

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

Cancels & replaces the same document of 29 November 2010

Network on Early Childhood Education and Care

**NEW APPROACHES AND INNOVATIVE MODELS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: THE
NORWEGIAN FRAMEWORK PLAN FOR THE CONTENT AND TASKS OF KINDERGARTENS**

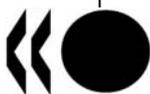
**6-7 December 2010
Conference Centre Room CC7
OECD, Paris**

This document was written by Dr. Thomas Moser for the 8th meeting of the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care held on 6-7 December 2010 at OECD headquarters in Paris, France.

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JT03293608

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New Approaches and innovative models in curriculum development
: The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens¹

Paper presented at the 8th OECD Early Childhood Education and Care Network Meeting 6-7
December 2010, Paris.

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• **The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens**

Norway's current Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) was established by the Ministry in 2005 and entered into force in 2006 and superseded Norway's first framework plan that was introduced in 1995 (Ministry for children- and family affairs, 1995) and entered into force in 1996. The revised plan of today is a regulation to the Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005) and therefore as binding as the law. Furthermore the plan applies to the entire nation, for all institutions regardless of ownership (in Norway approximately one half of the institutions is privately owned, the other half is public).

As part of a coordination of the educational laws in Norway, a new purpose clause had to be developed and the Parliament decided in 2009 to adapt the Kindergarten Act by releasing a new purpose clause, which entered into force 1 August 2010:

“The kindergarten shall, in collaboration and close understanding with the home, safeguard the children's need for care and play, and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development. The kindergarten shall be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs, and are rooted in human rights.

The children shall be able to develop their creative zest, sense of wonder and need to explore. They shall learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The children shall develop basic knowledge and skills. They shall have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities.

Kindergartens shall meet the children with trust and respect, and acknowledge the intrinsic value of childhood. They shall contribute to well-being and joy in play and learning, and shall be a challenging and safe place for community life and friendship. Kindergartens shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all types of discrimination.”

As a consequence of this minor changes in the Framework plan have become necessary. The proposal has recently been on a public hearing and will enter into force within a short time.

¹ **Acknowledgment:** I want to thank senior advisor Kari Jacobsen from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research for her critical reading and constructive contributions to this paper.

The framework plan provides guidelines on the values, content and tasks of kindergartens. All kindergartens must base their activities on the values established in kindergarten Act, and on the international conventions to which Norway is a signatory, including the ILO's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of the framework plan is to give head teachers of kindergartens, pedagogical leaders and other staff a binding framework for the planning, implementation and assessment of the activities of kindergartens. The framework plan also provides information to parents, owners and supervisory (municipal) authorities. As a didactical tool the framework plan should provide the prerequisites for planning, documentation and assessment and evaluation as well as quality development.

Involvement of key stakeholders in the development

The Framework Plan was established from a committee which formed by the Ministry with the author of this paper as leader. The committee group consisted of seven persons with partly different representing to some degree different academic disciplines; one kindergarten head teacher (preschool teacher), one preschool teacher working for the Sami parliament on the educational issues; two associate professors working at university colleges with preschool teacher education with the subjects pedagogy and religion/ethics respectively; two professors working at university colleges with philosophy/ethics and sports sciences respectively. Also the secretary of the committee, senior advisor Kari Jacobsen from the Ministry of education and research, is basically educated as preschool teacher and holds a master of early childhood education. The composition of this group represented not only different subjects but also various basic understandings of children, childhood and kindergarten.

The committee includes staff, staff trainers and researchers, but, on the other hand, there is no representative for children, parents, local municipalities and private providers. However, every stakeholder, interest groups and others who were concerned about curriculum development, have an opportunity to reflect their opinion to the committee and to access to their public website. A later draft version of the suggestion of the committee underwent a public hearing and many stakeholders could put comments on it. Finally, after the hearing, the Framework Plan got its final form by the Ministry.

New features and approaches

The ministry stressed that the Framework Plan must specify the kindergarten's social mission and mandate and must live up to the requirements of a tool for the work of kindergarten staff and a basis for supervision by the local and regional authorities of the kindergartens. The pre-schools basic character as an arena for play, care and learning for young children in groups must be clearly presented. The committee should in its efforts take into account recent research on young children's socialization and learning.

Finally summing up the content of the mandate the Ministry pointed out that the revised framework plan should:

- provide a basis for the kindergarten planning, implementation and evaluation of content (annual plan work);
- should be based on international conventions, which is obligated to follow;
- have a holistic view of caring and learning;
- contribute to a good transition between kindergarten and school and
- present goals for the pedagogical work in everyday life in kindergartens as well as for the subjects/learning areas.

The intentions of the ministry expressed in the mandate for revision of the framework plan still is rooted in social pedagogical values and perspectives and that one is interested to follow the Nordic model or tradition for early childhood education.

As the title of the national Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens indicates, the plan is no detailed curriculum document neither defining outcome goals nor prescribing how and when these goals has to be reached. The National Framework Plan rather presents basic values for the

pedagogical work, points out the importance of children’s participation in designing everyday life and pedagogical processes in Kindergarten and gives some indications on what children should be guaranteed to experience and do in the institution. In general one can say that both the first plan of 1995 and the revised one from 2005 has support among the preschool teachers and affects pedagogical practice in the kindergartens (Retvedt, Skoug, & Aasen, 1999; Steen Rønning, 2010; Østrem et al., 2009)

With only 36 text pages in A5 format, the revised framework plan is considerably shorter than the previous plan in 1995 (136 text pages in A4 format) and even significantly shorter than the committee’s recommendation. The new curriculum has a more contemporary and, as experienced and confirmed from preschool teachers, a more attractive and user friendly layout with a consistent graphic identity. Even the format and mode of production (spiral groove binding; A5 format) indicates that the framework plan to a greater degree has become a working tool for daily use than a textbook. The following picture may illustrate differences between the 1995 and the 2005 plan even on the superficial level of the front page:

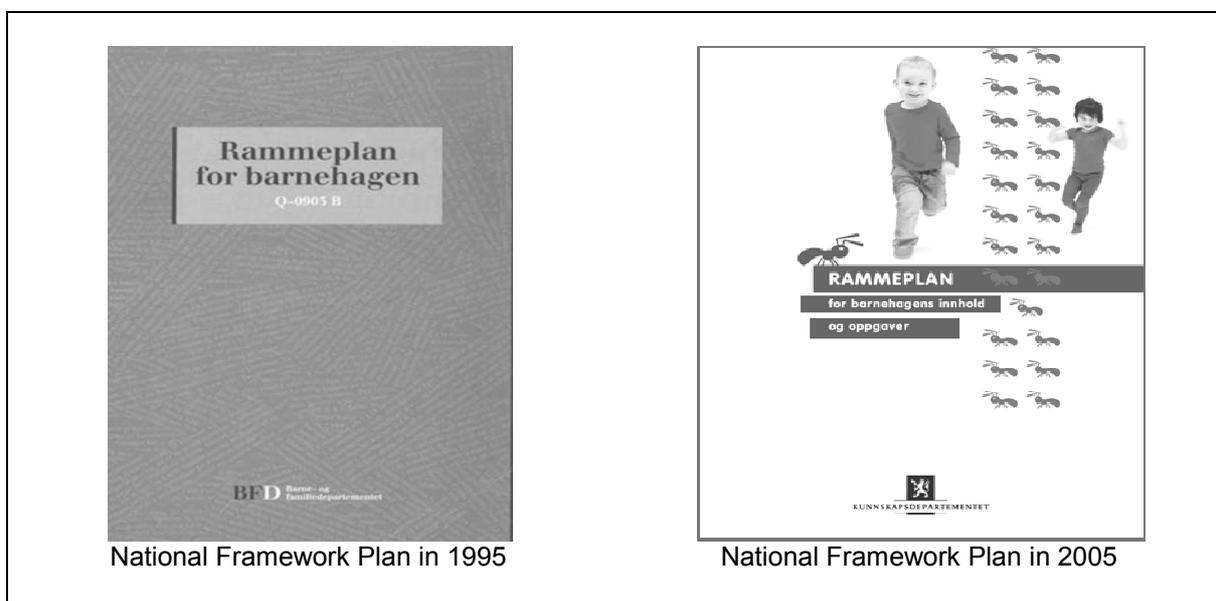


Figure 1: The front page of the 1995 Framework Plan for the Kindergarten and the revised version from 2005 Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens.

This change from the plan of 1995 reflects the Ministry's intention to make a clearer and shorter plan that speaks easily and directly to the reader, and it has been pointed out that the plan must not only address academically educated preschool teachers. The document should also speak to the non-academically trained staff, which still represents the majority of staff in Norwegian kindergartens, as well as to parents, local politicians and bureaucrats responsible for or dealing with early childhood education and care matters. The following table gives an overview over the structure of the Norwegian framework plan by presenting the table of contents:

Table 1: Table of contents in the Norwegian framework plan for the content and tasks for kindergartens

Introduction 3	2.6 Kindergartens as cultural arenas 19
PART I THE SOCIAL MANDATES OF KINDERGARTENS	Chapter 3 Learning areas 21
Chapter 1 The purpose, values and tasks of kindergartens 5	3.1 Communication, language and text 21
1.1 Mission statement for kindergartens 6	3.2 Body, movement and health 22
1.2 Kindergartens with other mission statements 6	3.3 Art, culture and creativity 23
1.3 The fundamental values of kindergartens 6	3.4 Nature, environment and technology 24
1.4 Children and childhood 7	3.5 Ethics, religion and philosophy 25
1.5 Children's participation 8	3.6 Local community and society 26
1.6 Collaboration with the homes of the children 9	3.7 Numbers, spaces and shapes 27
1.7 Kindergartens as pedagogical undertakings 10	PART III PLANNING AND COOPERATION
1.8 Physical environments that promote the development of all children 11	Chapter 4 Planning, documentation and assessment
1.9 An inclusive community with space for individual children 12	4.1 Planning 29
1.10 Kindergartens for Sámi children 12	4.2 Documentation as a basis for reflection and learning 30
PART II CONTENT	4.3 Assessment of the kindergarten's work 30
Chapter 2 Care, play and learning 14	Chapter 5 Collaboration 31
2.1 Care and upbringing 14	5.1 Primary school 31
2.2 Play 15	5.2 Child welfare service 32
2.3 Learning 16	5.3 Mother and child health clinics 33
2.4 Social skills 17	5.4 Pedagogical-psychological counselling service 33
2.5 Linguistic competence 18	5.5 Educational establishments 33
	5.6 The Sámi Parliament 34
	5.7 Other partners 34

Part one and chapter one give strong indication for the understanding of kindergartens as value based and child centred pedagogical enterprises as part of a local, national and global society. The table of contents reveals that learning areas (subjects, chapter three) make up one part in the curriculum (eight pages) with almost the same amount of text as chapter two, care play and learning (seven pages) that together represents the content part of the plan.

It may be somewhat surprising for readers from other countries that working/teaching methods are not mentioned at all in the table of contents. If working/teaching methods are presented and discussed in a curriculum, it advises and prescribes to some extent how the job has to be or could be done. If working/teaching methods are not mentioned at all, the preschool teacher her- or himself must have a much greater extent to consider and develop concepts and plans and to coordinate several didactical aspects. Since there are no outcome goals either, the planning, development and/or selection of methods is a very complex and challenging enterprise demanding even more didactical competence. This is already a first aspect underlining the importance of the competence of the staff to achieve high pedagogical quality in the institution.

Unlike many other curricula, but in tradition of a "Nordic model" the Norwegian framework plan does not define any outcome goals (aims). What is defined for the subjects, named learning areas in the Norwegian framework plan, process-aims as experiences children should meet during their time in kindergartens. Together with the subject related process-goals there have been defined concrete demands to the staff in terms of what aspects or matters and prerequisites staff has to ensure that children can actually make these experiences.

The following gives an example of the framework plan, especially communication, language and text in the learning area (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, pp. 21-22; Norwegian paper version: pp. 34-35):

Providing early and good linguistic stimulation is an important part of the role of kindergartens. Communication takes place through interplay of receiving and interpreting messages, and sending messages oneself. Both non-verbal and verbal communication plays an important role in developing good verbal language skills. Varied and rich experiences are essential prerequisites to understanding concepts. It is necessary to converse about experiences, thoughts and feelings in order to develop a rich use of language. Text covers both written and oral stories, poetry, rhymes, nonsense verses and songs. Important aspects of the transfer of cultural values are linked to communications, language and texts.

Through work on communications, language and texts, kindergartens shall help to ensure that children

- listen, observe and respond to mutual interaction with children and adults
- develop their understanding of concepts, and use a varied vocabulary
- use their language to express feelings, wishes and experiences, to solve conflicts and to create positive relationships through play and other social interaction
- develop a positive relationship with texts and pictures as sources of aesthetic pleasure, knowledge and conversations, and as inspiration for fantasies and creativity
- listen to sounds and rhythms in the language and become familiar with symbols such as numbers and letters
- become familiar with books, songs, pictures, the media, etc.

In order to work towards these goals, staff must

- be conscious of their position as role models for how to listen and respond constructively, and how to use body language, speech and text
- promote trust between children, and between children and adults, so that children enjoy communicating and feel confident using different types of language and texts in their everyday lives
- facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and in more formal situations
- create an environment that stimulates all children to use language well, and that encourages listening, conversation and play involving sounds, rhymes, rhythms and fantasies with the aid of language and song
- understand the importance of children's mother tongues
- encourage children with bi- and multilingual backgrounds to use their languages, whilst helping them to gain experiences that build up their conceptual understanding and vocabulary in Norwegian
- support children who have various communication difficulties, who do not use language much or who are late developers in terms of language

- allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children's initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing at writing and dictating texts
 - create an environment in which children and adults every day experience excitement and joy through reading aloud, telling stories, singing and conversation, and being conscious of the ethical, aesthetic and cultural values that they are communicating.
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There is a growing concern in Norwegian ECEC whether or not an open and input-based orientation is appropriate. According to mainstream opinion of researchers and teachers at the university colleges, preschool teachers are educated, is that a non-outcome orientation is almost the one and only way providing good, value based and child oriented ECEC services. On the other hand, special pedagogues, psychologists and other professionals working for children at risk want to have more concrete and accessible aims. These parts in the discussion express scepticism about what they characterize as to open and vague "low-structured" work in kindergartens, often referred to as too little goal-oriented, too general and not sufficiently taking into account the individual child's prerequisites and needs for learning and development.

In Norway, approximately only one third of employees in ECEC institutions are academically educated and there are two thirds assistants, partly trained for child related work in the secondary level. The majority of the assistants may have other, but not primarily educational relevant vocational education, or, as the majority of them, do not have such an education at all. Nevertheless the assistants spend most of their time with the children, while pre-school teachers have to spend much of their working hours for purposes that are not directly aimed at children or not in an immediate relationship with the children. Thus pre-school teachers have a great responsibility in relation to concretize and implement the curriculum with their working group, which often consists of one preschool teacher and two or three assistants. Preschool teachers have to ensure that the daily activities, consistent with the educational guidelines of the plan, performed by other staff.

Critics of the open and input-oriented pedagogical approach believe that the development of more detailed and prescribed plan is a prerequisite to provide better quality services for all children. One cannot, according to this critic, be sure that the intentions of the plan are followed and fulfilled satisfactory especially because, according to the framework plan, there normally should not be conducted individual assessment of children at all.

Kindergartens will normally not assess the achievement of goals for individual child in relation to specific criteria. The main focus of assessment should be put on system, not on individual child; "Information and documentation shall provide the basis from reflection and discussions among staff, children and parents. The results of the assessment should be used as a basis work for education and care in next year's annual plan" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006, p. 31).

This approach to quality development at the institutional level already indicates in the first part of chapter 4.3 including assessment of the kindergarten's work:

"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 well-being 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 kindergarten Act, this Framework Plan and any local guidelines and plans."

It is obvious that such an understanding of assessment requires a tremendous expertise and competence in the staff group. The question has been raised on the issue whether or not the required competencies are present in the institutions.

Optimal length and degree of detail of standards and/ or curriculum

There is a somewhat fuzzy situation in the actual Norwegian ECEC debate when it comes to optimal length and degree of detail of standards and/ or curriculum: Operationalized learning objectives are not required or requested in public government documents. Therefore, only few research evidence (generalizable statistical findings) has been provided to confirm that the kindergarten follow-up and live up to its social and educational mission. Although many good qualitative research indicates that there are some examples of good pedagogical work in selected kindergartens, but no full picture about the situation in general, all over the nation, can be drawn.

Although the public documents (The Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan) are quite clear that there should not be a “testing culture” in kindergarten, a more general assessment and documentation of the effects, even on an individual level, are increasingly in demand, both the politicians and the research context. In academic and public debates, it is often spoken about that neo-liberal tendencies already have largely influenced and changed the Norwegian school system. Individual performance measurements have been introduced over the past years, mainly as a consequence of international comparative studies (PISA, etc.). Sceptics of this development fear that it is only a matter of time before similar procedures are established in kindergarten. Recently published research (Østrem, et al., 2009) about the implementation process of the revised Framework Plan has shown that 86 % of the ECEC institutions are applying individual assessments tools, mainly in the area of language development and verbal skills. This fact is discussed to be in conflict with the actual regulations (the Framework Plan).

As implied above the issues of detailed goals or aims at the individual level are intensively discussed in Norway. To my opinion, none of the important stakeholders really goes so far that they want to introduce individual outcome goals in kindergarten. One obvious exception could be the domain of language development where the assessment of language performance and skills is conducted by defined criteria. Nevertheless there is a group who wants to quantify the effect of being enrolled in kindergarten on the basis of quantitative data to document whether Norwegian ECEC system is achieved its mission or not. In the last five years, there have been significant increasing opportunities to apply funding to research projects to address kindergartens in Norway. Different research groups and milieus, which offer preschool teacher education from outside of university colleges, have entered the field and initiated different types of research than the traditional small scale qualitative and ethnographic oriented research.

To search for effects of a pedagogical enterprise such as kindergartens can be done in quite different ways. The main tendencies in Norway p.t. are on the one hand be done by national, macro economically or sociological analysis as conducted by Havnes and Mogstad (2009) and Mogstad and Rege (2009). On the other hand, new type of research in Norwegian ECEC could be initiated as it was the case when the Norwegian research council in 2010 funded three longitudinal research projects explicitly focusing on effect oriented research:

- Preventing Later Literacy Failure in Kindergarten: A longitudinal randomized-trials study of oral language development and intervention
<http://www.forskningradet.no/servlet/Satellite?c=Prosjekt&cid=1253962049493&pagename=utdanning/Hovedsidemal&p=1224697819097>
- Preparing for school in Norwegian day care centres
<http://www.forskningradet.no/servlet/Satellite?c=Prosjekt&cid=1253962512374&pagename=utdanning/Hovedsidemal&p=1224697819097>
- Day-care effects on children's competence and adjustment: A longitudinal, multilevel and multi-informant community study
<http://www.forskningradet.no/servlet/Satellite?c=Prosjekt&cid=1253962049480&pagename=utdanning/Hovedsidemal&p=1224697819097>

One can expect research findings about various effects of kindergartens from at least five Norwegian large scale projects in the coming years.

In a recent White Paper (St.meld.nr.41., 2008-2009, Quality in Kindergartens), it is stated that the government will strengthen the kindergarten as a learning arena to secure all children good possibilities for development. The content of the kindergarten must be varied and in accordance with the interests and backgrounds of each child and the group of children. Children in kindergartens should get a common platform and a good start of their lifelong learning. All children should develop, learn and be good prepared for school attendance. The content and task of kindergartens must be founded on a holistic approach to learning, where care, play and learning are closely connected. Further the White Paper concludes that the Ministry will consider if the goals for the learning areas in the framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens can be more distinct and develop new rules concerning documentation, mapping and evaluation of individual children and the kindergarten's pedagogical work. It must also be considered if the kindergarten's work with the youngest children (under the age of three) needs to be more emphasized. A plan concerning how this work should be conducted is now under establishment in the Ministry.

Recently (1st of October 2010) a report (Green Paper) from a public commission was launched. The author was a member of this commission. This report should give knowledge based advises on what all preschool children should have experienced on basis of a systematic pedagogical offer in kindergarten before they start school (Brennautvalget, 2010; Brenna Commission, report 2010:8). The report proposes some changes in the Framework plan but wants to continue within a "Nordic model paradigm" e.g. by maintain process oriented goal formulations and avoid a "general testing strategy" of all children in kindergarten.

The commission proposes that the framework plan should have the followings, in addition to goals for the subject areas;

- goals for the kindergarten's work with play, care and social competence
- goals for what basic competence all children should develop
- goals set by children themselves for their own learning and development

The Commission also proposes that the framework plan should have the followings;

- clear (clearer than today) demands concerning the kindergarten's annual planning process
- clear (clearer than today) demands on progression in children's learning and development
- demands focusing on formal and informal learning situations

Concerning school preparation activities the Commission proposes that the kindergartens mainly should emphasize the development of children's social competence, language and other forms of communication and the Framework plan must be clear on what the content of the school preparation activities should be, and what it shouldn't be.

The report is launched for a public hearing. After the hearing, the Ministry would decide the follow-up procedures. The decision from the Ministry will show the extent to which Norway can continue on the path of a social pedagogical approach rooted in a Nordic model. The alternative could be a more "schoolish" organisation in kindergarten, where individual learning and development goals become more centralized. As a member of the Brenna commission, the author does hope that the common intention of the commission not to leave the Nordic path become to lead the governmental decisions.

Research findings and country's experiences

There is a limited amount of Norwegian research that could provide answers on this and the following questions given by the Directorate (Alvestad, Johansson, Moser, & Søbstad, 2009; Borg, Kristiansen, & Backe-Hansen, 2008; Borge, 1998; Gulbrandsen, Johansson, & Nilsen, 2002).

Age-appropriate curriculum

The current Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens is a curriculum which does not distinguish between younger and older children in the age group 1 to 5 or 6. The Framework Plan includes all children regardless of their age. The challenges associated with entrance age (1 to 3) are intensively discussed and a few research projects have been initiated on this issue (Løkken, 2000). In general, it has been claimed a serious lack of knowledge about the youngest children's life in kindergarten. It shows that most of the educational activities are aimed to the older children and there is a risk that the youngest are "floating" in the institution without receiving necessary attention. It has been asserted that this risk may largely depend on the organisation of the institution and the pedagogical leadership.

Outcome-based vs. input-based curriculum

The current Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens represents a more or less exclusively input-based curriculum. As mentioned above, the pros and cons of output orientation are actually widely discussed. Even if there are tendencies to open up for some output orientation, the author does not expect tremendous changes in the basic input orientation. Nevertheless, demands to input will possibly be concretized and sharpened.

Holistic curriculum

The current Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens represents a holistic approach for early education and child care. To the knowledge of the author no research has been conducted that focuses specifically on this subject, especially not in a comparative perspective (holistic versus non-holistic approaches).

Curriculum which ensure smooth transition to primary education

This represents a topic of significant importance in the Norwegian discussion on kindergarten, having a prominent position in both the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan as well as in academic and public debate.

A recently finished developmental project in five municipalities in the Norwegian county of Rogaland brought forth interesting results concerning transition from Kindergarten to school. In the report (Rogaland Fylkeskommune, 2006) emphasizes the significance of a good contact and direct cooperation between preschool teachers and primary school teachers. For the two professional groups the process of getting known to and obtain an insight into each other's pedagogical contexts and practices revealed an unexpected amount of similarities in pedagogical values, attitudes and practices and contributed to a much better understanding of "the other group". Working directly together seems to be more effective than only "hearing about it". The constructive dialogue between the professional groups showed positive consequences for the parents meeting with school and their coping with the transition in general. A focus on transition has, as a consequence of the focus on the transition process, more explicit been integrated in both, the work of the local municipalities, the school and the kindergarten annual plan.

The position of play in the pedagogical context, both the children's free play and a more instrumental application of play, has been shown to be important for transition in the county of Nord-Trøndelag (Lillemyr, 1998). The organizational culture in the pedagogical institutions, as coming through in the staff's attitudes to children (and children's play), was identified as an important factor for the quality of transition processes. Furthermore, the aspect of learning organizations with a clear pedagogical leadership has been proved to be a prerequisite to develop and apply new knowledge concerning transition. The role of the headmaster as pedagogical leader seemed to be generally underestimated. The development and learning of children's social competencies and their experiences from mastering tasks and situations are fundamental challenges which demand continuity and cooperation between kindergarten and school. As a consequence of the findings, one claimed changes in the teacher training with more focus on fundamental motivational processes and processes related to young children's motivation. The study also revealed a general lack of cooperation between kindergarten and school.

Bergström and Voll (2002) identified four important levels for cooperation between kindergarten and school: First, the municipality level, including all local authorities with responsibility for kindergarten, school (and after school). The second level contains headmasters/head teachers (leaders of the institutions) and the third level addresses pedagogical leaders (main teacher for a class; pedagogical leader of a department in kindergarten). The fourth level contains children and the other staff in the institutions. Like others, also Bergström and Voll emphasize the importance of attitudes and expectations of the staff. A common understanding concerning the concepts play and learning is needed as an important prerequisite for transition and cooperation. Like Lillemyr (1998), they underline the significance of supporting intrinsic motivation and self-concept. Furthermore, they focus on stimulating speech and communication, integrating parents, looking at the individual child and development of outdoor space/physical environment.

A recently published study about transition-related information sharing between kindergarten, school and parents in Norway (Thorsen, Bø, Løge, & Omdal, 2006) revealed that information about children's special needs and about their social competence (social functioning; language skills; interplay with other kids and adults) was pointed out as most important for each of the three groups. The parents spent more attention to the children's development and cognitive characteristics than the professionals. Interestingly, information about the children's expectations and their cognitive abilities was given less priority. However, the authors were surprised that the school and –to some degree- also the kindergartens did not address much attention to the children's expectations, the family background and the quality of the local environment. Thorsen et al. (ibid.) interpret these findings as an expression of an old and narrow conception of school readiness and a one-dimensional and non-ecological (non-holistic) understanding of learning. On the other hand, there was a high willingness and interest in sharing information between the two institutions, in addition to a high correlation between their evaluations of what kind of information is seen as most significant. The correlation between the information priority of the parents at one side and the two institutions at the other was moderate.

Integrated curriculum for early education and child care

The current Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens represents an integrated curriculum for early education and child care. To the knowledge of the author no research has been conducted that focuses specifically on this subject, especially not in a comparative perspective (integrated versus non-integrated curriculum).

Challenges and opportunities

The transfer of the ECEC sector from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education and research in autumn 2005 required a new consideration of the draft Framework Plan. It was necessary to consider the whole framework and the coordination between the Framework Plan and the National School Curriculum in relation to structure, content and notions. This was also in accordance with views of several of the viewpoints from most main stakeholders in the hearing process.

The views from the different instances showed agreement on the principles in the draft document. The draft's proposition on the principles that the kindergarten is an arena for care, play and learning, was most like the principles in the former Framework. The current Framework was established in accordance with the stakeholders' views concerning closer connection between the Framework for Kindergartens and School Curriculum.

The municipalities were content with the Framework Plan, which was easy to read and use, still had process goals but no goals to attain and kept the principle of local freedom and adaptation. The municipalities asked for a more concrete text about evaluation and about when data to be gathered, which will need permission from the National Data Surveillance Authority. The Organization of Local and Regional Authorities meant that the Framework was a recognition of good kindergarten tradition and practice, and that it seemed to be non-controversy and democratic.

The universities and university colleges had different kinds of views, from agreements and satisfaction to strong dissatisfaction. Some of them wanted stronger signals from the Ministry concerning content and central concepts. The Organization of Private Kindergartens was content with the main principles in the draft. The Union of Education Norway meant that the Framework draft is needed to go deeper into a new section concerning the content of kindergartens in the (at that time) new Kindergarten Act, and that it was not enough rooted in major changes in the work of kindergartens (more children under the age of three, new knowledge about children, multicultural society). The Ombudsman for children was satisfied with the deepening of children's participation, while the Ombudsman for Equality was satisfied with the way the topic gender as a relevant factor in the kindergarten's work was described, and states that the kindergartens must promote equality.

Future plan for revision

The first framework plan was launched in 1995 and entered into force in 1996. A decade later, in 2006, a revised version was implemented. However this "revision" can also be seen as a new plan, due to tremendous changes in the document. Nevertheless, the basic values and intentions have been continued. Next time circle may be shorter because the government is about to implemented a minor revision in 2010 and initiated a further and probably much bigger revision process to be started in 2011.

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