

Observing and reflecting together

Due to the rather dominant idea that children need to be made(pre-)school ready, it is more common that new children are framed from a deficit perspective in terms of what they are actually lacking to be in preschool (e.g. they are not potty trained, they do not speak Dutch well enough,...). When professionals from different backgrounds (childcares, teachers) observe together and discuss how children act and learn, the necessity of a holistic viewpoint in which caring and learning are inseparable is automatically brought to the foreground. Gradually different groups of professionals from both childcare and (pre) school will start to discover that children already are very capable once they arrive in childcare or in preschool. With the exercises 'observing and reflecting', we will strengthen the competences of teachers and childcare workers to become more sensitive and responsive to the needs of each child and parent.

The pedagogical coach has an important role in guiding the observations made by teachers and childcare workers. Observing and reflecting requires mutual trust. 'Learning from each other' is an important objective of the learning network. Besides observing in your own setting/context, it is also interesting to visit a colleague in 'his/her' own setting/context. This observation method covers three steps

1. One day training, warming-up by using external movie fragments and/or photos.
2. Observe an action within your own organisation.
3. Observing an action within another organisation.

3.2.1. Observing without interpretation

During the day you constantly look at 'what is happening' at that moment. You receive signals, you watch, you listen and react to this. You do this spontaneously, it is important that you are aware of this subjective view. Besides, it is good to observe and to understand the different actions objectively. Observing and reflecting give you a different view on a situation. Within a learning network you will alternately observe and reflect together to make multiple interpretations, provided that you are open to a 'different' view on the actions.

3.2.2. Trust, curiosity and respect

A caring learning environment, in your own organisation and within the learning network is essential to invite a colleague or to visit another colleague. Observing and giving feedback as well as being observed might cause stress to teachers and childcare workers. You are curious about the other person's story, communicating respectfully about your observations. Giving and receiving feedback asks for mutual trust. What do you want to reach with your feedback? How to make sure you open up for feedback?

3.2.3. An observation exercise in three steps

In order to gradually build up the process of observing, giving words to what they see and eventually share reflections, we propose to work in different steps, at least over a course of 6 months. In a first step, you use movie fragments or photos of children and families in ECEC and primary schools. In a second step, you observe in the classrooms or playgroups of your colleagues in your own institution (at the moment in which both child and parent are in the classroom, and at the moment with the child alone). You share the observations and reflections, preferably supported by a pedagogical coach in the ECEC centre or school. In a third phase professionals from different settings visit one another and observe similar moments. These observations are discussed with all the professionals in the inter institutional learning network. When sufficient time and support is given to the professionals, they will come to a point in which they discuss the meaning of educating and caring for young children.

ANNEX

Observations in three steps

Step 1: observing by using external movie fragments and/or photos

Participants of the professional learning network learn to observe, give words to the observations and make different interpretations together. As this can be a vulnerable endeavour for professionals, it can be interesting to start with observing practices that are external to the practices of the professionals.

In this **scenario**, we advise the use some external film fragments. Because of privacy and copyright issues, we are not able to present movie material that we have used in the Start project. However, everybody can look for material in which children and families are in ECEC centres or primary school. Be aware that it is better not to use didactic movies with a normative voice-over but just use movie materials without any guidance.

Tip 1: in the **video databank** of the international Care project many movies can be found to use for this exercise: <http://ecec-care.org/resources/video/>

Tip 2: The documentary ‘**Pina schaukeld** Was kleine Kinder brauchen’ is a documentary that offers many possibilities to practice your observation skills. © ‘Pina schaukeld Was kleine Kinder brauchen | Ein Do-cumentarfilm von Heide Breitel | 2016

You can order this film: seminar@childcareinternational.nl

Tip 3: The documentary **Flammable**, © VBJK Boudry, C. & De Weerd, H.
<https://vimeo.com/vbjk/review/324949438/6dd0710703>

In this documentary, Alain Platel observes movements of babies and toddlers in childcare centre Patjoepelke (Lokeren, Belgium).

Tip 4: <https://vbjk.be/nl/publicaties/werken-met-het-memoq-zelfevalutie-instrument-dimensie-6-gezinnen-en-diversiteit>

These fragments shows us how one a childcare centre respect the families in their identity. As a childcare worker, you invest in a continuous dialogue with families. It is a Dutch spoken fragment, but you can observe interesting interactions.

Below you find an example of a training of step 1. The example concerns a one-day training in which ECEC and primary school staff collaborated to observe, understand, reflect, give and receive feedback from each other.

9.30 –10.00	<p>Warm-up 'Pick a photo'</p> <p>There are a number of photos of children & situations in the middle of the table. The photos relate to the working environment of the participants. Each person picks a photo that you are intrigued by.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why this picture? Why does it touch you? What do you see? Which associations do you make? What does it tell you about your job as a teacher/childcare worker /headmaster/director? - Zoom-session: discuss the photo with your neighbour who is not from your country - Lets' discuss 4 examples / Keywords will be written down on a board
10.00 – 10.15	<p>Introduction: Today's goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning to give words to observations - Making different interpretations of observations - Learning to give feedback to one another - Getting to know each other across countries
10.15 – 10.30	<p>Illustration 'Inflammable Fingers' movie https://vimeo.com/vbjk/review/324949438/6dd0710703</p> <p>Reflection: Zoom-session: Reflection in small groups What is remarkable? Where, in which fragment do you see the image of a rich child? Why this film: observe & understand children intensely to find keys for actions and interactions,</p> <p>Fascination,surprise, curiosity</p> <p>Points of attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each moment is an interesting moment - Every action is a story - Recognising children's agency and capabilities to explore the world
	<p>Excercises filmround 1-2-3</p> <p>Questions for each film clip There are some general questions but, depending on what is seen in the movie, you can ask extra questions to initiate more debate (see table below)</p>
10.30 – 11.10	<p>Film round 1 Goal: observing, giving words and making interpretations</p>

	<p>People are divided into groups of different settings (ECEC and schools) E.g. 6 tables with 6 laptops with 6 different movie fragments. Each table has a list with questions to discuss in a group</p> <p>In this timeslot, 2 movie fragments will be shown. 20 minutes per movie Each film fragment has its theme for observation Each table has a list with questions to discuss in his/her group. (see list below)</p>
10 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.30	<p>Film round 2 + exercise in giving feedback Goal: observing, giving words and making interpretations People are divided into mixed groups E.g. 6 tables with 6 laptops with 6 different movie fragments Each table has a list with questions to discuss in a group*** In this timeslot, 2 movie fragments will be shown. 30 minutes per movie.</p> <p>Constructive feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect the opinion and experience of the other - Focus on the situation, not the person - Describe your observations (“I saw this...”.) - Share how it affects you and how you interpret it from your perspective - Be specific with your feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Break your feedback down into key points Give specific examples of each point - Give words to strengths and opportunities <p>Extra instruction: imagine the educator of the movie was present in your discussion.</p>
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break
13.30 – 14.15	<p>Film round 3 + connection with observation tool Goal: observing, giving words and making interpretations People are divided into mixed groups 6 tables with 6 laptops with 6 different movie fragments Each table has a list with questions to discuss in a group In this timeslot, 2 movie fragments will be shown. 20 minutes per movie. Link it with the principle 6.2 of the observation tool day 1 (“The educator provides an inviting, safe, healthy, stimulating, and inclusive physical environment that promotes children’s exploration, learning, and independence.”)</p>
14.15 – 15.00	<p>Plenary discussion part 1 Group discussion and exchange Each group presents their discussion For three movie fragments we present one provoking statement (prepared or based on the discussion – see below). People divide themselves in the room based on ‘I agree’, ‘I disagree’, ‘I partially (dis)agree’. We ask for their arguments.</p> <p>1. Collective interactions</p>

	<p>'Silent children are good listeners'?</p> <p>2. Individual interactions 'Recognising a baby's agency is more difficult'?</p> <p>3. Outdoor Activity 'Children do not need structure and defined time during the day'?</p>
15.00 – 15.20	Coffee break
15.20 – 16.15	<p>Plenary discussion part 2 Group discussion and exchange Each group presents their discussion For three movie fragments we present one provoking statement (prepared or based on the discussion – see below). People divide themselves in the room based on 'I agree', 'I disagree', 'I partially (dis)agree'. We ask for their arguments.</p>
16.15 – 17.00	<p>Evaluation How was this day? What did surprise you? What have you learned today for your action research in transitions? How can we utilise each other's different professional backgrounds more in observing and interpreting? Who else can help us in this exercise? (child, parent)</p>

e.g. Film clip : Collective interactions, e.g. Circle Time

Movie 1 Collective interactions		
e.g. Circle Time		
You observe a circle time. You write down some key words or tools for your narrative. Only after your entire observation time, you write out your text. Think about what you want to observe beforehand: e.g. verbal and non-verbal communication, who talks often, who doesn't talk, eye contact, who ...		
A) BROAD VISION	Observe without interpretation or judgement	
Circle time	<p>The perspective of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the child - the teacher or childcare worker 	+/- 30 minutes

	<p>General Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OBSERVE: Take notes on what you observe. What do you see without making interpretations? • GIVE WORDS: Discuss your observations with the others. • REFLECT TOGETHER: What do you think is happening to the child(ren) and the professional(s). Discuss multiple interpretations or perspectives. • Child(ren): How are the child(ren) doing in terms of 'wellbeing' and involvement? How do children learn from themselves and the others? 	
	<p>Professional(s): What is the role of the professional? How do professional(s) respond to children's actions and languages?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space and materials: What is the role of the space and materials? How do they facilitate these interactions? 	
	<p>Depending on what is seen in the movie, you can ask extra questions to initiate more debate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When doing circle time or other collective moments of verbal interaction, what are the points of attention? • How do you facilitate collective interactions in multilingual groups of children? How do you increase the wellbeing and involvement of all children? 	

Step 2: observing transitional practices in your own organisation

A colleague observes another colleague during a particular 'moment' of transition within his own organisation.

2.1 Observing in your own setting		
e.g. A welcoming moment with parents in the group/class in the ECEC centre or primary school		
You observe a welcoming moment. You have a notebook within reach, occasionally you write down some key words or tools for your narrative. Only after your entire observation time, you write out your text. Think about what you want to observe beforehand: e.g. verbal and non-verbal communication, eye contact...		
A) BROAD VISION Welcoming of parents and children	Observe without interpretation or judgement	
	The perspective of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the parent - the child - the teacher or childcare worker 	+/- 30 minutes
B) ZOOM IN ON 1 SITUATION Welcoming of 1 child & parent	Observe without interpretation or judgement	
	Here you zoom in on 1 welcoming situation with a parent/child	Max. 5 minutes
Process your notes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write out your notes / 2. Give meaning to your observation 	
A moment with children during the day (this can be connected/linked to the welcoming moment)		
A) BROAD VISION A moment during the day	Observe without interpretation or judgement	
	Describe the environment, the number of children and what is happening. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you choose this moment of the day? 	+/- 20 – 30 min
B) ZOOM IN ON 1 SITUATION	Observe without interpretation or judgement	
An interaction with 1 or more children during the day. You make a choice: *Interaction child/child	This action can be connected/linked to the previous observation and you zoom in	Max. 5 min.

<p>*Interaction child/children *Interaction child/childcare worker or teacher</p> <p>*Interaction between children *Interaction between children and teacher / childcare worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you make this choice? - Why do you zoom in on this child? - What is happening? - What do you see? 	
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2.2 Give words and reflect

The observations are discussed during a meeting. The educational coach guides the discussion and monitors the emotional safety in the group.

e.g. A welcoming moment with parents in the group/class

Give words to your observation from everyone's perspective. Discuss the actions from everyone's perspective. Think of

- Feeling welcome
- Wellbeing
- Involvement
- Dialogue

A) BROAD VISION

* Welcoming of children and parents
* What did you see?

- Child
- Parent
- Teacher/ childcare workers

B) ZOOM IN ON 1 SITUATION

Welcoming of 1 child & parent

- Child
- Parent
- Teacher/ c childcare workers

A moment with children during the day

A) BROAD VISION

A moment during the day

B) ZOOM IN ON 1 SITUATION

An interaction with 1 or more children during the day

How did you experience the task?

*How was it for you to be observed?

*How was it for you to observe your colleague?

- *How was it to share, discuss your observation with your colleague and coach?
- *How was it for you to hear and discuss the observations of 'your' action?

2.3 Follow-up

Step 3: Observing transitional practices in other organisation

We follow the schedule of step 2, but employees of one organisation visit another organisation as part of the inter institutional Learning Network. E.g. A teacher observes a childcare worker and a childcare worker observes a teacher.

Original Source: Režek, M., Mlinar, M., Van Laere, K., Boudry, C., Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A., Prodger, A., Geraghty, S., Welsh, C. (2019). Transitions in Early Years. A Training Kit for ECEC and Primary School Professionals. Ljubljana: ERI.