

OECD network concerning ECEC 30. - 31. October 2008 - Kari Jacobsen, Norway

Evaluation and Assessment of Learning and Wellbeing – The Norwegian Case

Background to the issue or context to how the government is thinking about the topic

The Norwegian Government has little or no tradition for evaluation and assessment of individual children, unless they seem to have special educational needs. This way of thinking is a common Nordic tradition, which seems to be under some pressure, due to the fact that politicians might want to know if they have ‘value for money’ and professionals might want to measure individual children for different reasons. Different methods of observation or screening are developed by different professional groups, e.g. the ECCERS Scale, or TRAS (Early Registration of Language), these might be used by the barnehage itself or the owner of the barnehage.

The Framework Plan for the content and Tasks of Kindergartens states that each barnehage must evaluate its own work and that evaluation must be part of each barnehage’s annual plan. Further is stated: ‘Documentation linked to individual children can be used in connection with cooperation with external welfare services if this is done in collaboration and understanding with the parents/guardians of the children. If specific goals are to be set for individual children, there must be a reason for this, and the goals must be set in collaboration with the parents and any partners outside the kindergarten. This type of documentation is subject to a duty of confidentiality. (...) Parents are entitled to see documentation about their own children.’ (page 30)

What policy goals or outcomes are being considered?

According to the Framework Plan, all barnehager must work continuously with care, play, learning and the children’s social, Cultural and linguistic competences. All barnehager must work with seven learning areas which cover a wide range of learning. There are goals for the work within each learning area, in order to promote the development of children, and to clarify the responsibilities of the staff. The aims that focus on children’s experiences and learning, are expressed as process aims. Children are not being measured on an individual basis. The way in which the learning areas are adapted to the interest of the individual children, the group, and the local community, must be determined by each individual barnehage, and set out in the kindergarten’s annual pedagogical plan.

As mentioned above, the barnehager must assess their own work. The Framework Plan states ‘The quality of the everyday interaction between people at the kindergarten is one of the most important factors for the development and learning of the children. The wellbeing and development of the group of children and individual children shall therefore be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Attention must be paid to interaction amongst the children, between children and staff and amongst the staff. The work of the kindergarten shall be assessed, i.e. described, analysed and interpreted, in relation to criteria set out in the Kindergarten Act, this Framework plan and any local guidelines.’

What issues or factors have been considered in any policy development or design?

Norway’s first Framework Plan entered into force in 1996. The principles I have mentioned from our current plan were also represented in the first one. When the former Ministry of Children and Family Affairs set down a working group to revise the Framework, it was part of the group’s mandate that the main principles should be the same, e.g. childhood as a phase of intrinsic value, work towards goals, not measure children in accordance with a set of criteria, see education and care as a whole etc.

What has been involved in any policy implementation?

In connection with the implementation of the new Framework Plan the ministry used grants in the implementation process. The county governors were responsible for giving local authorities and barnehager information about the new Framework. The ministry has commissioned an evaluation on the implementation of the Framework Plan. The report is expected next spring.

What have we learnt?

As we don’t assess children’s learning, it is difficult to say what we have learnt. But the evaluation of the implementation of the Framework Plan might give us information that requires further consideration.

Anything else you believe we will find of interest

The Norwegian Government is working on a white paper, report, concerning quality and content in the ECEC sector. The report will present the present situation and lay down principles for our further work to improve quality and discuss whether we need more criteria for quality assessment and evaluation.