Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

NORWAY

Miho Taguma, Ineke Litjens and Kelly Makowiecki

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Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway 2013

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and Kelly Makowiecki

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FOREWORD

This publication is intended to be a quick reference guide for anyone with a role to play in encouraging quality through Norway's early childhood education and care (ECEC) curriculum.

There is a growing body of evidence that children starting strong in their learning and well-being will have better outcomes when they grow older. Such evidence has driven policy makers to design an early intervention and re-think their education spending patterns to gain "value for money". At the same time, research emphasises that the benefits from early interventions are conditional on the level of "quality" of ECEC that children experience.

What does "quality" mean? *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care* has identified five policy levers that can encourage quality in ECEC, having positive effects on early child development and learning.

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five policy levers, Norway has selected **Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards** for its current policy focus.

This policy profile for Norway would not have been possible without the information, input and feedback provided by the national co-ordinator, Ms. Tove Mogstad Slinde. We would like to thank all those who gave their time to respond to our questions, provide background documents, comments on preliminary drafts and validate the information for accuracy. We would also like to thank consultants Janice Heejin Kim and Matias Egeland who worked on sections of the preliminary drafts as part of the OECD team on ECEC.

The online version of the quality toolbox can be found at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood/toolbox**. The online toolbox has additional information, such as a country materials page where actual documents from OECD countries are presented, including curricula, regulatory frameworks and data systems information. All information related to the OECD Network on ECEC is available at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood**.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A common curriculum framework helps ensure an even level of quality across different forms of provision and for different groups of children.

ECEC has for a long time been an important topic in Norway, but is receiving increased policy interest, as improving quality in the ECEC sector is a subject of growing importance. The OECD has identified five effective policy levers to encourage quality in the sector: 1) quality goals and regulations; 2) curriculum and guidelines; 3) workforce; 4) family and community engagement; and 5) data, research and monitoring. Norway considers improving quality through curriculum as important; it considers a well-designed balanced curriculum as key to providing high-quality ECEC with the most favourable holistic outcomes for children.

With a weak curriculum framework, children may miss out on stimulating environments that are of high importance during the early years.

A common framework in the form of a curriculum or learning standards helps staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, keep progression in mind, provide a structure for the child's day, focus on the most important aspects of child development, and respond adequately to children's needs. It can also ensure continuity between ECEC and primary schooling, ensuring that children are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for primary school and further learning. Additionally, a common framework helps parents learn about child development and encourages them to ensure a good home learning environment and can act as a bridge between staff and parents for information sharing about what children do in centres, facilitating needs-based interventions.

Designing curricula based on cognitive and neurological science can contribute to the age-appropriateness of activities and ensure that children do not miss out on relevant development elements.

Research indicates that the brain sensitivity to language, numeracy, social skills and emotional control all peak before the age of four, which suggests that ECEC matters greatly for children's development of key skills and abilities. High-quality curriculum frameworks are related to practice in which cognitive and social development are viewed as complementary and of equal importance. Combining child-initiated and staff-initiated contents and activities maximises cognitive learning and social outcomes: child-initiated activities can have long-term benefits, including an increased level of community service and motivation to pursue higher education; while staff-initiated learning has positive (short-term) effects on IQ scores, literacy and math. Local adaptations of curricula in partnership with staff, families, children and communities can reinforce the relevance of ECEC services to local children and communities.

Norway could share its good initiatives to enhance quality through curriculum with peer countries, such as implementing an integrated framework for ECEC; emphasising children's agency and play; recognising the importance of parental opinions; and highlighting the importance of inclusion.

The Norwegian *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* is a progressive and legally binding document regarding the orientation and aims of ECEC. The framework provides continuous child development through the use of one national framework for ECEC, putting the child and play at the centre of the curriculum, ensuring age-appropriate content, reflecting parental opinions and expectations in centre-level curricula, and emphasising the importance of tolerance and mutual respect for cultural and religious differences.

International comparative data suggests potential areas of reflection in developing the curriculum framework for Norway, such as furthering guidance for staff in identifying children's needs; and strengthening communication and dissemination competencies of staff further.

Capitalising upon its strengths, Norway could further enhance quality through curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) mapping or identifying children's needs through complementing the framework with pedagogical examples or questions for reflection; and 2) further strengthening the communication skills of staff for effective curriculum implementation and stimulation of early development.

Norway has undertaken measures to tackle challenges in enhancing quality through curriculum by, among others, revising the framework to meet changing needs of society; aligning the curriculum with international conventions regarding children's rights; and evaluating the implementation of the framework.

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC curriculum are: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment. Norway has made several efforts to tackle these challenges by, for example, covering the entire ECEC range as an integrated system with one national framework; specifying age-appropriate learning areas, which are intertwined with play; and evaluating the implementation of the framework.

To further their efforts, Norway could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand and Sweden, such as developing goals or child outcomes to guide staff in their practices and identify children's needs; improving linkages between the curriculum for ECEC and the primary school curriculum; including practical examples for staff in the curriculum; and developing assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the policy profile

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become a policy priority in many countries. A growing body of research recognises that it makes a wide range of benefits, including social and economic benefits, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning, more equitable outcomes and reduction of poverty, and increased intergenerational social mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the "quality" of ECEC.

Definitions of quality differ across countries and across different stakeholder groups depending on beliefs, values, a country's (or region's) socio-economic context, and the needs of the community of users. While definitions should be interpreted with caution and sensitivity when comparing cross-country practices, the OECD has taken a two-tier approach to define "quality" to proceed policy discussions. Therefore, this policy profile considers quality as in "structural quality"[1] and "process quality"[2], and sets out "child development" or "child outcome" as quality targets.

Based on international literature reviews findings, the OECD has identified five levers as key policies to encourage quality in ECEC:

1) Setting out quality goals and regulations
2) Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
3) Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
4) Engaging families and communities
5) Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five levers, Norway has selected "designing and implementing curriculum and standards" to be the theme of its policy profile. As reference countries in focus for international comparison, Norway has selected New Zealand and Sweden.

Structure of the report

This report consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1: What does research say?

This chapter aims to help you to brief political leaders, stakeholders and the media about the latest research and explain why a framework, such as curriculum or learning standards, matters for better child development. It includes an overview of research findings on why curriculum matters, what the effects of different curricula are on child development and the quality of ECEC provision, which aspects matter in curriculum, policy implications from research, and knowledge gaps in current research.

Chapter 2: Where does Norway stand compared to other countries?

Chapter two provides an international comparative overview of where your country stands with regard to curriculum design. It identifies the strengths and areas for reflection for Norway in comparison with the selected reference countries. The chapter can provide insight into which aspect of curriculum Norway might consider taking policy action on, and can raise awareness about policy issues.

Chapter 3: What are the challenges and strategies?

Chapter three presents the challenges countries have faced in designing, revising and implementing curriculum and gives alternative approaches to overcome these challenges. This chapter provides an overview of what New Zealand and Sweden have done to tackle challenges in designing, revising or implementing curriculum.

NOTES

1 Structural quality consists of "inputs to process-characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience". These characteristics are not only part of the ECEC location in which children participate, but they are part of the environment that surrounds the ECEC setting, *e.g.*, the community. They are often aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

2 Process quality consists of what children actually experience in their programmes – that which happens within a setting. These experiences are thought to have an influence on children's well-being and development (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

*Curriculum and standards can reinforce positive impacts on children's learning and development. They can: i) ensure even quality across different settings; ii) give guidance to staff on how to enhance children's learning and well-being; and iii) inform parents of their children's learning and development. Countries take different approaches in designing curriculum. There is a need to think beyond curriculum dichotomies (*e.g.*, academic-oriented vs. comprehensive approaches, staff-initiated instruction vs. child-initiated activities, etc.) and consolidate the "added value" of individual approaches.*

What is curriculum?

Curriculum refers to the contents and methods that substantiate children's learning and development. It answers the questions "what to teach?" and "how to teach it?" (NIEER, 2007). It is a complex concept especially in ECEC, containing multiple components, such as ECEC goals, content and pedagogical practices (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

What is at stake?

There is growing consensus on the importance of an explicit curriculum with clear purpose, goals and approaches for zero-to-school-age children (Bertrand, 2007). Most OECD countries now use a curriculum in early childhood services, especially as children grow older, that is to say, that some structuring and orientation of children's experience towards educational aims is generally accepted. Currently, there is little pedagogical direction for younger children, although many neurological developments take place prior to age of three or four (OECD, 2006). Curricula are influenced by many factors, including society's values, content standards, research findings, community expectations, culture and language. Although these factors differ per country, state, region and even programme, high-quality, well-implemented ECEC curricula provide developmentally appropriate support and cognitive challenges that can lead to positive child outcomes (Frede, 1998).

With trends toward decentralisation and diversification of policy and provision, there is more variation in programming and quality at the local level. A common framework can help ensure an even level of quality across different forms of provision and for different groups of children, while allowing for adaptation to local needs and circumstances. A clear view and articulation of goals, whether in the health, nutrition or education field, can help foster programmes that will promote the well-being of young children and respond adequately to children's needs (OECD, 2006).

Well-defined educational projects also serve the interests of young children. In infant-toddler settings with a weak pedagogical framework, young children may miss out on stimulating environments that are of high importance in the early years. At the programme level, guidelines for practice in the form of a pedagogical or curriculum framework help staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, keep progression in mind, provide a structure for the child's day, and focus observation on the most important aspects of child development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004).

Debate remains widespread over the "correct curriculum approach" for the youngest and older children in ECEC. This raises important questions about aspects, such as the scope, relevance, focus and age-appropriateness of content; depth and length of descriptions; and input- or outcome-based descriptions. The learning areas that receive most focus in official curricula – particularly in countries where child assessments are used shortly after entry into primary school – are literacy and numeracy. Countries in the social pedagogy tradition do not exclude emergent literacy and numeracy but seek to maintain an open and holistic curriculum until children enter school and, sometimes, well into the early classes of primary school. On the other hand, countries in which early education has been part of, or closely associated with, primary school tend to privilege readiness for school and a more academic approach to curriculum and methodology.

Why does it matter?

Consistency and adaptation to local needs

A common ECEC curriculum can have multiple benefits. It can ensure more even quality levels across provisions and age groups, contributing to a more equitable system. It can also guide and support staff; facilitate communication between teachers and parents; and ensure continuity between pre-primary and primary school levels. However, a curriculum can remain unchanged for years and lack the necessary innovation to adapt to ever-changing "knowledge" societies. It can equally limit the freedom and creativity of ECEC staff (OECD, 2006).

Because ECEC centres are becoming more culturally diverse with children from different backgrounds and home environments, acknowledging that these children might have different needs is important for the effectiveness of a programme. Settings and activities that are designed to accommodate young children's different approaches to learning have been found to reduce disruptive and inattentive behaviour, like fighting with peers and unwillingness to respond to questions or co-operate in class (Philips *et al.*, 2000). The wide range of cultures, communities and settings in which young children grow up makes it essential to engage different stakeholders in developing and refining curricula and to adapt curricula, when needed, to local or cultural circumstances. This is to ensure that curricula actually meet children's needs and truly focus on the child and their development (NAEYC, 2002).

Balancing diverse expectations

It is important that all stakeholders agree on the contents of the pre-primary curriculum. Governments and parents may share common objectives such as preparing children for school; but they may also disagree on the appropriateness of specific pre-primary subjects for children, such as the integration of ICT in activities. In multicultural societies, governments may want to create a skilled and knowledgeable workforce and prioritise shared values for building a sense of community. Meanwhile, minority group families may be more concerned with transmitting native languages and customs to children while respecting specific beliefs on child rearing. Curricula can contribute to balancing different expectations of early childhood development in the curriculum and ensure that expectations and needs of different stakeholders are met (Bennett, 2011; Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2011).

Provides guidance, purpose and continuity

Curriculum can provide clear guidance and purpose through explicit pedagogical guidelines. A focused curriculum with clear goals helps ensure that ECEC staff cover critical learning or development areas. It can therefore equip children with the knowledge and skills needed for primary school and further learning and facilitate smooth transitions between education levels (UNESCO, 2004).

Improves quality and reinforces impact

Curriculum can establish higher and more consistent quality across varied ECEC provisions; and having a steering curriculum is found to contribute to decreased class repetition, reduced referral to special education and better transitions to primary school (Eurydice, 2009). At the same time, a high-quality curriculum can reduce the fade-out effect of knowledge gained in preschool (Pianta *et al.*, 2009).

Facilitates the involvement of parents

Curriculum can inform parents about what their children are learning in an education or care setting. It can act as a bridge between ECEC staff and parents for information sharing and needs-based interventions. Parental knowledge of the curriculum can be particularly important for children with special needs or learning difficulties to provide added support at home. One of the most effective approaches to increasing children's later achievement and adjustment is to support parents in actively engaging with children's learning activities at home (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall 2006; Sylva, Melhuish *et al.* 2010). Activities that can be beneficially promoted include reading to children, singing songs and nursery rhymes, going to the library and playing with numbers.

What aspects matter most?

Thinking beyond curriculum dichotomies

Traditionally, ECEC curricula have been categorised into academic and more comprehensive models. An academic approach makes use of a staff-initiated curriculum with cognitive aims for school preparation. A comprehensive approach centres on the child and seeks to broaden the scope for holistic development and well-being (Bertrand, 2007; OECD, 2006). An academic approach can prescribe teaching in critical subject areas but can also limit a child-centred environment characterised by self-initiated activity, creativity and self-determination (Eurydice, 2009; Prentice, 2000). With more flexible aims, a comprehensive approach can better integrate social and emotional well-being, general knowledge and communication skills but risks losing focus of important education goals, as can be seen in Table 1.1 (Pianta, 2010; Bertrand, 2007; UNESCO, 2004).

It is argued that high-quality ECEC settings are related to curriculum practice in which cognitive *and* social development are viewed as complementary and of equal importance. Such integrated curriculum is believed to contribute to high-quality ECEC and improved social behaviour (Table 1.2) (Bennett, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). As an example, Sweden is considered to have high-quality ECEC in part because its curriculum contents place the same value on social and cognitive learning (Sheridan *et al*., 2009, Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

It should be noted that "mixed models" that combine different curriculum approaches are not always successfully integrated in practice. In some countries, the implementation of a mixed model curriculum has been found to be less effective than pure "academic" or "comprehensive" approaches. Nevertheless, a clear dichotomy between the "academic" and "comprehensive" approaches is not necessarily warranted. Instead of focussing on "type" of curriculum it may be beneficial to highlight a curriculum's 1) critical learning areas and 2) implementation (Eurydice, 2009).

Table 1.1. Effects of academic and comprehensive curriculum models

Which "model" is most likely to improve a child's...	Academic	Comprehensive
IQ scores	X	
Motivation to Learn		X
Literacy and Numeracy	X	
Creativity		X
Independence		X
Specific Knowledge	X	
Self-confidence		X
General Knowledge		X
Initiative		X
Short-term outcomes	X	
Long-term outcomes	X	X

Source: Pianta *et al.*, 2010; Eurydice, 2009; Laevers, 2011; Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Table 1.2. Different curriculum models' effect on school behaviours

	Direct Instruction	Child Centred (constructivist)	Child Centred (social)
Misconduct at age 15	14.9	5.9	8.0
Ever been expelled from High School	16.0%	5.9%	8.0%
Total number of classes failed	9.6	5.0	4.9

Notes: For "Misconduct at age 15", the sum is out of 18 possible criteria of misconduct. For "Ever been expelled from High School", this is the percentage of sample group members that had been expelled from High School. For "Total number of classes failed", this is the number of classes failed by per member of sample group (asked at age 23). Results are from a study of different curriculum models impact on disadvantaged children in New Jersey. The sample groups are randomly selected and have comparable socio-economic backgrounds and other background characteristics. "Child Centred (constructivist)" is a High/Scope curriculum model, "Child Centred (social)" is a Nursery School programme with a focus on social skills. Both curriculum models place stronger weight on child-initiated activities.

Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Critical learning areas

Literacy[1]

The importance of literacy is well-documented as the means through which all other subject areas are acquired (NIEER, 2006). Researchers continually point to the benefits of emergent literacy for language development and reading outcomes (UNESCO, 2007). Literacy skills have also been consistently linked to improved school performance and achievement as well as higher productivity later in life. Evidence suggests emergent literacy should focus on improving vocabulary and listening skills; building knowledge of the alphabetic code; and introduce printing (NIEER, 2006). The OECD has shown that children whose parents often read to them show markedly higher scores in PISA 2009 than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all (OECD, 2011). Research also shows that children quickly establish a stable approach to developing emergent literacy skills. In order to do so, it is essential that they are exposed to texts, pictures, books, etc., in different communicative contexts. For example, structured play that is integrated into children's everyday interests can more easily introduce the fundamentals of written language (Mellgren and Gustafsson, 2011).

Numeracy

There is a general consensus that early mathematics and emergent numeracy[2] should be implemented on a wide scale. Even the youngest children use abstract and numerical ideas (amounts, shapes, sizes) in everyday "play" (Björklund, 2008); and staff can use children's existing knowledge and curiosity to develop mathematical concepts, methods and language (Amit and Ginsburg, 2008). In everyday activities, numeracy should focus on "big ideas" to support mathematical competence, namely numbers and operations; shapes and space; measurement and patterns (Amit and Ginsburg, 2008; NIEER, 2009).

Developing early mathematical skills means that the child discerns relations in space, time and quantities and acquires an ability to use his or her understanding in communication with others when solving problems, in logical reasoning and in representation (Björklund, 2008 and 2010). Longitudinal studies on early numeracy show that a child's understanding of numbers and numeric relationships can predict later acquisition of arithmetical skills and mathematical competence (Aunio and Niemivirta, 2010; Aunola *et al.*, 2004).

ICT

Computer-facilitated activities can have positive impacts on play and learning. They can tap into a child's creativity and motivate curiosity, exploration, sharing and problem solving (UNESCO, 2010). ICT can even eliminate boundaries between oral and written language and allow the visualisation of mathematical concepts and relationships (UNESCO, 2010). But while computer use is positively associated with achievement in math, it can be negatively correlated with reading. Some studies demonstrate that more frequent use of computers among low-achieving readers can hinder literacy progress since computers tend to replace face-to-face instruction, which is critical in literacy development (Judge *et al.*, 2006).

Science

When a child experiences science-related courses early in life, he or she is found to be encouraged to ask questions, think more critically, experiment, develop his/her reasoning skills, read and write. Studies suggest that children become better problem solvers and even experience a raise in their IQ when they are taught principles of logic, hypothesis testing and other methods of reasoning. These dimensions are all tackled in science practices (Bybee and Kennedy, 2005).

Art and music

Arts can boost children's attention, improve cognition and help children learn to envision, *i.e.*, how to think about what they cannot see. The ability to envision can help a child generate a hypothesis in science later in life or imagine past events in history class. Intensive music training can help train children for geometry tasks and map reading. However, there is little attention in research to children's use of art and music practices and its effect on developmental outcomes (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Physical and health development

Motor skills, such as crawling, walking and gym classes or play time, are related to children's development of social skills and an understanding of social rules. Health education and hygiene practices are found to have positive effects for children and their parents. Children participating in ECEC programmes with specific hygiene and health guidelines have improved hygiene habits, which often result in healthy weight and height in comparison to children who do not benefit from such practices (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Play

It is important to integrate exploration, play and peer interaction into the curriculum. Evidence suggests that "social pretend play" and "child-initiated play" lead to better co-operation, self-regulation and interpersonal skills (Bodrova and Leong, 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Child-initiated play has been specifically linked to symbolic representation (Bodrova and Leong, 2010). Researchers point out that the combination of indoor and outdoor play – involving the use of media, role play, drawing and puppets – provides numerous high-quality development opportunities for children to create and negotiate (Aasen *et al.*, 2009).

Choice, self-determination and children's agency

Research shows that children are more competent and creative across a range of cognitive areas when they are given the *choice* to engage in different well-organised and age-appropriate activities (CCL, 2006). A curriculum can stimulate this behaviour through including cross-disciplinary learning activities that trigger children's curiosity. Fun and interesting themes which feed into children's curious nature and address topics of interest for young children can make learning more personal and relevant for young learners (NIEER, 2007). Implementing such activities in small groups can encourage greater autonomy (Eurydice, 2009; Laevers, 2011) and provides more space for spontaneous or emergent learning (NIEER, 2007). Children's agency and participation is not only important in order to facilitate effective learning of different curriculum elements but is also important in its own right (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child) and to foster democratic values. When placing value on children's agency, it is considered important that children are allowed freedom of expression and that their modes of communication are recognised in everyday interactions (Bae, 2009).

Children's perspectives

Research on ECEC curriculum confirms the importance of children's perspectives not only through their participation in activities – but through their active input in decision making (Broström, 2010; Clark *et al*., 2003; Sommer *et al.,* 2010). Evidence suggests that consultation with children can increase their self-esteem and foster social competence (Clark *et al.,* 2003). It can also help ECEC staff and management reflect on their own practice and aspects such as the design of indoor and outdoor spaces (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson, 2008). Research found that child-initiated activities are important expressions of children's perspectives and to understand their opinions and views. Bae (2009) indicated that when it comes to supporting children in expressing their views and securing their right to freedom of expression in practice, their right to participate is threatened if this is reduced to formal routines emphasising individual choice.

Assessing or researching the perspectives of younger children, who are not yet able to speak or express their opinions, has received little attention in research. Some of the suggested methods are to observe which activities or materials children prefer and incorporate this in the curriculum plan, have children draw their preferences, or let parents inform ECEC workers of what their child likes to do or play with (Save the Children, 2000).

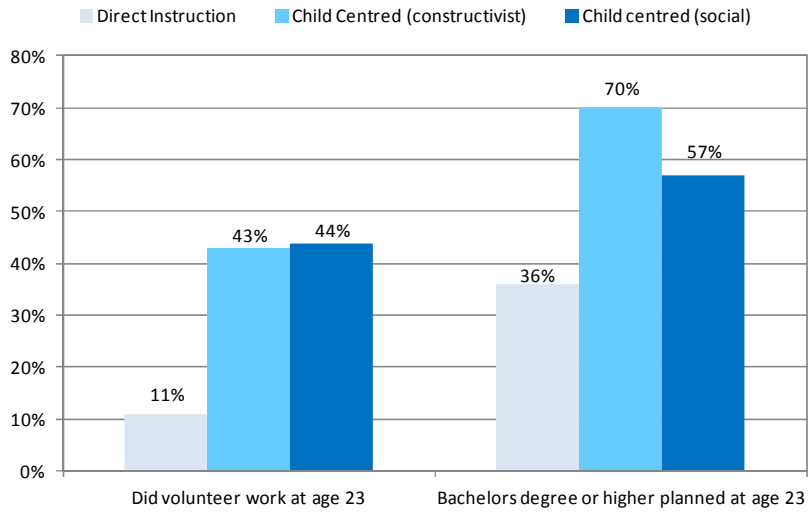
Child-initiated learning

Children learn best when they are active and engaged; when interactions are frequent and meaningful; and when curriculum builds on prior learning (Kagan and Kauerz, 2006; NIEER, 2007). The ability of staff to create a chain of learning events over time with clear direction and concrete activities is also important for consistent development, especially in academic topics (Doverborg and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

Evidence suggests that a curriculum with a high level of child-initiated activities can have long-term benefits, including an increased level of community service and motivation to pursue higher education (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Impact of different curriculum models

On community involvement and motivation to pursue further studies



Notes: Results are from a study of different curriculum models' impact on disadvantaged children in New Jersey. The sample groups are randomly selected and have comparable socio-economic and other background characteristics. "Child Centred (constructivist)" is a High/Scope curriculum model, "Child Centred (social)" is a Nursery School programme with a focus on social skills. Both curriculum models place stronger weight on child-initiated activities.

Source: Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997.

Teacher-initiated learning

Research demonstrates that teacher-initiated learning (common in the academic approach) can reduce early knowledge gaps in literacy, language and numeracy. Numerous studies have concluded that high-quality academic programmes involving explicit teaching can have positive short-term effects on IQ scores, literacy and math (Pianta *et al*., 2009) (Table 1). These skills have been found to be strong predictors of subsequent achievement (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 2007). However, as pointed out above, child-initiated learning can have long-term benefits and is highly important for children's future social development. In order to maximise learning, development and social outcomes, it is suggested that ECEC curricula should combine child-initiated with teacher-initiated contents and activities (Sheridan, 2011; Sheridan *et al*., 2009).

What are the policy implications?

Adapting curricula to local circumstances

A greater extent of local adaptation of curricula can reinforce the relevance of ECEC services. This can be especially important when "national" values or ideas on early childhood development are not shared by all (Eurydice, 2009). Co-constructed responses developed in partnership with teachers, parents, children and communities can greatly enhance the local appropriateness of curriculum aims and objectives (OECD, 2001).

Designing curriculum based on cognitive and neurological science

Cognitive developmental science and neurological research indicate that children learn certain things at particular ages, in a certain sequence. The "peaks" of brain sensitivity may vary across functions/skills as follows (Figure 1.2) (Council Early Child Development, 2010):

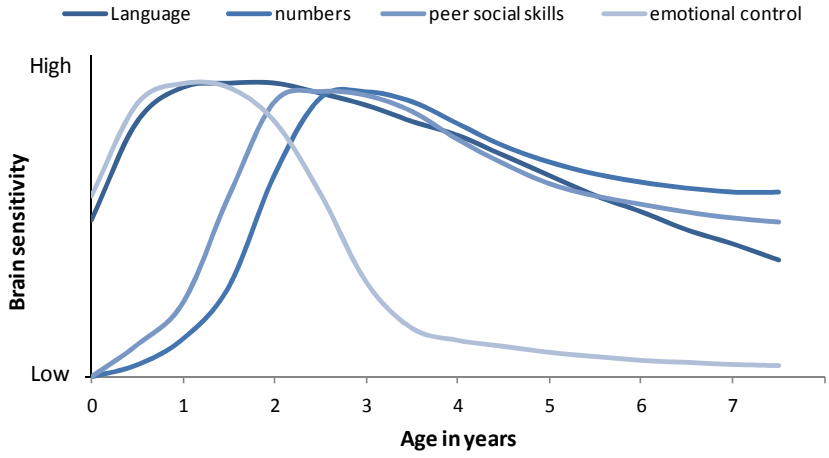
Emotional control and peer social skills

The brain sensitivity to development of emotional control starts from the middle level, increases to the high level from birth to around age one, and declines to the low level where it stays from age four. Peer social skills start with the low level, increase rapidly from ages one to two, gradually decrease and remain at a medium level from age four.

Language and numbers

Language development starts at the middle level, increases to the high level at around ages one to two, slightly decreases towards age four, and will continue to decrease towards the middle and low levels from then on. Numeracy starts with the low level, increases rapidly from ages one to three, gradually decreases but will be maintained at the high level from age four.

Figure 1.2. Sensitive periods in early brain development



Source: Council for Early Child Development (2010).

Recognising the "virtues" of complementary curriculum models

In practice, comprehensive programmes are thought to better facilitate a child-centred environment where learning builds on existing knowledge from children's perspectives. Children's priorities can be identified in a number of ways, for instance, children can be engaged in taking photographs of the most important "things" in the classroom. Experiments like these have been able to identify the importance of friends, staff, and food and outside play. Other information-gathering tools, such as interviews, questionnaires and role-play, reveal that children like to finish their activities and appreciate support for periods of transition between activities (Clark *et al.*, 2003). Children can benefit from teacher-led interaction and formal instruction (Eurydice, 2009). However, play-based, as opposed to "drill-and-practice", curricula designed with the developmental needs of children in mind can be more effective in fostering the development of academic and attention skills in ways that are engaging and fun (Brooks-Gunn, 2007).

Considering national characteristics and ECEC structural factors

National characteristics and ECEC structural factors provide insight into the appropriateness of curriculum models. Where staff have little certification and training; and where ECEC provisions are fragmented, staff may benefit from added guidance and a more concrete curriculum. In countries encouraging child-centred activities and giving space to staff to create local innovations and adaptations, a child-centred model requires practitioners to be adequately qualified and trained to balance wide-ranging (and more abstract) child development areas. Thus, the chosen curriculum must be coupled with adequate staff training, favourable working conditions and appropriate classroom materials (OECD, 2001; 2006).

Ensuring sufficient and appropriate staff training

To enhance children's learning and development, (additional) staff training is needed on curriculum in general, but also on specific areas in which staff might need additional training support, such as multicultural classroom management and adaptation of curriculum contents to diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Furthermore, in a rapidly changing society, knowledge on the use of ICT is becoming more relevant, which can also facilitate early development, especially in reading (Judge *et al*., 2006).

Ensuring that curriculum or standards are well-aligned for children ages zero to six and beyond

It is not only important that curriculum standards are present in ECEC environments but that they are well-aligned from ages zero to six, or even beyond: an aligned vision of ECEC contents can ensure more holistic and continuous child development.

What is still unknown?

Comparative advantage of different curriculum models

Table 1 compares the specific outcomes of "academic" and "comprehensive" curriculum models based on a selection of research findings. It remains unclear which of the two approaches produces the largest long-term benefits on health, college attendance, future earnings, etc. Geographical and political positioning has likely influenced the existing research: American researchers are more likely to support an academic ECEC approach, whereas the trend in Europe points to the importance of non-cognitive learning areas. More research is therefore needed to clarify the mixed research findings across different country-specific ECEC contexts.

Pedagogical strategies to support "play"

Most researchers agree that children's "play" is important for cognitive, social and emotional development. It has been traditionally integrated into subject-based learning, improving literacy, math and science outcomes. However, there is little differentiation between types of "play" (*e.g.*, social, pretend, object) that serve different developmental purposes. A lack of evidence leads many to unfairly separate play ("child-initiated games with no purpose") from curriculum ("teacher-initiated practices with useful benefits") (Bodrova and Leong, 2010).

Non-Western curriculum models and their effects

There is considerable literature on "academic" and "child-centred" curriculum models as seen in North America and Europe. But a Western child-centred curriculum focused on

individual benefits can actually contradict other value systems, including those who privilege group interests (Kwon, 2004). Thus, there is a need to research and diffuse alternative national curriculum models that are locally adapted and implemented.

NOTES

1 Key to the term literacy is the interrelatedness of all parts of language: speaking, listening, reading, writing and viewing. Emergent literacy refers to the acquisition of those concepts concerning print, language, communication and the activities of reading and writing that provide the foundation (basis) for learning the skills of literacy (NIEER, 2006).

2 Emergent numeracy and mathematics refer to the construction of the foundations and ideas for future mathematical concepts as children interact mentally, physically and socially with their environment and with others. It is the early development of mathematical proficiency.

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CHAPTER 2

WHERE DOES NORWAY STAND COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens *(*Rammeplan for barnehagenes innhold og oppgaver*) is a progressive and legally binding document regarding the orientation and aims of ECEC. The framework provides continuous child development through the use of one national framework for ECEC; putting the child and play at the centre of the curriculum; ensuring age-appropriate content; reflecting parental opinions and expectations, as well as children's agency, in centre-level curricula; and emphasising the importance of tolerance and mutual respect for cultural and religious differences. Additionally, it guides practitioners in helping children make a smooth transition from kindergarten to school.*

Capitalising upon its strengths, Norway could further enhance quality through curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) mapping or identifying children's needs through complementing the framework with pedagogical examples or questions for reflection; 2) reflecting upon content areas to respond to societal changes, such as revisited attention to health and well-being and the use of ICT in ECEC; 3) further strengthening the communication skills of staff for effective curriculum implementation and stimulation of early development.

The Norwegian *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Rammeplan for barnehagenes innhold og oppgaver)* is a progressive and legally binding document regarding the orientation and aims of ECEC. The framework takes a holistic view of what facilitates healthy child development, stimulates knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and common international traditions, and promotes democracy. Among its strengths are its emphasis on the importance of play and child agency that are integral to the framework. Some areas for reflection and consideration are identified with Norway's framework, mainly related to implementation or responding to changes in society.

Sweden's curriculum is, as Norway's framework, a legally binding document, while New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* is not and, due to its non-legal status, has more possibilities to prescribe activities and practices for staff and include more detailed descriptions of expectations for child development and staff performance. Norway and Sweden aim at clarifying staff performance and guiding staff through providing complimentary support materials for staff for implementation of the framework.

Strengths of Norway's framework

Continuous holistic child development approach throughout the ECEC period

Norway, as well as its comparison countries Sweden and New Zealand, has an integrated ECEC system under one lead ministry. All three countries seek to integrate education and care in order to provide holistic child development. The Norwegian *Framework Plan for the Contents and Tasks of Kindergartens* seeks to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and considers ECEC as a broad preparation for life while acknowledging the intrinsic value of childhood. The framework is based on a holistic view of children. This means that the development of children is seen as a dynamic and closely interwoven interaction between their physical and mental circumstances and the environment in which children grow up.

The integrated approach is reflected in the Norwegian framework, as well as the Swedish curriculum and the curriculum framework in New Zealand, through the scope of the curriculum, which covers all children from birth to compulsory schooling, providing continuous child development practices and opportunities. Like most countries aiming to deliver "integrated" services, Norway, New Zealand and Sweden have frameworks that cover age zero, or one, to age six (Figure 2.1).

All three countries emphasise the importance of age-appropriate pedagogy and content, although New Zealand is the only country of these three to include outcomes, guidance and experiences for different age groups. The Norwegian and Swedish curricula delegate this task much more to ECEC centres, giving providers large flexibility in adapting the framework to the needs of different age groups. This fits well with the Nordic curriculum tradition of providing large flexibility for local adaption. Sweden differs from Norway and New Zealand in its use of a transitional "preschool class" for six-year-old children. Up until 1998, both Norway and Sweden enrolled six-year-olds in ECEC. Norway made education for six-year-olds part of compulsory elementary school, whereas Sweden, at the same time, created a new non-compulsory "preschool class" for six-year-olds. The preschool class for six-year-olds in Sweden can be considered an initiative aimed at facilitating a smooth transition from kindergarten to elementary school. Six-year-olds in Norway start compulsory primary education, while in New Zealand, children start school at age five.

In comparison with other countries, the majority of jurisdictions with a "split" system, in which child care and early education are governed by different ministries, have created a learning framework only for children in the older age bracket of ECEC: from around age two-and-a-half or three to compulsory schooling.

Others have curriculum frameworks that span both ECEC and compulsory school, aiming at continuous child development in early childhood and beyond. For example, Hesse (Germany) developed a curriculum for children from ages zero to ten, and Scotland's (United Kingdom) *Curriculum for Excellence* covers ages three to 18 – with age-appropriate content for different age groups.

Figure 2.1. Coverage of ECEC curriculum frameworks or guidelines by age group

	Standards/curriculum for Care
	Standards/curriculum for Education and/or Education and Care
	No standard curriculum is in place for the specified age group
	Compulsory schooling

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Australia	Belonging, Being, Becoming - Early Years Learning Framework for Australia							
Austria								
Belgium (Flemish Comm.)			2.5y Ontwikkelingsdoelen					
Belgium (French Comm.)			2.5y					
Canada (British Columbia)	British Columbia Early Learning Framework for 0-5 year olds					British Columbia Early Learning Framework for 5-6 year olds		
Canada (Manitoba)			Early Returns Curriculum					
						Manitoba Kindergarten Curriculum		
Canada (Prince Edward Island)	Early Learning Framework							
Czech Republic				Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education				
Denmark	Preschool curriculum Læreplaner							
Estonia		1.5y Framework Curriculum of Preschool Education						
Finland	National curriculum guidelines on early childhood education						Core Curriculum for Pre-primary education	
France			2.5y National curriculum for école maternelle					
Germany (Baden-Württemberg)	Orientierungsplan für Bildung und Erziehung für die baden-württembergischen Kindergärten						up to 10	
Germany (Bavaria)	Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung von Kindern in den ersten drei Lebensjahren			Der Bayerische Bildungs- und Erziehungsplan für Kinder in Tageseinrichtungen bis zur Einschulung				
Germany (Berlin)	Berliner Bildungsprogramm für die Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung von kindern in Tageseinrichtungen bis zu ihrem Schuleintritt							
Germany (Brandenburg)	Grundsätze der Förderung elementarer Bildung in Einrichtungen der Kindertagesbetreuung in Brandenburg							
Germany (Bremen)	Rahmenplan für Bildung und Erziehung im Elementarbereich							
Germany (Hamburg)	Hamburger Bildungsempfehlungen für die Bildung und Erziehung von Kindern in Tageseinrichtungen						up to 15	
Germany (Hesse)	Bildungs- und Erziehungsplans für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Hessen						up to 10	
Germany (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)	Bildungskonzeption für 0- bis 10-jährige Kinder in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern						up to 10	
Germany (Lower Saxony)	Orientierungsplan für Bildung und Erziehung im Elementarbereich niedersächsischer Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder							
Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia)	Mehr Chancen durch Bildung von Anfang an - Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen						up to 10	
Germany (Rhineland-Palatinate)	Bildungs- und Erziehungsempfehlungen für Kindertagesstätten in Rheinland-Pfalz						up to 15	
Germany (Saarland)	Bildungsprogramm für saarländische Kindergärten							
Germany (Saxony)	Sächsischer Bildungsplan - ein Leitfaden für pädagogische Fachkräfte in Krippen, Kindergärten und Horten sowie für Kinderttagespflege						up to 10	
Germany (Saxony-Anhalt)	Bildungsprogramm für Kindertageseinrichtungen in Sachsen-Anhalt							
Germany (Schleswig-Holstein)	Erfolgreich starten: Leitlinien zum Bildungsauftrag in Kindertageseinrichtungen						up to 15	
Germany (Thuringia)	Thüringer Bildingsplan für Kinder bis 10 Jahre						up to 10	

Figure 2.1. Coverage of ECEC curriculum frameworks or guidelines by age group (continued)

Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hungary				National Core Programme of Kindergarten				
Ireland	Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Aistear							
Israel				Framework Programme for preschool				
Italy	3 months			Guidelines for the curriculum				
Japan				Course of Study for Kindergarten				
	National curriculum of day care centers							
Korea				National curriculum for kindergarten		Nuri Curriculum		
	Standardized childcare curriculum							
Luxembourg				Le plan d'études				
Mexico	Childcare curriculum			Early childhood education curriculum				
Netherlands			2.5y	Development goals/competences				
New Zealand	Te Whāriki							
Norway	Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens							
Poland				Core Curriculum for Preschool Education				
Portugal				The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education				
Slovak Republic				The National Education Programme				
Slovenia		National Curriculum for Pre-school Institutions						
Spain	Early Childhood Curriculum							
Sweden		Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98					Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet Lgr 11	
Turkey				Pre-school education programme				
United Kingdom (England)	Statutory Framework for the Eary Years Foundation Stage							
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Pre-birth to three - staff guidelines			Curriculum for Excellence		up to 18		
United States (Georgia)			Georgia's Pre-K Content Standards					
United States (Massachusetts)				Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences				
United States (North Carolina)				Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies to Guide Their				
United States (Oklahoma)				Priority Academic Student Skills				

Notes: For Poland, the compulsory school age was lowered from age seven to six in 2009 with a transition period of three years (until 2012), during which time, parents can choose if their child starts school at age six or seven. For Sweden, *Läroplan för förskolan* is the curriculum for the preschool; *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet* regards the curriculum for the preschool class, compulsory school and out -of -school centres.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Child and play at the centre of curriculum with "age-appropriateness"

The Norwegian curriculum framework is well aligned with international agreements regarding the rights and entitlements of children: a strong recognition of children's agency, an appreciation of "being a child" and freedom to play guide both Norwegian and Swedish curricula. Play, children's agency and child-initiated learning are integrated in their frameworks. Research on curriculum approaches indicates that these aspects can facilitate confident children with a capacity for life-long learning.

With regard to children's agency, Norway states that children should have the right to express their views on activities and should be given the opportunity to take part in planning and assessing activities – and that weight should be given to their opinions. Also, Sweden's

curriculum points out that children should have real influence over working methods and contents of the preschool.

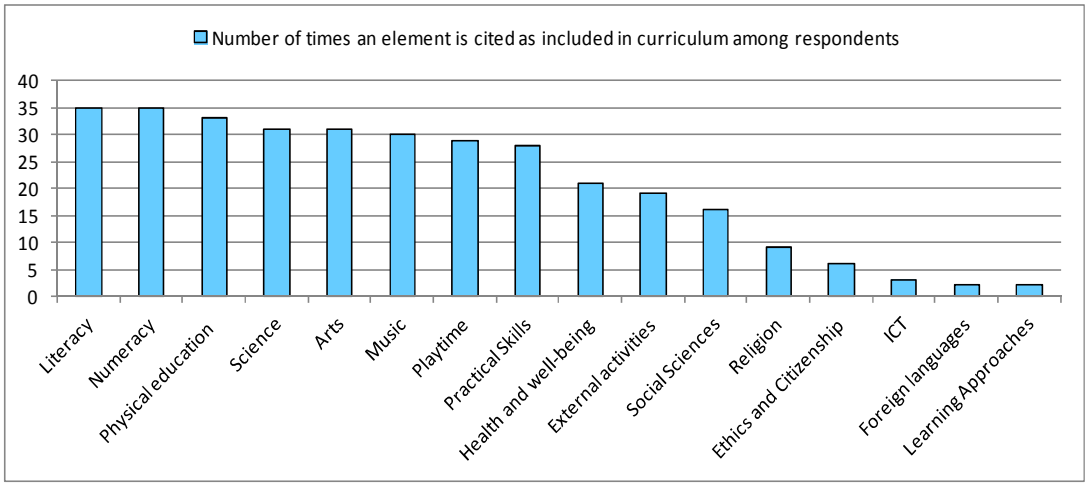
Regarding play in ECEC, this can have many forms of expression and can lead to understanding and friendship across ages and linguistic and cultural barriers. Through playful interactions, foundations for learning and social competence can be established.

While several countries allocate time specific to "play" in their curriculum, some indicate that play is embedded into other content areas in order to stimulate learning (Figure 2.2). New Zealand, Norway and Sweden include "play" in their curriculum while emphasising that play is integral to learning and development. Play is therefore intertwined with other subjects, as it is a natural form of learning for young children.

The Norwegian framework gives play "a prominent role in life at kindergartens", and the Swedish curriculum recommends play to be an "omnipresent activity". Both countries emphasise the importance of indoor and outdoor play. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* gives the opportunity for open-ended exploration and play as a way to integrate children's learning and development. Where *Te Whāriki* addresses play as an effective learning strategy, the Norwegian and Swedish frameworks also emphasise how play facilitates activities on children's own terms. The Norwegian approach to child agency and play, rooted in social pedagogy, has recently been taken up by an increasing number of countries (Table 2.1).

Age-appropriateness and needs-based pedagogy are highly valued aspects of the Norwegian framework, the Swedish curriculum and New Zealand's early childhood curriculum: activities ought to be adapted and suitable to children's level of function, current knowledge and understanding, and their requirements. The instruction aims at taking into account the age of children and the child's cultural, religious, linguistic, socio-economic and/or ideological backgrounds. The starting point for all three countries is the experience children have already gained, their interests, motivation and ambition to acquire knowledge.

Figure 2.2. Content areas included in ECEC curriculum[1]



Notes: Countries were asked to choose from a list of nine ECEC elements or subject areas: literacy; numeracy; science; arts; music; physical education; practical skills; playtime and; activities outside ECEC institutions (external activities). There were an additional seven subject areas identified by countries/regions, including religion; ethics and democratic citizenship; health, personal and/or social well-being; social sciences and/or inter-cultural education; ICT; languages (foreign); and learning approaches. Respondents could list more than one element. See Annex for definitions and methodology for data collection.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Table 2.1. Summary of major ECEC curriculum programmes/approaches/traditions

Name of programme/approach	Background theory or theorist	Main features
Didactic Curriculum/ Direct Instruction Curriculum	B.F. Skinner	Classic method of learning with mainly teacher-initiated activities which includes frequent repetition.
Socialisation Curriculum	Johann H. Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel	Views learning as an input by the environment. The main goal is socialisation, and the approach relies on unstructured play since it is believed that children must direct their own learning and will learn if developmentally ready.
Constructivist Curriculum/ Interactive Curriculum	Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky	Views learning as an active exchange between child and environment that progresses in 'stages', with a crucial role for adults and peers as stimulus in learning.
Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)	National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)	A balance of child-initiated learning and guidance from staff members. The approach provides a wide range of different activities which are carried out in groups, or independently. It focuses on socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development. All practices are based on i) theories of child development; ii) individual needs; and iii) the child's cultural background
Readiness for School Approach	Jean Piaget, etc.	Emphasis on monitoring and/or assessing children's development with the goal to prepare children (knowledge-wise and/or socio-emotionally) for formal education - ensuring that children will not start school with development arrears.
Outcomes-Based Education/ Performance-Based Education	William Spady, etc.	A child-centred learning philosophy that focuses on empirically measuring student performance (outcomes) and puts an emphasis on setting clear standards for observable, measurable outcomes.
Te Whāriki (New Zealand)	Helen May and Margaret Carr	*Te Whāriki* adopts a specific socio-cultural perspective on learning that acknowledges the different cultural and social contexts in New Zealand and a social and interactive way of learning is highly important. The curriculum is built around five 'pillars' of child development for which developmental, cultural, and learning goals are formulated.
Nordic Curriculum tradition	Social pedagogy	Prevalent among Nordic countries, the core of the curriculum is the dialogue between adult and child and creative activities, discussions and reflections. The curriculum sets goals for early education, but is flexible so that it can be adapted to local and individual needs.
Experiential Education (EXE)	Ferre Laevers	The degree of emotional well-being and the level of involvement are crucial for EXE. It emphasizes on concentration, intrinsic motivation and working in groups and stimulating children in their practices and thinking, and to give them autonomy.
High Scope Curriculum	David Weikart, etc. drawing on child development theories (Piaget, Vygotsky), progressive educational philosophy (Dewey), cognitive-developmental psychology (Clements, Gelman, Brenneman) and brain research (Shore, Thompson, Nelson)	The core idea is that children learn better by active experiences that express their interests. When children make their own choices for practices and activities, they 'naturally' engage in different interest areas and experiences that are keys to development. Routine is important in this, and children's development is observed and reported on daily.
Reggio Emilia Programme	Loris Malaguzzi	The programme aims to develop learning competencies through creative communication and dialogue, so that children will develop thinking capacity and construct their own theories and understandings, while content knowledge is considered secondary to learning: there are no planned goals or standards indicating what should be learned.
Montessori Programme	Maria Montessori	Programme is organized into five basic categories: practical life, sensorial, math, language and culture – and is based on the child's own natural inner guidance and interest in learning. The educator's involvement is reduced to the least amount possible.
Waldorf Steiner Education	Rudolf Steiner	The approach emphasizes the role of the imagination in learning, developing thinking that includes a creative as well as an analytic component. The education emphasizes learning through practical activities and materials are kept simple to employ and strengthen their imagination and creativity.

Source: OECD (2001), *Starting Strong*; OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II*; OECD (2010), EDU/EDPC/ECEC/RD(2010)6; OECD (2010), EDU/EDPC/ECEC(2010)3/REV1; www.naeyc.org; www.aee.org; www.educate.ece.govt.nz; www.highscope.org; www.reggiokids.com; www.montessorieducationuk.org; www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk.

Inclusion of learning areas relevant to early development

Defining the framework of learning content areas is a highly domestic decision, which draws on the country-specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts; therefore, there are no particular "recommendations" on what to include from an international perspective. However, international comparison on content areas could assist the process of self-reflection.

There is a wide consensus on the importance of emergent literacy and numeracy for children in ECEC, as all respondents to the OECD survey, including New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, include these two items in their curriculum or framework (Figure 2.2).

The Norwegian framework takes a wide, encompassing view of what facilitates child development, involvement and well-being, while many countries tend to focus on certain topics. Norway's framework includes academic-based learning subjects, such as communication, language and text, numbers, spaces and shapes and science, as well as a strong focus on the development of social skills, creativity, sense of wonder and need to investigate: "soft skills" related to active participation in society as well as lifelong learning.

"Arts" and "music" are other common subjects included in curriculum frameworks. All three countries include both curriculum areas. For example, in the Norwegian framework, this learning area covers, among other things, visual art, crafts, music, dance, drama, language, film, architecture and design.

Norway stands out from New Zealand and Sweden with the inclusion of the curriculum areas ethics, religion and philosophy. All three countries address the ethics and values that guide the frameworks; however, Norway is unique among the three in specifically prescribing religion and ethics as learning areas for children. The Norwegian framework prescribes that kindergartens should include values and traditions from Christian and humanist cultural heritage, while at the same time taking the religious and ideological diversity of children and families into account. Also, New Zealand and Sweden emphasise the importance of respect for different cultures, which is a topic of increasing importance in all three countries due to the rising number of immigrants in these countries.

Curriculum content relating to natural sciences is included by New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. Unlike Sweden, Norway and New Zealand include "social sciences"[2] in their curricula.

All three also address practical skills in their frameworks. Norway and Sweden prescribe activities outside of the centre in their curriculum, whereas New Zealand does not. In particular, the Norwegian and Swedish frameworks encourage activities in outdoor environments both within the ECEC setting and nature. Both curricula seek to encourage ecological and environmental awareness.

Reflection of parental opinions, expectations and children's agency in curriculum development

Parental expectations regarding children's early education can influence what children experience in educational institutions and care centres. Parents' feedback, consultation and interaction with a service provider and ECEC staff can contribute to making parental preferences an important input of ECEC frameworks, and their opinions and expectations can be reflected in the curriculum.

The World Values Survey[3] indicates that since the early 1980s, parental expectations towards children have strengthened. The perceived importance of both hard work and imagination as relevant qualities for children has risen.

Scandinavian countries stand out with a comparatively low emphasis on "hard work" (Figure 2.3). In Norway, the percentage of respondents rating "hard work" as important only grew from 3.8% in 1981 to 12% in 2005, while in Canada, it changed from 20.2% to 54.2%.

Democratic partnership and parental engagement are important aspects of all three curricula (Norway, New Zealand and Sweden). Table 2.2 shows that it is a legal obligation for ECEC provisions in Norway, New Zealand and Sweden to engage parents in ECEC. In these countries, parents have the possibility to be involved in decision-making processes in ECEC. Norway takes a progressive, democratic approach to curriculum design by giving parents the opportunity to have a say in the development of a centre- or child-specific curriculum plan and other ECEC-related matters through the establishment of a parents' council and a co-ordinating committee for each kindergarten comprised of parents/guardians and staff. It states that parents and staff have a joint responsibility for the well-being and development of children. The co-ordinating committee is responsible for establishing an annual plan for the pedagogical activities on the basis of the framework. In Norway and Sweden in particular, children and their parents are expected to contribute to activities and be included in processes. Co-operation between preschools and parents ensures that children receive the opportunity for development in accordance with their potential. Therefore, the curricula in Sweden and New Zealand denote that preschools should help families by supporting them in bringing up children and helping them to grow and develop.

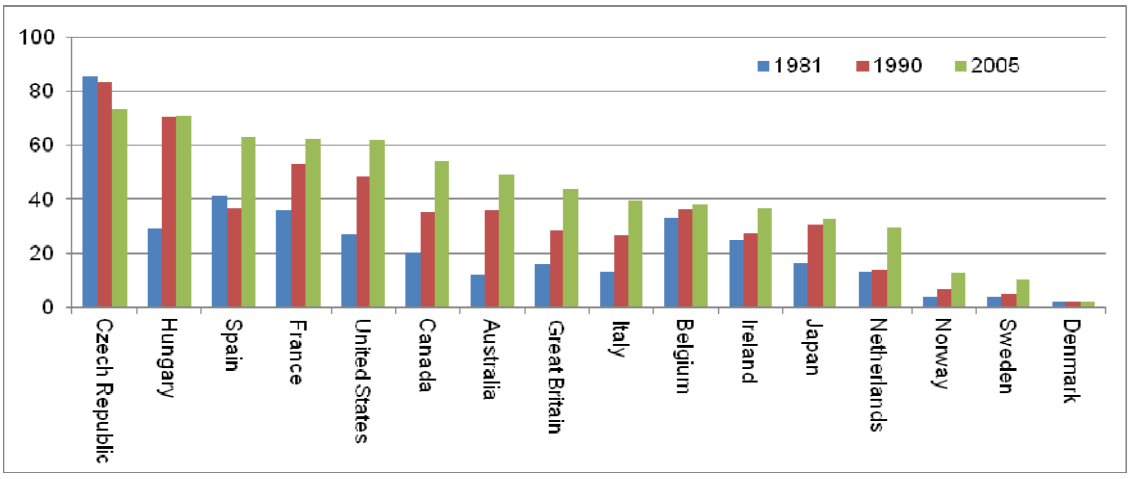
Highlighting the importance of children's agency

Children's agency is regarded as important by Norway as well as by Sweden. In Norway, the Kindergarten Act requires kindergartens to give children "the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten". The children should be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten on a regular basis, and children's views should be given due weight according to their age and maturity.

The Norwegian framework indicates that the needs and interests children themselves express in different ways should contribute to shaping the environment and activities in kindergarten and that children have a right to express their opinions on working methods and contents of the preschool. This ensures that preschool programmes reflect children's interest and contributes to the age-appropriateness of activities. ECEC staff in Norway are being trained on how to ensure children's agency is reflected in their programme.

Figure 2.3. Expectations of parents regarding their children's education and skills

The percentage of respondent that consider the statement "Children should work hard" to be an important quality for children in 1981, 1990 and 2005



Note: Data from the World Values Survey is presented from 1981, 1990 and 2005 or the nearest available year for each country. *Statlink*: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932321473.

Source: World Values Survey (2009), Four-wave Aggregate of the Values Studies, Online Data Analysis, www.worldvaluessurvey.org, accessed November 2011.

Table 2.2. Engagement of parents in ECEC

Making it a legal obligation	Making it a parental right	Putting it in a policy paper	Involving parents in decision making	Allowing parents to be providers
Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Japan*, Manitoba (CAN), Netherlands*, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal*, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Czech Republic, Norway, Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovenia, Spain, Sweden	New Zealand, Norway, Slovak Republic, Sweden	Australia, Belgium, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Belgium, Germany, Manitoba (CAN), Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovak Republic, Sweden

Notes: "Making it a legal obligation" means that ECEC services are obliged to provide opportunities for parents to be engaged in ECEC, or they are obliged to accept the engagement of parents. For Japan and Portugal, "Making it a legal obligation" only applies to kindergartens/preschools; and for the Netherlands, it only applies to child care.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Increased attention to cultural diversity, social integration and tolerance

In almost all OECD countries, the number of foreign-born residents has increased between 1990 and 2010 (Figure 2.4, Panel A). The size and composition of the immigrant population, as well as the impetus of the increase, vary across countries.

Norway and Sweden are considered "European states with post-war labour recruitment", of which some have large immigrant populations. At the beginning of 2009, Norway had 508 199 immigrants forming 10.6% of Norway's population, including 85 604 born in Norway to immigrant parents. The largest immigrant groups are Polish, Pakistani, Swedish, Iraqi and

Somalian. New Zealand is considered a "traditional settlement country" where about 10-20% of the population has an immigrant background.

OECD PISA studies find that there are large and significant differences in reading performances between 15-year-old native students and first-generation and second-generation immigrant students in many OECD countries (Figure 2.4, Panel B). Minority and immigrant groups with linguistic backgrounds different from the native language especially might experience difficulties in language and reading development.

The internationalisation of societies imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. Preschool is a social and cultural meeting place which can reinforce this and prepare children for life in an increasingly internationalised community. Awareness of cultural heritage and learning about the culture of others can contribute to children's ability to understand and empathise with the circumstances and values of others.

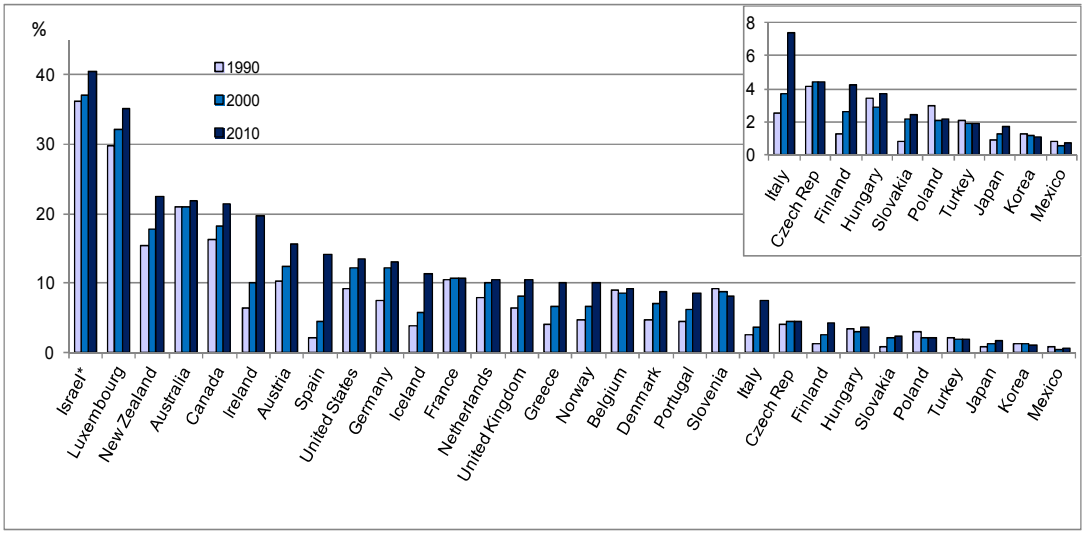
Norway, New Zealand and Sweden include "literacy" (including language learning) as an important element of their ECEC curriculum. Since Norway has an increasing number of immigrant population not speaking Norwegian as their mother tongue language, Norwegian language learning is an important aspect of stimulating their socio-cultural integration. According to the Norwegian and Swedish frameworks, multilingual children should be encouraged not only in Norwegian or Swedish language skills, but also in using their mother tongue language.

Other than immigrant minority groups, indigenous minorities like the Sámi in Norway and Sweden, and the Pasifika and Māori in New Zealand, also contribute to linguistic and cultural diversity within countries. The frameworks of all three countries emphasise the importance of recognising different cultural backgrounds and languages.

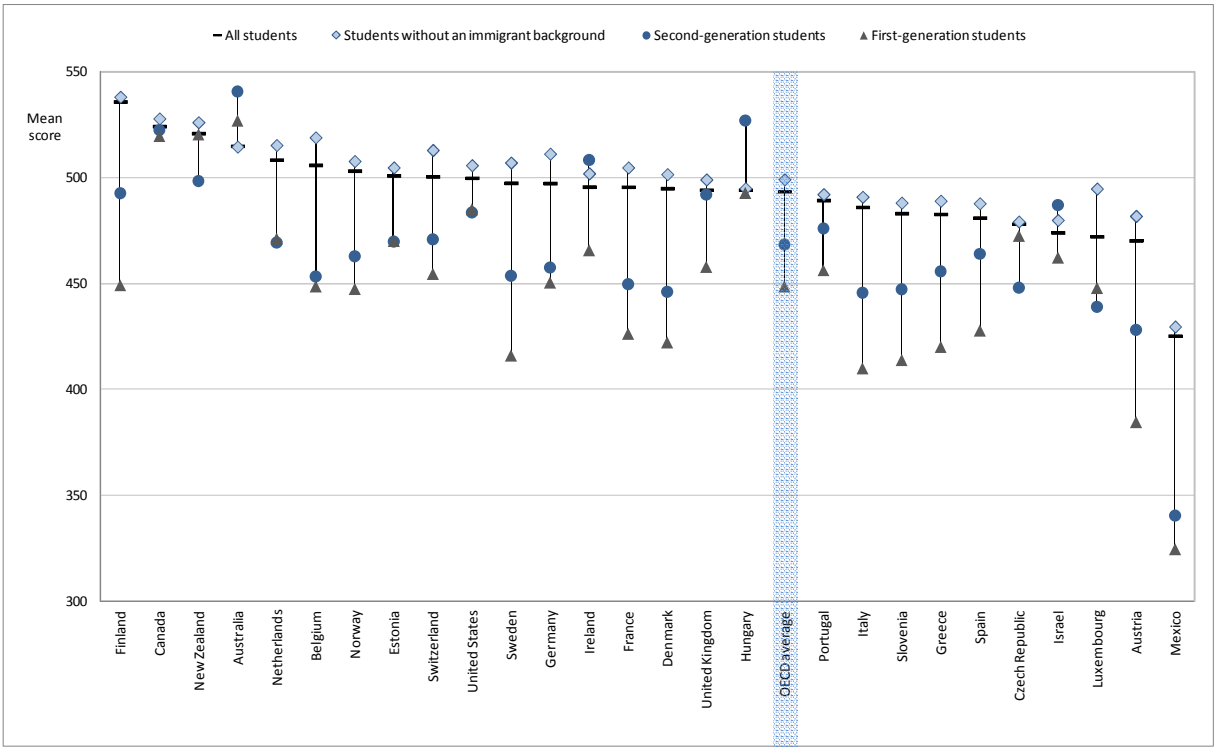
The Norwegian framework highlights the recognition of indigenous minorities and the equality of different Norwegian languages and cultures and emphasises the importance of "community", as does the framework of New Zealand. The new purpose clause in the Kindergarten Act and the revised framework of 2011 highlight the importance of common values and respect for cultural and religious minorities and addresses kindergarten as an inclusive fellowship for all children. The framework indicates that kindergartens should be a space used as a basis for dialogue, freedom of thought and respect for diversity. It explicitly prohibits all discrimination. Norway differs from Sweden in the extent to which the Sámi group is recognised and addressed in the curriculum. Sweden recognises the importance of the Sámi language and culture together with immigrant minorities. Norwegian kindergartens catering to Sámi children are expected to recognise Sámi culture as part of its curriculum. Kindergartens for Sami children in Sami districts are based on the Sami language and culture. The obligation to safeguard the interest of the Sámi people follows from international conventions[4] and national legislation. As indigenous people, the Sámi population are given a special status. The Sami parliament are in charge of financial means to secure that kindergarten catering to Sami children give the support they need to develop their pedagogical practices. However, Norway's plan is not built around the idea of "bi-culturalism" as is New Zealand's: New Zealand centres its ECEC curriculum on the recognition of different social and cultural contexts, addressing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country's population, where Māori children have the possibility to be educated in their native Māori language. Although countries are becoming increasingly multi-cultural with possible issues related to integration or "a feeling of belonging", only Norway addresses "ethics and citizenship" in its framework. None of the three countries include "learning foreign languages" as a prescribed element in their framework.

Figure 2.4. Immigrant population

Panel A. Trends of international migrants as a percentage of the total population



Panel B. Reading performance by immigrant status



Notes: For Panel A, international migrants are defined as individuals whose country of birth is not that in which they reside. *Statlink: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932320732*. For Panel B, countries are ranked in descending order of the mean score of all students.

Source: Panel A: United Nations Population Division (2008), International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision, online version, http://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp?panel=1, accessed June 2010 from OECD (2010), *Trends Shaping Education 2010*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/trends_edu-2010-en. Panel B: OECD PISA 2009 Database, Table II.4.1.

Provision of guidance for staff regarding transition to primary schooling

The framework in Norway, as well as Sweden's curriculum, indicates that kindergartens are expected and encouraged to co-operate with primary schools to smooth the transition from kindergarten to school. To link primary schooling and kindergartens, the learning areas in the framework for kindergartens are similar to the topics you will find in the school's curriculum,

as are its underlying values and objectives. Additionally, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research published a guidance booklet on the transition from ECEC to school, which has been disseminated to all municipalities and ECEC institutions. The publication is called *Fra eldst til yngst – Samarbeid og sammenheng mellom barnehage og skole* (From being the oldest to being the youngest – Co-operation and coherence between kindergarten [ECEC] and school)[5] and supports staff in kindergartens and schools to smooth the transition between the two institutions.

In New Zealand, the *Te Whāriki* curriculum includes explicit links to the primary school curriculum and learning areas for each development strand (or area). Since this curriculum is not a legal document, more explicitly prescribed content can be included. The links clearly describe what children are likely expected to do in primary school, how this relates to the experiences in ECEC and what activities staff can implement to facilitate this transition.

Potential areas for reflection

As stated earlier, curriculum design is a highly political and domestic matter, and therefore, the international comparison needs to be interpreted with caution. It is important to be reminded that the following potential areas for reflection are identified as a result of desk-based international comparison, without stakeholder's views, such as through a country visit, due to the constraints of the working methods involved.

Mapping or identifying children's needs, development and learning

Curriculum descriptions can generally be categorised into input- or outcome-based approaches. Most ECEC curriculum frameworks include "input from staff", *i.e.*, specific requirements as to what is expected of staff (Figure 2.5). "Values and principles" are frequently included, but "child outcomes" and "input from centre" are used by fewer countries.

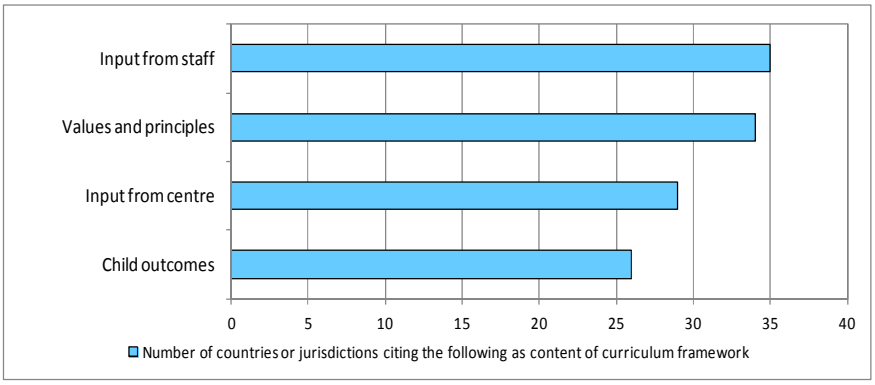
Both the Norwegian and Swedish curricula have a strong focus on the input: the values and principles that guide the curriculum and practice, expected inputs from staff, tasks or activities to be carried out by staff and learning areas to address. Nordic countries tend to avoid using the term "child outcomes", while Anglo-Saxon countries favour the approach.

New Zealand's framework covers the values and principles that form the base of the framework and expectations of staff, and it addresses expected child developmental outcomes. *Te Whāriki* cautions, however, that all children learn and develop differently, and that expectations to what children learn, and at what time, need to be flexible.

Since Norway's framework does not refer to any specific child outcomes or attainments children should reach or develop at a certain age, it can be a challenge for staff to identify or map children's developmental needs. The framework does indicate that kindergartens have a particular responsibility for preventing potential problems and for discovering children with special needs. Norway, as well as Sweden, places the emphasis of successful child development on staff performance. Observation and documentation are used to follow child development on an ongoing basis. This requires strong staff competencies and skills to identify children's needs without any form of assessment tools. The Norwegian framework and the Swedish curriculum are complemented with guidelines and materials to support staff. In New Zealand, practical staff support with example experiences and practices, as well as questions for reflection upon curriculum practices and planning, are included in the framework. This can guide staff in improving their own practices, strengthening their skills and stimulating the development of children.

Due to the legal status of the Norwegian framework and the Swedish curriculum, which are legal binding documents whereas New Zealand's framework is not, a clear indication of specific methodologies and performance in Norway and Sweden is not included in the framework. It might be worth reflecting on possibilities or necessities for complementing the framework with further guidance for staff to strengthen their competencies and skills in identifying children's needs.

Figure 2.5. Approaches of ECEC curriculum[6]



Note: Respondents may list more than one content category.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Reflection upon content areas in response to the changing needs of the society

The Norwegian framework addresses some emerging curriculum topics of increasing relevance related to healthy socio-emotional development; however, the contents could be constantly re-visited to better capture the changing needs of the society.

Health and well-being

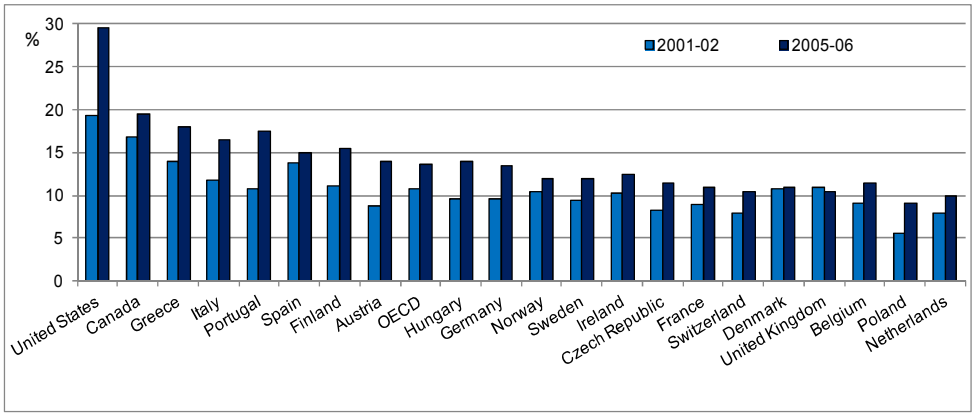
Child obesity is one factor that affects child well-being, and in many countries, it is on the rise (Figure 2.6). From 2005-06, between 10-30% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries were considered obese, while this was between 8-19% five years earlier.

In Norway, about 12% of 15-year-olds were considered obese in 2005-06 which is below the OECD average, although the Norwegian obesity rate increased since 2001-02. Sweden's obesity rate among 15-year-olds increased from 9.4% in 2001-02 to reach the same rate of child obesity as Norway in 2005-06.

These figures indicate that families and children have developed less healthy lifestyles and might exercise less than a decade ago. Research found that when children (and parents) are educated about hygiene, health and physical exercise, this improves children's early physical development. Although Norway includes subjects related to "health and well-being" in their ECEC curriculum through the topic "body, movement and health", the approach or contents could be re-visited, thinking ahead and considering the rising obesity rates.

Figure 2.6. Child obesity going up

Percentage of 15-year-olds suffering from obesity



Source: OECD (2009), *Health at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/health_glance-2009-en; OECD Indicators from OECD (2010), *Trends Shaping Education 2010*, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/trends_edu-2010-en.

ICT

Among the reference countries, only New Zealand includes ICT, although the Norwegian curriculum recommends that children have the opportunity to experience how digital tools can be used for play, communication and collection of information. The lack of a specific topic on ICT might be in line with a general tendency to focus on general, and over-arching, values and goals, rather than specific learning content.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has developed rapidly over the past 40 years. ICT has now become part of our everyday lives. Access to computers at home grew rapidly in OECD countries between 2000 and 2009 although discrepancies can be observed across different countries (Figure 2.7). In Norway, as well as in Sweden, the availability of home computers in households is high (close to 90%). In New Zealand, a large majority of households (80%) have access to a computer at home.

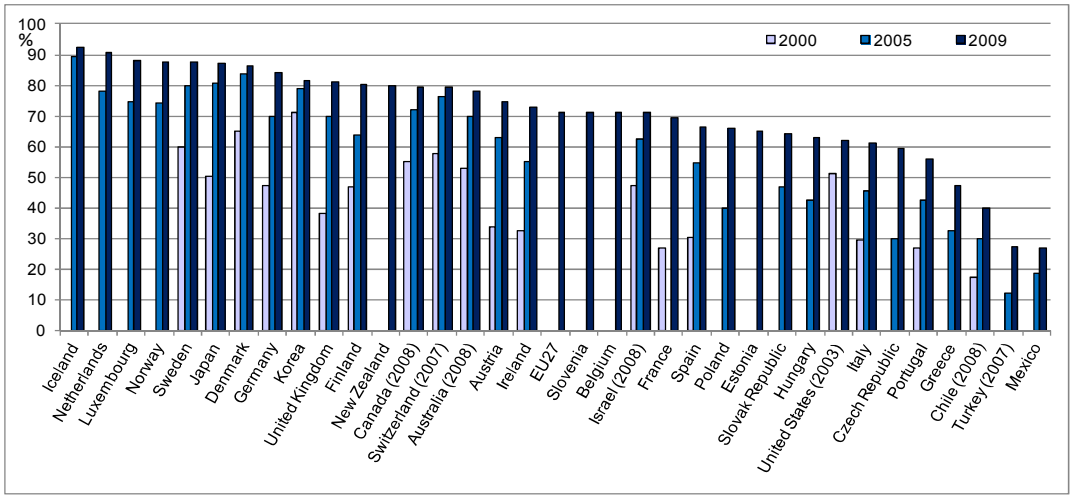
Computers and ICT have profound potential to impact how people live, learn and work. If used wisely, ICT can foster many benefits, including helping children visualising abstract issues, searching for knowledge, reflecting on experiences or images, or exploring letters and learning how to read. It also fosters children's general technological skills.

Only a few countries have included ICT and technology as a topic in itself in their ECEC curriculum, including Korea, New Zealand and Spain (Figure 2.2). In Norway and Sweden, this is not an individual topic prescribed in the national curriculum framework, but individual ECEC centres often use ICT tools or include it in their own local plans and practices; or computers are used and intertwined within different curriculum learning areas.

Since ICT is becoming a more important part of society and can be a useful tool in learning, countries might consider addressing this issue in their curricula.

Figure 2.7. The use of ICT (including PC, portable and handhelds)

Households with access to computer at home as percentage of all households



Notes: Generally, data from the EU Community Survey on household use of ICT, which covers EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Turkey, relate to the first quarter of the reference year. For the Czech Republic, data relate to the fourth quarter of the reference year. *Statlink*: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932321530.

Source: OECD, ICT database and Eurostat, Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, July 2010.

Communication and capacity building for effective implementation

The Norwegian framework provides an over-arching framework for the orientation and goals of ECEC in Norway and avoids making specific prescriptions as to what exactly children should learn. This approach to ECEC curricula can allow practitioners to tailor programmes to local, and even child-specific, contexts. However, large flexibility for staff in curriculum implementation might also lead to large differences in the quality of centre-level curricula. Additionally, to ensure curricula fit local and child specific contexts, strong communication skills with other staff members, parents, and in some cases, the local community or community services, are important.

Norway's framework and its accompanying support materials for staff indicate that the preschool's work should take place in close co-operation with the home environment of the child. Norway gives parents the opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes in ECEC through participation in parent councils and co-ordinating committees (Table 2.2). Kindergartens also are encouraged to seek co-operation with the individual homes of children, and parents are involved in assessing the work of preschool. Additionally, staff is expected to show respect to parents and the family; maintain on-going dialogues; and take into account parental viewpoints. However, in most OECD countries, it remains a challenge as to how to reach parents and families who do not have a "pro-active" approach and inform them about the curriculum.

Professionally developing and strengthening staff members' communication skills on a regular basis can encourage meaningful interactions between staff and between staff and parents with possible beneficial outcomes for both children's and staff's development. In most countries (including New Zealand, Norway and Sweden), ECEC professionals receive some form of training on communication; but there might be a need for more structural training on this, as communication with parents can improve staff's skills to implement curriculum and improve their playroom or teaching practices and skills. Additionally, parents who are well-informed of their child's or centre's curriculum are more likely to use aspects of the curriculum in the home.

NOTES

1 Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Luxembourg, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

2 Social sciences refer to subjects studying the relationships and thinking of human society, such as history, geography and philosophy.

3 The World Values Survey is a global research project that explores people's values and beliefs, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have. It is carried out by a worldwide network of social scientists who, since 1981, have conducted representative national surveys in almost 100 countries: www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

4 ILO's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, UN convention on the Rights of the Child.

5 www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Barnehager/veileder/f4248%20fra%20eldst%20til%20yngst.pdf

6 Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, Bavaria (DEU), British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Hesse (DEU), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES?

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC curriculum are: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment.

Norway has made several efforts in tackling these challenges by, for example, covering the entire ECEC age range as in integrated system with one national framework; specifying age-appropriate learning areas, which are intertwined with play; and evaluating the implementation of its framework. To further efforts, Norway could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand and Sweden, such as developing goals or child outcomes to guide staff in their practices and identify children's needs; improving linkages between the curriculum for ECEC and the primary school curriculum; developing practical examples for staff to complement the curriculum and guide staff in implementation; and developing assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

This chapter aims to identify alternatives Norway could consider when facing challenges in curriculum revision and implementation. First, it describes common challenges countries are facing and then presents the different approaches Norway has been using to tackle the challenges. Lastly, it identifies strategies undertaken by Sweden and New Zealand.

Common challenges

The OECD international survey on quality has identified four common challenges countries often face in designing, revising and implementing a curriculum framework: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment.

Defining goals and content

When designing a curriculum framework, guidelines or standards, the goals of ECEC have to be defined as well as the actual content of the curriculum. Defining these is a challenge in many OECD countries due to the different visions of stakeholders on what the curriculum should aim at and include. Policy makers, researchers, ECEC professionals and parents consider different subjects to be important, and each has their own cultural values and ideas about early development. Aligning curriculum goals and contents with the current and future needs of society at large can be challenging, especially with changes, such as increasing migration and advances in information and knowledge economies.

Most countries set out goals, guiding principles and content in their curriculum framework or guidelines, explicitly stating the aims of the country's ECEC services, curriculum, the roles of different actors involved in ECEC, and the subjects prescribed at national level. This is most often a result of intensive consultations with the different stakeholders in ECEC.

Curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Ensuring continuous child development from birth to primary education is a key challenge in countries with a "split system" where child care and early education are administered by different ministries. In these countries, a lack of a curriculum framework for children aged zero to three is often non-existent; or if it exists, is not aligned with the curriculum for children aged three to six. The rationale of the split system is often attributed to differences between the two sectors, such as historical roots, different goals and focus on contents.

Ensuring smooth transition from ECEC to primary education is also a challenge in integrated systems like in New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. Teaching approaches and practices that children experience are often disconnected in ECEC settings and compulsory schooling.

Effective communication and implementation

Gaining wide support for curriculum and implementation is a challenge faced by many countries. Without "buy-in" from those who are to implement a change or a new idea, any reform may fail. And the "buy-in" or "consensus" cannot be built – without sufficient and strategic consultation – at the implementation stage.

It is also a challenge to implement the change or new idea without support. The kind of support required for effective implementation depends on various characteristics of the staff as well as contexts.

Furthermore, preparing conditions for staff to effectively implement the curriculum is another challenge. Insufficient guidelines and resources are likely to enhance difficulties, especially

for inexperienced, new staff or staff with lower qualifications. Certain working environments, such as having too many children to look after, may hinder practising the pedagogy guided in the curriculum.

Monitoring or evaluation of effective implementation at the programme level is another challenge for national governments.

Systematic evaluation and assessment

Determining a curriculum's effectiveness and relevance is challenging for many countries due to a lack of capacity at the policy level for conducting evaluations, collecting valid, informative, credible information and data, and assessment procedures and instruments that combine efficiency and being informative.

Norway's efforts

Norway has made considerable efforts to tackle the challenges.

To better define goals and content

Emphasising the importance of common values and respect for different cultures as a basis for the curriculum

Recognising the historical cultural background, Norway has based its curriculum (*Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*) on fundamental values in the Christian[1] and humanist heritage and tradition, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights. These values include a belief in human worth, empathy, forgiveness, community spirit, solidarity and shared responsibility. Kindergartens in Norway should promote human equality, human dignity, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health, sustainable development and respect for the environment. This indicates that kindergartens are assigned a societal role: its primary goal is described as to safeguard children's basic needs for care and play, promoting learning as the core of holistic, all-around development.

Kindergartens have the role to support each individual child whilst taking into account their common interests of all children in the group. Tolerance, solidarity, empathy and respect are highly important cornerstones of Norway's framework. There is also a strong emphasis on gender equality in the Norwegian framework.

Norway is not merely aiming at ECEC staff in its framework, but also children's parents or guardians, owners/managers of ECEC provisions and municipal authorities responsible for monitoring ECEC centres. The plan has been developed for all adults closely related to ECEC so as to stimulate children's early development, and early development is regarded as "collaboration" between these adults. Activities within ECEC centres should be carried out keeping in mind the values that guide the frameworks in order to promote responsibility and interest on the part of children and encourage their participation in society. The children and their parents are expected to contribute to activities and be included in processes.

Developing age-appropriate content based on children's needs and play

Age-appropriateness and needs-based pedagogy are highly valued aspects of the Norwegian plan. Norway aims at bringing different subjects and ways of learning into balance, forming a balanced whole where children develop broad knowledge. The daily rhythm and environment should be well-balanced according to children's age, including a good balance between care and rest and other activities. To make it easier for kindergartens to plan a varied and comprehensive pedagogical programme, the content of kindergartens in

Norway is divided into seven learning areas for children's experience, exploration and learning: 1) communication, language and text; 2) body, movement and health; 3) art, culture and creativity; 4) nature, environment and technology; 5) ethics, religion and philosophy; 6) local community and society; and 7) numbers, spaces and shapes.

Each learning area is intertwined with play. The framework indicates that conscious use of play to promote the development and learning of each individual child should always be present in preschool activities, as play and enjoyment in learning in all its various forms stimulate development. Additionally, instead of explaining or prescribing to staff how they should implement a learning area, each area is defined by a specific aim, *i.e.*, staff groups are free to choose methods to foster children's curiosity, creativity and thirst for knowledge.

The framework strongly emphasises the importance of building conscience within children about the environment and nature and respect for natural environments. Observation and reflection skills in young children are regarded as important and are expected to be stimulated in early development. Additionally, municipalities have the responsibility to ensure that kindergartens for Sámi children in Sámi districts are based on Sámi language and culture, and to ensure that Sámi children in all municipalities can secure and develop their language and their culture.

Specifying goals for staff's work, avoiding the use of individual child outcomes

Norway's framework specifies process aims to orientate the work of the kindergarten, ECEC staff and the quality development in kindergarten, but it does not define individual child outcomes. Each learning area includes such process aims to promote the development and learning of children and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff and what is expected of ECEC staff. These aims include examples, such as "helping children develop their understanding of concepts using a varied vocabulary", "becoming familiar with books, songs, pictures, etc.", "having positive experiences of outdoor activities and being outdoors in different seasons", and "learning about religions, ethics and philosophy as aspects of culture and society". The process aims for children are linked to descriptions, which specify the responsibilities of staff, and some topics are further elaborated in guidelines and support tools for staff. The aims describe the attitudes, ideas and values staff should strive to instil in children, including "solidarity and responsibility". The framework also clarifies expectations of staff with regard to the home environment of children and other educational services. Staff are expected to create good relationships with the parents of children and to co-operate with primary schools and other services. Sweden's curriculum also emphasises the importance of good communication and interaction as well as the involvement of parents in the early education of children.

Ensuring flexibility for local adaption of the curriculum to meet local needs

According to the Kindergarten Act, the owner of a kindergarten in Norway may adapt the framework to local conditions and to the interests and needs of individual children, the group and the local community; and this should be set out in the kindergarten's annual plan. Since preschool children are not a uniform group and children arrive at kindergartens with different backgrounds, the provision of an equal, high-quality day care programme requires individual adjustments to the service and local adjustments to the content. Kindergarten content shall be designed in such a way that feels relevant to individual children and to the group, and it should be included in the kindergarten's annual plan.

The kindergarten's co-ordinating committee, consisting of staff and parents, must establish the annual plan for the kindergarten's pedagogical activities. The staff and especially the pedagogical leaders are expected to carry out the pedagogical programme in each kindergarten in accordance with the framework, local adaptations and the annual plan.

Based on the different needs of children, centres can develop teaching material, methods of working, equipment and approaches.

Revising the framework and Kindergarten Act to reflect changing societal values

Norway's framework and its underlying Kindergarten Act have gone through several changes: The first framework was drafted in 1995 by a committee set up by the former Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration, consisting of researchers, practitioners, experts, policy makers and representatives from local authorities. The Sámi Assembly drafted a Sámi section for the framework. Both drafts were presented at public hearings, open for discussion and comments. Afterwards, the Ministry made a new draft for public hearing before the framework was established.

After a change of government in 2005, ministerial responsibility for kindergartens was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Research. A new Kindergarten Act (regulation) was established in 2005 to increase quality in kindergartens, enhance children's rights to participation and develop a new and expanded section concerning the content of kindergartens. The proposed content of the Act was presented at a public hearing where all stakeholders in the ECEC field, such as owners, parents, educators, researchers, other ministries, organisations and administrative bodies on various levels were invited to comment on the revised proposal to the regulation.

In 2007, changes to the Objectives/Purpose clause for both Kindergarten and Schools and Training Institutions were proposed by a public commission and accepted in 2008. The commission consisted of people with different professional backgrounds who came to an agreement towards a definition of the purpose clause for Norwegian education, including ECEC, schools and the VET sector. The report proposed a new formulation of objectives for kindergarten, primary and secondary education, and training. The objectives for kindergarten to compulsory education and training have the same structure and express the same value base. This can contribute to greater coherence between kindergartens, schools and training establishments.

The new purpose clause emphasises children's need for care and play, respect for human worth, intellectual freedom, charity, equality and solidarity as basic values of society and the Norwegian education system. The committee based its proposals on the following processes:

- The cultural tradition and a cultural diversity of Norway;
- The obligation to follow human rights conventions;
- The need to reflect greater coherence between kindergartens, primary and secondary education, and training;
- The need to reflect changes in the kindergarten sector and the education sector, while safeguarding the needs and distinctive natures of the institutions.

Following changes in the new Purpose Clause, changes to sections in the Kindergarten Act were needed. Due to the necessary changes in the Act as well, the new Purpose Clause for Kindergartens did not enter into force until August 2010. Additionally, the framework needed to be altered accordingly, and the revised version entered into force in January 2011.

Meeting with stakeholders on a structural basis to discuss ECEC to ensure buy-in

Norway organises ECEC roundtables in the form of a National Kindergarten forum twice per year, contributing to structural buy-in. During these roundtables, different ECEC topics and issues are discussed. Example subjects of discussion include funding, research and

knowledge on ECEC, legislation, quality aspects of ECEC, policy design and policy implementation. A wide range of stakeholders are invited and attend these roundtables, which are lead by the minister, including representatives from the ministry, the directorate for education and training, county governors, the national parent committee, the national research council, the national board for teacher education, organisations for centre owners, teacher organisations, staff organisations and representatives for big cities. These meetings are organised on a regular basis, providing opportunities for discussion, updating information, finding agreements and creating buy-in for decisions and changes.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Aligning with common values, indigenous values, and international conventions regarding children's rights

Norway's revised *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* strengthened in its latest version of 2011 the values that appear in different religions and beliefs, including empathy, forgiveness, a belief in human worth, community spirit, solidarity and shared responsibility. Kindergartens in Norway are explicitly encouraged to promote human equality, human dignity, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health, sustainable development and respect for the environment. This indicates that kindergartens are assigned a societal role: its primary goal is described as to safeguard children's basic needs for care and play, promoting learning as the core of holistic, all-around development. Tolerance, solidarity, empathy, respect and gender equality became more important cornerstones of Norway's framework.

Additionally, Norway has aligned its curriculum with international conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Its legislative framework (the Kindergarten Act and the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*) states the expectations concerning the quality of kindergartens, including conditions for learning and well-being. Norway introduced in 2005 a section in the Act giving "Children in kindergarten (...) the right to express their views on the day to day activities of the kindergarten". This is followed up in the framework. Children are seen as subjects or agents in their own right who should be met with respect in their diverse forms of communication.

On account of the special rights of Indigenous peoples, Norway has a special obligation to safeguard the interests of Sámi children and parents. This relates to the International Labour Organization's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Sámi children need to be enabled to retain and develop their language and culture regardless of where they live in Norway. Kindergartens in Sámi districts should be an integrated part of, and demonstrate the diversity, vigour and variety of, Sámi society. Sámi statutes include the aim of strengthening children's identity through the use of Sámi language and by teaching children about Sámi culture, ways of life and society. Important aspects of Sámi child rearing should be retained through working methods and everyday life. The programme of kindergartens must be arranged in such a way that children are involved in various work processes and are able to participate in cultural and social activities. It is crucial that staff speak Sámi in Sámi kindergartens. At kindergartens catering for Sámi children outside Sámi districts, parents and children are entitled to expect staff to be familiar with Sámi culture and to emphasise it as part of the kindergarten's programme.

Covering the entire ECEC age range as an integrated system

Norway's framework is designed for the country's integrated ECEC system, therefore covering the care and education of all children in ECEC aged zero to six (school starting age). The clauses for kindergarten, schools and vocational training have the same structure and express the same value base. This is done to contribute to greater coherence between

kindergartens, schools and training establishments. The purpose clause still reflects the uniqueness of kindergartens. Norway has also made a clear connection between the framework for ECEC and the curricula for Norwegian primary schools. The learning areas are, to a great extent, the same, as the subjects are similar in ECEC and primary school.

To ensure that children and parents receive as comprehensive a service as possible, helping children as they grow and develop, kindergartens must collaborate with other services and institutions in the municipality. Cross-disciplinary and holistic thinking is therefore of central importance in the Norwegian framework. Kindergartens in Norway have the obligation to, in collaboration with schools, facilitate the transition of children from a kindergarten to year one and to any after-school groups. This shall be done in close collaboration with the children's homes. Plans for the children's transition from kindergarten to school must be specified in the kindergarten's annual plan. Kindergartens should also, based on needs, co-operate with child welfare services, mother and child health clinics, pedagogical-psychological counselling services and educational establishments to ensure that children receive necessary help and support for child development.

For effective communication and implementation

Establishing a roundtable and a National Parents' Committee

Norway organised a roundtable discussion to define needs to inform stakeholders about curriculum changes and the priorities for an implementation strategy. Different stakeholders were invited: municipality organisations and kindergarten owners, trade-unions, universities/ university colleges, county governors and others. Information meetings were also held for country governors regarding the curriculum and its implementation.

In 2010, Norway established a National Parents' Committee for kindergartens (*Foreldreutvalget for Barnehager*). The committee was established to represent parents and advise the Ministry of Education and Research on matters of informing parents about ECEC-related matters. The National Parents' Committee also aims to strengthen the involvement and engagement of parents in ECEC through information and guidance.

Preparing guiding tools and materials for parents and staff

To support the implementation of its framework, Norway has issued guiding booklets on relevant themes, such as pedagogy for the youngest children, multiculturalism, children's agency and participation, language and language stimulation, numeracy, outdoor activities and gender equality. These booklets have been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and were authored by experts. The intention behind the booklets is to promote reflection and discussion between staff on the framework and the realisation of goals in local contexts.

National centres for central curriculum topics, such as multiculturalism, natural sciences, mathematics, reading and language development, and arts and culture, have been established in order to promote better teaching and learning from kindergarten through teacher education. The national centres are organised as independent units in association with universities/university colleges. They put together and present research and practice as well as materials, such as videos. These information sources and materials are shared with kindergartens and other parties of interest to inform them about the latest ECEC developments and stimulate information and knowledge development and exchange of information on these topics. They can also provide online education possibilities.

Setting up a dedicated online website by the ministry

In Norway, the website of the Ministry of Education and Research has a dedicated page to the content of kindergartens with extensive information and links to relevant documents. Furthermore, the ministry published a series of pamphlets that address issues and practices around different themes of relevance to the framework. Since 2012, the Directorate for Education and Training in Norway is responsible for the development of kindergartens and provides information and guidance to the sector. The directorate's website has a dedicated section for kindergartens with updated information on curriculum, pedagogies, legislation, research and statistics.

Enhancing staff competences and attract staff

In Norway, project funding was made available for the revised framework by the Ministry of Education for improving staff competences and recruitment of staff from 2007-10. Grants were conditional upon municipalities establishing plans for competence development, as well as an implementation plan aligned with national priorities, which are pedagogical leadership, children's participation, language environment, language development and learning, and collaboration and coherence between kindergartens and schools.

In addition, Norway emphasises that good management of ECEC centres is highly relevant for successful implementation of a curriculum. Norway learnt that resources should be well-managed and that the management team, including owners and head teachers, should inspire the rest of the staff in effective implementation. The kindergarten owner and management are also responsible for ensuring that their own and other staff's competences are sufficient and suitable for working in ECEC provisions and that staff work is goal-orientated. Additionally, kindergarten owners and their management are responsible for meeting the legislative standards and regulations. Strong management with capable people in the management team was found to be key to successful implementation in Norway. Therefore, one of the national priorities on competence development in ECEC in Norway is pedagogical leadership.

Regarding leadership training, a national education programme for head teachers in kindergartens was established in 2011. The Directorate for Education and Training manages the programme as well as the application process from public and private kindergartens. The programme is provided by five universities/university colleges with special expertise in leader training. It is offered to managers in kindergarten free of cost for the participants

Stimulating literacy development at home

In Norway, the projects *BOKTRAS*[2] *and LESEFRØ* were based on co-operation between public libraries and kindergartens with the aim of introducing young children to literature. It was a three-year project from 2005-08, which consisted of setting up branch libraries in kindergartens. The libraries involved reached out to more families than just the parents and children who already knew about and made use of library services. The project LESEFRØ was especially targeted towards kindergartens with a high proportion of immigrant children. The libraries use the kindergarten as an arena for the active promotion of literature, thereby helping to develop children's language and social skills.

Nowadays, many libraries have an ongoing co-operation with interested kindergartens as a result of these projects. Through co-operation between libraries and kindergartens, family access to children's books is not restricted by pressures of time, distance to the nearest library or opening hours.

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Assessing and monitoring kindergartens

In Norway, the municipal authorities are obliged to supervise/monitor kindergartens to see if the institution's practice is in accordance with legislation and the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*. Additionally, the work of kindergartens is internally being assessed. The quality of everyday interactions between people at the kindergarten is one of the most important factors for the development and learning of the children. This shall therefore be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Attention is 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, the framework and any local guidelines and plans.

A recent study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers shows that 55% of municipal authorities have developed local criteria for monitoring kindergarten content aligned with this legislation and framework. Municipalities report that they base monitoring activities on the following aspects: report of concern from parents and the public, advice from national authorities, the annual pedagogical plan produced by each kindergarten, and parents' responses to surveys on the quality of kindergarten.

Focusing on staff performance

Assessment practices in Norway regarding the curriculum and performance focus on staff pedagogical approaches – not individual performance of the child, as staff attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children are regarded as key in bringing up children to become participative, democratic members of society. As a basis for reflection and learning, Norway uses documentation so as to understand children's learning and allow staff to reflect on their work, the values and tasks of the kindergarten, and the role of play, learning and development. The well-being and development of the group of children and individual children are observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. If specific goals are set for individual children, there must be a reason for this, and the goals must be set in collaboration with parents and any external welfare services outside the kindergarten. This type of documentation is subject to a duty of confidentiality.

Evaluating the implementation of the framework

Vestfold University College in Norway has conducted an evaluation of how the framework is implemented, used and experienced. The evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research. It consists of two quantitative and two qualitative investigations among groups involved in the work: children, parents, preschool teachers, assistants, head-teachers, municipalities as local kindergarten authorities and county governors. The report shows many positive results concerning the implementation, but it also points out some challenges, such as the understanding of documentation and the mapping of children's development and learning, the need for competence in the sector and limited resources for implementation.

Possible alternative strategies: Lessons from Sweden and New Zealand

Alternative approaches from Sweden and New Zealand can provide "food for thought" in overcoming challenges.

To better define goals and content

Setting curriculum goals and guiding principles based on community and cultural values

New Zealand's curriculum approach is based on societal, communal and cultural values: the sense of community and cultural heritage and understanding. The curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is founded on the aspirations for all children in New Zealand to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. There are four broad principles at the centre of the early childhood curriculum: empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships. Five strands, or essential areas of learning and development, arise from these four principles. The five strands relate to well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. The curriculum includes a Māori immersion curriculum to recognise and meet the needs of the Māori population, and it also addresses the Tagata Pasifika culture to ensure that the language and culture of the Māori and Pasifika is protected, respected and supported. The curriculum is therefore bilingual and bicultural, developed in both English and Māori language.

Curriculum addressing different age groups

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum defines how progress towards learning in early childhood learning environments can be achieved. To ensure the framework is age-appropriate, the content is made for three different age groups within ECEC: infants (birth to eighteen months), toddlers (one to three years), and young children (two-and-a-half years to school entry age). *Te Whāriki* is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that children's needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings. For children who require resources alternative or additional to those usually provided within an early childhood education setting, an Individual Development Plan or Individual Education Plan (IDP or IEP) will be developed.

Te Whāriki takes up a model of learning that weaves together intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of discrete skills. The framework consists of four parts: 1) the principles of the curriculum; 2) its five strands; 3) goals for the early childhood years; and 4) examples of the links between early childhood education, the school years and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework for schools. The five strands or development focus on well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. Each of these five strands are linked with essential skills or learning areas, such as communication, language development, numeracy and mathematics, science, technology, social sciences, arts, health, work and study skills, problem-solving capabilities, social development and self-management.

Sweden and New Zealand regard the acquisition of observation and reflection skills in young children as important, as they are expected to stimulate early development. Their curricula encourage staff to teach children how to think for themselves, reflect on their own ideas and thoughts, and discuss different opinions to create mutual respect and understanding.

Developing goals for staff or child outcomes for identifying children's needs

Sweden's *Curriculum for the Preschool* also specifies goals for development to orientate the work of the preschool and the quality development in preschool but does not define child outcomes. The goals are linked to guidelines for staff, which specify staff responsibilities. The goals describe the attitudes, ideas and values staff should strive to instil in children, including "openness, respect, solidarity and responsibility", "developing abilities to listen,

reflect and express their own views and try to understand the perspectives of others", and "giving children the opportunity of understanding how their own actions can have an effect on the environment". The guidelines also clarify expectations of staff towards the home environment of children and other educational services. Staff are expected to create good relationships with the parents of children and to co-operate with the preschool classes for six-year-olds, primary schools and leisure time centres. Norway's framework likewise emphasises the importance of good communication and interaction as well as involvement of parents in the early education of children. In Norway, an annual plan should specify the kindergarten's work and set out how the stipulations of the Kindergarten Act on content will be followed up, documented and assessed.

Assessment practices in Norway and Sweden regarding curriculum and performance focus on staff pedagogical approaches – not the individual performance of the child – as staff attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children are regarded as key in bringing up children to become participative, democratic members of society. As a basis for reflection and learning, Norway uses documentation so as to understand children's learning and the work of staff to allow for reflection on the values and tasks of the kindergarten and on its role as an arena for play, learning and development. The well-being and development of the group of children and individual children shall be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis.

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum includes several dispositions, named learning outcomes, for each of its five strands: well-being, belonging, contributions of children, communication and exploration. These dispositions are encouraged rather than taught and, similar to the curricula in Nordic countries, reflect the holistic way children grow and learn: cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of human development are interwoven. The early childhood curriculum takes up a model of learning that weaves together intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of specific skills. The context around the child (physical surroundings, emotional context, relationships with others, and the child's immediate needs at any moment) will affect and modify how a particular experience contributes to the child's development. This integrated view of learning sees the child as a person who wants to learn, sees the task as a meaningful whole, and sees the whole as greater than the sum of its individual tasks or experiences.

Since *Te Whāriki* emphasises social relationships and personal well-being, outcomes are formulated in terms of relationships and well-being and is focused on the skills and abilities children should develop rather than actual attainment targets. For each strand, knowledge, skills and attitudes are described, and examples of experiences are given, which help to meet these outcomes. Examples of outcomes include: confidence and ability to express emotional needs, knowledge about how to stay healthy, and a sense of responsibility for one's well-being and that of others. For staff, questions for reflection are included, which aim at guiding staff in stimulating children in their development and improve staff pedagogy and quality. Additionally, for each strand and goal, adults' responsibilities in management, organisation and practice are explained. Each of the strands or learning areas also lists specific links to schooling to stimulate continuity between early childhood education and primary school. This section indicates the skills or attributes children will likely need when moving from ECEC to school to ensure continuous development and lifelong learning, *e.g.*, be able to work co-operatively; have experience in making choices and decisions, setting their own goals and using their initiative; understand basic concepts about rules, rights and fairness; and have established self-care skills.

Evaluation and assessment forms a part of *Te Whāriki*. The purpose of evaluation is to make informed judgments about the quality and effectiveness of the programme. The system of

evaluation focuses on how human relationships and the programme provide a learning environment, which is based on the goals of the curriculum. Evaluative procedures emphasise the quality of provision and make use of all the forms of assessment that can be carried out by both adults and children. The reflective questions listed in the curriculum provide one example of an evaluation process. People involved in providing the programme in each setting are encouraged to make evaluation part of their continuing dialogue.

Assessment in New Zealand involves, as it does in Norway and Sweden, intelligent observation of children by experienced and knowledgeable adults for the purpose of improving the programme. Meaningful insights from observation and reflection can occur when adults listen, watch and interact with an individual child or with groups of children. These continuous observations provide the basis of information for more in-depth assessment and evaluation that is integral to making decisions on how best to meet children's needs. *Te Whāriki* points out that assessment of children's learning and development should always focus on individual children over a period of time. Staff should avoid making comparisons between children since the needs of the children, not assessment procedures, should determine the curriculum.

Reviewing or analysing the curriculum to improve relevance to meet children's needs or ECEC goals

Sweden has reviewed and revised its preschool curriculum to increase and update its ECEC curriculum of 1998. The revised curriculum came into force July 2011. The pedagogical tasks of the preschool have been strengthened in the revised curriculum by clarifying the goals for language and communication, mathematics, natural science and technology. Furthermore, a new section for follow up, evaluation and development and a new section for the responsibility of the head of the preschool have been added.

The aim was to make the preschool even more instructive and to give preschool teachers responsibility according to their education. Evaluation has been a critical area for the staff, and the new guidelines will serve as supervision to develop the quality of the activities. Evaluating the quality of the preschool and creating good conditions for learning requires monitoring, documenting and analysing the child's learning and development. The aim of evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of preschool can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development. Ultimately, this involves developing better work processes, being able to determine whether the work takes place in accordance with the goals, and investigating which measures to take to improve the conditions for children to learn, develop, feel secure and have fun in preschool.

Early Childhood Education services in **New Zealand** each develop, based on the national *Te Whāriki* curriculum, their own curriculum programme for child development in accordance with the needs of children, parents and the community. Through the use of evaluative procedures, the programme will be continually or at least regularly modified, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children within the curriculum goals. New Zealand finds it important that the curriculum as a whole, or a particular range of experiences in the programme, is modified if not working well to meet the needs of children and the goals of the curriculum.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Linking the ECEC curriculum to primary schooling curriculum

New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum is linked to the country's Curriculum Framework for schools. The principles in the school curriculum put emphasis on a "natural connection" across learning areas and competencies as well as the positioning of the competencies as

parallel domains alongside the strands of *Te Whāriki*. For each of the strands of the ECEC curriculum (well-being, belonging, contributions of children, and communication and exploration), links have been made with the learning areas and skills in the school curriculum to smooth the transition from preschool to primary school. The emphasis in New Zealand has shifted towards expecting the school "to make connections" with the new entrant child's earlier experience, rather than the child arriving "ready for school". Strengthening links between the different early childhood education services has encouraged a growing appreciation of each other's differences and similarities.

For effective communication and implementation

Explaining curriculum in understandable language, avoiding technical terms

When the curriculum is explained in understandable language, staff and parents with different backgrounds have better knowledge of it. To achieve this, **New Zealand**'s *Te Whāriki* includes a dictionary of subject-specific terms used in the curriculum. This results in better implementation of the curriculum by educators and other ECEC staff; it can stimulate expanding the use of the curriculum by parents in home learning activities.

The National Agency for Education in **Sweden** developed a booklet focusing on resources in language stimulation presents examples and articles on how to actively engage parents in language stimulation both in and outside preschools. This is an example of explaining an important curriculum subject, namely language development, in understandable language.

Strengthening information provision on the curriculum online

The National Agency for Education in **Sweden** developed online support websites for staff, providing information, guidance and support regarding curriculum changes. Brochures were developed for the ECEC sector explaining the changes in the curriculum. These were sent to the providers and staff of ECEC centres.

The website[3] of **New Zealand**'s Ministry of Education provides widespread information about the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, including the entire curriculum document, guidelines for staff, assessment practices and news on the curriculum. It gives examples of practices staff can use in their ECEC centre, and it gives information on changes or examples of curriculum implementation and on professional development programmes. The Ministry has its own official online magazine, the *Education Gazette*[4], containing news articles, notices and vacancies and providing a monthly update to the early childhood education sector.

Developing practical example experiences to complement the curriculum

The curriculum framework for ECEC in **New Zealand** provides professionals with examples of experiences that help meet the outcomes of the curriculum. The guidance is divided into experiences helpful for infants, toddlers and young children to ensure practices and activities are age-appropriate. It provides ideas for activities and what is important to keep in mind for staff working with children. It also sets out questions for reflection for staff members, which help professionals analyse what they could improve when implementing the curriculum.

Revising initial education and providing demands-driven training

Sweden focuses training on relevant curriculum subjects to strengthen staff knowledge of the curriculum and particular subjects, such as language development, mathematics, experimental sciences and child assessment through observation and documentation of learning and well-being. To strengthen staff competence, Sweden has allocated SEK 600 million on continuing education for preschool teachers and child minders for a three-year period from 2009-11 under the programme "The boost for preschool". The programme

consists of in-service training (university courses) for preschool teachers (ten weeks) and childminders (five weeks) targeted on language/communication and mathematics. Pedagogical leaders for preschool are also offered university courses (30 ECTS, 20 weeks) in language/communication and mathematics and follow-up and evaluation. Teachers and child minders keep 80% of their salary during the study period, co-funded by the government and the preschool principal organisers. This initiative gave staff and management more competence to work with the new, clarified goals in the Swedish curriculum. A key lesson learned from Sweden is that staff competence is decisive for quality in preschool. The education and skills of preschool teachers are one of the most important factors ensuring a successful preschool system. To work in accordance with the curriculum, staff must have good knowledge of young children's development and learning.

New Zealand focuses in staff training on the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, and provides training to improve learning outcomes for all young children, especially those at risk. Teachers are expected to strengthen their teaching practices. The government also provides training to support the implementations of *Kei Tua o Te Pae*, Assessment for Learning. Teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

Improving working conditions to stimulate effective implementation

In 2004, **Sweden** granted an increase of SEK 2 million of state funding to local authorities for the employment of 6 000 additional preschool teachers and child assistants. The grant was intended to reduce class sizes and improve staff-child ratios to 1:5 on average for zero to six years to improve the quality of ECEC and qualitative curriculum implementation.

Pay parity between kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in **New Zealand** has made Early Childhood Education (ECE) teaching a more attractive occupation. A funding system that provides incentives for services to employ more ECE-qualified registered teachers has meant that services can afford to pay better salaries and significant increase the number of registered teachers in the workforce, leading to more qualified teachers in ECE centres who are trained in curriculum and its implementation.

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Integrating "curriculum" as part of evaluation or assessment practices

In **Sweden**, the quality of the preschool is regularly and systematically documented, followed up and evaluated. Evaluating the quality of preschool and creating good conditions for learning requires that curriculum implementation and the child's learning and development are monitored, documented and analysed. The aim of such evaluations is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of the preschool, *i.e.*, its organisation, curriculum adaption, content and actions, can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development. Analyses of the results of evaluation indicate areas that are critical for development. All forms of evaluation of quality, pedagogy and activities take the perspective of the child as the starting point. Children and parents can participate in evaluation, and their views are to be given prominence, according to the curriculum. Additionally, self-evaluation kits have been developed so that ECEC professionals can evaluate their knowledge of the curriculum framework and implementation of the framework.

New Zealand implemented *Kei Tua o te Pae*[5], Assessment for Learning, in which teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. The national government offers training on this assessment practice to ECEC staff. The curriculum programme is evaluated in terms of its capacity to provide activities and relationships that stimulate early development. Such assessment ought to be a

two-way process. Children's self-assessment can inform adults' assessment of learning, development and the environment by providing insights that adults may not have identified and by highlighting areas that could be included or focused on for assessment. Children and parents can help in deciding what should be included in the process of assessing the programme and the curriculum.

New Zealand also uses child assessment/development practices to reflect on curriculum design and implementation. Children's experiences are described in a Learning Story Framework by staff and children, which focuses on assessment in a narrative form, as a story, a connection between the individual learner and the environment. It takes the view that children leave early childhood settings for further education with some well-established learning narratives or working theories: packages of inclination, knowledge and skills to do with being a learner. The initiative has been released with videos, accompanying readings and workshops, and has provided a useful way for children and practitioners to reflect on ways to implement curriculum and assessment and to locally adapt *Te Whāriki*.

NOTES

1 Private kindergartens/owners are at liberty in their statutes to determine that the values referred to in section 1, shall not be based on fundamental values of the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition. (Kindergarten Act section 1 a)

2 www.splq.info/issues/vol40_3/10.htm

3 www.educate.ece.govt.nz/

4 www.edgazette.govt.nz/

5 www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/Assessmentforlearning/KeiTuaotePae.apx

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ANNEX

DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

A **curriculum framework** (**guidelines** or **standards**) is a tool which can guide the content of and approach to children's care and learning.

Curriculum contents can be organised into subject elements or areas. ECEC elements or subject areas highlight priorities and clarify how care, pedagogies and teachings are organised. In the OECD Network on ECEC's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal" (2011), countries were asked to choose from a list of nine ECEC elements or subject areas:

1. **Literacy**: refers to all subjects related to reading and writing, including language learning and development, and word recognition.
2. **Numeracy**: refers to all subjects related to numbering and counting, including calculations, number recognition, spaces and shapes.
3. **Science**: refers to all scientific subjects, such as geography and natural science.
4. **Arts**: refers to all subjects related to some form of art, including drawing, colouring, painting and handicrafts.
5. **Music**: refers to all subjects involving music, such as singing, playing musical instruments and dancing to music.
6. **Physical education**: refers to all instructed subjects that require physical effort or are related to physical well-being, such as gymnastics, sports and classes about food or hygiene.
7. **Practical skills**: refers to all practices related to practical skills not mentioned in one of the other subjects (*e.g.*, tying shoe-laces).
8. **Playtime**: refers to the time children can play freely, *i.e.*, child-initiated play: the time that a child can decide for him- or herself what he/she wants to do and play with (inside or outside).
9. **Activities outside ECEC institutions** (external activities): refers to field trips, such as outings to museums, public parks, libraries, concerts, and art and science centres.

There were an additional seven subject areas identified by countries/regions, including religion; ethics and democratic citizenship; health, personal and/or social well-being; social sciences and/or inter-cultural education; ICT; languages (foreign); and learning approaches.

The findings presented here are based on data from the OECD Network on ECEC's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal" (2011). For each graph and table, the countries or regions for which data is used are listed.

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