



## MANUAL for the facilitator



vbjk

Vernieuwing in de  
Basisvoorzieningen  
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in the Early Years  
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la Petite Enfance



INTERNATIONAL  
**STEP by STEP**  
ASSOCIATION





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# 1 INTRODUCTION

With this manual you can get started with Wanda. It helps you to introduce and facilitate appreciative analysis of practices. For more background, we refer you to additional information in this text or sometimes to the downloads on [www.projectwanda.be](http://www.projectwanda.be). Specific material (Step by Step cards for the facilitator, glasses, time cards...) can be found in the materials folder. You can record your own reflections in the workbook.

## Wanda-jargon

The acronym WANDA literally stands in Dutch for Appreciate [**W**aarderen], **AN**alyse and Deeds [**DA**den]. It is a method to examine your practice in a group setting. Through this reflection, practices can change. Further along in the text, we call the method appreciative analysis (of practices).

During a Wanda session, you sit around a table with a group of participants: that is the learning group. During each session, that group discusses a meaningful situation: this is the case. The person who brings the case is called the contributor.

The one who facilitates monitors and supports the process of appreciative analysis is the facilitator. In a Wanda session, you go through a number of phases.

## For whom?

Wanda can be used for teams, student groups, peer groups and other learning groups. When, in the text, we speak about participants or staff, we mean practitioners in the ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) sector and in out-of-school care and/or students in various training courses.

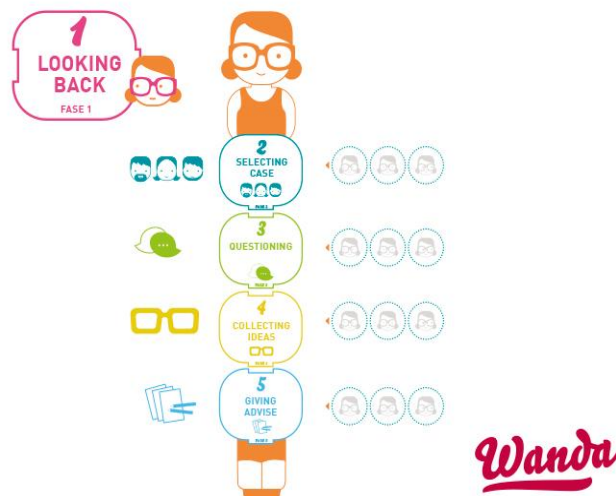
This bundle is intended for supervisors, team leaders, pedagogic practitioners, (internal or external) coaches, trainers and coordinators who offer educational support to practitioners/teachers and are able to take on the role of facilitator.

## What?

When unexpected situations occur, we often tend to come forward instantly with a solution or a conclusion. In this way, we develop all kinds of standard procedures: what do we do in this situation, how we react to this? With Wanda, you do not react immediately but first you take a step backwards. The key is 'understanding' the situation. Crucial is that this is done from different angles: by connecting various perspectives in a situation, you come up, as a group, with fascinating questions and possible interpretations. A new insight is created. By working this way in a process-based manner, you can bring about change in individuals and organisations. If, during appreciative analysis, you focus solely on process or solely on results, then it does not work as well. However, if you keep both in balance, then you can use appreciative analysis to work structurally on quality.

A Wanda session lasts one and a half to two hours and works through 5 different phases:

- Looking back
- Choosing a case
- Asking questions
- Collecting ideas
- Giving various kinds of advice



These stages are handles in order to better understand why certain situations manifest themselves. Insights from case discussions can lead to actions – by the individual practitioner/teacher/student, by the team, the organisation, the local society ... – who enables the practice to grow and evolve.

### Why?

Working in ECEC or in other socio-educational sectors is not a technical job. You work with children, parents, colleagues and organisations in the neighborhood – in short, with people. The job is in the heart of society, which is becoming ever more diverse, in all areas: socio-economic, ethnic-cultural, family make-up, etc. That makes the job complex. A list of appropriate actions is not always applicable.

That is why the ECEC sector needs reflective practitioners: people who consciously and critically reflect on their own actions. These are practitioners/teachers who want to explore their own practice. By engaging together in critical and creative thinking, you can work on quality. Such a reflection process needs explicit attention and the group dynamic is very important: by placing the ideas, questions and insights of colleagues together, you help each other move forward. The ultimate goal is that participants further develop themselves and their practice. Appreciative analysis endeavors to support this group learning process.

The method is based on practical experiences: what can we learn from situations from our daily practice? That is why it also works well in teams with a mix of short-schooled and longer schooled employees.

### Sources of Inspiration

Wanda has its roots in two approaches:

*Analyse de pratiques* (analysis of practices) originated in the 1960's in France, on the incentive of Michael Balint. This English-Hungarian psychoanalyst analysed the way a group of doctors worked. This way of working later found its way into the broader social sector and came to be utilized in a more systemic manner. In France, many professionals – groups of colleagues, students groups, etc. – in childcare and other domains work with *analyse de pratiques*. For many, it turns out to be a tremendous asset in the workplace: the atmosphere on the work floor improves, people feel

supported and valued in their job. ESSSE – École de Service Social du Sud-Est, Lyon – introduced the Wanda team to the work methods and the educational effects of this French approach.

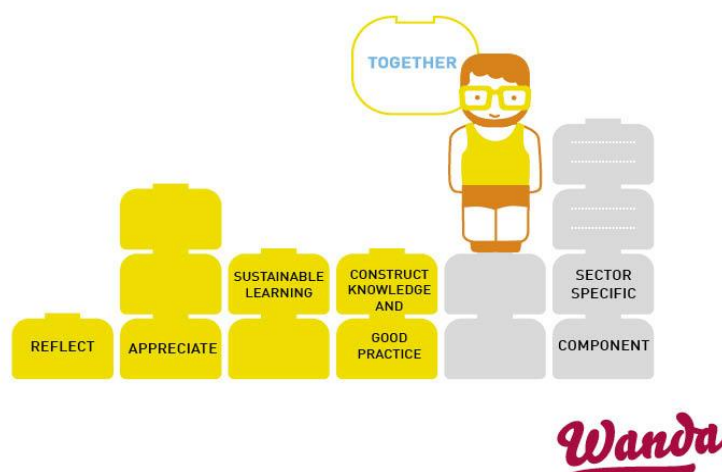
*Appreciative inquiry* was developed in the mid-80s in the US by David Cooperrider and Srivasva. They found that the focus on successful experiences yields more and leads more quickly to effective changes than problem-oriented strategies.

Literally, 'Appreciative Inquiry' means appreciative investigation.

The point of departure is the strength that is present in people and organisations. The exploratory path towards positive stories instigates change. More information on all literature consulted, working visits, exchanges and interviews can be downloaded at [www.projectwanda.be](http://www.projectwanda.be).

## 2 BUILDING BLOCKS

The underlying process of appreciative analysis is based on a number of building blocks. The figure below shows the four general building blocks. There is also one building block specific to your own sector.



### 2.1 Reflecting together

It used to be that jobs in the social sector were often interpreted in a more technical and distant manner. Too much emotional involvement can hinder the quality of service, so it was thought. The more distant professionals acted with a know-it-all attitude: as 'experts', they indicated 'the pathway' to the 'clients'. In this way, the job evolved into a set of skills and a number of professional standards that applied to everyone. How you had to act in certain situations was predetermined. But our thinking about work and quality in the social sector is changing. It is now evolving into a more 'normative-critical interpretation':

- The increasing diversity requires practitioners who do not view their actions and their vision as absolute. The professional tries to connect various perspectives in his/her work: the practice is a meeting and negotiation between people with different visions, norms and values.
- Acting professionally is value-laden. It is based on such concepts as personal commitment, appreciation, attention, integrity, sincere cooperation and a feeling of social responsibility.

- The professional can critically reflect on his/her actions. He/she is a 'researcher' who dares to question the assumptions and obviousness in which one operates.

Examining your own pedagogical practice and reflecting together. How do you actually do that in practice? You can reflect before the action, during the action or after/on the action. The latter is what happens in appreciative analysis: by discussing a situation that actually occurred, the participants together examine their own actions, the interactions with children, parents, co-workers, fellow students... within the organisation or training course, and also within society as a whole. This allows you to connect the short term (situations that are occurring now) to the long term (how we look at our work, what do we stand for, what drives us?). With appreciative analysis, you can also couple the individual interest to organisational interest and even to social significance.

## 2.2 Appreciating together

Appreciative analysis examines critically, but respectfully. Each participant, but also the characters in the cases (children, parents, practice staff, students ...), is approached from their own identity, with respect and appreciation.

Appreciative analysis is therefore a way in which to give someone a positive boost. At the same time, the participants grow in the empathic and appreciative way of viewing others. That competence helps the practitioners/teachers to interpret the job in a more normative-critical manner. A session must also provide sufficient time and space for this. In the analysis, you also gauge what provides strength and energy in difficult situations. It could be the motor for change. If you often focus on positive aspects, participants also focus in that direction. For that reason, you use appreciative analysis in 'problem' situations to look for elements that could possibly work. Together with the participants, you look at how you can strengthen them and transfer them to other situations.

## 2.3 In-depth learning together

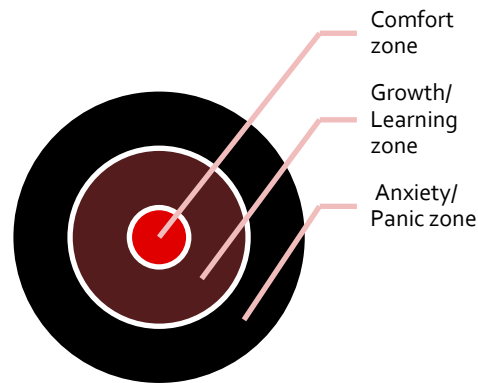
During the session, each participant can contribute a situation which touched him or her in one way or another. That may be an unexpected event, something that was surprising in a positive sense, or something that affected – or even shocked – you. In short, there is a kind of 'special feature' there that calls for further examination.

In each session, the group chooses one situation – from all these situations – that may be of interest to everyone: that is the case. Subsequently, the thoughts, emotions and impressions from that one case are explored. The group tries to transform the issue into possible actions that would be of value to the contributors, well as to the organisation.

### *In-depth learning in balance:*

In-depth learning takes place in a zone between comfort and fear of the uncertain (see image below): you try to challenge participants without making them anxious. Invite them to leave the familiar paths; go looking together for alternative meanings and possible actions. In the comfort zone, after all, little or no in-depth learning occurs. Appreciative analysis that only confirms how well participants are doing leaves few footprints.





On the other hand, appreciative analysis that seeks out too much uncertainty can paralyse participants. An overdose of uncertainty and anxiety then hinders learning. In appreciative analysis, we look for a balance between the two. As facilitator, you seriously think about a safe environment in which participants are free to speak and are allowed to show their vulnerability. How can you ensure such a climate and at the same time provide a good learning atmosphere? You do not, after all, want to turn these into therapeutic group sessions. Focusing on the case is a good strategy.

#### *In-depth learning for everyone:*

In-depth learning does not only occur for the contributor of the case. The others also learn from the case discussions: participants, the facilitator and the organisation in question (training courses, services, schools...). Find out how there can be a learning transfer at the team and organisational levels. Organisations that dare to adjust their way of working based on appreciative analysis, benefit from such a transfer.

## **2.4 Building knowledge and practice together**

In order to be able to come to new insights and actions, you use Wanda to observe and question situations from the practice. That happens in five stages and contains a number of important components:

#### *Observing:*

We cannot look at – or talk about – something objectively. Subjectivity always plays a part: we always color the reality from our own point of view, this is how we bestow it with meaning. All phenomena and events are, therefore, our own social constructions.

That is precisely why it is extremely important to share our observations with each other. How do we look at what has happened from various perspectives? Can we, with those various perspectives, come together into a sort of inter-subjective image of reality? Through this, fascinating questions come by which we can broaden our own outlook.

#### *Analysing and questioning assumptions:*

In the Wanda sessions, we discuss and analyse the subconscious glasses that each of us puts on. We dismantle our own viewpoint and, through discussions in the group, we bring in other perspectives, other ways of looking at things. This happens in phase 4: participants are encouraged to take on a

different point of view/another position. From this perspective (of the child, the parent, the neighborhood...) you can look at a specific situation from a different angle.

### *Building new insights and actions together:*

By working together to connect new perspectives, new insights arise. This creates openness to change in the professional setting; change in the team, the organisation and the local society. It is amazing what insights and knowledge can result from putting on different glasses.

## **2.5 Sector-specific building blocks**

The last building block is sector-specific: for appreciative analysis, you do know the practice of your participants. What is the purpose and social function of your specific sector? How is it positioned? Who is the target audience and what is the positioning between the practitioner and the target audience? What are the objectives in relation to your target audience and in relation to society? If you explore these questions and develop the building block for your sector, you can tackle your appreciative analysis more thoroughly.

*For example, in the Flemish community of Belgium, Wanda developed appreciative analysis in the womb of the childcare sector. The sector-specific building block deals with the social, educational and economic function of childcare services.*

*The economic function of childcare makes it possible to combine work with family. Fathers, mothers and other caregivers can work outside the home, apply for a job or take a training course. In addition, in childcare itself, of course, people also find work. Through social measures, people with a precarious status are also employed.*

*Childcare also assumes a pedagogical function. It offers a space for social experimentation and a powerful learning and living environment that ensures developmental opportunities for children. To be able to share in the child-rearing process, the childcare facility also makes sure that the parents are sufficiently involved in its functioning.*

*The social function of childcare means that it can contribute to creating a more just society. All children and parents should – with respect for their identity – be offered sufficient opportunities to participate in childcare and in society. Childcare services grapple – either unintentionally or subconsciously – with the exclusion mechanisms for certain groups of children and parents.*

*It is important to think about the rationales of your own sector in your own context.*

### 3 WHERE & HOW CAN IT WORK?

If you would like to implement appreciative analysis, it is a good idea to first think about it thoroughly. What place and space will it be given in your organisation? What would you like to achieve? The answers to these questions depend on the context in which you want to work. Below we describe a number of important considerations.



#### 3.1 Goal in mind

In a general sense, appreciative analysis contributes to quality improvement and professionalisation. If you want to introduce it into your organisation, try, in any case, to make your targets more concrete. Why would you like to deploy appreciative analysis and what do your colleagues think of it? Does appreciative analysis fit into a broader framework of objectives and methods?

##### *Example*

*In a family day care service, there is a professionalisation plan. Every practitioner follows his/her own qualification route: some attend the Family day care Academy, others participate in a digital learning platform or combine both and come together in Wanda sessions every six weeks. Through this blended learning and exchange of experiences, practitioners can grow in their job.*

##### *Example*

*Appreciative analysis fits within the quality plan of an ECEC centre. In addition to individual support, the follow-up of practitioners and in-depth team meetings, the director also decides to organise Wanda sessions.*

If you are starting a learning group, it is then important to discuss the objective you have in mind with the participants as well. It is possible that not everyone finds that objective equally important. If that is the case, go looking for common needs and desires to improve the work. What are the expectations of the participants? What could the expectations of your target audience (children, parents, neighborhood ...) be? In order to create more motivation and shared concern from the participants, link these wishes to the strengths of the organisation. Goals can evolve during the process. Perhaps appreciative analysis will set in motion an unexpected dynamic on which you would like to focus. Revisit and discuss possibly shifting objectives regularly.

##### *Example*

*In an ECEC centre, appreciative analysis is introduced by a reflective exercise on the changes in the job over the years in the childcare. The teachers found that the work is now much more pedagogical. But*

*often there is a lack of time to discuss their educational practice: meetings are often about practical-organisational aspects. After the exercise, the group decides to provide more time for appreciative analysis so that the teachers can evolve in the pedagogic aspects of the job.*

## 3.2 Free space

Appreciative analysis is an individual and collective growth process in which participants can learn only when they allow themselves to be vulnerable (see also 3.3). A climate of trust is crucial. It is all about having a space in which you can think and speak freely. Don't take it too literally: people can never be completely free to speak; there are always social codes to which you want to adhere.

Nonetheless, you can work on a climate in which participants are given the chance to express thoughts, questions and doubts freely. In order to do this, it is a good idea to set up a number of agreements together (see 4.4). Take plenty of time to get to know each other and to sound out boundaries. Respect the silent ones in the group dynamics as well: involve them sufficiently in the analysis but also allow them the space to think for themselves. Appreciative analysis takes place, after all, in a 'safe-tense' space. Working on safety is important and this is not contradictory to daring to challenge familiar pathways (see 2.3). Moreover, safety is never finished: it is always an area of concern.

Whether or not you can achieve a 'free space' largely depends on your organisational culture. Learning organisations, organisations with an open culture of communication and organisations with a more democratic personnel policy will have fewer problems with this.

## 3.3 In concrete

The objective you have in mind with appreciative analysis and the space in which participants can speak freely is ensured by attending to a number of aspects.

### *Privacy:*

Even within appreciative analysis, one must ensure that sufficient care is taken to safeguard personal data. Therefore, during the sessions, make sure that you adhere to the accepted privacy policy in the organisation. Be extremely careful with personal and medical information of parents, children, colleagues and other involved parties.

### *Example*

*In the initial parental meeting, the parents at the childcare centre are, as a general rule, told that there are occasional team meetings in which situations from the childcare centre are discussed. The parents are also told that such meetings are held in order to work on quality and to keep growing.*

### *Facilitator:*

Any internal or external person can take on the role of facilitator. Both choices have advantages and disadvantages. An internal facilitator knows the work context of the participants and can do a follow-up of the variety of advice at the organisational level very well. An external facilitator struggles less with the tension between hierarchy and 'speaking freely'. Weigh the choice of an internal or external facilitator, in particular, with regard to the objective you want to achieve with appreciative analysis within the organisation.

Just like the participants, the facilitators also grow during the process of appreciative analysis. What works well and what does not? What tensions do they experience? You can organise exchange and provide support for them. Internal facilitators will certainly want to discuss their conflicting roles.

#### *Participants:*

The group can range from a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 15 people. Less than 5 is possible, but then fairly few different perspectives will be presented. Ideally, a group has 8 to 12 people.

Appreciative analysis is difficult to make successful in an unstable group. Continually starting over is not conducive to the feeling of safety and the learning process. The advantage of a group of participants who do not know each other is that you can query, in an unbiased way, each other's practices. If the participants are well acquainted with each other's practice, then phase 3 (asking questions) remains at least as important. Even if they feel they know the situation or the context well, encourage them to examine the case, as it were, from a position of ignorance. It can also lead to surprising new insights for them.

If participants are not accustomed to discussing their practice in a group setting, it is better not to jump in immediately. Think about some warming-up exercises to bond the group together and to create a culture of talking. For example, first organise a group discussion: what is your driving force for this job? Why have you chosen this field of study? How you describe yourself on the work floor?

#### *Example*

*When a new employee or intern comes into the team, the facilitator leaves it to the participants to explain about the objectives and agreements of Wanda. That immediately binds the group together even more.*

#### *Example*

*Two out-of-school initiatives did not achieve a sufficiently large and stable group. They decided to organise appreciative analysis together: one supervisor is the facilitator, the other alternates with writing the report. A lot of care went to connecting the two teams; this was done using introductory exercises.*

#### *Time & space:*

For appreciative analysis, you need time and space. In some organisations, child-free hours are creatively organised. Some training courses search intensively for other ways to interpret the lessons.

#### *Example*

*In the training for future ECEC practitioners, a secondary school wants to invest more in reflection, in the connecting of theory and practice. Some teachers now supplement existing teaching hours in which internships are discussed with appreciative analysis. After a positive evaluation, the school wants to make this into a more structural part of the course.*

*In practice:* a session should be held at least once every 6 weeks. In this way, the group can bond sufficiently and get into – and stay in – the process. The internship is an intensive but instructive period for students: the sessions should therefore be included.

A typical session lasts one and a half to two hours and during this time one case is discussed. In addition to time, participants also need to have space their heads. Can they go with their practical and organisational needs to other platforms? If they don't know where to go with such questions,

then there is little learning space left. Appreciative analysis requires a quiet and comfortable space. The participants should have the chance to concentrate on the group-process.

*Example*

*In a family daycare centre, practitioners can go to an interactive digital learning platform with all kinds of questions as well as practical matters. In the Wanda sessions, there is space for practical analysis.*

*Example*

*An ECEC centre alternates with the organisation of a substantive team and a practical team. The practical team deals with organisational matters. In the substantive team, appreciative analysis continues: participants can then completely immerse themselves.*

*Example*

*The coordinator of an ECEC centre regularly goes to visit the classrooms and asks the teachers about their practical questions and concerns. In this way, at a team meeting, the teachers have more mental space for the content.*

*Example*

*In an ECEC centre, the facilitator left it up to the participants to furnish the space. They wanted to sit around a table: that was for them less threatening than sitting in a circle without a table.*

*Evaluating:*

Appreciative analysis is a collective learning process. Thus, it is occasionally necessary to reflect in the group on the learning effects. You should, therefore, document the content of the sessions (see also 6.1). Do this in a way that is comfortable for the group. Reports and other documentation material form the basis for evaluating. Is it meaningful for every participant? Are the sessions sufficiently inspiring? Are the objectives still the same? Were there unexpected dynamics that deserve extra attention and may be acknowledged in this group?

*Example*

*In a training course, students are not evaluated on the content of what they talk about during the appreciative analysis sessions. Students do receive credits for being present and for their portfolio in which they report on the insights they gained from the appreciative analysis (for example, during an internship).*

Talk to the participants about how you document and evaluate. A learning group that knows what is being done with the outcome of the learning process is a safe learning group. By discussing the evaluation approach, you also create a space for speaking freely. It is certainly not the intention to bring individual learning processes to evaluation moments with employees or students. That is, of course, unless the staff member or student introduces this him/herself and wants to talk about it here. This is no simple task, certainly not for internal facilitators. That is why it is good, as a facilitator, to reflect after each session on what you bring in and what you don't. You must certainly follow up on the various kinds of advice to the team and the organisation which have been formulated by the participants. What the contributor does with the advice given to him/her is up to the contributor him/herself.

Because of the culture of 'speaking freely', you, as facilitator, cannot require or force anything here. In any case, you start the next session with a retrospective (phase 1): what did the contributor do with the advice?

## 4 GETTING STARTED

### 4.1 Preparation is everything

Before you get started, it is best to first list the aspects from Chapter 3. After all, what you want is to take your team or group of students along in an intensive process of reflection and exchange of experiences. Here, we take another extended look at how you communicate all that with the participants. How do you explain appreciative analysis? How do you get clarity about everyone's expectations? How do you make clear agreements with the group?

### 4.2 Introduce Wanda (with a metaphor)

Unknown is unloved. When you want to get started, you need to make sure that the concept of appreciative analysis is crystal clear for the participants. You can use a power point with the building blocks to introduce appreciative analysis. Usually, however, words remain rather abstract. Images can help. You can use a metaphor for this. It is a form of imagery that allows you to compare abstract things with concrete objects. With a metaphor, you can make it clear what targets you put first, which processes you will go through and what building blocks are necessary for this. Compare, for example, appreciative analysis with the building of a tower: in a manner of speaking, each person is standing on his own tower. The building blocks here are our ideas and beliefs, our context, our background, and so on. From this position, we look at the people and the things around us. In appreciative analysis we want to shed ourselves of our own views, to come down from our tower. We deconstruct our view; we break down our own tower and place the various building blocks in front of us. We question our natural assumptions and certainties. Enriched by new insights, we then reconstruct our tower. For that, we use old and new insights; our own ideas and the perspectives of others. The more closely the participants feel connected to the metaphor, the better it works. Try, therefore, to connect with the world or work context of the participants. For each setting, you can think of a new metaphor. Develop them in detail and try to include them in the long-term process of appreciative analysis.

Thinking metaphorically is not self-evident. The metaphor you used to initially introduce appreciative analysis to the participants, you yourself conceived and worked out in advance. Once you have been working with the group for awhile, then you and the participants can also come up with your own metaphor together. Do the participants want to develop the metaphor creatively and provide it with a physical place in the group? By creating together, you will get to know each other in a different way and that is good for the atmosphere.

#### *Example*

*In a childcare centre where the garden is a substantial feature, the facilitator develops a metaphor using precisely that element. 'Compare our functioning to a garden'. In the beginning we look at the garden with binoculars, a microscope, a telescope.... We then dig in the garden through various layers of earth: what are the various perspectives (of the child, the parents, colleague...)? That digging will not always be easy. If a shovel hits the hard surface, we will need help from fellow students or colleagues. We will continue to dig deeper, until we find water that we can give to the plants and trees in our garden. The water is a symbol for new ways of dealing with a situation.*

#### *Example*

*Provide all kinds of random objects from everyday life. These could include, for example, a bicycle pump, a pie plate, a candle... Ask the participants to use this material to describe the core process of appreciative analysis.*

### 4.3 Explicating the aims

Try to make the objectives 'quality improvement and professionalisation' of appreciative analysis more concrete for your group (see also 3.1). However, keep them broad enough: do not fill in the learning opportunities of the participants too specifically; if you do, you put the brakes on them.

When you introduce appreciative analysis to the participants (see 4.2) you can also clarify the aims together.

Do you also have your own aims within your organisation? If so, mention them. Make sure there is no hidden agenda; transparency from the start about the aims is an added value. This is especially true when you are an internal facilitator, hierarchical coordinator or mentor of a learning process.

### 4.4 Shall we decide to do it like this?

Clarity is one thing; a safe and open atmosphere is at least as important (see 3.2). For the facilitator, this is one item to work on: security and trust do not come by themselves, you must continually create them. Only then can the participants express themselves freely and dare to question their own actions and those of the organisation. Clear group agreements are an important safety element here. What are the boundary conditions, how can everyone function at his/her best? Ask the participants what they need in order to feel sufficiently secure and have maximum benefit from their learning opportunities. Invite them to decide for themselves which agreements are worthwhile. Establish the agreements together, keep an eye on them and monitor them together. As facilitator, you don't have to do alone, make each participant co-owner of the group atmosphere:

- Write all the agreements on one sheet of paper. In the materials folder, you'll find a poster for this.
- Have the agreements signed by the participants: they declare their consent and promise that they will respect the agreements.
- Bundle the creative forces: let the participants develop the agreements figuratively, for example with icons, imagery, calligraphy, etc....
- Provide physical space for the agreements. Make them visible in each session.

#### *Example*

##### ***Agreements from the first Wanda-session:***

- *You may always question.*
- *You may always choose whether or not you answer.*
- *Everyone is equal, any input is ok.*
- *Everyone is always present, even if you are not on the schedule for that day.*
- *We start and end on time (5.00 – 7.00 pm).*

##### ***Added later:***

- *We allow everyone to finish what he/she is saying.*
- *Practical matters, schedules, etc. ... do not count here.*
- *Everyone who has a birthday that month brings a treat.*

It is a good tip to take ample time for this. In the beginning, you automatically pause at the agreements. You can do this with the poster from the materials folder. In later phases, it is important to occasionally go back.



## 4.5 Learning through visualisation

Chapter 5 addresses the various phases of a session. One of your tasks is to clearly demarcate those successive phases. In order to have a 'good' session, it is for example important that participants do not immediately give advice or prepare hypotheses: first comes the round of questions. As facilitator, you explain that again and you ask them to save their advice for later.

During the first sessions, in particular, the boundaries between the various phases are still vague. Going through all the phases once is not sufficient. It takes some practice, both for the facilitator and the participants. As long as it is needed, you can briefly repeat the sequence of the phases at the beginning of each session. For example, when going over the group agreements (4.4) you can brush up on the sequence of a session. It can help to make up a visual image of the phases. For this you can continue with the metaphor from 4.2: put the imagery of the phases on paper and reach for it when moving onto the next phase. If the participants enjoy working with maps, photos, logos, icons, etc., let them create a suitable image for each phase. You could use the schematic overview in the materials folder. You can also find the various phases in the Step-by-Step cards for the facilitator.

## 5 RECURRING PHASES IN A SESSION

A session consists of five phases. To go through all of the phases, you figure on one or two hours for each case. In the Step-by Step cards for the facilitator, some guiding questions and tips can be found for each phase.

### PHASE 1 – Looking back

*What happened with the case?*

After the introductory session and after the first real session, you can start the second session with a retrospective. The contributor from the previous session now has the opportunity to provide feedback to the others on how the follow-up went with respect to the previously discussed situation. The contributor is free to talk about it in any way he/she wishes. How did it proceed further? How did he/she then deal with it herself/himself? What were the consequences? etc. The contributor is never required to implement the advice formulated by the others. He/she may just as well indicate that nothing happened. The duration of this phase depends on what the contributor tells and how the other participants react. Of course, the contributor is not the only one who learned something in the previous session. Other participants may also talk about what they got from the previous analysis, how they applied it to new situations and how they dealt with it. Such dialogue again offers learning opportunities for the group. It is important that participants themselves indicate what is enriching for them; as facilitator, you cannot determine that. In the long-term, professional growth that is internally motivated is far more effective.

### PHASE 2 – Choosing a case

*Which situation are we going to discuss?*

One participant contributes a situation that touched him or her in some way: an event, an experience or an interaction that made an impression. That could be an experience that was surprising in a positive way or an experience that astonished or even shocked the contributor. If, for example, a participant feels stuck in an impasse in relation to a particular child, a specific parent,

etc.... then such a situation can also be contributed. What is important is that it really is about a specific situation, a concrete event. It is not then about the relationship with a particular child, parent, colleague or fellow student in general. Sometimes, participants want to discuss that, and then they describe multiple events with the same person. That is not the idea. As facilitator, you ask them to choose one meaningful moment of interaction. The more concrete the situation, the more the participants will get out of it. And the relationship that the contributor would like to present will also be discussed via a concrete case in the following phases.

*Example*

*In a childcare centre, the facilitator developed positive, stimulating questions to arrive at a positive case. 'With respect to your work, why do you get up in the morning? What are you passionate about in your job?'. It reminds participants to reflect on the drive that they feel; when positively motivated they come up with very interesting cases. Similar questions are: 'What did you tell about your work when you came home in the evening? What is, for you, the most important part of your job?'*

*How do you decide on a case?*

From the various situations which are presented, the group chooses a situation that may be interesting for everyone to discuss. That then becomes the case. It is also possible – especially during the first sessions, but also later – that the group does not spontaneously submit a case. There are existing techniques for this. But do not force it. As a safety function, this can never be mandatory for the participants. If no case is submitted repeatedly, you can query this. What makes it difficult to submit to a case to the group? What do you need for this?

*How do you choose a case?*

To choose a case, you should create a distinction between urgent and any prepared case. As a general rule: urgent matters are given priority. Some recent events have had such an impact on one or more participants that they demand priority. You can make an agreement with your learning group to ask for urgent issues at the beginning of each session and to give these priority.

If there are several urgent cases, you can let the participants themselves decide what is most urgent and therefore what must be given priority. After the urgent cases, you deal with the other cases. The contributor can know in advance that his/her case will be addressed; he/she can therefore be prepared. Sometimes, participants know several days or even weeks in advance that their case will be discussed. You can also ask several participants to prepare a case. At the beginning of the session, the learning group decides which case is to be discussed.

*How/what do you tell about a case?*

If you know which case is going to be discussed, it is during this phase that the contributor briefly describes what exactly happened. Here, variations are possible. The contributor can describe the situation. He/she can also make it visual: using all kinds of material, the contributor literally creates a picture of the situation with a particular child, parent, colleague or fellow student, in general.

*Example*

*One childcare centre always visualises the case. The contributor gets some dolls and houses and some extra time to portray the situation. Through the structuring, the contributor also obtains new insights.*

*Example*

*Habib has recently celebrated his first birthday. We asked the parents to switch from fruit porridge to sandwich bread. We notice that Habib wants to eat sandwiches just like the other kids; her parents want her to continue to eat fruit porridge. Even during parties, Habib is only allowed to eat fruit porridge while I, as practitioner, see that she also wants to eat other things. At a party the other children got pancakes, Habib got fruit porridge. The father came in and looked surprised. I did not know how to react.*

*Example*

*In an out-of-school care facility, there are 13 children. It is 10 o'clock and the children are playing. David (4 years old) and Luna (4 years old) are playing with the blocks together. At one point, David makes a gun with his fingers and aims it at Luna while he screams: 'You're dead!' I hear this and I am very shocked. I go to him and say, 'David, you know very well that we do not play with guns here because you hurt each other with them. You are naughty now'. David says nothing, he goes to sit on the mat, crying.*

As facilitator you pay attention to the focus that the contributor uses when he/she presents the case. If the contributor himself is an actor in the case, then he/she speaks from personal experience. Sometimes the case is about an event which was witnessed by the contributor. The contributor has no active role in the situation himself; he/she is mainly an observer. We recommend discussing previous situations that the contributor himself has experienced. If the contributor nonetheless chooses an observation, such as a shocking situation with a colleague, be alert to the sensitivities of other participants (including the colleague in question). Some cases can better be avoided; appreciative analysis is then not the right place for them.

In these examples, a negative experience or a difficult situation is the central focus. Often, participants choose a situation that has made an impression on them and in which they do not know how to respond. But the focus can also be on positive elements. Occasionally, you can, as facilitator, explicitly ask for this: choose an event that surprised you or impressed you in a positive sense, an event that you found amazing. Reflecting on a positive case together can be very useful.

Why did it go well? How can you use the positive elements of that situation in other situations? Even if it is a positive event, there are learning opportunities. Try to balance between the positive confirmation of the participants for each other, and the learning opportunities from the analysis.

Sometimes, other participants know the case that the contributor submits. They may already know the answer to certain questions (see phase 3) and can also add elements to the analysis (phase 4). Then you must make sure that these participants do not take over the role of the contributor. The contributor is the central figure: he/she wants to be inspired by the questions, hypotheses and opinions from the learning group in order to proceed. As facilitator, you make sure that the contributor retains ownership of his/her case.

*Example*

*One case in the out-of-school care is about Rosie. The contributor is new and has not known Rosie very long. Another practitioner has known this girl for years and does not agree with the way this child is depicted. She answers the questions that the contributor himself cannot answer. Soon, all further questions are being addressed to her. Because she has a different relationship with this child, the analysis takes a different direction. The original contributor cannot discuss her concerns and goes home feeling a bit resentful.*

*Example*

*A father suddenly voices his appreciation for a practitioner. In the beginning things were not going so well, communication was not as clear. However, something happened so that the father is now feeling good. Initially, the participants wondered whether this was a meaningful case: there was not so much*

*to say about it, was there? Together, they then look at what it was that enabled the trust between the father and the practitioner to grow. What were the strengths? How can you follow through on them? For many practitioners, this was ultimately a very enriching case.*

## PHASE 3 – Asking questions

*What do we see?*

The situation has been introduced and it is now time to explore it in greater depth. What exactly happened? What is the context of the various involved parties? What other factors might play a role? With exploratory questions, the other participants come to know as much as possible. They will look at all aspects that may be significant, without interpretation or judgment. Thus, you invite participants to ask questions and, whenever possible, you have the contributor answer. As facilitator, you take an active part in this phase: together with the others, you ask questions to unravel the situation. You do make sure that it does not turn into a two-way conversation between you and the contributor; you encourage all participants to question in depth. The questions card in the materials folder can help with this.

It is important to spend enough time on this phase. Exploring the context of the case helps focus the content. A thorough investigation here is the basis of the hypotheses (in phase 4) and the various kinds of advice (in phase 5). Insufficient exploration time in phase 3 leads to a superficial analysis further on.

For participants who are well acquainted with each other's practice, this can be a challenging phase. They work day in and day out with each other and know the children, parents or colleagues involved. Sometimes they know the case or are they themselves involved in it. Try to let them take their distance, let them also ask questions. Sometimes they get surprising answers; they then adjust their own assumptions. Avoid leading questions at this stage and advise the participants not to make assumptions yet. Ask them to hold onto – or even to write down – ideas for later: suspicions and suggestions will come up for discussion in the following phases. The aim is to investigate first in depth, on the basis of explorative questions. Who-what-how-where-when-why can yield a great deal of information. Examples can be found on the Step-by-Step cards for the facilitator.

How do you know when this phase is completed? If you have taken plenty of time for this phase and participants fall silent, you then ask if there are any further questions. Silences do not always mean that there is nothing more to be said; sometimes it is a moment to reflect or let information sink in. If you feel that there are no more questions, then you should quickly do a final check. Then, you close the question and answer session with a brief feedback to the contributor. The contributor then summarises exactly why he or she has chosen this case and what he/she wants for the future. It may be useful to introduce here the time perspective: What happened (then - past)? What is at issue today (now - present)? What is yet to come, how do you see things evolve (in the future)? This time awareness ensures that participants do not get stuck. Dwelling on the past too long can hinder a constructive dynamic. Looking ahead to the future opens up possibilities. Use the time cards from the materials folder. As facilitator, you can bring them up (and place them on the poster with the core process) if participants continue digging into the past. You identify the 'past' and shift the focus from the 'present' slowly to the 'future'.

What the contributor summarises is sometimes surprising. The original motivation to introduce a case sometimes shifts. That is the effect of having questions presented to him: the contributor gets a better insight into the core of his/her concerns. Then the participants can clarify the contributor's question with their own questions. As facilitator, you can use the summary to reframe a difficult situation into a positive learning question. You can do this by asking the contributor about the future. How does he/she see himself/herself in similar situations in the future? What is the desired situation? Again, you can find guiding questions on the Step-by-Step cards.

Always remain alert when formulating the desired situation. It is not the intention that the contributor only thinks how the other person might change. In appreciative analysis, it is the participants who want to broaden their own outlook and critically reflect on their own actions. When the contributor indicates that a child, parent or colleague is starting to behave differently you can point, as facilitator, to the learning principles of appreciative analysis and try to reframe the situation: we cannot change another person, but we can change how we look at things or our own actions.

## PHASE 4 – Collecting ideas

*What can this all mean?*

Only when the interactions and context of the case are completely mapped out, you move on to the fourth stage where the participants 'gather ideas'. What do they think all plays a part here? Why do they think the involved parties responded in this way or that? What could the situation have meant for the parties concerned?

Actually, the ideas that come up here are assumptions/hypotheses. These are possible explanations, but it is not the truth - everyone should always be aware of that. However, the hypotheses can broaden the view of the case. The strength of appreciative analysis is precisely not to linger on the meaning presented by the contributor, but to bring in the views of others. It is precisely the diversity of approaches and perspectives that provides the most learning opportunities. The contributor does not necessarily have to talk or to answer at this stage. The other participants simply imagine what the situation could potentially mean. It is not about the truth, the contributor does not, therefore, have to justify himself. Make that explicit. Sometimes it is reassuring to know that he/she may simply listen.

*Visualising:*

The Step-by-Step folder contains guiding questions with which you and the participants can come up with hypotheses. But it can also help to visualise the views of the participants in the case. In this way, each actor is given a clear place in the analysis, no one is left out.

In the folder, you can find 15 different pairs of glasses that portray the most common perspectives for the childcare sector. This allows you to scroll through the different views. You can assign a pair of glasses to each participant: you take the perspective of the child; you have the perspective of the organisation... You can also discuss each pair of glasses with the whole group together. In this way, all participants take in each perspective.

There are also ways to visualise the various perspectives:

- Draw a sociogram, a mind map ... with the relationships between all participants.
- Work with a setup: put the various participants (represented by chairs, dolls ...) across from each other in such a way that the relationships become clear.
- Use material in which the perspectives of different participants are portrayed: photos, hats, dolls, toys, icons...
- Role-playing may seem threatening and you should use it carefully.

### *Example*

*When the contributor presents his/her case, he/she chooses a hat for every actor who will be discussed in the event. During the hypothesis period, each of the hats is given a turn; this way, we do not forget any of the perspectives.*

### *Example*

*In one ECEC centre, there are two chairs ready. One chair is for the parent, the other for the teacher. To take a different perspective, the participants literally switch chairs.*

Not every pair of glasses must be put on. Depending on the case discussed, not every perspective needs to be addressed. Or you might, in a particular case, even be missing a pair of glasses: if so, feel free to add them. Depending on what the group finds relevant at that time, you take on more or fewer different perspectives. As facilitator, you can put on the less common glasses: those of the theory or of society, for example. In this way, you stimulate the participants to question matters more sharply.

### *Choose your sources of knowledge:*

Participants already have a lot of knowledge themselves. They know the child in the classroom or the parents in question. They have self-knowledge and they know what the mission and vision of the organisation is. They know the relevant regulations and the local community where children and parents live. The 'internal' knowledge is available and you can address it with the various perspective-glasses. With the theory glasses, you can also tap into other knowledge. In the ECEC sector, this involves, for example, children's rights, wellbeing & involvement, Malaguzzi's image of the child, the ISSA quality principles, and also all kinds of systemic, developmental psychology, sociology... theories. Initially, the facilitator generally presents the theoretical framework. For participants it is, after all, not easy to establish links between theory and practice. They can use a bit of a boost. After several sessions, the participants become familiar with the link between theory and practice and they themselves can also come up with ideas. Do not hesitate to work with that now and then. Though it seems hard to connect theory and practice, it is a good way to work appreciatively. In childcare, the link with theory provides the profession with a strong educational value: it is not simply 'caring for children'.

The effect is that participants in appreciative analysis gain confidence and learn to assess the value of their job. The knowledge glasses are also a good way to make theory come to life. By using them as one of the many perspectives with which you can examine a concrete case, you connect them to your daily practice with various concepts and create an overarching framework that can offer support. Do not lose sight of the experiential component; theory then often becomes that much more attractive. Provide made-to-measure information: take the degree of difficulty into account and find theoretical frameworks that fit/complement the vision of the organisation and the knowledge of the participants. Also gauge the knowledge that is already present in the group (which is also the knowledge that you still continue to develop during appreciative analysis); ask about familiar frameworks and provide others on a voluntary basis. Sources of knowledge are intended to support the content, not to steer the session. In addition, you give the participants enough time (for example, between sessions) to process the information. If you set up a forum (e.g. online) where, after the sessions, the participants can share their experiences and the themes from the appreciative analysis, you can also use this forum to make texts available.

## **PHASE 5 – Giving various kinds of advice**

### *How do we proceed?*

In the final stage, various kinds of advices are addressed. The participants formulate to the contributor advice on possible new avenues, ways of acting, changes and adjustments. The contributor may (but is not required to) do something with all the advice, but not every opinion is addressed directly to the contributor. There is also advice to the team, the organisation as a whole,



to the government and/or local society, etc. This never, in principle, includes advice for the parents or children in question in this format: they do not need to change themselves via this reflection method for team members. As facilitator, you help to qualify each advice. You point out to the group that we are not looking for the one and only solution, we only offer possibilities and suggestions.

Also maintain the balance between advice for the contributor himself and advice for other levels. Keep that in balance: the idea is not that the contributor is responsible for all the changes and neither is the organisation or society. Gradually, you will get to know the participants better: some tend to ascribe everything to themselves, others attribute everything to the 'other' (child, parent, colleague, organisation, society). In order to be able to learn in depth, it is best to maintain a systemic look during the advice: people are not all-powerful in what happens, but they do influence certain parts of the system. Challenge participants in a positive way. What is it that you can change and bring into motion? It is up to the contributor whether or not to follow the advice. The contributor himself decides what makes sense and what he/she can do with it. Usually, a contributor also needs some time to allow things to sink in. Wait until the next session: in phase 1, you can have the contributor (and the other participants) look back. In any case, the final phase of this session is concluded with explicit attention for the contributor. Out of respect for his or her story, you provide the opportunity for him/her to complete the analysis.

Ask the contributor what he/she has gotten out of the sessions. Let yourself be inspired by the guiding questions in the Step-by-Step folder for the facilitator. Thank the contributor and the participants for their open learning attitude. You could also give your personal feedback about the learning process itself.

## 6 FOLLOW-UP

After each session, you, as facilitator, are responsible for the feedback. That is, in the first instance, the reporting, but also the follow-up on an organisational level, at the level of the participants (monitoring of personal questions) and at the level of you as facilitator.

### 6.1 The reporting

The report may serve a number of purposes. Depending on this, you do it more or less extensively, although getting even the minimum amount on paper is always meaningful. With a report you can document content and process aspects. Depending on the purpose of the report, you can integrate the process-based section and the content into one report or you can divide it up into different versions. In any case, make clear agreements. Depending on what purpose it serves, you decide with the group who will report, which elements should certainly be included and how and by whom it is followed-up.

A final report contains substantive elements: which case was discussed, what topics are covered, which discussions are conducted, what are the reflections? It helps participants reconstruct everything that has been said, especially when everything is recorded in clearly ordered phases. As the connecting factor, the substantive report also shows the evolutions that the learning group goes through. It makes the process and the results visible and is therefore also an appreciation for the efforts that have been made. If you limit this final report to the essence (the case and the opinions), it is then, in terms of time and energy, also feasible for the participants to do the reporting. This can be done by rotation and you can also use techniques such as mind-mapping with key words per phase. Such a report may even be done on the spot with the whole group together: documenting together is a convenient way to look back at the core of the previous session. If you do not do this too concisely, you encourage the reporting of the work quickly after the session. There is also the process report with - of course - more process-oriented elements. As facilitator, you map out the

group process in this way. You do this in order to follow-up better (although that can also be done in your personal reflection report) but also to make the learning effects visible to the participants. What has the group achieved in terms of reflecting together and adjusting their own actions? Be alert in the process report for privacy and for the definitive meaning of the written word. Especially in relation to hierarchical supervisors, it is best to decide in advance how learning and assessment can be separated. For a safe learning environment, you need clear agreements. Finally, you can also ask everyone to make (brief) notes for themselves. This includes the contributor, the other participants, you as facilitator... Everyone gets something different from a Wanda session. A personal reflection report helps show this.

## 6.2 At the organisational level

What is black and white in the report naturally requires follow-up. Did the perspective (the glasses) of the theory come up and does the group want to know even more about it? Were advice formulated with a different approach in the team, in the organisation? See how you can record this. Can you provide the participants with background information? Is it necessary to revisit the planning in another meeting, to modify workflows? Or do you want to develop a new policy within the organisation in response to a Wanda session? Perhaps, it is even necessary, following specific advice, to go and discuss certain phenomena or problems with other institutions (ECEC centres, (Local) government that is responsible for ECEC,...).

## 6.3 At the participant level

A session can unleash a great deal. The topics that are covered can affect people. It is therefore important that participants know where they can go with their questions and emotions.

### *Example*

*In the session of an ECEC centre, the role of parents in the daily reception is discussed. The facilitator, who is also the coordinator, noticed that the participants had various opinions that sometimes differed from the vision of parental involvement. At the next team meeting (not to be confused with a session), 'Discuss and develop parental involvement' was placed on the agenda.*

As facilitator, you can be a listening ear, but what if you have difficulty combining this with your role as coordinator or as teacher? It is certainly not the intention that you offer extensive individual or even therapeutic support. When necessary and where possible, you provide a referral. But make sure at all times that participants have somewhere to go with questions or problems.

## 6.4 At your level

Even for the facilitator, a session can be very intensive. Sometimes, your own emotions or experiences come bubbling to the surface, sometimes the expectations for personal feedback are too great. Be sure to read Chapter 7, but also remember that it may be a good idea to allow yourself to be supported by fellow facilitators. In a peer group, you can engage in dialogue and/or discuss difficult situations or discuss follow-up questions. In the Wanda pilot project in the Flemish speaking part of Belgium, this proved to be an important support in the past session.

In the Wanda pilot project, coordinators of family childcare services, out-of-school care, childcare centers ... discuss the stresses they encounter as internal facilitators. The tension between the role of coordinator and facilitator will always be there, so you will certainly find a way to deal with it.



## 7 THE ABCs OF THE FACILITATOR

Facilitating appreciative analysis is extremely interesting. After all, you get to work with a group of professionals or students to achieve intensive learning opportunities. In this section, you can read more about the roles and competencies of a facilitator. Read through it before you start Wanda: it will give you a good idea of what your function is. But do not let yourself be put off. You do not need to take on all the roles at all times. Everyone has his own style. Gear your style to the goal of appreciative analysis in your organisation and the kind of guidance that your participants require. Over time, you can go back to this text. In particular, if you are not in contact with other facilitators, you can use this overview to reflect on your own performance as a facilitator. Stay true to your style, reflect on what you're good at, but also occasionally reflect on how you can still continue to grow.

### 7.1 The facilitator as 'learning facilitator'

Learning is the primary goal of appreciative analysis. Facilitating that learning is the primary goal for the facilitator. A session is only successful when the participants, both individually and collectively, have learned something. You achieve this by establishing yourself as a kind of coach. As a learning facilitator, you are alert to what is going on with the participants. You examine what may lead them to learn from each other. Therefore, you encourage participants to take just that step further: you bring them into a comfortable 'chat zone' and 'pull' them into the learning zone (see 2.3). On the other hand, you also build in sufficient security; that is needed to achieve a learning atmosphere.

As a facilitator, you are constantly working on a balancing act: during the sessions, you observe your interactions, you also listen (perhaps especially) to what people are not saying or doing. You have an eye for the collective learning effect as well as for the individual. You are concerned about the learning opportunities for the contributor as well as for what every other participant in the case picks up. Where possible, you take into account different learning styles: one wants to analyse everything very specifically, the other mainly wants to try things out. One wants to think about things all over again, the other would like to get to work. The learning facilitator creates a climate of dialogue and participation. This goes beyond the exchange of ideas and experiences, you design a 'democratic place' where axioms and assumptions can be questioned. In this way, you ensure that participants experience freedom of expression (see 3.2). However, they may not always feel confident and comfortable in this 'free space'. Relationships are discussed, knowledge of situations is disputed. That does not always feel safe.

As a learning facilitator, you have pretty much mastered the method of appreciative analysis. The Wanda material can help you with that, especially in the beginning. Use it as much as possible to grow in your role. Appreciative analysis is a more narrative method. Language and the ability to express oneself are important. But because it is based significantly on the daily practice, less verbal participants or participants with a different native language can also participate fully. Where language would, in fact, be a hindrance, you, as learning facilitator, look for other ways.

### 7.2 The facilitator as process monitor

In appreciative analysis, there is not one central truth. Situations are always approached from various perspectives. In order to achieve this, there are successive phases. In order to work well, there are, furthermore, group agreements (4.4).

There are, therefore, a few things which the group must adhere to. It is your job to monitor that. The content (of the agreements and during the phases) is introduced by the participants. As the monitor, you create the space; you invite the participants to make agreements, you introduce a specific phase. At the same time, the participants remain owners of their own learning process. They indicate what they want to discuss. They set priorities, which may also evolve. As the monitor, you

supply structure, a framework and knowledge sources. You help the shaping of the process; the group determines the end result. You monitor the group agreements chiefly in terms of providing a safe and challenging learning environment. You ensure that every participant experiences freedom to speak – and to remain silent. If the discussion starts to go in a certain direction that is clearly too sensitive for the contributor, let it rest. Participants themselves will then indicate when would be a good time (next time?) to continue with this.

As process monitor, you are responsible for the safety and the environment to speak freely, but make sure everyone is focused on the case and the analysis. During the phases you must chiefly monitor the pace. When is it time to move onto the next phase? Do not go too fast, then it becomes superficial. Do not go too slow, that provides too few results and participants drop out. You also monitor the difference between the phases: what comes up, and when? At the start of a session, it is quite possible that you will overflow a bit.

### **7.3 The facilitator as content expert**

As facilitator, do you have to know something about the sector? The answer is quite subtle. You have a sensitivity to and knowledge of the finality of the field (see 2.5, sector-specific building blocks). But you do not have to 'know' everything. Sensitivity is also acquired by combining theoretical concepts and insight with practical knowledge and a healthy dose of empathy.

Compare it with taking a helicopter view. You must be able to transcend a specific situation and to frame it into a larger context. In this way, you will be able to suggest other pathways. It is also necessary to be able to connect practice with theory: which conceptual and legislative frameworks play a role in the case?

However, no advanced knowledge or specialisation is required. That may even backfire. With extensive expertise, you tend to view the case from a specific framework or take up space from the participants. Of course, knowledge at appropriate times makes sense: it can help you to broaden the situation. But always offer this as a possible hypothesis, and not as 'the truth'.

### **7.4 The facilitator as group leader**

Each group is unique. It has its own dynamics, its own relationships and its own understandings. As facilitator, you are sometimes part of the group, sometimes there is some more distance. The relationship between an internal facilitator and his participants (staff or students) is different than that between an external facilitator and the participants. The interrelationships between participants who know each other (colleagues, students) and participants who do not know each other (a newly composed group) are also different. As a group leader, you have an eye for that. You also keep an eye on the present dynamics. Who has the final word? Who mainly follows? How do newcomers integrate into the group? How does the group feel about you?

If you are starting out with a newly composed group, then you have to invest in making the collection of separate individuals into a group. When you start with an existing group, you keep in mind that, outside the sessions, important issues may also arise. This may interfere with the learning dynamics in the group. Try to overcome the 'chatter' and focus on the appreciative analysis.

You can be realistic in this: with appreciative analysis, you cannot eliminate years of repressed tension between two colleagues. The sessions can, however, contribute to a growth in their mutual understanding. Orienting towards a learning attitude is often a big step in the right direction. Moreover, professional readiness for positive cooperation with respect to the working and learning relationship is more important than being friends with each other.

Sometimes it might happen that groups of participants are negative towards appreciative analysis. If that is the case, make an analysis of the possible reasons for this. Do they see how useful this can be? Do they think it is a waste of time? Is it sufficiently in keeping with their needs? Is the space 'free'

enough to share visions? Try to break the ice, involve them, for example, by having them contribute a case themselves.

## **7.5 The facilitator as learner**

If you facilitate reflective participants, then you reflect yourself, as well. At what points do you differentiate? What is your style? What role do you usually take as facilitator and do you also take on the various other roles to a sufficient degree?

Find your strengths, pay attention to your weaknesses but stay true to yourself. You can recognise authentic facilitators by their own style and their capacity to use it to the fullest in the most diverse contexts. They are also sensitive to their own boundaries and have the ability to communicate this.

Appreciative analysis works very well if, during a session, you also become a learner and also join in the search for interpretations and advice. Alongside of the participants, you are also learning and cannot assess the outcome of a case discussion in advance. As a learner, you ask questions from a 'Socratic ignorance': you take nothing for granted; only then can you achieve a broadened perspective of a situation.

## **7.6 The facilitator as advisor**

Sometimes, as a facilitator, you end up in the current of organisational development. What emerges in the sessions, often relates to the functioning of the organisation itself. This may include a different organisation of mealtimes, better documented transfer of shifts, the schedule used in a better way, substantive coordination with cleaning staff, etc. Many advices go beyond the participants.

In your advisory role, you can offer advice to the organisation/organisations. First, consider whether your advice is feasible. And try to sense whether the organisation would actually be taking a big step forward with the advice. You do not take on the role of advisor for trifles: it only works well if you use it for the moments that matter.

If you finally decide to inform the organisation, then you do this quite explicitly from your position as facilitator with a mandate from the participants. Refer specifically once more to the objectives of appreciative analysis: the organisation, after all, has instigated this in order to work on quality.

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*Wanda*



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