

Netherlands

Country Overview

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Country name

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, social and emotional learning (SEL) is organised as a part of healthy lifestyle promotion education and active citizenship education (Diekstra, 2008). Social and emotional learning programmes are mainly referred to as “social skills training” or “life skills training programmes” (Cefai et al, 2018). There is no national curriculum in the Netherlands for childcare and primary education. For children from 0 to 4 years of age, a national pedagogical framework has been defined, which serves as the base for childcare centres to develop their own curriculum. Following a holistic approach, childcare has the task to ensure the physical, social, emotional and personal well-being of the child. Education and care are considered to be inseparable elements of pedagogical practice (OECD, 2016). Central goals are defined for primary education, which means that the core curriculum tends to be uniform. However, schools have the autonomy to choose their own teaching methods and learning materials to attain these goals. The most recent version of the curricular recommendations entails different learning areas related to 21st century skills like social and cultural skills, cooperation, self-regulation and communication. (SLO, 2020)

Different SEL interventions have been developed and implemented in the Netherlands. PAD -Programma Alternatieve Denkstrategieën was one of the first SEL programmes to be implemented in the Netherlands in the 1980s, (Van Overveld, 2017). Another programme in the field of SEL is Toppertraining (Kanjertraining). The goal of the programme is to stimulate authentic and respectful social behaviour and well-being of children. The Peaceful School programme has been developed for primary schools to promote social competence and become democratic citizens. In 2014, an online SEL programme for schools Kwink (<https://www.kwinkopschool.nl/>) was launched. It is the first programme to integrate the five SEL competencies of CASEL (Van Overveld, 2017).

In order to improve the quality of education, the policy is stimulating evidence-based practice in schools (OECD, 2011). Schools can consult databases for the evaluation of the effectiveness of educational or youth intervention programmes, such as the Netherlands Youth Institute (NYI) and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment.

Development

Social and emotional learning programmes are mainly referred to as “social skills training” or “life skills training programmes” in the Netherlands (Cefai et al, 2018). Although there is no exact data available about the actual number of schools that have been implementing SEL programmes Diekstra (2008) concludes that a substantial percentage, or perhaps, even a majority of the schools have been working with SEL programmes in one way or another. From the late 1980's, there was a growing awareness in the Netherlands about the role the educational system had to fulfil with regard to the social and emotional development of children. The increasing attention for the mental well-being of children was a direct consequence of the World Health Organization's definition of health that states health is a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease (Diekstra, 2008). From 2000 onwards, there was a rise in the number of SEL programmes for primary and secondary education (Van Overveld, 2017). Social and emotional learning is organised as a part of healthy lifestyle promotion education and active citizenship education (Diekstra, 2008). For this country overview, the focus is the promotion of social and emotional skills development in early childhood education and care.

In the Netherlands, children under 4 years of age can attend full day private childcare centres, or home based care provided by childminders. For children between 2 and 4 years of age, publicly funded playgroups or early childhood education programmes intended for children at risk of educational disadvantages are provided. At 4 years of age, most children enter pre-primary education, which is located in a primary school setting. Compulsory education starts at 5 years of age, but nearly all children start school at 4 years of age, (Eurydice, s.d.).

There is no national curriculum in the Netherlands for childcare and primary education. For children from 0 to 4 years of age, a national pedagogical framework has been defined, which serves as the base for childcare centres to develop their own curriculum. This pedagogical framework defines four basic goals for childcare:

- 1) Provide a secure foundation;
- 2) Encouraging personal competence;
- 3) Promote social competence;
- 4) and Transferring norms and values.

(Slot, 2016).

Following a holistic approach, childcare has the task to ensure the physical, social, emotional and personal well-being of children. Education and care are considered to be inseparable elements of pedagogical practice (OECD, 2016). In 2018, a pedagogical curriculum for early childhood years was developed, which describes how childcare settings can work around the four basic goals for childcare. It is a research-based document that is a directive for childcare settings. The active role of educational professionals in the development of social and emotional skills ('soft skills') has been highlighted in the curriculum (Fukkink, 2017).

For primary education central goals are defined, which means that the core curriculum tends to be uniform. However, schools have the autonomy to choose their own teaching methods and learning materials to attain these goals. The National General Institute for Curriculum Development provides curricular suggestions in order to support school leaders. Since 2006, all primary and secondary schools are required to include education for active citizenship or civic engagement in their curriculum goals and activities. Civic education has three main goals: 1) fostering adjustment and the capacity for self-regulation; 2) Enhancing the ability to think independently and in a way that allows for constructive participation in democratic processes of discussion and decision-making; 3) Promoting social involvement and community orientation. As it became a formal requirement for schools to engage in civic education, schools (re)found their way to social and emotional learning programmes, (Diekstra, 2008). However, as a result of the freedom of education, no formal regulations regarding content and didactic forms have been formulated with regard to the development of social and emotional skills. Therefore, the differences between schools can vary tremendously. The national institute for curriculum development in the Netherlands (SLO) provides schools with information and tools to develop social and emotional learning. Looman and colleagues (2014), studied the importance of a whole

school approach of social and emotional learning programmes in primary education. The most recent version of the curricular recommendations entails different learning areas related to 21st century skills like social and cultural skills, cooperation, self-regulation and communication (SLO, 2020).

Assessment

In order to improve the quality of education, the policy is stimulating evidence-based practice in schools (OECD, 2011). Schools can consult databases for the evaluation of the effectiveness of educational or youth intervention programmes. The Netherlands Youth Institute (NYI) is an independent knowledge centre on growing up. They manage a database with youth interventions that provides school leaders and other professionals with accessible information on which youth interventions have been shown to be effective. Intervention programmes are described in a detailed manner and the descriptions include whether interventions are evidence-based with further information about the research. Another database conducted by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment includes interventions that promote a healthy lifestyle. In this database, 79 interventions have the aim to promote the social and emotional development of children in primary education. However, a majority of the programmes are not clearly described, and therefore not replicable in another location. Ten out of seventy-nine interventions are assessed to be “theoretically well-grounded”, “probable effective” or “proven effective” (Looman et al, 2014).

Intervention

PAD - Programma Alternatieve Denkstrategieën was one of the first SEL programmes in the Netherlands. It was first introduced in 1987 (Van Overveld, 2017), and is the Dutch version of the PATHS programme from the USA. PAD is a universal programme for children from 4 to 12 years of age. The aim of PAD is to increase the social-emotional competences of children in order to prevent behavioural problems. There are 4 central themes: 1) self-awareness; 2) self-regulation; 3) emotions; and 4) problem solving. PAD consists of 161 classroom lessons that are offered from grade 1 to grade 8. On average, a lesson of 30 to 45 minutes is given once or twice a week. In addition, there is daily time for processing what has been learned. The lessons consist of varied teaching methods. PAD is based on the ABCD Model of Development. According to this model, people develop optimally when feelings, behaviour and cognition are integrated (Affective-Behaviour-Cognitive). This integration is a lifelong and dynamic process (Dynamic). PAD has been certified as an effective intervention by The Netherlands Youth Institute. Another programme in the field of social and emotional learning is Toppertraining (Kanjertaining). In the training, a 'Topper' is defined as someone who is authentic, trustworthy, socially competent and respectful to others and him/herself, (Vliek, 2015). It is a preventive intervention programme for children between 4 and 16 years of age. The goal of the programme is to stimulate authentic and respectful social behaviour and well-being of children. In schools, the programme has the aim to improve the classroom climate by stimulating positive relationships between the pupils and between the teacher and the pupils, (Vliek, 20210). For each age group, there are 10 lessons of one and a half hours that are given every other week. The methods include exercising social skills like dealing with bullying, role-plays (supported by wearing four caps), giving feedback to each other, and exercises in building confidence in oneself and in others. The lessons are given by the classroom teacher, after having received training from Toppertraining trainers. Teachers are motivated to use "topper language", and to fulfil a role model-like function. Four research studies have been conducted, three had a quasi-experimental design and one study followed a randomised control trial with a half-year follow-up. Following these studies, the NYI gives the Toppertraining programme the label "probable effective". The Peaceful School is a programme for primary schools to promote social competence and become democratic citizens. The programme targets five domains of social emotional development: self-awareness, social awareness, decision-making, self-management, and relationships. It includes social and emotional skills development in the context of civic education. In 2014, an online SEL programme for schools Kwink (<https://www.kwinkopschool.nl/>) was launched. It is the first programme to integrate the five SEL competencies of CASEL, (Van Overveld, 2017). The NYI gives the programme the label "theoretically well-grounded".

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