

## On how to include special needs children – two cases from preschools in Amsterdam

*These cases takes place in Dutch preschools. In the Netherlands children from 2-4 years old can either attend a daycare institution or a preschool program focusing more on educational preparation. In addition, children in general only attend daycare/preschool 'part-time', meaning 2-4 half days a week. Most of the staff also only works half time, i.e. 2-4 days per week. This case takes place in a preschool. If a child is identified as someone who needs additional help, the preschool can apply for an extra daycare helper (unskilled) through the Okido program. <sup>i</sup>*

**A:** In a Dutch preschool, professionals have raised some concerns in relation to a three-year-old boy, as he seems to have a hard time understanding agreements and activities being initiated. He also responds strongly to incentives from the environment. The professionals have had conversations with the parents and they have decided that the boy needs more one on one attention. Therefore, they have applied for an extra daycare teacher through the Okido guidance program.

The Okido helper arrives and focuses on the boy, but after a while the conclusion is, that the boy does not seem to benefit enough from the involvement of Okido. The childcare professionals then agree that something has to change and they decide that the boy has to be part of a different group with less children, a more free play environment and more pedagogical assistance for 2 daily periods. During these periods of time the boy does not attend preschool activities. The parents in the beginning resist this idea as they would like the boy to just attend a regular preschool program. In the small children group, the boy seems more relaxed and there is room to participate or to pull back. He takes more initiative and explores more often. There are also more resources to aid him in his needs.

### Questions

- ❖ What are the differences in the two inclusion strategies that take place in this case?
- ❖ Please discuss differences between one on one inclusion strategies vs. group inclusion strategies
- ❖ Why do you think the parents at the beginning resist an alternative for their child?
- ❖ Please discuss pros and cons in relation to placing the child in a small children group outside the preschool context during the day.

**B:** In the preschool, there is also a 2-3 year old boy who stands out a little. He has a large head, looks cross-eyed and cannot control his saliva. He cannot talk yet and does not play with other children. He moves freely around and does his own thing. His level of playing, though, is more typical of a 1,5 year old, but he does not bother anyone. When the children gather in a circle to talk it is not clear whether he is

participating and it seems that he cannot follow the conversations and questions. His mother does not want him to attend a special needs group, and is convinced that he will come around with a bit of extra support.

The mother eventually changed her mind but at that time it was not possible to find a special needs program for the child, so he stayed in the preschool – and the placement actually in some ways went pretty well even though the boy couldn't fully follow the program. He was not a burden to anyone and the professionals invested in a relationship with the child and they worked with how to support the parents in an acceptance of their child's special needs. At some point another boy with special needs was placed in the preschool. This boy had primarily trouble to engage in a positive social relation with other children. He punched and pushed and the first boy adapted this behavior rather quickly and even bigger. Suddenly he was no longer quietly doing his own thing and the staff had to keep an even better eye on him. The situation got out of hand. Luckily, a special needs team got involved with this family. The parents were consulted about the situation and together they decided to end the placement, even though there wasn't an alternative for the boy.

### Questions

- ❖ Do you end a placement when a child is too far behind in his development to participate in the activities of the preschool? After all, if a child isn't able to participate in every part of the education, will the child enjoy going to the preschool? Is the child being challenged on his level?
- ❖ How long do you give the parents space to 'adjust' to the idea of a development challenged child? Is it in the child's best interest to pressure the parents into a transit for the child? How much space do you give to the acceptance process?
- ❖ How far can you go in the adjustment of the education for one child?
- ❖ For both cases, A & B, please discuss: Where are the possibilities, where are the restrictions when we talk about inclusion? What is the goal of the professionals and for whom?

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<sup>i</sup> (These cases are extracts. You can read more about the Dutch child care system (p. xx) and the Amsterdam cases (p. xx) here ([indsæt link](#)))