



Towards Opportunities for Disadvantaged and
Diverse Learners on the Early childhood Road

Report

Promoting the Wellbeing of Toddlers within Europe

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Introduction to the Report

The TODDLER Project focuses on one of the EU Commission's priority themes for 2009-2010 identified in EURYDICE (2009), by supporting early years' practitioners, teachers and students in their understanding of how to promote development of toddlers (aged 18 to 36 months) from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

“The policy challenge, therefore, is to (re)build (current) systems of early childhood care and education that meet crucial design features as outlined above, that provide high quality care and education for all children, that are integrated, attractive and affordable to all families regardless social class or minority status, yet that is sensitive to differing educational needs and to compensate early educational disadvantages” (EURYDICE, 2009:39)

The aim of the TODDLER Project is to develop reflective practitioners who can promote and improve practice to provide effective early years care and education for diverse and disadvantaged toddlers in reaching their full potential.

This report has been compiled using experiences and expertise from each partner country exploring the different contexts and perspectives of wellbeing that influences practice. These materials have been left verbatim, as far as possible, to maintain the context and originality of each country.

Each partner has been asked to provide a definition of wellbeing and to identify their country's underpinning legislation and research on wellbeing. This information has been compiled into a report/handbook which can be used as teaching materials in conjunction with the PowerPoint.

Contents include:

- Definitions of wellbeing
- Theoretical backgrounds
- Literature Reviews
 - Curriculum documents
 - Piece of National Research
 - Recommended Reading

These materials are photocopiable for teaching purposes.



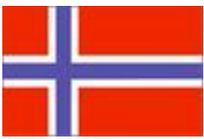
Norway

Definitions of wellbeing

Wellbeing is a positive physical, mental and social state. It is enhanced by conditions that include positive personal relationships with adults and peers, an environment that promotes challenging indoor and outdoor play activities, and an inclusive community that allows the individual child to experience joy and happiness, to unfold his/her potential and to express his/her view on the ongoing activities.

Rothle M. and Morkeseth E. I.

This is based on the analyses of quotations from the Framework Plan as well as the Norwegian tradition within Early Childhood Education and Care, we can formulate more explicitly what is meant by the term “children’s wellbeing in kindergarten”:



Norway

Theoretical background to children's wellbeing

There exists no official definition of well-being in legislation/political documents and very few books/articles are coded with the keyword well-being. This does not mean that children's wellbeing is not focused on. The term wellbeing (Norwegian "trivsel") is used frequently in everyday language and is also found in the national curriculum. We will present quotes about *well-being* from the Kindergarten Act (legislation) and the national Framework Plan (Curriculum), interpret and analyze these texts in order to unveil how children's well-being is understood in Norway.

The Kindergarten Act

The Kindergarten Act (2005) mentions wellbeing in the description of the purpose of kindergartens:

Section 1 Mission statement of kindergartens (...) The kindergarten shall meet the children with confidence and respect, and recognize childhood as a phase of life with an intrinsic value. The kindergarten shall contribute to wellbeing and joy in play and learning and be a challenging and safe place for community and friendship. The kindergarten shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all kinds of discrimination.

Interpretation:

The term "wellbeing" is here connected to "joy", describing positive feelings. The Norwegian word for wellbeing is "trivsel" which derives from the same root as the English verb "thrive". The term "trivsel" means something alike: good looking, feeling well, flourishing, growing evenly and developing harmoniously. It is not about a good mood in a short moment, more about a positive state of mind and feelings in general or in a specific situation. In the mission statement wellbeing is connected with "joy" and "learning". Wellbeing and joy is intended to be some of the fruits of play and learning.

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens

The issue of wellbeing is explained further in five sections of the national *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergarten* (Ministry of Education, 2006). In the following, we will show under which headlines wellbeing is mentioned, and then interpret the quotations from the national curriculum.

Collaboration with the homes of the children (...)Two concepts in the law, understanding and collaboration, cover different aspects of the contact between kindergartens and parents. Understanding means mutual respect and recognition of each other's responsibilities and tasks in relation to the child. Collaboration means, regular contact during which information and reasoning is exchanged. Questions relating to the wellbeing and development of children shall be discussed, along with the pedagogical activities of the kindergarten. This collaboration shall make it possible to develop the mutual understanding needed to deal with dilemmas that

may arise when the considerations of an individual child have to be seen within the context of the group of children.

Parents and the staff of kindergartens have a joint responsibility for the wellbeing and development of children (Framework Plan, 2006:9).

Interpretation:

This section is about the collaboration with the parents, which highlights the shared responsibility for the overall development and wellbeing of the children. Linking development and wellbeing means that wellbeing is seen as a condition for child development as well as developing will bring about the child's wellbeing. The adults' main task is defined as fostering children's wellbeing and overall development.

Physical environments that promote the development of all children. Kindergartens shall have sufficient space and equipment to allow play and varied activities that promote a love of exercise, and provide a wide range of motor and sensory experiences, as well as the opportunity to learn and master skills. Alternating between play, learning, concentration and expression is necessary for physical and psychological well-being. The design of the physical outdoor and indoor environment provides an important framework for children's well-being, experiences and learning. Staff in kindergartens must look at the physical frameworks for children's learning environments as an entity. The countryside and local neighbourhood also provide opportunities for experiences and challenges (Framework Plan, 2006:11).

Interpretation:

In this section wellbeing is defined to comprise two aspects; physical and psychological. Physical wellbeing has to be cared for by creating a varied physical environment to enhance a wide range of motor and sensory experiences (indoors and outdoors). The psychological wellbeing is dealing with children's socio-emotional state and related to children's encounters with peers and adults in the group.

An inclusive community with space for individual children. The content of kindergartens shall be designed in such a way that it feels relevant to the individual children and to the group. The care and learning environment at kindergartens shall promote the well-being, happiness, sense of achievement and self-esteem of children. Kindergartens must support and challenge individual children on their own terms, and help them to enjoy a meaningful life together with other children and adults (Framework Plan, 2006:12).

Interpretation:

In this section the enhancement of the individual wellbeing is intertwined within the community life in kindergarten. The promotion of children's wellbeing is linked to the promotion of positive feelings like happiness, sense of achievement and self-esteem. The main task is children's psychological growth, which can be supported by creating a caring, challenging and inclusive community of adults and peers. This means that the individual well-being is contingent upon the wellbeing of the group.

Play shall play a prominent role in life at kindergartens. Play has intrinsic value and is an important part of child culture. Play is a universal human phenomenon, which

children are skilled at and enjoy. It is a fundamental lifestyle and way of learning through which children can express themselves.

Play has many forms of expression, and can lead to understanding and friendship across ages and linguistic and cultural barriers. Playing together forms the foundation for children's friendships with one another. Participating in play and making friends form the basis for the well-being of children and for the opinions they form at kindergartens. Through interaction with each other, they form the foundations for learning and social skills. On the other hand, forced exclusion from play prevents friendship and appropriate relationships (Framework Plan, 2006:16).

Interpretation:

Play is seen as a universal human phenomenon, as children's fundamental lifestyle and as a way of learning and expression. The interpersonal relationships in play and the creation of friendships are designated to be fundamental to children's well-being.

Assessment of the kindergarten's work. The quality of the everyday interactions between people at the kindergarten is one of the most important factors for the development and learning of the children. The well-being and development of the group of children and individual children shall therefore be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Attention must be paid to interaction amongst the children, between children and staff and amongst the staff. The work of the kindergarten shall be assessed, i.e. described, analysed and interpreted, in relation to criteria set out in the Kindergarten Act, this Framework Plan and any local guidelines and plans (Framework Plan, 2006:30).

Interpretation:

The curriculum tells that the ongoing assessment should focus on the wellbeing of the group as well as the wellbeing of the individual child. The quality of everyday interaction is emphasized as a key factor for children's development, learning and wellbeing. Nevertheless, particular observation tools to assess wellbeing do not exist.

Children's participation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the fact that children are entitled to express their views on everything that affects them, and that their views should always be taken into consideration. (...)

Children express their feelings both through body language and through words. The youngest children express their views through body positions, mimicry and other forms of emotional expression. Children's emotional expressions shall be taken seriously. Children must be helped to wonder about things and to ask questions. They must be actively encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions, and must receive acknowledgement for doing so. The seeds of inconsiderate behaviour, bullying and lack of empathy may be found in violations to the child's self esteem.

Kindergartens must operate on the basis of children's own ways of expressing themselves. Staff must listen to and attempt to interpret their body language, and must be observant in relation to their actions, aesthetic expressions and eventually

their verbal communications. Kindergartens must allow for the different perspectives of different children, and must respect their intentions and realms of experience (Framework Plan, 2006:8-9).

Interpretation:

The curriculum is concerned with the children's right to express their opinion and underlines the adult's task to take all kind of expressions into account. Especially the non verbal communication through body language is highlighted as an important message about the child's emotional state. A listening and observant staff seem to be a condition for respecting children's different intentions and realms of experience.

Summary

Based on the analyses of quotations from the Framework Plan as well as the Norwegian tradition within Early Childhood Education and Care, we can formulate more explicitly what is meant by the term "children's wellbeing in kindergarten":

Wellbeing is a positive physical, mental and social state. It is enhanced by conditions that include positive personal relationships with adults and peers, an environment that promotes challenging indoor and outdoor play activities, and an inclusive community that allows the individual child to experience joy and happiness, to unfold his/her potential and to express his/her view on the ongoing activities.

A theoretical rationale for the importance of young children's socio-emotional wellbeing and how it may be promoted, is outlined in the article written by Associate professor Gerd Abrahamsen, UiS.*

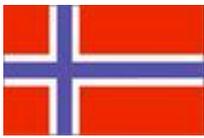
Reference:

Abrahamsen, Gerd (2011) The necessary interaction (work title) Article in progress.

Framework Plan for the content and Tasks of Kindergartens, Ministry of Education 2006

Further information available at:

http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd/dok/lover_regler/forskrifter/2011/forskrift-om-rammeplan-for-barnehagens-i.html?id=631906 (Accessed 22.6.2011)



Norway

Literature Review

Curriculum Documents

Norway. Ministry of Education (2006) *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergarten*. Ministry of Education

Available at:

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd/Selected-topics/kindergarden.html?id=1029>

The first Framework Plan for Kindergartens came in 1995, and was built on the Norwegian kindergarten tradition, with emphasis on the social- emotional function of the kindergarten. The next plan came into force in 2006. This plan reflects that the kindergarten has got a new role to play in the educational system. It is built on the international conventions, to which Norway is a signatory, including the ILOs Convention number 169, concerning Indigenous and Tribal People, and the UN Convention on the Right of the Child. The child's right to freedom of expression is strongly underpinned, so is also documentation as a basis for reflections and learning. The kindergarten is more seen as a pedagogical institution. The plan identifies seven learning areas that are of central importance to experience, exploration and learning. These areas are largely the same as the subjects that children subsequently encounter in school. The learning areas are:

Communication, language and text

Body, movement and health

Art, culture and creativity

Nature, environment and technology

Ethics, religion and philosophy

Local community and society

Number, spaces and shapes

The plan has also a chapter about collaboration with other services and institutions in the municipality, such as the child welfare service, mother and child health clinics, the schools and pedagogical -psychological counselling service.

In 2010, a new Kindergarten Act was introduced by the Storting (parliament), leading up to minor changes in the Framework Plan in 2011. This updated version of the Framework plan is still not, by the end of June 2011, translated into English.

National Research

Children's participation in a relational perspective – focus on the youngest children in kindergartens.

The project is a network project between 6 Universities/University Colleges in Norway, funded by The Research Council of Norway. In close cooperation with practitioners in the field and through explorative designs the project studies various dimensions and situations which shed light on children's participation.

The project consists of 6 sub-projects with a common focus on the youngest preschool children (ages 1-3). The projects investigate various themes such as playful expressions, learning situations, ethical and pedagogical challenges, meal times as spaces for participation and various ways to document children's participation. An important overall theoretical conception is that children's participation must be understood as something other than individualistic self-determination. Neither can it be reduced to top-down decided methods or routines. The various sub-projects presuppose that everyday meetings between people in kindergartens are central for children's participation and learning. In addition, adults' ethical beliefs and views about children and learning are regarded as essential.

The projects will investigate how practitioners, students and teachers in preschool teacher education can become more critical and conscious of their own ways of being and frames of reference in relation to children's participation and learning.

Objectives:

- To develop new knowledge about young children as participants in everyday routines, play and learning activities in kindergartens.
- To contribute to opportunities for kindergarten staff to critically reflect on their own frames of reference and ways of being.
- To participate in collaborative processes which can contribute to change.
- To contribute to new perspectives on learning and curriculum studies, and the development of professional thinking for use in preschool teacher education and in kindergartens.
- To develop a network across educational institutions.

6 sub-projects:

1. The learning areas of kindergartens in tension between adults' authority and the participation of the youngest children. Assistant professor Anne Tove Fennefoss and Assistant professor Kirsten E. Jansen

2. Documenting and reflecting on young children's participation in kindergarten – a cooperative project with kindergartens in Tromsø. Lecturer Toril Sverdrup and lecturer Anne Myrstad

3. Meal time with the youngest children in kindergarten – democracy's cradle? Assistant professor/ PhD candidate Berit Grindland

4. Young children's expressions and adults' understanding. PhD candidate Nina Johannesen

5. The youngest children's positioning in pedagogical processes in kindergarten. PhD candidate Ninni Sandvik

6. Playful-humoristic interaction as a part of children's participation. Professor Berit Bae

The findings of the project is described in: Bae, B. (red)(2012): *Medvirkning i barnehagen. Potensialer i det uforutsette*. Bergen. Fagbokforlaget.
www.medvirkning.no/formidling

Recommended Reading

Drugli, May Britt (2010) *Liten i barnehagen. Forskning, teori og praksis*, (in English: *The youngest children in kindergarten. Research, theory and practice*). Oslo: Cappelen Damm AS.

The book has its starting point in the transactional model (Sameroff 1975, 2000). The child's development is understood as transactional processes between the child and its environment. For children in kindergarten this means processes between the child, the parents and the staff.

The attachment between the child and the adults, both the parents and the kindergarten staff, is discussed. So is also the adult's self-insight and reflection on their capacity to build a secure base for the child. Through presentation of research, the author gives the reader a broad presentation of the kindergartens effect on the child's development; emotional, physical development, cognitive and language development, social functioning and behavioral difficulties. Children at risk are also addressed.

The book focuses on the responsibility the practitioner in kindergarten has to establish and maintain high quality in the relations both with the child and the parents, and within the staff-team. It shows, through research, how problems in one of the relations will foster problems in the other relation.

It discusses practical examples of how kindergartens can build up good environments; to give the child a good transition period between the home and the kindergarten, the importance of the encounters that is taking place in the morning and in the afternoon, the staffs understanding of small children in general and the specific child and its parents in special. We find the book important both because it presents research, gives practical examples and strongly points out the role of the practitioners in kindergarten.

Abrahamsen, Gerd (2012) *Holding the child in mind. The emotional quality of interaction between young children and their caregivers and its implications for the capacity to learn*.

The article highlights the importance of socio-emotional wellbeing and supportive child-adult relationships and their implication for the child's capacity to learn. The author presents a theoretical rationale for the toddler's need of a 'secure base',

'mirroring' of feelings, 'life company' and 'transitional objects' in early years settings. Departing from examples of interaction episodes in toddler groups, the author will discuss possible challenges for the educational work. The author is an expert in early childhood studies at UiS, publishing research articles and books about the educational work with children under three.