Pedagogical quality of after-school care: Relaxation and/or enrichment?

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ABSTRACT

After-school care has experienced explosive growth in several countries since this century. Our current knowledge of the pedagogical quality of this type of childcare is very limited. This study describes two inter-related Dutch studies: a survey related to the various criteria for the pedagogical quality of after-school care ($N = 501$) and the results of the first assessment of the pedagogical quality of after-school care in a nationally representative sample ($N = 110$ groups, 185 caregivers). The pedagogical quality was predominantly satisfactory to good for emotional support by staff, indoor and outdoor space, and organization, but there were also weaknesses with regard to explicit stimulation of children's development. We discuss the implications of these findings in the context of the goals of after-school care from the perspectives of children, parents and professionals.

1. Introduction

After-school care – also called 'out-of-school care' or 'school-aged childcare' – has become an important socialization environment for a rapidly growing number of children throughout Europe, Australia and the United States. According to American statistics, one in four American children of elementary school age who attended childcare went to after-school care (Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010), and an estimated eight million children took part in an after-school program in the beginning of this century (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010). Also Australia (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016), Japan (Kanefuji, 2015), Korea (Hoon Bae & Bin Jeon, 2013), and different European countries have recently experienced a sharp growth in after-school care (OECD, 2006; Plantenga & Remery, 2017), including the Netherlands. Although after-school care still played a fairly insignificant role at the end of the 20th century, in 2014 there were more than 6300 after-school care facilities in the Netherlands, attended by 16% of children aged 4 to 12 years. These developments in the Netherlands and other countries make after-school care, which has existed in its current scope and form for only a relatively short time, one of the biggest changes in the lives of elementary school children in the 21st century (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Smith & Barker, 2000).

The design of after-school care and its pedagogical quality for a broad range of children is a topical issue after the significant growth of after-school care in western countries. The history of origin of after-school care is relatively short and there are not yet crystallized goals

and methods for this type of childcare. Historically, after-school care has been regarded as a service for parents rather than an opportunity for children (Simoncini, Cartmel, & Young, 2015). Programs in the United States have evolved from safe havens for "latchkey kids" in the 20th century, into ambitious after-school programs designed to promote well-being and positive youth development. After-school care in the United States has thus expanded its mission beyond simply providing a safe place – especially in unsafe neighbourhoods – to promoting positive youth development, which may include a focus on citizenship, character development, social and intellectual development, cultural and artistic development, and health (Farrell, Collier-Meek, & Furman, 2019; Halpern, 2002).

At about the turn of the century, various authors have emphasized that after-school care requires its own approach within the childcare field and needs more clarity regarding the criteria for its pedagogical quality (e.g., Beckett, Hawken, & Jacknowitz, 2001; Halpern, 2000; Larner, Zippiroli, & Behrman, 1999; Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell, 1999; Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002; Smith & Barker, 2000; Vandell & Posner, 1999). Further, more research is needed to evaluate whether after-school care meets the standards of pedagogical quality. Currently, there is little research into the pedagogical quality of after-school care, certainly when compared with preschool childcare. This lack of information is remarkable when we take into the account the large number of children attending after-school care and the public funding involved (Plantenga & Remery, 2017; Schuepbach, von Allmen, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2017). Despite the turbulent growth and current social

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importance of after-school care, it is still seen as the Cinderella of child care services (see Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014).

1.1. Present study

We know relatively little about the different goals of afterschool care according to different stakeholders and its pedagogical process quality. We answer two research questions in this article:

Which goals and pedagogical aspects are regarded as important for afterschool care in the Netherlands?
What is the pedagogical quality of Dutch after-school care?

This study reports the results of two related Dutch studies into afterschool care. We conducted a broad consultation of stakeholders, including staff, experts, parents and children, to answer the first research question (Study 1). Subsequently, we evaluated the pedagogical quality of afterschool care in the Netherlands with a newly developed measure (Study 2), based on the findings from the consultation. Finally, we discuss our findings related to a variety of programs for youth, including after-school care, after-school programs, extended school services and out-of-school time programs.

2. Study 1: Consultation of Stakeholders: What is Important in After-school Care?

2.1. Introduction

Programs vary considerably in their goals and their activities and structure. After-school care should center on the care of children and on recreation, according to various authors (Halpern, 2000; Horgan, O'Riordan, Martin, & O'Sullivan, 2018; Øksnes, 2008; Sanderson & Richards, 2010; Vandell & Posner, 1999). Or as Larner et al. (1999: 8) have put it: a high-quality after-school care program is all about 'fun and friends, voice and choice'. After-school care should be more than just free play (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014) and the program should 'balance safety, a measure of guidance, enrichment, and spaces that children, especially those who are 8 or 9 and up, can feel they own', according to Halpern (2000: 203). A good program also offers a wealth of opportunities for positive interaction with friends (Pierce et al., 1999). There should be a stimulating environment that meets the need of children of elementary school age to learn new skills and to explore their potential (Collins, Madsen, & Susman-Stillman, 2002; Eccles, 1999). This goal relates to the range of games, materials and activities and the design of the indoor and outdoor space. Most programs offer several activities that may begin with some type of academic assistance (e.g., help with homework), coupled with various enrichment activities such as physical recreation, arts, music and opportunities to develop leadership and other types of personal and social skills (Durlak et al., 2010; Kuperminc et al., 2019). Children of elementary school age do not need just interesting materials and activities, but they also need emotional support and supervision. The interaction skills of staff are therefore an essential part of the process quality in after-school care (Eccles, 1999; Pierce et al., 1999, 2010).

Children in after-school care have a growing need for autonomy (Halpern, 2000; Pierce et al., 1999; Vandell & Posner, 1999). This means that high-quality after-school care should provide a flexible program with a range of activities from which children can make independent choices. Children should also have a voice in what they do in their leisure time (Horgan et al., 2018; Øksnes, 2008). The program should therefore invite children to take part in decisions related to the program and activities (Smith & Barker, 2000).

Recently, some authors have raised questions about the goals of after-school care programs. More specifically, some authors are concerned that the traditional emphasis upon leisure and recreation in these programs is being overshadowed by a focus on academic

achievement and accountability (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Horgan et al., 2018; Moloney & Pope, 2020). Further, children should be involved more often in discussions about the goals and design of after-school care (Kanefuji, 2015; Simoncini et al., 2015). This raises the question which goals different stakeholders, including adults and children, find important for after-school care and which dimensions of pedagogical quality are considered important to reach these goals. In this study, we consulted various Dutch stakeholders in order to discuss the goals of after-school care and to inventory quality criteria for after-school care in the Netherlands. Educational experts, pedagogical staff, parent and children were included in a broad consultation.

2.2. Method

Pedagogical experts ($N = 129$), after-school care staff ($N = 54$) and parents with one or more children attending after-school care ($N = 375$) completed a broad survey. We also conducted structured interviews with individual experts ($N = 10$) and organized a moderated panel of adults ($N = 14$), including parents and childcare experts (e.g., stakeholders from branch organizations, national centers of expertise, vocational training organizations and unions). We also organized four in-depth focus groups ($N = 12$) with younger (4–8 yrs.) and elder children (8–12 yrs.) to explore the views of children. The different themes from the survey, interviews and panels were derived from the literature and existing measures, such as the SACERS (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996) and the related HUGS (Tietze, Rossbach, Stendel & Wellner, 2007), Youth Program Quality Assessment (Adams, Brickman, & McMahon, 2005) and interaction scales for child daycare centers (e.g., NCKO, 2009). The topic list for the adult and child focus groups were similar, but the wording of questions was adapted for the different target groups.

2.3. Results of the consultation

The consultation of various stakeholders with a questionnaire yielded some commonly shared views on the goals and pedagogical quality of after-school care (see Table 1). The different respondents (experts, parents and staff) agreed that after-school care should mainly focus on relaxation and recreation, and should provide an important foundation for children's social, physical and creative development. There was also a broad consensus among all those interviewed that after-school care should promote the broad development of children in a holistic way. Each group of respondents felt that an emphasis on targeted stimulation of cognitive development and school learning was less appropriate for after-school care. After-school care programs should offer children a broad range of activities, including sport and creative activities, according to the respondents. Ideally, this means that an after-school care facility should have a wide range of materials and enough spaces for both quiet and active play for different age groups and also an outdoor play area was considered to be of paramount importance.

The respondents also stressed the role of pedagogical staff. Caregivers should respond to children's needs in a sensitive and responsive way. Caregivers should also respect and stimulate children's autonomy. Pedagogical staff must further be able to organize the program, which may be complicated because it should offer several parallel activities to choose from, for children of different ages. Caregivers should further be able to communicate effectively with youth and to stimulate the broad development of children with different interests, backgrounds and needs. Lastly, pedagogical staff should be competent in guiding children's interactions, both positive and negative, to support children's social development.

There were also some differences between the stakeholder groups, defined as a difference of 0.5 between the average scores for each group on the survey scores (see Table 1). Parents considered outings, a tracking system to monitor children's wellbeing, and attending

Table 1
Perceived importance of pedagogical criteria according to experts, parents and staff (min–max: 0–3).

	Experts	Parents	Staff
Goals of after-school care			
Stimulating children's general development	2.0	2.0	2.0
Stimulating cognitive development	1.4	1.5	1.6
Stimulating creative development	2.2	2.0	2.2
Stimulating social development	2.5	2.3	2.4
Stimulating physical development	2.4	2.2	2.3
Relaxation and recreation for children	2.7	2.7	2.7
Criteria pedagogical quality			
Competent staff (at intermediate training level)	2.8	2.7	2.7
Highest vocational training level for some staff	2.0	1.9	1.5
In-service training for staff	2.3	2.2	2.2
Intervision as part of professional development	2.3	2.2	2.4
Supervision and pedagogical support	2.4	2.2	2.3
Staff attendance at conferences, workshops	1.8	1.6	2.2
Consulting specialist magazines, childcare sites	2.0	1.8	2.0
Adequate staff-to-children ratio	2.6	2.6	2.7
Balance between male/female staff	2.1	1.6	2.0
Competent staff: problem behaviour of children	2.6	2.5	2.6
Assistants for staff	2.0	2.0	2.2
Continuity of staff	2.6	2.6	2.6
Emotionally supportive staff	2.7	2.6	2.7
Varied program with various activities	2.5	2.4	2.4
Children choose what they do and with whom	2.5	2.3	2.4
Participation of children	2.4	1.9	2.4
Privacy for child	2.4	2.3	2.5
Continuity of group	2.0	2.1	2.1
Matching peers for child to play with	2.4	2.4	2.3
Program balance between structure & flexibility	2.3	2.2	2.1
Clear rules for practical group matters	2.4	2.4	2.4
Private building for childcare (i.e., not school building)	2.6	2.5	2.7
Attractive outdoor facilities	2.7	2.7	2.8
Organizing outings	1.6	1.4	1.9
Exchange of information between staff and parent(s)	2.4	2.4	2.4
Written pedagogical policy	2.5	2.1	2.4
Inclusive policy related to diversity	2.0	1.6	2.0
Communication school – after-school care	2.3	2.2	2.3
Monitoring system with child-related information from school and after-school care	1.6	1.3	1.8
Adequate transport from school to after-school care	2.6	2.7	2.7

Note: Score 0 = very little importance, 1 = some importance, 2 = important, 3 = very important

conferences for pedagogical staff less important, compared to the opinions of pedagogical staff and experts. Parents and experts expressed that a mixture of staff at intermediate and higher vocational training levels with different professional backgrounds would contribute to the pedagogical quality of after-school care. The caregivers indicated that staff at high vocational training levels was not really important for after-school care.

Various themes were discussed in the interviews and focus groups. A recurring theme was 'balance'. Respondents emphasized the importance of a balance between the wishes of children and adults (see also Smith, Peck, Denault, Blazevski, & Akiva, 2010), between a structured and a flexible program, and between older and younger children. The respondents also emphasized the balance between relaxation and stimulation. For example, one of the parents stressed that 'after-school care should not only take care of children but also raise them'. Parents wanted that the staff provide warm support for their children (i.e., care) and also have an active, stimulating role (i.e., raising).

Adults in the focus groups also mentioned the possible risk of 'schoolification' (see also Moloney & Pope, 2020; Van Laere, Peeters, & Vandenbroeck, 2012). In an ideal program there should be opportunity for relaxation, rest and physical activity, and children should have the possibility to entertain themselves both indoors and outdoors, according to the interviewed parents. A program may include explicit stimulation of children's development, but a formal approach to learning with a strict focus on the regular school curriculum is not appropriate for after-school care, according to the parents.

The parents also highlighted that the different needs of the children (4–12 yrs.) are best served by a professional team with complementary competencies. Finally, the importance of coordination between elementary schools and after-school care and communication between childcare and school staff was stressed. In the words of one of the parents from the panel: 'When there are problems with one or more children, communication between the school and after-school care in an integrated approach is desirable. In this collaboration, after-school care should clearly profile itself as the domain of socialization. School and out-of-school care are close to each other, but they approach learning and upbringing from different angles.'

The children in the focus groups emphasized the importance of after school care for them. One of the children related after-school care to unsupervised care: 'Otherwise you would be sitting home alone when your parents are working'. The children named the activities they like best in after-school care. (e.g., 'You can do a lot of nice things you can't do at home: there is a soccer table, and lots of playmobil stuff, and beautiful craft materials'; 'There are lots of friends, including your own siblings'; 'You can choose what you want to do, like at home.'). Most children also considered it important to play outside a lot during out-of-school care; especially the children living in an urban environment like Amsterdam stressed this. Last but not least, they indicated that pedagogical staff teaches them how to live together and tot get along well. Relatedly, the presence of supportive caregivers (also in case of bullying) is important. Elder children also emphasized the importance of child participation and fair rules. Both girls and boys emphasized the value of male staff and they preferred a mixed-gender team.

2.4. Conclusion

The findings from our broad consultation make clear that different goals should be incorporated in a broad program that meets the different interests of children. The social development of children is considered the cornerstone of Dutch after-school care. Achieving academic developmental goals or other cognitive goals for children may also be relevant for after-school care, but instructional support from the staff should not be methodical. The stakeholders also emphasized the importance of various structural quality characteristics and indicators of process quality, including high-level interactions between staff and children. The outcomes from this consultation were subsequently incorporated in the evaluation of the pedagogical quality of Dutch after-school care with a newly developed measure (see Study 2).

3. Study 2: National Quality Assessment of After-school Care

3.1. Introduction

The process quality of after-school care is still relatively unexplored territory. A recent exploration of after-school care in EU member states showed large differences related to structural quality characteristics, including group size, child-to-staff ratio and qualification of staff (Plantenga & Remery, 2017). However, process quality was not included in this study. Other studies have relied on surveys to evaluate after-school care (e.g., Kanefuji, 2015). Observational studies in the US have revealed that many programs seem to struggle to meet the standards for high-level process quality (see Farrell et al., 2019; Palmer, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 2009; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Based on their observational study of US afterschool programs, Smith et al. (2010) concluded that 'many after-school settings have not advanced far beyond a "child care" model where safety and fun are part of the program model but where motivation and deeper cognitive engagement with content is lacking' (p. 366). This line of study shows the hybrid nature of after-school programs with a focus on "education" and "care" has revealed clearly different quality levels for these two different

components of the program.

Other authors have questioned whether the pedagogical quality of after-school programs is adequate, but from a different perspective. Some authors (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Moloney & Pope, 2020) have expressed deep concerns related to the changing focus from "care" to "education" in afterschool care. The emphasis on academic achievement of young children in after-school care may interfere with children's need for relaxation and their well-being (see Study 1).

In sum, some authors – from the perspective of after-school programs as care and leisure time – have expressed their concerns related to the increasing focus on academic achievement in highly structured programs, whereas other authors – from the perspective of after-school programs and positive youth development – have found significant variation and also low levels of process quality of the structured curricular part of after-school programs. This question is directly related to Dutch after-school care. As Study 1 showed, adults and children have emphasized the importance of relaxation, but also positive youth development is considered a corner stone of Dutch after-school care. This raises the question whether Dutch after-school care, which includes both relaxation and youth development as important goals, succeeds in striking a balance between "care" and "education".

This study reports the first assessment of the pedagogical quality of Dutch after-school care in a nationally representative sample. A validation study of the newly developed measure supported its reliability and validity (see Appendix A for details) and the new measure was subsequently used in a large-scale assessment.

3.2. Method

The after-school care facilities were randomly selected from a national register for childcare centers (in Dutch: 'Kinderopvangkaart'). We contacted 220 centers, which yielded a response rate of about 35%; this figure is consistent with findings from earlier assessment studies of Dutch daycare centers. In total, 78 after-school care facilities were visited and observations were carried out in 110 groups involving a total of videotaped 185 caregivers. The final sample contained after-school care centers in the four biggest cities of the Randstad (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, 12.8%), as well as in other major cities (23.1%) and small municipalities (64.1%). The final sample reflects the nationwide distribution of after-school care facilities of 12.7% in the four major cities ('G4'), 24.9% from other large cities ('G32'), and 62.4% in small municipalities, as registered in the Dutch *Kinderopvangkaart*. The centers were visited on different days of the week. More visits were made on relatively busy days for after-school care in the Netherlands (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday) than on relatively quiet days (Wednesday and Friday).

3.3. Measures

The broad definition of pedagogical quality for afterschool care (see Study 1) required a comprehensive measure to assess structural quality characteristics, global process quality (e.g., the program, availability of materials, indoor and outdoor space) and the quality of interactions between staff and children (see also Colpin, Laevers, Daems, Schippers, & Vandemeulebroecke, 2004; Huang, La Torre Matrundola, & Leon, 2014; Tavecchio, van IJzendoorn, Verhoeven, Reiling, & Stams, 1996). We developed an observation chart to assess global process quality, a scale to evaluate staff-child interaction from videotaped episodes, and questionnaires for children; also additional items were developed (see Measures below; see Appendix A for a brief summary of the validation study).

After-school Care Observation Chart. The aim of the Observation Chart is to identify the structural quality characteristics and the general process quality of after-school care centers. The measure comprises 37 items that cover five main themes: Indoor space (i.e., size, layout and atmosphere, activities and privacy); Outdoor space (i.e., size and accessibility, layout); Materials (including movement and motor skills, language and thinking skills, games, spatial awareness and techniques, attention to nature, game consoles/video/video games and television, creative and artistic development, music, dance, drama/theater); Organization (a regular group with regular staff, group composition and stability, group size and staff-to-child ratio, open door policy, range of activities, balanced program, pedagogical aims and staff coaching, team composition and development, physical safety, contact with parents, information exchange with elementary school, information exchange with other institutions, responding to children with special needs); and, finally, process quality criteria (e.g., greeting and leave-taking, attention and contact, respect for autonomy, stimulation and encouragement, structure of the program, group functioning: children's behavior; group functioning: role of staff). For each item, two external, trained observers assigned a score on a scale from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 2 (not fully adequate), 3 (adequate), 4 (good) and 5 (excellent). They did so by scoring the presence or absence of a number of objective sub-criteria. Brief supplementary interview guidelines were developed for aspects where direct observation yielded insufficient information or none at all. The scores were based on observations made over an entire afternoon (at least three hours) by two independent observers who were present at the same time. The final scores were then determined by calculating the mean score for both raters. In case of discrepancies (≥ 2 points), consensus was reached through discussion; in case of a difference of 1 point, the score was averaged.

Interaction Scales for Pedagogical Staff in After-school Care. The measure, which is based on the conceptual framework of *Authors-a*, distinguishes six main categories, which were individually scored for each pedagogical staff member: Emotional support (with an indicator for sensitivity and for responsiveness); Respect for autonomy (non-intrusive style and encouraging independence); Structuring and organization (structuring the program and non-permissive style); Talking and explaining; Stimulating children's development; and Supervising interactions (encouraging positive interactions and dealing with negative interactions). A score from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) was assigned on each scale. The scores were allocated on the basis of video recordings made during the observation afternoon. The pedagogical staff were filmed during their interactions with children in different situations, at different times of the afternoon. This involved three 10 min fragments for each member of staff. The video material was then scored by external observers who, after training, had demonstrated a satisfactory level of agreement with a jury score ($ICC > 0.70$). These observers had not visited the after-school care center and were blind to other quality scores.

3.4. Results

On average, the overall pedagogical quality of the visited after-school care centers was satisfactory, as measured with the Observation chart. Relatively strong aspects were *Interactions between staff and children* (mean score of 3.7) and *Indoor and outdoor space* (3.3 and 3.6, respectively) (see Table 2).

Closer analysis of the scores also highlighted some weaknesses. Although the score for the quality aspect of the scale *Material* (mean 3.1) is satisfactory, this did not apply to all development areas. A large percentage of after-school care centers scored unsatisfactorily for

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for global process quality (min–max: 1–5).

	Mean	*SD*
Indoor space	3.3	1.1
Outdoor space	3.6	1.1
Materials	3.1	0.6
Organization	3.2	0.6
Process quality	3.7	0.7

Language and thinking skills (59%) and for *Music, dance and drama/theater* (40%), because there were no, or only very few, materials available that were appropriate to the ages of the children present. There was a clear division for the development area of *Nature*. About 50% of the groups were rated as unsatisfactory on this component, while 39% were good or excellent. Further, a similar division can be seen in *Indoor and outdoor space,* where many facilities received a good or excellent score (60%), but where about 30% were unsatisfactory with regard to the size and layout of the available spaces. Also the item *Group composition and stability* within the *Organization* scale was often weak (62%). In half of cases, care occurred within mixed-age groups catering for children from the youngest to oldest age groups. In many cases, a different division was not practically feasible because these are small centers with only a single group of children. However, in 20% of these groups, one or more children did not have a single child in their own age group to play with. *Team composition* was scored as unsatisfactory for more than 80% of centers. This assessment takes into account characteristics for a mixed team composition in terms of gender and specific skills. The fact is that two-thirds of the selected after-school care centers employed only women or, in the case of one after-school sports club, only men. In half of teams respectively there was no variation in specific skills and in one third there were no opportunities for role differentiation. *Information exchange and coordination with elementary schools* were also clear areas for improvement for most centers (79%) as there was little to no mutual contact concerning pedagogical policy.

The pedagogical staff scored relatively high on emotional support, respect for autonomy, classroom organization, and talking and explaining. The average score for stimulating children's development corresponds to a rating of 'moderate' and supervision of social interactions was rated low (see Table 3).

3.5. Conclusion

The pedagogical quality of Dutch after-school care is, generally speaking, satisfactory. Emotional support given by staff, sufficient indoor and outdoor space and many organizational aspects were strong aspects. Weaknesses could also be identified, however, such as the often limited supply of materials for language and thinking, nature, and expression in the form of music, dance, drama and theater, and a lack of outdoor playing opportunities. Also the level of interaction skills related to developmentally stimulating conversations and facilitating peer interactions was low. In addition, there was a relatively large number of centers where children had little opportunity to play with children of their own age and gender. Lastly, Dutch after-school care appears to be a 'world apart', with few links with elementary schools and other institutions.

4. General discussion

Our line of research has provided new insights into the goals of after-school care from the perspectives of different stakeholders (Study 1) and its pedagogical quality (Study 2).

Our Study 1 shows that Dutch stakeholders formulated both care

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for the interaction skills of pedagogical staff (min–max: 1–5).

	Mean	SD
Emotional support	3.8	0.9
Respect for autonomy	3.6	0.8
Classroom organization	3.9	0.7
Talking and explaining	3.7	1.0
Stimulating development	3.2	1.3
Facilitating peer interactions	2.5	0.9

objectives and educational objectives, even though the latter were framed in a holistic developmental approach. The main outcome of our Study 2 is that Dutch afterschool care offers children from 4 to 12 years a safe and positive environment where they can relax and play after school. Materials and stimulating children's development were weaker aspects. The generally positive result is found for a relatively new type of childcare with a brief history of origin. The findings for Dutch afterschool care seem also slightly more positive than evaluations of Dutch daycare (*Authors-b*).

Whereas after-school programs are explicitly designed to stimulate children's development and are often characterized by a structured curriculum-based program (see Durlak et al., 2010; Halpern, 2000; Lauer et al., 2006; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Scott-Little et al., 2002), after-school care centers on the care of children and on recreation (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Colpin et al., 2004; Horgan et al., 2018; Moloney & Pope, 2020; Øksnes, 2008; Vandell & Posner, 1999). Dutch school-age childcare seems more related to after-school care than to after-school programs. However, our study shows that the distinction between after-school care and after-school programs from the literature may be extended. After-school care is an umbrella term for different programs with different goals and, relatedly, various labels are used in the literature (e.g., educare, extended school services, extended education care, leisure centers, recreational programs, remediation care, talent/enrichment "classes", whole-day school, youth development programs). Program providers may choose different goals within a broad spectrum for youth development in an after-school setting and the boundaries between after-school care and after-school programs may be fuzzy in practice. First, an after-school care center may decide to focus strictly on a basic program with relaxation after school and having fun with friends (type 1, which has an interface with after school care, leisure centers, recreational programs). A second option is offering a hybrid program with a combination of both relaxation and stimulation of non-academic competencies, fitting in with positive youth development programs that have existed for many years in the United States (see Durlak et al., 2010; Smith, Witherspoon, & Osgood, 2017; type 2, interface with educare, extended school services, extended education care, talent/enrichment "classes"). A third type involves a hybrid program with both relaxation and stimulation of academic competencies in a curriculum (see Lauer et al., 2006). Theoretically, it is also possible to offer an extended school day program with a strict focus on academic learning (e.g., a focus on basic skills like reading and math, homework class, remedial teaching) and without a distinct part of the program that is devoted to relaxation (type 4, interface with remediation care); this type of program does not seem to fit in with Dutch' after-school care, however (see Study 1). A center may even combine the formats of basic after-school care (i.e., type 1), a hybrid program with a focus on relaxation and talent development (type 2; for example, after-school care from type 1 may be combined with a focus in the program on nature, sport or a tech club), or a hybrid program with a focus on relaxation and academic learning (type 3), depending on the age group or the needs of the student (type 5). For example, after-school care from type 1 may meet the needs of the youngest children in after-school care (i.e., children from 4 years attend after-school care in the Netherlands), whereas type 2 and 3 may be more suited to elder children. This fifth type of program with a broad range of services requires extra coordination and presumably a broad, interdisciplinary team with complementary competencies.

As Study 2 showed, the broad concept of Dutch after-school care, which fits in with the hybrid type 2, is not without complications. The broad educare profile that Dutch stakeholders have in mind, implies a rather ambitious agenda in mind for the 'Cinderella of child care services' (see Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014), because it requires a variety of learning materials and high-level support from the staff for both the emotional and the instructional domain. Our evaluation revealed a split profile with relatively high levels of 'care' and relatively low levels for 'education', and this pattern was found both for global process quality

and caregivers' interaction skills. The observed weak relationship between after-school care and the primary school (see Study 2) reflects, at system level, the division between education and care in a split system (Palmer et al., 2009; Van Laere et al., 2012). This split profile, which is also found in other studies for after-school care (Schuepbach et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2010) and also early childhood education and care (*Authors-a*; Perlman et al., 2016), raises the question whether it is possible to achieve similar quality levels on care and educational criteria in hybrid types of after-school care (i.e., type 2, 3 and 4). The fact is that the lower results for educational quality cannot be easily explained by unfavorable conditions, as Dutch after-school care has favorable structural quality characteristics, compared to other European Union countries (Plantenga & Remery, 2017). A more likely explanation is that the hybrid educare format poses a double challenge for professionals and requires resources from both childcare and education. The findings from our study underline that after-school programs should strike a balance between the ideas of adult stakeholders and children and between relaxation and stimulation, which may require a variety of materials and activities in a flexible program and a broad team with multiple skills.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Background information related to the validation of the after-school care measure

A.1. Sample and procedure

The validation study involved 31 groups from 18 locations and 148 videotaped episodes from 43 caregivers. The centers, which existed on average five years (varying from 1 to 18 years), were located in different regions in the Netherlands, including the Randstad, which is a megalopolis in the central-western Netherlands consisting primarily of the four largest Dutch cities and their surrounding areas (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht), medium-to-large cities (e.g., Amstelveen, Leiden, Tilburg) and smaller cities, both inside and outside the agglomeration of cities in the Randstad. Two trained observers visited the groups from the beginning till the end of the program and independently scored the global process quality with a newly developed chart. At a random selection of the groups ($N = 14$), a different observer evaluated the pedagogical quality using the SACERS measure. At the end of the afternoon, child questionnaires (with a reply envelope) were handed out to the parents and/or the children; we received 126 child questionnaires from 21 groups. The test-retest reliability was assessed in a small, random sample of ($N = 10$ groups with 11 caregivers, 26 videotaped episodes), which were visited by a new observer.

A.2. Validation measures

School-Age Child Environment Rating Scale (SACERS, Harms et al., 1996). All 43 items of the SACERS were included with the exception of the optional 'Special needs supplementary items'. The SACERS was scored on the same day as the newly developed measure by a third, independent observer, who was blind to other quality scores. This measure (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$) was used to evaluate the concurrent validity of the Observation Chart.

Well-being of children in after-school care. We adapted a standardized

instrument for school well-being (from the Dutch COOL project) to use in the context of after-school care. The scale comprised 13 items, scored on a five-point scale, related to the children's feelings related to their teacher and peers ('We have a nice class', Sometimes I feel alone at school'). For this study, we adapted only the wording of the items to the after-school context ('We have a nice group in after-school care', 'Sometimes I feel alone in after-school care'). This scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$) was included to evaluate concurrent validity with the newly developed child questionnaire.

Child rating of their after-school care. With a single item from the child questionnaire children were asked to give a mark for their after-school care between 1 (very low) and 10 (very high). This item was included to explore the concurrent validity with the Child Questionnaire.

School Commitment questionnaire (Peetsma, Wagenaar, & de Kat, 2001). This scale measures self-perceptions of commitment to school ('I follow closely what happens during class', 'I am bored at school') with 7 five-point scale items. This scale, which had a relatively low internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.52$), was only included to evaluate discriminant validity with the Child Questionnaire.

A.3. Reliability findings

The inter-observer agreement for the observation chart was good at total score level with a mean intra-class correlation coefficient, *ICC* (two-way random, absolute agreement) of 0.86. The internal consistency was adequate to good for the subscales for the indoor space ($ICC = 0.63$), outdoor space (0.72), materials (0.62), organization (0.88) and a rest category of other process quality criteria (0.84). The internal consistency of the chart with all items from the subscales was also satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$). However, three smaller scales related to staffing, safety and interactions showed lower inter-observer agreement ($\alpha = 0.53$, 0.47 and 0.47, respectively); these were therefore not included in further analysis.

The Group Observation measure was not reliable. Inter-observer agreement was very low ($ICC = 0.37$ for total score, 2 observers), and, hence, this measure was not included in further analysis.

Inter-observer agreement was satisfactory for the interaction scales, $ICC = 0.82$. Also the internal consistency of the instrument was good ($\alpha = 0.82$). The test–retest reliability, which was determined in a small sample ($N = 11$ with 24 videotaped episodes in the first wave and 26 episodes at the retest), was good, $r_s = 0.81$, $ICC = 0.73$.

Finally, the internal consistency of the child questionnaire was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$).

A.4. Validity findings

The total scores for the Observation Chart were positively related with the ratings from the SACERS, $r = 0.51$, $p = .030$. The Interaction scores, after averaging individual caregivers' scores from the same group, were strongly related the interaction items from the SACERS (i.e., items 28–33, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$), $r = 0.77$, $p = .005$. The Child Questionnaire showed a strong correlation with the Well-being questionnaire, $r = 0.72$, $p < .001$, and with children's ratings of their after-school care, $r = 0.46$, $p < .001$. Overall, these findings support the concurrent validity of the newly developed Observation Chart, Interaction Scales and Child Questionnaire. As predicted, the Child Questionnaire was only moderately related to the School Commitment questionnaire, $r = 0.20$, $p = .03$, supporting discriminant validity for the Child Questionnaire. Finally, the total Observation Chart score and the Child Questionnaire scores, averaged over children from the same group, were positively related, $r = 0.44$, $p < .045$ ($N = 21$ groups).

A.5. Conclusion

The findings of our validation study showed adequate reliability of

the newly developed measures for after-school care, including inter-observer agreement (0.86 and 0.82 for Observation Chart and Interaction scale), consistency (ranging from 0.74 to 0.82) and test–retest stability (0.81 for the Interaction scales). The concurrent validity of the measures is supported with statistically significant validity coefficients (ranging between 0.51 and 0.72). A low correlation with the unrelated School Commitment questionnaire (0.20) supported the discriminant validity of the child questionnaire. The Group Climate measure proved unreliable, however, and was not included in the final measure.

Our validation study has a number of limitations. We did not determine test-retest stability for the Observation chart and we evaluated test-retest stability for the Interaction scales only in a small sample. It should also be noted that individual items of the newly developed measures were slightly modified after our first field test and we deleted psychometrically weak items from subscales.

Appendix B. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104903.

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