be ready for the child (Dumčius et al., 2014 ; Lehrer et al., 2017): the family, the community in which the child lives, the childcare centre and certainly also the preschool have to be well prepared to receive the child. We can ask ourselves whether the preschool is sufficiently child-ready and adapted to the diverse group of the youngest children of our society with their specific care, learning and play needs. In some courses, we found that popular assumptions about-school readiness were presented to students as truths.

For example, in one course, school readiness in preschool is described as "the child can spend several hours without parents; the child can use the school language well enough to be understood; the child understands specific tasks; the child can put on his/her coat on his/her own,...."

This comes presumably from an older text from the former Child & Family Agency. However, it is not clear what the scientific basis of these assumptions is, or whether these truths are more consistent with the institutional and historical realities of preschools and educational policy, in which care is considered secondary to learning and in which preschool teachers have too many young children to take care of.

There seems to be a tension between the recognition that transitions can be stressful for children and parents and, at the same time, the justification for those harsh, abrupt transitions because of unfavorable structural conditions. Some examples can be found here below.

Some courses acknowledge that sleeping is important for children. Yet it seems to be up to the teacher or the school whether or not to have a sleeping area for children in kindergarten.

One of the courses for future preschool teachers discusses physical development in terms of sleeping, eating and motor skills (e.g., drawing). Regarding sleeping, it is believed that 3-year-old children do not need afternoon naps.

It is not clear what the scientific source of this might be. The question is whether this assumption is rather linked to the institutional habit of preschools, where often comfortable and quality pedagogical sleeping places/infrastructure are not present.

The key questions then become:

- How can school care for children with different preschool experiences and include them all?
- How can childcare and/or preventive family support accompany children and families in this transition process (saying goodbye, anticipation,...) without simply making them school-ready?
- How can preschool include children and families in meaningful learning, education and play processes beyond their background experiences (whether children have already been to child care or not, whether they are refugee children entering at age 4 or 5 or not, etc.).

When we examine the curricula/courses from this angle, we can see that a couple of University College training institutions for future preschool teachers and pedagogues of young children address this continuum and field of tension directly with the students.

For example, in the action-oriented working courses for future preschool teachers of one University Colleges, there is a chapter called 'toddlers' (peuters), with an introduction to the split ECEC system and the transition that children face. Equal opportunities and transitions are connected by taking the toddler participation (kleuterparticipatie) governmental policy as an overarching pillar. The course deals with the question 'school-ready children or child-ready schools?' and asks the open question: 'smooth transition for all = a utopia?' by referring to different studies. From the perspective of making schools more child-ready, the course deals with possible initiatives before the first official entering day, with concrete (short) examples of: registration interviews, class visits, welcome letters, welcome moment and home visit. Initiatives during and after entering school are also mentioned, in which parents are considered active partners.

In the common educare course for students in preschool education and childcare in another University College, scientific evidence is presented that transitions are considered important, in line with equal opportunities of children and combating poverty. Instead of focusing on school-readiness as a child feature/competence, the emphasis in this educare module is also put on relationship building capacities of professionals and ECEC organisations.

These are two interesting examples in which students are actively invited to reflect upon the tensions that they will be confronted with in childcare and preschool practice. When this field of tension or continuum is not explicitly discussed with students, it can confuse them, also when they start working in practice.

Child-ready transitions and familiarization

Some courses/curricula also address the other side of the continuum. However the meaning of "child-ready schools" is not always addressed in the same way.

In one of the University College trainings for future preschool teachers, making schools child-ready with an eye towards warm and inclusive transitions for a diversity of children is understood as making the school environment preschool-appropriate, guiding professionals and create adequate types of activities. A list of specific toddler activities is then introduced such as tic-tac, surprise box, language materials and the storytelling apron.

Some courses in trainings for professionals in childcare emphasize the importance of respecting the child's rhythms. The idea is thus to provide a child-friendly daily routine organized by the staff.

This approach is also present in courses for out of school care professionals working with preschool aged children. However, the same approach is not extended to the preschool itself. So how can child-friendly day care become a common denominator for future professionals from preschool and out-of-school care? How can future out-of-school child care professionals and future preschool teachers discuss this in depth with each other?

Another way in which the courses understand child-ready schools is by emphasizing the importance of a daily individual rather than collective welcoming moment for younger preschoolers and their parents. According to this course, an individual welcome can better anticipate when children will need to say goodbye to their parents. This is attributed to the psychological-developmental idea that a young child may have separation anxiety and mourn the loss of the familiar figure.

In order for school staff to be more considerate of the child's rhythms, other courses highlight the importance of familiarisation pathways in preschool, in which building relationships and trust between child, staff and parents is essential. Familiarisation pathways also involve allowing the school to listen openly, take into account parents' concerns and, ultimately, adapt vision and practices to the collective needs of young children and parents. However, we must remain cautious about what the essence of familiarisation may be in relation to child-ready schools.

In one of the courses for future preschool teachers, familiarisation is emphasized as an important aspect to avoid stressful transition periods for children and parents, and is understood as preparing children and parents for preschool.

The emphasis here still seems to be mostly on how teachers can help parents prepare their children for preschool, but not really on how the school and teachers themselves can listen to and adapt to the new children and families.

In general, it seems that in the effort to ensure smooth and less stressful transitions for children, a school-readiness approach still remains implicitly present.

Contradictive messages for future professionals

Another example about the tension school readiness vs. child readiness is potty 'learning'.

In one course for future educators of the young child, learning to urinate and defecate is constructed as "potty training," implying that you need to actively train this. Although the course helps students

understand that developmental psychology is a way of understanding reality, the translation when it comes to potty training is rather directive. Parents are seen as primarily responsible, and the role of childcare or preschool staff is not mentioned. Besides, the course says children are potty trained from 2 to 2.5 years old, and from 3 to 4 at night.

Again, it is not clear what the scientific rationale is here, especially since other courses from the same training institution state that each child follows its own developmental rhythm.

For example, in another course for the same students, potty 'learning' is understood as a maturation process in which the conditions for potty 'learning' occur at the age of 4. Emphasis is placed on the fact that children must be ready, and that potty training can only be started during quiet periods (which is often not the case when children enter preschool). Moreover, forced toilet training by urinating on command in schools is deconstructed and criticized in this course. The role of professionals is also explained, focusing on how they can support children in this discovery of their own bodies.

Also the courses for future childcare workers in adult education understand toilet 'learning' as a process that can only happen through physical (bladder and bladder control are sufficiently developed) and intellectual development (the child can handle it consciously). Each child follows his/her own pace, for some this may be as early as 2 years old, for others it may take until when they are 3 or 4 years old to be potty trained. It is emphasized to students that daytime potty training actually comes naturally with individual support, and without forcing.

In a course for future preschool teachers, it is recognized that children become potty trained at different times. However, it is said that it is better for children to be potty trained before 2.5 years of age, otherwise it becomes a burden for teachers. For example, "parents may decide to delay the start of preschool. If a child needs more time for certain aspects, it does not mean that he/she cannot start school. Often it depends on the school and its possibility to take this as an obstacle or not. For example, if the class is very large, the teacher will probably not have much time to spend more with certain children. A conversation with the school may clarify this [...]"

The latter is an example of a contradictory message that on the one hand emphasizes that children have different timing and ways of developing, but on the other hand clearly states that this diversity in timing and ways cannot always be taken into account in preschool.

The same happens in the vocational training for future childcare workers. Also there, conflicting messages are given to students once the child has to go to school.

For example, "However, potty training and school readiness have little to do with each other, many schools do require toddlers to be potty-trained when they come to school. This is understandable. Of course, it is not a big deal for a child to walk around with a diaper in the class. But when it is multiple children, a lot of valuable time is lost in taking care of them. Therefore, it is asked to bring children to school only when they are truly potty-trained."

The above messages may result in students/trainees thinking that potty learning is the individual responsibility of parents, who are then asked to quickly prepare their children in order not to have difficulties in daily life in preschool. Moreover, this creates a rather challenging situation for students, as future preschool teachers, early childhood educators and pedagogical coaches will be faced with young children who, on an ontological level, have care and learning needs for which many schools have historically not been adequately prepared. Students and professionals may then face conflicting feelings, frustrations and ideas that may ultimately hinder their well-being and job satisfaction in working with the youngest children in school, as the last ones do not conform to the homogeneous normative school-age child in their minds. The biggest problem is that presenting institutionalized notions of school readiness to students may lead them to unintentionally exclude socially vulnerable children and families in their future practice.

Transition to primary school

Curricula/courses for future preschool teachers place in general more emphasis on transitions to primary school than on those from home/childcare to preschool.

In one of the University Colleges, the third year is entirely focused on the transitions to elementary school, as almost all subjects are organized together with those of the primary education course.

This dominant focus on the latter transitions, as opposed to the earliest transitions, can be partly explained by the fact that preschool education is presented in accordance with the vision of the Flemish government, which explicitly sees it as a preparatory phase to primary school. In preschool children should be made school-ready (in addition to other objectives such as contributing to their cognitive, motor and emotional development).

In some courses, the concept of school readiness for primary school is critically debated (e.g., you have to find the middle of the continuum: school-ready children as well as child-ready schools). Nevertheless, definitions of school readiness (as a set of skills and attitudes for entering primary school) are ultimately presented to students as factual. In literature, however, we see that many questions are raised about the concept of school-readiness, since this approach ultimately harms equal-education opportunities. As Prodger et al. describe "The public debate has shifted heavily toward the view that children should become school-ready, rather than that schools should become child-ready, with little or no attention to the very real children who will come through their doors, as opposed to a kind of idealized child who can easily fit into the established structures and processes that the schools themselves have developed (Case Study Start, p. X)."

Educare

When working on an alliance with parents in order to foster warm and inclusive transitions from childcare/home to preschool/out of school care, ECEC staff gets automatically many requests for more emotional and physical care during the school day. These requests are difficult to answer, due to a too high adult-child ratio, limited caring infrastructure and staff who consider care subordinate to learning. On the side of childcare, staff will often have the impression that some toddlers are 'getting too old', need more challenges and are therefore definitely ready for preschool. When professionals only see care as a technical matter, some children who are getting more self-reliant in physical care, are considered ready. However, the other educational dimensions that childcare can offer to children, irrespective of their age, are not enough taken into account in this vision. This is in line with the results of the quality MeMoQ⁴ evaluation from which it comes out that the educative and learning potential of many childcare centres and family day carers is not well thought-out and developed. These two tendencies (in preschool and childcare) show how investing in warm transitions makes sense only if the pedagogy of childcare and preschool is based on how young children actually learn and play, and on what kind of pedagogical approach is needed in alliance with parents. Some schools have started to question their own pedagogical project and daily structure to see if it is adapted to the age-specific care, learning and playing needs of the youngest children. In recent qualitative studies, there is a small group of professionals who indicates that care activities such as eating, drinking, going to the toilet, can be essentially pedagogical. These professionals also underline how supporting cognitive, social, motor and artistic learning processes requires a caring attitude from the staff and school environment. Education is here understood as a joint responsibility of parents and school, based on the idea that the child needs both. In international literature and in international policy institutions such as the European Commission (2020a) and the Council of the European Union (2019), this pedagogical approach is known as 'educare': care is learning and learning is care, regardless of whether the ECEC system is split or integrated (Broström, 2006), as recently underlined also by the OECD (2021), which highlights the importance of supporting meaningful interactions in childcare and preschool for children's learning, development and well-being. Also in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the concept of educare starts to gain more ground. For example, the quality framework for preschool education of the Education Inspectorate considers educare as one of the levers to realise quality preschool education and inclusive toddler participation. The pedagogical concept of educare has here a children's rights translation (General comment 7), which emphasises that the right to learn (art 28/29), the right to development (art 6), the right to care, wellbeing and respect for the child (art

⁴ In 2014 the Flemish government agency Upbringing (*Opgroei*) published a Pedagogical Framework (MeMoQ Pedagogisch Raamwerk) to support high quality pedagogy in childcare centres, and a self-evaluation instrument (*MeMoQ zelf-evaluatie instrument*) which contains 6 dimensions to be explored (<https://www.kindengezin.be/kinderopvang/sector-babys-en-peuters/pedagogische-aanpak/memoq-pedagogische-raamwerk/>)

3), the right to good health (art 24) and the right to play and leisure (art 31) require an integral, holistic approach for the youngest children in society.

When looking at the analysed curricula and courses with an educare lens, we can identify the following themes and issues:

- implementation and integration of educare in different subjects,
- physicality and body in an educare approach,
- language & meaningful interactions in an educare approach.

We address each of these themes below.

IMPLEMENTATION AND INTEGRATION OF EDUCARE IN DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

Although educare as such (with the exception of one example) is not directly mentioned in the courses, there seems to be a consensus about the importance of this approach. This consensus coexists with contradictions that need to be addressed.

Educare as basis

The interviewed lecturers in the focus group or interviews underlined that educare is the unspoken basis of their philosophy.

As one of the pedagogue trainers said: *'We prepare students on: how can nappy and meal moments be moments for language stimulation? How can care and pedagogy meet in the offer and activities?'*

Lecturers say that in their lessons they go deeper into the concept of educare and that students do reflect on the experiences they witness during their internships. Sometimes, through reflection methods such as Wanda⁵, specific cases are discussed. Some of these cases might deal with educare, but there is no guarantee that every student will be confronted with this theme. If the case is dealt with, the students refer sometimes to the confusing practices they witnessed: childcare workers who mostly technically 'care' and don't go deeply into interaction with children, or seldom stimulate children into experimenting and learning. Through group reflection methods, students are challenged to think about what they would do if they were the childcare worker, how would they deal with educare etc.

Coherent interconnection between care and education

Although educare is recognized as crucial, its direct implementation and integration in the different subjects requires more reflection, exchange, coordination and attunement.

⁵ www.wanda.community

It is interesting to notice for example that traditionally, in the curricula for childcare professionals, the subjects concerning 'care' and 'pedagogical approaches' belong to two different courses, which implicitly could indicate that they are still conceived as separated domains.

The analyzed training institutions are looking for ways to better connect these dimensions.

In the subject 'pedagogical approach' of one of the training institutions (Syntra), the learning outcome is described as follows: "The student deals with babies and toddlers according to the basic pedagogical principles that should be used in child care and creates a climate of well-being and involvement for optimal psychological, emotional, cognitive and physical development. He/she does this by encouraging positive interaction and responding to the social-emotional needs of the young child. The trainee has an understanding of the overall development of infants and toddlers. He/she supports and encourages children in their development based on the knowledge that age-related developmental theory is not binding and that each child develops at their own pace and according to their own interests."

A holistic development of children is also central to the subject 'care and welfare' of the 7th year child care where students are required to act from a holistic, emancipatory and dynamic vision of humanity in relation to the child and his/her environment. The teachers interviewed indicate that efforts are being made to link the subject of 'care' away from the purely technical interpretation, and 'pedagogical action' more so that students understand that these are not separate areas of work.

The curriculum of the Adult Education training institution is also inspiring. Pedagogical action is understood as action that takes into account the basic needs of every human being: physical needs (eating, drinking, exercise, optimal body temperature and sleep); need for affection, warmth and tenderness; need for safety, clarity and continuity; need for recognition, affirmation; need to perceive oneself as capable; need to be a good person and feel connected. It is assumed that if the basic needs are not met, socio-emotional problems will develop in the child. From there, it is important to be engaged in what really concerns children. In several places throughout the courses, it is emphasized that you cannot piece together a child's development. Each child plays an active role in his/her own development, and each developmental process is unique. Care moments are learning moments and play moments are learning moments and vice versa. It is also emphasized, in order to disprove somewhat the dogma of educational professional-driven activities, that care moments are full-fledged activities in themselves, where children learn a lot and 'refuel' emotionally as well. The subject of nutrition not only focuses on healthy and hygienic nutrition, but also on how, as a child care worker, you can pedagogically supervise eating moments for children in order to create a pleasant, instructive moment.

In the training institutions for future preschool teachers there is a focus on the pedagogical approach and less on the caring aspects of education. This contains some risks in term of giving students mixed messages in which the care-learning hierarchy is presented.

Good examples that look for a more coherent approach are present.

In one of the University Colleges, educare is a specific common module for both future pedagogues working in childcare and preschool teachers. It is clear that educare is seen as a new, important

evolution and a way to challenge the historical split system. Moreover, the ethical dimension of taking care and of equal opportunities is underlined. Besides caring as an act, caring for people as an ethical concept in all domains of life is presented. This includes a caring responsibility for children and a sensitive-responsive attitude. One of the subjects is called 'ethical reasoning' and it concerns the importance of ethics, educational values, having moral conversations. Students get as task for example to search for their own educational care profile ('opvoedkundig zorgprofiel'). Students from the two different disciplines learn together what educare can mean and why educare and pedagogical continuity are important in the early years. ECEC child curricula from both the childcare and preschool sectors are brought together.

Caring, playing, learning

Although not framed as such, educare in each training is also indirectly integrated in the learning outcomes of the pedagogue of young children and professional competences of the preschool teacher.

In many pre-service trainings for future preschool teachers and pedagogues in childcare, attention is given to the 100 languages of children and a strong child image (Malaguzzi, 1971). The courses deal with how to create a rich play-learn environment in which all expressive languages of children are taken into account. From this point of view, the value of play is very much stressed, with reference to Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi, Gardner, Freinet approach.

In one of the courses it is stated that in order to play safely, comfort and wellbeing are needed in a positive learning climate.

Although the link between a strong, competent child, play, learning and interaction is clear, the care dimension could be more explicitly elaborated here. The pedagogical views of Emmi Pikler could help not only for the future pedagogues of young children, but also for future preschool teachers.

In the University College trainings for future pedagogues working in childcare, separate subjects on care are foreseen. In one of these courses, care is approached from different dimensions: 1) a medical and hygienic point of view (CPR, medical basic knowledge on vaccinations, measuring, eye & ear test, ...), 2) practical skill side (caring acts) and 3) an embodied dimension (importance of physical touch that takes away tension in a baby's body and stimulates blood circulation, muscle development and emotional balance, importance of movement for toddlers).

This is quite interesting and could also help the pre-service trainings for future preschool teachers to address care more explicitly (see also the following section 'disembodiment of the child').

In sum, although the theme is present, there is still some work to do on how to discuss the importance of educare explicitly with students, and how to implement and integrate this vision in different subjects (developmental psychology, language course, care course, ...). Whereas some innovative common modules exist on educare, other courses refer in general to concepts as 100 languages, play-learn environment, wellbeing, parents as first educators. All these references are crucial to make students understand the role of educare for young children in both childcare and preschool. However work is needed to better connect all these themes in a coherent way in the whole curriculum.

DISEMBODIMENT OF THE CHILD

Which place to the body?

By merging consciously emotional, physical care, playing and learning of young children in a holistic pedagogical educare approach, the body of the child is very much in the essence of working in the early years. How do professionals relate with their bodies to children's bodies? How do children bodies relate to one another? Hamington (2004) emphasises that our bodies are also made to care. From that perspective, Hamington articulates that education is not simply a matter of shaping the mind. Rather, it is an 'embodied exchange'. When adults teach a child to ride a bicycle, embodied aspects of care are always present. Moreover, working with young children is inherently 'body work', meaning that bodies work on and with other bodies (Wolkowitz, 2006). Body work is sometimes considered as 'dirty work', as professionals have to negotiate the boundaries of the body and deal with matter out of place (for example pee, poo, snot, blood,...) (Douglas cited in Twigg et al., 2011).

In a context of increasing schoolification of the early years, the body and emotions tend to be more forgotten or denied in favor of the head with its brain. This is an increasing movement to intensify the Cartesian division between body and mind. From this perspective, we examined how the body of the child is addressed in the different courses, also in relation to the bodies of other children and the body of the professional. This is a crucial theme, since students will have to deal with children's bodies and body care work.

One of the University Colleges has a common educare module for both future preschool teachers and pedagogues working in childcare. In this module emphasis is put on embodied relational care instead of emotional and physical distant professional attitudes. How do you, as future professional, work with your body in relation to the body of the child? How do you reflect on touching, hugging and comforting from a professional perspective? The bodily proximity seems to be very important for young children's care and learning.

Also the adult education curriculum for childcare workers focuses on how professionals can touch young children. Drawing on insights from Emmi Pikler about the messages hands give to young children (patient, calm and cautious hands VS impatient, hurried or restless hands), they emphasize the following in the course: "Do you ever stop to think about how you touch babies and what message your hands give? With babies you have a lot of body contact. This is an important need of babies. With your hands you give a message to a baby, with your hands you communicate. Babies depend on others and are touched and picked up a lot throughout the day, often by different people who have their own way of touching. Babies' experiences of touching and grooming influence their expectations about other people, themselves and the world. Your way of doing things contributes to this. When you approach them lovingly, they see the world as loving and themselves as valuable. How can you touch/care for a baby in such a way that they feel respected? It is good not to just unexpectedly touch or pick up a child, or approach from behind and then suddenly wipe his nose. Also, be sure to "invite" a baby first by making eye contact and waiting for

his/her agreement. Finally, when picking up and holding the baby, make sure you give the baby both support and freedom of movement. Every baby has a preferred posture in this as well. Pay close attention to what the child indicates. Don't force him into your own preferred posture. This way, a childcare worker can respond to baby's reactions and there is much more interaction". This presentation of ideas invites student trainees to examine their own pedagogical/caregiving practices.

Another professional training program for child care workers emphasizes the importance of ergonomics (prevention of musculoskeletal disorders) and proper posture.

Beyond technical aspects

With the exception of two training courses, the embodied dimension of educare is less explored directly with students in the other different courses/curricula.

In the training courses for future pedagogues and childcare workers, caring for the body of the child is part of the curricula, even as separate subject. However, in these courses, the challenge remains to consider care beyond the technical-service signification, and transform it into educare moments: how can caring moments also be learning moments and bounding occasions with professionals?

In one of the courses (focused on 'educational questions and parenthood') for future pedagogues of young children, when exploring potty learning, it is underlined that learning to go to the toilet is also related to discovering sexuality in children. It is advised to answer to the questions of children referred to the different parts of their bodies, and about the differences boys/girls. In this case, going to the toilet is seen as educational moment to further explore children's bodies (in the next section 'language, meaningful interactions and educare', we will further elaborate upon making care more educational and vice versa).

In contrast to the training courses for pedagogues of young children (PJK), bodily care is less explored in the training courses for future preschool teachers.

In one of the University Colleges, developmental psychology is one of the main domains for students to develop a basic attitude and vision. Based on Laevers (2005), wellbeing (extent to which classroom and pedagogical contexts meet the child's basic needs) and involvement (extent of intensity with which a child participates), the physical development related to sleeping, eating and motorics (e.g. drawing) are discussed. It is however striking that toilet learning, discovering your own body in letting go and control pee and poo, is not addressed as such.

In general, a strong emphasis in the curricula/courses for future preschool teachers seems to be put on the socio-emotional development and wellbeing. The question is whether this is sufficient to also deal with the bodily dimension of care, play and learning.

Bodies and didactical practice

Another example where it becomes clear that only certain aspects of the child's body are seen and valued, is in the didactical acting of one of the courses of a University College that prepares future preschool teachers.

Didactical practice (didactisch handelen) is defined as all acts that stimulate and ameliorate the learning and development processes of children. It is stressed that this cannot be separated from the pedagogic practice (pedagogisch handelen) and from ensuring an optimal pedagogical climate. Didactical acts should be incorporated in broad, person forming goals. The following skills are needed for didactical acting: knowledge of developmental psychology; recognising developmental moments, knowledge on using these moments, be able to observe, class management, stimulating (language) development, planning and organising.

Here the model of didactic acting is derived from a certain child image in which the head (cognitive learning), hands (psycho-motoric development) and heart (socio-emotional development) are underlined. But what about the rest of the body, like the stomach (eating processing), the bladder, the ass? Moreover, it seems that the head is only connected to cognitive development. But in reality much of the cognitive development is connected to bodily experiences, meaning learning through the body (Hamington, 2004).

In the same course, there is also an interesting reference to the needs pyramid of Maslow, in which development requires energy to keep the growing process going. Further in the course, this needs pyramid is used to analyse case studies of children. It is however striking that the physiological dimension of this pyramid (e.g. feeding, sleeping) is not included in the discussion of the case studies. This hinders the possibility for students to reflect on questions such as: if a child did not sleep well or eat well during lunch time or breakfast, what will this mean for their learning opportunities during the day?

Could we think of a more embodied educare perspective as basis of didactic acting?

The courses concerning sport, health and physical education (L.O.) can be interesting when referring to a more embodied conceptualisation of didactic acting.

Certain of these courses underline the importance of movement and natural movement urge of toddlers. Teachers can stimulate this need and support toddlers in becoming more agile/mobile (bewegingsvaardiger). An important message here is that psychomotorics establishes the unity of the motor and the mental (cognitive-affective) in the movement. Another course on music also stipulates the importance of movement. According to Jacob Kugel (1969), movement concerns three aspects of the body: body plan, body awareness and body idea. Body awareness means the physical properties and capabilities of which a person is aware, the information that a person acquires about his/her body and the movements they make. This depends on what is possible per age phase.

It is interesting to find these messages in these courses. However, these concepts should be spread as basis in the whole curriculum, instead of being fragmented in specific thematic courses.

LANGUAGE AND MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS IN AN EDUCARE APPROACH

As the OECD (2021) underlined recently in its Starting Strong quality report, meaningful interactions in an educare approach are an essential lever to reach high quality early childhood education and care. We used this perspective to how language is connected to an educare approach in the analysed courses/curricula. Interesting examples can be found.

In one of the training courses for future pedagogues of young children, language development starts from a strong child image. Some key concepts are: warm, reciprocal interaction (e.g. ABC of love, Melanie Klein) and a sensitive-responsive educational attitude. The examples that are used to explore are also 'caring moments' (e.g. eating fruit).

These can be interesting educare examples in which care and learning are joined. Although some courses do not address it as such, the lecturers of pedagogy of the young child explained in the focus group, that they always have the educare concept in the back of their mind.

In the courses of the vocational training for childcare workers through adult education, language and the importance of being linguistic is emphasized in each course. It is said that in caring professions, working experientially is an important competence. All contacts with children evoke feelings and language is important to name the child's emotions and to make clear to the child what you are going to do in a caring moment.

The pedagogy course emphasizes that talking to children and explaining is the basis of everything. "Young children learn during everyday situations and especially in 1-to-1 interaction with their educators. Language stimulation works best when it is fun and casual (no language lessons) and responds to what the children themselves are interested to... The most important thing about talking is that you make sure it is two-way. You tune your communication or language offerings to the child in front of you: you choose the right words (and/or the right gestures with young children), you use the right tone, you ask the right questions so that the child understands what you mean and is also motivated and able to talk back. When a child responds, it is important to listen carefully, be patient and support a child in what he/she wants to say. Make sure you are talking "with" the child and not "to" the child".

Concerning the courses for future preschool teachers, in some of them the focus on language development refers more to the traditionally assumed learning moments (e.g. circle time). In other ones, examples are used from young toddlers to discuss language development in the context of multilingualism.

In general, much emphasis is put on language-stimulating conversations with young children for preschool staff and primary school teachers. The key message to students is to make more time for conversation. Interesting examples are provided of all moments during the day (e.g. saying goodbye of parents, eating moment ...).

In one of the internships specifically oriented on working with young toddlers (peuterstage), one of the students' task for example is to enrich 3 routines more in a linguistic manner. In another preschool teacher training the framework of the project Kleine Kinderen, Grote Kansen (<https://www.grotekansen.be/nl/home/1>) is used to connect language with the importance of warm relations, expression and thinking.

The themes are: how to create a strong learning environment to stimulate language development?; how can we use storytelling to entice children to interact?

Nevertheless, besides these examples, putting educare in practice remains a challenge in the training courses for future preschool teachers, as a starting professional underlined in the focus group: *'during the training, it was difficult to learn how you can give an educational value to all the small moments in preschool'.*

3.2. Continuity with home and neighborhood

In order to create inclusive transitions, families and local communities surrounding the ECEC centres are indispensable partners. If an educare approach wants to succeed in creating better equal opportunities for children, also families' and local communities' needs should be an important starting point in developing pedagogical practices.

As one of the courses for future preschool teachers underlines, it is important to understand the pedagogical climate in which the teacher and childcare worker are approached as educators ('opvoeders').

From the argument of pedagogical continuity, partnerships with parents as educators are important to enrich each other and complement the education of children. Although all the pre-service trainings recognise the importance of creating partnerships with parents and with the local context and communities, we have identified some issues that need further clarification and research in order to prepare students as best as possible to work with children, parents, families and local communities.

RECIPROCITY AND SUPPORTING PARENTS BEYOND INSTRUMENTAL APPROACHES

In many courses of the pre-service trainings, especially those preparing students to work in childcare, a strong, competent image of parents is presented. For example it is explained to students that *"parents always have the best intentions for their children and they often try to make the best of it"*. Parents are considered the first educators and it is assumed that *"they want the best for their children"*. In courses on educational issues in the signification of raising children (*opvoeden*), collaboration with parents and a diversity of families is considered important from that perspective.

In one of the courses for future pedagogues to work in childcare, there is a chapter about how to have a partnership with parents as a building block for education and care, how to talk to them, how to interview them and talk about parenthood and parenting.

Familiarisation (*wennen*) is also an important theme and is brought up as a 'negotiation practice between ECEC and families'. However, when presenting concrete examples, some tensions are to be identified.

For example, in one of the courses course, the case is discussed in which a mother wants her child to go to preschool, but feels he is 'not ready'. The text describes a meeting between the childcare worker and the mother to discuss this. The final agreement is to set up a meeting with the preschool staff in order to see what the school expectations concerning starting children are. After this meeting the mother can then decide if the child is ready or not to start school.

It is remarkable that an effort is made towards a dialogue between parents, childcare workers and the preschool staff. However, it seems like the main goal here is that the mother is better informed on the expectations of the preschool and its constructions of a school-ready child (see 3.1. pedagogical continuity – transitions). Based on this one-sided information, the mother can decide whether she considers her child ready or not to start preschool. There seem to be no mutual effort regarding how the ECEC can also listen to the mother and co-construct a pedagogical approach that will fit this child in his important transition from home/childcare to the preschool.

Collaboration and communication with parents is considered a crucial competence/learning goal for students. But what the exact nature of this communication and collaboration is, seems sometimes less clear.

For example, in one of the courses for future preschool teachers, it is underlined that starting school is not one moment but it begins earlier. Therefore open class days and info moments to accompany parents and children are given as inspiring examples. It is also written: "A nice addition during this kind of initiative is to provide a moment when you give information to parents in a room next to the classroom. At first, a lot of toddlers will cry. When this stops after a while, it is very reassuring for the parents to hear that they also stop crying".

Here it looks like info moments, instead of being focused on a dialogue, are mainly seen as occasions to inform parents on what they can do to help the school in dealing with their children. Moreover the crying of young toddlers is justified in this example as something parents have to adapt to, instead of questioning the crying itself, and how a collaboration between parents and school could contribute to less stressful transitions.

In the same course, many tips are given on how to have a dialogue with parents aimed at the preparation to start preschool. However the preparation doesn't seem to include questions from parents themselves. It concerns tips for parents on how they can prepare their children in getting potty trained, closing their jacket, listening to simple requests... etc.

The relationship with parents here seems to have again a more instrumental nature, as communicating with them is mainly about what parents should do for the adaptation process in school, and less on what preschool staff and parents together can do to smoothen the transition. When talking about what the school can do, this goes again in the direction of 'what can the school do to prepare the parents, so that they can prepare their children', without a reciprocal approach to create real dialogue.

This signifies a broader problem. One of the main issues of the instrumental approach on parental involvement is that assumptions made with regard to parents prevail, instead of enabling reciprocal communicative spaces for parents, professionals, policy makers and/or researchers in which multiple meanings and concerns about early years education and care can be discussed (Jésu, 2010; Rayna & Rubio, 2010; Van Laere et al., 2018). This reminds us of the urgent challenge that Canella (1997) identified over twenty years ago in her book *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*: ‘educators and researchers have not yet constructed a language that gives the message that we want to learn from, and with, parents and their children’ (Canella, 1997, p.107). The question here is: how can lecturers approach this equal partnership and required reciprocity in the pre-service training context with students?

CO-EDUCARE OR INDIVIDUALISATION OF CARE AND EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONS OF PARENTS?

Creating a dialogue with parents on their pedagogical approach towards children is in essence a co-educare approach (Rayna & Rubio, 2010). In fact, in the pre-service trainings, there is a gap on how future ECEC staff can have deeper conversations with parents within a co-educare approach. Some interesting exceptions are present, but even in those cases, what ECEC can do to support parents is not enough explained.

In two courses of training institutions for future pedagogues of young children, typical educational, parenting and care issues of parents are presented to the students, such as sleeping and eating problems of children. Knowledge on eating/sleeping patterns is presented, also on what you as a parent can do about this.

However, the course does not address what an ECEC centre can signify in the support of these typical educational, parenting and care issues of parents. What is the knowledge of the ECEC staff in these matters and how can they help this process from their sight? Are typical educational and caring issues of parents seen as individual problems of that child and parent? What can co-educare mean in this context? How can parents feel supported in their approach and how can the latter be attuned to the approach of the ECEC centre (meaning not necessarily the same, but in well-thought connection). Knowing that parents have many educational, parenting and care issues/questions is important, but there is still a part missing in what ECEC staff members can signify in all this. With more investment in this field, parents would feel adequately supported in different ways (educational, caring, practical,), and children would consequently benefit from this co-educare approach too.

In another course of the same pre-service training on ‘educational systems in crisis’, possible perspectives of parents are presented. Here, difficult education/upbringing (opvoeden) is understood as an experience in which the fit between the child’s behavior and the reactive style of the caregiver

(parent, teacher) is not like it was expected. When parents experience a lot of stress in parenthood, there is less mental space which can lead to increasing arousal, resulting in a loss of reflective ability and use of non-mentalising modi. This can cause a decrease of resilience and increased stress. Therefore, this course points out that parents need to be able to take care of themselves or they need a captain who keeps his rudder straight. Parents can be brought back in their own window of tolerance (co-regulation) by a partner, a friend or therapist.

Although this is also applied to the situation of childcare workers (in the sense that they also need co-regulation to avoid stress), these stressful situations for parents are not seen as opportunities in which ECEC professionals can play a very essential role in co-regulation and giving mental space back to parents.

A debate is needed on how ECEC can play a bigger support role for parents than just informing them on the (yet important) daily experiences. How can ECEC staff be supportive to parents in an emotional, educational, caring and practical way (meaning also supporting parents to create networks amongst each other)? Missing this chance means conceptualizing the education/upbringing/raising of children rather as an individual responsibility of parents, leaving especially more societally disadvantaged families alone. Suggesting self-care as only support will not suffice, knowing that all parents have different means and social networks. The question here can be whether ECEC can become the first 'to go' place, in which parents are supported by a bigger educational and caring community, which could help reducing their stress and loneliness.

There are a few ECEC examples in the Flemish community of Belgium who manage to do this (e.g. community oriented childcare centres and preschools). The developments in certain regions in Italy can be inspirational as well. In these regions, it is habit to understand ECEC centres as meeting places for children *and* families. In this vision, ECEC is a place to support parents themselves, not just directly in relation to their children's development (e.g. Bronfenbrenner approach, 1981), but also as individuals that share vulnerabilities, strengths, similar and different parental paths. ECEC centres help parents in getting out of the loneliness that often accompanies the first years with a young child. That is why many activities for small groups of parents together are organised (thematic groups, workshops...), with the transversal aim of supporting the creation of friendship networks and self-support groups amongst families themselves (Catarsi, Fortunati, 2005). In this sense, co-educare is seen as creating a community around children, which gives reciprocal support in good and more challenging times (Rayna, Rubio, 2010).

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS ADDITIONAL DIMENSION OR STARTING POINT?

Creating an educational community also encompasses being aware of the needs of the local communities surrounding the ECEC centre, as neighbors can be future parents or (volunteer) co-educators for the children (e.g. going with the children to a bakery means that the baker in the store interacts with children and educates them informally and indirectly as well). The curricula of the training institutions preparing future childcare workers and pedagogues (Bachelors and vocational training) underline the importance of creating a connection with the community and the neighborhood, and space is given to how to create inter-sectoral collaboration. However, these themes are not always explored in details with concrete examples that can help students in connecting theory and practice.

The influence of the community on the development of children is underlined too.

One of the training institutions stimulates students in reflecting about their own 'identity story', by connecting it to the community and family they grew up in.

In this way, the curriculum supports students' (self)reflection and the awareness of their own story and identity, which ultimately will help them valuing the story and identities of others (children and families).

In one of the University Colleges, the community approach is even the starting point of the pre-service training of future preschool teachers and pedagogues, who are respectively seen as 'urban educators' and 'city pedagogical coaches' in the context of a metropolitan city and superdiversity.

In another University College for future preschool teachers, the practices of community based schools (brede scholen) are extensively explored with students.

In general it looks like the relationship with the community is present in the courses of the analyzed training institutions, but not always in a deep and enough concrete way for students.

3.3. Professional Continuity

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION IN ECEC

In the evolution towards educare practices and warm transitions, interprofessional collaboration is crucial. Interprofessional collaboration between childcare, out of school care staff and preschool staff requires a specific competence set. Merging the expertise of future ECEC staff from different disciplines in, for example, inter-institutional learning communities or moments of shared critical reflection / intervention can be of great importance. In this way, students will feel supported in developing their relational expertise to do 'boundary work' together. Hopefully this will lead to an increased shared problem ownership in organising warm and inclusive transitions and implement an educare approach for children, parents, families and local communities.



Interprofessional collaboration is one of the learning outcomes of the University Colleges. Especially in the internships, attention is given to involving all partners, so that students have to be able to see the networks that can be created with the ECEC centre (with social organizations, health organizations etc.). For example pedagogues working in childcare have to make contact with surrounding preschools to develop transitional practices.

The basis to work on interprofessional collaboration starts with pre-service trainings raising awareness on the fact that other types of ECEC staff are also co-educators of young children. For example, in the courses for future preschool teachers, childcare workers (both working in childcare and preschool) are getting more visible as professionals who also have an educational role to play.

In one of the courses, students in preschool education reflect on examples of a childcare worker that is struggling with its educational role in preschool. Another example of a family day carer is used as a reflection exercise for preschool teacher students.

This gives indirectly the message to preschool teacher students that childcare and family daycare workers are also important members of the educational team. It could be interesting to maybe include examples of preschool teachers as educational professionals in the curricula for childcare staff too. In this way, future childcare staff would also feel connected to the situation of preschool teachers.

Concerning the horizontal transitions during a school-day, we can see a huge gap in exploring the interprofessional collaboration between out of school care staff and preschool staff. There are some small new action research projects that are presented to students (e.g. Value project, DUJO project)⁶. These projects focus on what the essence of collaboration between childcare workers/assistant educators and preschool teachers is, in the sense of questioning and discussing concepts like division of roles, tensions, status, equity and equality between the two professional groups. However, besides these references, the crucial collaboration between these two sectors is not enough taken into account.

CONCRETE PROJECTS

Interprofessional collaboration takes also shape in concrete projects involving different initial training institutions (see more in the paragraph about structural continuity).

In one of the University Colleges, students in pedagogy of the young child and preschool education get the opportunity (as voluntary and not mandatory choice) to have a reflective buddy from the other orientation to exchange and discuss experiences in their internship.

⁶ Value: <https://vbjk.be/en/project/value-professionalisation-and-collaboration-for-assisting-and-core-professionals-in-ecec>; DUJO: <https://vbjk.be/nl/projecten/dujo-naar-duurzame-jobs-in-opvang-en-begeleiding-van-school>

This helps students in developing their own professional identity. The interviewed lecturers see this as a great opportunity, but address that it is challenging to organise this for every student in a structural way.

In another University College a specific course on being a childcare worker in the preschool context will be developed by a lecturer of preschool education and a lecturer of pedagogy of the young child.

In this same University College an optional subject for third year students is created on interprofessional collaboration in education. This subject is organised by lecturers in pedagogy of the young child (childcare), preschool and primary education, secondary education, special needs education and social work. Students from different training orientations work together to reflect on educational cases, they make an analysis and develop suggestions for the working field.

In another University College, as already mentioned, a common course on educare is created for students of pedagogy of the young child in their 2nd year and students preschool education in their 3rd year. This educare course starts from the plea/calling "Educare: Pedagogues and preschool teachers together for care and learning!" The focus in this common course is on collaboration and integration of both 'worlds', by having intervision, exchange and co-constructing transitional practices and policies in ECEC.

In general we can conclude that some of the analysed pre-service training institutions make an effort in providing good examples of interprofessional collaboration and in stimulating it amongst lecturers and students. More work has to be done in order to invest in this direction in a structural and coherent way.

3.4. Structural Continuity

In order to have warm and inclusive transitions, additional work on a structural, more systemic level needs to be done. This is called working on structural continuity and it concerns the level of governance, needed to stimulate pedagogical continuity, continuity with the home and community and professional continuity.

UNDERSTANDING ECEC SPLIT AND INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

Knowledge about the ECEC system

To understand many issues that happen across Belgian ECEC (e.g. potty training as a constructed problem at the age of 2,5 due to the institutional history; the educational deficit in childcare; the caring deficit in preschool), a good understanding of the history of the ECEC system is important. What are consequences and side effects of ECEC split systems, and how is ECEC organised and implemented in countries with an integrated ECEC system or a split system where children start

school later (then at 2,5 years old)? How are practices and policies dealing with the construction faults of the split system?

In the Flemish community, we can lately identify two pathways to deal with the split system:

- new practices and policy proposals that want to improve the transition for children and families within the existing ECEC split system;
- new practices, policy recommendations or policy ambitions (setting up pilots financed by the Minister of Welfare) that underline the importance of developing an integrated provision for young children consisting in preschool staff, childcare staff and out of school care staff. These type of projects challenge the existing ECEC split system.

In the analyzed curricula, the historical and structural knowledge about ECEC is not always enough addressed. Some good examples can be identified.

In some internationally oriented courses of the University Colleges, the discussion on the split and integrated system is addressed, and the European policy agenda and the European Quality Framework for ECEC (European Commission, 2019) are presented. There, an educare approach and an institutional integration of childcare and preschool is recommended to avoid abrupt, hard transitions for children.

In University Colleges, international visits and internships are possible, so that students are confronted with different ECEC systems, and they can critically reflect on the existing Flemish split ECEC system.

In the already mentioned University College with the specific common educare module for both future preschool teachers and future pedagogues for young children, the situation of split versus integrated systems is explored by comparing the Belgian situation to the case of Slovenia, a previous split ECEC system that turned into an integrated system after the Yugoslavian war. The side effects of the ECEC split system are explored with students by looking at the qualitative studies on the perspectives of children, parents and professionals on transitions and educare.

Transitions and educare are not just new buzz words. These concepts derive from an thorough problem analysis by taking a democratic perspective. In sum, a better understanding of this history and how in current times people are challenging the split system is important knowledge for future ECEC staff, in order not to legitimise the current situation but to challenge it and attune it more to young children/toddlers.

Knowledge on the rationals of ECEC

To better understand the macro social and political level of development of early years systems and its effects in practice, more discussion on the societal goals/rationales of ECEC provision is needed too. ECEC systems are not stable, unchangeable realities by themselves. They are constructions

made in a specific time and context with specific explicit and implicit goals. In the analysed curricula, more work needs to be done in this direction, although good examples are present.

One good example can be found in the already mentioned common educare module. The latter extensively explores and discusses with students underlying societal rationales developed over time on why the government invests in childcare, preschool and out of school care. Questions are raised such as: is ECEC a place for democratic experimentalism or a place to confirm the dominant discourse that is popular in neoliberal societies? How do free market principles influence the relation between childcare and preschool, and between ECEC in general and compulsory school?

In one of the courses of the University Colleges preparing future preschool teachers, students are introduced to different child images and how these are linked to education (e.g. hygiene offensive, medicalization ...).

Exploring the societal rationals, could also lead to a fundamental discussion on the value of childcare and preschool according to children/families, researchers and policy makers.

For example, in line with the vision of the Flemish government, preschool education is understood in the courses as 1) making a contribution to the multiple formation ('veelzijdige vorming') of children 2) stimulate children in their cognitive, motoric and affective development and 3) making children 'school-ready' for primary school. School-readiness is defined here as skills and attitudes that are needed to make the transition to the first grade in primary school.

It is not clear how this school readiness is presented to students, as a contestable subject or as a truth. More discussion is needed whether this school-ready idea, which is contrary to equal opportunities and inclusive transitions, is the real main goal of preschool. A better understanding of the rationals of ECEC would help a meaningful and critical discussion on these themes.

STRUCTURAL CONTINUITY WITHIN THE TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

One of the consequences of a ECEC split system, is that the training institutions are also organised independently: childcare workers, preschool teachers and pedagogues of young children. How can training institutions challenge these splits? How can they create more structural continuity within the training institutions themselves, which will lead to having more pedagogical continuity, continuity with home / neighbourhood and professional continuity across the early years?

In general, there is no structural continuous collaboration between the initial training institutions preparing future childcare and preschool teachers. When the two institutions belong to the same University College, there are sometimes examples of inter-institutional learning activities, but also in this case not in an embedded structural way. The analyzed vocational training institution (7^e jaar Kinderzorg) doesn't have any collaboration with other training institutions. Sometimes students that left the vocational training to study at Bachelor level, are invited to introduce the Bachelor

course to the vocational students. It needs to be noted that during the focus group with the representatives of the initial training institutions, part of the discussion was based on the need to collaborate more amongst different institutions, and maybe to organise common years for students of both sectors.

At this moment, collaboration (when existing) seems to be in general more present amongst the lecturers themselves (through participation to common projects or research) than amongst students. Some good practices need to be noticed.

The already mentioned 'educare course' followed at the same time by the students of the 2nd year Bachelor pedagogy of the young child and the students of the 3rd year Bachelor preschool, seems strongly oriented towards sharing an educare perspective between the two sectors. Supervision moments with both students and an internship of 24 hours with a focus on educare are organised. Another training institution preparing pedagogues to work in childcare is planning to start a course called 'childcare workers in preschool', with a focus on the intertwined value of caring and learning. A teacher from the training institution childcare and a teacher from the training institution preschool are working on this together. In this institution, students of the last year studying to work in childcare have the possibility to do their internship in a preschool class.

The curriculum of this same training institution offers a thematic week (Ipsie-week) in which students from different training institutions (childcare, preschool, social sector etc.) work together on concrete cases.

In another curriculum, specific courses are focusing on interprofessional learning and working. In the second year, students of this training institution can choose to work in the already mentioned buddy-system, in which one student of the training-childcare and one of the training-preschool exchange their internship experiences. However, not all students choose this system, and in the interviews the lecturers underline the difficulty of making this exchange structural, due to practical and organisational obstacles.

One of the University Colleges preparing future preschool teachers has a more structural collaboration with the primary school training. The third year has many shared courses for students trained as preschool teachers and students trained as primary school teachers, which of course stimulates discussions on transitions and pedagogy.

During the interviews, the lecturers showed interest and proactive motivation to make the connection with the training institutions forming childcare pedagogues more real. Moreover a lecturer preparing childcare pedagogues pointed out the importance of having future pedagogical

coaches that can support staff both in childcare and preschool (and not just in childcare, as it is the case at the moment). This would need investment at the political level to make the collaboration of the two sectors possible.

4. Pre-service training issues applied on transitions and educare

TENSIONS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Through the interviews with teachers and starters (ex-students now working in the sector), some common issues are often underlined. One of them is the gap that seem to occur between theory and practice. The starting professionals that took part to our focus group underline the distance between theory and practice when it comes to the preparation they received, and the need for a deeper and better understanding of the sector before starting working.

As one starter professional underlines: 'we found a gap between what we learn in theory during the training and what we find in practice when we start working. [...] It would help to have more information about how to concretely approach children that start preschool'.

Another starter professional (working in preschool 2,5-6) states: 'starting working was a shock. I saw that the start of preschool for young children is very abrupt, there is a lot of pressure on children to be 'ready'. Also the infrastructures sometimes don't help. For example, where I worked, there was no sleeping place for the children'.

This confirms the gap between theory and practice, besides reminding the important connection between *educare* and the conditions offered by a thoughtful and organized space that allows the implementation of a real *educare* approach.

Again, a starter (who studied at vocational level and works in the childcare sector) says: 'I was prepared and not prepared by the initial training. You learn about creating a safe place in the class, but it's one or two lessons, so not enough. Then you come in a group with many children, and you don't know how to create a safe place in those conditions'.

Here the mismatch between theory and practice comes out, underlying also the challenge of the lack of structural conditions (e.g. adult-child ratio) that can hinder the actual realization of an *educare* approach.

In the specific case of the vocational training, it could be that, even though the concepts of the curriculum seem focused on an *educare* approach, the fact that this training lasts only one year doesn't give to students the possibility to get a real good preparation for the workfield.

Also the responsible of this institution confirmed this issue during the focus group with the representatives of the initial training institutions: 'I find that the curriculum itself is based on educate concepts, but the whole training is too short to actually work deeply on these concepts'.

Concerning this vocational training, one of the issues seems to be also the fact that students don't always choose this training as first choice. From the research work of Master students of the University of Ghent (nota Vandenbroeck, 2022), we see that there is a tendency in arriving to this training as a result of not succeeding in what was chosen in the first place. As a consequence, many students arrive to this path without a strong motivation towards the studies and the future profession, and they see the vocational study as a first step to then do something else – for example preschool teacher, nurse... From the research of these Master students, it comes out that just 26 on 130 interviewed vocational training students say that they want to become childcare workers after their studies. This raises questions concerning the contents of the training, but also the (low) social and economical recognition of the childcare sector workers.

CONTACTS WITH PARENTS

Also when it comes to the theme of the relationship with parents, starting professionals from preschool (2,5-6) underline a lack of continuity between what they learn during their studies and what they find in practice. More specifically, they learn about collaboration with families, but once they do their internship or start working, they often end up in contexts in which parents might not be allowed to come inside the institution. The lecturers and responsables of the different training institutions underlined the same issue during the focus group, by pointing out how their curriculum focuses on parents' participation, but often students do their internship in preschools in which (still) parents are not allowed inside. The responsables stressed how the Covid19 pandemic made all this worse, since some schools now think about keeping this practice (not allowing parents inside) even after the pandemic, risking to step back into a medical approach to ECEC (Van Laere et al., 2021). Related to this theme, both the starting professionals and the representatives of the training institutions (preschool) involved in our focus groups underline that it would be important for students to do part of their internship during the familiarisation moments of children in preschool. This represents sometimes a challenge, as the preschools themselves prefer to avoid the presence of students during this delicate period. What could be done is giving to students an 'observation task', without an active direct interactions with the families. During the familiarization moment, the relationship child-parent-professional is the priority and a very delicate dynamic is created, involving building trust and a mutual dialogue. It is understandable that the ECEC staff wants to 'protect' this period. At the same time, for future professionals it would be an important experience to be able to observe this transitional period. Maybe with clear tasks and by making the expectations towards the students explicit, this could be possible. Some examples are to be found in Italy: in certain childcare centres a

one-way glass window is placed next to the children room. The internship students spend the first part of their internship observing through this window. If used during familiarization moments, students could get the opportunity to witness this important period without interfering with its delicate dynamics. At the same time, their observations could become interesting material to be discussed with the ECEC staff themselves.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF INTERNSHIP AND REFLECTION

Another related issue that arises from the interviews is connected to how the internship period is conceived and organized. Both teachers and starters consider the internship period as crucial in order to connect theory and practice and in order to get to know the field. From the interviews with the teachers and responsables of the different training institutions, we see that in general there are exchange moments with the students about their internship experiences. In certain cases, group reflection methods (like Wanda⁷) are used to support students in reflecting together on their experiences during their internship, as already mentioned. As we read in one of the curricula of the University Colleges preparing pedagogues of the young children, there is a focus on developing empathic competences, being 'curious', caring, valuing uncertainty as a way to encourage contextualized reflection on practice.

One of the starter professionals working in preschool 2,5-6 states: 'we reflected individually, but not much in group. This is something I would implement more in the initial training: learning to reflect on practice in group'.

In general, it seems that reflection on practice is present in the different curricula, but not in a continuous and coherent way alongside the whole training path. This is an issue underlined also in the already mentioned Master thesis of students of the University of Ghent (nota Vandenbroeck, 2022).

Even when group reflection for students seem embedded in the curriculum, reflecting specifically on the theme of transitions happens when students spontaneously bring up the subject and/or when the teacher her/himself is passionate about this theme, but it doesn't seem a theme structurally present into the reflection practice foreseen for all students.

As a teacher explains: 'we see the students individually to reflect on their internship twice a year. So it can be that 'by accident' in one of those meetings we focus on transitions, but the time is very short, and the meetings are very much oriented by the 'learning goals' that we foresee so there is not much time left for inspiring exchanges about practice. [...] We also have group reflection sessions with students 4 times per year. There it can also be that 'by accident' the discussed theme of one session goes about transitions'.

⁷ www.wanda.community

The same goes for educare-related themes. Amongst the above mentioned 'learning goals' for internship in this training institution, there is also a focus on connecting learning and caring. However, the teachers and responsables interviewed underline that students find it hard to connect the theory they learn during their studies with the practice they experience in the ECEC centres where they do their internship. For example they might notice that during changing the diaper, professionals don't always interact individually with the child. This sometimes opens up other themes for reflection, for example related to the conditions needed to bring *educare* in practice, starting from a good adult/child ratio in ECEC.

As an interviewed teacher says: 'when students bring challenging experiences from their internship, we stimulate their critical reflection by asking for example what would you have done in this situation? What is the challenge? How do you think we can overcome it?'

All interviewed training institutions confirm the importance of the internship period, and at the same time the challenge to really value it within the training trajectory. Mostly, it is stated that more time would be needed to meet the students individually and in small groups to exchange and critically reflect on their experiences and find the links with what they study, by also focusing on educare and transitions.

An interesting practice is underlined in the curriculum of the training institution that has the common educare course: there, part of the internship (24 hours) is specifically focused on educare, and students are asked to describe the first (pre)school day. A connection is also made with reflecting on one's own story, for example by remembering what students themselves found stimulating, comforting, interesting, when they were children. This approach is enriched by connections with art and with the 100 languages approach of Loris Malaguzzi. Within this reflection path, popular statements about transitions and educare are critically discussed with the students (e.g. 'entering preschool means enduring for a while. It's a difficult period, but after a while children are fine'; 'too much care can be an obstacle to learning'; 'children should be better prepared by their parents before entering preschool' etc.). The internship focused on educare in this institution is connected to a specific course about this theme, organised together for students of the 2nd year childcare and students of the 3rd year preschool education.

Another interesting practice comes from a training institution that organizes a system of buddies, in which one student studying for childcare and one studying for preschool exchange about their internship period. However at the moment, the buddy system is not compulsory for everybody. Students can individually choose to step into this system, and not many of them are using it until now.

Once again, good practices are present on the level of internship and of the connection between theory and practice when it comes to transitions and educare. However these practices are not yet enough embedded in a coherent and continuous way in all initial training institutions' curricula.

5. Concluding reflections

As part of the international Intrans project, we aspired to initiate/deepen discussion among initial training institutions about how transitions and educare applied to the curricula designed for future ECEC professionals. For this purpose, we conducted a small-scale exploratory study to get insights on what messages students receive on paper or digitally about transitions and educare. Since our data only concern courses on paper or digital courses, we make no statements about how transitions and educare applied in other ways are applied in classes and internship discussions. Interviews with responsables and lecturers clarified specific aspects, but the small scale of our study doesn't allow us to state general conclusions.

Based on the findings, we wrote this discussion paper as the start of a discussion on the implementation of transitions and educare both within and across courses. In this way, we also hope to invite the lecturers and responsables not involved in this sample to reflect on these themes in their own courses. For this purpose we developed reflection questions for each item discussed in this paper. These questions are meant for Dutch speaking readers and are available on the Dutch version of this same document.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our sample shows that the courses focus on the vertical transition from home to childcare and from home/childcare to preschool. Compared to the University Colleges, the vocational courses for future childcare workers seem to give little attention to transition to preschool/out-of-school care. In general, all programs give limited attention to the horizontal transitions that children experience throughout a day of care/school.

We also notice contradictory tensions between making ECEC child-ready and making children school-ready. Notions of school readiness present in the courses sometimes reflect an institutional and historical reality, rather than having a scientific basis in psychology or social pedagogy. Inspiring examples on this matter come from the courses of some University Colleges that discuss explicitly with students the tension between child-ready/school-ready transitions and equal opportunities.

Although educare is implicitly finding its way into the programs, there is still work to do to make the crucial role of educare explicitly discussed with students and to incorporate this vision into all courses (developmental psychology, language course, care course, pedagogy ...) coherently. In a holistic educare pedagogy in which emotional, physical care, play and learning cannot be separated, the whole body of the child is central. Working with young children includes body work and care for one's own professional body. Body work (e.g., intentional touching, supporting potty

training, sleeping, resting, eating ...) is little addressed in initial training courses for future preschool teachers.

Another important aspect underlined in our analysis of the courses is the tension between instrumentalization of parents and an alliance based on co-education between professionals, parents and extended community. Practicing with students how communication should be reciprocal (e.g. in familiarization moments) with parents remains a challenge in the internship periods. Moreover, although questions from parents are recognized, the role that future professionals can play in supporting parents with their questions and in creating networks amongst families themselves is very little explored. Investing in this direction would mean understanding children's upbringing not only as an individual responsibility, but as a social one.

In order to work on all these aspects, interprofessional collaboration is crucial.

The latter could be better explored in the courses (especially concerning horizontal transitions between school and out of school care). Some inspiring examples are present, in which future professionals are introduced to interprofessional collaboration and reflection.

To better understand many issues of the ECEC in the Flemish Community of Belgium (e.g., potty training as a constructed problem at age 2.5 due to institutional history), an understanding of the history of ECEC is important for students. What are consequences and side effects of split systems of care and education? How is care and education organized and understood in countries with integrated or split systems where children start school later (than at age 2.5)? How do pedagogical practices and policies deal with the structural flaws inherent in a split system?

The sample shows that the discussion about these issues is more present in the University Colleges than in the other courses.

Other important aspects that our analysis underline concerning transitions and educare in the courses are the tension theory-practice, and the crucial role of the internship period: how are future professionals prepared to deal with transitions and educare? Are they prepared to work in an ideal ECEC or in a real one? More work is needed to better connect what students study and what they meet in their practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recent international research and policies about transitions and educare developed in the last ten years have had a clear impact on the structure and contents of the initial training curricula for future ECEC professionals. However, although a direction towards an educare philosophy is present, more work needs to be done to make this approach structural and coherent in all courses and curricula. To make this concrete, it would be interesting to bring the themes of educare and transition into educators' conversations about the initial training curricula. How can the unspoken educare philosophy find its reflection on paper or digitally, so that the messages students receive are coherent on a content level? Training teams face the difficult task of preparing future professionals



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to deal with the tension between the split reality of care and education and the ideal holistic educate pedagogy for young children and families. Offering insights and knowledge about the history of ECEC and the tension between split versus integrated systems is important, even in short-term professional training programs for childcare workers. Areas of tension do not disappear by not discussing them. Instead they only gain a place by making them discussable with students. The role of internship becomes here crucial too. It is especially during this period that lecturers and tutors can support students in connecting theory and practice and in critically discuss contradictions.



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