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Caring and Learning Together: A Case Study of Ghent The Flemish Community of Belgium

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UNESCO Education Sector

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About the Report

The present report was commissioned by UNESCO within the framework of the Caring and Learning Together: a Cross-National Study on the Integration of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) within Education, implemented as part of its 2008-2009 biennial programme. The study examines the policy of integrating ECCE within the education system, which is being adopted in a growing number of countries. It aims to generate a better understanding of the policy by looking at the experiences of five countries – Brazil, Jamaica, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden – and one municipality – Ghent in Belgium Flanders – which have chosen this option. The study also looks at why other countries have not followed this course of action. It offers an assessment of integration-within-education, and provides key policy insights and recommendations on the subject.

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1. Introduction

General features

The three Communities of Belgium (French, Flemish and German) traditionally have a split system, with early childhood education for children from 2.5 to 6 years of age and child care for children from 0 to 3 years. Early childhood education (*kleuterschool*) is the competence of the Ministry of Education, while child care (*kinderopvang*) is the competence of the Ministry of Family and Welfare.

There were approx 195,000 children below 3 years of age living in the Flemish Community in 2007 (Kind & Gezin, 2008) and another 187,000 from 3 to 6 years of age.¹ Birth rates in Flanders are slowly increasing since 2003 and the fertility rate is at present 1.76. 20% of newborn children have a mother with non-Belgian nationality.

7.6% of children under 3 years old and 10.8% of children between 3 and 6 live in a single-parent family. 60% of children (from 0 to 6) live in a family with two parents at work. 10% of them live in a family with no parents at work. 70% of mothers with children below age 3 are at work. 74% of mothers with children from 3-6 years are at work. 11.5% of children below 12 years of age is at risk of poverty (i.e. living in a family earning less than 60% of the Median). This is the case for 29% of children living in single-parent families. When six criteria of marginalization (low income, low education, housing, health and development) are combined, 7.3% of children are born in a marginalized family. 60% of them are from ethnic minorities.

Kleuterschool

Almost 100% of children from the age of 2.5 or 3 to 6 years are enrolled in *kleuterschool*. This does not mean, however, that all children attend school daily. Figures on attendance are scarce, with the exception of the municipal schools in Ghent. Figures show that in these schools, child absence varies highly from 0 to 33%, with children of ethnic minorities and children at risk of poverty being significantly more frequently absent.²

However, the full enrolment does mean that there are sufficient provisions in early childhood education from 3 years on to provide a place for each child. All *kleuterscholen* are fully subsidized and no parental fees are due, whether the schools are private (mainly organized by Catholic organizations) or public (either municipal or State schools). State and private (both funded) schools have consistently been in competition with each other and fierce debates between the ideologies of confessional (denominational) versus lay or neutral education have marked the history of Belgian education. During the last century

¹ All figures in this report, unless stated otherwise, are from 2007 and based on the yearly reports of Kind & Gezin.

² Coenen, R. (2008) *Kleuterparticipatie Stedelijk Onderwijs*. Gent: Stad Gent.

this competition was also the subject of heated political debates, resulting in two “school wars” and eventually ended with a “school peace pact”, ensuring the “liberty of the parent” to enroll “his” or “her” child in the school of “his” or “her” choice.

Child care

This is not the case for child care (for children from 0 to 3 years). There are child care places available in the Flemish community for 34.5% of the children. But, since one place may be occupied by more than one child (e.g. part-time attendance) the number of children who regularly attend child care is much higher: 52.2% of children in Flanders regularly use child care. Since children can go to *kleuterschool* from 2.5 years on, the number of children attending ECEC from 0-6 years is still slightly higher, namely 61%. There is a dramatic shortage of places. Recent studies showed that at least 10% of parents looking for child care do not find a place. Another 10% of parents that do find a place do not succeed in finding one that meets their demands (e.g. half days instead of full-time or too far away from their home). Single parent families, families on the poverty line and ethnic minority families have significantly more difficulties in finding a place than the average families.³ Recent new legislation compels funded centres to provide for these families to at least 20% of their capacity.

Not all child care provisions are publicly funded. Funded services may be either public (municipal) or private (run by NGOs, often organizations with a Catholic inspiration). The Flemish child care sector consists of a variety of services:

a) Funded services

These provisions are fully funded (salaries and working costs) through the governmental agency Kind & Gezin. In return structural quality criteria are fixed (i.e. adult/child ratio, space, self-monitoring through rating scales, quality instruments, staff qualifications, etc.). Parents pay a fee according to their income. There are two types of funded services for the under three's:

- Child care centres, (in total: 15,438 places) with a minimum of 23 places, staffed by childcare workers with a vocational training of one year after secondary vocational school. The management consists of an educator, hospital nurse, social worker or social nurse (bachelor level), in some (few) larger provisions there may be pedagogues or psychologists at master level.
- Family day care schemes, (in total: 30,713 places) staffed by social workers or other social pedagogic professions at bachelor level, responsible for the administration and for the selection and in-service training of the family day care providers they have registered.

³ MAS (2007). Analyse van het zoekproces van ouders naar een voorschoolse kinderopvangplaats. Leuven: MAS. See also Vandenbroeck, M.; De Visscher, S.; Van Nuffel, K. & Ferla, J. (2008). Mothers' Search for Infant Child Care: The Dynamic Relation between Availability and Desirability in a Continental European Welfare State. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(2) pp 245-258.

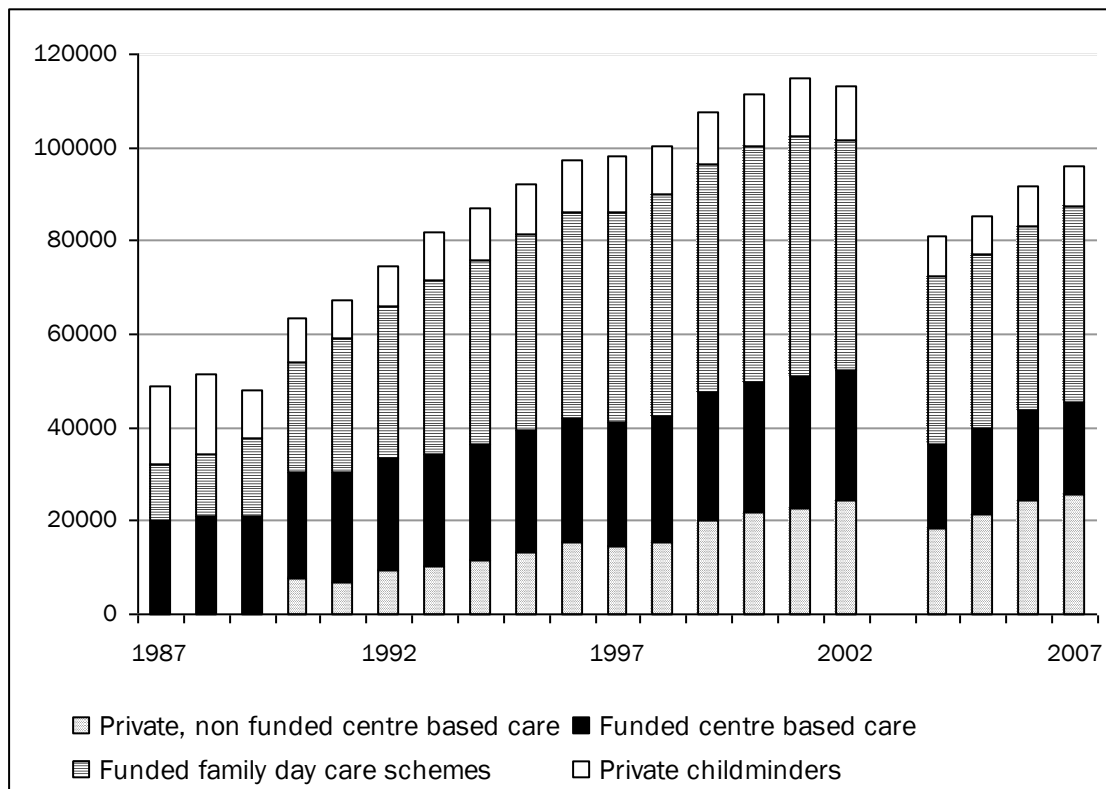
b) Non-funded services

These provisions are private, market-oriented. In contrast to many other countries (e.g. The Netherlands, Australia, UK), they are not run by larger for-profit organisations, but the sector consists of many individual small enterprises, often catering for a very small number of children. There are no qualification requirements in these centres, but some receive a contribution of 550 euro per child per year and in these cases at least one childcare worker has to be qualified at secondary level. Parental fees are not fixed and so are up to private negotiation. Traditionally, parental fees do not vary according to income. New legislation will gradually introduce income-based fees in this sector from 2009 onwards.

The same two types of services exist in this market oriented sector:

- Independent Child care centres (many have less than 23 children): 24,137 places
- Private (independent) childminders: 7068 places.

The following chart gives an overview of the number of children in each type of provision, as well as of the evolution of the last decade. It shows that the extension of child care has predominantly been in non-funded places and in family day care, rather than in funded, centre-based care.⁴



⁴ The apparent downturn of children in 2004 is due to a change in the registration system. Up to 2003 all children that attended child care at least once during that year were counted. After 2004 all children that attended child care during one week in February were counted.

School-age childcare

In addition the Flemish Community also provides for school-age childcare for children from 2.5 to 12 years of age. Just as the child care for children from 0 to 3 years, school-age child care is under the competence of the Ministry of Family and Welfare and of Kind & Gezin. The previous 4 types of provision (funded and non funded, family based and centre based care) may take up this function, since they may enroll children up to 12 years of age.

Additionally, *Initiatieven voor Buitenschoolse Opvang (IBO)*, or school-age child care centres provide for approx 55,500 children. The largest population of children from 2.5-12, however, is still taken care of by the *kleuterschool* and the primary schools after and before opening hours, as well as during the lunch breaks and on Wednesday afternoons.

The two major cities (Antwerp and Ghent) also have school-age child care centres inside the schools for the children attending “*kleuterschool*”. This will be explained further.

2. Historical context of integration

Early childhood care and education in Belgium (and consequently in the Flemish community) has been marked by a split system since its very origins in late 19th century. In the years before the First World War, when the organization of care was discussed, the role of the State as well as the relationship between education and care was debated. With the first formal legislation of child care, in September 1919, it was argued that child care needed to be separated from education: child care was formally constructed as a charity for mothers in need and as a medical service, just as for infant consultations, and could by no means have anything to do with preschool education, according to the legislator.⁵ In contrast to preschool education, child care was considered a “necessary evil”: necessary to combat child mortality by substituting deficient mothers, but evil, since it may incite mothers to escape from their maternal duties.⁶ In this same legislation, that stayed unchanged until the mid 1970's, the legislator preferred private (although often funded) initiatives rather than State initiatives, the State being considered too bureaucratic, and the general public opinion being very much impressed by the vast activities of private charities, distributing food and taking care of children and families in need during the first World War (e.g. Relief for the Belgian Children). In short, the split between education and care and the role of private charities or (later) NGOs is deeply embedded in Belgian history.⁷

Notwithstanding this historical organization, exceptions have always existed. Since the late 19th century for instance, the city of Liège organized, funded and controlled child

⁵ Velghe, H. (1919) *La protection de l'enfance en Belgique. Son passé – son avenir*. Bruxelles : Goemaere.

⁶ Velghe, 1919, op. cit.

⁷ For a more extended analysis, see Vandenbroeck, M. (2006) The Persistent Gap between Education and Care. A History of the Present' Research on Belgian Child Care Provision and Policy. *Paedagogica Historica*, 42 (3) 363-383.

care centres.

After World War II, and especially from the 1960's onwards, the major cities of Flanders, Ghent and Antwerp invested in public provisions, including child care centres and *kleuterscholen*. Both Ghent and Antwerp are cities where the socialist political party has regularly been in power in a coalition with other parties and where the socialist labour unions have been quite influential since the Second World War. Especially in the city of Ghent, this has led to an integration of education and care on a municipal policy level, as well as on the level of in-service trainings and pilot projects, but not on a level of provisions or initial training. This shall be explained in more depth below.

3. Rationales for integration put forward at the time of integration

In this section we will explain an important shift in the long history of the split system (between education and care) as well as in the construction of child care as a 'necessary evil' that occurred in the 1960's and 1970's. In this period two new forms of child care emerged within the education system: after-school care for the *kleuters* (3-6 years) and pre-kindergarten classes for toddlers (18 months to 3 years) in the *kleuterschool*. The emergence of these types of childcare within the education system need to be considered in a context of growing female employment, especially of higher educated women in the rapidly growing tertiary sector, and in the context of a fierce competition between public and Catholic schools over "the soul of the child".

There are hardly any documents on the history of child care services for young children in Ghent before 1976. Our information for this period comes from interviews with key-persons that were active during this period.

The city council in the 1960's and 1970's was governed by the socialist and Catholic parties: two parties that had an opposite view of the role of public education. In this period Belgian society was strongly divided by the so-called "school war" that took place at the end of the 1950's. In this struggle for 'the soul of the child' the Catholics tried to expand their own clerical education with subsidies from the Belgian State, while liberals and socialists were in favour of the development of State or municipal education.

The city of Ghent had a long tradition of education for working class children in their municipal schools. Most of the municipal schools were situated in working class neighbourhoods. Only four municipal schools in city centres were populated by middle class children. From the early 1960's on, these so called *Hoofdscholen* (headschoools) already had special provisions for out of school care for the children of the '*kleuterschool*' (3-6 years). The schools in the working class neighbourhoods lacked such after school provision and in the 1960's they were confronted with a decline in the number of pupils enrolled in primary school.

At the end of the 1960's, the Socialist party decided to try and stop the decline of the public education system of the city. The example of the Hoofdscholen with their afterschool provision for young children was considered to be an appropriate answer to a new emergent need of parents (raise of female employment in the tertiary sector) as well as an effective way to attract pupils to city schools. The working class schools had so called '*schoolcomités*' (school committees). These committees consisted of socially engaged people mostly with links to the Liberal and the Socialist party that were defending the school. They asked the city counsellor for education to give the same opportunity to working class parents as middle class parents had for headschools. For this reason several measures to create out of school centres for the '*kleuterschool*' were taken. These measures were taken 'in silence' (meaning without any public debate, and often without the Catholic party being aware of them) to avoid the reaction of the Catholic coalition partner.

In the sixties during a short period the existing four day care centres were under the responsibility of the aldermen of welfare, but from the beginning of the 1970's onwards, childcare institutions were part of the direction of education, ruled by the Socialist party. It was under the education department that the child care sector exploded from 4 day care centres (*kinderdagverblijven*) and 4 *peutertuinen* (toddler centre for children age 1.5 to 3 years), to 25, in just one decade. In the early 1970's, the rationale for the creation of child care centres inside the education direction was very pragmatic. At that time, the number of working mothers was increasing and the city invested in crèches and in out of school facilities for the youngest children (3 to 6 years). The city schools "lost" many pupils during this period and the aldermen of education saw in the creation of services for young children (both crèches for children aged 0 to 3 years and pre-kindergarten classes for children from 18 months to 3 years) a way of attracting new children to schools. The children of the crèches were seen as potential pupils for the *kleuterschool* (kindergarten) and the aim of the development of out of school facilities for the 3 to 6 year olds was also to attract more children to the primary schools of the city, because the out of school centres were an extra service for working parents that the Catholic and State schools did not provide.

The *peutertuinen* (toddler centres) were highly successful in the city of Ghent as well as in Antwerp. One of the reasons was that traditional childcare centres were only funded for poor families. When the families' income rose above a certain threshold, they did not receive any funding for the child (childcare as necessary evil). Therefore, children of two-income families (especially when women worked in the tertiary sector) were often refused in child care centres. The following table shows the rapid expansion of these centres in Flanders after decades of stand-still.

Table: Expansion of child care centres and *peutertuinen*, 1947-1978

Year	Child care centres	Peutertuinen
1947	43	
1948	42	
1949	42	
1950	43	
1951	43	
1952	45	
1953	47	
1954	47	
1955	48	
1956	49	
1957	49	
1958	51	
1959	52	
1960	53	
1961	57	
1962	62	
1963	63	
1964	66	34
1965	67	86
1966	70	101
1967	73	
1968	72	155
1969	78	171
1970	83	181
1971	90	204
1972	119	230
1973	143	256
1974	156	255
1978	271	246

In the beginning, the Socialist alderman, Mr. Pante, and the Head of School Inspection, Mark David, took the initiative of starting a new pedagogical guidance centre for city schools. In an interview the former initiator and school inspector Mark David points out

that the pedagogical quality of the education system in the 1960's early 1970's was very poor and that they wanted to increase the school results of the children in those popular schools (attended by working class children). Pante and David were very ambitious for this 'Pedagogical Centre' and succeeded in attracting three scientific collaborators from the Ghent University with a PhD, a pedagogue and two developmental psychologists. Two of them had written their PhDs on the school deprivation of working class children in primary education. Because of the high number of working class children that were attending the city schools, this understanding of cultural deprivation was seen as very important for renewing the educational system of the city.

With the start of the Pedagogical Centre the rationale for the integration of child care and *kleuterschool* changed dramatically, from a pragmatic one to a pedagogical one in which the well-being of the child was central. The three staff members of the Pedagogical Centre had an impact on the discussions on integration which cannot be overestimated. They set up a research centre in 1979 with funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The results of the research showed an extreme emphasis on medical-hygienic aspects in childcare centres leading to the exclusion of parents and to a very child unfriendly approach. One of the leading members of the staff, Armand De Meyer, stated in an interview that the scientific background of the three staff members with a PhD, served as a leverage in the process of change that the Pedagogical Centre introduced. It gave them a legitimation to direct the child care sector that at the time was dominated by a hygiene-orientated approach, towards a more pedagogical approach. Additionally, their status helped them to argue with the general inspection of NWK (the predecessor of Kind & Gezin) that such a medical-orientated approach should gradually be discarded.

The action research project that was lead by Dr. Armand de Meyer aimed at introducing a pedagogical approach on two levels. First they tried with success to influence the policy of the city council and administration: the head of the child care sector, who had a medically-orientated vision, was replaced by the same inspector as the *kleuterschool*. Second, the pedagogical centre worked with the staff in the centres to create a more pedagogical practice.

For the out of school sector collaboration with the *kleuterschool* was from 1981 a main topic in the action research project. In the interview Dr. De Meyer emphasized that the Pedagogical Centre never imposed the integration of childcare and *kleuterschool*. De Meyer does not believe in the effectiveness of top down measures for integration. He feared that in the 1980's this would have resulted in a schoolification of the childcare sector. The *kleuterschool* in this period was still very adult centred. Today, this has changed into a more experiential approach, due to various influences (amongst others the work of Prof. Ferre Laevers from Leuven University). Instead, the Pedagogical Centre wished to introduce a more holistic, child-centred approach both in child care and in *kleuterschool*, rather than just integrate provisions.

The policy of the Pedagogical Centre to integrate the childcare centres into the education department had very positive results on the quality of the centres (Peeters, 1993), and also

gave opportunities for in-service training and better recruitment procedures (De Meyer, 2008).

4. Process and transition at ministerial level

This shift in the construction of child care (as an educational environment, rather than a necessary evil) was typical for Ghent, the situation in the rest of the country being quite different. Indeed, in 1973 fierce debates were held at ONE / NWK (the predecessor of Kind & Gezin and ONE) about the toddler centres in the education system. Until then the toddler centres were not financed through NWK /ONE and consequently they had no say in their expansion. However, the infant consultation schemes that were in these toddler centres were funded and therefore ONE /NWK had a view on what happened in these new emerging centres. The central government had decided to fund new child care centres and in that context a discussion was held about the toddler centres: should they be funded by NWK / ONE or not and under what conditions? While those at the educational department argued that the organization of pre-kindergarten belonged to the educational system and may give a head start to children from working class families, the pediatrics of NWK /ONE argued that care and education needed to be separated. The discussions were closed with the High Commission of the ONE / NWK deciding that they would fund the *peutertuinen* on the condition that they would be structurally separated from the school (meaning for instance that the *kleuterschool* teachers could not act in the *peutertuinen*), arguing that there cannot be any education in the “pre-pedagogical age”.⁸ The inspection was instructed to control that no educational activities took place in the funded *peutertuinen*.

5. Process and transition at local level

The local (municipal) government is an important provider of childcare and education. In the 1970's and the 1980's in Ghent, this municipal government had their own inspection of childcare and *kleuterschool*, notwithstanding the inspection of the childcare centres and schools by national Belgian and later (end of the 1980's) Flemish inspection bodies.

The administrative integration was already established by the beginning of the 1970's but the research based evaluation of 1979 (Peeters, 1993) was essential for the process that was set up by the Pedagogical Centre and that led to a more pedagogical approach in the childcare sector. The integration was carefully guided by the Pedagogical Centre and was based upon action research in the centres. In the centres the new approach was discussed with the practitioners and the parents. The Union of Childcare workers also played a role in giving more autonomy to the practitioners in the centres. Parents had no official representation on the city level, but they were very active in the centres. By the end of the

⁸ Nationaal Werk voor Kinderwelzijn (1973c) *Critische uiteenzetting over het verslag van de werkgroep kribben*. Internal document. Brussels: NWK.

Bernard van Leer project in 1984 new evaluation research showed that more links between childcare and *kleuterschool* (education) had been created.

From the start of the work by the Pedagogical Centre in the childcare sector (1979) the city of Ghent had a great autonomy and in the interview Dr. De Meyer said that the impact of the national body (Office National de l'Enfance and later Kind & Gezin) had little impact on policies towards childcare and integration in education in the city of Ghent.

The changes that were set up from 1979 onwards were based on giving more autonomy to the centres, the teams and especially the childcare workers that worked with the children. Since the integration the responsibility of the local government in Ghent has increased regarding the pedagogical policy. At the same time, the Pedagogical Centre has gained autonomy, not only in relation to the Flemish community, but also in relation to the local, municipal government, due to the fact that a relationship of trust has been established.

The influence of the Pedagogical Centre on innovations and local policy can hardly be overestimated. Very often, innovations were conducted in pilot centres by the staff of the Pedagogical Centre, in close collaboration with the staff of schools and child care centres. After an experimental phase, results were disseminated both on policy and on a practical level.

This was the case when the Pedagogical Centre introduced a child and family centre approach, based on the social pedagogy of Celestin Freinet in one *kleuterschool*, and later expanded to several schools, including a secondary school.

It was also the case when community-centred child care centres were introduced in the poorer areas of the city, and when a more diverse curriculum was introduced in child care centres, based on the insights of the DECET network. Eventually the diversity project evolved into a policy of the municipality that cherishes equality and accessibility in municipal child care. At the start of the new millennium the city council took the decision to integrate a centre for out of school care for primary schools in the Department of Education, within the Welfare Department of the city. With this decision the whole childcare sector of the city of Ghent was integrated into the Department of Education.

6. Consolidation and new reforms

In an interview the former director of the Pedagogical Centre warned that the administrative integration of childcare in education did not automatically lead to a better collaboration between the two types of professionals: childcare workers and kindergarten teachers. On the contrary Dr. De Meyer suggested that in the early 1980's, by working together, the prejudices between one group and another even increased. The working conditions and level of initial training requirements were very different for both groups: teachers having higher salaries, more holidays and less working hours per day. The

childcare workers were seen as carers but not as educators and therefore they felt inferior to the teachers. Consequently, the integration on the work floor needed to be carefully monitored by the Pedagogical Centre. The former Director of the Pedagogical Centre tried for instance in the beginning of the 1980's to set up common in-service training courses for teachers and childcare workers. But neither group was happy with this: the teachers complained that the in-service training was not meeting their expectations and the childcare workers felt insecure in the presence of the teachers. The Pedagogical Centre therefore decided to split the in-service training for both groups again.

With the support of the Bernard van Leer foundation the Pedagogical Centre was able to give a larger pedagogical support to the childcare centres so that they could then provide for the *kleuterschool* and the primary school. The staff of pedagogy in Ghent consisted of three pedagogues at master level, three at bachelor level plus an administrative collaborator. The large investment of educationalists or pedagogical counsellors in the sector of childcare helped to increase the status of the work done by the childcare centres inside the city of Ghent. The educationalists also invested in events and actions reaching beyond their own circles: events to which parents were invited, meetings with other welfare organizations and also the results of the work done by the centres was communicated via the local press. All this investment in childcare had a very positive effect on the childcare centres in Ghent. For Dr. De Meyer it was crucial that the childcare sector got the opportunity to create its own identity. He strongly believes that each part of the education system must have its own identity. From his long experience in the education field, he is convinced that in the first year of *kleuterschool* a lot can be learnt from the experiences and working methods of childcare centres, just as in the first year of primary school a lot can be learnt from the last year of *kleuterschool* and so on. This raises the point that without a strong identity of services for 0 to 3 year olds, an administrative integration can be dangerous: it can lead to a schoolification of services for the youngest children. As a member of an audit team for the teacher training of the 'kleuterklas', De Meyer raises the problem that the training of the teachers is not adapted to work with the youngest children. So, *kleuterschool* teachers can learn a lot from the day care centres.

The Belgian and later the Flemish Government was (and still is) responsible for training requirements and salaries, so the city of Ghent had no legal status with to harmonize the working conditions and diploma requirements for both professionals. Consequently, the city lacked the tools to dismantle the status differences between the two professions. Although today there is much more mutual respect between each profession, the status of the teacher is still much higher than that of the childcare worker. In the Dr. De Meyer's vision, the status of both professions can only be the same if training requirements and salaries are equal. He refers to the relation between *kleuterschool* teachers and primary teachers: both have been trained, since a long time, to a bachelor level, but it is only since *kleuterschool* teachers have received the same salary (late 1990's), that both professions are working together in equal ways.

The fact that childcare training is still on a secondary vocational level is jeopardizing *kleuterschool* integration. But on the other hand the pedagogical guidance that has been

set up in Ghent over the past 30 years has had a very positive effect upon the pedagogical identity of the services for the youngest children. In a few cases the strong links that were developed between childcare centres and local neighbourhoods were afterwards introduced in the *kleuterschool* that was located in same building as the daycare centre (we shall come back to this later).

In the new millennium integration was continued through the creation of a sub-department within the administration of Education (Dienst Kinderopvang- Service for Childcare). In 2002 the first director of the Service for Childcare within the education department was established. In 2006 the director of Childcare (master level) received the support of a middle management of 5 persons at bachelor level. The Service for Childcare has the same status as the Service for Kleuter and Primary school or the Service for Secondary school. Next to this new sub-department the Pedagogical Centre continued the pedagogical guidance work of the day care centres with 7 educationalists or pedagogical counsellors (6 at bachelor and one at master level). Ghent is the only city in Flanders where the child care sector is supported by both direction and middle management on an administrative level and with pedagogical counselling within a Pedagogical Centre on an educational system.

7. Consequences of integration

The integration of the services for the youngest children in the Educational Department has had an important effect on the policy of the city towards childcare services. Over the last 14 years the aldermen / alderwomen have created new centres with a focus on accessibility for vulnerable groups.

In the 1990's, the Pedagogical Centres started an experimental project in one child care centre, situated in an area with predominantly ethnic minority families (mostly with a Turkish background). The aim was to transform the traditional day care centre (operating rather isolated from its neighbourhood) into community based child care with a strong emphasis on accessibility and parent participation as well as on respect for diversity and social inclusion. In the follow year the pilot project expanded to four day care centres, all situated in the more deprived areas. The project was successful: multilingual and diverse staff were recruited, and enrolment of children from ethnic minority families increased. Also, in contrast to many other day care centres and *kleuterscholen*, these pilot projects succeeded in collaborating closely with parents, including parents from ethnic minorities who actively participated in the life of the centres.

The pilot project revealed at least three points:

- That local experimentation can bear fruit. The Pedagogical Centre, for instance, convinced the municipal authorities to refuse the funding of Kind & Gezin for one or two years, and rather fund the pilot centres themselves, in order to have the

- freedom of experimentation without having to take numerous administrative regulations into account which might jeopardize accessibility.
- That enrollment of children from ethnic minority families is possible and welcomed by these families (in contrast with the prevailing idea at the time that Turkish families do not want child care since the women do not work).
 - That parent participation (including parents from ethnic minority groups) is possible and welcomed by the parents (in contrast with the prevailing idea, also in *kleuterscholen*, that “those” parents do not participate).

In each of these three areas, the pilot projects succeeded to have some structural impact:

Impact on administrative procedures

Ongoing discussions between the Pedagogical Centre, VBJK and Kind & Gezin resulted in changes in the administrative procedures that were considered difficult thresholds for families living in poverty and or ethnic minority families (e.g. some of the paper work needed to determine parental fees). Moreover, they showed that equal access is possible and helped raise awareness of this issue.

Impact on accessibility in municipal child care centres

Ghent was the first city in Flanders to create special places for vulnerable groups in all day care centres by developing the Tinkelbel procedure. Every parent wishing to enroll his / her child in child care, should contact a central office and will have an equal opportunity in his / her attempt to find a childcare place according to the same set of social criteria. In so doing the Tinkelbel procedure brought the traditional concept of “first in, first served” that favoured higher educated, two income families (as it continues to favour these families in the rest of Flanders) to an end. Tinkelbel takes into account specific priority criteria that favour single mothers, parents that speak another language, parents with low incomes and parents in crisis situations. The latest figures show that the Tinkelbel system is succeeding in making the childcare facilities accessible for those target groups. The numbers of children in such target groups attending the centres is today equal to the percentage that these groups are living in the city of Ghent, which means that the population of the municipal child care centres is today a correct representation of the Ghent population regarding income, working situation, origins, family composition etc.

In contrast with general figures in Flanders, the latest internal report of Tinkelbel (2009) shows that of a total of 6,407 children:

- 20% of the parents are in training
- 16.6% of the children live in single-parent families
- 8.6% are enrolled due to crisis situations in the family
- 19% of the parents have a low-level education

- 19% are low-income families
- 32% of the families speak another language than the dominant language

The Service for Childcare of the city closely monitors this project and provides statistical evidence on access, but also on the (un)equal distribution of child care places within the city. These detailed figures are considered when planning new provisions.

The Pedagogical Centre has set up a policy for the integration of children with disabilities in day care centres.

Impact on the pedagogy of the kleuterschool

The project of the community based child care centres showed that far-reaching involvement by parents is possible. This has also inspired some of the kleuterscholen, especially when they are based in the same buildings as the pilot day care centres. In such cases, kindergarten teachers have come to study the day care centre practices and translated some of their approaches to their own needs. This may mean for instance that the multilingual communication sheets used in the day care centres have then been used by the kleuterschool. Another example is that most kleuterscholen start with a circle time which will to a large extent determine what happens the rest of the day (in the context of experiential learning). The collaboration with the daycare centres has made them aware that the children from ethnic minorities are less active in these circle times and therefore their experience is not taken into account as much in the curriculum. This has led to initiatives where mothers are invited to participate in the circle time. They also use more children's drawings, which are explained during circle time with the help of the mothers, as a support for children who are less fluent in the dominant language.

Impact on process of professionalization of the child care sector

In general, one can say that the guidance of the pedagogical centre and the management by the Childcare Service of the Department of Education has promoted an interpretation of professionalization that is based on an integrated concept of pedagogy which is widely disseminated in municipal day care.

The salaries of the childcare workers of the city of Ghent are higher than in most of the other centres.

The key-persons that were interviewed all agree that integration in the Education Department is the main reason for the exponential growth of day care centres. The *kleuterschool* has for a long time been seen as a right for children and parents, through the integration of childcare in the education system, while quality care by qualified persons is also seen as a right for children under three and after school.

For the moment there are 1,027 child places in the centres for 0 to three years, and 2,279 in the out of school centres for young children. Ghent is the only city in Flanders that invests as much money in child care. Of the total workforce of 478 full time workers, only 170 are subsidized by the Flemish government, while the salary of nearly 300 persons is paid by the city.

8. Lessons, implications and remaining challenges

Authors are asked to offer conclusions on the following topics (indicating when necessary if these conclusions are based on evidence from research evaluations).

In Ghent, integration of child care centres into the educational system is undoubtedly the work of the Socialist party. The rationale of the Socialist party's commitment must be seen in the 1960's and the 1970's from a very pragmatic point of view. The Socialists wanted a strong municipal educational system and the childcare centres were a successful instrument to support the educational system for the working class children based on the (French) values of 'laïcité'. This pragmatic standpoint was coupled with a sincere concern for high quality education for the working class.

From the 1980's until now the integration was based on themes of social inclusion and a holistic pedagogy that were introduced by the Pedagogical Centre. The Socialist and Liberal aldermen supported these 'left' points of view, but the link with the Socialist party became less obvious. These visions have become mainstream in Ghent and are supported by most of the democratic parties.

As said earlier, the integration of education and care in the city of Ghent is only partial, considering the split system that prevails in Flanders. Important differences in status and professionalization of the staff, linked to a split system on the Flemish level, would mean that further integration may result in the schoolification of child care.