Background

The project is based on The Ministry of Education and Research’s demand to develop research-based knowledge on Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care where enrolment starts at an early age and children can have long days in the institutions. The Ministry aims at understanding the relations between educational and psychological processes and structural variables, with a focus on the staff-child and child-child relations, both for mainstream and marginalized children. In addition, the Ministry also emphasizes a research use for national studies on early learning (Early Provision of Preschool Education) and NCCK (Netherlands Consortium Kinder-opvang Onderzoek) as models and collaborating partners for the Norwegian study.

From the Ministry’s demands we have the ambition to focus on three fields:
• Knowledge on ECEC quality in Norway
• Which is the effect of ECEC of varying quality on children’s wellbeing and social, emotional and cognitive development?
• Develop a research-based tool for the national evaluation of process quality in ECEC

Status of Knowledge

ECEC research in Norway has few studies on ECEC quality. There are studies of more general aspects of education, and smaller qualitative studies reflecting the lack of a national research program (Bjørnestad et al., 2012). We have some major studies from Norway that focuses on structural aspects and long-term outcomes (Vassenden et al., 2012; Martinsen et al., 2009; Havnes & Mogstad, 2009). It is also assumed from administrative data (UNICEF/OECD) that there is a need for longitudinal research with a multiple method approach on the child’s learning, wellbeing and social, emotional and cognitive development. Hence optimizing children’s early experiences will help improve educational outcomes and social adjustment. In the longer term such developments will have consequences for social and economic development, not only of the individual but also for society as a whole. This is becoming increasingly so as the skills for success become greater and more varied. Thus high quality child care can be seen as a key part of the infrastructure for a successful society.

Research Questions

What are the relations between structure and organization, pedagogical processes, wellbeing and children’s development and learning? How can quality be considered in an appropriate and practically relevant way?

Method

The project is designed as a longitudinal study to assess the effect of the quality of ECEC on children’s wellbeing, development and social, emotional and cognitive development. To be able to follow up and analyse the 1 600 children, evaluate the quality, and develop a Norwegian Evaluation Quality Tool we need a variety of instruments to collect data.
• Assessment of the children twice (at age 2 and 5)
  • Both cognitive and social assessments
  • Mapping children’s social and behavioural adjustment profile
  • The data give us the opportunity also to follow up the children later in their educational career (in primary/secondary/upper secondary school)
• Interview with the parents twice during the project period
  • With focus on factors such as demographic (education, family structures, labour/employment), characteristics of the family, use of care (home care or day-care) and the child’s development and behaviour from birth
• Interview with the staff/head of the day-care centre
  • With focus on factors such as structural aspects, ratio, staff qualification, training of staff, use of the Framework Plan, parental involvement etc.
• Observation
  • Use of global quality measurements (ITERS, ECERS-R and E, CIP) developed and adapted to a Norwegian context
• Video recording of interaction between staff and child (use of Caregiver Interaction Profile (CIP))
• Case studies
  • We will use case studies to go in-depth and follow up interesting findings from the quantitative data

Relevance to Society

Research stresses the importance of good quality of day-care for children’s wellbeing and development. Our project will contribute to enhance the quality in Norwegian day-care centres so we can give all children maximal conditions for learning and development. The project also aims to give the practitioners self-evaluating monitors to maintain a high level of quality in everyday life in day-care centres, based on structural, process and content quality. It is becoming apparent that the early years are very important in providing a foundation for the child’s later life in both educational and social development. Hence optimizing children’s early experiences will help improve educational outcomes and social adjustment. In the longer term such developments will have consequences for social and economic development, not only of the individual but also for society as a whole. This is becoming increasingly so as the skills for success become greater and more varied. Thus high quality child care can be seen as a key part of the infrastructure for a successful society.

Better Provision for Norway’s Children in ECEC

The Better Provision for Norway’s Children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) project (BePro) is the first major study in Norway to focus specifically on the quality and effectiveness of ECEC. The study will explore the characteristics and quality of different kinds of early years provision and the impact various types of settings have on children’s wellbeing, attainment, progress and development.

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