Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

SWEDEN

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Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sweden 2013

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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 Sweden'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, Sweden has selected **Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards** for its current policy focus.

The OECD Secretariat would like to thank the national co-ordinator, Mr. Christer Tofténius, for his work in providing information. We would also like to thank all those who gave their time to respond to our many questions, provide 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 always been an important topic in Sweden 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. Of the five aspects, Sweden considers improving quality through curriculum as a priority; 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 it can act as a bridge between staff and parents for information sharing about what children do in centres as well as facilitate 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.

Sweden 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; providing a well-balanced holistic content; and recognising the importance of parental opinions.

Sweden's ECEC curriculum (*Läroplan för Förskolan – Lpfö 98*, revised 2010) is overall a cogent, legally binding document that addresses the values and principles that guide ECEC programmes with accompanying documents that indicate what is expected from centres and staff. The curriculum provides continuous child development through the use of one national framework plan for ECEC; putting the child and play at the centre of the curriculum; balancing content by addressing academic and socio-emotional development; reflecting on parental opinions and expectations, and addressing respect for cultural values.

International comparative data suggests potential areas of reflection for Sweden, such as furthering guidance for staff in identifying children's needs; revisiting alignment with primary schooling; reflecting upon emerging content areas; and furthering communication, leadership and teaching management skills.

Capitalising upon its strengths, Sweden could further enhance quality through curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) mapping or identifying children's needs through complementing the curriculum with pedagogical examples or questions for reflection; 2) reflecting on content addressing social integration aspects through language learning; 3) improving explicit alignment with primary schooling; 3) 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; 4) further improve communication and dissemination by staff, as well as leadership and teaching management, for effective implementation of the curriculum and stimulation of early development.

Sweden has undertaken measures to tackle challenges in enhancing quality through curriculum by, among others, revising the integrated curriculum for the entire ECEC age range to improve relevance; developing holistic curriculum content based on children's needs; developing practical support materials for staff; and using observations by staff to monitor children's development.

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. Sweden has made several efforts to tackle these challenges by, for example, covering the entire ECEC age range as an integrated system with one national framework; taking into account children's varying conditions and needs when developing content; providing support materials for staff in identifying children's needs and implementation of curriculum, such as guidelines and videos; and assessing curriculum outcomes using observation techniques.

To further their efforts, Sweden could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand, Norway and Portugal, such as developing curriculum content for different ages and development groups; explicitly linking the ECEC curriculum to the primary school curriculum; including practical examples in the curriculum to support staff and stimulate development at home; and evaluating the implementation 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 in terms of "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, Sweden has selected "designing and implementing curriculum and standards" to be the theme of its policy profile. As reference countries in focus for international comparison, Sweden has selected New Zealand, Norway and Portugal.

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, matter 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 Sweden stand compared to other countries?

Chapter two provides an international comparative overview of where your country stands regarding curriculum design. It identifies the strengths and areas for reflection for Sweden in comparison with the selected reference countries. The chapter can provide insight into which aspects of curriculum Sweden might consider taking policy action on, and it 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 a quick overview of what New Zealand, Norway and Portugal 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 content 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, 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 the 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 the 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). 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 content places the same value on social and cognitive learning (Sheridan *et al*., 2009, Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

It should be noted that "mixed models" combining 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 the "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

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 literacy for language development and reading outcomes (UNESCO, 2007). Literacy has also been consistently linked to improved school performance and achievement as well as higher productivity later in life. Evidence suggests that 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 learning literacy. 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 should be implemented on a wide scale, especially for disadvantaged children. 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, as 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, such as "Alive!" (the study of living vs. non-living things), 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 participation is not only important in order to facilitate effective learning of different curriculum elements but can be important in its own right and 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 (only when age-appropriate and possible) 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).

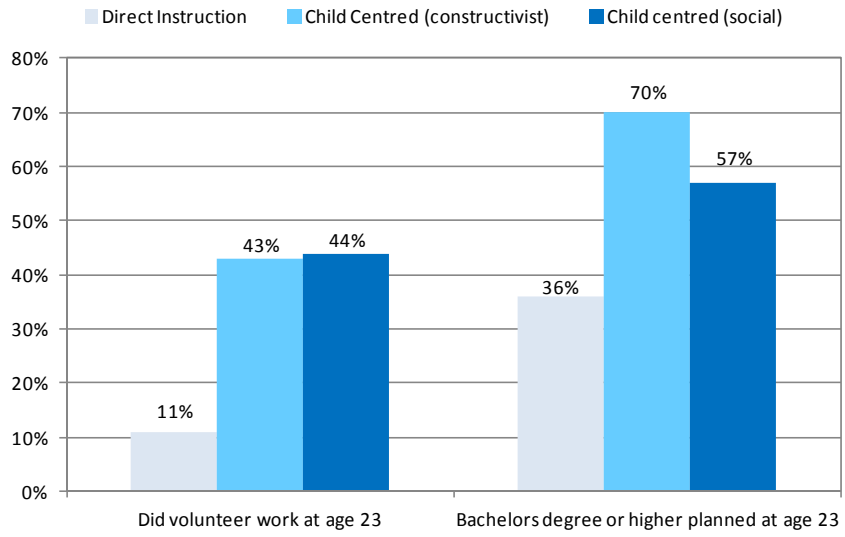
Child-initiated learning

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 1.1). These skills have been found to be strong predictors of subsequent achievement (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 2007). However, as pointed out earlier, 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):

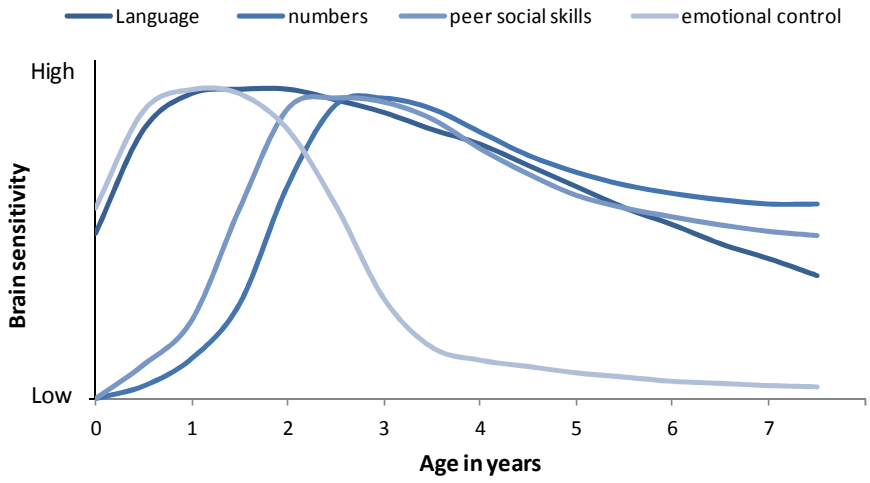
Emotional control and peer social skills

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 activities. Experiments like these have been able to identify the importance of friends, staff, 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 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 aged 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 1.1 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.

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CHAPTER 2

WHERE DOES SWEDEN STAND COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES?

*Sweden's ECEC curriculum (*Läroplan för Förskolan – Lpfö 98*, revised 2010) is a cogent and legally binding document that addresses the values and principles that guide ECEC programmes with specific references to what is expected from centres and staff. It provides continuous child development through the use of a national framework plan for ECEC, putting the child and play at the centre of the curriculum, balancing content by addressing academic and socio-emotional development, and reflecting parental opinions and expectations.*

Capitalising upon its strengths, Sweden could further enhance quality through curriculum. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) mapping or identifying children's needs through complementing the curriculum with pedagogical examples or questions for reflection; 2) reflecting on content addressing social integration through language learning; 3) improving explicit alignment with primary schooling; 3) reflecting upon content areas to respond to societal changes; and 4) further strengthening communication and dissemination by staff, as well as leadership and teaching management, for effective implementation of the curriculum and stimulation of early development.

Sweden's ECEC curriculum (*Läroplan för Förskolan – Lpfö 98*, revised 2010) is overall a cogent document that addresses the values and principle that guides ECEC programmes with specific references to what is expected from centres and staff. Among its strengths are its holistic orientation and aspects of play and child agency that are integral to the framework. The curriculum stimulates knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and promotes democracy. Some areas for reflection and consideration are identified with Sweden's curriculum, mainly related to implementation or strengthening staff skills to respond to changes in society.

Sweden's curriculum is, as Norway's framework plan, also a legally binding document, while New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* and Portugal's curriculum guidelines are not. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* has, due to its non-legal status, 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 curriculum.

Strengths

Continuous holistic child development approach throughout the ECEC period

Sweden, like New Zealand and Norway, has an integrated ECEC system under one lead ministry. These three countries seek to integrate education and care in order to provide holistic child development. 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 to ECEC is seen through the use of a single curriculum framework covering children from birth until compulsory education (Figure 2.1). The school starting age may differ: in Sweden it starts at the age of seven, while in Norway it starts at the age of six and in New Zealand at the age of five.

Portugal operates a "split" system where the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is responsible for child care (zero-to-three-year-olds), while early education is governed by the Ministry of Education (three-to-six-year-olds). Many countries with a split system have created a learning framework for children in the older age bracket of ECEC only: from around age two-and-a-half or three to compulsory schooling. Portugal's *Core Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education* issued by the Ministry of Education covers children from the age of three until the age of six – the compulsory schooling age in Portugal.

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.

Curriculum based on clearly stated values promoting lifelong learning and equity

In Sweden, democracy forms the foundation of the preschool. The Education Act of Sweden (2010:800) stipulates that education in the preschool aims at children acquiring and developing knowledge and values. ECEC is expected to promote all children's development and learning and a lifelong desire to learn. An important task of the preschool is to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. Each and every person working in the preschool should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as respect for the environment.

The Swedish curriculum also indicates that upholding these fundamental values requires that the attitudes from which they are derived are clearly apparent in daily activities. The

activities of the preschool should be carried out democratically and thus provide the foundation for a growing responsibility and interest on the part of children to actively participate in society.

The values of Norway's *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* are similar to Sweden's, but they are based on Christian and humanist values. This means that kindergartens (*barnehager*) in Norway should base their activities on ethical values rooted in Christianity[1] and humanism – which are assumed to be widely held by the Norwegian population. The Christian and humanist values upon which the plan is based include empathy, forgiveness, a belief in human worth, equality, common responsibility, honesty and fairness. Kindergartens in Norway should also promote human dignity, equality, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health, sustainable development and respect for the environment.

New Zealand's curriculum document and Norway's revised framework plan of 2011 emphasise the importance of belonging to a community and society. The *Te Whāriki* curriculum of New Zealand emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things. *Te Whāriki* 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, indicating that the upbringing of children is a community-wide responsibility.

Well-balanced, age-appropriate content covering cognitive and socio-emotional subject areas

All four countries (Sweden and its reference countries) feel age-appropriate pedagogy and content is important for child development. Activities ought to be adapted and suitable to children's level of function, current knowledge and understanding. The instruction aims at taking into account the age of children as well as children's cultural, religious, linguistic, socio-economic and ideological backgrounds. The starting point for Nordic countries and New Zealand is the experience children have already gained, their interests, motivation and ambition to acquire knowledge. New Zealand includes 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. Portugal takes a more outcomes-based approach for three-to-six-year-old children, as their Curriculum Guidelines include child outcomes (Table 2.1).

The Swedish Curriculum and the Norwegian framework take a wide, encompassing view of what facilitates child development, involvement and well-being, while many countries tend to focus on certain topics. Both include 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" that are related to active participation in society and lifelong learning.

All respondents to the OECD survey, including Sweden, New Zealand, Norway and Portugal, include literacy and numeracy in their curriculum or framework. Curriculum content relating to natural sciences is included by all countries (including Sweden and its reference countries). However, New Zealand, Norway and Portugal all include "social sciences" in their curricula, whereas Sweden does not (Figure 2.2).

"Arts" and "music" are other common subjects included in curriculum frameworks. All countries (including Sweden, New Zealand, Norway and Portugal) include both curriculum areas. All also address practical skills in their frameworks, although not always as a separate

subject in itself but as integrated in, or interwoven with, other subjects, such as well-being and health. Unlike Norway, Sweden, New Zealand and Portugal do not prescribe "religion" or "ethics and citizenship" as specific subject areas in their curricula. Although not prescribed as a specific topic, the Swedish curriculum does address the values and principles that should guide ECEC programmes, which are largely based on democratic societal values. The Norwegian framework prescribes that kindergartens should include values and traditions from a humanist cultural heritage, while taking into account the religious and ideological diversity of children and families. New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* addresses the values and expectations society holds with a strand dedicated to belonging and states that children should be comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events in their environment.

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

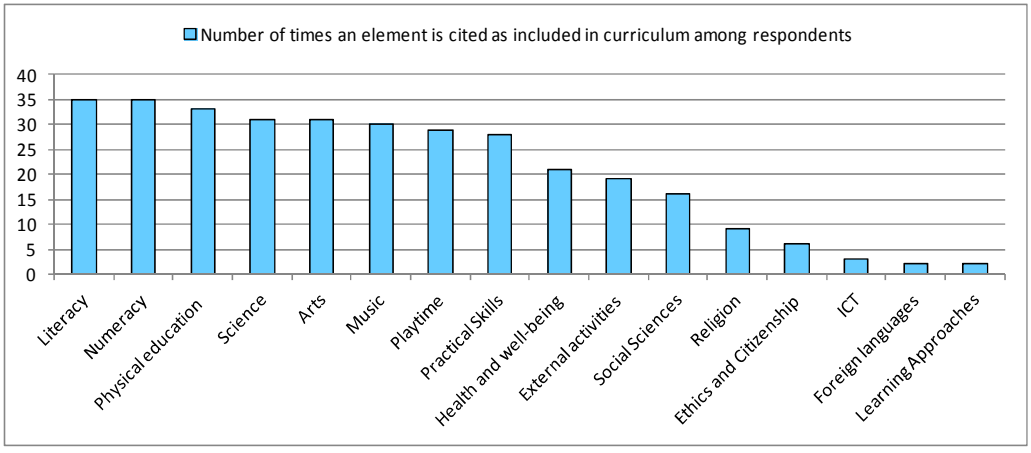
Name of programme/approach	Background theory or theorist	Main features
Didactic Curriculum/ Direct Instruction Curriculum	B.F. Skinner	Classic method of learning with mainly teacher-initiated activities which includes frequent repetition.
Socialisation Curriculum	Johann H. Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel	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.

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

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: Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, doi: 10.1787/9789264192829-en; OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, OECD Publishing, doi: 10.1787/9789264035461-en; 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.

Figure 2.2. Content areas included in ECEC curriculum



Notes: Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flanders (BEL), Wallonia-Brussels Federation (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. 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.

Emphasis on the importance of play

Play has many forms of expression and can lead to understanding and friendship across age groups and linguistic and cultural barriers. Through playful interactions with each other, foundations for learning and social competence can be made. 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, Portugal and Sweden include "playtime" as a separate curriculum element but also emphasise that play is integral to learning and development.

The Swedish curriculum recommends that play should be an "omnipresent activity", and the Norwegian framework gives play a "prominent role in life at kindergartens". 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* and the Swedish curriculum address play as an effective learning strategy, the Swedish framework also emphasises how play facilitates activities on children's own terms. Sweden 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 their various forms stimulate imagination, insight, communication and the ability to think symbolically, co-operate and solve problems. Portugal indicates that play is intrinsic to children's development and highlights that indoor and outdoor play should be both possible and encouraged in ECEC.

Children's agency is regarded as important by Sweden. The curriculum states that "the needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning activities" and that "children should have real influence over working methods and contents of the preschool". This compliments research findings on curriculum approaches indicating that if children are free to choose their activities and initiate play, it can facilitate confidence and a capacity for life-long learning.

Sweden, Norway and Portugal prescribe activities outside of the centre in their curriculum, whereas New Zealand does not. The Swedish framework, for example, encourages activities in outdoor environments at the ECEC setting and in nature. The Swedish curriculum specifically addresses and encourages the use of the outdoors as an arena for exploration, learning and child-initiated (child-agency based) play. It also uses child-initiated play in outdoor environments to raise ecological and environmental awareness.

Recognition of the role of parents and families in child development

Democratic partnership and parental engagement are important aspects of ECEC curricula: parents can be an important source of constructive feedback and input to ECEC programmes. Co-operation between preschools and parents ensures that children receive the opportunity of developing in accordance with children's potential. 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[2] 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. The Scandinavian countries stand out with a comparatively low emphasis on "hard work" (Figure 2.3). In both Norway and Sweden, parents consider "having imagination" as a more important skill for children.

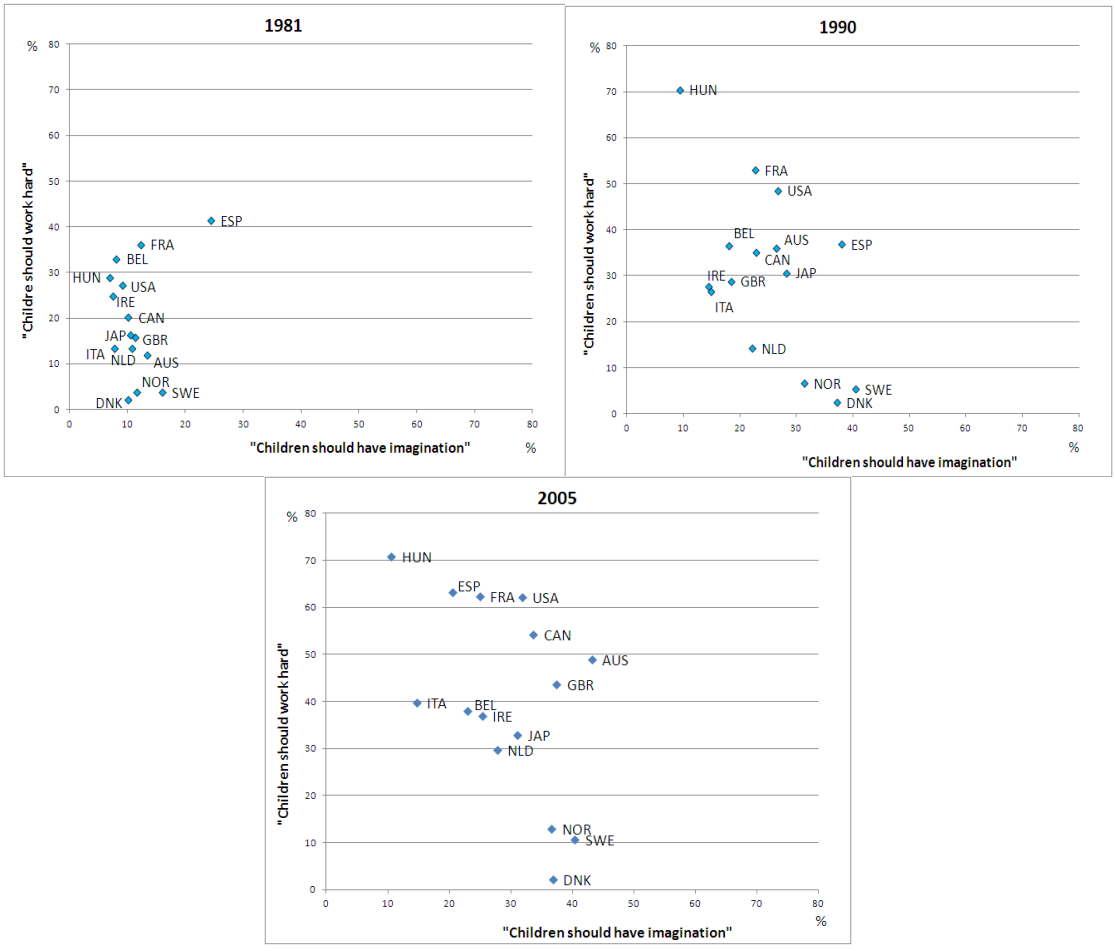
Democratic partnership and parental engagement are important aspects of all four curricula (New Zealand, Norway, Portugal and Sweden). Table 2.2 shows that it is a legal obligation for ECEC provisions in New Zealand, Norway, Portugal and Sweden to engage parents in ECEC. In these countries, parents have the possibility to be involved in decision-making processes in ECEC. Parents and staff are regarded as having joint responsibility for the well-being and development of children.

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. Swedish parents are included in the curriculum development process and expected to contribute to activities. They are involved in developing a curriculum specifically

for their child and can co-decide (with staff) on the development processes and purposes of their children. They have a right to at least one development discussion per year with the staff of their child's ECEC setting. During this conversation, the child's development is thoroughly discussed, and parents and staff can share knowledge and experiences.

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

The percentage of respondent that consider the statements "Children should have imagination" and "Children should work hard" to be important qualities for children in 1981, 1990 and 2005



Note: Data from the World Values Survey is presented for 1981, 1990 and 2005 or the nearest available year for each country.

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, 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.

Respect for cultural values

The internationalisation of societies imposes high demands on the ability of people to live with and understand values inherent in cultural diversity. Preschools and care centres are important social and cultural meeting places that 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.

Sweden's curriculum, as Norway's framework plan and New Zealand's curriculum, emphasises the importance of recognising different cultural backgrounds and languages. Sweden's curriculum and the Norwegian framework plan of 2011 highlight the importance of common values and respect for cultural and religious minorities, and address kindergarten as an inclusive fellowship for all children.

Both Sweden and Norway recognise and address the Sámi minority group in their curricula. Sweden recognises the importance of Sámi language and culture together with immigrant minorities. All Norwegian and Swedish kindergartens catering to Sámi children are expected to recognise Sámi culture as part of its curriculum.

The framework in New Zealand is developed around the idea of "community" (as in Sweden and Norway) but also on the idea of "biculturalism". 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. Sweden and Norway recognise the importance of respect for different cultures and religions but also highlight the importance of integration into Nordic society.

Potential areas for reflection

Curriculum design is a highly political and domestic matter, and therefore international comparisons 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 stakeholders' views, such as through a country visit, due to the constraints of the working methods involved.

Reflection on alignment with primary schooling

Sweden differs from Norway, New Zealand and Portugal, 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. Although Sweden's curriculum content is not explicitly linked to the school curriculum, Sweden encourages ECEC centres to co-operate with the preschool class, as well as primary schools, to smooth the transition from kindergarten to school.

In New Zealand, the *Te Whāriki* curriculum includes for each development strand (or area), explicit links to the primary school curriculum and learning areas. 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. In Norway, to link primary schooling and kindergartens, the learning areas in the framework plan for kindergartens are similar to the topics you will find in the school's curriculum, as are its underlying values and objectives.

Mapping or identifying children's needs, development and learning

Curriculum descriptions can generally be categorised into "input"- or "outcome"-based approaches. Among OECD countries, fewer countries specify "child outcomes" and "input from the centres", while most ECEC curriculum frameworks include "input from staff", *i.e.*, specific requirements as to what is expected of ECEC staff (Figure 2.4). While Anglo-Saxon countries (New Zealand included) and Portugal favour the outcome-based approach, Nordic countries tend to avoid using the term "child outcomes". The Swedish and Norwegian curriculum frameworks have a strong focus on 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.

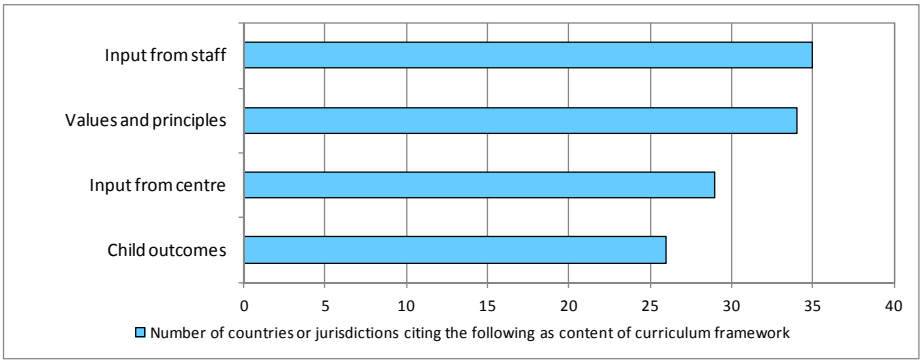
New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* and Portugal's guidelines for three-to-six-year-olds specify expected child outcomes in addition to input from service providers and staff. New Zealand focuses herein largely on developmental process outcomes and little on actual child outcomes in terms of what precisely a child should know at a certain age; while Portugal states what children should know or be able to do at a certain age. However, these outcomes in Portugal function as guidance for staff and not for benchmarking child performance. *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.

By identifying child outcomes or developmental goals, staff can be supported in identifying children's needs and mapping their development and learning processes. In addition to child developmental outcomes or goals, Sweden places emphasis of successful child development fully on staff performance and uses documentation tools to follow child development. This requires strong staff competences and skills to identify children's needs. Sweden, as well as New Zealand, Norway and Portugal, developed practical materials for staff to support them in identifying children's needs and mapping their development.

However, New Zealand also addresses this in its curriculum by including questions for reflection for ECEC professionals in their framework and example practices that are linked to the curriculum's aspirations and goals for children. This can guide staff in improving their own practices and strengthen their skills as well as stimulating the development of children.

Due to the legal status of the Swedish curriculum and the Norwegian framework plan, which are legal binding documents (whereas New Zealand's framework and Portugal's curriculum are not), a clear indication of specific methodologies and performance in Sweden and Norway is not included in the documents. It might be worth reflecting on possibilities or necessities for complementing the curriculum with such guidance for staff regarding identifying children's needs or revising the general guidelines and support materials that the Swedish National Agency for Education has in place, *i.e.*, analysing whether these (still) serve the purpose sufficiently and whether they (still) meet the needs of staff.

Figure 2.4. Approaches of ECEC curriculum



Notes: Based on responses from the following countries and regions: Australia, Austria, Bavaria (DEU), British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flanders (BEL), Wallonia-Brussels Federation (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. 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 on cultural diversity: social integration through language learning

In almost all OECD countries, the number of foreign-born residents has increased between 1990 and 2010 (Figure 2.5, Panel A). The size and composition of the immigrant population, as well as the impetus of the increase, vary across countries.

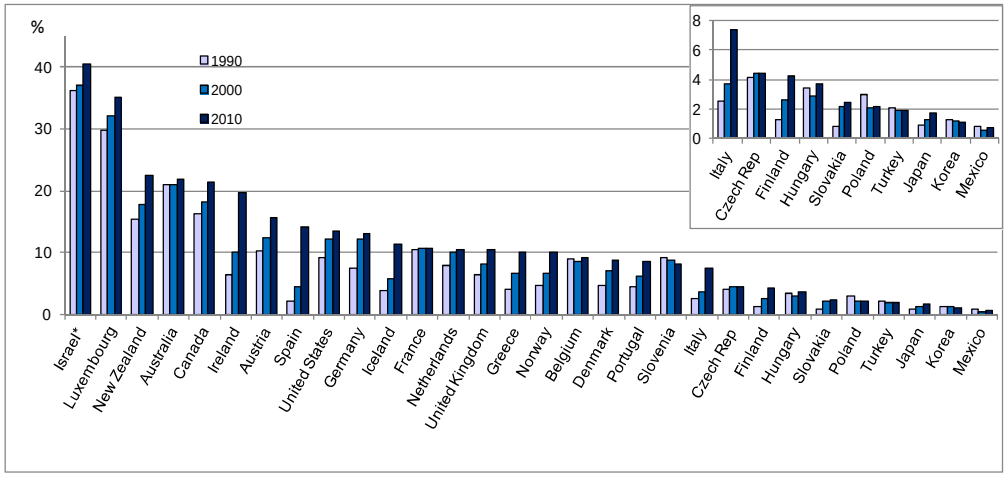
Sweden and Norway are considered to be "European states with post-war labour recruitment" of which some have large immigrant populations. New Zealand is considered a "traditional settlement" country where about 10-20% of the population has an immigrant background. In New Zealand, the percentage of the population with an immigrant background increased from 15.5% in 1990 to 21.3% in 2010. In Norway and Portugal, the increase was from 4.6-10% and 4.4-8.6% respectively. In general, there is an increasing share of immigrants across OECD countries that can pose opportunities and challenges for learning and inclusion.

To ensure children learn the mother-tongue language at a young age, Sweden and its reference countries include "literacy" (including language learning) as an important element of their ECEC curriculum. Learning and acquisition of the local language can be an important aspect of stimulating socio-cultural integration. According to the Swedish framework, multilingual children should be encouraged not only in the country's national language skills but also in using their native language.

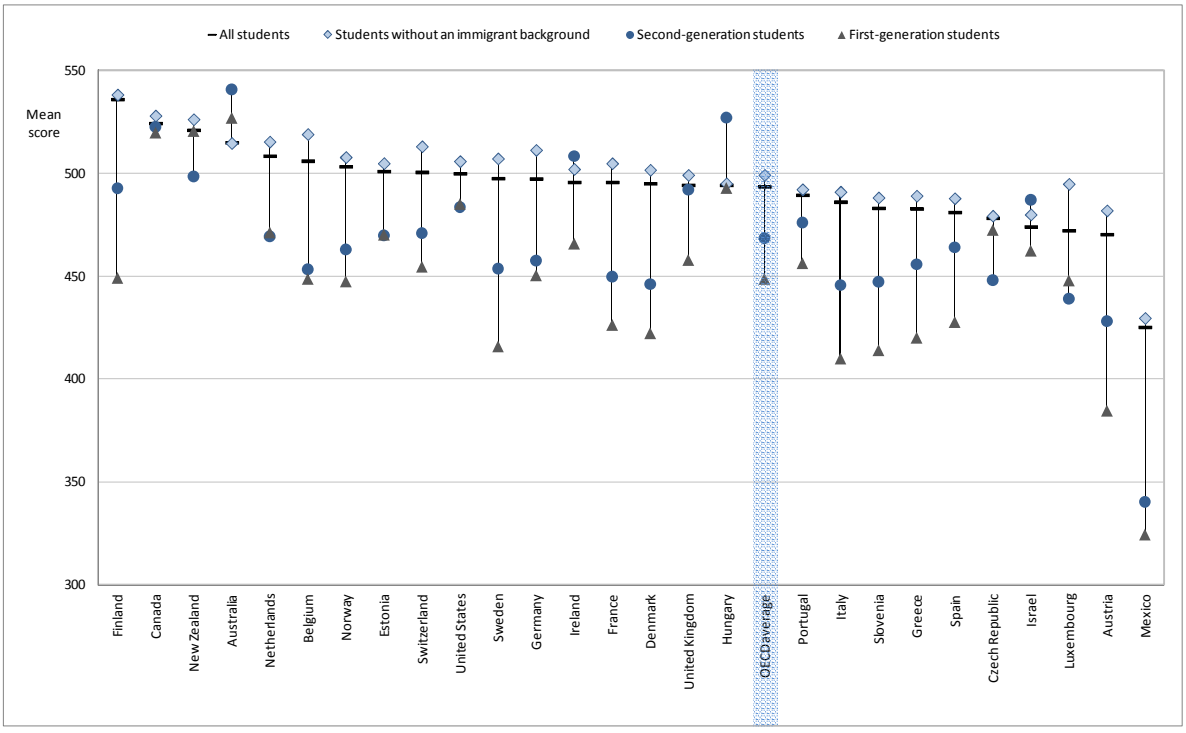
However, immigrant children are still found to underperform on language skills in comparison to their native peers. OECD PISA studies found that there are large and significant differences in reading performances between 15-year-old native students and first-generation and second-generation immigrant students in many OECD countries (Figure 2.5, Panel B). In Sweden, first generation immigrants, on average, score 91 points less than their non-immigrant peers; the score difference for second-generation immigrant students is 53 points – still well over one year of schooling. Minority and immigrant groups with linguistic backgrounds different from the native language especially experience difficulties in language and reading development.

Figure 2.5. Immigrant population

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



Panel B. Reading performance, by immigrant status



Notes: 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.* 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.

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

To better capture the changes in society, the content could be constantly re-visited to reflect community and parental needs.

Health and well-being

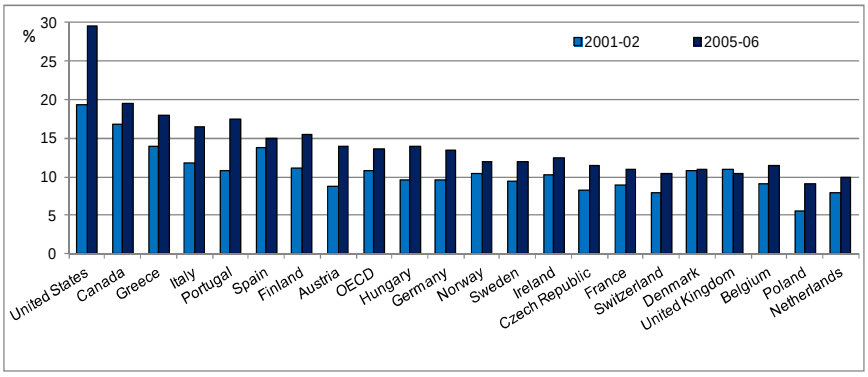
Child obesity is one factor that affects child well-being, and in many countries it is on the rise (Figure 2.6). In 2005-06, between 10-30% of 15-year-olds in OECD countries were considered obese, while this was between 8-19% five years earlier.

Sweden's obesity rate among 15-year-olds increased from 9.4% in 2001-02 to circa 12% in 2005-06. This is below the OECD average and at about the same level as in Norway, although the number of overweight children has increased over time. Portugal is experiencing a more emerging issue regarding children's physical health: child obesity almost doubled in Portugal from 2001-06.

The increase in child obesity rates indicates that families and children have less healthy lifestyles and might exercise less than they did 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 Sweden includes subjects related to "health and well-being" and "physical education" in their ECEC curriculum, 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

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 from 2000-09, although discrepancies can be observed across different countries (Figure 2.7). 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 visualise abstract issues, search for knowledge, reflect on experiences or images, or explore letters and learn how to read. It also fosters children's general technological skills.

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. In Portugal, about 55% of households have access to a computer, although this figure doubled in ten years time from 2000-09.

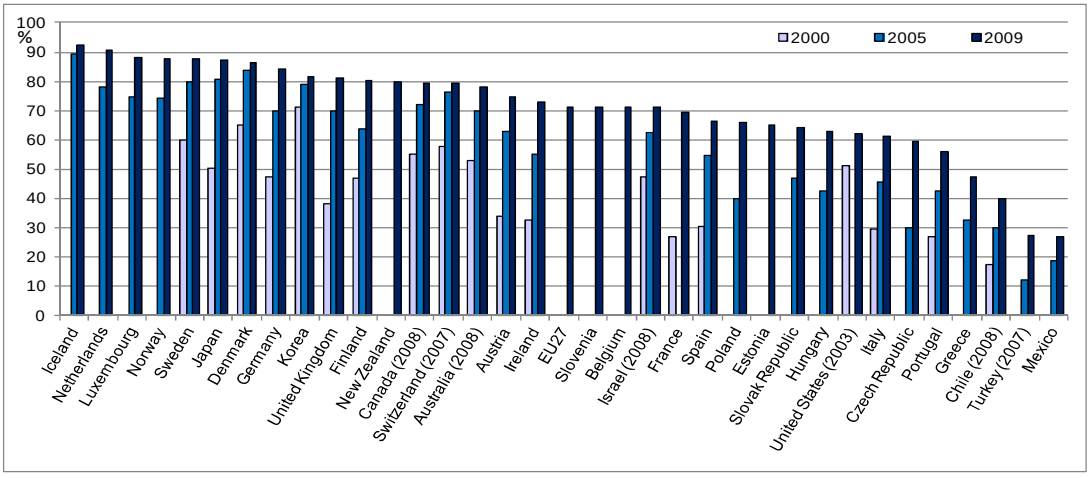
Only a few countries have included ICT and technology as a topic in itself in their ECEC curriculum, including Korea, New Zealand and Spain (Figure 2.2). In Norway and Sweden, this is not an individual topic prescribed in the national curriculum framework, but individual ECEC centres often use ICT tools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

The Swedish curriculum includes two goals regarding technology, though not ICT specifically, and states that children should develop their ability to identify technology in everyday life and explore how technology works as well as develop their ability to build, create and construct using different techniques, materials and tools. The Norwegian framework plan encourages kindergartens to give children the opportunity to experience how digital tools can be used in play, communication and for collecting information.

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

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.

Staff communication skills for effective implementation

ECEC staff are required to have good communication skills not only with colleagues on issues arising on the job but also with parents to discuss their child's development. In most countries (including Sweden, New Zealand and Norway), 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 playroom or teaching practices and skills. 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.

Sweden's curriculum highlights that the preschool's work should take place in close co-operation with the home environment of the child. Parents have the opportunity to be

involved and influence activities in the preschool. Preschool teachers are responsible for ensuring that parents have these opportunities; families receive a good introduction to the preschool; development dialogues take place; parents are involved in assessing the work of preschool; showing respect to parents and the family; maintaining on-going dialogues; and taking account of parental viewpoints.

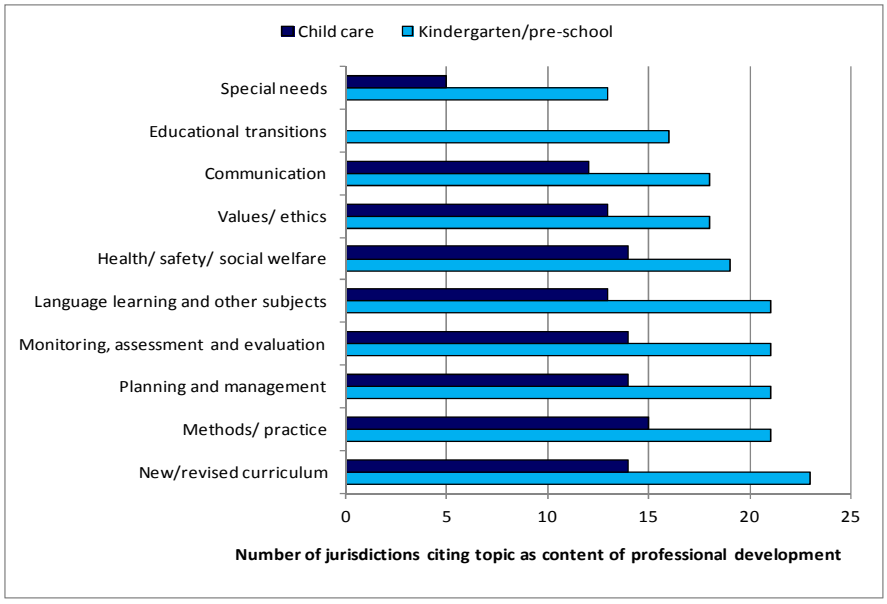
ECEC staff in Sweden have great responsibility in informing parents and maintaining good relationships with them. In many other OECD countries, parents are also dependent on ECEC staff to hear about the centre's activities, routines in the playroom or teaching, and the curriculum. Professionally developing and training staff members' communication skills can therefore encourage meaningful interactions between staff and between staff and parents with possible beneficial outcomes for both children's and staff's development. 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.

Leadership and teaching management for effective implementation

Although there is an increasing need for the development of leadership skills in many OECD countries, leadership has received only intermittent attention by early childhood theorists and researchers. There may also be a lack of awareness among ECEC staff and managers about the importance of leadership and management skills. However, leadership is of great relevance in ensuring high-quality ECEC provision and good implementation of the curriculum since leadership strengthens staff performance. Sweden addresses this in their guidelines for preschool teachers and curriculum, which explain the responsibilities of staff, including the different tasks of different professionals. The Swedish curriculum also indicates the importance of the role of the head of preschool and strong management in a separate section.

While staff in Sweden are trained on management and planning during their initial education, and there are possibilities for professional training on this as well, there is little further guidance and support for staff with caring responsibilities and teaching positions on leadership and management in their playroom, *i.e.*, how to manage their playroom and conduct leadership. Therefore, mapping staff needs for professional development in leadership and management might be useful, and addressing these needs might be a possible area for reflection.

Figure 2.8. Content of professional development



Notes: For kindergarten/preschool, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. For child care, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Finland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Spain and Sweden. Countries were given a range of topics to select from, including the possibility to list topics not mentioned in the selection. Answers indicating "other" without specifying which topic was referred to with "other" are not included in this figure. Countries with an integrated ECEC system who indicated that the subjects of professional development were similar for the whole ECEC sector/ECEC age range: responses have been included in both "child care" and "kindergarten/preschool" since the content of professional development refers to the whole ECEC age range, including ECEC workers with younger children (herein referred to as "child care").

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

NOTES

1 Private kindergartens/owners are allowed to leave Christian values out of their curriculum planning.

2 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.

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.

Sweden has made several efforts to tackle these challenges by, for example, covering the entire ECEC age range as an integrated system with one national framework; taking into account children's varying conditions and needs when developing content; providing support materials for staff in identifying children's needs and implementation of curriculum; and assessing curriculum outcomes using observation techniques. To further their efforts, Sweden could consider strategies implemented by New Zealand, Norway and Portugal, such as developing curriculum content for different age and development groups; explicitly linking the ECEC curriculum to primary school curriculum; including practical examples in the curriculum to support staff and stimulate development at home; and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum.

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

Common challenges

The OECD international survey on quality has identified four common challenges that countries 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 such changes 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 the 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 experienced by children 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.

Sweden's efforts

Sweden has made considerable efforts to tackle the challenges.

To better define goals and content

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

Sweden has reviewed and revised its preschool curriculum of 1998, and the updated version came into force in 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 give 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 that the child's learning and development are monitored, documented and analysed. The aim of the evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of the 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 as well as investigating what measures need to be taken in order to improve the conditions for children to learn, develop, feel secure and have fun in preschool.

Developing age-appropriate content based on children's needs

Sweden aims at bringing different subjects and ways of learning into balance and form together a balanced whole where children develop broad knowledge. For example, Sweden indicates in its curriculum that "account should be taken of the varying conditions and needs of children", and children should "receive support in relation to their needs and circumstances". The curriculum encourages preschools to offer different activities and switch between activities during the course of a day. Although interaction between staff and children is found to be key in early development, the Swedish curriculum indicates that learning should also be based on what children learn from each other and regards children in the room/centre as an important and active part in development and learning. The daily rhythm and environment should be well-balanced according to children's age, including a good balance between care and rest as well as other activities.

Great importance is given to language learning, as language development and learning are linked and contribute to the development of a personal identity. The preschool should put great emphasis on stimulating each child's language development and encourage and take advantage of the child's curiosity and interest in the written language. Children with a foreign background are encouraged to learn their mother tongue language better to create opportunities for learning Swedish better and develop their knowledge in other areas. The preschool should help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receive the opportunity to develop their Swedish language and mother tongue. Creating and communicating by different forms of expression (pictures, songs, drama, dance, spoken and written language) provide the content and methods used in stimulating language development. Similar to Norway's framework plan, Sweden's curriculum puts great emphasis on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation. Preschool activities should have an ecological approach, contributing to a caring attitude among children regarding the environment.

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

Sweden's *Curriculum for the Preschool* specifies goals for development with the aim to orientate the work of the preschool and quality development in preschool but does not define child outcomes. The goals are linked to guidelines for staff, which specify the responsibilities of staff. 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 explaining the responsibilities for ECEC staff 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 also emphasises the importance of good communication and interaction as well as involvement of parents in the early education of children.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Covering the entire ECEC age range as an integrated system, linking it to the home environment

Sweden's *Curriculum for the Preschool* is designed for the country's integrated ECEC system and therefore covers the care and education of all children in ECEC. It aims at making links between the ECEC environment and the home environment of the child, indicating that the preschool's work with children should take place in close and confidential co-operation with the home, and that parents should have the opportunity within the framework of the national goals to be involved and influence activities in the preschool.

Establishing links with the preschool class for six-year-olds, primary schools and leisure time centres

To support the all-round development of children for the future, Sweden's *Curriculum for the Preschool* strives to have ECEC centres establish good working co-operation with the preschool class, the school and the leisure-time centre. Cross-disciplinary and holistic thinking is of central importance in Sweden's curriculum. The curriculum indicates that co-operation should be based on national and local goals and the guidelines applicable to the different activities. As the time approaches for the child to transfer to preschool, school and the leisure-time centre, the ECEC setting has the special task of facilitating the transition; and extra support for completing the preschool period is given to those children who need it.

Kindergartens in Norway must also collaborate with other services and institutions in the municipality. They 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 is to be done in close collaboration with children's homes. Plans for 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

Providing "practical" support materials

The National Agency for Education in Sweden published support material and General Guidelines with comments for guidance and supervision for municipality management, heads of preschools and staff in preschools. The Agency also has, in co-operation with Swedish Television, made short films to give inspiration on how to implement and stimulate different curriculum subjects in preschool, such as mathematics and natural science. The Swedish curriculum includes guidelines for preschool staff, which specify the responsibilities of teachers to ensure that work is carried out in accordance with the general goals in the curriculum. The guidelines also specify the responsibilities of each staff member in the work team in the preschool. This contributes to a better understanding of the expected tasks of different staff members towards child development.

Developing booklets to explain curriculum aspects

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

Providing online support

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.

Focusing training on relevant curriculum subjects

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 allocated SEK 600 million on continuing education for preschool teachers and child minders for a three-year period (2009-11) under the programme "The boost for preschool". The programme consisted of in-service training (university courses) for preschool teachers (ten weeks) and child minders (five weeks) targeted at 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.

Employing additional staff and improving staff-child ratios

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-year-olds to improve the quality of ECEC and qualitative curriculum implementation.

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Regularly evaluating and documenting the quality of preschool

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 monitoring, documenting and analysing curriculum implementation and the child's learning and development. 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 their implementation of the framework.

Assessment of curriculum outcomes based on observation

Assessment in Sweden involves 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 groups of children. These continuous observations provide the basis of information for more in-depth assessment and evaluation integral to making decisions on how best to meet children's needs. In Sweden, assessment of children's learning and development should always focus on individual children over a period of time; and staff should avoid making comparisons between children since the needs of the children, not assessment procedures, should determine the curriculum.

Possible alternative strategies: Lessons from New Zealand, Norway and Portugal

Alternative approaches from New Zealand, Norway and Portugal 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. *Te Whāriki* 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 the English and Māori languages.

Norway's framework plan is based on empathy, forgiveness, a belief in human worth, equality, common responsibility, honesty and fairness. Kindergartens in Norway should promote human dignity, equality, 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 and promote learning as the core of holistic, all-around development. Kindergartens are to support each individual child whilst taking into account the common interests of children. Equality, tolerance and respect are highly important cornerstones of Norway's framework plan: the equality of genders and children with different backgrounds is emphasised and should be reflected in early education. Norway is not merely aiming at ECEC staff in their framework plan but also the children's parents or guardians, the owners/managers of ECEC provisions, and municipal authorities who are responsible for monitoring ECEC centres. The plan has been developed for all adults closely related to ECEC in order 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 so as to promote responsibility and interest on the part of children and encourage their participation in society. Children and their parents are expected to contribute to activities and be included in processes.

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 that 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.

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum 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.

Specifying age-appropriate learning areas that are intertwined with play

In **Norway**, age-appropriateness and needs-based pedagogy are highly valued aspects of the framework plan. 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. The framework plan 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.

Each learning area covers a wide range of learning, and they are intertwined in play and activities. The staff groups are free to choose methods to foster children's curiosity, creativity and thirst for knowledge. Additionally, municipalities have the responsibility to ensure that kindergartens for Sámi children are based on Sámi language and culture.

Setting learning outcomes to support staff

The Ministry of Education in **Portugal** is setting *Learning Outcomes* for preschool education (three-to-six-year-olds). Learning outcomes are acknowledged as the evidence of child performance, and they are defined in terms of child outcomes. They can be used as tools supporting teachers in their everyday work. The *Framework Law of Preschool* states the general objectives of preschool.

Developing learning outcomes reflecting the holistic development of children, which should be encouraged rather than taught

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 therefore 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 (the physical surroundings, the 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 are focused on the skills and abilities children should develop rather than in terms of 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 keep themselves healthy, and a sense of responsibility for their own well-being and that of others. For staff, questions for reflection are included, which are aimed at guiding staff in stimulating children in their development and improve staff pedagogy and quality. Additionally, for each strand and goals, 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 so as 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", "have established self-care skills".

Revising curriculum to reflect societal values

Norway's framework plan and its underlying Kindergarten Act have gone through several changes. The first framework plan 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 part for the framework plan. Both drafts were presented on public hearings, open for discussion and comments. Afterwards, the ministry made a new draft for public hearing before the framework plan was established.

After a change of government in 2005, the 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. Their report proposed a new formulation of objectives for kindergarten, primary and secondary education, and training. The objectives for kindergartens 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 and 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 the 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 plan needed to be altered accordingly, and the revised version entered into force in January 2011.

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 plan 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. The content of

kindergartens shall be designed in such a way that feels relevant to individual children and to the group and 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 plan, local adaptations and the annual plan. Based on the different needs of children, centres can develop teaching material, methods of working, equipment and approaches.

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 also finds it important that the curriculum, as a whole or as a particular range of experiences in the programme, is modified if it is not working well to meet the needs of children and the goals of the curriculum.

Discussing with stakeholders to ensure stakeholder 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 being 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 is 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 very regular basis, providing opportunities for discussion, updating on information, finding agreements and creating buy-in for decisions and changes.

Portugal's curriculum guidelines for three-to-six-year-olds were developed in a process of broad consultation involving preschool teachers and researchers. Official publication of the *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education* was preceded by a long discussion process involving the preparation of three drafts. The first draft was analysed by institutional partners: the Regional Directorates for Education, the Inspector-General of Education, Initial Teacher Training Schools, Teachers' Associations, Teachers' Unions, the Association of Private Education Providers and Parent Associations. A second draft was produced based on comments received from the institutional partners and was distributed among groups of preschool teachers for comments. Teachers were asked to apply the proposed guidelines prior to commenting. Comments from the teachers were incorporated into the final version of the curriculum guidelines. Portugal is in the process of developing curriculum guidelines for ages zero to three, in line with the guidelines for ages three to six. Relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, ECEC staff, teacher and parent associations, and researchers are involved in the design process. During a forum in June 2011, debates were organised with stakeholders discussing what should be included in the curriculum guidelines for ages zero to three and how they should be implemented.

For better curriculum alignment for continuous child development

Linking the ECEC curriculum to the primary school curriculum

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum in **New Zealand** is linked to the country's curriculum framework for schools. The principles in the school curriculum emphasise 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". The strengthening links between the different early childhood education services have encouraged a growing appreciation of each other's differences and similarities.

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 and promote learning as the core of holistic, all-around development. Tolerance, solidarity, empathy, respect and gender equality became more important cornerstones of the framework plan.

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. In 2005, Norway introduced 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 plan. 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 but 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.

Setting learning outcomes for all education levels

The Ministry of Education in **Portugal** is setting *Learning Outcomes for all education levels*, aiming at aligning the outcomes for different education levels. Although the implementation of the outcomes will not be mandatory, it is expected that teachers, children, students and families will start using the outcomes and regard them as a useful tool in curriculum implementation and early development.

For effective communication and implementation

Establishing a round-table and a National Parents' Committee

Norway organised a round-table discussion to define needs to inform stakeholders about curriculum changes and the priorities for an implementation strategy. Different stakeholders were invited: organisations of municipalities 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*). It was established to represent parents and advise the Ministry of Education and Research on matters of informing parents about ECEC-related matters. The 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 plan, **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 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 interests to inform them about the latest ECEC developments and stimulate information and knowledge development as well as the exchange of information on these topics. They can also provide online education possibilities.

Portugal carried out a study to identify the areas in need of materials to support the implementation of the curriculum guidelines. Based on the study, booklets were prepared for teaching literacy, mathematics and experimental science. Additionally, the Social Security Office developed a guidance manual for social security nursery care services. The manual gives guidance on implementing curricular practices and advises on pedagogical activities.

Setting up a website by the ministry

In **Norway**, the website of the Ministry of Education and Research has a page dedicated 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 plan 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 is 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 and is offered to managers in kindergarten free of cost for the participants.

Stimulating literacy development at home

In **Norway**, the projects *BOKTRAS*[1] *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 reaching 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 kindergartens inspired or 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.

Explaining curriculum in understandable language, avoiding technical terms

When the curriculum is explained in understandable language, it is found that both staff and parents with different backgrounds have better knowledge about the curriculum. In order to achieve this, **New Zealand**'s *Te Whāriki* includes a dictionary of subject specific terms used in the curriculum. This also results in better implementation of the curriculum by educators and other ECEC staff. New Zealand found that it stimulates expanding the use of the curriculum by parents in home learning activities.

Strengthening information provision on the curriculum online

The website of **New Zealand**'s Ministry of Education[2] provides widespread information about *Te Whāriki*, including the curriculum document in its entirety, guidelines for staff, assessment practices and news on the curriculum. It also gives examples of practices staff can use in their ECEC centre, gives information on changes or examples of curriculum implementation, and on professional development programmes. The ministry also has its own official online magazine: the *Education Gazette*[3]. The magazine covers a variety of news articles, notices and vacancies and provides a monthly update to the early childhood education sector.

Providing demands-driven training on curriculum implementation

New Zealand focuses staff training on the implementation of the *Te Whāriki* 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 implementation of *Kei Tua o Te Pae* (Assessment for Learning). Teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

Increasing the number of qualified teachers to stimulate effective implementation

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

For systematic evaluation and assessment

Assessing and monitoring kindergartens' accordance with legislations and everyday interactions between adults and children

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 the everyday interaction 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 children, between children and staff and amongst 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, framework plan and any local guidelines and plans.

A recent study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2010) shows that 55% of the 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 assessment on staff performance

Assessment practices in **Norway** regarding the curriculum and performance focus on staff pedagogical approaches – not individual performance of the child, since 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. This is to understand children's learning and to

allow staff to reflect on their work and 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 the parents and any external welfare services outside the kindergarten.

Evaluating the implementation of the curriculum

Vestfold University College in **Norway** has conducted an evaluation in 2009 of how the framework plan 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.

Portugal has undertaken *Monitorisation and Supervision of Curriculum Development in Preschool Education* (2006). The Directorate General for Innovation and Curriculum Development hired the University of Oporto to carry out a case study with 20 kindergartens to collect data on the quality of actual practices of how curriculum guidelines have been used. The results of the study are practical: they call for more support materials, teacher training sessions on the assessment methods of children and their learning environments, more documentation, and strategies to facilitate transition into the first cycle of primary education; and they identify target areas as experimental science, writing skills and mathematics.

Integrating "curriculum" as part of evaluation or assessment practices

New Zealand implemented *Kei Tua o te Pae*[4] (Assessment for Learning), in which teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. 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 the ways human relationships and the programme provide a learning environment based on the goals of the curriculum. Evaluative procedures emphasise the quality of provision and make use of all forms of assessment that can be carried out by 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.

The national government offers training on *Kei Tua o Te Pae* 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.

Using documentation to assess child development and use of curriculum

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. This is to understand children's learning and the

work of staff to allow for reflection on the values and tasks of the kindergarten, and the role of play, learning and development. Documentation can only be linked to specific goals in special circumstances but, in general, should not be used to categorise or judge children's development. If specific goals are to be set for individual children, there must be a reason for this, and the goals must be set in collaboration with the parents and any partners outside the kindergarten.

New Zealand uses child assessment/development practices as a method to reflect upon curriculum design and implementation. Children's experiences are described in a Learning Story Framework by staff and children. The framework 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 setting 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 develop their own locally-adapted *Te Whāriki*.

NOTES

1 Scandinavian Library Quarterly website (2011), http://slq.nu/?article=norway-books-in-the-kindergarten (accessed 28 July 2011).

2 New Zealand Ministry of Education (2011), Early Childhood Education Teaching and Learning website, www.educate.ece.govt.nz (accessed 28 July 2011).

3 New Zealand Ministry of Education (2011), Education Gazette website, www.edgazette.govt.nz (accessed 28 July 2011).

4 New Zealand Ministry of Education (2011), Kei Tua o te Pae website, www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/Assessmentforlearning/KeiTuaotePae.aspx (accessed 28 July 2011).

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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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