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Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. Approaches and experiences from selected countries

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Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care

Approaches and experiences from selected countries

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The German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V., DJI) is one of Germany's largest social science institutes focusing on research and development around the topics of children, youth and families, as well as the political and practical areas related to them.

The German Youth Institute is based in Munich with a branch office in Halle/Saale. Founded in 1963, its supporting organisation is a non-profit association whose members stem from the political and academic spheres, as well as from other associations and institutions dedicated to the support of children, youth and families. Its institutional budget is primarily funded by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), and, to a lesser degree, by the German federal states (Länder). Additional financial contributions are made by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) as part of the Ministry's project funding, and by various foundations, the European Commission and institutions for the promotion of research.

The International Center Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) was established at the Department of Children and Childcare at the German Youth Institute in 2012. Conceived as a Joint Research Center, the ICEC bundles the field of research with scientific policy consultation. The focus is laid on questions of governance and quality development in early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems. The Centre strives to bridge national and international debates in ECEC and encourages the exchange of perspectives on specific topics. In its work, the ICEC aims to identify good practices and to shape developments in the field of ECEC. In conjunction with this aim, the ICEC is actively involved in international panels and networks in the field of early childhood education and care.

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Contents

Foreword

In many countries, quality regulation and assurance in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are challenging matters that widely dominate current debates. Within the past years, approaches to quality regulation and assurance have been put into practice in different ways. This volume provides a broad insight into diverse systems of monitoring ECEC quality. Such a bundling and analysis of international systems and their approaches does not yet exist in this form. The International Center Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) has taken that as an occasion to elaborate this volume at hand. To spread the compiled information internationally, the volume is published in German[1] and English.

A lot of "creative minds" and "busy hands" were involved in the development and completion of this international volume. At this point, we explicitly would like to thank all authors for their commitment, their patience and the very constructive and inspiring cooperation. With their contributions, they offer a sound insight into the structure of the ECEC systems in their countries as well as the monitoring systems established there. Furthermore, we would like to sincerely thank Prof. Dr. Sybille Stöbe-Blossey from the University of Duisburg-Essen for her critical review of the manuscript and her valuable comments.

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Munich, June 2017

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1 Klinkhammer, N./Schäfer, B./Harring, D./Gwinner, A. (Eds.)(2017). Qualitätsmonitoring in der frühkindlichen Bildung und Betreuung – Ansätze und Erfahrungen aus ausgewählten Ländern. München: DJI Verlag.

1 Quality development and assurance in Early Childhood Education and Care – International perspectives

Nicole Klinkhammer, Britta Schäfer

1.1 Introduction

In Germany the participation of children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been increasing steadily for several years. According to the current Education Report for Germany, children attending ECEC services are getting ever-younger, and spend longer hours at the facilities (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016). A similar trend can be traced in international reports, albeit with variations from country to country (cf. OECD 2015a, 322ff.; European Commission et al. 2014, 2015, 2015a; Urban 2009). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) thus represents a key factor in childhood and children's development. At first glance, this could be perceived as a positive trend, given that various studies have identified children's attendance of child care facilities as a key determinant for improving performance in later education (cf. e.g. Burger, 2010; Roßbach et al. 2009).

ECEC is credited with the ability to compensate for educational disadvantages caused by social background, and thus is thought to foster equality of opportunity for all children (cf. e.g. Akgündüz et al. 2015; European Commission et al. 2014; Lesemann 2009). However, the available data does not provide cast-iron evidence for assuming a compensatory effect from the attendance of an ECEC setting; the use of ECEC services does not appear to compensate for inequality resulting from children's social background, nor does it reduce the gulf between privileged and disadvantaged children (cf. Riedel 2016, 49). However, a positive influence from ECEC can be seen when the settings attended are of high quality. Accordingly, there is no doubt that all children, including those from a disadvantaged background, benefit from the encouragement they receive at high-quality early childhood education and care settings.

This insight holds especially true with regard to children's linguistic and cognitive development (cf. Lazzeri/Vandenbroeck 2013). Since, particularly for the 0-3 age group, research findings on social and emotional development are less clear further research is needed here (cf. Anders 2013). Nevertheless, there is consent in the scientific community that high-quality ECEC services have a significantly greater and longer-lasting impact on children's well-being and development than services of average or low quality (cf. e.g. Ahnert/Lamb 2011; Burchinal et al. 2011; Hall et al. 2013; Urban et al. 2011; Roux/Tietze 2007; Ruxton 2011; Sylva et al. 2004; Wyrobnik 2015).

If we assume that high-quality services in early childhood education and care encourage and foster children's development in diverse ways, the following questions arise: How can 'quality' be understood in the context of early childhood education and care? How can it be adequately measured, and how can it be developed and assured in child care settings?

1.2 Approaching concepts of Quality

The issue of what constitutes quality in early childhood education and care has been the subject of (inter)national debates since the 1970s (cf. e.g. Dahlberg et al. 2013, 103; Penn 2011; Ceglowski/Bacigalupa 2002, 89). Among the various understandings of quality Dalli et al. (2011) have identified two main stances: 1) discursive philosophical approaches, and 2) effectiveness/impact measurement approaches (ibid. 25ff.). Within the first line quality is understood as a value-based, relational and dynamic construct that also arises from discourse over the preconditions and accompanying specific perceptions concerning early childhood education and care (cf. Jones et al. 2016; Dahlberg et al. 2013; Moss/Dahlberg 2008; Moss 1994).

Despite the fact that scholars who identify with this approach refer to a similar understanding of the concept of discourse, a closer examination reveals distinctions. These differences may be rooted in their basic understanding or self-perception (i.e. depending on whether a rather theoretical or more application-oriented approach is taken), the accompanying objective or its perspective, or the methods applied (cf. Roux 2013, 131f.). For example, the 'Kronberg Circle' (*Kronberger Kreis*) may be perceived as an approach oriented towards application and practice and pursuing a more dialogue-based quality development (Kronberger Kreis 1998). The Kronberg Circle draws up dimensions and indicators of quality to be addressed and reflected on in dialogue-based practice (Kronberger Kreis für Qualitätsentwicklung in Kindertageseinrichtungen 1998). The objective is to change and improve pedagogical practice through the process of research itself (cf. Roux 2013, 134). The same principle is pursued by newer approaches such as the one on quality development in a discursive process (cf. Schneider et al. 2015). Unlike the Kronberg Circle this approach does not reference existing concepts such as the situational approach or best practice ideas. The discursive process refers to both the way quality standards evolve over time and to on-site trajectories of quality development in the respective child care settings (cf. Schneider et al. 2015, 18).

Furthermore, there are approaches that can be assigned within the context of research. Here it is the intention to theorize the concept of quality, and the focus is laid on the practice of socially constructing quality in ECEC settings. For example, an ethnological study entitled 'What constitutes a good kindergarten?' (*Was ist ein guter Kindergarten?*) by Michael-Sebastian Honig et al. (2004) examines the question of how ECEC professionals' ideas of 'good' or 'better' practice influence, and thus structure, pedagogical events in day-to-day routine at child care settings (Honig et al. 2004, 16). From this perspective, quality is a relational construct representa-

tive of the outcome of an evaluation process performed by adults in everyday interactions at ECEC settings (cf. Honig et al. 2002, 2). By directing the attention towards (pedagogical) practices and their constructive mechanisms, Roux believes that this approach sensitizes to the significance of such an understanding of sociogenesis in altering quality management (cf. Roux 2013, 136). Simultaneously the emphasis of this approach is on the theorisation and conceptual development of quality.

Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence, who can also be assigned to rather discursive philosophical approaches – or may even be regarded as their founders – go as far as to question the very concept of quality. In their view, this concept is a result of economically focused discourse dominated by a positivistic, modernist paradigm, which reduces the complexity of quality and allows early childhood education and care to degenerate into "technologized practice".

> *It seems to us that the concept of quality does have a very particular meaning, that of a modernist understanding of the world. Quality is a 'technology of distance', a means of excluding individual judgment and for crossing group and community borders. Quality cannot be conceptualized to accommodate complexity, values, diversity, subjectivity, multiple perspectives, and other features of a world understood to be both uncertain and diverse (Dahlberg et al. 2013, 111).*

The authors thus criticize the dominant concept of quality in the scientific mainstream for being presented as a universal, fixed and objectively definable 'standard' which is recognizable in practice, but which does not take the constituent elements of quality – variety, values, context etc. – into consideration (cf. also Moss 2015). Based on this understanding, the authors reject evaluations and their resulting assessments along heavily standardized procedures, such as it is applied by ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale). Instead, they favour a 'language of evaluation' that allows scope for variety, reflection, dialogue, confrontation etc. The practice of 'pedagogical documentation' developed in the Italian community of Reggio nell'Emilia is introduced as an option:

> *Pedagogical documentation renders learning processes and educational practice visible by documenting them in a wide range of different forms (e.g. notes, photos, video and audio recordings, artistic and creative works produced by children etc.). In this way, they can be shared, discussed, reflected on, interpreted and – if necessary – evaluated. Everyone takes part; children, pedagogical professionals, teaching assistants, families, administrative staff, other individuals – [...] (Moss 2015, 39).*

Therefore the pedagogical documentation serves to encourage the discussion and exchange of ideas over concrete aspects of everyday life in a child care setting, and thus to introduce transparency for all those involved. The objective focuses on developing a wide range of ideas from a broad and democratic exchange of views, rather than evaluating pedagogical practice. From this perspective, discussing 'quality' in the sense of a presumably 'objective' and standardized 'truth' would seem to be an overly abbreviated approach. As an alternative, Moss suggests examining the many stories and

aspects of early childhood education and care. The authors use the term 'meaning making' to express this shift in perspective:

> *Like quality, meaning making is inscribed with certain values and assumptions derived from a particular paradigm, though very different to quality's: meaning making welcomes contextuality, values, subjectivity, uncertainty, and provisionality. The language of meaning making opens to evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation, as a process that involves making practices visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation, leading to a judgment of value, contextualized and provisional because it is always subject to contestation (Dahlberg et al., 2013: xv).*

By contrast, effectiveness/impact measurement approaches to quality are primarily based on quantitative empirical research. In this category, discursive and philosophical approaches are countered with the view that quality can be operationalized using generalized and structured criteria and pre-defined indicators. Thus, quality is seen as a quantifiable 'object' in the field of pedagogy (cf. e.g. Zaslow et al. 2013; Burchinal 2010; Tietze et al. 2005; Tietze et al. 1998). From this perspective, quality is an element that can be measured and evaluated in ECEC settings. Based on the data and findings collected in this way, the aim is to develop instruments for systematic quality development and assurance and to provide those instruments – depending on data format and target group – to professional practice or to the political and administrative level.

This category of approach gave rise to the structure-process-model, which classifies quality into three basic dimensions and follows an effect logic of self-determining factors (e.g. Kalicki 2015; Esch et al. 2006; Leu 2005). Structural quality, i.e. framework conditions such as group size or staff-child ratio, is designated as the input dimension. These, in turn, impact on the output dimension, which is known as process quality, focusing on the actual events at the child care settings (e.g. teacher-child interaction, activities for children). The outcome dimension (outcome quality) derives from this; it may be understood in different ways, often including children's skills and abilities, child well-being or parent satisfaction.

In recent years the national as well as international debate over quality, has undergone continuous change, in step with changing socio-political influences (including the acknowledgement of early childhood education and care by the political sphere). New scientific findings (e.g. the influence of good pedagogical practice on child development) have continually influenced the course of debate. Nevertheless, the mentioned approaches and concepts of quality continue to exist more or less in parallel. The crucial difference between them emerges over the issue of whether quality can be rendered tangible and measurable by empirical means and, if so, which instruments and methods are appropriate to do so. However, there is still no shared concept of what constitutes quality in ECEC (cf. Roux 2013, 130).

In recent years, the concepts and approaches to quality have noticeably expanded and advanced which is due to a broad debate on the two approaches described above. A characteristic feature here is that a new perception of quality has developed, based on the combination and adaptation of aspects from existing quality concepts of both – the discursive and phi-

losophical, and the effectiveness/impact measurement approach. At a conceptual level, work like that of Sonja Sheridan (cf. Sheridan in this volume; Sheridan et al. 2013) has striven to draw bridges and approach the concept of quality in a theoretical manner based on a systemic perspective. This reflects an attempt to take the concept one step further and modify it while simultaneously expanding the perspective on quality in early childhood education and care. Inspired by discursive and philosophical approaches quality is viewed as a multi-perspective, discursive and modifiable construct while also referencing the classic quality model (input, output, outcome) central within the effectiveness/impact measurement approach, which in this reading is not based on rigid definitions of quality. Instead, it is recognized that the understanding of quality and its creation in practice are not governed by strict principles, but are dependent on their contexts and stakeholders in the broadest sense. The understanding of quality is subject to ongoing processes of negotiation and creation at all levels of an ECEC system (cf. Urban et al. 2011, 2012; Schneider et al. 2015; Sheridan 2007, 2001a). The objective of these negotiation and creation processes is to establish, develop and safeguard 'good' quality, albeit with the awareness that this understanding is governed by a value judgement of 'good' and 'poor' quality.

The different country contributions presented in this volume indicate the importance of a discursive understanding of quality also with regard to quality development and assurance processes. This understanding of quality – again demonstrated by the country examples – does not contradict the assumption that good pedagogical practice and its framework conditions, such as the dimensions of structural quality, are empirically measurable. Instead, it underlines the importance of reflection and self-criticism on the part of all stakeholders. The following questions remain part of a circular process (cf. Achten/Bodeving in this volume): What do children, ECEC professionals, administration officials, policymakers, and scientists understand by 'good' quality in early childhood education and care? What does 'quality' of this kind mean to them, in terms of 'meaning making' as described by Dahlberg et al. (2013, 92ff.)? How can quality be developed and assured in early childhood education and care, and what approaches, instruments and methods need to be applied? What changes and modifications within the ECEC system, in pedagogical practice or in structural conditions are required for this to be achieved? Approaches of this kind to quality and quality development and assurance processes are constantly revealed throughout this volume, and therefore offer a common reference point for the various articles.

1.3 Monitoring as an instrument for Quality development and assurance

Along with a growing interest in assuring 'good' quality in ECEC scientific and political debates concerning potential instruments and methods for quality development and assurance have intensified further in recent years, both in Germany and at international level (cf. European Commission

Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014; Altgeld/Stöbe-Blossey 2009; NESSE 2009; OECD 2012, 2015; Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012). Looking at the level of governance within an ECEC system, possible policy steering instruments include statutory regulation of (minimum) standards or quality targets for early childhood education and care settings, but also curricula and qualification and further training of ECEC professionals. The CoRe study showed that a 'competent system' is a necessary precondition for a guarantee of high quality (cf. Urban et al. 2011; 2012). Given this, successful development and assurance of quality depends not only on approving a measure or a funding strategy, but requires a cohesive and systematic approach to producing 'competence' throughout the various levels of the ECEC system and thus establish the main preconditions for quality development and assurance.

Within this context, quality monitoring represents an instrument that can be used for developing and assuring quality in early childhood education and care. Monitoring can be applied at various levels of the ECEC system, and thereby generate different kinds of information; it can thus simultaneously be perceived as an opportunity resp. an aspect of governing quality in each case primarily aimed at generating data (unlike e.g. governing through financial, legislative, interventional or other steering methods etc.).

> *In an ECEC context monitoring refers to the continuous and systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data which supports a regular review of the quality of the ECEC system. It is based on pre-agreed quality standards, benchmarks or indicators which are established and modified through use (European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014, 70).*

The term 'monitoring' may refer to both systematic observational and evaluation processes. In some cases, related terms for monitoring processes are used synonymously (e.g. 'supervision', 'evaluation'), or monitoring is described as a part of ECEC evaluations. As a result, confusion over terminology may result and must be clarified when addressing issues of governing quality. A key question involves the type of data that is generated and for whom and for what purpose it is collected. Monitoring is generally understood within the context of ongoing analyses of information concerning development processes within the system (e.g. children's participation in education, staff-child ratio). Adjustments and alignments can be made on this basis, and processes can be optimized (e.g. expansion of services offered, improvements to structural quality). Monitoring procedures are thus used as a method of aggregating governing knowledge for the various stakeholders in the ECEC system (policymakers, administration, service providers, parents as service users).

This is usually achieved by evaluating structural data concerning the system and/or by conducting surveys. In ECEC, 'monitoring' is thus often determined by political or administrative intent to examine new regulatory methods and forms of management with respect to their ability to ensure quality, or to introduce accountabilities (cf. OECD 2015; Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012). However, evaluations, internal as well as exter-

nal or third-party evaluations, are generally mentioned when (direct) feedback is given to professional practitioners in the form of observations and/or evaluations of aspects, including pedagogical work at an ECEC setting in general and activities of pedagogical professionals in particular (cf. Braun 2005). This is effected by applying previously agreed principles or criteria to bring transparency and/or objectifiability to evaluations (cf. Scheunpflug et al. 2010).

Widely varying procedures or instruments can be used for this purpose, such as the process-oriented self-evaluation instrument ("Self-evaluation instrument for child care settings" (SiCs), cf. Laevers in this volume), the "Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale" (ECERS-3) (cf. Harms et al. 2014) or its adapted German version, the "Kindergarten Evaluation Scale" (*Kindergarteneinschätzskala*, KES-R) (cf. Tietze et al. 2005a). Overall, innumerable instruments and procedures for evaluating the various aspects of quality are in use at national and international level (cf. Altgeld/Stöbe-Blossey 2009).

The two levels of data generation described (overall system – field of practice in its broadest sense) are closely interconnected, or cannot be clearly separated in practice. This can be seen in the individual articles in this volume, which use terminology shaped by their specific national contexts. The definitions given are intended as a guide. The term 'monitoring' thus generally refers back to the process of data generation; however, where 'monitoring systems' are addressed, this refers to the complex interactions of monitoring and evaluation processes, extending as far as the structural establishment of inspection bodies etc.

From an international perspective, there is growing interest in introducing monitoring systems at the national level (cf. OECD 2015). While Anglophone countries in particular already have long-standing experience with various forms of monitoring in early childhood education and care, in recent years a number of other countries have implemented monitoring systems or are currently in the process of doing so. Monitoring generally addresses quality of ECEC settings, quality of pedagogical professionals, implementation of educational programmes and recording of child development and skills. These individual areas are often interconnected in the monitoring process. The commonest areas monitored are the quality of pedagogical professionals and of ECEC settings (cf. OECD 2015; European Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014).

Although an in-depth scientific analysis of *how* monitoring can help achieve concrete and measurable quality improvement has yet to be conducted, positive effects on ECEC quality have been ascribed to the process, including the benefits of data generation for evidence-based policymaking (cf. OECD 2015), and positive impacts on the way in which pedagogical professionals view their profession (cf. Schäfer/Eberhart in this volume). In this context, studies show that self-evaluation of pedagogical staff can be an effective means of professional advancement by improving reflection and staff collaboration (cf. Sheridan 2001; OECD 2015, 123ff.; Sims/Waniganayake 2015).

In Germany, ECEC quality monitoring has taken place within a range of contexts. ECEC data has been drawn from official child and youth welfare statistics to serve purposes like the advancement of Vol. VIII of the Social Code (SGB VIII), the social reporting at national, Land and municipal level, or the local and regional planning of youth welfare measures. Furthermore, the data is used for secondary research studies (cf. AKJStat[2]). Child and youth welfare statistics take the form of a cross-sectional survey set forth in law (Sections 98-103, SGB VIII), which supplies annual data on structural features such as staffing and staff qualifications. Evaluation of these system-related statistics primarily takes place in the form of educational and social reports such as the National Educational Report (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016), the Bertelsmann Ländermonitor (Bock-Famulla et al. 2015) and the Child and Youth Welfare Report (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfebericht*, BMFSFJ 2013).

On the other hand, in recent years scientific cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys on the subject of ECEC have been conducted in Germany, including the "German National Study on Early Childhood Education and Care" (NUBBEK) (Tietze et al. 2013) and the "National Educational Panel Study" (NEPS). Nevertheless, to date, there has been no standardized, systematic monitoring process at national level covering all ECEC settings. This is because responsibility for quality development and assurance in Germany primarily lies with local providers of public youth welfare services under SGB VIII Section 22a (5), which also explains the remarkable regional differences with regard to the quality of settings. Moreover, this is reinforced by diverging methods and instruments for the evaluation of pedagogical practice (cf. Esch et al. 2006).

1.4   The development of this volume

This volume of articles was assembled on the basis of the authors' contributions to the workshop, "Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care – Approaches and Experiences from Selected Countries", organized by the International Centre for Early Childhood (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute in November 2015. Starting from the assumption that monitoring of child care facilities plays an important role in quality development and assurance, the workshop focused on collating and discussing empirical values from other countries. To do this, experts were invited from other countries which

- like Germany, apply a socio-pedagogical approach to early childhood education and care, and/or
- have ECEC services with a decentralized organizational structure
- have only recently introduced monitoring systems or are currently in the process of doing so.

2   http://www.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/index.php?id=412

The workshop was designed as a platform for the focused exchange of ideas and experiences concerning approaches, methods, and challenges related to quality monitoring systems. Particularly close attention was paid to the following aspects:

1. Objectives, targets and content of monitoring
2. Roles and responsibilities in monitoring systems
3. Monitoring instruments
4. Democratic and ethical aspects of monitoring

With regard to the quality concepts presented in the previous section, the workshop clearly showed that implemented systems are frequently based on an empirical, evidence-based understanding of quality (e.g. Australia, Netherlands). However, newly implemented systems in particular show more advanced forms of understanding, which combine elements of discursive and philosophical approaches with those of effectiveness/impact measurement approaches in one way or another (e.g. Flanders, Luxembourg, Sweden). Irrespective of the major differences between the individual countries discussed at the workshop, joint discussions highlighted a single issue for successful quality monitoring, namely that development and assurance of quality in early childhood education and care represents an ongoing process which takes place throughout all levels of an ECEC system, yet which must also provide scope for reflection and for modification of established approaches, methods and practices already in place. This requires both ongoing collaboration and end-to-end communication between the stakeholders in the fields of policymaking, administration, practice and science.

This volume was produced on the basis of the workshop. Its aim is to foster communication between the various stakeholders concerning critical aspects of quality development and assurance in early childhood education and care. Given the debate at the workshop, the editors of this volume had the aim of making the findings and experiences reported from the various countries accessible to a wider public. The purpose of the volume is to provide insight into different governance approaches and current developments in the field of quality monitoring systems and to inspire equally useful and constructive debate among its readers.

This is also due to the interest and mission of the *International Center Early Childhood Education and Care (*ICEC); the centre and its work is located at the interface of politics, science and practice/administration. In turn, the concept and elaboration of this volume needs to be understood in the context of this intersection: Its articles are written by authors occupying active roles in the fields of science, politics and administration. In this way, the volume tries to highlight different aspects and challenges of developing and assuring quality on the different levels of the ECEC system. With the findings and information composed here, the volume tries to initiate and enrich the national and international debate on monitoring systems in ECEC.

1.5 Content of this volume

The articles in this volume give an insight into the monitoring systems of Australia, Sweden, Slovenia, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany (Berlin), and Belgium (Flanders).

Margaret Sims, *Jennifer Sumsion*, *Gerry Mulhearn* and *Sue Grieshaber* present the monitoring system in Australia, tracing the chronological course of implementation and examining the individual elements of the National Quality Framework as well as outlining the ongoing controversies and debates in the ECEC profession in the country. They conclude their article with a critical view of 'top down' approaches to the development and implementation of quality monitoring procedures, as well as potential – or, in the case of Australia, actual – negative consequences for quality development processes.

A contrasting view is provided by the article by *Sonja Sheridan*, examining the Swedish approach to systematic quality work. The author's descriptions are based on Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model, a pedagogical perspective of quality and the political requirements and framework conditions in the Swedish preschooling system. Thus, Sheridan explores preschool quality and systematic quality work in relation to conditions created on different system levels for children's well-being, learning and development in Swedish preschools. She provides insight into frequently used approaches and instruments applied within the national quality assurance system. In conclusion, the author describes the importance of a shared understanding of quality among all stakeholders at all levels, and of a joint interest in, or understanding of, how high quality in early childhood education and care can be assessed, evaluated and further developed.

The article by *Nada Požar Matijašič* and *Stanka Lunder Verlič* presents the Slovenian preschool system and explains the variety of approaches and procedures used in quality evaluation and assurance to date at both system and setting level. The authors describe a complex network of roles and responsibilities and of procedures used in quality monitoring at child care settings. A national framework for a quality assessment and assurance system was recently introduced with the aim of streamlining these diverse methods. Matijašič and Verlič outline the current efforts involved in the development and implementation of this system in Slovenia and in their conclusion, address the issue of creating a balance between (nationally created) standardization and (regional/local) autonomy.

Manuel Achten and *Claude Bodeving* deal with the national quality monitoring system recently introduced in Luxembourg. The authors trace its creation within the context of the ECEC system and of the national framework plan for non-formal education, which forms the conceptual basis for all early childhood education and care settings up to youth centres. Achten and Bodeving show the degree to which developments in Luxembourg are influenced by the political aim to expand early childhood education and care services in terms of both quantity and quality. They describe the quality development and assurance processes initiated in recent years, pointing out

the special importance of a circular structure for quality development and assurance processes. Achten and Bodeving conclude by describing forthcoming challenges and hurdles for effective quality development.

Maartje Jacobs' article provides an overview of the ECEC system in the Netherlands and also describes the structure of the supervision system and the duties of the inspectorates that perform supervisions. The supervision framework used here is currently undergoing revision and reorientation. The author also points out further changes, such as new requirements for qualification levels of ECEC professionals and changes in finance streams for large cities and small municipalities. Jacobs concludes by posing a series of questions indicative of the challenges that lie ahead for the supervision approach as practised in the Netherlands.

The article by *Persille Schwartz* focuses on the child's perspective. The author outlines the basic characteristics and context of Denmark's decentralized quality monitoring model. As the consideration of children's perspectives in the evaluation of ECEC settings is anchored in Danish legislation, this aspect is central to the article. Schwartz presents the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), the national knowledge centre for evaluating ECEC settings. In this capacity, EVA has initiated a project based on the Mosaic approach of Allison Clark and Peter Moss, which offers an approach for pedagogues addressing the child's perspective. The author describes the findings from the project, primarily from work with young children, and discusses the opportunities and challenges in pedagogical practice and quality improvement that result from the consideration of the child's perspective.

Britta Schäfer and *Janina Eberhart* focus on the perspective of pedagogical professionals with respect to the effectiveness of monitoring, taking Berlin´s evaluation system as an example. To do this, the authors give an outline of the German ECEC system and the quality development instruments and initiatives that have been introduced in recent years. Schäfer and Eberhart explain the evaluation system in Berlin, its relevant stakeholders and its internal and external evaluation procedures. In this context, the authors surveyed pedagogical professionals in Berlin to investigate their perception of external and internal evaluation and of quality in their ECEC setting before and after the introduction of the evaluation system. In conclusion, they discuss their findings and emphasize that evaluation may impact positively on ECEC quality at multiple levels; however, they also point out problems that have arisen in areas including efficient use of the data collected and practical implementation of quality requirements.

Christele van Nieuwenhuyzen provides an introduction to the early childhood education and care system in Flanders and the recent legislative changes introduced there. The author describes the shift in preconditions for quality development and assurance resulting from those changes, primarily in services for babies and toddlers. In this area, the Flemish government has commissioned a "practice development project" (Measuring and Monitoring Quality (MeMoQ) in baby and toddler care) involving the development of a pedagogical framework and three instruments to cater to the various interests and needs of the various stakeholders (pedagogical

professionals, administration, parents, children). The author illustrates the ways in which the principles of transparency and participation which guide the project method are applied and points out the forthcoming challenges facing widespread implementation of the instruments developed.

Subsequently, the article of *Ferre Laevers* presents a process-oriented approach to quality monitoring that is also applied within the MeMoQ-project. The approach takes the child's perspective into consideration and focuses on the question of how children experience ECEC settings. The author points to the concepts of 'well-being' and 'involvement' as key variables that form the starting-point of the quality monitoring instruments which he presents. After an introduction and explanation of these instruments, he provides an overview of research findings from studies where those instruments were tested. In conclusion, Laevers discusses the implications of these research findings for quality monitoring and educational policy in general.

The volume concludes with an examination of future prospects by *Nicole Klinkhammer* and *Britta Schäfer*. Their article analyses the approaches, procedures and reports assembled in this volume with reference to the concept of 'educational governance'. Furthermore, the authors discuss their findings against the backdrop of the German ECEC system. They identify potential connections for a Germany-wide debate on this topic and point out development perspectives for quality monitoring approaches and procedures.

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2 Regulating for Quality in Australian Early Childhood

Margaret Sims, Jennifer Sumsion, Gerry Mulhearn, Susan Grieshaber

2.1 Introduction

This article addresses the highly complex early childhood education and care (ECEC) reform process in Australia from 2009 to the present day. First the Australian early childhood context as well as the Australian political environment are introduced, with particular focus on how they impact on the reform process. Second, the complex processes of quality regulation in Australian ECEC are described in a little detail. The reforms have progressed through the development of a national early childhood quality agenda to the development of a range of activities and outcomes necessary to bring various states and territories together in functioning partnerships. Curricula have been developed, along with a quality assessment process which resulted in services being rated based on the newly developed standards. Third, the impact of this massive political change on children's outcomes is depicted and the evaluations undertaken to examine the effectiveness and impact of the process are identified. Ultimately, the recent changes in quality regulation in Australian early childhood are critically discussed.

2.2 The Early Childhood System in Australia

Australia is a liberal democracy modeled on the British system. Australia has six states and two territories, held together by a national constitution that defines citizen rights and responsibilities. The Federal Government is responsible for foreign relations, trade, defense, immigration and, to an extent, child care. State and Territory Governments are responsible for all other matters. Under this system the provision of early childhood education (preschool) was, and remains, the responsibility of the states/territories and, in the past, each of these jurisdictions had their own (and different) regulations. In contrast, while child care was a federal responsibility, there were different regulations at each state/territory level for minimum standards in child care.

The most significant national reform of early childhood education and care (ECEC) began in 2007, led by the the Australian Labor Government, and included all jurisdictions. The current ECEC system reflects the involvement of both the previous Labor Government and the current Liberal-National Coalition. There is no agreement between the different political parties in relation to early childhood; thus the sector experiences considera-

ble changes and ongoing uncertainty, depending on the political agendas of the party in power at any one time. Overall, however, reforms in early childhood education have developed from a neoliberal agenda which positions quality improvement in services as only attained through the enactment of legislation and accountability. Although there is a growing international resistance to this underpinning assumption (see the following for examples: Abendroth/Portfilio 2015; Giroux 2015; Sims/Waniganayake 2015) at present this resistance has not impacted on the Australian early childhood system nor on the legislation governing it.

Early childhood services in Australia are traditionally divided into two types: child care and preschool education. The following services are included under the child care banner:

- *Long Day Care (LDC):* these are centre-based services operated by community management committees or private providers (including child care corporations). They offer care usually between 7.30 am and 6.00 pm Monday to Friday. Parents using these services are eligible for the Child Care Benefit[3] to contribute towards costs. The benefit received is related to income, and some services require parents to pay a gap fee even when they are in receipt of the maximum benefit. Quality in Long Day Care services is controlled by legislation as part of the National Quality Framework (NQF).[4]
- *Family Day Care (FDC):* educators provide child care in their own homes for children and are supervised and supported by a co-ordinating scheme. Care is flexible and may be offered outside normal business hours and over the weekend. The service is available to children from birth through school age. Parents using this service can claim the Child Care Benefit. Quality in Family Day Care services is controlled by legislation as part of the NQF.
- *Outside School Hours Care (OSHC):* these are often (but not always) based at a primary school and offer care after, and sometimes before school for primary school-aged children. Services are run by schools, community groups, nonprofit organisations and private providers. Parents using this service can claim the Child Care Benefit. Quality in Outside School Hours Care is controlled by legislation as part of the NQF.
- *Occasional Care Services (OCC):* offer child care on a casual hourly or sessional basis. Parents have the flexibility to leave their children for short periods of time when they need irregular care. Services must operate under the relevant state or territory regulations but are not subject to the requirements of the NQF.
- *In Home Care:* there is only a small number of these services, which are targeted at those who have special needs, i.e. rural communities, family illness or disability, multiple births and non-standard hours of work, or

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3   See https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/child-care-benefit for further information in relation to this benefit.

4   The NQF is discussed later in this chapter.

those who cannot access other services. In Home Care services are not covered under the NQF and parents cannot access the Child Care Benefit.

Preschool education services are designed for children in the year before they begin compulsory primary education.[5] In the past these services have often been part-time (e.g. three mornings a week), and current hours of operation vary from part-time to a full school day (9 am – 3 pm). Different jurisdictions use different names for these programmes: e.g., kindergarten, pre-primary, prep, or preschool. Programmes are run in schools, in community settings or integrated within Long Day Care or Occasional Care services. Management of these services can be undertaken by a school, a community management committee, a private provider or a corporation. Preschool is largely provided by government in Tasmania, Northern Territory, South Australia and, to some extent, the Australian Capital Territory.

The government focuses on universal access to preschool education services, with the goal of ensuring that each child has 600 hours of preschool education delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher in the year before beginning school. To achieve universal access, all states and territories have signed a National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for 2016 and 2017. This agreement requires states and territories to support preschool programmes in all settings. This target has yet to be met: in 2012 86.3% of children attended a government[6]-approved preschool (cf. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2014). Funding has been committed to support universal access until 2017 (cf. Australian Government, Department of Education and Training 2016). In contrast, attendance at child care services is lower. In 2012 the percentage of children attending government-approved child care services varied from 52.7% of two-year-olds and 59.7% of three-year-olds to 51.1% of four-year-olds (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service provision 2014).

Costs to families vary across the different services. Preschool education services in 2012-13 ranged from $A2.27 per hour in metropolitan and inner regional areas to $A1.86 per hour in outer regional areas. Preschool costs are subsidized by the government through the partnership agreement referred to above. Parents pay these fees and do not receive any additional benefit to cover their costs. In contrast, child care costs ranged from a median of $A367 per week for full-time care (50 hours) in metropolitan and inner regional areas to $A334 in outer regional areas.[7] Costs of child care

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5   The age at which children begin compulsory schooling varies across the states and territories (see http://www.kidspot.com.au/school/primary/starting-school/starting-age-for-first-year-of-school-requirements-for-each-state) but it is generally in the year they turn 6 years of age.

6   Government here may mean federal (if the programme is in a child care setting) or state (if the programme is in a preschool setting).

7   Children attending preschool are likely to do so on a sessional basis (morning only, or a school day), and thus costs can only be presented per hour as an average would blur the two different

can be ameliorated if parents qualify for the Child Care Benefit,[8] and they may also claim a Child Care Tax rebate. In general, however, the cost of child care runs at about 51.5% of average family household income[9]. The cost of child care is currently under review. Child care costs have been increasing at a faster rate than the consumer price index,[10] and since 2013 have increased at a greater rate than inflation. It is argued that the requirements of the NQF (see later) are a key driver of increasing costs, as is increased demand for services.

Other formal or informal arrangements are possible. Grandparents provide care for around 30% of children of working parents (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014), but figures for families using nannies are not provided. At the present time nanny care is unregulated.

2.3 Development of the National Quality Agenda

The National Quality Framework (NQF) was developed from the National Early Childhood Development Strategy (Council of Australian Governments 2009); both are components of one of the largest reforms in Australian early childhood history. The development of the NQF began with a working paper, followed by extensive consultations involving any interested stakeholders around the country (cf. Early Childhood Development Steering Committee 2009). Over 400 written submissions were received and analysed. Before the implementation of the NQF in 2012 could be completed, legislation needed to be developed in each jurisdiction, along with partnership agreements between the federal government and that jurisdiction. The National Quality Framework consists of several components (cf. Sims et al. 2015, 13):

- National Law
- Regulations enacted in each State and Territory jurisdiction
- The National Quality Standard embedded in the law, that outlines consistent expectations for programmes about quality
- A national quality rating and assessment process that rates services against the National Quality Standard and the Regulations
- Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia which outlines principles, practices and outcomes for early childhood programmes.

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attendance patterns. In contrast, costs for child care are presented per day because parents are required to pay for a whole day, even if they are using the service for fewer hours. Thus a cost per hour for child care would suggest a flexibility that is not available to parents.

8   As of April 2016, families receive the maximum child care benefit if total family income is less than $A43,727 per year. The Child Care Benefit reduces to zero when total family income (for a family with 1 child in care) reaches $A152,147.

9   See: www.mychild.gov.au/childcare-information/fact-sheets

10   See: https://theconversation.com/factcheck-has-there-been-a-massive-increase-in-child-care-costs-under-the-coalition-government-55931

The NQF is compulsory for Long Day Care, Family Day Care, preschool (or kindergarten) and Outside School Hours Care services.[11]

The development of a quality assurance system in a federated nation introduces multiple complexities involving laws, regulations, different types of services, different patterns of attendance, different funding arrangements and different costs. The NQF, introduced from 1 January 2012 by the previous Labor Government (federal), is still evolving, and is presently under scrutiny by the current federal National-Liberal Coalition government. Early childhood policy in Australia (and elsewhere) appears to be particularly susceptible to changes in government ideology, and the new reviews (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2014; productivity Commission 2014) concerning this point have a stronger focus on child care as a tool to enhance parental employment and position child care (particularly that for children under 3) as separate from early education services, in contrast to a focus on meeting children's rights for a quality education, or a focus on preparing children for participation in adult civic life.

2.3.1 National Law and Regulations

Because Australia is a federated system, the NQF could not be operationalized until legal partnership agreements had been ratified with each state and territory. These partnerships clarify objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators, and specify the roles and responsibilities of the states and territories. There is no ONE overarching agreement. Rather, the objectives of the early childhood agenda are captured in a range of partnerships including:

- *The National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education*[12]
- *The National Partnership Agreement on National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care*[13]
- *Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*[14]

The National Partnership on National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood

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11 It does not apply to: a school, if children under school age are included in a programme with children of school age; activity-specific classes (e.g. a ballet class); programmes operating in hospitals or of a therapeutic nature; occasional care; programmes operating in a hotel or resort for children staying there short-term; mobile services; school holiday services; Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services; and some other services specifically related to particular jurisdictions.

12 See: https://education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreement-universal-access-early-childhood-education

13 See:www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/early_childhood/quality_agenda/national_partnership.pdf

14 See: www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/health_indigenous/ctg-early-childhood/national_partnership.pdf

Education and Care has an implementation plan that operates across all jurisdictions, which aims to ensure consistency in implementation despite the complexity of differing operating contexts. All the other Agreements have separate implementation plans for each State and Territory.

2.3.2 National Quality Standard (NQS)

The NQS evolved from previous national and international research. The following recommendations from the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2006, 4) were particularly influential in the development of the early strategy document:

- To attend to the social contexts of early childhood development
- To place wellbeing, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies
- To create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance
- To develop with the stakeholders broad guidelines and curricular standards for all ECEC services
- To encourage family and community involvement in ECEC services
- To aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.

Interpretation of the NQS is intended to take account of context (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2011). Given the complexity of the Australian early childhood system (centre-based and in-home care, care versus education, metropolitan, regional and remote locations, for example) the need for a flexible system was paramount. The National Quality Standard (NQS) is located at schedule one of the National Regulations[15]. The NQS aims to improve quality by focusing on better educator-to-child ratios, achieving greater individual care and attention for children, improving educators' skills and qualifications, providing better support for children's learning and development, and developing a national register to help parents assess the quality of education and care services in their area.

There are 18 standards across the seven quality areas[16], and each standard has several elements (58 in total):

> Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
> Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
> Quality Area 3: Physical environment
> Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
> Quality Area 5: Relationships with children

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15 See: http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653

16 See www.acecqa.gov.au/Quality-Areas

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management.

An example of one of the standards and related elements is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Quality Area 1: Standards and elements

Standard 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development.	Element 1.1.1 Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.
	Element 1.1.2 Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program.
	Element 1.1.3 The program, including routines, is organised in ways that maximize opportunities for each child's learning.
	Element 1.1.4 The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.
	Element 1.1.5 Every child is supported to participate in the program.
	Element 1.1.6 Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world.
Standard 1.2 Educators and coordinators are focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.	Element 1.2.1 Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluation.
	Element 1.2.2 Educators respond to children's ideas and play and use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning.
	Element 1.2.3 Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.

(Source: www.acecqa.gov.au/Educational-program-and-practice)

These standards and elements are currently under review, with the aim of reducing the number of standards and elements in order to simplify the process.[17]

The NQS rating instrument used in the rating of services against the NQS (Rothmann et al. 2012) was developed in consultation with representatives from each jurisdiction. The Australian Council of Educational Research undertook an investigation of various alternatives and their validity, reliability, objectivity, feasibility and usability. A pilot instrument was developed and trialed in 21 Long Day Care Centres and a revision tested in a wider range of 189 services before the final version was produced. The tool offers performance indicators for every element in the standards at each of the rating levels. The Assessment and Rating template is available online.[18]

The first part of the assessment process against the NQS is a self-evaluation of the service and the development of a Quality Improvement Plan for the service by the staff in the service.[19] This is submitted to the relevant State and Territory Regulatory Authority. The second step requires an Authorised Officer employed by the relevant State and Territory Regulation Authority to rate the service against the standards based on the written documentation provided.[20] An Authorised Officer (usually the person who has done the rating) undertakes a site visit (the duration of this visit is generally six hours but can vary depending on the service) and completes the assessment. This assessment involves the Authorised Officer observing the educators and children during their normal daily routines, discussing the practices observed and sighting relevant documentation.[21] After the visit the regulatory authority completes the rating and sends a draft to the service, in order for them to provide feedback on the assessment or ask for clarification before the final ratings are provided to the service. The principle of 'earned autonomy' informs the rating so that services receiving a higher rating are assessed less often. The period between assessments can thus vary from one to three years.

Authorised Officers are required to give services notice (usually five days) before they visit to undertake the assessment. However, they are also able to make unscheduled visits, particularly when there is reason to believe

17 A guide to the NQS is available at http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/NQF03-Guide-to-NQS-130902.pdf

18 See: http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Assessment%20and%20Rating/2014/20140711%20Assessment%20and%20Rating%20Template%20for%20ACECQA%20website.pdf

19 www.acecqa.gov.au/quality-improvement-plan_1. The entire process is outlined at www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment-and-ratings-process and the Operations Manual for the Regulatory Authority can be found at http://www.acecqa.gov.au/operational-policy-manual-for-regulatory-authorities

20 See http://files.acecqa.-gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/Assessment%20and%20rating%20process_121108Approved.pdf, and the rating instrument at http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/-Assessent%20and%20Rating/2014/20140711%20Assessment%20and%20Rating%20Template%20for%20ACECQA%20website.pdf

21 See http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Assessment%20and%20Rating/2014/Guide%20A_R%20-Services%202.pdf

the service may be non-compliant, has provided false evidence or is likely to destroy evidence should a visit be announced.[22]

The ratings allocated are given in each of the seven quality areas, and an overall rating is also given using the following scale:

- Exceeding National Quality Standard
- Meeting National Quality Standard
- Working Towards National Quality Standard
- Significant Improvement Required

It is possible for a service to request a review of the allocated ratings.[23] Services rated at Exceeding NQS were entitled to apply for an Excellent rating. This rating, whilst initially available, has now been archived as it was not thought to contribute additional value in the system.

2.3.3 National Quality Assurance Authority

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) was set up on 1 January 2012 to implement and guide the monitoring and quality assurance system. ACECQA is responsible for a range of functions including guiding the implementation of the NQF and reporting on its operation and effectiveness in improving quality. ACECQA also publishes a range of resources to support services in their quality improvement activities, and authorizes and maintains registers of approved training courses and accredited services (cf. Sims et al. 2015, 41. Part of ACECQA's role is the approval process needed to operate a service.[24] ACECQA determines the qualifications that should be held by the Authorised Officers employed by the various regulatory bodies in the different jurisdictions. ACECQA also accredits qualifications for staff[25] and provides a list on their website of those qualifications they have accepted as appropriate for a person to be eligible for a position as an early childhood teacher as identified in the regulations. Providers of higher education courses can apply to ACECQA for their qualifications to be accredited and must then demonstrate how their course covers the required material, including specifications for professional practice.

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22 See: http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/OPM/2015%20JUNE/OPM-E%20Monitor%20Comp%20-Enforce.pdf

23 See: http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/Information%20Sheet%20-%20-First%20Tier%20Review.pdf and http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Quals/Information%2-0SheetSecondTierReview_v7July2013.pdf

24 See: http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/Information%20sheets/-ACECQA%20Information%20-Sheet%20%20Overview%20of%20Approvals.pdf

25 See: http://acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications

2.3.4 Early Years Learning Framework

Two learning frameworks have been approved, one for early childhood (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2009), and one for school-aged care (Commonwealth of Australia 2011). The EYLF was the first formal outcome of the Early Years Strategy. The EYLF itself was developed in stages consisting of (Sims et al. 2015, 59):

- A literature review of early childhood education and care curriculum and frameworks (cf. Wilks et al. 2008)
- A commissioned background research paper suggesting possible directions for the Early Years Learning Framework (cf. Edwards et al. 2008)
- A discussion paper bringing the information together was released for national consultation (cf. Productivity Agenda Working Group Early Childhood Development Subgroup 2008)
- Tenders were called for in August 2008 for the following two stages in the development of the Early Years Learning Framework. The recommended version of the framework was required to be submitted in May 2009.

Consultations were held over the draft EYLF and a six-week trial took place between February and April 2009, with the final version being launched in July of that year. Services used the framework for two years before the NQS became operational. A number of jurisdictions had already developed their own frameworks, some of which continue to be used. The Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2011) undertook a study to identify baseline practices and track the beginning of engagement with the EYLF. The study demonstrated that ECEC staff were having difficulties with professional reflection and family engagement, and lacked access to appropriate professional development. Further research (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2012) tracked implementation in 2011-12 and indicated that educators were still struggling to understand and use the EYLF and that educators in remote areas were particularly at risk.

Both the EYLF and the school-aged care framework identify current understandings of high-quality practice. The EYLF articulates five principles that underpin quality learning experiences:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships
- High expectations and equity
- Respect for diversity
- Ongoing learning and reflective practice

and eight areas of practice that outline pedagogical intentions:

- Adopting holistic approaches
- Being responsive to children

- Planning and implementing learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning
- Valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families
- Providing for continuity in experiences and enabling children to experience successful transitions
- Assessing and monitoring children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.

Five learning outcomes are described, which are aimed at recognizing the complexity and interrelatedness of quality learning:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
- Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners
- Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

2.4   Key debates

2.4.1 Has quality improved?

There is no research identifying quality of Australian early childhood services using internationally standardized measures of quality taken before and after the implementation of the NQF. ACECQA publishes quarterly snapshots of quality assessments but these are simply reporting the current situation, and services' performance against the identified Australian standards. As of 31 March 2015 56% of services had received a rating, and 66% of these were assessed as Meeting or Exceeding NQS (thus 34% of services which underwent a rating are operating at a level below NQS) (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2015b). As of August 2015, 63% of services had received a rating and 66% remained assessed as Meeting or Exceeding NQS (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2015a). Services are more likely to be rated well on: *Quality Area 4 - Staffing arrangements, Quality Area 5 - Relationships with children* and *Quality Area 6 - Partnerships with families and communities*. Services are performing less well on: *Quality Area 1 - Educational program and practice, Quality Area 2 - Children's health and safety, Quality Area 3 - Physical environment* and *Quality Area 7 - Leadership and service management*.

Fourty-four percent of Family Day Care services are rated as needing to improve, compared to 34% of centre-based care services. These services may only have one area for which they are rated as "working towards", or they could have this rating for all seven areas and all 58 elements. ACECQA expected that many services would achieve this rating during the transition into the NQS as the requirement to meet the standard in all 58

elements is an aspiration. There are minimal differences in the quality ratings of services based in disadvantaged compared to advantaged areas, but more services in remote and very remote areas[26] are likely to be rated as working towards NQS. Remote and very remote areas are characterized by a significant lack of resources and trained staff, families are more likely to be living in poverty, and children's development is more likely to be at risk.

2.4.2 Are there changes in children's outcomes?

One way of estimating whether the quality assurance process is having an impact is to look at children's performance at school entry over the past few years, remembering that only approximately half of all children beginning school have attended ECEC services. Table 2 shows the achievement levels of children nationally as they enter school, derived from data from the Australian Early Development Index (now known as the Australian Early Development Census). This demonstrates that the only improvement in children's achievement between 2009 (when children in ECEC would NOT have been subject to the NQS) and 2012 (when children in ECEC would begin to be subject to the NQS, and certainly should have been subject to the EYLF) is in the areas of emotional maturity, cognitive and language development. This suggests that these children may have experienced ECEC opportunities that focused more on these areas of development rather than other areas such as physical and social-emotional development. ACECQA is also attempting to evaluate the impact of their work, and has recently established a Research Advisory Committee (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2013a) and appointed a Research and Evaluation Manager.

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26 Note that in the Australian context, 'remote' and 'very remote' refer to geographical location only and is independent of socioeconomic status. Included in the remoteness rating is distance to services, population size and distance from population centres –
See: www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/remoteness+structure

Table 2 Changes in outcomes for Australian children as measured by the AEDI (cf. Australian Government 2013b, Centre for Commmunity Child Health & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research 2009)

	% 2009	% 2012
Children developmentally vulnerable in one domain	23.4	22
Children developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains	11.8	10.8
Children developmentally vulnerable in physical health and wellbeing	9.3	9.3
Children developmentally vulnerable in social competence	9.5	9.3
Children developmentally vulnerable in the area of emotional maturity	8.8	7.6
Children developmentally vulnerable in language and cognitive skills	8.9	6.8
Children developmentally vulnerable in communication skills and general knowledge	9.2	9.0

(Source: Sims/Waniganayake 2015, 340)

2.4.3 Quality and Fees

Sims et al. (2015, 69) provided a copy of a table looking at the links between fees and quality (see Table 3 in this article). Both the lower and higher cost services appear less likely to be of high quality, although the lower cost services were also more likely to be rated as working towards the NQS (i.e. they did not meet the required standard). However, as not all services have been rated yet, the validity of these assumptions remains questionable and it is not appropriate to speculate why this data demonstrates that the average cost centres performed at a higher level of quality.

Table 3 The relationship between fee level and quality rating

National Quality Standard Assessment	Fee	Level				
	$A56-70	$A71-85	$A86-100	$A101-115	$A116-130	
Exceeding National Quality Standard	20%	30%	30%	10%	10%	100%
Meeting National Quality Standard	18%	46%	36%	0%	0%	100%
Working Towards National Quality Standard	29%	34%	24%	10%	3%	100%

(Source: Early Childhood Australia 2013, 3)

2.5 National Reviews

ACECQA undertook a study of the regulatory burden imposed by the NQF (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2013b), which reported that the majority of educators felt positively about the system. Those who had gone through the rating process identified it as less burdensome than those who had not. In particular, those who had been assessed under the previous system (operated by the National Child Care Accreditation Council) thought that the current system was less burdensome. Concerns were raised about the cost of the process: the report estimates a one-off cost for the initial design of an NQF compliant programme as $A3,990, an annual cost per room of documentation of the programme and reflections[27] of $A6197.80, and an annual cost per child of documenting assessments of $A689.80. These costs all needed to be covered by the service itself.

The Wave 2 report (cf. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2014) presented data collected at the beginning of that year and demonstrated that perceived burden was lower than in the earlier research. A third wave of data collection is currently taking place and has not yet been published.

A Regulation Impact Statement was released for consultation in November 2014 (cf. Education Council 2014), which argued that three years after implementation, there was a need to consider refining or enhancing the NQF. In particular, the report argued the need to address concerns over (ibid., 17):

- areas of unnecessary regulatory and administrative burden
- insufficient consistency and clarity; and
- incomplete regulatory coverage.

The recommendations made in the review include (ibid., 23):

- Refining the National Quality Standard and assessment and rating process
- Removing supervisor certificate requirements
- Expanding the scope of services covered by the NQF
- Extending some liability to educators
- Changes to prescribed fees
- National educator to child ratio for OSHC services
- Improved oversight of and support within FDC services.

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27 Within each centre are several rooms where children are grouped generally by age. Each room has its own staff who work only in that room. Within each room staff are required to reflect on their practice and to produce documentation relating to each child.

The Productivity Commission (2014) was also tasked with undertaking a national review, not specifically of the national reforms, but rather of the early childhood sector in terms of its ability to support women's participation in work and offer quality learning experiences for children as well as its flexibility and sustainability. This report brought to the fore the old 'care versus education' debate. Specifically, the Productivity Commission reported (ibid., 8):

> *It is accepted that children are learning and developing very rapidly in their early years; it is also accepted that the quality of children's environment and interactions is important for learning and developing outcomes. What is not supported by the research evidence, and what the Commission does not accept, is that either (or a combination) of these findings necessitates that children require a tertiary qualified educator from birth.*

As a consequence of this, the Productivity Commission recommended that children under three do not require a university-trained teacher. Instead, their needs are better met by an educator holding a Certificate III qualification (Recommendation 7.4, 56). In Australia this is a qualification where, under the national qualifications framework[28] staff are expected to manage routine tasks and be able to solve routine problems. This qualification level can be obtained in six months on completion of secondary level education. In contrast, children over three years of age are positioned as learners, and it is recommended that their learning needs are better met by an early childhood teacher with a university degree.

At this point the extent of influence held by this report remains unclear. Subsequent to its presentation, Australia had a change of Prime Minister and a change of Ministerial portfolios in 2014 and again in 2015. There are preliminary indications that these changes may impact on the Commonwealth government's early childhood agenda, and 2016 has seen the introduction of a pilot programme offering child care subsidies for families using nannies and a requirement that children are fully immunized in order to qualify for the Child Care Benefit and the Family Tax Benefit[29].

2.6 Discussion

Changes to regulation and quality assurance in Australian early childhood education began with the Council of Australian Governments (2009) report and progressed with the development of a National Quality Framework. The framework consisted of a number of elements, beginning with the enactment of a national law. Each state and territory was then required to enact relevant legislation to comply with the national law. The national law encompasses the National Quality Standard (NQS). Services are assessed

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28 See: www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/in-detail/aqf-levels
29 See: www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/the-new-laws-that-come-into-effect-in-2016-around-australia/news-story/d1c8d62202b041d3614a3d252fd049dc

against the NQS using a national rating system, which is operationalized through State and Territory Regulatory Authorities. A national learning framework (EYLF) is part of the package of reform; this identifies principles of quality practice and national learning outcomes which are to be used to develop appropriately contextualized learning opportunities for children.

Costs of compliance remain a concern, as does the regulatory burden. Part of the NQS and national law has included progressive improvements in structural elements of quality such as adult to child ratios. Such changes have cost implications for those delivering services (cf. Productivity commission 2014, 8), and there has been pressure to reduce the legislative requirements for quality in order to reduce costs. Certainly both the Productivity Commission (2014) and the Education Council (2014) have partially justified their recommendations to dilute quality requirements on the basis of cost. It appears that neither the argument of children's rights nor the children-as-economic-investment argument outweigh the issues of current-day costs and the tension between state and parental responsibility for these costs.

Concern remains over the fact that policy in early childhood is still subject to significant changes depending on government ideology. Funding priorities change with each new government, and services set up and flourishing at one period sometimes find themselves defunded upon a change in government. Sustainability is thus a significant concern, impacting not only on families and communities, but on the early childhood workforce. Tension over responsibilities of government and families in relation to cost continue to position child care (but not preschool education) as beyond the financial capacity of some families and communities, making it impossible for some parents to participate in the workforce and impacting on the resources of families to support their young children. There is considerable evidence in Australia to support the contention that the gap between those families who are advantaged and those who are disadvantaged is not narrowing (cf. Song et al. 2014; Australian Government 2013a; Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth 2013), and actually widens for Indigenous school children as they progress through school (cf. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). This suggests that early childhood services (among many others) are not accessible to those families who most need them, and ongoing instability in many services due to funding uncertainties exacerbates accessibility problems.

Australia's early childhood quality assurance and compliance system offers one model of managing quality. International debate exists in relation to the effectiveness of a top-down, imposed regulatory approach to quality assurance, and, at this time it is not yet possible to demonstrate clearly whether this approach in Australia has had a positive impact on children's outcomes. Change is inevitably a mixture of joy and disappointment, and the early childhood quality improvement process in Australia is no different.

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3 Preschool Quality, Governance and systematic Quality work in a Swedish Preschool context

Sonja Sheridan

3.1 Introduction

This article aims to explore preschool quality and systematic quality work in relation to conditions created on different system levels for children's well-being, learning and development in Swedish preschools. It is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979, 1986) and a pedagogical perspective on quality (cf. Sheridan, 2001, 2007a, 2009), building on research on preschool quality and the policy and context for Swedish preschools. This theoretical framework will be elaborated in the second part of the article. Part three will give an insight into the Swedish preschool context and the systematic quality work performed there. In the conclusion, part four, the strength of this approach will be discussed.

The ecological system theory highlights how the quality of a preschool is dependent on several factors that interact with one another on different system levels (cf. Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986). On the macro level, a country's policy and educational intentions for preschool, as well as societal views on the child and childhood (cf. Moss 2004; Sylva et al. 2010), influence conditions created for children's learning and development in preschool – the micro level. In a spiral process, policy can also change over time for various reasons, such as new findings from research, changing parental views and implications drawn from preschool teachers' practical experience of preschool. This means that the quality of preschool has to be studied from a comprehensive perspective and in the light of preschool policy and views on children's learning and development.

Pedagogical quality is a novel perspective on quality and can be defined as an intersubjective perspective on quality (cf. Sheridan 2009). It constitutes four dimensions of quality, embracing aspects of quality such as policy for preschool, curriculum goals and content of early childhood education/pedagogy, pedagogical processes, communication, interaction and participation. The four dimensions are intersubjectively agreed and subjectively conceived depending on perspective, time, and context, which is taken into consideration. Through their interaction, different conditions are created for children's learning and development in preschool, affecting a wide range of cognitive, social and emotional outcomes in children's learning and development (cf. NICHD 2005; Burchinal et al. 2009; Sheridan et al. 2009; Burchinal et al. 2010; Pianta et al. 2010; Sylva et al. 2010). The four dimensions of quality will be elaborated and discussed in part two.

Research shows that only preschools of high quality can significantly affect children's academic achievements, self-esteem and attitudes towards lifelong learning (cf. Schweinhart et al. 1993; Sylva 1994; Sheridan et al. 2009; Sylva et al. 2010). This makes it vital to understand what constitutes quality and how it can be discerned, evaluated and enhanced through systematic quality development work (cf. SFS 2010:800).

In research, high quality in preschool is characterized by both child- and goal-orientation as well as by interaction, communication and participation (cf. Siraj-Blatchford 2007; Sheridan et al. 2009; Sylva et al. 2010). The learning environment is rich in challenges and learning opportunities. Children participate in and influence ongoing activities as well as their own learning. The preschool teachers are engaged and present physically, emotionally and cognitively in communicating about issues in the past, present and future. They focus on the children's interests, experiences and knowledge formation in relation to the overall goals for preschool. A central aspect is that they communicate and focus on a shared object of learning (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009).

In contrast, low quality can be characterized by limitations in interaction, communication and participation. The learning environment is also restrictive in space, material resources and accessibility for the children, as well as offering few opportunities for children to learn different content. Preschool teachers seem to focus on keeping control and maintaining order. Preschool teachers and children both seem to have different intentions and be unaware of each other's intentions.

Thus, variations in the quality of preschools can be described as the fit or lack thereof between various factors and aspects, such as pedagogical intentions, uses of material resources, contents, activities, teachers' learning strategies, communication and interplay with children, and children's learning and experience of participation and influence, documentation and evaluation (cf. Sheridan 2009; Pramling Samuelsson/Sheridan 2009). In high-quality preschools these aspects are intertwined, shaping and constituting each other constructively, while in low-quality preschools they seem to be separate constructs and situations. As preschool quality varies, indicating that the children are exposed to unequal conditions for learning (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009; Sylva et al. 2010), the key question is: how can the quality of preschool be discerned, evaluated and enhanced through systematic quality development work?

3.2   Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is composed of interactionist and relational perspectives that draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979, 1986) as extended by Garbarino (1992) and by Miller et al. (2011). These researchers advocate a critical ecology of the early childhood profession, as well as of theories of children's learning (cf. Vygotsky [1934] 1986), and a perspective based on four dimensions of pedagogical quality (cf. Sheridan 2009). Together, these theoretical perspectives contribute to an understand-

ing of relationships between policy issues and educational goals, and of how these affect the conditions for children's learning in preschool.

The ecological systems theories and the four dimensions of pedagogical quality are applied to examine preschool governance and systematic quality development work in relation to children's learning in preschool in terms of different interrelated strata – namely macro, exo, meso, micro and chrono system levels. In this article, the dimensions of pedagogical quality are used to highlight how systems interact on different levels and create conditions for children's well-being, learning and development in preschool. The ecological perspective (cf. Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986) contributes to an understanding of social policy issues on the macro level combined with the municipalities' allocation of resources (exo level), affecting structural factors and pedagogical processes in preschool (micro level) over time (chrono level). It highlights how, through interaction between the systems, preschool teachers obtain knowledge of how to work with quality issues and deal with different goals, contents and situations in preschool, as well as develop an understanding of how curriculum goals can be concretized in practice, evaluated and enhanced. This article discusses the influence of various factors and aspects on the conditions for children's well-being, learning and development from a pedagogical perspective on quality.

A pedagogical perspective on quality, as an inter-subjective phenomenon (Sheridan, 2009), derives from the view that there are values and conditions so crucial to children's learning and well-being that they serve to bridge cultural and contextual specifics and function as unifying devices (cf. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989; Balaguer 2004). Thus, an inter-subjective perspective on quality means that, to a certain extent, people can agree on and share understandings of experiences, values, structural factors, pedagogical processes and situations in preschool (cf. Sheridan 2009). The core of pedagogical quality lies in the interplay between the preschool teacher and the child. This means that pedagogical quality does not exist in itself, but takes shape and develops in pedagogical processes through interaction and communication between children and teachers, and through children's interactions with objects in preschool contexts (cf. Sheridan 2001, 2007a, 2009; Sheridan et al. 2009).

As mentioned above, there are four interacting dimensions that constitute pedagogical quality. These are the dimensions of (1) society, (2) preschool teachers, (3) children and (4) learning contexts (cf. Sheridan 2007a, 2009). The four quality dimensions are derived from a meta-analytical process of deconstruction and reconstruction of research on quality in preschool (cf. ibid.). Each dimension is made up of qualities that are unique to that dimension and that can be related to structures, processes, contents and results (cf. Donabedian 1980; Sheridan 2009). Depending on how the dimensions interact with one another, learning environments of different qualities are created. Thus, from a pedagogical perspective on quality the learning environment in preschool can be seen as a complex system of interplay between policy, people, material resources, contents and pedagogical processes.

3.2.1 Four dimensions of pedagogical quality

The dimension of society focuses on policy and societal intentions related to views of the child, childhood and preschool. The dimension of society encompasses norms and values, traditions, cultural and contextual specifics and preschool traditions that need to be taken into account when the quality of preschool is evaluated holistically and with transformative intentions. Its structural quality embraces laws, policy, economic funding, expectations and societal demands on preschool. This dimension provides knowledge of policy and the overall goals for preschool and shows how these goals are intended as values, content and activities in practice. In this article, analysis through the dimension of society focuses on governance and systematic quality development work in the macro and exo systems.

The focus of *the dimension of preschool teachers* is on preschool teachers' child perspectives and their professional competence and knowledge in terms of strategies, approaches, communication and interplay. The dimension encompasses preschool teachers' beliefs and values, their views of the child and their knowledge and learning, as well as their competence, knowledge and skills in a broad range of areas. A central factor is the preschool teachers' ability to understand the child's own perspectives and how to make the child part of ongoing activities. In this article, the analyses aim to highlight preschool teachers' various approaches and learning orientations, content knowledge and didactical strategies in terms of competence in sharing and communicating learning objectives with the children.

The dimension of the child focuses on children's well-being, learning, development and participation from a child perspective and the perspective of the child. Central in this dimension is children's meaning-making, communication and interaction, both with one another and with preschool teachers. The outcome quality in this dimension highlights children's learning processes in relation to curriculum goals and conditions for learning in preschool. In this article, the analyses underline different approaches and methods to documentation and assessment as a means to support and challenge children in their learning, as well as to enhance preschool quality.

The dimension of learning contexts highlights the observable aspects of quality in preschool. It shows how teachers, children and (learning) objects interact and are related to one another in practice. The focus of this dimension is on how space, materials, goals, contents, pedagogical processes, communication and interaction are formed into a learning environment and on how this environment supports and challenges children's learning, development and participation. In this article, the analyses focus on learning environments of different qualities and on how these environments create different conditions for children's learning and well-being in preschool.
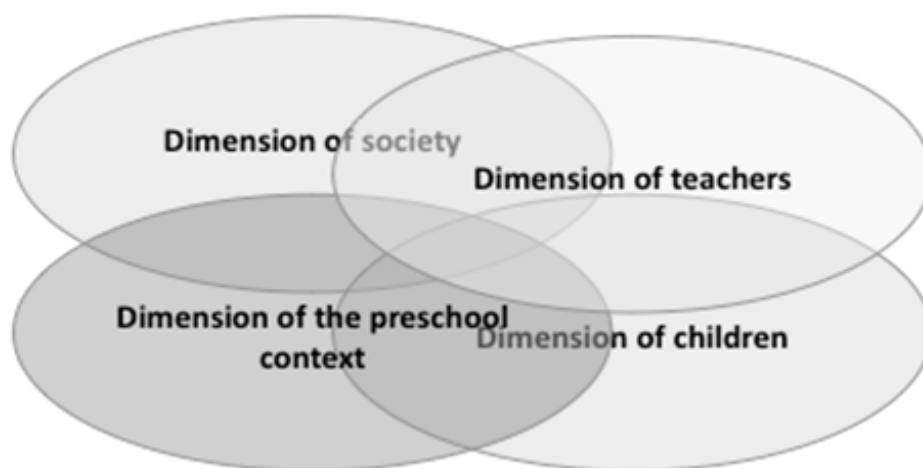
Figure 1 Four dimensions of pedagocial quality as tools and analytical lenses
(Source: author's own)

3.3 Swedish preschool policy, governance and context

Sweden has a decentralized government system in which each of the 290 municipalities is responsible for their own preschools. This means that Swedish preschools are governed and monitored on three system levels; the macro level (society), the exo level (municipalities) and the meso/micro levels (preschool). Laws, objectives and guidelines are formulated on the macro level to be monitored and supported by the municipalities and realized as content and activities in preschool.

The political intention is for these systems to be linked, interact and mutually influence one another in order to create equal conditions for children to learn and develop in preschools of high quality. If and when these systems interact in a mutual and non-hierarchical way, policy in terms of laws, guidelines and curriculum guides the work in municipalities and preschool, and is in turn influenced by different stakeholders through research and practical work in preschool. However, research shows that in some municipalities the systems do not interact constructively with one another, but tend to work independently of each other. In some municipalities, instead of supporting preschools in working in line with curricular intentions, the governance may even hinder them (Lager, 2015). Taking this into consideration, focus is now directed towards each system and its governing role.

3.3.1 The macro system – society

In Sweden, early education is a question of laying a broad foundation for children's lifelong learning and knowledge formation in terms of wellbeing, values, attitudes, learning, play and creativity. Swedish preschools should

offer an enjoyable, secure and rich learning environment, aiming to give children a good start in life by applying a holistic approach to promoting their lifelong learning and development (cf. The National Agency for Education 2011).

In the last decade, Swedish preschools and preschool teacher education have undergone a process of dynamic change (cf. Pramling Samuelsson/Sheridan 2010). Preschool has been subject to the authority of the Ministry of Education since 1996 and constitutes the first step of the educational system. In the Education Act (cf. SFS 2010, 800), preschool is recognized as a distinctive kind of school within the Swedish educational system. Preschool is under the direction of the Education Act (ibid.) and the preschool curriculum (1998/2010), which set forth the societal and educational intentions for preschool and children's learning and development (cf. The National Agency for Education, 2011). The National Agency for Education supports the educational system through guidelines, recommendations and implementation suggestions, while the National Agency for Inspection monitors the equality and high quality of the educational system.

The Education Act, which came into force in 2010, requires that all municipalities and preschools work systematically with quality issues. It stipulates that the systematic quality development work is to be documented, but not how. This is up to the preschool teachers in preschool to decide and carry out.

The Swedish national curriculum for preschools was introduced in 1998 and revised in 2010 (cf. The National Agency for Education 1998/2011). The revision directed a stronger focus onto children's learning and development of various content areas, such as early mathematics, literacy, natural science and technology. This means that preschools should be more pedagogical and learning-oriented, but *not* in an academic way (cf. Bennett 2010). Following the preschool tradition, different goals and content areas are to be integrated with one another in different themes, for example themes of spring, circus etc. using preschool didactics (cf. Pramling/Pramling Samuelsson, 2011). By applying this thematic work approach, learning is also to be integrated with play and care and built on children's interest and previous experience. Thus, children's social, emotional and cognitive learning are integrated and viewed as of equal importance (cf. The National Agency for Education 2011). Contents and activities are also to be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values, enabling children to acquire an understanding of the values upon which Swedish society is based. The preschool curriculum clearly states that children are expected to participate, develop social competence, acquire knowledge within a broad range of areas and learn how to play and cooperate with their peers.

The curriculum also sets forth the requirement of following up, evaluating and developing preschool quality, which requires monitoring, documentation and analysis of the child's learning and development:

> *The quality of the preschool shall be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed. Evaluating the quality of the preschool and creating good conditions for learning requires that the child's learning and development be monitored, documented and analysed. Supporting and challeng-*

ing children in their learning entails knowledge of each child's experiences, knowledge and participation, as well as influence over and interest in the different goal areas. This also requires knowledge of how the child's exploration, questions, experiences and involvement are used in the preschool, how the child's knowledge changes and when they experience the preschool as interesting, fun and meaningful.

The aim of evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of the preschool i.e. its organisation, content and actions 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 the preschool. Analyses of the results of evaluation indicate areas that are critical for development. All forms of evaluation should take the perspective of the child as the starting point. Children and parents should participate in evaluation and their views are to be given prominence (The National Agency for Education 2010, 14).

In the revised preschool curriculum (2010), preschool teachers were assigned distinct areas of responsibility:

They are, for example, responsible for how the goals of the curriculum are integrated with each other in pedagogical work, and for ensuring that each child's learning and development is regularly and systematically documented, followed up and analyzed so that it is possible to evaluate how the preschool provides opportunities for children to develop and learn in accordance with the goals and intentions of the curriculum. Documentation, follow-up and analysis should also cover how the abilities and knowledge of children change over time in the goal areas in relation to conditions created for learning, and ensure that the knowledge provided by the systematic work on quality is used to develop the quality of the preschool, and thus the child's opportunities for learning and development (cf. The National Agency for Education 2011, 14f).

For preschool teachers to follow the Education Act (cf. SFS, 2010:800) and the intentions in the preschool curriculum (2010), specific competence and knowledge within a broad range of areas are required. The preschool curriculum comprises a number of goals to aim for, but no guidelines are given of how preschool and education should be organized as a means of reaching the visualized outcomes. Thus it is up to preschool teachers themselves to interpret the goals and to decide how they should be concretized as contents and activities. Hence, the quality in preschools in terms of conditions created for children's learning is dependent on the preschool teachers' competence and understanding of the goals and the preschool assignment, as well as their beliefs and views concerning the child, knowledge and learning (cf. Sheridan et al. 2015), which direct the focus onto Swedish preschool teacher education.

3.3.2 Swedish preschool teacher education

In Sweden, a new form of preschool teacher education was introduced in 2011. The three-and-a-half-year academic education programme is based on

scientific evidence and proven experience and governed by national policy, curricula and guidelines (cf. SFS 2010:541). The programme involves 210 higher education credits, 30 credits of which are for practice experience in preschool. Amongst other things, the introduction of a new preschool teacher education programme meant that all educational programmes for preschool teachers in Sweden had to be planned with new goals, courses and content.

The overall goals for preschool teacher education are extended and organized within the domains of 1) knowledge and understanding, 2) skills and abilities, and 3) judgement and approach. Through the educational programme, preschool teacher students are to develop a professional identity as preschool teachers. After completing the programme, these preschool teachers should have the necessary knowledge and abilities to independently take responsibility for pedagogical activities in preschool and provide for children's right to care, development and learning. One key goal for preschool teaching students is to learn how to create high-quality conditions for children's learning and development in preschool.

In both the revised preschool curriculum and the new preschool teacher education programme, the focus is clearly on content areas such as language, mathematics, technology and science, as well as documentation, evaluation and didactic issues. The revised preschool curriculum highlights preschool teachers' responsibilities for pedagogical issues and states the explicit aim of the new preschool teacher education programme as educating teachers for a professional role (cf. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2011; Pramling Samuelsson/Sheridan 2010). Thus, the quality of a preschool, referring to the conditions created for children's learning about different contents, is dependent on the preschool teacher education programme for educating preschool teachers to work with the goals in the preschool curriculum in a competent and professional way.

3.3.3 The exo system – municipalities

Preschools can be either private or owned by a municipality. Independently of their ownership, all preschools are under the responsibility of their municipality and are obliged to comply with the preschool curriculum. Municipalities must work systematically on quality issues related to preschool (cf. SFS 2010:800). Thus, municipalities have a dual assignment, both being responsible for preschool quality and being the provider of resources in terms of facilities, leadership and numbers of children in the groups, the child-staff ratio, and organization of the working teams and the child groups in preschool. These are conditions that often lie beyond preschool teachers' own influence, and are something they need to deal with professionally in their work with the children.

In most municipalities preschools are usually open from 6:30 to 18:00 on weekdays. The children are often organized into toddler (aged 1–3), older preschool children (aged 3–5) or sibling groups (aged 1–5). The constitution of the working team varies, but in regular child groups, one preschool teacher and two childcare attendants often work with a group of children.

However, new trends tend to influence how the children are organized in preschool. One example is age-homogenous groups, in which, for example, a preschool group is made up of only the 5-year-olds. Another trend is that two or more traditional child groups are joined with an extended working team of preschool teachers. Where statistics show 26 children or more in a group, this most often reflects this new organization of combined groups, comprising 40 to 50 children or more and extended working teams of seven or eight adults (cf. Seland 2009; Williams et al. 2016). In regular child groups the average number of children is 16.9, but the numbers can range from eleven to 26. The staff/child-ratio is 5.3, which means that both group size and child/staff ratio have been relatively stable during the last decade (cf. The National Agency for Education 2014a, b).

In 2013, the Swedish National Agency for Education removed their recommendation of a maximum of 15 children per group, for the simple reason that municipalities did not follow these guidelines. However, a benchmark is now once again on the political agenda for the number of children in a preschool group (cf. Sheridan/Williams 2016). In 2016 the Swedish National Agency for Education recommends the following benchmarks: 1) 6 to 12 children in the group for children aged 1–3, and 2) 9 to 15 children in the group for children aged 4-5. In the following, approaches and methods used for systematic quality work in preschool will be examined.

Approaches to and methods for systematic quality (development) work in terms of documentation, assessment and evaluation

As stated above, systematic quality work in municipalities and preschools is regulated by the Education Act (cf. SFS 2010:800). According to the law, the quality of preschools must be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed. The documentation must include information on results, analyses of development areas and decisions concerning the required actions. The quality work is to be based on both summative and formative approaches and be guided by the aims and intentions of the curriculum. Thus, on a macro level, the focus is on the *what* aspect: i.e. that the quality of a preschool is to be documented, followed up, evaluated and developed, but not on *how* this is to be done. Decisions of how to evaluate preschool quality and how children's learning processes can be documented and followed up in relation to the goals in the curriculum must be made by the municipality, the head of the preschool and the preschool teachers.

The aim is for preschools to work systematically with quality issues in order to discern, evaluate and improve aspects in preschool that are important for children's well-being, play, learning and development. Systematic quality work involves various interdependent steps that follow on from one another in a specific order (Sheridan/Pramling Samuelsson 2009/2016; Sheridan et al. 2011). These steps are: planning, realization/doing, observing, documentation, evaluation and analyses of quality in terms of children's learning and development. Together they form the basis for enhancing preschool quality and function as a means of creating better conditions for children's well-being, learning and development in preschool. Although the whole working team at a preschool is involved in systematic quality work, it

is the preschool teachers who have specific responsibility for this work (cf. The National Agency for Education 2011).

In Sweden, multiple approaches and methods are used to evaluate preschool quality and to assess children's learning and development in various areas. Digital technology is often used for documentation and to create different kinds of portfolios. Thus, modern technology has become an important tool in the documentation and evaluation processes, giving preschool teachers an option both to capture specific learning situations and to follow the progression of children's learning processes over time (cf. Siraj-Blatchford/Siraj-Blatchford 2006). The growing use of different kinds of documentation and evaluation has also raised the need to adopt a critical approach towards methods that lack a clear definition, solid scientific and theoretical base or clear indication of how the documentation and evaluation will be used in preschool in evaluation and assessment of children's learning and development (cf. Bjervås 2011; Vallberg Roth 2010a,b; Vallberg Roth/Månsson 2008a,b, 2010).

Generally preschool teachers are often sceptical about methods introduced by the municipalities (cf. Lager, 2015). The main reason for this is that most of the methods introduced are experienced as result-oriented, focusing on what children actually know instead of their learning processes and changes in ways of understanding. Consequently, challenges faced in systematic quality work include the use of approaches and methods to gain knowledge of children's learning processes, and to change understandings within various content areas without making value judgments about individual children. Instead, the knowledge gained through documentation and assessment is to be used in this type of approach to enhance preschool quality as a whole, in order to create better conditions for children to learn and develop.

Common approaches and methods for assessment and evaluation

The most common approach for capturing children's learning processes and preschool quality is pedagogical documentation (cf. Dahlberg/ Lenz Taguchi 1996; Lenz Taguchi 1997, 2000, 2006; Rinaldi 2006; Lutz 2009; Bjervås 2011; Sheridan et al. 2013). Pedagogical documentation aims to highlight the relation between the child, the environment and the preschool teachers' approaches, and when used as intended, it can be viewed as a contrast to testing of, and making value judgements about, individual children.

Pedagogical documentation can serve several functions (cf. Dahlberg/ Lenz Taguchi 1996). One is to function as a tool for the child to recall, reflect over and explore previous understandings of situations and learning contents. Another is to provide preschool teachers with knowledge of the child's learning processes and the way in which the child understands different contents and objects. A third aim is to provide parents and society in general with information about the preschool. Thus, pedagogical documentation highlights children's learning processes, preschool teachers' approaches towards the children and the preschool quality for the attention of different stakeholders (cf. Dahlberg/Lenz Taguchi 1996; Sheridan 2001).

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (cf. Harms/Clifford 1980; Harms et al. 2015) is a valid and frequently used instrument to evaluate preschool quality in different parts of the world (cf. Phillips/Howes 1987; Tietze et al. 1996; Scarr et al. 1994; Sylva et al. 2006; Sylva et al. 2010). In Sweden, the ECERS has been used as a tool for research, external and self-evaluation, and the improvement of preschool quality (cf. Kärrby/ Giota, 1994; Andersson 1999; Sheridan 2001; Sheridan et al. 2009). The ECERS-3 (cf. Harms et al. 2015) consists of 35 items, which define different levels of quality in typical preschool situations. These items are grouped together into six subscales. Detailed descriptions are provided for each item, with item scores ranging from 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). The lower levels of quality are characterized by pedagogical unawareness and a focus on rules, and material resources, while the 'excellent' level is characterized by preschool teachers' interaction and communication with children in order to encourage learning within different content areas.

In this article, studies based on the ECERS as an example are chosen primarily because of its ability to detect curricular and environmental quality and its ability to function as a measure of comparative quality from a national as well as an international perspective (cf. Sylva et al. 2006; Tietze et al. 1996). A further advantage is that ECERS evaluations focus on the conditions for learning, the pedagogical processes and the experiences of the children rather than on individual preschool teachers or children, which is in line with the Swedish preschool curriculum.

3.3.4 The meso/micro system – preschool

Preschool is an important part of the Swedish society in that 87 per cent of all children aged 1–5 are enrolled in preschool (cf. The National Agency for Education 2011). Preschool is a very important time in children's lives. During this period children are engaged in a dynamic development process, in which they develop cognitive, social, emotional, physical and communicative competences. Thus, the quality of preschool becomes vital as it affects a wide range of outcomes in children's learning and development (cf. Sylva et al. 2010).

Research highlights critical factors for the preschool quality, such as curriculum goals, the physical environment, group size, staff/child ratio, preschool teachers' competence and the make-up of the child group and the organization of the group of children throughout the day (cf. Sylva et al. 2010; Sheridan et al. 2014; Williams et al. 2016). Research shows that both in Sweden and in other countries, preschool teachers often divide the children into smaller groups during part of the preschool day (cf. Sylva et al. 2010; Sheridan et al. 2014). The reasons for this are mainly to pursue theme-based work and because opportunities for children to be seen and recognized are limited in the larger group. In specific learning situations and working with curriculum goals, children need to be in a smaller group.

A Swedish study shows how, why and when children are divided into smaller groups in preschool and how different ways of organizing the group of children creates a variety of conditions for children to learn and develop

in relation to the goals in the preschool curriculum (cf. Sheridan et al. 2014). *An un-organized environment* – in which preschool teachers and children are mainly together in the whole group throughout the day except for short teacher-organized activities and 'circle time' – makes it hard for the preschool teachers to see what is going on among the children and engage themselves in children's learning. Such an environment also creates limitations for interaction and communication between teacher and child, few reciprocal encounters, and few opportunities for children's participation in, and learning of, different content. In *an activity-organized environment*, the preschool day is organized through preschool teacher-planned activities. The children circulate between rooms and activities, while the preschool teachers are often responsible for a specific room, which makes it hard for them to follow individual children's learning processes.

In contrast, *a learning-oriented organized environment* is based on children's participation and interest in learning. The organization of the children into smaller groups and the choice of activities and objects for learning are often shared issues communicated between the preschool teacher and the child/children. The main aim is to create conditions for children's participation and learning of curriculum goals. The preschool teachers' competence at being able to organize the children in such ways that good conditions for learning are created is a skill highly valued by preschool teachers (cf. Sheridan et al. 2011). Preschools with a learning-oriented organized environment embrace the characteristics of high-quality preschools (cf. Sheridan 2009; Sheridan et al. 2009; Sylva et al. 2010). This way of organizing everyday life in preschool can be viewed as an example of a Nordic preschool didactic, based on tradition and developed towards a more learning-oriented and child-centred approach (cf. Pramling/Pramling Samuelsson, 2011). An example of the preschool quality as evaluated with the ECERS is given below.

The Swedish preschool quality as evaluated with the ECERS

Sweden is ranked as having a high-quality ECEC system, but research applying ECERS shows that the quality varies across preschools (cf. Andersson 1999; Sheridan 2001; Sheridan et al. 2009). In the study of *Children's Early Learning*, 38 preschools involving 225 children aged 1–3 and their teachers and parents participated (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009). A revised version (cf. Kärrby 1989; Sheridan 2007b) of the first version of the ECERS (cf. Harms/Clifford 1980) was used to evaluate preschool quality. The preschools were externally evaluated and related to the teachers' self-evaluations with the ECERS. The study was analyzed by applying each of the four quality dimensions individually and all four together (cf. Sheridan 2007b, 2009). The variations in quality between the 38 preschools and the preschool teachers' self-evaluations are described in figure 2. The grey bars represent the quality level reached through external evaluations, and the dots on the line represent the quality level according to the teachers' self-evaluations.
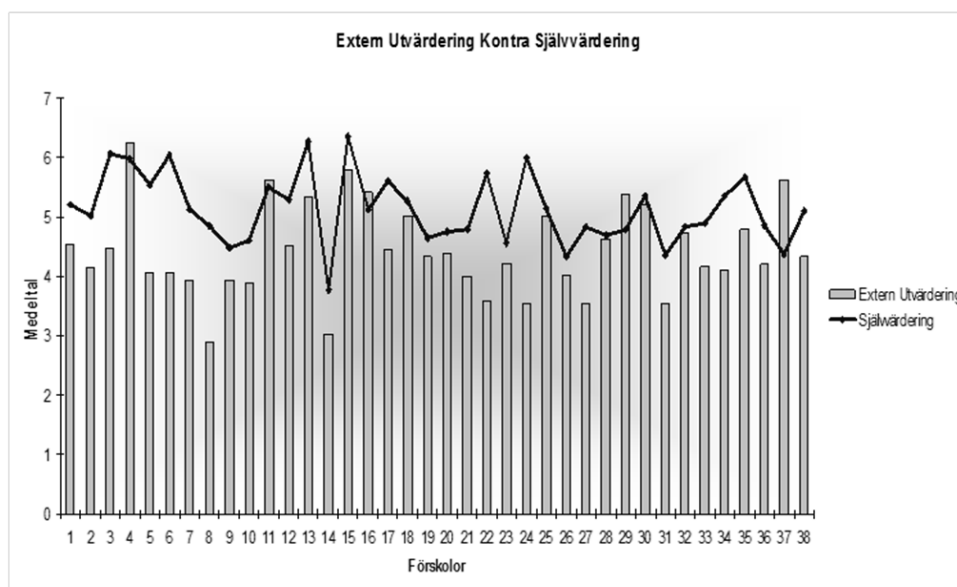
Figure 2 Variations in quality for 38 preschools, external evaluations and self-evaluations
(Source: Author's own)

The variations in quality were notable. Ten preschools were externally evaluated as being of excellent quality and 19 of good quality, while nine were of low quality. The external evaluations had a mean value of 4.44 and a range of 2.90–6.24 (1.00 - 7.00 = min-max). The mean values for the self-evaluations were higher, at 5.19, and ranged from 3.41–7.00. Thus, the results reveal differences both across teachers' self-evaluations and compared to the external evaluations. While teachers in preschools who were externally evaluated as being of low or good quality tend to evaluate their own preschool quality as high, teachers in preschools of high quality seem to underestimate their own quality (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009).

To capture the relationships between the preschool quality and the conditions created for children's learning and development of social competence, new methods were developed for the observation and assessment of children's learning and interaction with their peers. Video observations were used to document children's language and mathematical understanding during structured situations characterized by play, interplay and dialogue. Analyses applying the four dimensions of quality highlighted tendencies towards a link between high quality in preschool and children's learning of mathematics and communication. The results show that children under three years of age, participating in the nine preschools of high quality, were more successful in communication and language and in early mathematics tasks compared to the children in the low- and good- quality preschools.

The results highlight three qualitatively different learning environments, namely *Separating and Limiting environments*, *Child-Centred Negotiating environments* and *Challenging Learning environments* (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009). The variety of learning environments of low, good and high quality created a variety

of conditions for children's well-being, learning and development in pre-school.

Separating and limiting learning environments can be characterized by their limitations in space, material resources and restricted availability for the children. These preschools offer few reciprocal encounters and show poor interaction and communication between teacher and child. There are also few opportunities for children's participation and learning of different content. The preschool teachers' learning approaches can be described as *abdication, being unengaged and absent or dominance,* and focusing more on keeping control and maintaining order instead of being engaged in children's learning processes. In preschools of good quality, the preschool teachers often had a *negotiating* approach. The characteristic of these three learning approaches is that the preschool teachers seem to believe that children learn by just doing things and by participating in different activities.

In preschools of high quality, the learning environment appeared to be rich in challenges and learning opportunities. The children participated in activities together with preschool teachers, who were engaged in their experiences and knowledge formation in relation to a shared object for learning. They interacted with the children and communicated about issues in the past, present and future. The preschool teachers had a *learning-oriented approach.* Their focus was on children's learning of specific objects, and they created conditions for the child to learn about the object intended. One main difference between the *learning-orientated* approach and the approaches of *abdication, dominance and negotiating,* is preschool teachers' understanding of how children learn and make meaning about different contents, situations and phenomena. The variety of learning environments of low, good and high quality indicates that children have unequal opportunities for learning in preschool. The knowledge generated by this study also provides additional evidence that children's opportunities for learning depend on the quality of their preschool.

3.4   Conclusion

The article explored Swedish preschool quality and systematic quality work in relation to conditions created on different system levels for children's wellbeing and learning in preschool. The theoretical framework is mainly based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979, 1986) and an inter-subjective perspective on quality, and the data was analysed by applying the four quality dimensions (cf. Sheridan 2007, 2009). Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) argues that some aspects within and between the systems create possibilities, while others restrict and can hinder children's learning and development in preschool. Analysis through the dimension of society highlights clear and well-established political intentions for the Swedish preschool system in terms of social reforms, stable funding, laws, curriculum, guidelines and a new preschool teacher education. A comparison made by UNICEF (2008) between different benchmarks in 25 countries, such as the amount of educated teachers in preschool etc., highlights that Sweden was

the only country which fulfilled all ten benchmarks.

One of the latest reforms and laws (cf. SFS 2010: 800) states that all municipalities and preschools must work systematically with quality issues to promote equal conditions for all children to learn and develop in preschool. Municipalities thus have a key role: they are responsible for preschool quality and have the dual responsibility of both guiding and following up the quality work in preschools. Taking this into consideration, some municipalities might need to reflect on how they support preschools in their systematic quality work and the methods they choose for this purpose (cf. Lager 2015). Research strongly underlines a critical approach towards methods used for documentation and assessment of children's learning processes, as well as methods for discerning, evaluating and enhancing preschool quality (cf. Vallberg Roth 2010a, 2010b; Bjervås 2011). Important is a clear definition and a solid scientific and theoretical base, combined with a clear indication of *how* the documentation and evaluation will be used in preschools (cf. Alvestad/Sheridan 2014).

Research clearly shows that quality varies across preschools (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009). A recent report revealed that systematic quality work in preschool mainly focuses on the fundamental values in the curriculum, children's development of social competence and the way in which activities are organized and carried out (cf. The National Agency for Inspection 2011, 10). Learning seems to be taken for granted by children's participation in various activities, which can be related to characteristics in low- and good-quality preschools. Preschool teachers express that they lack knowledge of how to document individual children's learning processes or how to use the knowledge gained from documentation as a base for evaluation and means of enhancing preschool quality, which is the fundament of systematic quality work (cf. SFS 2010:800). In contrast, excellent quality, as evaluated in approximately 25 per cent of preschools that participated in a study of children's early learning, created good conditions for children's well-being, lifelong learning and development (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009).

The analyses applying the dimension of society and the preschool teacher dimension stress the importance of competent and professional preschool teachers. At the same time research, (cf. Sheridan 2001; Sheridan et al. 2009) and evaluations in preschool (cf. The National Agency for Inspection 2011, 10) highlight a variety in preschool teachers' approaches and learning orientations, as well as differences in content knowledge and didactic strategies. Taking the analyses applying the dimension of the learning context into account, unequal conditions for children's learning and development in Swedish preschools are highlighted (cf. Sheridan et al. 2009). The results show that the teacher's professional approach and competence are critical to what children learn in preschool (cf. Sylva et al. 2010). Of equal importance is that systematic quality work becomes a tool in preschool to enhance preschool quality, and thus the conditions for children's learning and development.

The understanding of preschool teacher competence is contextual. The meaning given to preschool teacher competence in Sweden can be related to the socio-political changes that have taken place in Swedish society over

the past decade (cf. Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1986; Garbarino 1992). In a study, three intertwined dimensions of teacher competence were identified (cf. Sheridan et al. 2011). Two of these dimensions identify competence in terms of knowledge of what, how and why, while the third dimension is rather unique (cf. Sheridan et al. 2011). It can be related to research that views preschool teacher competence as interactive and transactional (cf. Broström/Veijleskov, 2009; Sommer 2011), and situational and relational (cf. Dalli 2008; Miller et al. 2011; Sheridan 2011). In Sweden, preschool teacher competence is seen in terms of dialogue-based, interactive and relational qualities and transactional competences that are expressed though care, communication and interplay with the children, colleagues, parents etc. (cf. Sheridan et al. 2011).

In sum, the analyses performed by applying the four dimensions of quality highlight how social policy issues on the macro level combine with the municipalities' quality work and provision of resources to affect conditions for preschool teachers' quality work, as well as children's wellbeing, learning and development in preschool over time. The analyses show that in a decentralized system in which Swedish preschools are governed on different system levels, involved stakeholders require an understanding of relationships between policy issues and educational goals and of how these affect the conditions for children's learning in preschool, as well as a common interest in working in the same direction. If and when these systems interact in a mutual and non-hierarchical way, equal conditions can be created for children to learn and develop in preschools of high quality.

A fundamental element of enhancing preschool quality and creating good conditions for children's learning is the presence of well-educated and competent preschool teachers with an understanding of how the quality of the preschool is made up and how it can be discerned, evaluated and enhanced through systematic quality development work. In systematic quality development work, the four dimensions of quality can be used as tools for observing and analysing children's well-being, learning and development in relation to the curriculum goals, to their own communication and interaction with the children, and to preschool quality. Thus, systematic quality development work can be carried out in a more holistic way.

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4 Quality Assessment and Assurance in Preschool Education in Slovenia

Nada Požar Matijašič, Stanka Lunder Verlič

4.1 Introduction

This article will firstly give some information on preschool education in Slovenia. Secondly, the Slovenian approach of assessing and assuring quality in preschool education will be described. The third part will provide an insight into the current efforts of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport to elaborate a national framework for quality assessment and assurance (QAA). Finally, in part four, conclusions will be drawn concerning efforts to assess and assure quality in Slovenian kindergartens in the past and the challenges that lie ahead in the future.

4.2 Preschool Education in Slovenia

Slovenia has a unified system of preschool education for all children aged 1 (following the end of statutory maternity leave) to 6 (when compulsory schooling begins). Preschool education is an integral part of the education system and has been under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) since 1993. The government is responsible for the national policy, the legislative framework and the general programme of preschool education. Preschool education is regulated by two key Acts: the Organization and Financing of Education Act[30] and the Preschool Institutions Act[31].

In Slovenia, preschool education is organized as a public service. In 2014/15, 93% of kindergartens were public and 7% were private. Therefore the majority of children are enrolled in public kindergartens[32] (96%) (cf. SORS 2016).

One of the key objectives of kindergartens is to provide every child with high quality and age-appropriate opportunities for learning and social experience. Preschool education complements family care. Participation of children in preschool education is not mandatory. According to data from

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30 For more information see: http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO445 (Link in Slovenian).

31 For more information see: http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447 (Link in Slovenian).

32 The provision of kindergarten services in Slovenia (slo: vrtec) is delivered in one setting for the whole preschool age range (1–6). Kindergarten is by far the most dominant form of ECEC setting (home-based ECEC also exists, but it caters for a very small share of children).

the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS), 76.8% of children aged 1–5 were enrolled in kindergartens in 2014. In the last ten years, the number of children enrolled in kindergartens has increased by more than half (from 54,815 children in the 2004/05 school year to 84,750 children in the 2014/15 school year), an increase of 54.6% since the 2004/05 school year.

Table 1 Enrolment rate of children attending kindergartens by age, Slovenia, 2014/15 school year

	Age of children						
	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6 or over[33]
	%						
Total	**76.8**	**42.8**	**69.0**	**82.8**	**89.3**	**91.8**	**6.5**
Boys	77.3	42.4	69.5	82.5	89.5	92.1	8.2
Girls	76.3	43.1	68.4	83.1	89.0	91.5	4.8

(Source: SORS 2016)

4.2.1 Organization

Kindergartens can offer various programmes, which differ in length: full-day (6–9 hours), half-day (4–6 hours) and shorter programmes (240–720 hours per year).The full-day programme is also the most common one (97.8% of children are enrolled in full-day programmes) (cf. SORS 2014). Preschool education is provided throughout the year. Kindergartens are open a minimum of five days per week. Individual kindergartens are on duty on Saturdays and are open to all children in the municipality. Kindergartens are closed on Sundays and public holidays. Their opening hours are not regulated by law, but are determined by the kindergartens themselves in their Annual Work Plans[34], in consideration of the needs of working parents (their working hours) and the characteristics of the programmes they

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33 This refers to some cases when the enrolment can be postponed and 6-year-olds can stay in the kindergarten.

34 The organization and detailed contents of the life and work in a kindergarten are determined by the kindergarten itself in its Annual Work Plan (AWP); it is adopted by the Kindergarten Council and approved by the municipality. In their AWPs, kindergartens determine the organization and operating time, the kindergarten programme, any after-hours duties, cooperation with other organizations, activities for integrating the kindergarten into the environment, enrichment activities, participation in projects (e.g. in the field of health, sports, culture), library office hours, celebrations, cooperation with parents etc. The parental participation plan includes meetings with parents, consultations, information exchange on a daily basis, workshops for parents and other forms of parental participation in the kindergarten programme.

offer.

Preschool education is provided for two age groups. The first age group includes toddlers aged one to three, and the second age group spans children aged three to school age. By law, the number of children shall not exceed twelve in a first age group and 22 in a second age group. In 2005 the Preschool Institutions Act was amended, allowing the founding municipality to make a decision to increase the ratio, but by no more than two children per group. The purpose of this amendment was to reduce the number of rejected children in locations where there are not enough available places. Detailed standards on numbers of children are specified by the Rules on the norms and personnel requirements for the performance of preschool education activity[35], which are issued by the Minister of Education.

Kindergartens are established by municipalities. Preschool education in kindergartens is funded from the municipal budget, parental contributions, a state budget and other sources. Municipalities determine the cost of programme per child by considering a variety of factors (the cost of the programme, including education, care and nutrition costs; national regulations on pricing; and families' economic situation). Fees for parents are subsidized by the municipalities in accordance with the national scale of family income and wealth. There are no fees for those with the lowest income. The Preschool Institutions Act and the Fiscal Balance Act[36] (2012) provide additional funds from the state budget for parents with two or more children enrolled in kindergartens, so that parents pay only 30% for the second child and no fee for younger siblings.

Each kindergarten has its own governing body, the Kindergarten Council. The Council is comprised of representatives of the municipality, education staff and parents. Parents are members of the Kindergarten Council on an equal footing with the other members. According to the Organization and Financing of Education Act, each kindergarten also has a Parents' Council. The Parents' Council is a consulting body comprising a parent representative from each group in the kindergarten. The Parents' Council makes proposals, forms opinions and elects its representatives to the Kindergarten Council.

4.2.2 Preschool staff

The programmes at the kindergarten are delivered by the preschool education staff, i.e. the preschool teacher and the preschool assistant, working together in the group. The simultaneous presence of both is regulated at national level; they must both be present together for at least six hours per day in first age groups, and for at least four hours per day in second age groups. They prepare and plan the education process, cooperate with par-

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35 For more information see: http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV7036 (link in Slovenian).
36 For more information see: http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6388 (link in Slovenian).

ents and take part in the organization of life and work in the kindergarten. The child-to-adult ratio in the first age group is six children per adult during the time when they are both present, and eleven children per adult in the second age group.

Preschool teachers for both age groups hold bachelor's degrees in preschool education, and preschool assistants of both age groups hold upper secondary qualifications in preschool education. Continuing professional development is a professional duty and right according to the Organization and Financing of Education Act and the Collective Agreement for Education in the Republic of Slovenia. The Collective Agreement for Education in the Republic of Slovenia determines the right of the education staff to five days of in-service training per year or 15 days over three years.

Public kindergartens have counselling services that operate in the setting[37]. Counsellors can be psychologists, special educators (defectologists), pedagogues, social pedagogues, special and rehabilitation pedagogues, social workers and some other. Other professional specialists are organizers of health-hygiene regimes and nutritionists.

The kindergarten is led by the head teacher, who acts as the pedagogical leader and the manager. In larger kindergartens, the head teacher has one or more deputies.

4.2.3 Curriculum

The Preschool Institutions Curriculum (MESS, 1999) was adopted by the Council of Experts of RS for General Education[38] and gradually implemented in public kindergartens. The Curriculum is based on the developmental process approach, which includes high quality planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process that takes into account individual traits and development of each child as a more important goal than achieving prescribed results. It was drafted as an open and flexible national document with specified principles, outcomes and examples of activities, but is not structured in detail. Kindergartens and education staff participated in its drafting, in cooperation with lecturers from institutions for initial preschool teacher education and other academic experts for preschool education development and substantive experts.

The curriculum for kindergartens and any subsequently adopted annexes[39] and instructions are considered binding documents for public kinder-

37 Kindergartens with 30 or more groups are entitled to a full-time counsellor, smaller kindergartens to an adequate proportion of a full-time counsellor.

38 For more information see: http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/urad_za_razvoj_izobrazevanja/strokovni_sveti/strokovni_svet_rs_za_splosno_izobrazevanje/ (link in Slovenian)

39 Guidelines to the Kindergarten Curriculum in programmes with adapted implementation and additional expert care for children with special needs (http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/-mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/vrtci/pdf/kurikulum_navodila.pdf) (in Slovenian); Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum in ethnically mixed areas (http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin-

gartens. The curriculum contains the basic principles of preschool education (e.g. democracy and pluralism, right to choice and diversity, autonomy, a professional and responsible approach by the staff). There are six activity areas: locomotion, language, art, society[40], nature[41] and mathematics. Some cross-disciplinary activities, such as health care, safety and traffic education, are interwoven throughout all areas and are part of the way of life and working at the kindergarten. Other aspects concerning the child at kindergarten are also included: development and learning, sleeping/resting, eating and other routine activities, relationships among children and between children and adults, the importance of space, and cooperation with parents. The curriculum emphasises the importance of communication for social learning and of a flexibly managed, safe and supportive environment. The individual child's development is monitored by the preschool teacher, who observes his/her progress[42] and informs his/her parents.

There are no compulsory topics within the activity area, nor any national standards to achieve. Within the curriculum, the preschool education staff is encouraged to make autonomous and responsible expert decisions within the proposed principles and guidelines with regard to selection of appropriate methods of work and techniques for preschool children.

/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/vrtci/pdf/vrtec_Dodatek_-_narodnostno_mesana.pdf)
(in Slovenian); Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum for work with Roma-children
(http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/vrtci/pdf/vrtci_Dodatek_RO
MI.pdf) (in Slovenian); Kindergarten Curriculum and adapted programmes for pre-school children
(http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/vrtci/pdf/kurikulum_prilag_p
rogram.pdf) (in Slovenian).

40 Global goals for the field of society are (1) experiencing kindergarten as an environment with equal opportunities to participate in activities and everyday life regardless of gender, physical and mental constitution, national origin, cultural background, religion etc., (2) learning about oneself and other people, (3) shaping basic living habits and learning about the differences between living habits of our own and of other cultures and between different social groups, (4) learning about the closer and wider social and cultural environment and learning about multicultural and other differences, (5) encouraging sensitivity to the ethical dimension of diversity, (6) building a foundation to understand historical changes; learning that people and the environment, society and culture change with time, (7) ability to learn about new cultures and traditions, (8) learning about safe and healthy lifestyle.

41 Global goals for the field of nature are (1) experiencing and learning about living and inanimate nature and its diversity, connectivity, constant processes of change and aesthetic dimensions, (2) developing a friendly, respectful and responsible attitude towards living and inanimate nature, (3) learning about one's body and the cycle of life and about a healthy and safe lifestyle, (4) learning about substances, space, time, sound and light, (5) learning about technical objects and developing skills in the fields of technique and technology, (6) encouraging different approaches to learning about nature.

42 Each kindergarten decides individually on how this is recorded (different protocols, portfolio of the child, etc.).

4.3 Quality Assessment and Assurance in Preschool Education

The Slovenian system of evaluation takes place at the macro level as evaluation of the education system, and at the micro level as evaluation of educational institutions[43].

4.3.1 Evaluation of the education system (external)

Evaluation of the education system is the responsibility of the Council for Quality and Evaluation[44], an expert body of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. It identifies fundamental evaluation issues, prepares proposals for evaluation topics, selects and monitors studies, gives opinions on the plans and reports on the introduction of new elements. The Council for Quality and Evaluation also plays an important role in the coordination of monitoring the implementation of new programmes and programme elements, in accordance with the Rules on updating educational work.[45]

The quality of the education system is also evaluated by international comparative studies, national evaluation studies and their implementation[46], and monitoring and evaluation of new educational programmes and their elements. International evaluation studies provide comparable data needed for analysis of the education system, and are an important basis for designing educational policies. National evaluation studies consist of Slovene evaluation studies and secondary data analyses of international evaluation studies addressing systemic issues. These national evaluation studies are development- and research-oriented. The strategy and implementation of evaluation is specified and assured by the Council for Quality and Evaluation. The Council also monitors the progress of evaluation studies and reports to the relevant National Council of Experts[47] and the Minister, as well as to wider circles of experts.

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43 It includes kindergartens, compulsory basic school and upper secondary school etc.

44 For more information see: http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/urad_za_razvoj_izo-brazevanja/evalvacija_vzgoje_in_izobrazevanja/evalvacija_vzgojno_izobrazevalnih_programov/#c17670 (link in Slovenian)

45 The regulations lay down the procedure and leading partners responsible for the modernization of educational work (eg. new programmes, new programme elements, new solutions for curriculum implementation at operational level), and for the educational system evaluation, which is based on the national evaluation studies. For more information see: http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/-pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV12027 (link in Slovenian).

46 For more information see: http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/urad_za_razvoj_izo-brazevanja/evalvacija_vzgoje_in_izobrazevanja/evalvacija_vzgojno_izobrazevalnih_programov/#c17671 (link in Slovenian).

47 For more information see: http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/urad_za_razvoj_izo-brazevanja/strokovni_sveti/ (link in Slovenian)

In parallel with this, there are several public institutions responsible for the implementation and monitoring of new programmes and their elements in the education system. This kind of evaluation is carried out by the National Education Institute of Slovenia (NEIRS), whose obligation is to introduce, monitor and evaluate new programmes and other new elements at various levels of education.

4.3.2 Evaluation of the educational institution - kindergarten (external)

During the reform of the education system in 1996[48], Slovenia upgraded the system of kindergartens regulated by law, in line with the national goal of ensuring a high-quality education system and institutions with effective management. The Organization and Financing of Education Act sets forth that quality assessment and assurance in preschool education should be provided. There are several structural elements which define the quality of preschool education, and which are defined at national level in regulations. These include the number of children in the group, the child-to-adult ratio, the level of education of head teachers, preschool teachers and preschool assistants, the standards governing space and equipment etc.

External evaluations of kindergartens are performed by the Inspectorate for Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia[49] (hereinafter the School Inspectorate), the Health Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia, the Market Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia and the NEIRS.

The task of the School Inspectorate is to oversee the implementation of legislation, other regulations and acts governing the organization, the appropriate use of public funds and the implementation of educational activities in kindergartens (and other educational institutions[50]).The regulations prescribe performance of regular inspections by the school inspectorate every five years. When there is any suspicion of illegal activity recorded or reported by e.g. parents, children or staff, an extraordinary inspection procedure is conducted. If irregularities are found, the inspector sets a time limit for improvement. If violation of standards jeopardizes the lives and health of children and staff, the inspector can order temporary closure of the kindergarten.

The Health Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia inspects the implementation of laws and other regulations regarding health-related issues (e.g. food preparation). The frequency of health inspection is determined by the risk assessment. The risk assessment also refers to inspection of the safety of the kindergarten's playground by the head teacher every day, and by the

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48 As a result of social, political and economic changes in the nineties, the reform of the education system became imminent.

49 For more information see: http://www.iss.gov.si/ (link in Slovenian)

50 Compulsory basic schools, music schools, upper secondary technical and vocational schools, upper secondary general schools, higher educational colleges, special needs education institutions, adult education institutions, residential homes for school children and students, and private education institutions which carry out public education programmes.

inspectors of the Market Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia once a year. NEIRS introduces monitors and evaluates new programmes and other new elements in kindergartens[51]. It also plays an advisory role if the kindergarten concludes that it needs consultation or advice. NEIRS also provides in-service training and organizes 'study groups', which are peer learning groups of professional staff at regional level.

4.3.3 Evaluation in the kindergarten (internal)

According to the Organization and Financing of Education Act, internal evaluation is a mandatory regular activity in kindergartens (and schools). Obligatory self-evaluation was introduced in 2008. The head teacher is responsible for implementation of annual self-evaluation, and for providing and assessing the self-evaluation process and for preparing the annual report on the self-evaluation process. The targeted area of self-evaluation is discussed and chosen at kindergarten/school level. After self-evaluation has been conducted, the self-evaluation report is presented to the Kindergarten Council as part of the report on the realization of the annual work plan (AWP).

Self-evaluation should encourage reflection on practice and professional development, initiate changes and result in a plan of improvement. The objective of annual self-evaluation is to evaluate the development achieved and introduce quality enhancements. The head teacher and the (preschool) staff evaluate the implementation of the AWP at least once a year, critically assessing educational activities by class groups and for the entire kindergarten (or school). The latter includes participation of all members of staff, parents (Parents' Council) and participants in the education process. The kindergartens' counselling services play an important role as well. Upon completion of the school year, the Kindergarten Council delivers an assessment of the report and proposes changes. At the beginning of the following year, the findings from the internal evaluation of the kindergarten are reflected in the institution's new AWP.

There are also other forms of internal evaluation such as evaluation of the (preschool) teacher´s work by the head teacher (i.e. she/he carries out annual interviews with staff, monitors the educational work and provides advice to preschool education staff, and makes proposals for their promotion to title[52]). The Kindergarten/School Council annually evaluates the work of the head teacher and likewise makes proposals for her/his promo-

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51 NEIRS also introduces, monitors and evaluates new programmes and other new features at other levels of education (compulsory basic education and general upper secondary education).

52 The system of collecting points for teachers' different activities which are considered for title promotion conditions is defined in the Rules on Title Promotion of Employees in Education (cf. https://zakonodaja.sio.si/predpis/pravilnik-o-napredovanju-zaposlenih-v-vzgoji-in-izobra-zevan-ju-v-nazive/).

tion to titles. Peer observation is also one of the instruments of internal quality assurance.

4.3.4 Projects supporting the development of quality assessment and assurance in preschool education

Two research projects had a significant impact on the creation of quality indicators and tools for determing the quality of kindergartens. The 'Quality Assessment and Assurance of the Preschool Education Project' (2000–2002)[53] focused on the definition of quality preschool education, taking into account the systemic and curricular characteristics of preschool education in Slovenia and the development of indicators incorporated into three levels of quality (structural, indirect and process).

The structural level includes input indicators such as the number of children in the group, indoor/outdoor space, child-to-adult ratio, professional qualifications of the staff, materials, the organization of the work and life in the kindergarten, etc.). Maintainance of the structural level of quality is guaranteed by the legally set standards mentioned above. The indirect level refers to the subjective conditions in which preschool education in kindergartens is provided (employee satisfaction, professional development, cooperation between the staff, kindergarten and families, cooperation with other kindergartens and institutions). The process level includes indicators which have an impact on the quality of work and the child's (cognitive, social and emotional) development in the process of preschool education, such as the planned and implemented curriculum, routine activities, activities in various areas of the curriculum, play, and social interaction between children and between children and adults.

A set of instruments for quality evaluation of all three levels was prepared (questionnaires and rating scales):

1. **Questionnaire for preschool staff** (cf. *Kakovost v vrtcih* 2002) – covers all levels of quality, mainly in the indirect (e.g. professional development and staff satisfaction, cooperation between various kindergartens and with other institutions, etc.) and process (implementation of the curriculum etc.) ones.
2. **Questionnaire for management staff** (cf. ibid.) – covers structural and indirect levels of quality.
3. **Questionnaire for parents** *(*cf. ibid.*)* – covers all quality areas, mainly cooperation between parents and the kindergarten and routine activities and levels of quality.
4. **Rating scale for preschool staff**: Aspired versus Actual (cf. ibid.) – allows preschool teachers to assess which aspects are

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53 For more information see: http://kakovost.ric.si/datoteke/Prvi%20del%20vrtec.pdf (link in Slovenian)

ideal in terms of quality and which are in fact present in their group.

5. **Rating scale for preschool staff** (cf. ibid.) – focuses on process quality.
6. **Rating scale on the involvement and well-being of preschool children** (cf. ibid.) – allows monitoring of children in various activities in the kindergarten.
7. **Scale of social interaction between the preschool teacher and the children** (cf. ibid.) – intended for preschool teachers.
8. **Instructions for a partially structured interview with the child** (*Pogled v vrtec* 2005) – intended to deliver a view of children as participants in early childhood education in kindergarten with respect to the environment, staff, activities, social relationships and rules which they perceive in the group. The interview is held by a preschool teacher from another group or by the kindergarten's counsellor.

The second project, 'Self-evaluation in Kindergartens: Quality Assurance'[54] (2003–2005), continued the previous one with a view to preparing case studies[55] on a small number of kindergartens from different backgrounds (large/small town, rural, independent, and school-based kindergartens). All case studies are presented in detail in the publication *Pogled v vrtec* (2005), which traces the realization of self-evaluation, analysis and interpretation of the collected data and plans for quality assurance. It can be concluded from different reports, articles, etc. that these instruments for quality assessment are used by Slovenian kindergartens.

4.3.5 Alternative approaches to quality assurance

It is also possible for kindergartens in Slovenia to acquire other forms of quality certification. For instance, some kindergartens/schools choose the 'Quality for the future of education' model, a comprehensive model for high-quality work at educational institutions, prepared by the Slovenian Institute of Quality and Metrology[56] (SIQ). This organization provides training for the preschool education and school staff. By tackling educational modules with clearly defined goals, the participants acquire knowledge of a high-quality management system. The content of each module should be an integral part of the educational Annual Work Plan.

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54 For more information see: http://kakovost.ric.si/datoteke/Prvi%20del%20vrtec.pdf (link in Slovenian)

55 For more information see: http://kakovost.ric.si/datoteke/Drugi%20del%20vrtec.pdf (link in Slovenian)

56 For more information see: http://www.siq.si/solstvo/index.html (link in Slovenian)

4.3.6 Head teacher survey on self-evaluation

Nevertheless, there is still a necessity for strengthening the awareness and knowledge of the staff on the importance of self-evaluation and the methods used for it. The results of the online survey of head teachers from all levels of education, carried out in autumn 2015 (cf. Taštanoska 2015), show that self-evaluation is mostly performed for the purpose of improvement. Head teachers from the survey estimated that self-evaluation improves teamwork, the organization of work, the climate and the culture in the kindergarten as well as the qualifications of professionals (also see Schäfer/Eberhardt in this publication).They agreed less with the statement that self-evaluation improves cognitive performance of children/pupils and cooperation with the local community.

The most common objectives of self-evaluation referred to by the kindergartens' head teachers are related to different areas of work and life in the kindergarten. They list goals from different areas of quality, which they have pursued in the process of self-evaluation:

- 45% of kindergartens list goals in the field of learning and teaching
- 43% of kindergartens list goals concerning the organizational climate and culture of the kindergarten (among them, communication between staff was most frequently mentioned, by 18 % of kindergartens)
- 40% of kindergartens list cooperation with parents (individual consultations, questionnaires on staff satisfaction) as an important goal
- 37% of kindergartens list goals concerning leadership and organisation
- 22% of kindergartens list goals of continuous professional development.

96% of head teachers of the interviewed kindergartens estimate that they still need support in implementing self-evaluation from different institutions (e.g. the National School for Leadership in Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, National Institute for Education, critical friends, faculties). Most of the assistance would be needed in the preparation of lists of indicators for self-evaluation and for identification of priority areas in the self-evaluation process.

4.4 Development of a national framework for QAA for the Education system (including Preschool Education)

Slovenia has been gradually establishing the system of QAA for more than a decade (several projects have already been implemented at various levels

of education[57]). An overview and comparison of practices in Slovenia with the OECD study[58] (Brejc et al. 2011; OECD 2013) show that various elements of QAA can be found at all levels of education in Slovenia from kindergarten to university. Indeed, Slovenia today ranks among the countries which partly practise various systems (models) of QAA or, as Kos Kecojević and Gaber state (2011, p. 43):

> *At individual levels and fields of education in Slovenia, there are in fact various concepts of QAA, various relationships between internal and external monitoring of quality, various emphases on the so-called opinion-dimension of well-being and processes and of assessing learning achievements. There are also differences in the mechanisms and devices that are available and in use, and in the number of institutions from individual levels which are actually involved in the processes of QAA. All levels directly or indirectly detect:*
>
> - *a need to develop sectoral protocols of QAA,*
>
> - *a need for common indicators,*
>
> - *a need for support (especially at the level of understanding the data and their conversion into indicators and at the level of quality assessment),*
>
> - *a need to develop tools and databases intended for kindergartens, schools and preschool and school teachers for the (self-) evaluation of their activities.*

The above represents a basis for a common core of QAA at various levels of the education system in Slovenia.

Given the need to integrate different practices and aspects of quality (responsibility for the quality of education in Slovenia is shared among different levels – national and local – and stakeholders such as the Ministry, Council for Quality and Evaluation, School Inspection, supporting public institutions, schools and kindergartens), the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is currently setting up a national framework for QAA in the field of education. A draft model of QAA in education was created, with testing planned in a forthcoming project, 'Establishment, updating and pilot testing of the QAA model in education', co-funded by the European Social Fund. The purpose of introducing this model is to define a common concept of QAA at the level of educational institutions, e.g. kindergarten, basic and upper secondary schools, in addition to the indirect purpose of evaluation

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57 'Design and introduction of a QAA system of educational organizations 2008–2014' was one of the biggest projects in the field of QAA. It was carried out by the National School for Leadership in Education (NSLE). The aim of the project was to provide an expert foundation for the QAA system, including self-evaluation and external evaluation in kindergartens and schools. Project proposals were based on the results of project evaluation and took into account the experience and insight into what is applicable and could be transferred into the education system.

58 Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment (2013)

at the level of the education system. The basic purpose of the establishment, development and testing of the model is the dynamic maintenance of quality where it has already been achieved, and the achievement and development of quality where it is too low. The system of QAA in Slovenia includes all levels of pre-university education and will in future also be based on internal (i.e. self-evaluation) as well as external assessment of quality.

The basic aims of the project are to:

- establish a uniform system of quality assessment and assurance
- unify the understanding of and approach to the self-evaluation of schools and kindergartens, taking into account sectoral specifics
- strengthen the capacities to implement self-evaluation at systemic, organizational and individual level
- develop and prepare the selected obligatory and optional referential frameworks and indicators for implementation of improvements and related self-evaluation of kindergartens and schools
- establish expert cores[59] at public institutions to support kindergartens and schools in QAA
- establish cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and expert cores in order to provide continuous (even after completion of the programme) and effective operation of the QAA system.

Implementation and testing of the model will involve kindergartens and schools through the 'network' of schools and kindergartens, as a form of work which has a long tradition in the Slovenian education system. Within this network, kindergartens and schools develop, test and implement new concepts. The model to be tested foresees triennial self-evaluation cycles for educational institutions instead of the current annual cycle, and focuses on three main areas of quality – learning achievement, school climate and staff professional develoment. The model allows the schools and kindergartens the freedom to add further areas of quality evaluation at their own discretion[60]. Working on three-year cycles, the pilot schools and kindergartens will prepare self-evaluation reports, present them to the School/Kindergarten Councils and publish them on the website of the institution.

The model of the QAA framework plays a special role for the Council for Quality and Evaluation in the process of evaluating system quality. It will review samples of school and kindergarten reports and, together with the evaluation report on the national level, establish a basis for possible

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59 There are currently no expert cores for quality in the Slovene education system. One of the objectives of the QAA project is to define the role of these cores in relation to kindergartens, schools and the education system as a whole, and to determine their placement in the educational system.

60 The optional areas will be chosen by the kindergartens/schools depending on their individual needs. Expert cores will give them support.

revision of mandatory areas of evaluation, proposals for evaluation studies, and targeted research projects or proposals on the functioning of expert cores.

The expected added value of the project 'Establishment, updating and pilot testing of the QAA model in education' compared to previous projects in the field of quality involves establishment of expert cores in addition to implementation of a unified system of quality assurance. This will be achieved through evaluation and monitoring of mandatory areas of learning and teaching[61], with the possibility of monitoring optional areas. Educational institutions will be able to benefit from the knowledge of experts within the expert cores, which will be established with a view to providing technical support and training in implementation of self-evaluation. Parallel to the existing self-evaluation scheme, various forms of external evaluation which are already in force will be preserved[62]. At the end of the project the model will have been adequately updated and tested and is expected to be implemented in all educational institutions.

The project outlines more efficient support for the empowerment and professional growth of head teachers, preschool teachers, teachers and other education professionals. The importance of the proposed model should be highlighted by the fact that the results of monitoring and evaluation of educational institutions and, indirectly, the educational system as a whole will serve the purpose of introducing further systemic changes to establish high-quality assessment and assurance in education.

4.5   Conclusion: Next steps and future challenges

The role of knowledge and the importance of education in modern society lead to relatively high expectations regarding the education system on the part of various stakeholders, parents and employers as well as students and adult learners.

Assurance of higher quality in education and training is a subject of political debate on education at both national and international level. At this level, there is broad consensus on the need for policies and systems aimed at assuring and enhancing the quality of education (cf. Eurydice 2015, p.10).

Slovenia has recently been very involved in QAA within the field of education, preparing a model of QAA with a common quality concept at different levels of education. Experiences so far have indicated that the development and implementation of such a model is a long collaborative process, which needs to be encouraged at national level, internalized by head teachers and preschool teachers, teachers and other professional staff in

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61   1) Attainments of children, pupils, and students; 2) Professional development of preschool and school teachers and other professionals; 3) Development of social climate in the group/classroom / kindergarten/school.

62   National evaluation studies, the Inspectorate for Education and Sport, external examinations, international comparative assessment of pupil attainment in individual areas.

kindergartens and schools, and transferred to the learning population. It is demanding work for all participants in education - head teachers, who must motivate and stimulate, (pre)school teachers, who must self-critically and constructively examine their work from the previous year and build on it in the following year and throughout their professional career, and – last but not least – the children/pupils/students themselves, who manifest the knowledge, not only in kindergarten and school, but also later in life. One of the main challenges circles around the question of how various aspects of monitoring can be integrated into a single system, and how indicators and instruments can be implemented accurately while the autonomy of kindergartens and schools is respected at the same time. The next challenge will be the establishment of expert cores, which will give appropriate support to kindergartens and schools for them to monitor processes in QAA.

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5 Development of Quality in the non-formal Education sector in Luxembourg

Manuel Achten, Claude Bodeving

5.1 Introduction

This article describes the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in Luxembourg. It starts of with the history and development of the system and moves on to describe the quality concept accompanied by the introduction of a monitoring system and a national framework plan for non-formal education. As in other European countries, the number of places at early childhood care settings has expanded dramatically in Luxembourg over the past ten years; the number of day care places available there for children aged up to 12 rose by almost 700% between 2004 and 2015 (cf. MENJE 2015). Since 2016 actions for improving process quality in non-formal educational settings – from private, public or municipal early childhood care settings to youth centres – have been regulated by law.

5.2 The development of the Early Childhood Education and Care system in Luxembourg

The first public ECEC services (*foyers de jour et crèches conventionnés*) in Luxembourg were founded in the early 1980s. They were primarily designed to provide support for single parents and socially disadvantaged children and families. Private ECEC providers (most of them registered non-profit charities[63] (*association sans but lucratif, a.s.b.l.*) signed cooperation agreements (*convention*) with the state (represented by the Ministry of Family and Integration; cf. Achten/Schmit 1998), which regulated the funding of the settings, their personnel and group structures and the collaboration between the contractual partners. Children were accepted into these care settings based exclusively on social criteria. The ECEC sector, still modest in scope at that time, was made up of these public care settings complemented by family day care and a small number of profit-oriented, private crèches.

As a result of the European Union's social and economic policies in the 1990s, rather market-oriented and economic goals – specifically, equality and employment objectives – moved into the focus of Luxembourg's family policy. During this period the country's employment market expanded dramatically. In response, Luxembourg's government supported the establish-

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63 http://www.legilux.public.lu/leg/a/archives/1928/0023/1928A0521A.html

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ment and expansion of child care services to allow all parents to reconcile work and family life, as envisaged in the European Union's "Lisbon strategy" (2000 – 2010)[64].

In 2005, a new type of child day care setting was introduced, the *maisons relais pour enfants*[65]. These laid the foundations for the creation of a flexible and widespread model of ECEC services at municipal level.

> *The maisons relais are fee-paying services designed to combine organisational flexibility – i.e. a service for parents – with pedagogical quality, i.e. an educational service for children. The maisons relais are a continuation of the foyers de jour, which provide schoolchildren with lunch and offer leisure activities on days where no afternoon lessons take place. However, they are also intended to accept children of preschool age, even moren: they are designed as places for all children and as connecting links between family, school and community* (cf. Honig 2015, 9).[66]

The School Act[67] also envisages that municipalities provide out-of-school care (*encadrement périscolaire*) for school-age children. The basic modalities and framework conditions are set forth in a Grand Ducal Regulation drawn up jointly by the Ministries of Education and Family Affairs[68]. Thus, municipalities do have the responsibility for ensuring reliable out-of-school child care and education services.

Due to the high demand for child care and a limited availability of places in ECEC the growth of a vast and unregulated child care market evolved. In November 2007, a law was thus passed regulating the structural framework conditions (including spatial standards, the number of children simultaneously in care) and the professional requirements (including education and training) which had to be met by childminders.[69] The introduction of the *Chèque-Service Accueil*, a nationwide system of child care vouchers, in March 2009 was a further innovative step leading to rapid expansion of child care services. Partial state funding of parents' child care costs made ECEC services affordable for all parents, while also ensuring some financial

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64 European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, Lisbon, Presidency Conclusions, I.5.; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm

65 Mémorial A: Règlement grand-ducal du 20 juillet 2005 concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de maison relais pour enfants.

66 This quote was translated from German into English.

67 Mémorial A: Loi du 6 février 2009 portant organisation de l'enseignement fondamental. Chapitre I. Cadre général. Section 6 – L'encadrement périscolaire, Art.16-17.

68 Mémorial A: Règlement grand-ducal du 16 mars 2012 portant exécution de l'article 16 de la loi du 6 février 2009 portant organisation de l'enseignement fondamental, relatif à l'encadrement périscolaire.

69 Mémorial A: Loi du 30 novembre 2007 portant réglementation de l'activité d'assistance parentale.

security for the child care providers. Private commercial child care expanded enormously as a consequence[70].

The extremely rapid expansion of child care services in the period from 2004 to 2012 could only be executed and absorbed by employing low-qualified pedagogical assistants[71] and by expanding profit-oriented private crèches. Since the public and political debate focused more closely on the rather quantity-based expansion and less on the quality of care on offer, the Luxembourg government introduced the first legal steps for establishing more precise definitions of what constituted high-quality child care from 2012 onwards. In this context, a range of legislative projects for quality development and assurance were processed in the 'non-formal educational sector'. This 'non-formal educational sector' is applied to public education and care for children and young people which is established between the public sector of "school" and the private area of the "family". Non-formal education covers all private, municipal and non-profit child care settings (*crèches, foyers de jour, maisons relais*, *assistance parentale*) and youth centres.

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70 Mémorial A: Règlement grand-ducal du 13 février 2009 instituant le « chèque-service accueil ». The service vouchers are awarded to children up to the age of 12. The amount paid in voucher-based state support depends on the parents' income and the number of children in the household. The parents select the child care setting and duration of registered attendance of their child up to a weekly maximum of 60 hours.

71 Child care settings employ staff re-entering the profession with proof of professional and personal experience, who – like childminders – must complete a 100-hour qualification course.
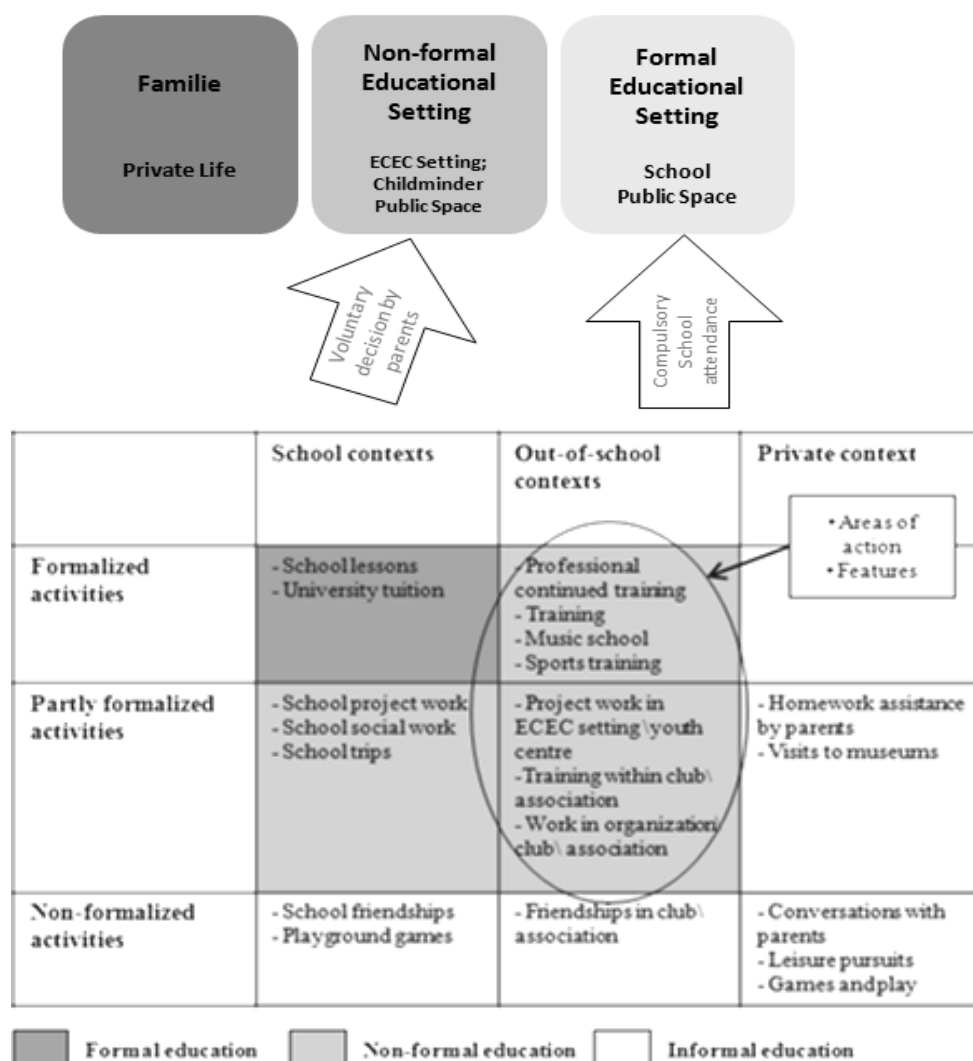
Figure 1: The interplay of family, school and child care
(Source: author's own)

In 2013 the current government tabled a proposal to establish a child-centred integrated system of Early Childhood Education and Care. The new "Ministry of Education, Children and Youth" was set up, combining all education and care institutions into a single specialist ministry instead of dividing them between two ministries as previously. Based on a holistic view of the child and an integrated concept of education, the Ministry now seeks to achieve a closer interlocking of political programmes, concepts, and administrative structures throughout the entire non-formal and formal educational sectors. In specialist literature, the transition from a split system, in which the responsibility for child care settings and schools fall within the competencies of different ministries, to an integrated system is described as beneficial for high-quality, cross-linked education and care services (cf. OECD 2006; UNESCO 2010).

5.3   Projects in the Early Childhood Education and Care field

Early Childhood Education and Care services in non-formal settings need to be understood as an integral part of public education, with the primary function of improving children's life chances. In recent years the *crèche* has advanced to become an important centre of education in which the personal resources of young children are fostered and encouraged, with the aims of contributing to greater equality of opportunities for all children and strengthening social cohesion in Luxembourg.

Before the quality concept is presented (see section 5.4), the following is intended to give an overview over further government projects in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care in Luxembourg.

5.3.1 Language and languages in Early Childhood – Multilingual Early Childhood Education[72]

Luxembourg is a multilingual country with a multilingual school system. Hence the challenges of multilingualism are particularly evident in the educational system, in which all school students must learn the country's three official languages (Luxembourgish, German and French) to the same high level[73]. School attendance is compulsory from the age of four. Luxembourg's school system includes six years of primary school, divided into four 'cycles' (*enseignement fondamental, cycles 1-4*).

Fewer and fewer children speak Luxembourgish as their first language: this applied to only 35.1% of children in *Éducation préscolaire (cycle 1)* in the 2013/2014 school year, so that the main language spoken at home by the majority of 4- to 6-year-olds is not Luxembourgish (MENJE 2015). The promotion of the Luxembourgish language was therefore one main rationale for the introduction of the *Éducation précoce* in 1998, a voluntary early education service as part of preschool for children aged 3–4. This one-year of early education for three-year-olds falls under the responsibility of the school sector and is free of charge for parents.

National studies show that native languages, migrant background and socio-economic factors play a central role for succeding at school[74]. Therefore, political decision-making processes and objectives must focus on making more effective use of inadequately exploited opportunities for action, by

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72 A more detailed description of the model can be found in the article by MENJE – Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse, Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (Ed.) (2016). Sprache und Sprachen in früher Kindheit [Language and Languages in Early Childhood].

73 English is added in secondary school.

74 http://zukunft.men.lu/dazugehoerige-projekte/sprachenlernen-in-der-schule

introducing measures such as a high-quality language programme free of charge for children aged 1–4 in child care settings from 2017 onwards. A one-year pilot phase for this voluntary programme began in March 2016. The child care settings participating in the programme are asked to develop their own concept showing how they integrate the two languages of Luxembourgish and French into their daily routine, how they approach the children's first languages while involving the families and, finally, how they connect with other players in the non-formal and formal (school) education sectors and in the field of early intervention services (e.g. speech therapy or medical services). To enable the participating settings to comply with these requirements, their personnel structures are redrawn; with increased staff numbers, more intensive communication situations can be designed and integrated support for the children can be established as a permanent feature of daily routine. Thus, the support of multilingualism in ECEC settings is regarded as an element of the public educational system.

Moreover, this concept of promoting multilingualism links up with quality development actions already undertaken in the non-formal educational sector, particularly the educational principles of the national framework plan for non-formal education (see section 5.4).

5.3.2 Networking of stakeholders and support of integrated structures

The networking between the formal (school) and non-formal educational sectors is the outward expression of a shared responsibility for an integrated and holistic education of children. Such collaborations and partnerships between pedagogical professionals play an important role in transitioning the child from the ECEC setting to primary school and help to maintain continuity in the child's learning and development processes.

Besides well-qualified and motivated pedagogical staff and ongoing quality developments, an appropriately high-quality infrastructure is needed to ensure high pedagogical quality. An integrated child-centred approach enables to overcome institutional logics and to rather foster collaborations between various administrative bodies and ministries, allowing school and out-of-school infrastructures to grow together into an interesting and child-friendly "whole" area of education and living space.

5.4 New legislative projects concerning Quality and the introduction of the concept of non-formal Education

5.4.1 Framework for non-formal Education

One core element of the quality assurance measures introduced in Luxembourg in 2016 is the child-centered approach of modern childhood research (cf. Oehlmann 2012; *MFI – Ministère de la Famille et de l'Intégration/Service national de la jeunesse* 2012). This approach emphasises children's status as

competent social actors, as co-constructors of knowledge and identity, and as proactive shapers of their own educational process and learning culture. This view of the child is introduced in the form of a national framework for non-formal education. In this framework, education is defined as an holistic concept (interconnection of informal, formal and non-formal education) and as the individuals' engagement with themselves and their environment (cf. *MFI – Ministère de la Famille et de l'Intégration* 2013*: Leitlinien zur non-formalen Bildung im Kindes- und Jugendalter*). Self-education is regarded as central, following the assumption that educational work is founded in the autonomy of the child's acquisition processes and their deliberate activation by adults. This modern concept of education is described in more detail in the national framework for non-formal education. Its general principles apply to both ECEC services and open youth work (e.g. resource-oriented youth work and empowerment).

Non-formal education has long been a significant concept in youth work in Luxembourg (cf. Bodeving 2013), but within the Youth Act of 2008[75] it was merely one of many variously differing objectives. The new Youth Act (*loi modifiée du 4 juillet 2008 sur la jeunesse*) now focuses on non-formal educational work. The law provides for the mandatory introduction of quality assurance measures in ECEC services and youth work, whereby the significance of the concept of education and the conceptualisation of non-formal education is repeatedly underlined. The structures of ECEC services and youth work are deliberately regarded as a common area of non-formal education: they are all classed as out-of-school and out-of-family educational work and the pedagogical staff apply similar methods and approaches.

Non-formal educational work is established as a cogent concept and as a key pillar for the actual pedagogical work involved in out-of-school child care. The definition of non-formal education was based on the UNESCO definition, which has the advantage that it compares the three types of education (informal, formal, non-formal) and establishes very clear distinctions and pedagogical objectives for non-formal education in contrast to informal education: "Non-formal education is any organized educational activity outside the established formal educational system […] that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives" (cf. UNESCO 1998).

In non-formal education, the overarching principles of education – inclusion, diversity, multilingualism – are joined by voluntariness, open work, participation, subject orientation, discovery learning, process orientation, partnership and dialogue. These elements represent important approaches enabling daily pedagogical routine to be based on the children's experiential world and interests. Pedagogical staff provide educational offerings, i.e. impetus to acquire skills and knowledge are provided and the staff is required to supply educational assistance (cf. Sturzenhecker 2013, 173). They themselves have the role of researchers seeking to grasp how children explore and understand the world. Within the scope of open pedagogical

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75   Mémorial A: Loi du 4 juillet 2008 sur la jeunesse

work, the objective is to offer educational opportunities that are based on flexibility and are open to the signals (impetus and needs) communicated by the children.

By describing these fundamental principles and pedagogical objectives (embedded within 'areas of action'), the framework identifies methods and means of non-formal education work in the services offered by ECEC settings, and provides impetus for day-to-day pedagogical practice. Six areas of action are defined as categories in which non-formal education is to provide educational offerings, and thus foster learning processes.[76]

Non-formal educational institutions have the responsibility of aligning the framework to their local and regional circumstances, as well as the target population and setting forth provider specific guidelines in their concepts. Given this, strict requirements are explicitly waived:

> *Once children are established as the centre of orientation for pedagogical work, all rigid curricular rules become obsolete. It is only consistent that educational plans […] [are] not rigid timetables which all ECEC settings must work through <in step>, but [should be] implemented in the form of concepts that are specific to the provider or the setting (cf. Krappmann/Wagner 1982, quoted in Preissing et al. 2015, 264)[77].*

The framework for non-formal education provides orientation for ECEC services, amongst others, and thus forms the bedrock of quality assurance measures such as those explained below. The plan deliberately refrains from imposing any detailed instructions for implementation. Instead, it includes various guidelines for actions such as drawing up a concept and producing daily documentation. The aim is to support the implementation of the framework at local and regional level, while maximizing the objectivity and transparency of the external quality assurance measures.

5.4.2 Ensuring and advancing process quality

Structural quality is a critical precondition for improving process quality. In Luxembourg it is primarily governed by the 'ASFT Act'[78], which defines formal requirements for the ECEC providers as well as safety regulations for non-formal education offerings. Provisions concerning structural quality, such as child-staff ratios, group sizes, infrastructure requirements etc., are regulated by a *Grand Ducal ordinance.*[79]

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76 Emotions and social relationships / Value orientation, participation and democracy / Language, communication and media / Creativity, art and aesthetics / Movement, body awareness and health / Natural sciences and technology

77 The original quote is translated from German into English.

78 Loi du 8 septembre 1998 réglant les relations entre l'Etat et les organismes oeuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique

79 Règlement grand-ducal du 14 novembre 2013 concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants.

The new Youth Act introduced in 2016 defines a series of binding measures designed to improve process quality and orientation quality. Although there is no doubt that structural quality has a major impact on process quality, we will nevertheless exclude structural quality in the following, and instead present a comprehensive overview of the direction aimed at by the quality drive of the new Youth Act. It should be noted that the statutory provisions deliberately refrain from addressing outcomes, in the sense of indicators of child development, educational success or evaluation of skills. The approach of non-formal education as outlined in the framework focuses its quality considerations on the learning environment, i.e. the question of how educational processes can be stimulated and how a setting needs to be designed for encouraging acquisition processes. The focus is therefore on issues of output, not of outcome.[80]

As already described, the national framework primarily addresses fundamental pedagogical goals that must be implemented in the services provided by ECEC settings. These goals, although integral to specific areas of action, are of a general nature. Even if they can be regarded as both guideline and stimulus within individual child care setting, they nonetheless provide binding orientation in terms of the content. The framework involves an obligation for the ECEC providers to draw their pedagogical orientation and practice from the principles and objectives it describes. Various measures and quality assurance instruments are available to verify the implementation of the framework and to assess whether the principles of non-formal educational work are being put into practice. These measures and instruments are largely based on long-term experiences gathered from similar measures in youth work in Luxembourg (cf. Biewers et al. 2013). For example, all ECEC settings are required to submit a pedagogical concept describing the priorities, pedagogical means and methods used to implement the objectives of the national framework at local level. The concept, which receives approval for a three-year period after in-depth examination by the Ministry, includes:

- a pedagogical section describing the objectives and fundamental pedagogical principles at local or regional level,
- self-assessment measures,
- a definition of areas for which pedagogical quality assurance projects are developed,
- a continuing professional development plan for the staff.

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80   cf. BMFSFJ – *Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* (2010, 415)

Quality development as a cycle

Evaluation of quality processes at macro level by external scientific institutes (univ.)

National framework plan for non-formal education
- Collaboration between research, practice, service providers, parents and policymakers
- Three-year development cycle

Pedagogical concept by child care setting
- Based on national framework plan
- Takes sociocultural context into consideration
- Guiding principles of service provider
- Pedagogical method

Log
- Documents daily pedagogical work

Process evaluation

Monitoring – external specialists

LE GOUVERNEMENT
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG

Figure 2 Quality development as a cycle

The requirements for continuing professional development provide that full-time ECEC staff must have completed a minimum of 32 hours of continuing training within a two-year period, with a minimum of eight hours of continuing training within one year. The important role played by continuing professional development is underlined by this measure:

> *Professional staff occupy a central role in child care and education. Their personal and professional skills largely determine the extent to which children are able to develop their full potential […] The high quality of pedagogical services can thus only be guaranteed by highly qualified staff, regular targeted training and professional consulting and supervision (cf. Achten 2012, 52).*[81]

An essential factor is that participation in continuing professional development activities and the training itself must be tailored to the national educational framework, i.e. the methods and areas of action of non-formal education. To ensure consistency between the education plan and the continuing professional development on offer, a commission is appointed by law to coordinate continuing professional development services and approve their programmes.[82]

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81 The quote was translated from German into English.
82 The members of the commission include representatives from provider structures, continuing professional development organisations, the Ministry of Education and the national youth service.

In addition, self-assessment procedures are a mandatory element of pedagogical concepts. Thereby the significance of common reflection and critical review is emphasized: the child care setting is understood as a learning system in which the learning processes of the staff must be taken into consideration, fostered and further developed. Self-assessment measures are used to optimise processes, to continuously improve quality, and to foster the professional discourse within the teams:

> *Hereby the staff gains detailed information concerning the interaction of processes and outputs. They also focus more closely on their clientele, exploring the concrete needs of the children/young people, investigating their worlds and lives and enquiring into their assessment of the professionals' services […]. As a result, professionals develop a mindset based on research and experimentation, and are able to evaluate their own interventions with professional objectivity (cf. von Spiegel 2014, 21).*[83]

To establish a self-image as a learning organisation in terms of systemic quality development involves the willingness on the part of the provider and its ECEC staff to build structures and processes in such a way that self-criticism, impetus from external sources, new perspectives and critical objections are not only noted, but also consciously accepted and desired. The results of the reflectiveness that follows then should be integrated into the settings' concepts.

Quality development throughout the ECEC system spans quality development both at the level of the providers and the settings, as well as at the national governance level (cf. University of East London/University of Gent, 2011). Accordingly, the national framework must undergo regular revision and expansion, and is thus limited to a three-year validity period. Revision processes are used for systematically incorporating experiences from practice and research results. External scientific institutes are commissioned to evaluate the quality assurance process, identify weaknesses and propose suggestions of improvement.

5.5   External monitoring by the National Youth Service

With regard to the implementation of curricula in the German ECEC sector Ilse Wehrmann claims for a quality assessment system for child care settings, a so-called "Kita-TÜV", that implies a periodic evaluation combined with an award or a seal of quality:

> *To ensure pedagogical quality in ECEC settings, standardized quality criteria that are binding nationwide upon all settings […] are essential. Ultimately, what we need are possibilities of imposing sanctions when quality criteria and*

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83   The quote was translated from German into English.

framework educational plans (curricula) are not adhered to by the providers and the settings [...]. However, at present we are lacking an independent institution that would define such quality criteria, monitor their implementation and award corresponding seals of quality. This would create transparency for parents and allow them to draw comparisons between the various ECEC settings and providers (cf. Wehrmann 2010, 30).[84]

Similar arguments have long been used in Luxembourg to call for external quality inspections (cf. *Ministère de la Famille et de l'Intégration/Service National de la Jeunesse* 2012). Within the development of the external monitoring system (designed by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth and by the National Youth Service) consideration both of national circumstances and developments as well as scientific results and international recommendations were taken into account. A variety of international recommendations concerning the quality of child care and of youth work, such as those made by the Council of Europe[85], the European Commission[86] and the OECD[87], were incorporated as important guides for the development of the system.

In the area of process quality, the starting-point is given by principles and objectives as defined in the framework plan, and not by fixed quality criteria in the sense of verifiable indicators. Priorities and pedagogical methods are described in the concepts drawn up by the individual settings, and are evaluated by external experts (*agents régionaux*) of the National Youth Service (*Service National de la Jeunesse*). These are awarded validity by the Ministry for a three-year period corresponding to the duration of the framework plan. Evaluation primarily focuses on the concepts' reference to the national framework; as all concepts are shaped by the social environment of the setting, by guidelines specific to the provider, and by the priorities developed and reflected by the ECEC team, the concepts of the settings all have their own characteristic 'nuances'. Guidelines for creating these pedagogical concepts are part of the national framework; they should serve as assistance and thereby maximize the concepts' uniformity of structure to simplify comparison by external experts and parents. Furthermore, it is required by law to make the concept public, thus at least offering the possibility of fulfilling the demand for "transparency and opportunities for comparison" for parents (cf. Wehrmann 2010, 30). According to this, quality assurance systems should also serve to provide all parents with information on the pedagogical quality of a child care setting. This is the only way for every family to make an informed decision (cf. Spieß 2013, 21).
Besides this evaluation of orientation quality, external experts have the following tasks within the monitoring procedure:

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84 The quote was translated from German into English.

85 e.g. Recommendation Rec (2002) 8 of the Ministerial Committee to the Member States concerning child day care

86 e.g. Communication by the Commission COM (2011): Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow

87 e.g. Starting Strong II: Early Childhood and Care

- comparison of pedagogical practice with pedagogical concepts;
- evaluation of compliance with staff professional development requirements;
- evaluation of quality development projects;
- proposals for advancement of quality in the individual child care setting;
- point of contact in the case of complaints, where necessary forwarding them to the responsible offices.

In addition to the inspection of documents (concepts, log, annual report), one of the central tasks of monitoring process quality is to evaluate direct pedagogical practice. Within the scope of this task the following questions are addressed: How are the objectives implemented in daily practice? What activities or projects contribute towards achieving these? What attitudes and pedagogical approaches are beneficial? Evaluation is performed with the most possible objectivity and transparency.

A key role in the evaluation procedure is played by so-called 'dialogue-based leading questions' (*dialogische Leitfragen*): in form of an open dialogue the head of the child care setting and the external expert investigate the strengths and the challenges of the setting's current pedagogical activity and its conceptual orientation, also taking into account the concept of the setting, its specific objectives and the annual areas of focus. These leading questions are clustered around the six areas of action from the non-formal education framework; moreover they span two further topics: 1. collaboration with parents and local networks, and 2. team-based collaboration and leadership skills. The questions are deliberately worded as open questions, also to inspire joint reflection and to pay adequate attention to the perspective of the ECEC staff. Those leading questions have the aim of providing pedagogical staff with further inspiration and impetus for their work.

Another important element of the quality assurance system is the 'log': here the pedagogical staff keeps a regular daily or weekly log that provides external experts and others with the documentation and information they need to evaluate the alignment of the setting's written concept with pedagogical practice. The log contains:

a) a description of the functions and the assignment of tasks within the setting,
b) the work regulations of the setting,
c) a list of daily activities with the children,
d) an overview of the staff's participation in continuing professional development.

As in the preparation of the concept, the guidelines for drawing up the log are also part of the national framework.

After completing their monitoring and evaluation, the experts submit a minimum of one evaluation report annually to the ECEC providers and the Ministry, that include both their analysis of the process quality and proposals for further quality development. Possibilities of sanctions are linked to

the service voucher system (i.e. service vouchers can be cancelled, thus cancelling the setting's funding).

The guidelines to prepare the log and the pedagogical concept are both part of the framework; in addition to providing clear and consistent guidance, this also has the benefit that the structure and the content of these quality assessment tools can be developed in partnership with the providers and umbrella organizations. A commission made up of representatives of ministries, providers and municipal councils is required by law and has the responsibility for the approval and evaluation of the framework. These participation-based structures were founded on the conviction that to be successful, quality development and assurance must primarily be based on the proactive participation and motivation of pedagogical staff and providers. Without their active engagement, the danger of a negative control model would have been too great:

> *There should be opportunities for everyone concerned with the development of quality in ECEC to contribute to – and benefit from – monitoring and evaluation practices. In this sense monitoring and evaluation processes should foster active engagement and cooperation among all stakeholders rather than pursuing the assessment of the performance of the service through a competitive environment (cf. EU-Working Group for Early Childhood Education and Care] 2014, 57).*

To support processes of reflection and dialogue between the players, all quality assurance and monitoring tools (e.g. inspections conducted by external experts) are published on the non-formal education website.[88] The overall process is further supported by continuing professional development, the establishment of collaborations and networks, and professional conferences and information events. In addition to this cycle of evaluation and monitoring, the findings and insights from practice are simultaneously integrated into the advancement of the framework. The continuous evaluation of the framework, underpinned by aspects including the quality assurance model described here, constitutes an important element in the national advancement of the early childhood education and care sector, while also supporting the quality of ECEC services at local level.

5.6   Prospects for the future

All elements of monitoring are designed to further quality assurance and development of ECEC services, i.e. first and foremost to support the children's own processes of education and acquisition and to focus on their well-being and perceived self-efficacy. Luxembourg's monitoring system takes this aim as its basis. To conclude, some factors which have a significant impact on quality dimensions are outlined in the following. They represent both opportunities for advancement emerging from the monitoring

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88 www.enfancejeunesse.lu

system and – if they are ignored – potential hurdles.

Significance of staff-child interaction

It is out of the question that the interaction between pedagogical staff and the child has a meaningful influence, particularly on the child's socio-emotional and linguistic-cognitive development. A national framework for non-formal education with defined fields of action involves the danger that the learning areas, and with them the issue of which activities and projects cover the various areas, might become too dominant in the implementation of the framework and in monitoring. Less weight might thus be given to the creation of a daily routine independently of the plan, to the staff-child interaction, and to reflections on the pedagogical attitude in general. Monitoring processes and instruments must receive critical attention and they need to be adjusted if necessary.

Interaction of structural and process quality

The measures of the quality initiative described are concerned with process quality, which is evaluated by external experts. However, process quality is strongly influenced by structural quality features such as child-staff ratios, group sizes, professional qualifications or infrastructure conditions; all these factors must be considered when the current quality of pedagogical processes is assessed. The national orientation of ECEC services may benefit both from scientific findings and from considerations and observations drawn from the monitoring process to improve structural quality features.

Organisational development

For early childhood education professionals, the implementation of the framework partly involves a readjustment and redefinition of their goals and objectives, or at least a realignment of priorities in their pedagogical work. In concrete terms, this may require ECEC services to plan for necessary changes in their organisational development, a time-consuming process that may also impact on team development (e.g. How and by whom should the concept be drawn up?). The players in the monitoring system must be aware of this and incorporate 'areas of resistance', essential interim stages or the involvement of specialist consultants in their considerations and evaluations.

Participation of children in the monitoring process

In the framework for non-formal education, participation is emphasised not only as an area of action, and thus an important field of skills development, but also as a characteristic feature of non-formal education: co-responsibility and co-determination are objectives of both early childhood education and care and of youth work, but are also fundamental methodical principles in pedagogical work. Education is inseparably entwined with participation: educational work without participation is not education (education perceived as the acquisition of the world, see section 5.4.1), while proactive experience of participation is education. When participation is the focus, the possibility of involving children should be taken into account for quality assurance measures. The measures, instruments and processes cur-

rently in use could be developed further to systematically record the child's perspective, taking orientation from questions such as: "Do I feel welcome? Am I accepted and understood by the adults, or overlooked and disregarded? […] Do I find most of the play and learning activities interesting or boring? Do I enjoy being here, or am I only counting the hours until I can go home?" (cf. Hartmann/Stoll 2004, 18).[89]

Interactions between educational settings

The introduction of quality assurance measures in Luxembourg has launched a debate over the very concept of education, including the collaboration between non-formal and formal education (see section 5.2). Monitoring is also intended to highlight the concept of non-formal education more clearly, with the aim of further clarifying differences and commonalities, strengths and risks. Finally, all the recommendations and implementations of non-formal education must not be allowed to obscure the influence of formal (school) and informal (family) education, or the interaction of education and care in the various settings attended by children. This aspect should receive more attention in considerations of advancement of quality in early childhood education and care services.

Educational landscapes at municipal level (*'Kommunale Bildungslandschaften'*)

Quality development measures and the national framework for non-formal education refer to education and care services in early childhood, for school-age children and public youth work; this has the benefit that collaborations and joint concepts can be established and e.g. transitional areas can be designed jointly by the stakeholders. This directly results in opportunities for interconnection, networking and joint planning within the scope of an educational landscape at municipal level ('*Kommunale Bildungslandschaften'*), which must continue to be fostered and advanced in the future.

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89   The quote was translated from German into English.

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6 The supervision of Early Childhood Education in the Netherlands'

Maartje Jacobs

6.1 Introduction

This article introduces the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system of the Netherlands and its approach to safeguarding quality. First, the ECEC system of the Netherlands is outlined. Second, the article describes the legal basis for the supervision of early childhood education. The third chapter examines the supervision system, while the fourth chapter refers to the differences between supervision in the large cities and the smaller municipalities. The article ends with policy plans in chapter five, and changes in the supervision frameworks in the final chapter.

6.2 Early Childhood Education and Care in the Netherlands: the system

The overall ECEC structure in the Netherlands is very fragmented. The Dutch ECEC system is split into early education on the one hand, and child care on the other. ECEC for children aged 0-6 is provided by playgroups, day care centres, and primary schools (in the first two years). The term "preschool" refers to playgroups and day care centres only.

ECEC services for children aged 0-6 are traditionally organized around three different functions in the Netherlands.

- Community-based playgroups (*peuterspeelzaal*) for the **development of skills** of children aged 2-4;
- Day care centres (*kinderdagopvang*) in order to facilitate the combination of work and **care** for working parents of children aged 0-4;
- Pre-school education ("voorschoolse educatie") in playgroups and day care centres for the age group of 2-4.
- Early childhood **education** (*vroegschoolse educatie*) for the 4-6 age group is integrated in the national educational system.

The child care market is partly privatized and is demand-driven. Child care services are financed by employers, the national government, and parents. Playgroups are mostly municipally funded and supply-driven. Sometimes parents are asked to pay a fee; this depends on the parents' income and the municipality. Early childhood education for the 4-6 age group is publicly funded.

6.2.1 Responsibilities

Since the Netherlands has a split ECEC system, different ministries are responsible for early education and care. At national level, early education falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, whereas child care services fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Therefore, two different inspectorates are involved: the municipality-based local health services (*Gemeentelijke GezondheidsDienst, GGD*) for child care and playgroups, and the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*) for early childhood education (for target groups, as defined by the municipalities).

Under the influence of decentralization and deregulation of national government policy (e.g. Naumann et al. 2013), the role of municipal authorities in the area of ECEC provision and policy has become more prominent in recent years. The provision of playgroups, for instance, falls under the responsibility of municipalities.

6.2.2 Special ECEC programmes for children at risk of a language deficiency

The Opportunities for Development through Quality and Education Act (2010) (*Wet OKE*) aims to support children aged two to five that are at risk of a language deficiency or being educationally disadvantaged by offering them preschool and early childhood education. These measures have partially been integrated into urban and municipal policy on educational disadvantages.[90]

Municipalities are obliged to offer targeted ECEC programmes at a preschool or day care institution to all children aged 2.5-4 at risk of educational disadvantages. ECEC for target groups has to meet the national quality criteria. Municipalities are free to broaden the definition of the target group. As a result, in some municipalities early childhood education programmes are offered to all children. Municipalities are furthermore obliged to make agreements with the relevant institutions or organizations over reaching the target group, identifying the target group and regulating inflow in preschool education programs. They must also ensure that school boards and preschool organizations make the statutory appointments.

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90 To close the gap for children with a lower socio-economic background, primary schools receive a budget for all children with a risk of educational disadvantages (aged 4-12). This includes children receiving early education in the 4-6 age group (almost all children in the Netherlands).

Quality requirements for ECEC for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds according to the law:

- Working with an integral ECEC programme
- Staff has received specific training in the field of preschool education
- ECEC offered minimum 10h each week
- Maximum group size: 16
- Staff-child ratio > 1:8
- ECEC staff: ISCED 3
- Language proficiency level
- Framework of the Inspectorate

6.2.3 Access and use of ECEC services in the Netherlands

ECEC is highly accessible in the Netherlands. There are subsidies to ensure the accessibility of child care services for working parents. Playgroups are subsidized by municipalities. Whether or not playgroups ask an income-dependent parental fee differs between municipalities.

The accessibility of ECEC is reflected in the high percentage (86 percent of all children aged 2.5-4) that attend centre-based child care services before entering school at the age of four (cf. *Ministerie van Social Zaken en Werkgelegenheid* 2014, 264). From that age onwards, every child in the Netherlands is entitled to enter school (publicly funded). As a result, virtually all children attend school at the age of four.[91] Compulsory education begins on the nearest school day after the child's fifth birthday.

6.3   The legal basis for supervision of Early Childhood Education and Care

Since the 1990s, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has pursued a policy aimed at eliminating educational disadvantages among children. A study conducted in early 2000 on the quality of early childhood education revealed that playgroups and day care centres had difficulties in providing sufficient preschool programmes for the entire group of toddlers. In addition, the quality of the preschool programmes was below par, as was the quality of the playgroups and day care centres (cf. Beekhoven et al. 2010). More information on the outcome of the studies is provided in Chapter 4.

For that reason, it was decided by law that the quality of playgroups and day care centres needed to be improved. The relevant law was the Opportunities for Development through Quality and Education Act (2010). The name of the Act refers to opportunities for all children through quality of

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91   100 percent according to OECD (2015, 33)

preschool education, playgroups and day care centres, and through education in preschools. Its goal is to create equal opportunities for all children.

The implementation of the Act involved the stipulations that municipal authorities, setting managers and school boards were required to make agreements, that the quality of playgroups and day care centres must be improved, and that the Inspectorate of Education receive the responsibility to monitor the quality of ECEC.

The Educational Supervision Act specifies that the Inspectorate of Education is required to supervise the following elements of preschool education:

- The basic conditions for preschool education
- Informing parents and parental involvement
- The quality of education
- Development, care and guidance
- The continuing trend towards early school education
- Quality assurance

At municipal level, the Inspectorate assesses whether the municipalities have reached agreement with the school boards and owners of preschool settings about:

- The definition of a target group child
- Reaching target group children
- The introduction to preschool education
- The continuous trend from pre- to early-school education
- The results of early school education

6.4 Supervision of Early Childhood Education

The Inspectorate of Education has been tasked with maintaining supervision of the quality of preschool education since the 2010 legislation. In addition, the Inspectorate supervises the quality of education at primary schools. Alongside the Inspectorate, a further supervisory body is responsible for supervising preschool settings, namely the municipal health services. Although the local health services and the Inspectorate of Education have recently started to cooperate, this is still at a low level and there is little exchange of information.

6.4.1 Supervision by the municipal health service

Each year, the municipal health service inspects all playgroups and day care centres both with and without early childhood education services. These inspections concern such aspects as safety and health. In addition, in settings with preschool education, the municipal health service supervises the basic conditions according to which preschool education is offered. These aspects concern the group leader-to-child ratio, the number of children in the group, the early childhood education time, the level of education of the

group leaders and the educational programmes used by group leaders in the preschool setting.

In other words, the health service supervises the basic conditions according to which preschool education is provided. If the health service identifies shortcomings, it is up to the setting to correct these shortcomings within the agreed timeframe. Eventually, the municipality can decide to halt a subsidy for preschool education in the event of quality lapses.

6.4.2 Supervision by the Inspectorate of Education

The Inspectorate of Education has formulated a supervision framework for early childhood education, stating that the Inspectorate monitors ECEC both at the municipal and the setting level. At municipal level, the Inspectorate checks every year whether the municipal authorities have made arrangements with the boards of the playgroups, the day care centres and the primary schools regarding a number of key components of early childhood education, viz.:

- Definition of the target group: which children are involved?
- Preparation and outreach: how is attendance of all target group children at a playgroup or a day care centre ensured, and does that work?
- Continuity: coordination between preschool and early school policies;
- Results of early school programmes: what must children know, what must they be able to do upon completion of primary year two (ages 5-6)?

In addition, municipal policy on early childhood education comprises a number of components that are important for ensuring the quality of the programmes provided. Municipal authorities often incorporate these components into the subsidy conditions to be met by the boards of playgroups and day care centres. Such components are: the parents' policy and an integrated early childhood education curriculum (language, mathematics, motor skills, socio-emotional development).

It is therefore clear to see that the supervision framework is based on statutory requirements. The same applies to the supervision of early childhood education at setting level.

At setting level, the Inspectorate examines the quality of early childhood programmes. It focuses on the quality of preschool programmes and, in the event of close collaboration, also visits the primary school that will accommodate the target group children when they reach the age of four. The Inspectorate assesses the following aspects:

- The conditions: this involves, for example, the number of children and staff in a group. This is already monitored by the local health services. The Inspectorate adopts the judgements of the local health services.

- The parents' policy: does the playgroup / day care centre involve the parents in the implementation of early childhood education?
- The quality of early childhood education in the groups: the Inspectorate observes teachers' actions and checks how the curriculum is implemented.
- Development, special needs provision and counselling: this involves the children that temporarily need additional support.
- Quality assurance: the Inspectorate assesses whether the settings are improving the quality of the early childhood education they provide.
- Continuity: have the preschool and early school years made agreements regarding a smooth transfer, providing for the transfer of information regarding the child's development from the preschool staff to its first primary year teacher?

Academic theories about the quality of education in young children were used to prepare the supervision framework (cf. Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2011). Experts from the field were also consulted.

The Inspectorate started with a small number of inspectors to supervise the quality of pre-school education. These inspectors were mainly experts in the field of education for young children. Major efforts have been made over the past five years to train all inspectors in this field of education by offering training.

The Inspectorate of Education has a further supervisory role in addition to supervising early childhood education: it also checks to determine whether municipalities ensure sound supervision by the health service, investigating whether the municipalities ensure that:

- new preschool settings are inspected by the health service;
- new preschool settings are placed in the national register;
- action is undertaken by the municipality whenever the health service observes shortcomings.

6.5 Supervision of Early Childhood Education in the G37 municipalities as well as medium-sized and small municipalities

6.5.1 First measurement of quality in Early Childhood Education

The Inspectorate of Education conducted an initial assessment of the quality of early childhood education throughout all Dutch municipalities. The assessments were completed in 2013 and provided a first national picture. The quality of early childhood education turned out to be sub-standard with

regard to many components. The Inspectorate identified many "points for improvement" with both the municipal authorities and the settings providing early childhood education (cf. Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2013). Many municipalities had failed to draw up agreements with the school boards, in particular with respect to the results. In addition, at many settings the quality of early childhood programmes was in dire need of improvement. The educational actions of the staff constituted a particular cause for concern. Fortunately, the Inspectorate also identified many good examples for others, both at the municipal and the setting level. This means that provision of high-quality early childhood education is indeed possible.

6.5.2 Supervision of Early Childhood Education following the demarcation assessment

Prompted by the results of the study, the Minister of Education awarded an additional budget of EUR 95 million in 2013, 2014 and 2015 to the 37 largest cities (G37), intended for the provision of early childhood education. Agreements have been made regarding the targets to be achieved by the G37 in exchange for the additional funds. The municipal authorities need to ensure that the playgroups and day care centres appoint more highly educated staff in order to improve quality. The language level of the staff must also be raised, as another study had revealed shortcomings in this area, particularly in large cities (cf. Droge et al. 2010). Staff who do not themselves have a good command of the Dutch language are unable to properly teach it to the children.

6.5.3 G37 Monitor: municipal authorities and settings

In 2013 and 2014, the quality of early childhood education was once again examined in the G37 (cf. Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2014). The study showed that almost all the cities had realized considerable improvements. Out of the 37 large cities, only a few cities failed to have made agreements with the school boards regarding certain components. As a consequence, discussions with the Inspectorate of Education, the ministry and representatives of these cities took place to negotiate the following steps to be taken. All the cities have made agreements regarding the target group definition and virtually all of them have made agreements on continuity. Some municipalities have particular difficulties in reaching the toddlers, and not all of them evaluate the quality of their own policy.

Quality improvement can also be observed at the setting level. Many more settings have improved the components monitored by the Inspectorate. For nearly all of them, the basis for early childhood education is up to par; the conditions under which the programmes are provided meet the statutory requirements.

A component that remains difficult for ECEC staff is educational practice, such as interaction between staff and children, or involving parents with activities at the setting or at home, like reading with their child. Both are, however, essential in providing good early childhood education. Some

staff find it challenging to react properly to the individual needs of children: what does this toddler need, how do I gear the programme to his/her needs, has it worked (has the child mastered the particular skill) and if not, why not?

The Inspectorate has been working on the latest monitor in the G37 since September 2015. In 2015 and 2016, the municipalities will be reassessed in terms of quality of early childhood education; based on questionnaires, this will relate to both municipal early childhood education policy and the quality of early childhood education at the settings. Both the municipalities and the early childhood education settings (preschool settings and primary schools) are expected to complete a questionnaire in advance. The staff will answer questions which are then converted into 'value scores' they award themselves. The Inspectorate will hold discussions with all G37 municipalities and describe the policy. The outcomes of the questionnaire will provide a clear picture of the quality of early childhood education at the settings. The Inspectorate will then audit 10% of all settings (random sample) to verify whether this picture is correct. All settings investigated within the G37 municipalities will receive a report. These reports will then be made public. The municipality will receive a copy of the report. In this way, the municipalities and the organizations will be enabled to discuss the various issues together.

The outcomes of the national monitor will be recorded in a final report for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, due to be published at the end of 2016. The report will describe how the quality of early childhood education has developed in larger municipalities in the period from 2010 to 2016.

6.5.4 Medium-sized and small municipalities

The Inspectorate is currently conducting "signal-directed" supervision of early childhood education in medium-sized and small municipalities. Signal-directed supervision is a term that refers to the way in which the Inspectorate of Education only supervises preschool education after receiving warning signals, such as signals about the quality of preschool education. Signals may be issued by the health service or by the municipalities or parents, or they may relate to new early childhood education settings. They can also relate to the quality of the municipal early childhood education policy. The signals received from the health service are very important. Starting from 1 August 2016, signal-directed supervision will also be undertaken in the G37. The health service visits all playgroups and day care centres every year.

Each year, the Inspectorate sends a questionnaire to all the 300-plus medium-sized and small municipalities. The answers provide a picture of the municipal early childhood education policy. The emphasis is on statutory requirements such as the target group definition. If the Inspectorate has the impression that the quality of early childhood education in a given municipality is not up to par, members of the Inspectorate audit the situation and prepare a report. These 'at risk' municipalities are checked as to whether

there are also signals from the health service about pre-school settings. If this is the case, the Inspectorate audits the setting in question.

Audits at an early childhood education setting take the following format:

- Introduction to management and team
- Observation in the playgroups
- Discussion with group leaders
- Discussion with care coordinator
- Discussion with management
- Final discussion with management (presentation of the outcome of the audit)
- The setting receives a report of the audit, which is subsequently published.

Each year, the Inspectorate (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*)[92] reports on the outcome of signal-directed supervision in all municipalities in the Educational Report. This report describes the quality of all Dutch education including early childhood education. The State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science, who is responsible for preschool and primary education, uses this information to fine-tune policy. The systematic approach of quality evaluation by the Inspectorate has the potential to identify possible shortcomings and quality differences across ECEC settings that may exist between the large cities and the medium-sized and small municipalities. The Inspectorate intends to further extend the reporting process by means of an annual inspection of a random selection of municipalities and preschool settings. This will help to monitor developments closely.

6.6   Policy plans

6.6.1 Plans in terms of actions

A challenge in the Netherlands is attaining high quality ECEC at the group level. Attempts are being made to improve this by focusing more on pedagogics in childcare, stimulating parental involvement, raising stability and improving staff quality. This means, for instance, more teachers with higher degrees, enhancing teachers' language levels, and stimulation of results-oriented working methods. The inspection framework of childcare services is re-aligned with new insights concerning quality of ECEC. At the same time, the ambition is to reduce regulation in order to avoid over-regulation in the same process.

92   See: www.onderwijsinspectie.nl

Additional policies attempt to raise the quality of target groups to an even higher standard. From 2017 onwards the 3F language level[93] for all staff working in early childhood education will be part of the legal framework.

6.6.2 Plans in terms of financing

Attempts are being made to harmonize childcare and playgroups further on, with respect to quality aspects, but to some extent (children from working parents) also financially. This means equalizing access to childcare and playgroups for children from working parents only. Furthermore, attempts are being made to reorganize the financial system from a system of tax supply (based on income) through parents, towards a system of tax supply directly from state to ECEC settings, but still based on individual incomes of working parents with children in ECEC.

From 2012 to 2015, the 37 larger municipalities in the Netherlands received additional funds (EUR 400 million) for early childhood education of target groups. This has enabled them to improve the access and quality of early childhood education. In contrast, access and quality in smaller communities lag behind. A possible new way of distribution is still a matter of political debate. The financial consequences for the coming years are therefore still uncertain. In order to improve the language level of staff, the smaller municipalities will receive EUR 2 million annually between 2017 and 2020 for testing staff language levels.

6.6.3 Harmonization plans

The Dutch government is currently working towards reducing the differences between free preschools and fee-based childcare through the Toddler project (*Peuterproject*). This legal trajectory focuses on reducing the gap between the two types of childcare (playgroups and day care centres) by focusing on 1) creating a single financial structure for the governmental subsidy received by working parents, and 2) equalizing the pedagogical quality of both preschool and childcare. Working towards equalizing the pedagogical quality, the Dutch government concentrates on improving the link between preschool/childcare and primary school and focuses more extensively on the development of children. The latter is attained through structured education of the pedagogical employees.

As stated earlier, the targeted ECEC programs are aimed at children aged 2.5-4 at risk of a language deficiency and/or educational disadvantages. To close the gap for children with a lower socio-economic background, primary schools receive a budget for all children at risk of educational disad-

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93 The 3F language level requires the following comptences: the person is able to participate in conversations about professional and societal topics. The person is able to read a wide variety of texts about professional and societal topics and the person is able to comprehend details as well as the text as a whole.

vantages (aged 4-12). This includes children receiving early education in the 4-6 age category (almost all children in the Netherlands).

6.7   Changes in supervision

Supervision by the Inspectorate of Education, including supervision of early childhood education, is changing. The Inspectorate is developing a new supervision framework that will be completed by August 2017.

6.7.1 Guarantees and encouragement

The new supervision programme by the Inspectorate is based on two main themes: guarantees and encouragement. Guarantees refer to the minimal quality in all schools, and encouragement refers to quality improvement by all schools. An important reason for adjusting the supervision framework is that the Inspectorate sees a degree of stagnation in the quality of Dutch education. An initiative Act has also been drawn up by members of parliament that assumes that the Inspectorate will examine statutory requirements employed in distinguishing between pass and fail marks. In other words, the Inspectorate will continue to ensure that all children receive education of a sufficiently high predefined quality. Another goal is to encourage school boards and schools to systematically work towards improving education (including early childhood education). Therefore, the Inspectorate opted for a programme that is aimed at encouraging all schools to improve quality, rather than focusing primarily on at-risk schools.

Not only is the vision of quality assurance in ECEC changing; the content of the framework and the working methods of the Inspectors are changing, too. Instead of the indicators used in the old supervision framework, the new supervision framework will use aspects and standards. The description will contain all elements relevant to quality, distinguishing between statutory requirements (set forth in law) and requirements that deliver encouragement, as described above. Within the requirements that deliver encouragement, the inspector will have greater freedom to make professional judgements and to provide a broader picture of quality in respect of the standard in question. Inspectors receive in-house training to guarantee a common understanding of quality standards despite the greater freedom. After the inspection, the inspector will write a report to state whether the overall quality requirements are met.

The new supervision framework currently being developed will be suitable for all educational sectors for children aged four and up. The intention is to focus more on young children in all the primary schools (and not just the schools accommodating target group children). A new framework will also be supplied for preschool education (for provisions for children between the ages of 2-4). That framework will make use of the new academic insights into the quality of provisions in respect of young children. It will be similar to the framework for primary education, but will do justice to the specific characteristics of preschool provisions.

6.7.2 New health service supervision framework

At the same time, the national organization of health services[94] (*GGD GHOR Nederland*) is working on a new supervision framework for the municipal health services. The intention is that playgroups and day care centres should improve overall quality by introducing better trained group leaders or through other measures. It is possible that within preschool provisions, the health service will be focusing more on supervision of elements currently examined by the Inspectorate of Education, such as educational quality. This will also have consequences for the supervision framework of the Inspectorate. Plans provide for avoidance of any overlap between supervision by the health service and supervision by the Inspectorate. Therefore the new frameworks are tuned.

6.7.3 Outlook: core questions for Supervision 2020

Essential issues in developing our new supervision for early childhood education at setting level, municipal level and system level are:

- Which early childhood education settings and municipalities will be visited by the Inspectorate?
- Why are these settings visited?
- How often will visits take place?
- What role does the board of the preschool setting have to play?
- What will the Inspectorate do, and what tasks will be set aside for the health service?
- What form should an inspection take?
- Will the Inspectorate issue a final assessment?
- How will the Inspectorate report on the outcomes (publish or not)?
- How can the Inspectorate obtain a clear national picture of the quality of early childhood education?

The Inspectorate will trial the new framework and various audit methods in pilot studies at preschools and primary schools. New audit methods include:

- Discussions with pupils, teachers and parents
- A feedback discussion at the end of the audit day or a few days later, attended by the board, the school head and a number of educational staff or teachers as well as the care coordinator
- A presentation at the start of the day by the preschool or primary school itself

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94   See: www.ggdghor.nl

Inspectors will be trained in the new forms of supervision and the new mindset required of them.

Thanks to the new content and the new approach, the Inspectorate aims to gain a greater insight into the quality of preschool education. After all, no matter what form the new supervision framework takes, it will be applicable in all ECE settings, and the overall goal is to improve quality so that all children can benefit from equal opportunities.

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7 Monitoring Quality in Danish ECEC settings with special focus on including children's perspectives by adapting the Mosaic approach in a pedagogical context

Persille Schwartz

7.1 Introduction

The article contains information about Denmark's decentralized approach to monitoring quality in relation to early childhood education and care (ECEC), with special focus on including children's perspectives. It introduces the reader to the main elements of the Danish Act on Day Care Facilities concerning monitoring, but as the Danish legislation emphasizes the inclusion of children's perspectives on their everyday life in the ECEC setting, the article focuses on this subject.

Inclusion of children's perspectives in the evaluation of their ECEC setting has been obligatory for Danish ECEC settings since 2004. The requirement was later integrated into the first Act on Day Care Facilities (2007), in which the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) was appointed as a national knowledge centre for evaluation within ECEC. EVA's development project on professional work with children's perspectives for children attending ECEC centres, still the Institute's largest to date, lasted one year, and included the youngest children aged 0–2 as a new element as well as children aged 3–6. The project was carried out in cooperation with five ECEC centres and with researcher Alison Clark from the Open University in the UK.

This article will firstly introduce the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) as a basis for understanding the position of EVA in the field of Danish ECEC development. Secondly, the main content of the Act on Day Care Facilities is described to provide a backdrop for the context of EVA´s project on children´s perspectives. Thirdly, the design and ethical considerations of the project are introduced and the main findings related to understanding opportunities and challenges for ECEC staff (pedagogues[95]) in involving children's perspectives are elaborated. Finally, the article will reflect upon how the project results may inform general monitoring initiatives within ECEC.

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95 Pedagogues have a bachelor degree in ECEC.

7.2   The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA)

EVA was founded in 1999, succeeding the Evaluation Centre for Higher Education, which existed from 1992–1999. The former centre was integrated into the new institute, which could therefore base itself on the staff, knowledge and experience contributed by the centre. EVA is an independent governmental organization with its own budget, a managing director and a board as well as a committee of representatives from Denmark's core educational organizations. EVA covers the whole educational system: ECEC, primary school, secondary school, upper secondary education (including vocational training), higher education and adult education. EVA's purpose as a knowledge centre is to explore and improve the quality of day care facilities, schools and education through national evaluation, analyses and tools that support development at national, municipal and institutional level.

By 2017 EVA will have had 25 years of experience in the educational sector, of which ECEC has been a part since the year 2007. In the Act on Day Care Facilities (2007, 2011, 2015)[96], EVA's task is defined as the systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of knowledge on ECEC settings and conducting of evaluations within ECEC. The Act stipulates among other things that municipalities and ECEC settings are obliged to support EVA by providing all relevant information needed to fulfil EVA's tasks. ECEC settings and municipalities have then access to the reports and materials EVA develops based on this data.

Since ECEC was introduced as part of EVA's responsibilities, several projects have been initiated that address the issue of ensuring that children's perspectives can be included in national as well as local evaluations. EVA published a report on using children's perspectives in evaluations, and has been helping local governments and administrations, educational institutions and ECEC settings to incorporate children's perspectives in their monitoring, curricula or everyday practice (cf. EVA 2009; EVA 2014). EVA has also carried out its own evaluations of the inclusion of children's perspectives the first of which examined children's experiences of language testing situations. This article concentrates on EVA's latest project, which investigates how to systematically support pedagogical involvement of children's perspectives in ECEC institutions, while also drawing on knowledge from previous projects.

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96   Act on Day Care Facilities 2015: "Consolidation Act on Day Care, After-School and Club Facilities, etc. for Children and Young People (Day-Care Facilities Act)" - http://eng.uvm.dk/Day-care/About-Day-care
Act on Day Care Facilities 2011: www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=137202
Act on Day Care Facilities 2007: www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=100807

7.3 Monitoring Quality – the Danish ECEC context

In Denmark, 89.6 % of children aged 1–2 and almost all children (98%) aged 3–6 attend full-time ECEC (cf. Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality 2016). With the exception of private child minding, all ECEC services are regulated by the national Act on Day Care Facilities (2015). The Act applies to public Family Day Care (age 0–3) and the various ECEC institutions: crèches (age 0–3), kindergartens (age 3–6) and age-integrated institutions (age 0–6).

Denmark has a long tradition of decentralized administration and monitoring by local governments throughout its 98 municipalities. This likewise applies to the ECEC sector. Apart from mandatory reports on some central structural indicators, the administration, implementation and monitoring of the Act on Day Care Facilities is the responsibility of local government authority.

The Act provides a general framework to ensure that monitoring is in place. It stipulates that the local government authority must have publicly accessible information on the method of control and conduct supervision of ECEC settings on a regular basis, where the form and frequency is up to the local government authority. Thus, decentralization potentially provides scope for 98 different ways of organizing and monitoring ECEC.[97]

Some municipalities use quality measures based on systems developed by sector-specific private consultant bureaus, universities or the Danish Centre of Educational Environment. Others use, or combine their monitoring with, various qualitative methods (metanarratives, peer observations etc.) to inform decisions at a political level, all in combination with the obligatory control visits done by pedagogical consultants or similar professionals from the administrative body of the local government. The systems differ widely in whether they assess child performances during their years of attending ECEC, or focus explicitly on the quality of the learning environment.

In 2009 EVA looked into the process of how data produced at the ECEC setting was communicated and used through the levels from administrative to political, and found that identification of a data production process that made sense to all three levels proved to be a challenge for the sector (cf. EVA 2009). It appeared that much of the data collected at ECEC settings by the pedagogues and managers was experienced as bureaucratic demands for data that could not be used for improving the practice at the ECEC setting. In comparison, qualitative data (narratives, learning stories, etc.) was considered more informative and useful by the pedagogues. The project also found that politicians who were provided with aggregated general data at administrative level actually regretted the lack of more nuanced insights into the ECEC settings. Following this project, EVA has cooperated with some of the municipalities to develop monitoring systems that pro-

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97 During 2016 EVA will conduct a national mapping of the municipalities' various use of quality measuring methods.

duce data considered by all levels to be meaningful and useful. Both monitoring systems are systematic and context-sensitive and create dialogues about quality at all levels.

One system, Evaluation Communities (cf. EVA 2010c), was developed as part of an initiative by the government and Local Government Denmark[98], which supported the development of eight different tools for monitoring and reporting on quality development within ECEC. Evaluation Communities is based on narratives from everyday practice, metanarratives and quantitative data aimed at monitoring quality in relation to the language development of young children. Evaluation Communities is a process consisting of three steps. First the pedagogues write down narratives (learning stories) on how they experience children's language learning. Then the collected narratives are revisited, reflected upon and turned into core stories on quality by a pedagogical evaluation community consisting of a group of pedagogues and other educational staff in an ECEC setting. Finally, the dialogue on quality is extended to include the municipal evaluation community, which is a broader circle of interested parties within the field of child day care (e.g. pedagogues, managers, parents, administration officers and politicians). The overall idea of the monitoring concept is to bring each individual experience of quality into play with the experiences of others at a level at which operation can be influenced. In all steps, narratives may be combined with research knowledge or with other data, such as results from language assessments of single children, a whole group or a municipality in general.

The other system was developed by EVA, pedagogical consultants from a local administration authority, ECEC managers and pedagogues in a municipality. It is based on rubrics[99]. It includes four levels of quality descriptions developed in agreement between pedagogues, managers and administration officers. The system includes self-evaluation (including parental interviews, children's perspectives etc.), peer evaluation and evaluation by the administration. The scores act as the basis for a context-sensitive dialogue between the ECEC manager and the administration officer on achievements and potential improvement in each ECEC setting. These dialogues feed into the political level as qualitative data, providing knowledge on the nuances behind the quantitative scores, which are also presented to the political level. In this system, research and other data may be added to enlighten the dialogues at the different levels (cf. Municipality of Fredensborg 2013)[100].

Both systems are solutions that overcome the data level challenge, but there are also municipalities using other approaches as indicators for learn-

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98 The national advocacy organization of Danish municipalities.

99 A matrix system with a description of quality at various performance levels which in this case focuses on the local government's priorities of political development.

100 The Quality Report gives an example of the use of the system.

ing environments or child outcomes for the monitoring of quality. Each municipality has its own methods and political priorities.

The Act on Day Care Facilities (2007, 2011, 2015) has no specific curriculum, but it prescribes that each ECEC setting in a municipality must develop and publish a local pedagogical curriculum in relation to six central topics: language, social skills, nature and natural phenomena, body and movement, cultural expressions and values and, finally, comprehensive personal development of the child. The pedagogical curriculum has to address the groups of children aged 0-2 and 3-6 explicitly, and it must pay special attention to children with special needs to ensure they gain the same educational benefits as every other child in the setting. The exact pedagogical method and formulation of aims are up to the local municipality and the local ECEC setting[101]. The pedagogical curriculum has to be evaluated biennially by the ECEC setting and must be approved by the local government. Parents from the parental board of the ECEC setting must be informed about the results of the evaluation of the local curriculum, and must be involved in decisions about initiatives following up on the evaluation.

In addition, the municipality has to make sure that children who do not attend ECEC settings and children who do not seem to have developed appropriate language skills by the age of three are tested and receive appropriate language stimulation if needed. Again, the method for testing and the degree of language stimulation offered are decided by the municipality[102]. However, the majority of municipalities use the national language test[103] developed for Local Government Denmark, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education (cf. EVA 2010a).

EVA has performed several evaluations of the implementation of the Act on Day-Care Facilities at both municipal and institutional level, and also examined outcomes for the children. The most recent national evaluation shows that learning has become a new point of attention at both municipality and institutional level (cf. EVA 2012). The six central topics are used by ECEC settings as a frame for planning learning activities. In relation to language in particular, there seems to have been an improvement in children's skills. On the downside, the evaluation shows that pedagogues are struggling to integrate documentation and evaluation as part of their everyday practice. Research has frequently found that when they do succeed in integrating documentation into practice, the documentation often tends to focus on illustrating children's happy and appropriate actions in an aim/action logic, rather than being used for exploring the relation between children and the context with the aim of providing feedback of improvement needs to the staff. The documentation practices tend to focus on the

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101 At present the frame of the national pedagogical curriculum is under revision.

102 However, the national rules on ammount of support apply, when the child is bi-lingual and is tested to be in need of language stimulation.

103 Sprogvurdering af 3-årige, inden skolestart og i børnehaveklassen" The test system has been developed to include a follow-up language test before school entrance and during kindergarten (Grade 0).

planned learning activities, shifting documentation of everyday life out of the focus of the professionals (cf. Plum 2010; Ahrenkiel et al. 2013; Emilsson/Samuelsson 2014). Throughout this discussion, studies have found that documentation can result in improvement in practice, though it demands skills in theoretical and philosophical analysis and time for reflection (cf. Vallberg-Roth 2012; Elfström 2013; Alnervik 2013).

7.4 Children's perspectives in Danish ECEC legislation

From an international perspective, the Danish Act on Day Care Facilities is particularly interesting because it explicitly stipulates that Danish ECEC settings must involve children's perspectives in the evaluations of the pedagogical curriculum (under consideration of the children's age and maturity). Furthermore, it takes into consideration how the learning environment[104] supports the local aims of the pedagogical curriculum.

According to the present Act on Day Care Facilities, ECEC settings are obliged to give children co-decision and co-responsibility and thereby ensure that children are introduced to and develop an understanding of democracy. Since these experiences cannot be provided without giving voice to the child, the legislation also supports consideration of the children's perspective in ECEC settings in this matter (albeit implicitly).

Paragraphs in the Act on Day Care Facilities (2015) related to children´s perspective[105]:

> §7. Children in day-care facilities must have a physical, psychological and aesthetic children's environment that promotes their wellbeing, health, development and learning.

> *§7,*4. Day-care facilities must facilitate the children's participation, responsibility and understanding of democratic principles. To achieve this, day-care facilities must promote children's independence and ability to engage responsibly in communities as well as their solidarity with and integration into the Danish society

> *§8, 2.* The pedagogical curriculum must describe the day-care facility's targets for the children's learning within the following themes: comprehensive personal development of the child, social competencies, language, body and movement, nature and natural phenomena and cultural expressions and values.

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104 The ECEC setting must ensure that children are offered a physical, aesthetic and psychological environment which supports their wellbeing, health, development and learning.

105 Cf. dcum.dk/daycare-act-in-part (01.08.2016)

§8, 5. Furthermore, the pedagogical curriculum must specify how working for a good children's environment, see § 7, paragraph 1, becomes an integral part of the pedagogical work. The children's environment must be evaluated from the children's perspective, and the children's perceptions of the children's environment must be included with consideration for the children's age and maturity.

§9, Stk. 2. The day-care manager is responsible for ensuring that the pedagogical curriculum is evaluated at least every second year. In this context, the manager is responsible for documenting whether the chosen pedagogical methods and activities (…), as well as the children's environment, see § 8, paragraph 5, will lead to the achievement of the established targets within the themes stated in § 8, paragraph 2. The manager must specify how the day care will follow up on the results.

§9, Stk. 3. The day-care manager must involve the parent board in the preparation and evaluation of as well as the follow-up on the pedagogical curriculum.

The first Act on Day Care Facilities was formulated in 2007 and integrated a previous law on a pedagogical curriculum in ECEC settings and a law on children's environment in day care. The Act put a strong emphasis on the requirement for ECEC settings to evaluate the physical, aesthetical and psychological child environment every third year or when institutional changes affected the child environment. This evaluation had to include the parental board and the children, with consideration to their age and maturity. It also had to be published and provide a description of the identified problems and an action plan of how to solve them.

Due to a strong professional demand for de-bureaucratization, the Act on Day Care Facilities was reformulated in 2011. In the new Act on Day Care Facilities, the annual evaluation of the pedagogical curriculum and the evaluation of children's environment every third year were integrated from 2011 onwards, including children's perspectives in the evaluation of the pedagogical curriculum every second year[106].The Danish Centre of Educational Environment[107] expressed a concern that the change of focus in regard to inclusion of children's perspectives (which only had to be included in the evaluation of the pedagogical curriculum and the learning environ-

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106 The new formulation was kept in the latest amendment of the Act on Day Care Facilities in 2015.

107 The center (DCUM) is as EVA a national independent center. It focuses on didactical educational environment. DCUM was included in the Children's Environment Act from 2006, which was written into the Act on Day-Care Facilities from 2007. Further information see Forslag til lov om børnemiljø i dagtilbud 2006: Legislation on Children's Environment in Day Care - www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=100797

ment, instead of the previous focus on the environment as a whole) would decrease their inclusion. This concern has not yet been followed up by evaluations.

However, increased attention seems to be paid to the importance of including children's perspectives of their ECEC setting. For instance The National Council for Children has increased its focus on children's experiences of their ECEC setting, and in 2012 established a Children's Panel of 1,000 children (4–6-year-olds from across the country) who volunteer their opinions on subjects taken up by the Council. Changes have also appeared in educational training of pedagogues. In the latest revision of educational training of pedagogues, the curriculum has been altered to explicitly state that students aiming their studies at children aged 0–6 must learn to work professionally to include children's perspectives in evaluations of the pedagogical curriculum. Finally, Denmark's local government has recently taken the initiative to formulate a policy on how to include and learn from children's perspectives at municipality level.

7.5　Background for EVA's project on pedagogical work with children's perspectives

EVA's latest project, exploring professional work on inclusion of children's perspectives, started from the provision in the Act on Day Care Facilities on inclusion of formulations of children's perspectives with consideration to the child's age and maturity. Most of the methods available for municipalities to include children's perspectives in evaluations of the pedagogical curriculum are based on the use of verbal language. The methods consist of interviews or questionnaires read aloud by an adult to elicit response in the form of smileys or other graphic icons.

In practice, this means that most ECEC evaluations pay attention to the opinions of older children (aged 4–5) who are able to express themselves verbally, simply because it appears too challenging, and perhaps even impossible, to address younger children. An associated risk experienced by ECEC staff is that children's perspectives have been included although in practice, the chance for the majority of the children in an ECEC setting to participate has not been regarded as relevant or possible. EVA wanted to address this problem to explore how the experiences and perspectives of the youngest children could be included, so that they were not left unnoticed in ECEC staff's interpretation of whether, and how, the children's environments in general support children in reaching the aims of the pedagogical curriculum.

In a previous project, EVA explored methods for understanding the perspectives of 3-year-olds, finding that interviews and questionnaires were not an appropriate method and that adult interpretation of videos seemed to be a more reliable source of data (cf. EVA 2010). Several other international studies have explored ways of collecting data with and from the youngest children (cf. e.g. Pramling/Pramling Samuelson 2011; Harcourt et al. 2011; Rasmussen et al. 2013; Fleer/Ridgway 2014). EVA's project, "Pedagogues

working with children's perspectives", aimed at continuing this line of exploration to **find ways to approach an understanding of the youngest children,** who have not yet developed the self-awareness and verbalization needed to convey their experiences. However, it also intended to leave the opportunity open for pedagogues to use their professional skills and knowledge of the children and the local context, to find ways of gathering data that made sense to the child and the adult.

Along this line, an important aspect of the project was to explore how a broader understanding of children's perspectives could **inform and contribute to quality improvement at the ECEC setting**. During their daily contact with children, pedagogues and pedagogical assistants[108] have a special opportunity of reaching a nuanced insight into the complex everyday life of an ECEC setting. The hypothesis of the project was that quality improvement would be motivated when staff experienced children's perspectives as feedback on how the ECEC setting[109] succeeded in understanding and supporting the needs of the present children, and that the insights would result in quality improvements.

The project also aimed **at broadening the understanding of the concept of children's perspectives** to include not only the children's opinion, but also the children's daily experiences in everyday life at the ECEC setting. This approach demanded a change in the pedagogues' approach to the child, changing from *asking* the child to putting an effort into *understanding* what it might be like to be inside the child's body and mind. Questions thrown up by the new approach include: what might be at stake for the child? How does it interpret the opportunities at the ECEC setting, and what is it trying to achieve?

The last important exploration of the project was to search for **ways to increase the influence of children** in the whole evaluation process – from selecting a focus and gathering data to finding solutions to the challenges experienced in the everyday life of the ECEC setting. Due to the asymmetrical power balances between staff and children, there is a risk that children will only be included at a superficial level unless the pedagogues are continuously aware of how to invite children to participate in gathering data and reflect on this, as well as choosing focuses of evaluations and contributing to the conclusions drawn and to the new initiatives and actions to be taken (cf. Hartcourt et al. 2011; Lindgren 2012). Inspired by Palaiologou's reference to eupraxia (2013), the project called for continuous and ethical awareness, not only as consent to and design of the study, but also as interwoven ethical reflections to be carried and addressed on an ongoing basis.

Summing up, the overall intention of the project was to explore how pedagogues could foster systematic involvement of the perspective of every

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108 No requirements concerning the skills of staff employed in assistant positions are imposed. Thus, they may or may not have a two-year training as pedagogical assistant.

109 The ECEC setting in this case refers to the physical, aesthetic and psychological environment for which the pedagogues are responsible and which, to some extent, they have the power to arrange and rearrange.

child on the life lived at the ECEC setting. The project aimed at achieving this by inviting children to express themselves in various ways and involve them without regard to their age, maturity or verbal skills.

The hypothesis (supported by the work of Mashford-Scott et al. 2012) was that children's perspectives are to be regarded as feedback giving the staff a unique insight into how the ECEC setting succeeds or fails in supporting the children's efforts to participate, develop and learn.

7.6 The project design

The project was initiated by EVA based on the Mosaic approach developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss (cf. Clark/Moss 2001/2011) as a method offering the possibility of addressing the above-mentioned challenges. So far, the Mosaic approach is usually used by researchers gathering data with and from children. Introduction of the approach for use by pedagogues to explore children's perspectives on everyday life in their ECEC setting was the first detailed exploration of the possibilities and challenges faced by pedagogues (early childhood practitioners) interested in seeking children's perspectives in this way.

7.7 The Mosaic approach

The Mosaic approach was originally developed during a research study aiming at developing methodologies for including the voices of young children in evaluations and explorations of the quality of their early childhood services (cf. Clark 2005). By inviting children to express their experiences of their childhood setting, not only through verbal expressions, but also through various kinds of other methods (photos, drawings etc.), children were given agency in informing the adult researcher about the things they considered of most importance in their ECEC setting. An early influence on the development of the approach has come from the Danish sociologist Ole Langsted in his articulation of 'children as experts in their own lives' (cf. Langsted, 1994).

In the Mosaic approach, each piece of data from the child is collected as tiles in a mosaic. The adult[110] in charge of the exploration also engages in observations of the child's movements, whereabouts and physical expressions. The data produced by and collected from the child is revisited and addressed by the child and the adult (e.g. by walking through a photobook of photos taken by the child, producing maps including its photos, drawings etc.) and in this way adding more tiles of data to the mosaic. The different mosaics produced by the children engaged in the project serve as children's 'voices' on quality in the ECEC setting. The Mosaic approach has been

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110   Who originally would be a researcher, but in EVA's project would be a pedagogue.

used to inform researchers about children's perspectives on quality in English ECEC services (expressed as phenomena of special importance to the child), but has also been used for gathering information about more specific matters such as children's perspectives on the use and improvement of playgrounds. This has included, for example, the approach being discussed and adapted for working with young children in early childhood in Iceland (Einarsdottir 2005) New Zealand (cf. Stephenson 2009; Dali/Stephenson 2010) and Australia (cf. Lee-Hammond 2013; Merewether/Fleet 2014). Other researchers have adapted the approach to listen to young children in different contexts including nursing (cf. Soanes et al 2009; O Callaghan et al. 2010) and environmental planning (cf. Roe 2007).

A few children are selected as primary participants. Each of them are invited to e.g. take photographs, produce drawings, maps or in other ways express their experiences of the subject in the focus of the project. These contributions of mosaic data tiles may be supplied and combined with data produced by the pedagogue, ECEC staff, the parents or other children. All the different pieces of data are gathered as different tiles in a mosaic for each child, representing expressions of the various children's perspectives on the subject in the focus of the project.

By looking at and analysing the tiles, the pedagogue is inspired to explore new understandings as well as taking a broader picture of several of the children's mosaics. In doing so, the pedagogue establishes a starting-point for insights that can be evaluated and elaborated by the children. In this way, children participate in data collection as well as analysis, conclusion and potential action plan (with attention to potential ethical considerations).

According to the Mosaic approach, understanding children can be described as:

- young children as 'experts in their own lives'
- young children as skilful communicators
- young children as active participant
- young children as meaning-makers, researchers and explorers
(Clark/Moss 2005, 2011, 4-12).

7.8   Theoretical standpoint of the project

The project draws upon the theoretical impetus underlying the Mosaic approach, which has been part of a continuing discourse concerning children's rights and listening to young children. However, as reported in the summary paper (cf. ibid. 2), the project design is inspired by systemic and social-constructionist theories on encounters and meaning-making (cf. e.g. Gergen 1995, 2001; Bateson 2000; Davies 2004), with attention to power (im-)balances of the educational system as revealed by e.g. Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu 1977). Thus, the emphasis in the project is on approaching encounters with children not as opportunities to extract the 'truth', but as opportunities for co-construction of meaning combined with a systematic reflection on power balances between the participants of the project.

As the project aimed at *exploring* the possibilities and challenges generated by the systematic inclusion of children's perspectives by adapting the Mosaic approach as *a possible meaningful way* for pedagogues to include children's perspectives, the project needed an evaluation with an adaptive design. This matched Michael Quinn Patton's thoughts on utilization-focused and developmental evaluation, since Patton's work argues that the value of an evaluation should be always be judged by whether it results in intended use by the intended users (cf. Patton 1994, 2008, 2011a, 2011b). As a consequence, it is necessary to work closely together with the intended users and incorporate thoughts of utilization by the intended users into all aspects of the design and completion of an evaluation. In this project, it meant that pedagogues and ECEC managers had to be involved in shaping the work, the data collection and the conclusions drawn from the data, both at individual and project level.

7.8.1 Project Participants

The project involved participation from researcher Alison Clark, EVA consultants[111], and pedagogues from five ECEC settings in rural, suburban and city centre locations across Denmark. The pedagogues had all previously been working with children's perspectives and had a special interest in continuing to learn more about doing so.

In the first part of the project two pedagogues from each of the five settings were involved. Six of the ten pedagogues were working with a special focus on fourteen children aged 3–5, and four pedagogues had a special focus on working with seven children aged 1.8–2.10. More children were participating as peers of the focus children. In the second part of the project, the ten pedagogues introduced their colleagues to the approach, thus including even more of the children. The experiences gained from the peer-led professional development were also included as data in the analysis of whether and how the Mosaic approach could be applied in a Danish pedagogical context.

7.8.2 Data Collection

The project contained three seminars focusing on an introduction to the Mosaic approach, the underlying principles behind listening to children's perspectives and ethics, methodological challenges and opportunities and, finally, an analysis of the project challenges and achievements. The first two seminars were video-recorded and the last was taped. Between the first and second seminar, the pedagogues conveyed their experiences of working with the Mosaic approach to the EVA project team every second week, either in online meetings between 3-4 pedagogues and the EVA consultants or through one-to-one individual telephone meetings between a pedagogue

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111 Having expertise in psychology and child development, pedagogic and evaluation theory and practice (including knowledge on methods for including children's perspectives).

and an EVA consultant. In addition, the pedagogues twice mailed postcards describing key moments, dilemmas and an open category for other findings.

These exchanges of information were continuously discussed in online meetings between the EVA consultants and Alison Clark. The project also included two fieldwork visits to the ECEC settings and an individual interview with each of the ten central pedagogues, including their reflections on a video recording of their initial understanding of children's perspectives.[112] In the last of the three seminars the ten pedagogues worked together to co-create a three-dimensional model of their experiences and learning in the project. The findings from Alison Clark and the EVA consultants were shared with the pedagogues for comments, additions and further reflections, and thereby integrated into a common map of experiences and learning from working with the Mosaic approach in a Danish pedagogical context.

7.8.3 The Analysis Process

Interviews and group discussions from the second and third seminar were transcribed and contributed to the pool of data, already consisting of the information on the postcards, notes from the telephone and online meetings, and recordings of the seminar. The written data were double-blind coded by the EVA team throughout the project process, and in cases of doubt the video material was viewed. The written data was coded using a matrix of the source of the data and the following categories of analysis; understandings of children's perspectives, experiences applying the Mosaic approach (split between views on challenges, possibilities, and inventions), staff's experienced outcome, staff's experiences of children's outcome, institutional outcome, knowledge-sharing among staff, suggestions for improvements, and findings related to the pros and cons of project design. All statements in the material were placed in the matrix, and statements that fitted into more than one category were copied and placed in all relevant categories. By the end of the coding only a few sentences remained in an open category. None of these enlightened the project focus any further. The content of each category was then summed up as the findings of the project. The coded statements were compared to the artefacts brought in by the pedagogues and the observations during the field visits, and the findings generated were analysed at online meetings with the EVA team and Alison Clark. The EVA team completed the project report and its conclusions in consultation with Alison Clark.

112 For the first seminar each pedagogue was asked to bring an artefact symbolizing a situation they had successfully experienced in relation to seeking children's perspectives. Their personal narrative revealing their initial understanding of working with children's perspectives was video-recorded.

7.8.4 Ethics

Ethical awareness and considerations were addressed thoroughly throughout the project. Special attention was paid to the process of selecting and inviting children to participate. Pedagogues were to invite the children they considered themselves to be the least familiar with (e.g. children who were newcomers, or children who did not attract much notice and rarely demanded the attention of the pedagogue). The choice was carefully considered in reflection of how the child's engagement might affect it, his/her everyday life and his/her relations to the other children and their peers. The children had the opportunity to decline or accept the invitation to participate – both initially and throughout the project. Parents were also informed about the project and its aims and gave consent to the participation of their children.

In addition, attention was paid to the use and inventions of methods adapted to what seemed the children's preferred way of expressing themselves and to the ownership of, and audience for, images produced by the children during the process. Finally, the pedagogues engaged in ethical reflections on the consequences of their work to seek children's perspectives at child, group and institutional level, e.g. when to include children and when to leave them undisturbed, how to be aware of whether the children understood the project and the elements of it (including reflections on occasionally being given access to secrets revealed by the child), and how to invite and perceive children's responses at all stages from data collection, displaying and analysing data to exploring the ideas of structural, processual or organizational changes arising from the work.

The ethical discussions during seminars and other encounters resulted in the formulation of a list of ethical questions for the pedagogues to revisit during the process, and by the end of the project basic ethical guidelines were drawn up as follows:

Ethical Guidelines
When working with young children's perspectives I need to:

- Stay curious about what the child expresses

    The whole point in seeking children's perspectives is for me to learn. In order to do so, I must remember that children will probably draw attention to something other than I would consider important, and that what I see reflects my own pre-understandings.

- Keep exploring the child's experiences

    The expressions of the child are not to be regarded as truths or characteristics of the actual child. The child's expressions are momentary and are related to a certain time, context and history.

- Explore different ways for the child to express his-/herself

The child's engagement will reveal preferences and competences in a given setting. I need to refrain from judging the child's abilities, but stay focused on creating environments and opportunities for the child to express his-/herself and his/her perspectives.

- Respect the child's confidentiality

  I am invited into the child's world, and it is my responsibility to care for the child's dignity and to respect his/her privacy.

- Stay ethical alert

  The process of exploration with the child in the moment is very unpredictable. Due to the asymmetrical power balances, I need to consider ethics in every action I take or refrain from taking.

7.9 Findings from the project – new possibilities

The project findings relate to possibilities as well as challenges for ECEC professionals when working systematically with involving young children's perspectives. The positive findings are related to the fact that pedagogues experienced the children's perspectives as valuable feedback, inspiring them to change their practices. Working systematically with children's perspectives also seemed to be a powerful instrument for making the pedagogues aware of how their preconceptions of a child could sometimes limit their understanding and empathy for the child. On many occasions this created a new curiosity and appropriate pedagogical actions other than those originally planned. Finally, the project has shown that it is possible to include the youngest children's perspectives in evaluations of an ECEC setting.

7.9.1 Children's perspective as unique insight and basis for change

Most pedagogues expressed that they had gained a new understanding of working with children's perspectives. By the end of the project their initial understanding, which they had originally regarded as professional work with children's perspectives, appeared to be an adult perspective of what would be good for the child to do or learn. The new understanding was concerned with putting an effort into understanding the child's experiences and intentions as a basis for pedagogical support. A synergetic form was thereby created that merges the child's intentions and the adult's professional knowledge. Thus, empathy seemed to have emerged as a strong and essential attribute for working with the children. In relation to this, the pedagogues also became more aware of the fact that their understanding of the children's activities and engagement was fractured from dividing their attention among many children and actions during the day. In contrast, the children had a much more thorough insight into their own and other children's doings throughout the day, and also of how the pedagogues' actions made

more or less sense to the children.

The pedagogues all reported that they had obtained insights into areas of ECEC practice that needed improvement. Some areas were related to adjusting the physical environment to suit the children's needs. For example, one of the pedagogues became aware that the organization of the cloakroom and dining area was not supporting the youngest children's attempts to be self-reliant with respect to getting dressed and setting the table. The insights resulted in the pedagogue and her colleagues' reflecting on the day as a whole and improving the organizational structure to offer the children more possibilities of developing self-reliance.

Other changes related to the way the pedagogical practices were organized. Two pedagogues from two different ECEC settings both learned that the very youngest children, who had not yet learned to walk, expressed many initiatives[113] to move to another place than the sandpit, in which they would normally be placed for outdoor play. This insight inspired the staff to support the children in engaging in new learning environments such as the slide, lying on blankets with the staff watching the leaves of the trees, etc. Finally some of the insights were related to understanding more psychological elements of daily life that were of special importance to the children: for example, the importance that some of the children attributed to belonging to a certain group, or the importance of having the opportunity to gather with siblings or friends placed in other groups of the ECEC setting.

In general, the feedback gained through the interpretation of children's perspectives seemed to gain strength from the experiences of the pedagogues during the project and their realization of how the children sometimes struggled with the environment of the setting in order to make their way to success. For instance, a group of children sitting in a circle on the floor was asked by the pedagogue what they liked about a trip they had been attending with the ECEC setting. A boy lay down on the floor in order to get closer to a poster with photographs from the trip. Immediately he was told to get back to his place in the circle. When the pedagogues asked another question the boy once again tried to get closer to the board, but was pulled back to sit in the circle. When the pedagogues saw a video of the event, they noticed how the boy's behaviour they had originally perceived as 'naughtiness' was actually an attempt to fulfil the task he had been given. This changed their view of the child immediately. But they also realized how the structural demands of circle time were not corresponding to the activity they had arranged, and reflected on how they could arrange future activities of that kind differently.

113 For instance the attention of the children was most of the time drawn to other areas of the playground, where other children were playing and they were often trying to crawl out of the sandpit.

7.9.2 Participatory changes

During the project many children developed more agency in the ECEC setting. The most extreme example of this was a girl who initially spent her time whispering and drawing tiny, almost invisible lines at the edge of the paper when she was invited to draw. By the end of the project, the pedagogue was surprised to find the girl had climbed the highest tower in the playground, from where she was yelling "Everybody, look at me!", thus expressing a new agency in positioning herself as someone who should be heard and seen by all children and adults in the ECEC setting. In general, the pedagogues reported their clear sense that children, once invited to inform the pedagogues about their perspectives, were keen to seize more opportunities to express themselves, e.g. by asking for the camera and taking for granted that they were the ones to be documented when on a trip.

On some occasions the focus on children's perspectives led pedagogues to become aware of how their preconceptions of a child were limiting their empathy for the child. Realizing this, they completely altered their originally planned actions in order to better meet the interests and needs of the child. For instance, a pedagogue progressed from interpreting a girl as having a possessive friendship with another girl to understanding the relationship as affectionate and with mutual benefits for both of the children. In this case, the originally planned action of splitting up the two girls was altered to helping the girls to enter a respectful and more balanced engagement instead. In another ECEC setting, a pedagogue was worried about a boy who seemed lonely and somewhat apart from the other children. She originally thought of how to help him to make friends, but having worked thoroughly with the boy's perspective on everyday life, the pedagogue realized that he appeared to have several friends already. Sometimes he just enjoyed spending time by himself concentrating on his personal interests; for example, he was so fascinated by insects that he would concentrate on hunting insects rather than playing with the other children in the playground. In addition, he enjoyed having conversations with adults, perhaps due to him being quite mature for his age.

In two ECEC settings, pedagogues reported that they had experienced keen interest from the parents of the children participating in the data collection. The parents were inspired to inquire even more deeply into their child's perspectives of both ECEC settings and home setting. These experiences of working together with parents appeared to form a new sense of connection and trust between pedagogue and parents. However, some pedagogues also expressed huge frustration after experiencing that some parents did not show any interest in the child's work and expressions, although invited to.

7.9.3 The youngest children's perspective

The project has drawn attention to the importance and possibilities of including children under three as well as older children. The inclusion of the youngest children has provided a rich seam of material, and many of the

most challenging and illuminating questions have arisen from considering the perspectives of the youngest children in the ECEC setting.

Central to this has been the pedagogues' openness to find methods of seeking children's perspectives by tuning into children's different modes of expression. Children aged one year and nine months were taught to take photographs of favourite things, persons and places. Their physical expressions of interest and engagement were observed and noticed by staff and parents. The pedagogues also invented other ways of getting data from the youngest children. For instance, the staff in one of the settings filmed a short everyday event and invited the children to watch the film. The children were keen to watch the film, and were observed by the pedagogues as they did so. The facial and bodily expressions of these very young children clearly indicated pleasurable and less pleasurable moments as the events of everyday life appeared on the film.

In general, the pedagogues became more aware of other communication opportunities besides the verbal, and on some occasions this awareness grew into everyday practice. For instance, a refugee girl at one of the settings was bewildered by having to enter a bus picking up a group of children in order to go to a playground. The pedagogue, who did not speak the child's native language, had the idea of showing the girl a photo of the group of children playing at the playground they were going to. The girl went reluctantly. At the playground the pedagogue documented the child having fun with the other children. Immediately after the trip she gave these photographs to the child so she could share her experiences with her mother and father in her native language. The photographs appeared to reinforce her perspectives and provided a reassuring platform for further discussion. The next day the child was ready and happy to leave for the field trip as soon as the bus arrived.

An important finding from working with the youngest children was that the display of their photographs, drawings and maps as part of the visual, participatory tools in the Mosaic approach appeared to add to the children's sense of belonging and being valued. This was noticed by many of the pedagogues, but was especially vivid to a pedagogue who had been working with a boy aged two. During the project his photos had been placed on the floor and had been used by the boy as a personal spot in the bigger group room. When the pedagogue started removing the artefacts they had produced during the project, he asked the pedagogue: "Aren't I smart any longer? Don't you like me anymore?". The pedagogue expressed a genuine respect for and interest in the child's perspective by inviting him to join a process of finding a new meaningful location for his artefacts. Initially, he suggested having the photos on the kitchen floor, which the pedagogue declined due to hygienic and practical reasons. He then suggested the photos should be placed on the floor next to where he would have his daily nap. This new location was agreed upon, and when the boy had placed his photos on the floor he looked up and said, "Now it's perfect!". The personal spot had successfully been transferred and, most importantly, the boy had been reassured in his understanding of his perspectives as being important and valued by the pedagogue. Thus, the work led to a new aware-

ness of how important objects may be to children, but it also generates awareness of the importance of including children in deciding when and how to end a project.

7.10   Findings from the project – challenges

The experiences taken from the project highlight some challenges. These are related to the pedagogues' lack of confidence with systematic work on involving children's perspectives by using a variation of methods and involving children in the whole process of a project – from choosing the research subject, gathering data, analysing and defining the initiatives to following up the findings.

7.10.1 Understanding the term 'children's perspectives'

The term 'children's perspectives' appeared to have a vast variety of interpretations. There appeared to be democratic, psychodynamic and explorative understandings of the term.

When the group of pedagogues was asked about their interpretation of the concept at their first encounter with the project, most pedagogues knew and referred to the UN Declaration and its statement of children's rights to be involved in decisions that matter to their lives. The pedagogues' democratic values are embedded in Danish culture, as indicated, for example, in the Act on Day Care Facilities (2007, 2011, 2015). They approached the term as a matter of giving voice to children's opinions as part of a learning experience within a democratic process. When asked to mention examples of working with children's perspectives, they mentioned situations where the children were asked to help choose between places to go on a trip, which items to get from a toy catalogue, or what they thought of toilet facilities at the ECEC setting.

When the idea of listening to children as experts on their own lives was introduced, it was countered with a concern that children should not decide everything themselves. Thus, children's perspectives were interpreted not as perspectives on an issue, but as children's requirements to have their needs fulfilled. In this understanding, professional responsibility adopted the approach of overruling the child and doing what the professional found best for the development of the child. In this understanding of the term, (adult) professional responsibility became an antithesis to including children's perspectives, and thereby an implicit hindrance for actually doing so. Introduction of the term 'children's perspectives' as feedback to the pedagogue concerning potential need for improvement in the children's learning environment appeared to offer the potential of improving quality at an ECEC setting as it may provide a better support for the child's wellbeing, health, learning and development.

A few pedagogues found it challenging to analyse the data they had gathered from and with the children. Their interpretations of data were aimed at revealing general characteristics and the personality of the children attend-

ing the project. Their analysis expressed an intuitive psychodynamic interpretation of children's perspectives. Having a long tradition of adapting a psychodynamic theoretical standpoint, some of the pedagogues struggled to adapt to the premises of the project being socio-constructive and aiming to inspire curiosity over what might be at stake for the child, rather than determining facts and final truths about the child. Since the process of gathering data in the Mosaic approach is not aiming at assessing psychological characteristics of children, it seems important to supplement the approach with support of reflections over relations, own pre-understandings and new curiosities to explore, rather than previously drawn factual conclusions.

By the end of the project most of the pedagogues had adapted an explorative understanding of children's perspectives. In the final seminar sessions they described working with children's perspectives as "a never-ending process" of ongoing learning. Their interpretation of working with children's perspectives was expressed as a way of relating to children in everyday life at the ECEC setting in order to achieve better understanding and find better solutions. The new understanding and changed position of the pedagogues was demonstrated by the fact that many of them expressed some frustration over having to struggle with their colleagues and managers to make them understand that the aim of the project was not to determine a truth about children's skills or actions, but to engage in an understanding of their perception of life in the ECEC setting.

All pedagogues stated that working with children's perspectives was experienced as a core element of pedagogical work, and they appreciated being able to concentrate on a task which was explained by many of them as "the reason they became pedagogues". They expressed the work as engaging, full of important insights and bringing them to a better understanding of what was at stake for the child. All reported that they experienced an improvement in their relations with the children in focus, and that the children likewise seemed to experience an improvement in relations. The pedagogues reported that the children kept looking out for them when they entered the ECEC setting in the mornings, and during the day they would often engage in closer contact and confidential talks even after the project had finished.

The pedagogues found that every child should be offered the chance to participate in such projects, since it strengthened the relations between the child and the pedagogue. They associated the Mosaic approach with giving the child better opportunities for being understood and met in his/her needs. In relation to this, the activities of gathering data were considered easily related to existing initiatives in the ECEC setting, whereas actual analysis of the data demanded additional time for reflection, writing and keeping track of the data.

7.10.2 Methodological Capability of Pedagogues

Another initial challenge of the project was that even though the pedagogues by recruitment were skilled in working with children's perspectives in their previous evaluations of child environment, they had a very narrow

repertoire of methods for data collecting. As mentioned previously, the pedagogues entered the project with a democratic understanding (speaking one's opinion) of the task of working with children's perspectives. Therefore it was not surprising that they were skilled users of circle time interviews with a group of children, but it was a surprise that only a few of the pedagogues had used other methods of data collection, such as child interviews and photo-stories.

It appeared that all the pedagogues were actually very familiar with using other methods of data collection, but simply did not associate it with children's perspectives of their childhood setting. For instance, observations were used as data for reports on children in vulnerable positions, narratives were used to document learning processes, and collaboration with parents was related to practical matters, exchanges of information on the child's day or problem-solving. Observation, narratives or parental collaboration were not considered as ways for exploring the child's perspective. Once this was realized it opened up a world of ideas to the pedagogues on how to work with children's perspectives.

The methods of data gathering were expanded when the introduction of the Mosaic approach by the pedagogues revealed the opportunities of giving the children agency in collecting the data. All of the pedagogues ended up asking the children to take photos of their favourite local project theme (e.g. the playground, the cloakroom or the ECEC setting as a whole). Even the youngest children were able to do so. As the pedagogues became more confident during the project, they used their professional skills, experiences and ethical awareness in choosing or improvising new ways of gathering data tailored to the children's reactions, different wishes for participation and ways of self-expression. The pedagogues took children's perspectives in a particular encounter into consideration and responded by improvising a new direction, initially unintended by the pedagogue. For instance, a pedagogue observed a two-year-old boy's movement around the playground by marking his tracks with footprints on a map. When the boy saw the map he commented that it looked like a treasure map, which inspired a group of children to use the map for searching for 'treasure', giving the pedagogue the opportunity of conducting a group interview on the children's experiences during the guided tour. It thereby became clear that the Mosaic approach has special potential because of its adjustability to individual children's motivation for expressing themselves. The approach offers potential for eliciting context-sensitive understandings of children's experiences.

The methods developed by the pedagogues during the project could be grouped into four types of data-gathering, demanding different focal points of awareness (including ethics), and they also call for different actions to be taken by the pedagogue:

1. **Child-initiated production:**
   This is when the child is completely in charge of producing the data, for instance when taking photos, recording sounds, making drawings, singing songs or any other expressions appearing straight from the child. The role of the pedagogue will mainly be to avoid interfering with the doings of the child until invited to

do so by the child. This category appeared to have the potential for creating sudden insights, as the pre-understandings of the pedagogue were easily confronted and challenged when the product proved to be something completely unexpected.

2. **Co-produced material:**
   This is when the data is produced by both child and pedagogue at the same time – for instance, during an interview, guided tour or roleplay or when revisiting a photobook together. These situations need much more direct caution from the pedagogue in trying to avoid taking the lead in the creation process or, when doing so, being extremely reflective of the consequences. It demands meta-reflection from the adult throughout the process. To some of the pedagogues in the project this category seemed very challenging, and they showed more familiarity with conducting probing interviews with children.

3. **Products initiated by the pedagogue:**
   This is when the data is produced by the pedagogue only, for instance when making observations, registrations, narratives/learning stories etc. Planning these methods seems easier as the agency of the child has little chance of interfering and influencing in the process. However, with these kinds of data the pedagogue must pay great attention to how the interpretation and the findings may be introduced to the child in order for the child to be able to influence them and perhaps have them adjusted.

4. **Products initiated by other than the pedagogue and the child:**
   This is when the data is produced by parents or colleagues or other children, for instance when using parental questionnaires or when asking children to provide information about their friends. Using this approach, the pedagogue must be extremely aware of the ethics inherent in asking others to produce data, as well as paying attention to how the findings may be introduced to the child in order for the child to be able to influence them and perhaps have them adjusted.

7.10.3 Ability to interpret data

Another challenge of adapting the Mosaic approach to the Danish ECEC context appeared to be that the pedagogues were not familiar with estimating the validity of qualitative data. They tended to interpret the data as quantitative data and assume their findings to be more or less valid. According to them, validation depended on the amount of times an expression was repeated by a child in the data collecting process, rather than using data to explore relational patterns between children and their environment. In addition, they needed to be reminded that if they wanted to estimate a child's competence level they would need to use specified tools (e.g. using

language tests for estimating the children's language development).

Working with the Mosaic approach supplied the pedagogues with important knowledge of how to connect and capture the interest of the child in following up on the needs found in a test. For instance, as a side-effect of working with children's perspectives, a pedagogue noticed how a child who was about to receive special language training used much richer language than normally when talking about the photos that she had produced herself. This obviously inspired the pedagogue to arrange more situations for the child to talk about her photos, but it also made the pedagogue aware of how the language of the child was situated and depended on the varied contexts of the ECEC setting.

7.10.4 Ethical Awareness

The project placed a very strong emphasis on ethical reflections, forcing pedagogues to address and report on ethical considerations in every initiative they took. The pedagogues obtained consent from parents and children. Furthermore, the method of systematic exploration with children made the pedagogues tune into the children's different modes of communicating and expressing themselves. The inspirations gained by the pedagogues from focusing on children´s perspectives were introduced for exploration by a wider group of children, in order to reach an understanding of how patterns at individual level were recognizable at group or institutional level. For instance, a pedagogue became aware of how the pedagogues had developed a habit of organizing lunchtime so thoroughly that the children's efforts to take agency became an obstacle to a smooth lunch. When the pedagogues left the opportunity open, it appeared that the youngest children (aged 0-2) were very eager to help set the table and organize lunch. Having realized this, the pedagogues changed the organization of the lunch to support the children taking agency. But in addition, the pedagogue and the rest of the staff of the ECEC setting started to take notice of other situations and times of day where the children appeared to be prevented from taking agency. This led to even more changes to structures of everyday life at the setting.

The challenge in relation to ethics was for the pedagogues to bear in mind that children can be included in more than the data-collecting process. Even though the pedagogues adapted a new view of children's perspectives as cooperation and exploration, finding solutions and pointing out the next area in need of investigative evaluation did not naturally occur as an obvious initiative. However, some of the pedagogues did manage to include the children and their verbal and physical expressions in finding the proper adjustment or new ways of organizing the environment of the ECEC setting to support the children better.

7.11 Conclusion: Children's perspectives as part of monitoring

Summing up the findings of the project, it showed that adapting the Mosaic approach to the context of a Danish ECEC setting would be applicable despite the methodological and analytical support needed. The Mosaic approach was adjusted both to support analytical reflection, by inviting the pedagogue to reflect upon relations (places, artefacts, people and activities) rather than character and skills, and to systematically consider and include a wider group of children when initiating actions arising from the work. Following these needs for adjustment, the project has resulted in the development of an app (*Børnemosaikker*) which provides methodological inspiration for gathering data with the youngest children, but also helps to frame analysis for pedagogues to use children's perspectives as feedback on how they can learn from the children.

On the one hand, the findings of the project showed context sensitivity to be an important aspect if pedagogues are to succeed in involving young children's perspectives, and therefore a combination of the Mosaic approach/*Børnemosaikker* with monitoring is likely to present a challenge.

On the other hand, the project has shown that systematic inclusion of children's perspectives has great potential for increasing professional learning outcomes for pedagogues and thereby inspiring quality improvement in ECEC settings in areas crucial to the children's life-opportunities in the setting - including potential for increased parental involvement in some cases.

With respect to monitoring, it is necessary to ensure that children's perspectives are addressed systematically. But there also seems to be a great advantage to defining work with children's perspectives as more than a democratic right. When the work is defined as cooperation and exploration of the children's experiences of their setting, it provides unique knowledge of how the pedagogical environment may continuously be adapted to support the children in the best possible ways.

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8 Does monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care contribute to Quality improvement? The staff's perspective

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8.1 Introduction

Empirical evidence indicates that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is critical for positive child development (cf. Burchinal et al. 2011; Yoshikawa et al. 2013). Therefore, there is an increasing trend across countries to implement quality development and assurance systems in ECEC in order to improve and unify quality (cf. Boller et al. 2015; OECD 2015). One approach to ensure quality is the implementation of monitoring systems. A variety of aspects can be monitored (e.g. structural quality, process quality) (cf. Pianta et al. 2009). Monitoring can reveal strengths and weaknesses of ECEC systems and programmes and can assist staff in improving their overall pedagogical practice. Even though it can be assumed that monitoring does influence quality positively, there is very little empirical evidence regarding the impact of monitoring on quality improvement in ECEC (cf. Jeon et al. 2014; Boller et al. 2015; Tarrant/Huerta 2015). Research indicates that especially for ECEC staff, monitoring can be burdensome. It appears to be time-consuming, resulting in less time for children (cf. Vallberg-Roth 2015), and more demanding than assessments that have been applied in the past (cf. Sims et al. 2015). Therefore, it seemed worthwhile to fill this research gap by taking into account the staff's perspective and asking them what impact monitoring systems in ECEC actually have on quality. Similarly to other countries, quality assurance and improvement is a hotly discussed topic in Germany. There is no German-wide monitoring system to date, and only the city-state (*Land*[114]) of Berlin has a state-wide monitoring system. Qualitative interviews with ECEC managers and staff in Berlin were therefore conducted and analysed. The research targeted the question of whether monitoring leads to quality improvement according to ECEC staff. The results reveal the staff's perspective on quality development and assurance in Berlin and the effectiveness of monitoring.

First, the article gives a brief overview of the German ECEC system, describes recent quality debates and approaches in Germany, and outlines the

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114 Germany is a federal state consisting of 16 states (Bundesländer, abbr. as Länder). Berlin is one state (Bundesland, abbr. as Land) and at the same time the capital of Germany.

Berlin evaluation[115] system as an example of monitoring quality in Germany. Second, the current state of research regarding the effectiveness of monitoring systems is described in brief. Third, the methods of our research are illustrated. Finally, the findings are presented and discussed.

8.2 Early Childhood Education and Care in Germany

The German ECEC system covers the age range from zero to school entry and is part of the child and youth welfare system. The responsibility for ECEC is shared between the federal government, regional governments (*Länder*-level) and municipalities (e.g. Oberhuemer et al. 2010). In Germany ECEC follows a holistic approach, meaning that education (*Bildung*), care (*Betreuung*) and upbringing (*Erziehung*) are intertwined. The organization of ECEC is based on the subsidiarity principle,[116] which implies that the provision of ECEC is mainly to be taken care of by non-profit government-dependent private providers (cf. Social Security Code, *Sozialgesetzbuch* VIII §4 sec. 2). Therefore, the majority of ECEC services are run by non-profit government-dependent private institutions (e.g. church-affiliated), which is why the German ECEC system is characterized by a pluralism of providers and pedagogical approaches. Accordingly, parents have the possibility to choose a setting that fits their personal preference. However, the pluralism of providers and their interest in maintaining their own individual profile can be seen as challenging when it comes to implementing a prescribed curriculum.

8.2.1 Quality development in Germany

The National Quality Initiative was initiated in 1999 by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ*). The ministry conducted the initiative together with ten *Länder*, ECEC experts, and various providers. The objective was to define pedagogical quality and to develop a set of instruments to measure quality (cf. BMFSFJ 2003). The initiative was divided into five sub-projects.[117] Within these sub-projects, quality criteria were set and evaluation methods were developed and tested in practice (cf. Esch et

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115 When referring to the Berlin system, "evaluation" instead of "monitoring" is used since that is the official term in Berlin.

116 The subsidiarity principle regulates the organization of social responsibilities. It is established by law and states that if suitable services from non-profit government-dependent private providers are in operation or can be established within a reasonable amount of time, public youth welfare authorities will refrain from taking any measures (Sozialgesetzbuch VIII §4 sec. 2).

117 The sub-projects were: I + II Quality working with children aged 0 to 6 (pädQUIS), III Quality and the situational approach (QuaSi), IV Quality for pupils in day care (QUAST), V Quality of provider (TQ).

al. 2006). The initiative reached more than thousands of ECEC services across Germany by means of information events or systematic training courses lasting up to two years (cf. Tietze 2008). However, the initiative's actual impact on quality development and assurance in ECEC is under debate (cf. Fröhlich-Gildhoff/Mischo 2011), especially because of its non-binding nature for stakeholders of ECEC in Germany. Not having involved all the *Länder* made it difficult to establish the initiative's outcomes nationwide in the long run. Therefore, after the initiative's funding phase ended in 2003, the previously developed quality criteria and evaluation methods were only applied desultorily throughout the country.

In 2001 the quality debate in the field of ECEC arose again when the findings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were published (cf. OECD 2001). The PISA study collected data of 15-year-olds in the domains of reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy in 32 countries. Germany was ranked below OECD average level in each domain (cf. Artelt et al. 2001). This was strongly criticised by the media and led to national political debates on the quality of effectiveness of the German education system as a whole (cf. Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012; Tillmann 2015). The importance of ECEC was then brought to the fore as one of the key elements for successful education (cf. Pianta, et al. 2009; Roth 2015). Large-scale longitudinal studies, such as EPPE in the United Kingdom or NICHD in the United States, provided evidence for the importance of ECEC (cf. Sylva et al. 2010; Vandell et al. 2010). As one of the results, the ECEC system became a focus of consideration and further quality development measures were implemented in order to increase quality in ECEC. As mentioned previously, Germany has widely varying ECEC because of its federal structure and the authority of decision-making at *Länder* level in education-related topics. Furthermore, there is great diversity among the providers. Both of these aspects led to immense challenges regarding implementing a national coherent quality framework. In the following, measures are described to provide an idea of the steps that have been taken for quality development in Germany:

- **A common framework for early education in child care services:** In 2004 the *Länder* agreed on a common framework for early education in child care services (*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*). The framework spans the following (cf. JMK/KMK 2004):

  - Educational goals and conditions
    The common framework defines the overall goals of ECEC as establishing principle competencies as well as developing and strengthening personal skills. Children should be prepared to manage life and to adhere to their learning goals when facing challenges. They should be motivated for lifelong learning and to become responsible members of society.

- A description of educational work

Educational work is described according to three major areas: 1. The holistic approach of ECEC includes an understanding of education and care as equivalent areas. ECEC is not structured according to specific learning areas; hence, the various subjects, such as science, sports or literacy, are intertwined. 2. Learning areas (e.g. literacy). Six learning areas are introduced and specific goals are identified. For example, literacy should help children to express their thoughts. Language development is embedded in personal relations and communication. Literacy is highly connected to books, storytelling and writing. 3. Pedagogical practices/quality development. Even though quality development is not defined in detail, it refers to different aspects that need to be considered, such as guidelines for pedagogical principles, the role of staff, parents and children's peers, the physical environment, and collaborations with other services, schools and the local community.

- Guidelines for optimizing the transition to school

To support a consistent educational biography, the common framework requests close collaboration between ECEC services, primary schools and parents. School readiness should be understood as a common task. Therefore, the curricula and educational methods of ECEC and school have to be linked to each other and the competencies of the children to cope with the transition need to be encouraged.

- **Implementation of curricula:** At the same time, all *Länder* specified and extended the objectives of the common framework by developing their own curriculum frameworks, and implemented them between 2003 and 2006 (cf. Stoltenberg 2008). Aside from the similarities set forth in the common framework, such as the holistic approach of German ECEC, they differ in aspects including the age range they target. Within the frameworks, most *Länder* provide guidelines for quality assurance. In some *Länder*, evaluation of ECEC services is a legal obligation or the implementation of a state-wide monitoring system including internal and external evaluations is planned (cf. Bock-Famulla et al. 2015).

- **Legal framework**: Besides the major changes regarding education-related aspects, the legal framework has been revised and extended to promote ECEC in Germany. In Germany the most common forms of ECEC are centre-based ECEC services (e.g. *Kindergarten* – age range usually three to six, *Kinderkrippe* – age range usually zero to three, and *altersgemischte Einrichtungen* – mixed-age ECEC settings with an age range zero to six) and family day care (*Kindertagespflege* – age range zero to six). In 2005 both types of child care settings received an equal status within the child and youth welfare sector with the introduction of the Day Care Expansion Act (*Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz, TAG*). Furthermore, the Child Care Act (*Kinderförderungsgesetz, KiföG*) laid down

an age range for legal entitlement to a place in ECEC (cf. European Commission et al. 2014). Since 1 August 2013, all children have been legally entitled to attend ECEC as of their first birthday. Besides the quantitative expansion of ECEC, the legal framework also highlights the importance of quality improvement by specifying quality criteria (cf. BMFSFJ 2004) and sets regulations for quality development and assurance at national level. According to the law, the provider is responsible for guaranteeing quality in ECEC services, including the development of a pedagogical concept as well as the application of instruments and approaches to evaluate service quality (Social Security Code, *Sozialgesetzbuch* VIII, § 22a). Therefore, many providers have their own quality management systems in place (cf. e.g. Tietze 2008).

- **Consultation system**: To further ensure quality, Germany relies heavily on a consulting system. ECEC consultants already formed part of German ECEC as long ago as the 19th century. However, the involvement of consultants as a possibility of increasing quality only came to the fore within the past decade (cf. Preissing et al. 2015) and was encouraged more recently by the Social Security Code *(Sozialgesetzbuch* VIII, § 22a). In most *Länder* the responsibility of municipalities or service providers to provide consultants (cf. Bock-Famulla et al. 2015) is defined by law. Consultants (*Fachberaterinnen und Fachberater*) support ECEC services to improve quality in many different ways. They are in charge of service- and provider-related tasks, qualification of staff and quality management and development, as well as administration and control. While there is no specific professional development for consultants, most of them worked in ECEC services before joining the profession and 82% of them hold a university degree (cf. Leygraf 2013). The tasks of consultants can vary and do not necessarily imply all of the mentioned tasks. Although consultants are considered to be a very important aspect of quality development and assurance in ECEC, many regions in Germany struggle to provide a sufficient number of consultants for their services. As a consequence to this, consultants criticise the lack of time they have to support ECEC services (cf. ibid.).

- **Special consultation for ECEC services:** Some *Länder* or providers also offer special consultation ECEC services (*Konsultationskitas*). These are ECEC services that serve as best-practice examples for others. The focus and objectives of consulting services can differ, depending on the initiative from which the consulting services originated. Usually consultation ECEC services are implemented to help in building a network among services, establishing support systems to realize the framework's objectives and honouring excellent services (cf. Baltrusch 2010). The nomination process as well as the criteria (e.g. the exceptionality of good practice, high-quality concepts and approaches) for becoming a consultation ECEC service varies widely across Germany.

In spite of all these efforts to develop and ensure quality in ECEC, no resounding success at national level has yet been achieved. On the contrary: comparison of studies from the 1990s (cf. Tietze 1998) with recent research findings (cf. Tietze et al. 2013) shows that quality in ECEC has hardly improved. Therefore, current quality debates are controversially discussing the possibility of implementing national quality guidelines. In 2014 the federal ministry and representatives of the *Länder* and municipalities met to initiate a process for developing common quality goals in ECEC, including e.g. staff/child ratios, working hours for pedagogical tasks, leadership, qualification of staff and health promotion (cf. BMFSFJ 2014). To involve the different stakeholders in this process, a working group was established that meets regularly to discuss quality-related topics (ibid.). A final report is expected by the end of 2016. However, response to the idea of a coherent nationwide ECEC framework on quality, e.g. by implementation of a quality law or consistent quality standards, is limited.

8.2.2 The evaluation system of Berlin

Within the past decades Berlin has been among those *Länder* that has progressively enforced quality development and assurance. Accordingly, in 2004 the *Land* Berlin implemented its own ECEC curriculum, which was developed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers. The Berlin Educational Program (*Berliner Bildungsprogramm – BBP*, updated in 2014) is mandatory for all Berlin ECEC services and was devised to support ECEC staff and to promote children's development. The "Berlin Educational Program offers binding, scientifically founded and objectively tested, guidelines for the work done at all Berlin pre-schools" (SBWF 2004, p. 3).

Additionally to the introduction of the BBP, the Berlin Senate for Education, Youth and Science[118] (*Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft, SBJW*) reached an agreement (*Qualitätsvereinbarung Kindertagesstätten, QVTAG,* revised in 2014) with ECEC providers' associations to ensure implementation of the BBP in the daily practice of child care services. The agreement is designed to guarantee the continuous development of quality in publicly funded child care services based on the BBP (cf. OECD 2015). For this purpose the following criteria need to be fulfilled: first, services must develop a pedagogical concept based on the BBP resp. adjust their existing concept and develop it further together with ECEC staff and parents; second, ECEC services need to be evaluated internally; and third, providers have to assign an approved evaluation agency to perform external evaluation of their services (cf. ECEC Childcare Funding Act, *Kindertagesförderungsgesetz, KitaFöG; BeKi*[119]). Accordingly, the Berlin monitoring system consists of regular internal and external evaluations. The following section describes the Berlin Kita Institute for Quality Development (*Berliner Kita-Institut für Qualitätsentwicklung, BeKi*), which is responsible

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118 Formerly Berlin Senate for Education, Youth and Sport

119 For this and other „BeKi" references see http://www.beki-qualitaet.de/

for the overall organization of the quality monitoring in Berlin, and explains the processes of internal and external monitoring.

The Berlin Kita Institute for Quality Development

In 2008 the Berlin Kita Institute for Quality Development was appointed by the Berlin Senate for Education, Youth and Science to monitor the process of quality development and to support the implementation of the BBP in practice on behalf of the *Land* of Berlin. This involves

- supporting the development of pedagogical concepts
- training of multipliers for internal evaluations
- providing evaluation agencies
- coordinating external evaluations
- ensuring high-quality execution of external evaluations
- aggregating and analysing data of evaluations (results are passed on to partners of QVTAG agreement, local youth welfare offices and providers)
- assuring communication between involved stakeholders (cf. BeKi).

Hence, the BeKi is involved in the entire process of quality development and assurance of the *Land* of Berlin – including internal and external evaluations.

Internal evaluation

The yearly internal evaluations aim at reflecting the pedagogical work of ECEC services and identifying developmental needs (cf. BeKi). The ECEC manager and the team reflect together on their own work by using instruments such as questionnaires. The internal evaluation process is lead either by the ECEC manager, an especially trained staff member or an external advisor. Additionally, the *Land* provides multipliers to support the internal evaluation process. Service managers, ECEC trainers, and representatives of providers can apply to become a multiplier. Quality requirements and quality criteria (*Materialien für die interne Evaluation zum Berliner Bildungsprogramm für Kitas und Kindertagespflege* updated in 2015) and a toolbox (*Werkzeugkiste Interne Evaluation*) form the basis of the internal evaluations. Both are distributed free of charge to all ECEC services.

The material is organized into three evaluation areas:
- Orientation quality (educational approaches, goals of pedagogical work, professional self-conception)
- Process quality (pedagogical-methodical tasks)
- Cooperation with parents and the team, leadership responsibilities

Anyhow, ECEC providers and their teams do not necessarily need to make use of those methods and tools as long as they follow the BBP's principles. After the internal evaluation, the ECEC services are required to inform their provider about the outcomes of their internal evaluation as well as the next steps (e.g. in-service training of staff) that the services have planned in order to improve their work (cf. OECD 2015, 54).

External evaluations

Since 2010, external evaluations have been conducted in a 5-year-cycle by

evaluation agencies approved by the Berlin Senate for Education, Youth and Science. External evaluations consist of three parts:

1. The provider, the manager, ECEC staff and parents take part in interviews or fill in questionnaires.
2. Rooms and material are inspected.
3. Interactions between staff and children are observed.

The providers of ECEC services can choose among the approved evaluation agencies to find the most suitable for their service to be evaluated. The methods, instruments and duration of evaluation vary depending on the evaluation agency.

After the evaluation, ECEC providers and their services receive individual feedback and an evaluation report, including information on their quality level, development prospects, necessary areas of improvement and recommendations to develop the service's pedagogical quality further (cf. BeKi). The results of the external evaluations remain unpublished unless otherwise specified by the provider, and they are neither ranked nor related to any rewards and/or penalties. However, if a provider refuses to allow external evaluations to be conducted, financial support from the *Land* of Berlin can be withdrawn (cf. ibid.).

8.3   Theoretical framework

Monitoring and evaluation processes are assumed to be important for quality improvement in ECEC (cf. Ma et al. 2011; Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014; Jeon et al. 2014; OECD 2015). Monitoring can help to identify strengths and weaknesses of an ECEC setting and directs its attention to areas of improvement that can then be addressed. Depending on the monitoring system in place, different aspects of quality can be monitored (e.g. teacher qualifications, materials and equipment, class size and ratios, staff-child interaction, child outcomes) (cf. Pianta et al. 2009). Previous research has shown that better structural quality goes along with improved process quality (cf. Phillipsen et al. 1997). Most monitoring systems therefore target structural quality aspects, and ECEC stakeholders often try to improve structural components in order to increase process quality. Even though there is already some research pointing to the importance of monitoring for quality improvement, this research field still lacks a wider body of scientific findings. There is no evidence as to whether monitoring systems actually increase quality, influence decisions by parents in their choice of ECEC services, or reduce variances between different services (cf. Goffin/Barnett 2015). Furthermore, there is little research that takes ECEC staff's perspective on the effectiveness of monitoring in ECEC into account.

We aimed to target this research gap and investigated the staff's perspective, applying a qualitative research approach. The paper bases its analysis on a theoretical framework, which describes quality in ECEC as consisting of three components: input (structural and orientation quality), output (pro-

cess quality) and outcome (child development and well-being) (cf. Tietze et al. 2013). However, it also considers quality as a continuing process between all the different stakeholders in ECEC, in which the definition of quality depends on each perspective (e.g. Wyrobnik 2015; Klinkhammer/ Schäfer in this volume). Therefore, we addressed the following research questions: How do ECEC manager and staff in Berlin perceive the internal/external evaluations? What is their daily routine like since the evaluations were introduced? How do they describe the quality of their setting before and after the implementation of the evaluation system?

8.4   Method

8.4.1 Sample

To address our research questions we conducted interviews with ECEC managers and staff in Berlin, which is the only *Land* to date that has implemented regular evaluations mandatory for publicly funded ECEC services in Germany. Our sample consisted of $N = 11$ female participants with a mean age of 44 years and an age range of 28 to 60 years. We conducted seven individual interviews (five managers, two ECEC staff) and two group discussions (three managers, one ECEC staff member). The requirement for participants to be part of our research was that they had been working at the child care service before and after the implementation of the Berlin evaluation system.

8.4.2 Procedure

We recruited participants randomly through emails, telephone calls, and snowballing by word of mouth. Each interview was conducted by us - the two authors of this article. Five of the interviews were conducted in person. For this, we visited the ECEC services during their standard opening hours. Each ECEC service offered a quiet room (mostly the offices of the managers or the team's meeting-rooms). The other two interviews were conducted via telephone, also during the opening hours of the service. Our data collection followed the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association. Participants received an invitation with details of our purpose, but without revealing the precise research question (cf. Witzel/Reiter 2012). They were told that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. All interviews were recorded with a voice-recording machine and were transcribed afterwards. Although we intended to record all interviews, one interview was not recorded due to technical errors, which we found out after the interview. The participants received a box of chocolates after the interviews as a thank-you. The interviews were conducted between June and August 2015.

8.4.3 Instrument

Problem-centred interview
The method we applied was the problem-centred interview by Witzel &
Reiter (2012). A problem-centred interview enables the subjective view of a
certain question to be captured and reveal what is important for the partici-
pants. This allowed us to focus on the staff's perspective and prevented us
from influencing the answers by bringing in our own expectations (cf.
Witzel 2000). However, a certain amount of prior knowledge is decisive in
formulating the questions (cf. Helfferich 2011; Witzel/Reiter 2012); we thus
reviewed international studies concerning the effectiveness of monitoring
on quality in ECEC and gathered information on the Berlin ECEC system.
Based on this information, we developed a guideline for the interviews.
According to the concept of problem-centred interviews, we gave an im-
pulse at the beginning and later only provided semi-structured prompts to
maintain the dialogue. Other than that, we followed the lead of the partici-
pants. Therefore, the guideline had to be flexible (cf. Schmidt-Lauber 2007;
Witzel/Reiter 2012). At the end of each interview we asked the participants
whether they would like to add something that mattered to them, but had
not been covered (cf. Helfferich 2011, 181). Subsequently to the interviews,
we drew up a postscript including our impressions, reflections, notes on
informal conversations, atmosphere and details of non-verbal and emotion-
al aspects (cf. Schmidt-Lauber 2007; Witzel/Reiter 2012).

Data analysis procedure of the problem-centred interviews
The data was analysed based on a conventional content analysis. A conven-
tional content analysis should be applied "when existing theory or research
literature on a phenomenon is limited. Researchers avoid using "precon-
ceived categories" (Hsieh/Shannon 2005, 1279). Hence, categories were
deduced from the empirical data gained through the interviews (cf. Mayring
2000; Hsieh/Shannon 2005). The analysis process already begins with the
transcription of interviews as a preliminary interpretation (cf. Schmidt-
Lauber 2007), in which not only spoken words but also interruptions, nois-
es (e.g. 'hem') and non-verbal expressions were included. Following this, we
analysed the transcripts systematically (cf. Mayring 2000). Therefore each
transcript was read carefully and key words substantially linked to the inter-
view guideline were marked (cf. Witzel 2000). Based on this, we built cate-
gories ("perceived overall quality improvement", "internal evaluation", "ex-
ternal evaluation") and relationships between the categories were identified
(e.g. sustainable effects of internal and external evaluations). Finally we
combined our findings with other research (cf. Hsieh/Shannon 2005).
Throughout the whole analysis, we also considered our postscripts in order
to fully understand the interviews' outcomes and to critically reflect on in-
fluences we may have exerted on the participants through aspects such as
our own pre-assumptions, the assessment procedure, non-verbal articula-
tions etc. (cf. Witzel/Reiter 2012).

8.4.4 Limitations

Our research aimed at aggregating empirical data regarding the impact of monitoring on quality from the perspective of ECEC staff. It provides insight into the staff's perspective and reveals specifics of the Berlin evaluation system. However, some limitations of our research need to be mentioned at this point. Albeit we carefully recruited participants randomly, a self-selection effect might have emerged. Our sample size was quite small, and most services that agreed to participate were already assessed as having good or very good quality. Other services that were asked declined to participate due to time constraints, as they explained. This might have biased our results. For future research, it would be desirable to find out more about how the ECEC services of lower quality manage their evaluations. It would be particularly interesting to find out whether evaluations affect quality in low-rated services and what the opinions of ECEC staff are.

8.5   Results

The following presents the identified categories based on the participant's statements. The three categories are: perceived overall quality improvement, internal evaluations, and external evaluations.

8.5.1 Perceived overall quality improvement

Major changes within the Berlin ECEC system already started in 2004 with the implementation of the BBP. When our participants compared the quality in ECEC before and after the implementation, they consistently noted a quality increase over the last decade. The main changes experienced by ECEC staff were within orientation and process quality. Most comments referred to the facts that before implementation, standards were lacking and ECEC staff had little awareness of their work and tasks. According to one ECEC manager, "work was more arbitrary"[120]. Today, work is better structured and the participants feel more professional. They also mentioned improved documentation practices as well as an increased awareness of the importance of interaction with the children. One ECEC manager noted regarding the staff-child-interaction that "before, work maybe hadn't been that much, er, worse, but you weren't really sure about why you were doing it"[121].

Those examples illustrate that ECEC staff see the improvement of quality in their tasks and profession. They did not refer to other factors such as structural aspects of quality, although those also affect their working conditions. Regarding the overall quality improvement, only a few participants

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120 Original quote: "war Arbeit beliebiger"

121 Original quote: "Davor war Arbeit vielleicht gar nicht so sehr viel, äh, schlechter, aber man war sich gar nicht so bewusst, warum man´s jetzt macht..."

indicated a causal relationship to the implementation of the BBP and the evaluation system. The majority of participants neither denied a connection nor doubted the usefulness of the monitoring system. They were simply unsure as to what factors caused the quality increase, as so many things were going on in the field of quality during that period of time. One ECEC staff member noted, "Well, we were already in a transition, so it's, therefore I can't really tell whether it was the external evaluation or because we'd already been reflecting pretty much"[122]. Many providers were eager to improve quality and offered advanced training or even implemented their own evaluation systems, which was recognized by another ECEC manager: "I wouldn't necessarily link it [the quality improvement] to the internal evaluations, but I would also factor in the [...] approach we worked with"[123]. Therefore, the participants were not definitely sure about what actually caused the quality increase.

8.5.2 Internal evaluations

In taking a closer look at the single aspects of the Berlin evaluation system, the participants of our research highlighted the importance of internal evaluations for their work.

When the internal evaluation became mandatory in 2008, only a few of our participants feared it to be some sort of control element. Most participants appreciated the opportunity to take time to reflect on their work and what needed to be improved. ECEC staff said that they finally had time to work intensively with topics that normally would be seen as important, but were not dealt with due to time constraints. The internal evaluation provides them with the assigned time and they are 'forced' to deal with certain topics. Nevertheless, one ECEC staff member also mentioned that "you don't have that much time. We kind of used the team meetings to prepare for evaluation as well, um, and in general, I think there's always too little time"[124].

Overall, internal evaluations have been perceived consistently as an "immense enrichment", "helpful", "exciting". They serve as "scaffolding"[125] to fulfil the requirements of the BBP step by step, as one ECEC manager expressed it. Participants even mentioned that they perceived internal evaluations as more effective than external evaluations. The intense

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122 Original quote: "Also wir waren sowieso schon in so 'nem Wandel, also das ist, deshalb kann ich dir gar nicht genau sagen, ist das jetzt weil die externe Evaluation war oder weil wir sowieso schon uns sehr viel reflektieren."

123 Original quote: "Ich würde es jetzt nicht unbedingt an der internen Evaluation festmachen, sondern auch in der Beschäftigung mit dem […] Ansatz".

124 Original quote: "Man hat ja nicht so viel Zeit, das sind dann die Dienstbesprechungen, die wir dann irgendwie dafür genutzt haben auch um das vorzubereiten, ähm, und generell so, ich glaub die Zeit immer zu wenig ist."

125 Original quote: "Also, das ist praktisch so ein Gerüst, sag ich mal, wo wir uns mit der Zeit entlang hangeln."

discussions within the team and the critical reflections on their work seemed to be beneficial. Furthermore, the team members reminded one another about their agreements afterwards. Therefore, participants reported that internal evaluations had longer lasting effects than external evaluations. However, one ECEC manager also remarked that evaluating sustainably is closely linked to the staff's motivation, which might decrease if procedures and contents remain the same: "[...] [You need] a highlight, something so that the next phase won't be the same. So that before everyone says ´Yuck, here you go again with that paperwork´ […]. Is there any other way of getting results, something for the second phase, something that makes it more interesting […]"[126].

With respect to our research questions, it can be assumed that participants did not directly link the internal evaluations to quality aspects, but to the BBP. However, the BBP is strongly connected to quality assurance, as one goal of the Berlin evaluation system is to guarantee the implementation of the BBP (cf. OECD 2015). Perceiving the internal evaluations as a helpful and supportive tool, participants pointed to the importance of internal evaluations for their work and the positive impact they had. Internal evaluations supported intense reflection on educational approaches and professional self-conception. Moreover, ECEC staff elaborated pedagogical-methodical procedures and put them into practice. Hence, our research shows that internal evaluations had positive effects on aspects of orientation and process quality.

8.5.3 External evaluations

In contrast to the internal evaluations, most participants feared the external evaluations. Before the external evaluation they felt "highly worried", "scared" and "anxious". However, the preparations for external evaluation were already perceived positively. Participants reported that the whole team was required to support the external evaluation process, for example by helping to get all relevant documents ready. Therefore, preparing for the external evaluations had a team-building character.

Regarding the evaluation day, ECEC staff reported that they were "insecure" and very aware of their own behaviour. However, after a few minutes that changed and they started to forget that the external evaluator was present. This allowed them to proceed with their work as usual. "Well, and, er, the first 10 minutes I really paid attention to myself and to what I wanted to say (laughs). And how I moved and whether I should touch the child from the side or from the front. But that [state of mind] vanished. Suddenly

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126 Original quote: „... [...] [man braucht] einen Clou, irgendwas, dass die nächste Runde nicht nochmal so ist. Also, dass bevor alle sagen ´Buäh, du mit deinen Bögen schon wieder´ [...]. Gibt es irgendwie was, wie man noch mal anders zu Ergebnissen kommen kann, was für ne zweite Runde, was sozusagen darüber hinaus die Sachen interessant [macht] [...]."

you're back in your routine"[127] (ECEC staff member). All participants reported that the external evaluator was an "inconspicuous" person, sitting quietly in a corner of the room. This made it easy for participants to forget the evaluator´s presence. Moreover, the participants described the external evaluator as a very calm, pleasant person with an "appreciative" nature. The consistency of these descriptions of the external evaluator leads to the conclusion that training of evaluators in Berlin has a strong focus on appreciation and constructive criticism, rather than a controlling character. This appears to have great effects on the openness of ECEC staff towards evaluation processes in general. After the external evaluation, the majority stated to look forward to the next evaluation as they were then familiar with the procedure. Given that the acceptance of all stakeholders is considered an important issue in successfully developing and improving quality (cf. e.g. Achten/Bodeving in this volume), the quality process in the ECEC services of our research was also enhanced by this. Furthermore, the participants appraise external evaluations as motivating and positively challenging – they feel that their work is taken seriously. The external evaluation strengthened their self-reflection and made them feel "proud", "self-confident" and "happy with themselves". In the words of one manager, "the ECEC staff's well-being is closely connected with the service's quality"[128]. The feedback reports that providers and services receive after external evaluation are designed to help services to take action concerning quality and undertake improvements. However, participants working in services that were already evaluated as high quality reported that they hardly involved the feedback report at all in their work[129]. Nevertheless, it gave them "a reason […] to note that it went really well and that it's nice to get positive recognition"[130] (ECEC staff). However, one manager complained about the appropriateness of some suggestions for improvement. At their service a trampoline was hanging at a height where it was not reachable by children. This was criticized by the external evaluator in the feedback report, although ECEC staff explained it had been placed there on purpose due to constraints of space.

127 Original quote: "Ähm, und ne die ersten 10 Minuten hab ich so doll auf mich geachtet und mir überlegt was ich sage (lacht)... Und wie ich mich bewege und ob ich jetzt ein Kind von der Seite anfasse, oder besser von vorne, aber das verschwindet dann. Man ist dann plötzlich wieder in seinem Alltag."

128 Original quote: "Das Wohl des Erziehers hat viel mit der Qualität auch des Hauses zu tun."

129 At this point it would be very interesting to have information on how centres of lower quality make use of the feedback report. In our research only one centre of minor lower quality - compared to the other centres - actually addressed the feedback report intensely.

130 Original quote: "Und nochmal stolz zu sein. Es war nochmal so ein kurzer Anlass […], dass es toll gelaufen ist und dass es schön ist, einfach ne Bestätigung zu bekommen."

8.6　Discussion

A widening body of research points to the importance of early years and the relevance of high-quality ECEC for young children's learning. Accordingly, there is an increasing interest across countries in enhancing quality in ECEC (cf. Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014; OECD 2015). Therefore, more and more countries are establishing monitoring systems in their ECEC services in order to increase and maintain quality. However, since the establishment of monitoring systems is a relatively new trend, it is not surprising that there is a lack of research findings regarding the impact of monitoring systems on quality. There is especially little research considering the staff's perspective on quality improvement through monitoring. With our qualitative research design, we addressed three questions concerning the ECEC staff's perspective on quality within the Berlin evaluation system.

8.6.1 Discussion of the three categories

Perceived overall quality improvement

Overall staff reported that quality in Berlin ECEC has increased over the last decade. However, our participants did not report a causal relationship between the implementation of the evaluation system and their perceived quality improvement. Staff reported that extensive quality development activities were performed in the field besides the implementation of the evaluation system (e.g. quality initiatives from the provider, or advanced training for staff). Even though staff did not report a causal relationship, they still indicated a positive connection between the implementation of the monitoring system and quality improvement.

Previous research has indicated similar findings and shows that implementation of a monitoring system is accompanied by overall quality improvement (cf. Ma et al. 2011; Schulman et al. 2012; OECD 2013; Jeon et al. 2014; Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care 2014; Boller et al. 2015; Tarrant/Huerta 2015).

However, it should be taken into account that it is difficult to relate the application of a single tool or method to a complex phenomenon such as quality improvement. Quality improvement involves many stakeholders and different aspects within and beyond the ECEC services (e.g. statutory regulations, qualification level of staff, attitudes and beliefs of staff), and it would be oversimplified to assume that the establishment of a monitoring system would be responsible for all the changes (cf. OECD 2013).

Internal evaluation

ECEC staff indicated that internal evaluations are crucial for their work. Contrary to other studies (e.g. Vallberg-Roth 2015), staff in Berlin rarely complained about the expenditure of time that the evaluations take. As established in the QVTAG (cf. Berlin Senate for Education, Youth, and Science 2014), participants stated they had the assigned time to undertake the evaluations. However, one ECEC staff member from our research admitted

there was a lack of time for evaluation, and a few also mentioned that implementation of the BBP was rushed under time pressure. Therefore, our results on that must be understood ambiguously to some extent. These findings can be supported by existing research. Friedman (2007) also indicated that there was "too little time to reflect and consider what you've done and whether it could be done better" (p. 8).

Nevertheless, the majority of participants said that thanks to the evaluations, they finally had time to discuss points that would normally be skipped due to time constraints. The approach seems to work especially well when the team agrees on certain topics together, and accordingly they remind one another when they have not followed the agreed points. Furthermore, ECEC staff indicated that the internal evaluations helped to positively change their awareness of their behaviour towards the children. This finding is confirmed by a study by Friedman (2007). The research report showed that ECEC staff's awareness and consciousness of what they are doing was enhanced by the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Moreover, a study by Tarrant & Huerta (2015) with a similar approach stated that the QRIS made ECEC staff more aware of, and sensitive to, the use of richer language with children.

External evaluation

Regarding the perception of the evaluation process, it can be seen that although ECEC staff were anxious before the evaluation, they afterwards indicated that external evaluations strengthened the appreciation of the profession as well as their self-perception of their work and profession. Therefore, it can be assumed that the external evaluations positively affected their work and boosted quality improvement. Tarrant & Huerta's study (2015) showed comparable findings and cited a participant: "My first expression to that was 'Yikes!' because somebody's going to come in to observe. Somebody's going to be in your classroom. Somebody's going to watch everything you do" (Tarrant/Huerta 2015, 330). However, similarly to our research, participants indicated that they appreciated the recognition and validation for the job that they are doing (cf. Tarrant/Huerta 2015).

Another point that needs to be discussed is how monitoring can be organized in a way that staff stay motivated and involved. The participants of our research did not indicate any decrease in motivation. However, the evaluation system in Berlin is also relatively new, so that motivation of staff might become more challenging in a few years, as one manager pointed out. In Friedman's study (2007), in which ECEC managers were interviewed, one indicated that at the beginning participation in the monitoring system had raised awareness and helped to increase quality, but that the initial excitement and benefits of taking part in the evaluation process wore off after three evaluations. The positive effect decreased over time.

Another challenge was to bring desirable standards of the evaluation systems and ECEC practice together. Apparently, this was not only an issue in our research, but also expressed in the existing literature. One ECEC manager indicated that the rating systems do not allow enough flexibility for practical application. This example highlights one major challenge of im-

plementing quality standards, which is not only true for evaluating quality in general. Furthermore, it is important that quality requirements also consider the different concepts of ECEC settings. Even though the Berlin evaluation system considers and respects the variety of concepts in German ECEC services, sometimes certain standards as well as broad quality programmes do not seem to be translatable into ECEC practice due to practical constraints.

Similarly, ECEC managers in a US study reported that they had several children with autism in a classroom and adjusted the classroom to their needs. Accordingly, they limited the number of items of student work or other materials to reduce distraction. However, due to the inflexible scoring sheet they failed to meet the requirement of having a certain amount of material in their classroom environment (cf. Schulman et al. 2012). Given these possible gaps between established standards and their practical implementation, the idea of quality as a process involving all ECEC stakeholders, and not a defined concept, comes even more strongly to the fore.

8.7   Conclusion

To sum up, ECEC staff perceived evaluations as a supportive and useful tool for quality work. ECEC managers and ECEC staff receive feedback on their strengths and areas of improvement and can therefore work on the criticized areas. Overall, our results indicate that evaluations can affect ECEC quality positively at several levels, depending on numerous factors such as available time or acceptance by staff (e.g. regarding their motivation to participate). According to the staff's perspective, orientation as well as process quality are particularly enhanced. Despite those findings, further empirical research on the impact of evaluation systems on quality is urgently needed. A body of empirical evidence that shows the benefits of monitoring would justify the establishment of monitoring systems in ECEC and lead to higher quality, which then has a positive effect on children.

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9 The road to monitoring Quality in Childcare settings for babies and toddlers in Flanders

Christele van Nieuwenhuyzen

9.1 Introduction

This article introduces the ECEC system in Flanders (Belgium), focuses on the recent reforms in childcare for babies and toddlers (regulation, financing and monitoring of (pedagogical) quality) and discusses the MeMoQ project that was launched due to these reforms.

First, a short description of the policy organization in Belgium will be given as background information for the outline of the formal childcare landscape in Flanders.

Second, the focus will lie on childcare settings for babies and toddlers, more specifically on the recent reforms which have led to the rethinking of quality assurance in those settings.

Finally, special attention will be given to the project of "Measuring and Monitoring of Quality" (MeMoQ) in childcare settings for babies and toddlers, which started in 2013 and will end in the autumn of 2016.

9.2 Policy organization in Belgium

Belgium is a federal state with three communities – the Flemish (in the north of the country), the French (in the south of the country)[131,] and the German Communities – and three regions, the Flemish region (Flanders), the Walloon region (Wallonia) and the Brussels Capital Region[132].

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131 The French Community of Belgium (as stated in the Belgian Constitution) has been renamed 'Federation Wallonia-Brussels' (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles).

132 Out of the total population of approx. 11.250 million, about 6.5 million live in Flanders, 3.6 million live in Wallonia (including about 76,000 in the German Community) and 1.1 million in Brussels Capital Region (http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/cijfers/bevolking/structuur-/leeft-ijdgeslacht/belgie/).
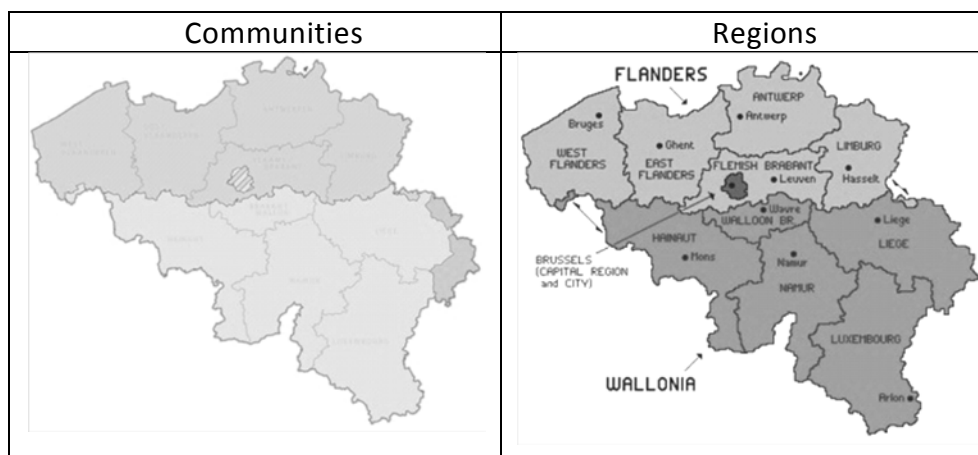
Communities	Regions

Figure 1 Communities and regions in Belgium

During the last few decades, policy domains and competences have been divided over the various levels of authority. Policy areas such as family services, childcare services, education, youth work and welfare are regulated at community level. Although the same kinds of services are offered to families in all three communities, different emphases or nuances do exist. The three communities of Belgium have a split system for ECEC. The childcare facilities[133] (*kinderopvang*) are the responsibility of the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family, while pre-primary education facilities (*kleuterscholen*) are the responsibility of the Department of Education and Formation and are integrated into the system of elementary education (age 2.5-12 years) (cf. Peeters 2013).

9.3   Outline of the formal childcare landscape in Flanders

In Flanders, formal childcare[134] falls within the responsibility of the Flemish Government, more specifically within the responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family. *Kind en Gezin* (Child and Family) is a Flemish governmental agency contributing to the well-being of young children and their families through the regulation of three policy areas: preventive family support, childcare and adoption. With regard to formal childcare, *Kind en Gezin* is responsible for implementing the policy laid down by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family and agreed upon by the Flemish government, both for the childcare of ba-

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133 Childcare for babies and toddlers (aged 0 to 3) and childcare for school children of pre-primary or primary school age before and after school hours and during school holidays.

134 Formal childcare is subject to legislation, provided by childcare workers and paid for by parents. Informal childcare is not subject to legislation and is provided by grandparents/neighbours/family/friends, etc., and parents usually do not pay for this informal childcare.

bies and toddlers (age 0 to pre-primary school age[135]) and for the childcare of school children from pre-primary and primary school age (age 2.5 or 3 to 12) before and after school hours and during school holidays.

With regard to childcare settings, *Kind en Gezin* has the following tasks:

- Checking compliance with the requirements for starting a quality childcare setting (and thus for obtaining a licence, accreditation or certificate), with respect to safety and hygiene as well as the number of employees and their training
- Granting a licence, accreditation or certificate
- Monitoring, supporting and enforcing the activities of the setting and ensuring the payment of subsidies to childcare providers
- Ensuring balanced distribution, on the basis of objective parameters, of the budget released by the Flemish Government for the creation of new places and retention of existing places throughout the different Flemish municipalities and Brussels Capital Region
- Consulting local authorities regarding the development of childcare within the framework of the creation of new places, as well as supporting them in their local director's role in childcare
- Giving advice concerning preparation of the policy laid down by the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family, and implementing this policy
- Monitoring and promoting the quality of formal childcare and advising the Flemish Government on the qualifications and competences for people working in formal childcare
- Offering families information about childcare

Since 2006 all childcare settings have been controlled by the inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate (*Zorginspectie*)[136]. The Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency inspects all settings (e.g. childcare settings for babies and toddlers and for school children) which are accredited, certified, licensed or subsidised by the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family or by other agencies of the Welfare, Public Health and Family policy area. In other words, it is not *Kind en Gezin* which performs on-site inspections of childcare settings or trains the inspectors that are responsible for the on-site visits.

Finally, by providing formal childcare the Flemish Government and the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family seek to provide a service to families

- that has an economic, pedagogical and social function;
- that is of high quality and is available, affordable and accessible for every child without any distinctions;
- in addition to the children's upbringing within their families, with respect for their capacities and home environment and the family's freedom of choice;

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135 In Flanders, children can go to pre-primary school (kleuterschool) from the age of 2.5.

136 See: http://www4wvg.vlaanderen.be/wvg/zorginspectie/Pages/Home.aspx

- that can be a meeting place for parents, with respect for diversity between parents and between children;
- that aims at overcoming disadvantage by devoting additional attention to vulnerable[137] families within the scope of a progressive universal offer.

9.3.1 Types of settings

In Flanders formal childcare can be provided within a home-based or a centre-based setting and can be organized by a private (69.3% of the total number of available places[138]) or a public provider (30.7%).

Home-based childcare[139] is provided by a single childcare worker and takes place at the childcare worker's own home. However, the care can also be provided at another location, e.g. a school building. The maximum number of children that can be present at the same time in a home-based setting is 8[140], but in practice home-based settings provide care to four children on average.

Although this kind of childcare offer is principally provided by one childcare worker sometimes two childcare workers take care of the children together. However, if two childcare workers take care of more than eight children in one home-based setting, they are referred to as '*cooperating childcare professionals*' and they fall by legal definition within the category of "centre-based childcare".

In contrast to home-based childcare, centre-based childcare[141] is generally a larger childcare setting with several childcare workers. Usually this type of care takes place in a building or space which is specifically intended for childcare. In a centre-based childcare setting for babies and toddlers, children are cared for in a group of a maximum of 18 children. The maximum number of children allowed per childcare worker in a centre-based childcare setting for babies and toddlers is eight if only one childcare worker is present in the group. As soon as another childcare worker is present in the group, nine children at the most can be cared for by each childcare worker.[142] The maximum number of children allowed per childcare worker in a centre-based childcare setting for school children is 14 and there is no restriction on the size of the group in centre-based childcare setting for school children.

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137 E.g. low-income families, single-parent families, underprivileged families.

138 More than half of these private providers are not for profit – (cf. Database Kind en Gezin 2015).

139 Formally known as "family day care" (onthaalouder) - it represents 23.5% of the total number of places available in childcare settings for babies and toddlers and for school children in Flanders (2015)

140 This is a maximum figure and not a target figure.

141 Formally known as "crèches" – they represent 76.5% of the total number of places available in childcare settings for babies and toddlers and for school children in Flanders (2015).

142 These are maximum figures and not target figures.

Childcare for	Type of settings	
	Home-based settings	Centre-based settings
Babies and toddlers (can be combined with child-care for school children at the same location)	With a licence	With a licence
School children of pre-primary or primary school age (before or after school hours or during school holidays)	- Only registered - With a certificate	- Only registered - With an accreditation - With a certificate (1)

(1)   During the entire year or only during holiday periods.

Figure 2 Formal childcare landscape
(Source: author's own)

9.3.2 Access and use of the childcare settings in Flanders

As in many countries, demand in Flanders is higher than supply. Nevertheless, the take-up rate for childcare services for babies and toddlers amounted to 51.6% in 2014[143] (19.5% in home-based settings, 32.1% in centre-based settings), which means that the standard of the European Barcelona Targets (33%) has been met in Flanders.

Take-up rates in childcare services for school children are less high (age three to six: 17.3%; age six to twelve: 11.7%)[144] due to the fact that other settings are available where school children can go before or after school hours or during school holidays (e.g. schools that organize childcare before and after school hours and during school holidays for their own pupils, settings of youth work organizations, sport services). Since those settings do not fall under the responsibility of the Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family, we do not have access to the take-up rates.

143 Due to the transition period after implementation of the new Parliament Act, new figures will only be available in 2016.
144 See: http://www.kindengezin.be/img/kind-in-vlaanderen-2014.pdf

9.4   Childcare for babies and toddlers

9.4.1 Recent reforms

On 1 April 2014, the new Flemish Parliament Act on Childcare for Babies and Toddlers[145] took effect in Flanders. The purpose of the Flemish government and the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family in passing this Parliament Act was to erase the important differences that existed between the different childcare settings. Before the Parliament Act, private providers had to apply for a certificate, and the conditions for obtaining such a certificate were different and less severe than the conditions for public providers, which had to apply for accreditation. All accredited providers received funding, whereas only some of the private providers were funded. Consequently, no uniform regulations concerning the quality conditions for public and private settings were valid and different instruments were used to monitor quality in public and private settings. This was a crucial point for the Flemish Government and the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family with regard to the pursuit of establishing high quality in a uniform way throughout all childcare settings for babies and toddlers. After all, all children and their families have the right to high-quality childcare, regardless of the type of setting.

One of the central changes is that from 1 April 2014 onwards a licence was required for any type of formal childcare for babies and toddlers[146]. Unlike in the past, the conditions for obtaining a licence are the same for all settings (public and private ones). Apart from licensed childcare for babies and toddlers, only informal childcare for babies and toddlers is possible (i.e. non-professional childcare provided by grandparents, friends, family, etc. and for which parents generally do not pay).

To obtain a licence, specific requirements have to be met by the childcare setting. These requirements are based on the specificity of the age group of babies and toddlers and pertain, among other things, to infrastructure, hygiene, safety, (pedagogical) quality and qualifications of the staff.[147]

Licensed home-based or centre-based childcare settings for babies and toddlers can also opt to receive school children from pre-primary and primary schools at the same location in addition to babies and toddlers, provided the licence requirements are complied with.

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145 http://www.kindengezin.be/kinderopvang/sector-babys-en-peuters/regelgeving-en-juridisch/re-gelgeving/#Decreet. The transition from the former situation (before the introduction of the Flemish Parliament Act) to the new situation (after implementation of the Flemish Parliament Act) will not be fully completed until 2020. Regarding the qualification of the workforce in child-care settings for babies and toddlers, the Parliament Act requires that everyone should be qualified by 2024.

146 Childcare subject to legislation, provided by professionals and paid for by parents.

147 For more details see: www.kindengezin.be/img/vergunning-bvr-bp.pdf.

As soon as a setting obtains a licence, it is inspected on site by the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency to check whether the legal requirements are still being met.[148] *Kind en Gezin* is informed after every visit and uses the findings of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency in the context of monitoring and promoting the quality in childcare settings for babies and toddlers.

9.4.2 Funding

The Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family and the Flemish Government decide yearly over making funding available to create more places in childcare settings or 'upgrading' the funding of existing settings.

The subsidy scheme for the formal childcare of babies and toddlers is a level-based system starting at Level 0. Each level implies additional tasks and conditions. The higher the level, the more subsidies the childcare setting can receive, but also the more conditions they have to fulfil. In each level, additional subsidies can be granted under certain conditions, more specifically for inclusive childcare for children with special needs or for flexible childcare.

			Level 3 (0.5%)
			Plus subsidy
		Level 2 (71.1%)	+
		Income-related fee subsidy	Income-related fee subsidy
	Level 1 (11.9%)	+	+
Level 0 (16.5% of the total number of available places)	Basic subsidy	Basic subsidy	Basic subsidy

Figure 3 Subsidy scheme
(Source: Database Kind en Gezin 2015)

Licensed childcare settings for babies and toddlers which receive no subsidies[149] (Level 0) or only receive a basic subsidy (Level 1)[150] are free to de-

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148 Starters: visit at the start of the setting, followed by a second visit within the year after the start; existing locations: once every three years or at any time when there is a justifiable reason for inspection (e.g. a complaint by a parent) or depending on the last monitoring results.

149 Because they do not meet the subsidy requirements or because they were not funded before the implementation of the Flemish Parliament Act and no additional funds were made available by the Flemish Government at that time for granting subsidies.

150 Before the implementation of the Parliament Act, they were generally the settings of private providers with certificates and not funded (level 0), or with small amounts of financial support (level 1).

termine the fee payable by families for the care of their baby or toddler. At these settings, families pay a fee which is not related to their income.

In childcare settings which receive an income-related fee subsidy (Level 2) or a plus subsidy (Level 3), families pay an income-related[151] fee for the care of their baby or toddler. Childcare settings that receive an income-related fee subsidy (Level 2) or a plus subsidy (Level 3) are obliged to observe a number of priority rules:

- **Childcare settings which receive an income-related fee subsidy (Level 2)** have to grant absolute priority to children from families where childcare is essential due to the working situation of their parents (retaining work, looking for work or following vocational training to that end), as well as to children from single-parent families, low-income families and foster families.
- **Childcare settings which receive a plus subsidy (Level 3):** these settings have to respect the same priority rules as in Level 2, but must implement a proactive admission policy to give places to vulnerable families[152], and their activities need to be aligned specifically to vulnerable families. They have to build and disseminate expertise to other settings on how to deal with vulnerable families in a respectful manner. Childcare settings at Level 3 also have to make efforts to recruit staff from vulnerable population groups.

The revenues from the financial contributions of the families are offset against the income-related fee subsidy and plus subsidy. As a result, care for children from low-income families does not have any negative financial consequences for the settings' operating budget. In this way the Flemish Government and the Flemish Minster of Welfare, Public Health and Families seek to foster universal access to all families, especially the most vulnerable ones. Furthermore, this is part of the Flemish Government's aim to overcome disadvantage by devoting additional attention to vulnerable families within the scope of a progressive universal offer.

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151 The minimum and maximum rates are laid down by law – Ministerieel besluit van 23 april 2014 (BS 4 juli 2014) tot uitvoering van het Subsidiebesluit van 22 november 2013 (in 2016: minimum EUR 5.02/day and maximum EUR 27.83/day).

152 Definition of a vulnerable family for these settings: a family which meets two of the following criteria, one of which must always be criterion (c), (d) or (e): (a) families where childcare is absolutely necessary due to the working situation of the parents (retaining work, looking for work or following vocational training to that end)/(b) single-parent families/(c) low-income families (d) families where one family member is disabled or has special needs or where care of the children in a childcare setting is necessary due to social-pedagogical reasons/(e) families where no parent has a diploma of secondary education.

9.5 Quality assurance in childcare settings for babies and toddlers

Since the implementation of the new Flemish Parliament Act on Childcare for Babies and Toddlers, a quality assurance manual has been mandatory for every provider with more than 18 places. Before the new Flemish Parliament Act, only public (accredited and subsidized) centre-based settings were obliged to have one. In this manual providers have to describe the procedures they use to evaluate quality in their setting(s), how they engage parents and how childcare workers are trained. *Kind en Gezin* offers tools to support providers in editing this manual[153]. The Flemish Care Inspectorate checks the content and implementation of the manual during the site visits.

After the implementation of the Flemish Parliament Act, there has not only been a transition towards uniform regulations for all childcare settings for babies and toddlers, but also the pursuit of a uniform quality achievement process in services for babies and toddlers. Before the implementation of the new Flemish Parliament Act, the instruments and/or methods used by the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency differed between home-based and centre-based settings as well as public and private settings. Based on the assumption that every child has a right to high-quality childcare, a new approach of monitoring and assuring quality had to be established.

Initially, the Flemish Government wished to develop a single instrument to monitor quality in home-based and centre-based settings as well as in public and private settings and emphasising pedagogical quality. Therefore, a preliminary research was conducted with the goal of answering two major questions:

- How to develop an instrument that can be used in all types of settings in a uniform way, both to monitor pedagogical quality and to improve this quality?
- What could such an instrument be like?

The research was commissioned after the publication of a tender to the University of Ghent (under the supervision of Prof. Michel Vandenbroek) and the University of Leuven (under the supervision of Prof. Ferre Laevers). The study (cf. Vandenbroeck et al. 2011) was conducted based on literature reviews and analyses of existing national and international instruments for monitoring quality, supported by three focus groups with different stakeholders (childcare settings, pedagogical coaches and inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency).

This research demonstrated the following two main issues:

1. That instead of a single instrument, three instruments had to be developed in order to monitor and improve quality in all types of settings in a uniform way:

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153 See: www.kindengezin.be/kinderopvang/sector-babys-en-peuters/kwaliteitshandboek

- A scientific instrument to **measure** the pedagogical quality in all settings in Flanders. This implied that a zero measurement had to be conducted to gain an initial view of pedagogical quality at settings in Flanders.
- A monitoring instrument as **a tool for regular inspection,** and thus for **monitoring** pedagogical quality in all individual settings.
- A self-evaluation instrument as a tool for guiding and supporting practitioners working in an individual setting to **improve quality** in their setting.

2. That these instruments could not be elaborated without developing a pedagogical framework defining pedagogical quality as a first step. In fact, the preliminary study demonstrated that a definition of pedagogical quality would be needed before it could be measured. Therefore, the pedagogical framework as the definition of pedagogical quality was to act as a connection between the three different instruments.

9.6 Measuring and Monitoring Quality in childcare settings for babies and toddlers (MeMoQ)

As a consequence, the MeMoQ project was launched in 2013 (the project was commissioned after the publication of a tender[154] to two universities: Ghent (under the supervision of Prof. Michel Vandenbroeck) and Leuven (under the supervision of Prof. Ferre Laevers). The assignment consisted of the development of a pedagogical framework and three new instruments to measure, monitor and improve quality. This project started at the end of 2013 and will be finalized in the fall of 2016.

Nov 2013	April 2014	Sept. 2014	April 2015	Sept 2015	April 2016	Fall 2016
Development of pedagogical framework						
	Development and testing of scientific instrument					
				Zero measurement		
						Analyses of results of zero measurement
				Development and testing of monitoring instr.		
				Development and testing of self-evaluation instr.		

Figure 4 Timeline of MeMoQ
(Source: author's own)

154 A new tender.

9.6.1 Approach

This MeMoQ-project uses a specific working method, the key words of which are **transparency** and **participation**. In fact, findings from the preliminary research underlined the need to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development and use of instruments to monitor, measure and improve quality. Two important working groups were constituted: the project management group and a consultation group.
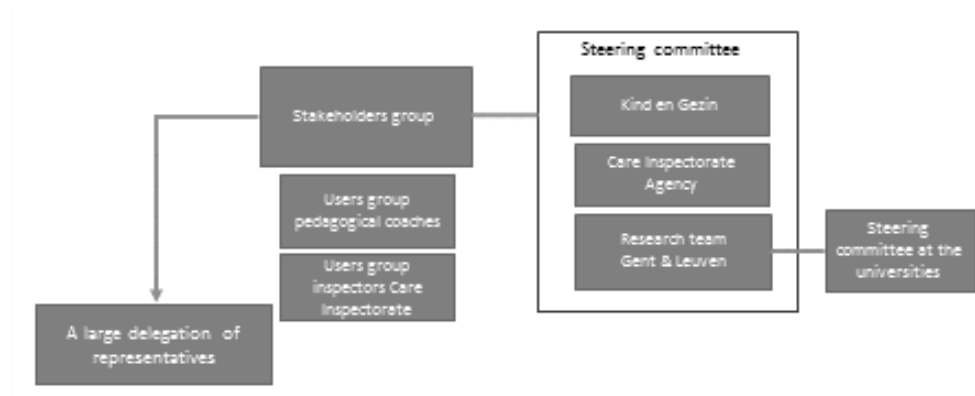

Figure 5 Working constellations within MeMoQ
(Source: author's own/ MeMoQ-Project)

The members of the steering committee are the researchers from the two universities, staff members of *Kind en Gezin* (as representatives of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family) and inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency.

The stakeholders group is a large delegation of organizations representing:
- childcare settings (home-based and centre-based/private and public)
- parents[155]
- minority groups[156]
- organizations against poverty[157]
- and representatives of
  - the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency
  - the Ministry of Education and Formation
  - local authorities in Flanders and Brussels
    - VBJK, training centers and officer
    - VBJK, the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (Vernieuwing in de Basisvoorzieningen voor Jonge Kinderen)

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155 By way of 'De Gezinsbond' – an organization in Flanders that represents families regardless of their religion, size and political convictions.

156 Such as ethnic minority groups.

157 Such as 'De Vereniging waar armen het woord nemen'.

- training centres
- the office of the Children's Rights Commissioner.

Within the scope of developing the monitoring instrument, an additional users group with inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency was implemented. The aim of the researchers in forming this working group was to develop the monitoring instrument in collaboration with the inspectors – the future users of the instrument. To elaborate the self-evaluation instrument, a users group with pedagogical coaches was composed for the same reason (because the instrument will be a tool for the pedagogical coaches).

In this way, interaction between research, policy and practice was established in order to agree on a common vision of pedagogical quality and how it could be monitored and assured. This approach was combined with regular communication with all other stakeholders without representatives in the stakeholders group (e.g. a place on the website of *Kind en Gezin* is especially reserved for MeMoQ, and a newsflash was sent to all childcare settings whenever an important phase was completed).[158]

Finally, a steering committee at the universities supported the researchers with regard to the methodology used to develop the instruments and the statistical analyses.

9.6.2 The pedagogical framework

Inspired by the findings of the preliminary research and other national and international references[159], the researchers proposed an initial version of the pedagogical framework. This proposal was discussed in detail and adapted several times, first by the steering committee and second by the stakeholders group. Only after several months a broad and balanced consensus on the final content of the pedagogical framework could be reached.

The pedagogical framework is a concise vision text on quality childcare. It describes pedagogical quality and acts as a source of inspiration for all practitioners working in childcare settings for babies and toddlers. It serves as a guideline and not as a manual. It also values childcare practice, which many practitioners already perform on a daily basis. Finally, it holds a powerful message – or even promise – for families, namely that they can be assured of pedagogical quality at the childcare settings.[160]

The pedagogical framework describes what childcare does for children, families and society, the perspective taken by childcare over children, families and society, and the orientation it offers for pedagogical practice with respect to children, families and society. It describes four areas of experi-

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158 See: www.kindengezin.be/kinderopvang/sector-babys-en-peuters/pedagogische-aanpak/me-moq

159 More detailed references can be found at the end of the pedagogical framework http://www.kindengezin.be/img/pedagogische-raamwerk-engelseversie.pdf.

160 See: www.kindengezin.be/img/pedagogische-raamwerk-engelseversie.pdf

ence which are indispensable for developing a challenging environment aimed at children's overall development:

1. "Me and the Other", because children develop their identity during early childhood in a world full of other adults and children;
2. "Body and Movement", because during early childhood the child's body undergoes extensive changes;
3. "Communication and Expression", because children learn to express themselves verbally and non-verbally during early childhood;
4. "Exploration of the World", because during early childhood children get to know and understand the world, both of objects and people.
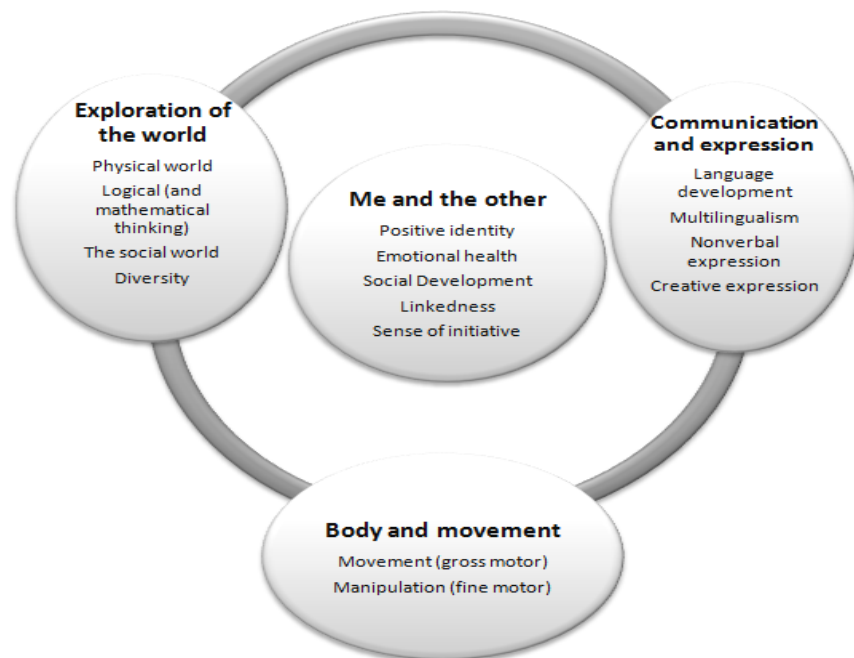
Exploration of the world
Physical world
Logical (and mathematical thinking)
The social world
Diversity

Me and the other
Positive identity
Emotional health
Social Development
Linkedness
Sense of initiative

Communication and expression
Language development
Multilingualism
Nonverbal expression
Creative expression

Body and movement
Movement (gross motor)
Manipulation (fine motor)

Figure 6 Areas of experience within the pedagogical framework
(Source: pedagogical framework, p. 11)

Children experience different things at the same time. Every game and activity of young children pertains to a different area of experience. What children learn is linked to where, how and with whom they learn. Children feel, move, do things together, explore, play, talk, are creative and think. In practice this means that care activities and educational activities are inextricably linked, that areas of experience are intrinsically intertwined, and that affective, moral and cognitive aspects are addressed in ways including the use of well-being and involvement as guidelines for pedagogical quality (cf. Laevers within this publication).

   These areas of experience and the rest of the framework content were an important starting-point and guideline for the development of the three

instruments (scientific instrument, monitoring instrument and self-evaluation instrument).

9.6.3 The scientific instrument

The aim was:
- to develop a reliable and valid scientific instrument workable in (private and public) home-based and centre-based settings in order to establish the current status of pedagogical quality at childcare settings in Flanders.
- to conduct a first measurement (or zero measurement) using this instrument.
- to repeat this measurement to examine the establishment of an evolution every three or five years.[161]

Furthermore, this scientific instrument not only had to take all relevant variables of pedagogical quality expressed in the pedagogical framework into account, but also had to establish the link between those variables. Finally, according to the key findings of the preliminary research, integration of the parents' voice had to be ensured as well. In addition, the pedagogical framework states that childcare is to be seen as complementary to the education of the parents. Therefore, it is important to give parents a voice in the process of measuring, monitoring and improving pedagogical quality.

Approach
Based on existing international instruments and the content of the pedagogical framework, a test instrument was developed by the researchers in close collaboration with the steering committee and stakeholders group. After several adaptations, a final test instrument was tried out in January 2015 at 120 units.[162] There was an overlap of 50 units in order to be able to evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument. The results of this pilot were statistically evaluated and supplemented with the researchers' experiences.[163]

Based on this information and the input and feedback from the steering committee and stakeholder group, a final instrument was developed and agreed upon before commencing the zero measurement.

The zero measurement (August 2015 – April 2016) was based on a representative sample of (private and public) home- and centre-based childcare settings (400 units in total). The results will be statistically analyzed to identify links between quality variables on the one hand, and between quality

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161 No decision has been made yet concerning the frequency.

162 A unit is one playgroup at a childcare setting.

163 Some findings were, e.g., that indicators needed to be added in the scale to observe the environment, scales had to be reformulated based on the statistical results of the questionnaire for parents and managers or adjustments had to be made to the questionnaires.

variables and type of setting and demographic characteristics on the other hand. Final results will be available at the end of 2016.

The instrument itself

The scientific instrument consists of observations in childcare settings over the course of half a day, supplemented with questionnaires to be filled in by parents and by the manager of the childcare setting. The preliminary study demonstrated that information about the achievement of pedagogical quality in individual settings can only be gathered by observation of what practitioners do with children, how they react to them and what kind of pedagogical conditions are determining the actual practice. The following aspects were observed:

- **The environment (what does the environment look like?) and the activities (what activities are undertaken?) in the individual setting**

The main issues that lead the observations are:
  - How is the space organized (indoor and outdoor), what is being offered to the children (toys, books, etc.), how is the room being used etc.?
  - What activities are done with the materials, are opportunities given to children to take initiatives etc.?

These observations were undertaken based on a scale specifically developed for this purpose by the researchers from the University of Ghent and the University of Leuven. The scale is based on the content of the pedagogical framework and other existing instruments and was developed in collaboration with the steering committee and the stakeholder group.

- **Interaction between staff and children**, from the point of view of both adults (observations based on the existing instrument of CLASS Toddlers/Infant) and children (with the help of the existing instrument, SiCs).
  - The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®): this is an instrument to assess the interactions between practitioners/teachers and children – how practitioners/teachers engage and relate to children and provide learning opportunities within activities and routines. CLASS for Infants (0 to 18 months) measures four dimensions representing the domain of "responsive caregiving": relational climate, teacher sensitivity, facilitated exploration and early language support. CLASS for Toddlers (18 to 36 months), in contrast, measures eight dimensions that represent the two domains of "emotional and behavioural support" (positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for child's perspective, behaviour guidance) and "engaged support for learning" (facilitation of learning and development, quality of feedback, language modelling).[164]

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164 http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/screening-and-assessment/class/

- SiCs (a process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings): This instrument was developed by a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University – Belgium) under the supervision of Prof. Ferre Laevers. Two indicators of quality are central to this 'experiential' approach: 'well-being' and 'involvement'. SiCs is designed to help settings to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to creating the best possible conditions for children to develop (see Leavers in this volume).

- **The parents' voice**

The voice of the parents is integrated by means of a questionnaire to be filled in by the parents of the children that were present in the unit being observed. Questions include: Why did they choose childcare? How did they go about finding a place? Why did they choose this particular setting? What are the most important learning experiences that their child should have (learn to play with other children, preparation for kindergarten etc.)? Is their child experiencing those aspects in this particular setting? What are the most important aspects in the organization of the settings, and are they satisfied with it?

- **Input and context according to the Comprehensive Quality Framework**[165]

Information about the input and context is gathered in a questionnaire to be filled in by the manager of the setting (some questions are adapted to the specific situation of home-based settings). The manager has to answer different questions concerning the overall structure and organization of the setting, e.g. the history of the setting, the number of units, the number of children and the background of the children, and the pedagogical vision of the setting, as well as information about the manager and about all practitioners working in the unit where the observation takes place. Furthermore, the respondent must state whether the setting is collaborating with other settings or organizations, and how the setting communicates with parents. The database of *Kind en Gezin* delivers information about the broader context of the setting (financing, type of provider, location, etc.).

9.6.4. The monitoring instrument

Although the development of the monitoring instrument is mainly derived from the pedagogical framework and the scientific instrument, its operationalization was also inspired by existing international and national instruments. However, it was not possible to fully integrate all aspects of pedagogical quality from the scientific instrument into the monitoring instrument. It is not feasible for inspectors to spend half a day in a setting. This means that this instrument has to be limited to key aspects of pedagogical

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165 For detailed information on the framework see Laevers in this volume.

quality that can actually be observed in an individual setting. Hence, the emphasis lies on the observation of what settings do with regard to the goals of childcare vis-à-vis children, and how to act in a pedagogical manner in practice with respect to children and families, as formulated in the pedagogical framework.

Furthermore, the monitoring instrument had to integrate the voice of the parents and needed to enable inspectors to evaluate the quality of a setting by pointing out the strengths of the setting instead of only the weaknesses.

Approach

First, the researchers familiarized the inspectors with the content of the pedagogical framework over a considerable amount of time, before working with them to develop a test instrument. This development process was closely followed up by the management and consultation groups.

Once the test instrument had been developed, all inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency received training (December 2015/January 2016) to provide them with the pilot of the test instrument. This pilot (February 2016 – April 2016) took place in approximately 115 (private and public) home-based and centre-based settings. An overlap was again foreseen in order to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. This means that some units were visited by two inspectors in order to test whether the instrument monitored what it was supposed to monitor, regardless of the person using the instrument.

Based on statistical analyses of the results of the zero measurement, combined with the results of the pilot of the monitoring instrument and the feedback of the inspectors, a cut-off score for a minimum level of quality will be determined in the autumn of 2016 (number of dimensions that should score "insufficient" before the setting is evaluated overall as of "insufficient quality"). This cut-off score will be determined by the Flemish Government, based on the proposal of the researchers and the input of the steering committee and stakeholders group.

The instrument itself

The instrument consists of observations in the childcare settings, supplemented with an interview performed by the inspector with the manager of the setting or a childcare worker regarding the approach of the setting to parents. Based on the pilot, the observations and the interview take a total of between 2.5 and three hours. Once the definitive instrument is available, visits by inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency will be unannounced (this was not the case during the pilot).
Six dimensions of pedagogical quality are integrated into the test instrument:

- **"Well-being and involvement"**: observation with SiCs. The purpose is to integrate the perspective of the child.
- **"Emotional and educational support"**: This focuses on the question of how practitioners act and react to children. These di-

mensions are observed with a reduced version of the scales used in CLASS Toddlers/Infant.

- The organization of the **environment**: Observations are based on a shorter version of the scale developed for the scientific instrument to observe the environment and activities. This serves to check whether every child is offered the opportunity for development in the four areas of experience expressed in the pedagogical framework.

- Based on the content of the pedagogical framework and in response to specific demand by all stakeholders in the steering committee and stakeholders group, **the voice of parents** is also being integrated into the monitoring instrument as a sixth dimension in the form of a small interview. This interview is conducted by the inspector with a childcare worker or the manager of the setting at the end of the visit.[166]

Each of the six dimensions is composed of indicators, and each indicator is scored based on a scale from one to four ("insufficient" to "excellent"). This results in one score (or colour) per dimension, so that the result of the total instrument is not one score, but six (one for each dimension). This is designed to enable the inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency to differentiate their final findings.

In fact, the preliminary study demonstrated that determination of minimum quality only is not recommended and that appreciation of good quality should be integrated as well. A final monitoring instrument as a tool for the inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency will be available at the end of 2016.

9.6.5 The self-evaluation instrument

The aspects of pedagogical quality integrated into the self-evaluation instrument (developed between November 2015 and February 2016) are derived from the pedagogical framework and the scientific instrument, with a strong emphasis on the evaluation of how a childcare setting deals, acts and reacts with children and parents, the neighbourhood and society. It is a tool initially designed for pedagogical coaches, but can also be used by managers of childcare settings or by childcare workers (individually or together with the support of a pedagogical coach). The tool helps to understand the strengths and weaknesses of an individual childcare setting. It enables its users to identify the actions they need to undertake in order to improve pedagogical quality at the individual childcare setting, and it supports reflective practice (individually and within the team).

This instrument also links external and internal evaluation, i.e. the actions undertaken by an individual setting to improve quality can be taken into consideration during the next visit of the inspector using the monitor-

166 www.kindengezin.be/img/pedagogische-raamwerk-engelseversie.pdf

ing instrument, and vice versa (if shortcomings were observed during a previous visit, the setting can illustrate which specific shortcomings have been tackled and how by presenting the results of the self-evaluation instrument).

In fact, the preliminary study demonstrated the importance of creating an opportunity to integrate the approach or vision of an individual setting into external monitoring results.

Approach

Again, a test instrument was developed by the researchers of the University of Ghent and the University of Leuven, but this time in close collaboration with the users group of pedagogical coaches. This process has been closely followed-up by the steering committee and the stakeholders group.

Before testing the self-evaluation instrument, the pedagogical coaches were trained by the researchers to enable them to use the instrument in an appropriate way. This trial started only after approval of the test instrument by the steering committee and the stakeholder group.

The pilot of the self-valuation instrument (February 2016 - June 2016) took place in (private and public) home- and centre-based settings. Again, an overlap was planned in order to test the reliability and validity of the instrument.

The instrument itself

The final version of the self-evaluation instrument will be available at the end of 2016. The test instrument is designed to help users to evaluate the approach of the individual setting by rating six dimensions of pedagogical quality (the same as those integrated into the monitoring instrument) through observation and reflection.[167] However, to avoid one-off or sporadic use of the self-evaluation instrument without anchoring the results obtained, the researchers based the development on the principles of the Deming Cycle (Plan – Do – Check – Act). This cycle is a systematic series of steps for gaining valuable learning and knowledge based on continuous improvement of a process.[168]

More specifically, an observation sheet was developed for each dimension with a complement of questions to help the users (managers, pedagogical coaches, childcare workers) to reflect and discuss the approach of the individual setting. It enables users to identify problems and areas for improvement. Actions can be planned based on the observations and reflections made, and goals or approaches are adjusted according to those findings. Since these steps are repeated, they are part of a never-ending cycle of continuous improvement.

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167 The sixth dimension, the voice of the parents, cannot always be observed at the moment when the self-evaluation instrument is being used; thus, this dimension is evaluated only as a set of questions for reflection.
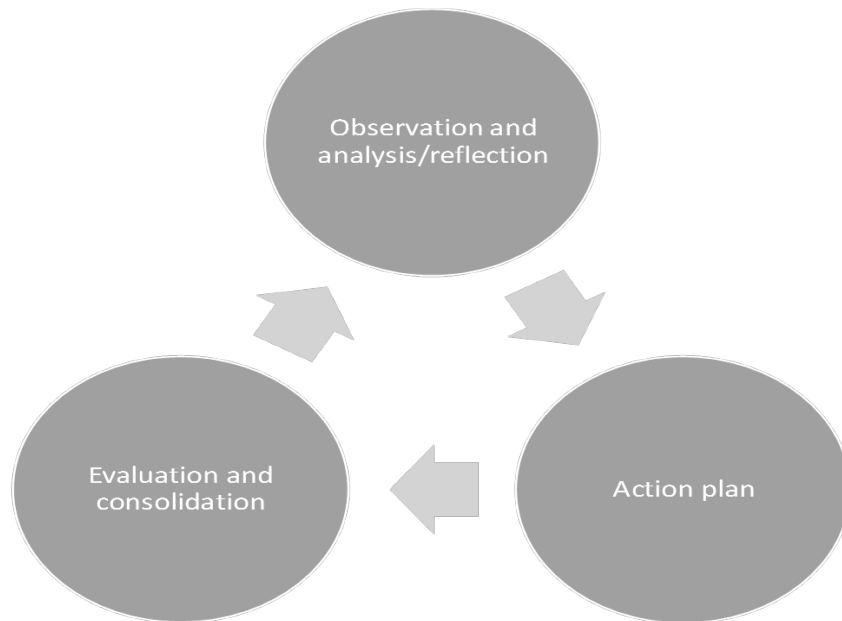
168 See: cf. https://www.deming.org/-theman/theories/pdsacycle

Figure 7 Cycle of continual improvement
(Source: author's own)

9.7   Outlook

At the end of 2016 we will have three instruments to measure, monitor and improve quality in all types of childcare settings for babies and toddlers in Flanders in a uniform way, all linked to each other by our definition of pedagogical quality (set forth in the pedagogical framework). Starting from 2017, quality assurance in Flanders will be a democratic process involving all relevant stakeholders, parents and children. Furthermore, based on statistical analyses of the results of the zero measurement conducted with the scientific instrument, we will obtain data on the current status of pedagogical quality in childcare settings for babies and toddlers in Flanders.

But the development of new instruments is clearly only the first step taken to measure, monitor and improve pedagogical quality. Important challenges for sustainable quality development still remain:

- Discussion and exchanges of views about the instruments are still ongoing. Even with the interim communications, important efforts will still be necessary to establish awareness and acceptance of the instruments on a large scale.
- It is possible that the results of the zero measurement will demonstrate fundamental shortcomings in the quality of childcare settings in Flanders. In order to tackle those shortcomings, possible new strategies will have to be developed and implemented.
- Implementation of the pedagogical framework is continuing alongside the start of the implementation of the instruments.
- The frequency of repetition of the measurements with the scientific instrument is still to be determined; in addition, efforts are to

be made to maintain this frequency in a structured manner regardless of periods of financial constraint.

- Not only must we from *Kind en Gezin* continue to support the pedagogical coaches and the settings in the use of the pedagogical framework; we must also provide them with all the necessary assistance in the use of the self-evaluation instrument and the use of its results.
- We must grant time to the inspectors of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency and the childcare settings: Once a definitive monitoring instrument is ready, inspectors will need time to integrate it into their daily activities, even if they have already trialled it; childcare settings will need to familiarize themselves with the new way of monitoring quality by the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency.

Although there is still a long way to go, it can be summed up that a basis for sustainable quality development in ECEC settings for babies and toddlers has been laid in Flanders within the last three years, together with the most relevant – and not only the professional – stakeholders. After all, this process of quality development and assurance integrates not only the voices of parents in a structured way, but also, and more importantly, the voices of small children (aged under 3), which is a relatively unique feature.

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Vandenbroeck, M./Laevers, F./Declercq, B./De Droogh, L. (2011): Vooronderzoek in functie van de ontwikkeling van een instrument voor het meten van de pedagogische kwaliteit in de voorschoolse kinderopvang.

Annex: Childcare for school children in Flanders

Childcare for school children targets children who attend pre-primary or primary school and is provided by childcare workers against payment before or after school hours or during school holidays.[169]

Theoretically, each home-based and centre-based childcare setting for school children must apply to *Kind en Gezin* for an accreditation or a certificate. Obtaining an accreditation or a certificate is subject to specific requirements. Obtaining an accreditation is subject to specific requirements in line with the licence requirements, but these requirements are based on the specific age group of school children. They pertain, among other things, to infrastructure, hygiene, safety, quality and the qualifications of the staff. The specific requirements for obtaining a certificate are also based on the specific age group of school children and are also related to infrastructure, hygiene and safety; however, relatively speaking, the qualification requirements for the staff are minimal.

As soon as a setting obtains accreditation or certification, it is evaluated by The Flemish Care Inspectorate in the form of on-site inspections to investigate whether legal requirements are still being met. *Kind en Gezin* is informed after every visit and applies the findings of the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency in the context of monitoring and promoting quality in childcare settings for school children.

Apart from the settings with accreditation or certification for school children, there is also informal care for school children (this is non-professional care provided by grandparents, friends, family, etc.) and the merely registered care. Not every professional who provides paid care for school children applies for accreditation or certification from *Kind en Gezin*, although they are theoretically obliged to do so. In this case, they only meet the registration obligation and report to *Kind en Gezin* over administrative affairs.[170] These merely registered initiatives are not subject to any further legal requirements.[171] As a result, *Kind en Gezin* does not hold inspections of these settings unless a complaint is made or a serious incident occurs. In this case, the Flemish Care Inspectorate Agency examines the conditions under which the children are cared for and whether this care situation is acceptable.

The subsidy scheme for formal childcare of school children is not a level-based system. If a childcare setting wants to obtain a subsidy, it must meet specific conditions. These requirements differ depending on the type of childcare setting and type of subsidy. Childcare for school children is also financed by bodies other than *Kind en Gezin*.

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169 The activities of youth work and sports services do not fall within the scope of this definition.

170 Informal care is exempted from this registration obligation.

171 This concerns, for instance, childcare provided by schools and within the school for their own pupils before or after school hours and during school holidays.

In general, settings are free to decide the fee which families must pay for the care of their school child[172] and can freely use the revenues from the families' financial contributions. Exceptions to this are the settings which already cared for school children (possibly together with babies and toddlers) before the implementation of the new Flemish Parliament Act and which were already asking families to pay an income-related contribution for this. In this type of childcare setting, revenues from the families' financial contributions are also offset against the subsidy.

Additional subsidies can be allocated for a number of specific assignments. However, not every childcare setting qualifies for these additional subsidies. Specific requirements must be met in order to qualify. Examples of possible additional subsidies are subsidies for inclusive care for school children with specific needs.

From 2015 onwards, preparations were started to develop a new Flemish Parliament Act for childcare for school children attending pre-primary or primary school.

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172 The minimum and maximum rates are laid down by law, specifically for centre-based childcare with accreditation and a subsidy for out-of-school care initiatives.

10 How are children doing in ECEC? Monitoring Quality within a process-oriented approach

Ferre Laevers

10.1 Introduction

Monitoring of quality in education refers to any effort by any responsible stakeholder to systematically collect data that shed a light on the quality of educational provisions and that covers variables that play a role in the fulfilment of the 'mission' or 'purpose' of the educational setting at hand. It also comprises the know-how, strategies, instruments and procedures involved not only in assessing quality but also in engendering processes to improve it, including the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions. Monitoring quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) can be conducted very differently. Any endeavour to monitor quality, therefore, rests on a conceptual framework defining quality. This article will introduce a process-oriented approach to monitoring quality, based on the Experiential Education model [EXE] (cf. Laevers 2011).

Firstly, the EXE is presented. By focusing on the micro level and not on factors at the level of the team and organization, three entrances or categories of variables – context, outcome and process – can be discerned. Within the 'context', the learning environment or the 'educational approach' is taken into account. The 'outcome' is about what is expected from the educational efforts in terms of 'structural' changes in the child or its development in a series of domains. The 'process' takes the child's perspective or its experience in the setting into consideration. Contrary to outcome, where the child's progress is assessed, the point of reference here is what goes on within the child while she/he is engaged in the actual educational context.

Secondly, the concepts of well-being and involvement as key variables of the process are described and their meaning for the children in the context of ECEC is outlined. Thirdly, the procedures of measuring well-being and involvement are explained in detail. The measuring scales are introduced and contrasted to common product-oriented approaches. Fourthly, research addressing the process-oriented EXE framework is presented, and results are put into a broader context and critically discussed. Fifthly, final conclusions with regard to educational policy are drawn, including proposals for ensuring and developing quality in ECEC within a process-oriented approach.

10.2 The Experiential Education [EXE] Framework for Quality

10.2.1 Quality at the level of the process

One of EXE's most important contributions is linked to the articulation of what goes on in children during their stay in whatever educational setting they attend. This is not surprising, since an 'experiential' approach – as defined by the Rogerian movement since the Sixties (cf. Rogers 1969) – is exactly about taking the perspective of the other person and figuring out, in an empathic way, 'what is happening on the other side'. Although identification of the 'content' of the experience (in terms of the mental activity, perceptions and cognitions) has its value, consideration of the 'quality' of children's experiences proved to be more practical with respect to monitoring. The insight grew that the most economic and conclusive way to assess the quality of any educational setting (from pre-school level to adult education) is to focus on the degree of 'emotional well-being' and the level of 'involvement' of the child. This is a bold statement that needs further support at the level of concepts, practice-based evidence and evidence from research.
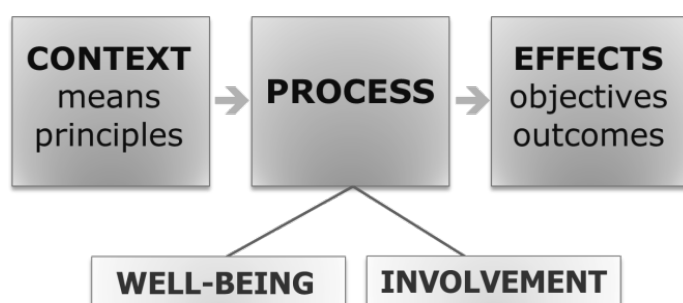

Figure 1 The Context-Process-Outcome model of the EXE framework

10.2.2 Quality at context level

The 'how' question is central to identifying quality at context level. The focus lies within characteristics of the 'learning environment' as it is shaped in early years settings or schools. It comprises the infrastructure, the 'content' as covered by the offer of materials and activities, the schedule of the day, the way children are grouped, the scope for child-initiated activity, the way adults interact with the children, etc. There is a broad consensus on the relevance of these and other aspects, expressed in internationally recognized scales such as the ECERS (cf. Harms et al. 2015) and the CLASS (cf. La Paro et al. 2012).

The diverse ways in which these aspects can be implemented have been illustrated in the OECD report 'Starting Strong', in which five curriculum outlines are highlighted – including the Reggio Emilia Approach, the

High/Scope Curriculum, Te Whariki and Experiential Education (cf. OECD 2004). In the latter, the know-how with regard to 'context' is captured by the Ten Action Points (cf. Laevers et al. 2013). They describe possible initiatives to raise levels of well-being and involvement – from 'rearranging the room' and the 'enrichment of areas' to 'developing positive relations' and 'interventions for children with special educational needs'. In addition to the Ten Action Points, the concept of 'adult style' has been developed to grasp the quality of interactions. Although adult interventions can vary extensively depending on the nature of activities or on the responses and initiatives of children, individual patterns can be discerned in these approaches. The 'Adult Style Observation Schedule' (ASOS) is built around three dimensions: stimulation, sensitivity and giving autonomy (cf. Laevers/Heylen 2003; Laevers et al. 2013).

10.2.3 Quality at outcome level

This third approach in the assessment of quality receives particular attention from policymakers, with good reason: the educational environment (the context) is but a means to realize the goals set out by a community, region or country. The curriculum with a description of educational objectives provides the framework for assessment at outcome level. Analysis of a series of such frameworks in ECEC (cf. MeMoQ 2014) reveals that there is a consensus in terms of the array of skills, knowledge and attitudes to be developed. For example, it is obvious that not only motor and cognitive development have to be addressed, but the socio-emotional domain as well. However, curricula can vary in at least two ways. One aspect is the weight given to some domains such as literacy and numeracy, while the other is the paradigm underpinning the objectives and its implications for assessment.

The EXE approach takes an outspoken position with regard to the outcomes, where it insists on particular attention being given to overarching dispositions such as self-management and entrepreneurship, social competence and mental health. But apart from that, it connects with the current constructivist view on competences. From the experiential point of view, we are not so much interested in amassing facts and knowledge and in training isolated skills. Instead, our efforts as educators should contribute to developmental changes, resulting in more complex 'basic schemes'. EXE strives for sustainable development, expressed in the concept of deep level learning (cf. Laevers 1998, 2000).

10.3 Well-Being and Involvement as Keys

In the development and implementation of EXE, identification of the process variables well-being and involvement, was a major step. The project was able to break through because dead-end discussions about what practitioners should or should not do to provide the best possible learning environment shifted to more fundamental criteria around which a consensus could easily be reached: there is no dictate about how one has to shape the

educational environment, but there is an agreement that if one does not provide the conditions for well-being and involvement, practice is not satisfactory. After this turning-point, great efforts were invested in clarifying these concepts and providing tools for assessment (cf. Laevers et al. 2005; Laevers et al. 2011).

Well-Being

Children in a state of well-being feel like a 'fish in water'. The prevailing mood is pleasure:

- They have fun, enjoy each other's companies and feel at home in their environments
- They radiate vitality as well as relaxation and inner peace
- They display an open and receptive attitude towards their environment
- They are spontaneous and feel comfortable, truly being themselves

All this indicates that their emotional well-being is in order and that their basic needs are satisfied: their physical needs, the need for tenderness and affection, for safety and clarity and for social recognition, the need to feel competent and the need for meaning in life (including moral values).

While a state of well-being is linked to a situation, it is more likely to occur when the child has self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness and resilience and is well in touch with his own feelings – all factors that are part of the child's profile (cf. Laevers et al. 2013).

A low level of well-being is a cause for concern. It means that a child in its present situation is under pressure because the environment is not meeting one or more of his/her basic needs and/or because the child lacks the equipment (competences, dispositions, emotional health) to cope with that environment. A low level of well-being can be considered a condition that can eventually affect emotional health and become a structural problem. A child that cannot cope with painful experiences tends to push these away. He or she becomes alienated from his/her own feelings and loses its self-confidence. In conclusion, signs of lack of well-being must be taken seriously because they indicate that the child's social and emotional development is endangered.

Enhancing children's well-being has nothing in common with 'spoiling' children, giving in or permissiveness. The child has an active role to play in satisfying his/her basic needs. The role of professionals is to offer the necessary emotional support and conditions for the child to learn and to interact successfully with his/her environment, people, places and objects. We know that experiences of true 'well-being' do not weaken individuals but make them stronger; they empower, and have a positive impact on the person's self-image and self-esteem.

Involvement

Involvement is what we observe when children are intensely engaged in an activity. It can be spotted at any level of development. Both the baby in the cradle, vocalizing and babbling, and the adult trying to formulate a definition, both the (mentally) handicapped child and the gifted student, can share this quality. Csikszentmihayli (1979) speaks of 'the state of flow' and certainly strikes a chord with this concept: it refers to a condition everyone can recognize, a state of arousal or 'flux' or 'energy' and so on.

> Involvement is a wonderful state of mind characterized by:
> - extreme concentration, uninterrupted attention, total absorption, lack of awareness of time
> - a high level of motivation, interest, fascination and perseverance
> - intense mental activity, vivid sensations and an embodied sense of meaning
> - deep satisfaction stemming from the fulfilment of the exploratory drive
> - acting at the very limits of one's capabilities, the 'zone of proximal development'

With all these characteristics, involvement can be considered one of the most direct and reliable signals for the occurrence of deep level learning. The exploratory drive, as a factor within the child, is a great facilitator for involvement.

Concentration is the most predominant sign of involvement. Involved person narrow their attention down to one limited circle. Involvement goes along with strong motivation, fascination and total implication. There is no distance between person and activity, no calculation of the possible benefits. Because of that, time perception is distorted (time passes rapidly). Furthermore, there is an openness to (relevant) stimuli. But what makes it really valuable is that it goes along with a particular mental activity: perception and cognition have an intensity lacking in activities of another kind. The sensory impressions are fresh and intense, the meanings of words and ideas are felt more strongly and deeply. Further analysis reveals a manifest sense of satisfaction and a physically felt stream of positive energy. Involvement is actively sought by people. Young children find it most of the time in the privileged area called 'play'.

The crucial point for involvement is that the satisfaction it gives stems from one source: the exploratory drive, the need to get a better grip on reality, the intrinsic interest in how things and people are, the urge to experience and figure out. Only when we succeed in activating the exploratory drive do we achieve the intrinsic type of involvement instead of involvement of a superficial, or emotional (e.g. witnessing an accident), or functional (e.g. paying attention to avoid failure) kind.

Finally, involvement only occurs in the small area in which the activity matches the capabilities of the person, i.e. in what Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development'. The person is clearly 'in his element' (cf. Robinson/Aronica 2009). One could not think of any condition more favourable

to real sustainable development or deep level learning. In sum we cannot do without involvement.

10.4   Assessment of Well Being and Involvement

10.4.1 The status of well-being and involvement

In an early stage of EXE, the potential of well-being and involvement became obvious. Their status as process variables makes them very interesting as touchstones for quality. In fact, they are not seen as characteristics of the learners, as competences and dispositions are. Both well-being and involvement are the result of a complex interplay between two entities: the child with its background and individual profile on the one hand, and the pedagogical approach and all the characteristics of the learning environment – i.e. at the level of the ECEC setting – on the other.

The levels of well-being and involvement give us an estimation of the power of the provided learning environment. They tell us how our efforts impact on children's experience. That way, the process variables are more 'reliable' indicators of quality than the characteristics measured at the level of the context. A particular approach for children can entail many qualities, but there is no guarantee that all children will benefit equally from it. The process variables bring us a step closer to the outcome: we know at least if, and how well, the approach is received by the child. If we do not pass that point, we cannot be optimistic about possible outcomes.

On top of that, the process variables transcend any curriculum or pedagogical model. Whatever choices have been made in terms of an educational approach, from Montessori to High Scope, from Reggio to Experiential Education [EXE], there is a growing consensus that when the ECEC setting or school does not meet the socio-emotional needs of children (visible in well-being) and/or does not offer a challenging environment leading to intense mental activity in learners (visible in involvement), it cannot be labelled 'good practice'.

10.4.2 Ways to measure well-being and involvement

In view of these strengths, tools known as the Leuven Scales have been developed to assess well-being and involvement. They are available in two variants, depending on their purpose and the procedure following it.
  A. The screening technique is used by the practitioner to assess well-being and involvement of all individual children periodically (based on observations over a period of a few weeks). It is the 'spinal cord' in the Process-Oriented Child Monitoring System (POMS) (cf. Laevers et al. 2013).
  B. The scanning technique gives a record of the level of well-being and involvement at a particular moment and is based on scoring a sample of seven to ten children observed consecutively during a two-minute slot. The technique is used as part of self-evaluation by settings, or in research projects, and is commonly embedded in a

pre- and post-test design. The scanning technique is described in the Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings (SiCs) (cf. Laevers 2007, 2008).

10.4.3 Screening of well-being and involvement

Most systems in use focus on outcome and are therefore product-oriented, such as the instruments derived from the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (cf. 4Children 2015). The gap between the actual development and the norm, i.e. what children of a particular age would 'normally' master, is the key. A child with lower levels for one or more developmental domains is then subject of additional (remediating) interventions. This approach has its limitations. The first is that using tests and scales to measure outcome in ECEC at a group level is extremely time-consuming, yet does not necessarily give an adequate view of whether children need more support. Further, most systems concentrate on typical academic achievements and forget that success (in school and in life) is often more dependent on the development of learning dispositions and overarching competencies such as exploratory drive, social competence, self-organization and entrepreneurship. Finally, identification of where a child stands in terms of achievements does not reveal which actions to take to support further development. The paradigm behind most monitoring systems seems to be that the task simply has to be broken down further to help the child overcome the gap. The average of the population of peers is the norm, and almost every child has to reach that point.

The Process-Oriented Monitoring System (POMS) (cf. Laevers et al. 2013) offers an alternative to this approach. It focuses on the two major indicators of quality of the educational process, namely well-being and involvement. These indicators answer key questions: How is each of the children doing in my class or group? Are the efforts we make sufficient to secure emotional health and real development in all important areas and for each of the children?

The group screening is the first step. It contains a scoring of well-being and involvement according to a five-point scale. Both five-point scales are illustrated here, with a description of level 1 (the lowest score).

Level 1: Very low well-being
Children with a very low level of well-being are clearly having a difficult time. They do not feel happy in the setting:

- Moments of 'true' pleasure are scarce or even non-existent
- They mostly seem anxious or tense, or show little vitality
- Contacts with their environment tend to be difficult
- They are either in conflict with others, or they avoid contact

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Level 1: Very low involvement
Children with a very low level of involvement often do not engage in any activity at all:

- They wander around, appear absent-minded and tend to stare aimlessly
- When any activity occurs it is often short-lived or purposeless
- They are easily distracted by surrounding noises, voices, movements etc.
- There is little mental activity; they do not seem to take anything in
- They often act without any effort or dedication

Further processing of the results of the group screening identifies children for whom there is reason for concern. Three colours are used to code this categorization:

GREEN	No score for either well-being or involvement below 4
ORANGE	One or both scores on level 3
RED	One or both scores below 3

Children with a score of three for one or both dimensions must get attetion, but children with a score lower than three are considered to be in the danger zone and will have to be given priority in the teachers' interventions. A group screening three times a year is advisable, e.g. in October, February and May. It enables feedback to be gathered on the impact of interventions.

10.4.4 From assessment to intervention

Process-oriented systems, with well-being and involvement as criteria, give a sense of purpose; it is within the reach of most practitioners to reflect on 'where' and 'when' the lower scores are observed, and from there what kind of changes in approach could improve the situation. The target is to evoke enjoyment and more intrinsic motivated action within those fields of development that are at stake (cf. Laevers et al. 2013). Additionally, by constantly focusing on well-being and involvement, immediate feedback about the impact of these interventions can be obtained. It is then possible to check whether other interventions have to be considered. These ideas for interventions pop up from analysis of the factors in the child and the environment that explain the observed levels of well-being and involvement. Typical interventions are, for example, helping children to cope with painful experiences, improving the group climate by supporting communication about feelings, gearing the offer of materials to the interests of children but also to the level of development of children at both ends of the continuum, helping children struggling with choosing activities, strengthening children with low self-esteem, etc.

10.4.5 An alternative to the product-oriented approach

The process-oriented approach exploits the wealth of information or images the practitioners have stored about each of the children, which are used to figure out how the child experiences the provided context. The group screening is limited to just two variables, and produces a shortlist of children who need more attention. From there, extra observations and collection of information are undertaken for a limited number of children. The nature of the two process variables guarantees that both socio-emotional development and development of competences and dispositions is covered. Typical features of the process variables are that they signal potential problems at the earliest stage and provide immediate feedback about the impact of interventions. Identification of children who do not thrive is more sensitive and secure.

A product-oriented approach focusing on achievement would label children who are not at the norm level as 'in need'. If the process-oriented approach indicates that the children are truly engaging in activities linked to the 'problematic' area (the ones with a gap),, the environment provided is adequate and offering exactly what these 'children who are below the norm' need. For example, a child with less developed fine motor skills that responds well to an offer of materials and activities mobilizing this domain of development will not be labelled 'endangered' despite its poor developmental level. Furthermore, it becomes clear how gifted and talented children are ignored or neglected in the product-oriented approach. Too many of these children are not spotted on the product-oriented radar, yet are in need of a more challenging environment. A gifted child causing no concern in terms of achievement will figure in a process-oriented approach on the shortlist of children in a problematic situation when we can realize the extent of its boredom.

10.4.6 Scanning of well-being and involvement

Next to the screening, a procedure has been developed to assess levels of well-being and involvement in settings at a certain moment of the day. In this 'scanning' technique, data are collected through observation of a sample of (seven to ten) children from a group during consecutive two-minute episodes per child. A score on the well-being and involvement scale is assigned during each episode. A scanning cycle takes about 25 minutes. This procedure is particularly useful for (1) **training purposes,** where a trainer with two or three trainees can jointly make scanning rounds in a group and share their scores after each cycle; (2) for **research,** where a few scanning cycles per group as a sample provide a view of the quality, and (3) for **self-evaluation** of quality by the settings.

The latter has been made available in the Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings (SiCs[173]) (cf. Laevers 2008, 2007).

Group: Pavillion – Age: 18-36 mths – Number: 14 ch.			Adults: 2 – Date: 08/11/2015 - From 9:10 to 9:45		
NAME	OBSERVATION	WB&INV	NAME	OBSERVATION	WB&INV
1 Aster	Lively, babbling, explores camera. Enjoying, radiating, some distraction.	4 (WB) 3 (IT)	6 Korneel	On a bike. Drives behind R. Shouts 'hello!', smiles, waves to adult. Energetic, radiating.	5 (WB) 5 (IT)
2 Jens	Gets up, watches, takes block. Speaks in 'phone'. Back to block, concentrated.	3⁺ (WB) 4⁺ (IT)	7 Fien	On carpet, takes block. Rubs eyes. Flips pages. Looks up, distracted. Mimicless.	3 (WB) 2 (IT)
3 Lowyck	Stares, flips through pages, absent. No expression. Yarns. Limited play.	3 (WB) 2 (IT)	8 Seppe	Displays fruits, washes & dries them. Stirs in pot. Serious & focused looks.	4 (WB) 5 (IT)
4 Boune	To kitchen, with energy. Fantasy play with pots. Laughts and babbles. Concentrated.	5 (WB) 5 (IT)	9 Sam	Plays with adult. Reaches pots again and again. Looks when photo taken. Relaxed.	4 (WB) 3⁺ (IT)
5 Kato	In doll area. Weaping. Rubs eyes. More crying. No activity.	1 (WB) 1 (IT)	10 Martin	Turns wheels without attention. Stares in space. No response to other. Tensed.	2⁺ (WB) 1 (IT)

Figure 2 The scoring form for well-being and involvement (SiCs)
(Source: Laevers, 2007)

The scoring form is used for the scanning of up to ten children and provides space for a short comment per child and the assigned levels. As a technique used by settings to gain an overview of their quality, the data on the form are discussed with the practitioners in charge of that particular group. Together with the observer, they analyse each of the scorings, compare them against their own impressions, and decide which factors can explain the high levels and which the low ones. To guide this reflection, five factors are taken into account:

1. The richness of the offer of activities (the infrastructure and equipment, variety and amount of materials, the range and quality of activities on offer etc.)
2. The group climate (pleasant atmosphere, positive relations between children and between adults and children, a sense of belonging etc.)
3. Room for initiative (ample freedom to choose, participation of children in practical matters and in the setting of rules and agreements etc.)
4. Efficient organization (clear plan of the day geared to children's needs, fluent transitions in activities, optimal use of guidance, appropriate grouping etc.)

173 The SiCs was developed for child care centres and child minders (children aged from 0–3) and out-of-school care (children aged from 3–12). An English version of the instrument can be downloaded from the CEGO (www.cego.be) or Kind&Gezin (www.kindengezin.be) websites.

5. An empathic adult style (taking into account children's feelings and needs, empowerment of children by stimulating interventions and support of autonomy)

This reflection on observations generates inspiring insights into actions that raise levels of well-being and involvement.

Although the screening technique is most powerful because it brings practitioners closer to each of the children, the scanning procedure can be seen as a very practical way to stand still and make a kind of 'snapshot' of how the setting is performing in terms of quality. The following three research examples of what these two approaches achieve will shed a light on their specific benefits.

10.5   What we learn from research

10.5.1 The Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings Study (cf. Laevers 2007)

This study, funded by *Kind & Gezin*, was part of the project in which the Self-Evaluation Instrument for Care Settings in Flanders (SiCs) was developed. The study entailed large-scale research using the SiCs. Levels of well-being and involvement were assessed and related to factors in the learning environment that could explain them.

A total of 11,014 children participated, spread over 748 settings. About 75% of the children were aged under three, while the remaining children were aged 3–12 and in out-of-school care settings.

During one morning visit (in child care centres), one observer collected data in up to three groups, based on one scanning cycle per group with scoring of well-being and involvement for ten children (see scoring form above). The experiences during this scoring and the associated additional observation also allowed the quality of the learning environment to be evaluated on a three-point scale (-1/0/+1). Five factors were rated: (1) the richness of the offer of materials and activities, (2) the group climate, (3) room for the child's initiative, (4) effective management of time and available staff, and (5) the adult's style.

Table 1 shows the levels of well-being and involvement observed in a sample of 10,950 children. The mean was 3.61 for well-being and 3.27 for involvement. Before a judgement is made, an acceptable score for a group or setting has to be agreed upon. To answer this question, it was crucial to understand what the levels mean for children psychologically. It was concluded that the mean score of 3.5 can be seen as a minimal acceptable result of the scanning. In that (hypothetical) case, level 3 would have been assigned in half the observations and level 4 in the other half. In terms of well-being, then, half of the children would feel neither particularly good nor particularly bad. Regarding their involvement, half of them would be active but without signs of concentration, and the other half would be active with moments of involvement.

Table 1 Percentage of children according to levels of well-being and involvement

Well-being: mean 3.61			Involvement: mean 3.27		
Levels 1, 1+ & 2	Levels 2+, 3 & 3+	Levels 4, 4+ & 5	Levels 1, 1+ & 2	Levels 2+, 3 & 3+	Levels 4, 4+ & 5
6%	44%	50%	21%	39%	40%

A first conclusion is that the settings are more effective in achieving higher levels of well-being than of involvement. While only 6% of the children did not feel at ease in the settings, 21% were spotted either doing nothing or only engaged in interrupted activity. Half of the children were doing very well in terms of well-being, while only 40 percent equalled that qualification for involvement. The mean score for involvement (3.27) was clearly below our norm (3.50).

The mean scores per setting, reported in Table 2, are based on the scanning results of the (one to three) groups that were visited during the morning visit. Here, we conclude that the 'norm' was met by 85% of the settings when it came to well-being. In terms of involvement, 42% of them were below the criteria of 'minimal acceptable score'.

Table 2 Mean scores for well-being and involvement per child care setting [N = 379]

	2.0 to 2.49	2.5 to 2.99	3.0 to 3.49	3.49 to 3.99	4.0 to 4.49	4.5 and more
Number	1	5	50	203	110	10
%	0.26	1.31	13.2	53.6	29.0	2.6
Low vs. high	14.77%			85.20%		

Right after the scanning cycle in each of the groups, five factors indicating determinants of well-being and involvement in the learning environment were rated on a three-point scale. Based on data from 612 observed groups, it can be concluded that the five factors contribute significantly to involvement. Theoretically, settings getting a +1 assignment on each of the factors (total score of +5) end up with a mean score for involvement of 3.79 – far above the 3.50 norm. Settings that are assigned a score of -1 for each factor (total score of -5) end up with a mean score of 2.69 – a dramatic difference

in 'quality of life' for children.[174] Where well-being is concerned, the connection with the factors is less stringent. Smooth organization of time, space and adult availability and a positive group climate have a particularly significant influence here.

10.5.2 Raising levels of well-being and involvement in preschool settings (cf. Laevers et al. 2011)

This project, funded by the Milton Keynes County Council, is the first intervention study to explore on a larger scale the impact on well-being and involvement of training and coaching based on the experiential approach.

49 out of the 114 pre-primary settings in Milton Keynes participated in this study. The data collection took place in 53 groups of children scattered over these 49 settings. The child-related observation data cover a sample of 470 children aged between one to six.

The scanning technique was used by 15 advisors for a baseline assessment in November 2009, a second measurement in March/April 2010, and a third one in July 2010. One or two groups in each setting were visited and a sample of 10 children (per group) was scored for well-being and involvement. During those visits the advisors also rated the quality of the learning environments, using five indicators: the richness of the offer, the group climate, room for initiative, clarity and efficiency of the organization, and the experiential style. The following scale was used for each dimension: 4 = outstanding, 3 = good, 2 = satisfactory, 1 = inadequate. The visits of each setting took one half-day. They also included a reflective meeting with the practitioner(s) to identify the strengths of the setting and agree upon possible actions for improvement. All the quantitative and qualitative data were summarized by the visiting observer in a concise report in the form of a 'Note of Visit'. In total, 142 Notes of Visit were collected, spread over the three assessments.

Contrary to the reported SiCs study in Flanders, a series of actions were deployed to support participating settings in implementing a process-oriented approach. The consultant team of early years advisors had two objectives in mind: (a) providing the expertise to support the practitioners in optimizing the learning environment, by offering an approach in which well-being and involvement of children form the central axes, and (b) conducting data collection as part of the research.

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174 Prediction of well-being and involvement based on the factors of the learning environment explained .53 of the mean score for involvement. This was controlled for a series of variables at child and setting level, such as gender, the size of the setting, geographical location, mean age level (multilevel analyses; N children = 4885; N groups = 612).

The project trajectory included the following actions:

1	Launch of the project with a full-day conference led by the Leuven team with an audience of the advisors and practitioners from all the participating early years settings and schools
2	For the advisory team: a full day of training dedicated to the Leuven scales and the SiCs
3	A half-day of training introducing the Process-Oriented Child Monitoring System (POMS) to the advisory team
4	Followed by side-by-side coaching session in smaller groups where the advisors practised scanning in settings, coached by members of the Leuven team
5	Introduction of the SiCs instruments to the practitioners of the Milton Keynes preschool settings by the advisory team
6	A half-day of side-by-side training delivered by the advisory team to the lead practitioners of every participating setting
7	Extended by one day of training on the POMS

Side-by-side observation is a training procedure that has been proven to be most fruitful: the (Leuven) trainer together with two or three trainees, simultaneously execute a scanning cycle in a setting and share their results immediately afterwards. These include both the scores for well-being and involvement, and an estimation of factors in the learning environment that may explain them.

In terms of resources, the settings were equipped with the POMS manual and the educational set "Box Full of Feelings" with a series of activities built around four basic feelings (happiness, fear, anger and sadness) (cf. Laevers/Moons, 2008).

Figure 3 shows how well-being and involvement of children rose within an 11-month period, from 3.34 to 3.72 for well-being and from 2.94 to 3.47 for involvement. A significant increase was registered from the first to the second measurement and from the second to the third. The intervention to make this happen consisted in supporting practitioners in using well-being and involvement as a guide to create a more powerful learning environment.
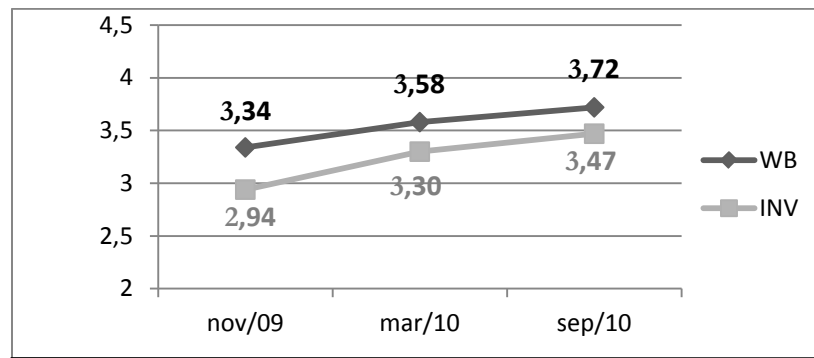
Figure 3 Development of well-being and involvement of children in Milton Keynes project
(Source: Laevers u.a. 2011)

As a result of this growth in well-being, the percentage of children with a score of four or more grew from 33 % to 54 % between the first and the third measurement. Children clearly felt more at ease in the settings and enjoyed being part of the group. For involvement, the number of high scores (four or more) actually increased by 25% (from 23% to 48 %). Children were engaged in the activities and showed more signs of concentration and intense mental activity in their activities in a moderate (level 4) or outstanding way (level 5).

Furthermore, the number of groups with levels lower than the norm of 3.5 decreased from 72 % to 48% for well-being, and from 96% down to 36% for involvement.

The relation between the dimensions of the approach [offer, climate, initiative, organization and style] and the scores for involvement and well-being was also examined. A rich offer and effective organization were found to be the most influential elements on involvement, while the richness of the offer and the adult style had a significant influence on well-being.

This research was complemented with a small-scale estimation of the impact of involvement on outcome. It showed a substantial gain in attainment on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. A sample of the ten most deprived schools in Milton Keynes succeeded not only in raising levels of involvement, but also in getting better results than the mean score across Milton Keynes settings as a whole. In general, at the start of the project Milton Keynes held 67th position in England for the gap between higher and lower achievers. A year after completion of the project, in 2011, they moved to place 16 and were thus among the 10% best results in England.

10.5.3 A longitudinal study with screening results of well-being and involvement (master's theses)

A study implying eight master's theses at the Department of Education (University of Leuven) was conducted in the period 2002 to 2009 under the title: 'The story of a class group: a qualitative longitudinal study on the

school trajectory of children'. The main goal was to focus on 'how children are doing' at school (starting at the age of 2.5) and how this develops year by year. An additional aim was to increase the understanding of factors that have an influence on the quality of children's lives and their development (mainly with the school context in mind). Finally, patterns in children's profiles were sought that could allow a prediction of their chances of a successful school and life career.

The project started in 2002 with three classes of 2.5-year-olds, which are pre-kindergarten classes in Flemish elementary schools. The classes were part of the pre-primary section of three different schools. In each of these classes, a random selection of 15 children formed the core sample. However, year after year a number of children dropped out for different reasons. Some children moved to another school, or the group was scattered over two or more classes, which made it difficult to observe them all. Therefore, new children were added to the sample each year, actually exceeding the number of 45 from the first sample. This was possible thanks to the participation of more students. Although less than half of the original sample could be followed up to the last phase (in 2009), for most of the children the data covered a period of three or more years. At the end of Phase 1 (which took three years) we had data on 55 children, at the end of Phase 2 (likewise taking three years) 61 children were followed, and at the end of Phase 3 (two years), there were 45 children.

The first challenge for this research was to develop a methodology that would allow holistic mapping of the many dimensions that needed to be addressed to understand children's experience of school and the influencing factors at a deeper level. To cover all these aspects, a variety of methods were used. These were observations, photos and video recordings, questionnaires for children and parents, tests, and interviews with the teachers.

In principle the master students visited the class they were assigned to over ten half-days per semester to collect data on about 15 children. In the following years, the number of half days was lowered to seven or eight for practical reasons. The heart of the procedure was the POMS, which enabled a portrait of every child in the sample to be built up. Apart from the screening of well-being and involvement, it provided the scales for the developmental domains (competences and dispositions) as tools for processing the many descriptions collected during the observation sessions.

The description of key variables with regard to the class context focused on the group climate, the teachers' styles, and the richness of the learning environment. A questionnaire for parents provided a view on their child-rearing behaviour. In the first years, a standardized situation was created to rate children's individual dispositions in the areas of self-organization, entrepreneurship and leadership. Finally, a sociometric enquiry in the class and self-reporting by children, with a questionnaire on their well-being and involvement at school and another on their self-estimation of their competences, completed the children's portraits.

All the collected data and reports were integrated into the individual portraits of the children. This entailed the results of all categories of data, extended with (a) an account of the interventions planned and carried out by

the teachers in the course of the trajectory, and (b) a prognosis of future developments.

The profiles of two children illustrate here how the data could be integrated into a coherent story by taking well-being and involvement as the common thread.
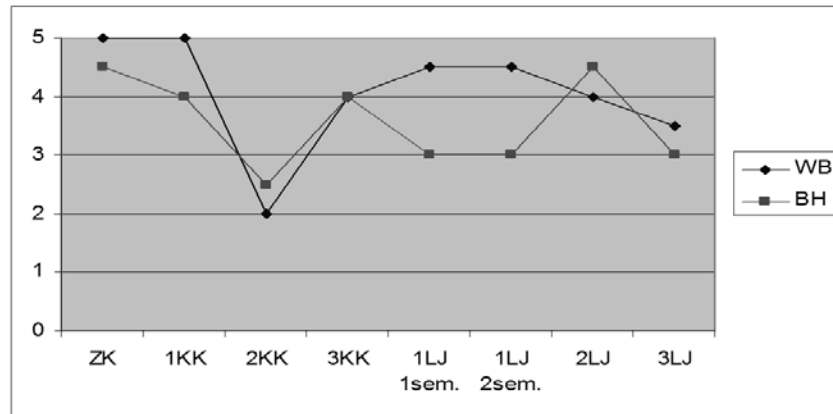

Figure 4 Trajectory of Dries
(Source: Master theses 2005-2009)

Dries was portrayed as a perpetually merry and smiling boy when he started school at the age of 2.5 (the pre-kindergarten year). However, in year 2 of kindergarten there was a dip in both well-being and involvement. Dries turned from a spontaneous child into more of an introvert. One of the hypotheses is that the group climate in that class and year was rather tense, and he could not enjoy interactions, despite of his high level of social competence. In the third kindergarten year the picture looked better. But in the first year of primary school his playful attitude collided with the expected task-oriented attitude and work pace. When the teacher confronted him with higher demands, his involvement went down. Thanks to his even-tempered attitude and self-confidence, he sustained his high level of well-being. His playful attitude did not hinder him in the second year of primary, where the teacher provided a flexible environment with a lot of opportunities to be active. The impact on involvement is remarkable. A new decline of well-being and involvement was reported in the third year. He encountered a stricter approach and had some trouble in adapting to it. Dries remained a playful person – still interested in activities that were seen as childish by his peers, especially the girls. Looking at the future, it is not clear whether he will succeed in coping with that. However, the observer reported from an observation in class the warm and supportive relationship Dries has with his father. This is without doubt a protective factor, together with the fact that Dries feels comfortable with himself. In total, he got a prognosis of 'rather worrying' to 'favourable', so somewhere in the middle of the continuum.
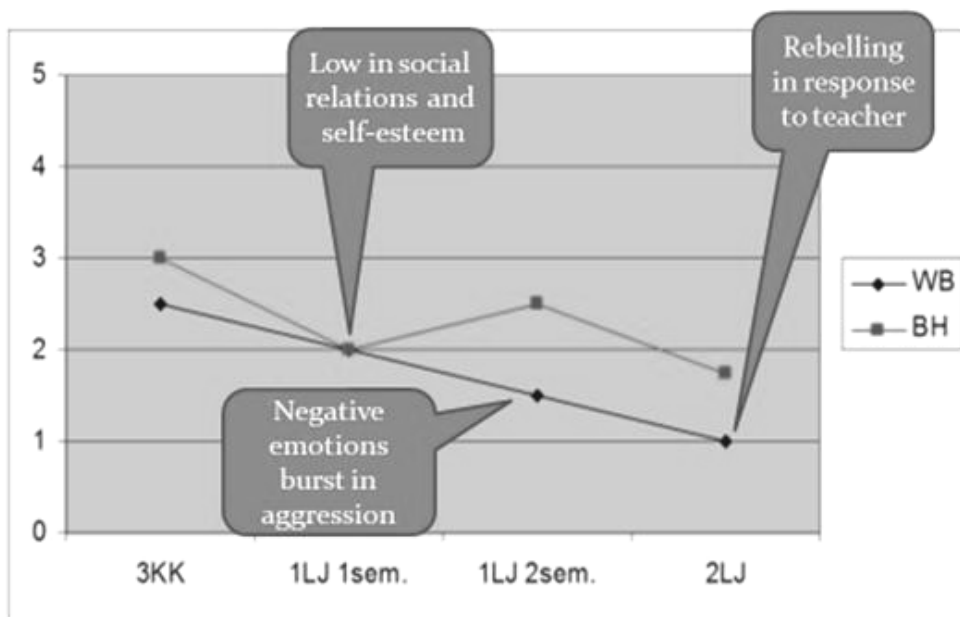
Figure 5 Trajectory of Myrthe
(Source: Master theses 2005-2009)

Myrthe had not got off to a good start when she was observed in the third year of kindergarten. The situation, however, deteriorated in the first year of primary. She showed less interest in other children, seldom looked happy and lost her spontaneity. High involvement was only spotted in free play. As the proportion of whole-class activities grew in the first year of primary, her involvement declined further. While the report in this stage suggested a problem in terms of 'difficulties with attention and concentration', the next cycle of observations revealed another point of concern. Myrthe did not seem to be able to be herself at school. She displayed a lack of self-confidence. In the questionnaire with regard to her self-image, she assigned very negative scores to herself on 'academic competences' and 'social acceptance'. She further seemed overwhelmed by strong emotions, sometimes leading to physical aggression. The build-up of tension was visible. Negative responses brought her to boiling point. She was particularly vulnerable to authoritarian approaches. The teacher in the second year of primary did not seem to take this into account; her interventions enhanced Myrthe's negative feelings and fed a negative spiral leading to a rebellious attitude. It was obvious that the future for Myrthe would not look bright if the problematic situation was not addressed. The prognosis was: 'very worrying'.

These two cases show how the two process indicators provide a strong basis for reconstructing the story of a child in a concise way. Where the trajectories could have been described in terms of achievement, the experiential approach brings us to the heart of the matter. Competences and dispositions are not disregarded, but are instead conditions that are considered within the frame of the whole child. Reading these portraits arouses a kind of deeper understanding and, in many cases, leads to a sense of what could or should be done to support the development of these children. A blue-

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print of children's educational needs emerges throughout each of the stories.

The concluding results at the end of Phase 2 (2007) and Phase 3 (2009) revealed that 30 to 37 percent of the children were either in the red (very worrying) or orange (worrying) areas.

PROGNOSIS		
Category	End of Phase 2	End of Phase 3
Very worrying	9.6	10.3
Rather worrying	28.9	20.7
Favourable	33.0	44.8
Most favourable	28.5	24.1

The stories altogether show us how trajectories are shaped by both factors within the child and factors within the context. In many cases this is a circular process where all parties influence one another. However, sometimes factors arise out of the wealth of data which point to one or the other direction.

Based on these rich accounts of 'how children experience school', at least four major factors can be addressed in the development of an empowering environment:

1. A positive group climate, positive relations between children and the development of friendships are highly protective factors.
2. An environment in which self-organization and an entrepreneurial attitude in children are recognized and fostered will allow children to take up an active role and will help the professionals to create an environment promoting well-being and involvement.
3. An awareness of how children think about themselves, and in particular how competent they feel, will help children to become aware of their talents and lead practitioners away from a deficit model.
4. An awareness of their own style is required from practitioners because the impact of how they intervene and relate to children can be huge – in both directions: it can hamper development or make children thrive, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

10.6 Conclusions with regard to national policy

In this article the focus did not lie on appropriate ways to monitor quality from the end of 'outcome', although the EXE approach has a particular view on this. What has been shown is a reasoning in which the process-oriented approach is exploited to its utmost with respect to monitoring, defined at the start as "any efforts by any responsible stakeholder to systematically collect data that give a view of the quality of educational initia-

tives (-)."

The insights stemming from research underpin the opening statement: the process variables have a particular status. Their potential as key indicators of quality is huge.

At the theoretical level, it was argued that shifting the focus from the context to the process brings us closer to what really counts: the outcomes. Well-being indicates that the learning environment is responding to children's socio-emotional needs and that it strengthens children as individuals. Involvement flags the educational approach as being successful in bringing children into the 'state of flow', and therefore provides the best imaginable conditions for deep level learning. There is ample evidence to conclude that this process-oriented approach is an interesting path for monitoring quality, for many reasons: it is practical and cost-effective, it offers conclusive criteria for risk of stagnation that are more secure than product-oriented approaches, it identifies who is benefiting from the professional's efforts and who is not, it allows early detection of risk of stagnation and later drop-out, it provides the shortest way to interventions, it stands above any educational model, and it can serve as a common base for the whole of the educational system (from 0-18 and beyond).

To put this kind of monitoring in place, two complementary strategies could be rolled out. The first would entail an annual collection of data using the **scanning** procedure, limited to a representative sample of settings or schools. At least three groups or classes can be scanned in half a day – providing scores on well-being and involvement (process variables) and ratings on a handful of factors that have been proven to be relevant (context variables). The SiCs research and the Milton Keynes study show how much information about quality is contained in the figures on well-being and involvement and the factors determining them. The procedure can be used at the level of individual settings as well as at local, regional and national level. Availability of these kinds of data at international level is desirable, as they could be at least as valuable and informative concerning quality as the results of achievement tests as provided by TIMMS or PISA.

Secondly, installing a digital version of the POMS (now available as LOOQIN[POMS]) would provide **screening** results on well-being and involvement for every child irrespective of their educational setting, in their early years and beyond. Screening of every child twice a year by professionals would suffice. With an investment of about 4 hours per group of 20 children per measurement (once introduced in the scales), the procedure is highly cost-effective. This initiative would provide a platform enabling all stakeholders responsible for children in the educational field to find out which children need more attention. That way, it would provide a tool for transcending fragmentation in the services called on to support children, schools and families. It would also provide a natural condition for involving parents; this concern led to the development of MyProfile (cf. Laevers et. al. 2012), an instrument allowing parents to become partners in a common mission: to share observations on well-being and involvement, to map children's talents, and to work together to find out and implement ways to support children's development.

In times where investment in evaluation is questioned more and more (in the world of management), an approach that captures the essence is highly in demand. More research in the form of intervention studies is needed to explore how well-being and involvement can serve as trustworthy indicators of quality. However, the massive practice-based evidence of the impact of the process-oriented approach shows that everything is in place to go ahead in this direction. Many of these insights stem from the dissemination of EXE in early years provisions during the last few decades, not least in the UK. The EEL project started the process in 1991 (cf. Bertram/Pascal 2004); in 2015, more than 450,000 children in England, representing about 70 % of reception classes, were screened by Early Excellence (for a national baseline assessment) using the Leuven scales (Early Excellence, 2015).

It is now up to policy to make use of the tools that allow to take the pulse of the educational system, and to systematically ask the one crucial question, "How are our children doing?"

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11 Monitoring as a guarantee of Quality? Evaluation of national reports and interesting aspects for Germany

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In this volume, different approaches, procedures and progress reports on monitoring quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) from selected countries have been introduced. The comparative analysis of these countries elucidates the fact that there are various ways of developing and ensuring quality in ECEC settings. Some of the presented countries (i.e. Australia, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia) have already established monitoring systems or have revised their existing procedures, while others (i.e. Flanders, Luxembourg) are currently in the process of developing or implementing such systems. These examples clarify that procedures of quality development and assurance are influenced by circumstances specific to national contexts, such as, for example, the organisation of welfare systems and the political-administrative framework conditions in which public systems of early childhood education and care are embedded, as well as, the dominant socio-cultural traditions and the pedagogical principles that flow from them.

In the face of the differences between these systems, it is undeniable, that the mere transfer of approaches and procedures from one country to another might not be a sensible strategy. Therefore, this is not the aim of the following discussion. Rather, the potential of systematic cross-country comparisons for identifying possible courses of action, potential solutions, and unintended or negative concomitant effects is used to provide impetus for the development of quality monitoring processes in Germany.

For the analysis of the monitoring systems presented in this volume, we have adopted a certain perspective. Since these systems are understood as specific approaches towards governing quality development and assurance in the ECEC system, the concept of 'educational governance' offers a helpful and interesting analytical framework. To date, the concept of educational governance has been little used in the analysis of ECEC systems (cf. Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012). By using educational governance as the heuristic perspective for the analysis of quality development and assurance in ECEC, this article helps to overcome this research gap. As part of our discussion, we present the main similarities and differences between the various monitoring systems, focusing on the question of how, and in what way, the approaches and procedures implemented contribute to quality development and assurance in ECEC. Here we point towards aspects that have proven to be effective, obstructive or even counter-productive.

For the purpose of this article, we establish our argument in three steps. Firstly, the analytical framework is introduced in its details and appropriated to the context of quality monitoring in ECEC. Secondly, similarities and

differences between the various monitoring systems from the perspective of educational governance will be elicited, based on a) the development and implementation of monitoring systems, b) the execution of quality monitoring, and c) the sustainability and effectiveness of quality assurance systems. The final section of the article addresses the possible linkages the international examples of quality development and assurance offer to the German ECEC system. Relevant aspects are identified and discussed against the background of the situation in Germany.

11.1 The perspective of Educational Governance as an analytical framework

The term 'educational governance' describes new forms of managing or steering the educational system that are primarily directed towards quality assurance and development (cf. Altrichter et al. 2007b; Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012). According to Ratermann and Stöbe-Blossey (2012), instruments for quality governance at the elementary level may include educational guidelines/curricula, concepts of internal and external evaluation, definitions of educational or quality standards, and/or national education reports (ibid., 9). Hence, the presented international examples of monitoring systems can be understood as opportunities for governing quality within the respective ECEC system.

While the perspective of educational governance has been in use as an analytical framework for governing the school system for several years (cf. Altrichter et al. 2007a; Kussau/Brüsemeister 2007; Brüsemeister 2012; Abs et al. 2015), a similar approach has been virtually absent from the examination of ECEC systems. In spite of this neglect, educational governance provides a helpful heuristic framework for the purpose of such analysis and reconstruction, given that it is geared towards the analysis of new forms of governance such as the above-mentioned instruments for quality assurance. Furthermore, the educational governance perspective can be used to analyse, understand and illuminate complex governance systems such as those found in quality monitoring systems. Thereby, its focus is on the coordination of actions between various stakeholders in a multi-level system (cf. Altrichter et al. 2007b, 10). This means that the analysis examines the entwined, multi-layered coordination of governance, and takes into perspective the actions of various stakeholders and political levels (cf. Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012, 12).

According to Arthur Benz, the concept of "coordination" describes the way various stakeholders act in concert and work towards a common goal (cf. Benz 2004, 20, quoted in Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012, 12). Given the goal of developing and assuring quality in ECEC systems, the issue is how the various stakeholders can coordinate their actions or their collabo-

ration on their (presumedly)[175] common goal. During this dynamic process specific and partially institutionalized constellations of actors are formed. The terminology "actor constellation" refers to a structure that influences the actions of stakeholders, and in turn is changed by itself through the practices and actions of these stakeholders (cf. Kussau/Brüsemeister 2007, 27). At the same time attention is paid towards field-specific governance structures, such as for example laws, that define stakeholders actions and substantiate their competencies and responsibilities (cf. Stöbe-Blossey 2012, 12ff.). This raises interesting questions such as to what extent processes of quality development and assurance, once initiated, facilitate new structures of collaboration or lead to new assignments of responsibilities.

Monitoring systems are always embedded within political systems, which are themselves organized according to the principles of political/governmental organization (e.g. federal, centralized, decentralized). Within the concept of a multi-layered system, this aspect is acknowledged; the term refers to the meaning of institutionalized relationships of interdependent stakeholders across the different political levels (cf. Kussau/Brüsemeister 2007, 31). Within the German context, for example, the subsidiarity principle – the assignment of responsibility at the lowest state level to avoid overregulation and control – plays an important role in governing the system of early childhood education and care. Especially within national monitoring systems, different relations between the responsible stakeholders exist. In a multi-level political system, it is thus useful to address the issue of how the (common) goal of quality development and assurance is organized. For this reason, the focus of analysis must be laid on the mutual relation between the following dimensions: the coordination of actions, the configuration of stakeholders and the multi-level ECEC system. From an educational governance perspective, these dimensions are central when analysing the development and execution of governance approaches to advance educational quality (cf. Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012, 9f.).

But what characterizes this (educational) quality? What do we mean when we – in the following sections – discuss the development, advancement, and assurance of quality within an ECEC system? Quality is perceived as a multi-dimensional and discursive concept (see Klinkhammer/Schäfer in this volume). Compatible with the governance perspective adopted in this discussion is the concept of a "competent system" that has been developed in the context of the CoRe study (cf. Urban et al. 2011).

According to this study, high quality can only be guaranteed in an ECEC system where the various stakeholders and levels involved in the system[176] receive support in their individual competence area as well as in their complex cooperation when providing ECEC services (cf. ibid, 21 and 32ff.).

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175 Portrayals from the various countries evoke the question of whether all stakeholders are actually pursuing the same objective with their monitoring quality system. This aspect is discussed later in this article.

176 Four levels were identified: (1) individual level, (2) institutional and team level, (3) inter-institutional level, and (4) political level (cf. Urban et al. 2011, 33).

Quality is not achieved by solely ensuring high level qualifications and continuous professionalisation of ECEC staff (individual level). Of equal importance are the existing framework conditions within the field of ECEC (including structural factors, working conditions) and support structures (including a consultation system, continuous training), cohesive policies and a unitary, integrated ECEC system[177] (cf ibid, 46ff.). According to the CoRe study, elements of a cohesive (national) ECEC policy[178] include a quality framework that contains quality criteria that must be fulfilled by all ECEC services and that inspire and enable the development of 'good practice'. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation framework should be in place that provides for systematic data collection on the ECEC sector and regular evaluations that involve all key stakeholders. Frameworks of this kind provide a basis for a shared understanding between the stakeholders and other instances involved in the process of defining core values of 'good practice' across all levels of competent systems. At the same time, those frameworks offer common orientation for the many activities within the field.

In the following discussion, the national examples presented in this volume are analyzed and compared, applying the outlined heuristic framework of an educational governance perspective and the approach of a 'competent system'. Of particular interest are approaches and instruments applied for monitoring quality on the one hand, and the processes accompanying monitoring on the other. Striking similarities and differences are presented along the line of three aspects: a) development and implementation of monitoring systems, b) execution of quality monitoring, and c) sustainability and effectiveness of quality assurance systems.

11.2   International comparison of Quality Monitoring Systems – Evaluation of national reports

11.2.1 Discourse-oriented processes as strategies for developing and implementing monitoring systems

The national reports indicate that the procedure selected for developing and implementing a monitoring system and for coordinating the approaches and instruments used is a trouble spot for the success of the intended quality process. Even these early stages build the basis for the later coordination of actions between the stakeholders involved. The descriptions provided by the individual countries already indicate major differences, as well as similarities, for this first phase.

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177 Unlike a 'split system' where care and education services are separate in terms of both policy governance, administration and their conceptual approach.

178 Further frames of reference are given as curriculum framework, qualification framework and governance framework (cf. ibid., 46).

For example, the development and implementation process in Australia can be described as a classic top-down process. Integrated into the *Early Childhood Reform Agenda* (cf. Sims et al. 2015), the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) was decided by political stakeholders of the national government in 2008. Furthermore, a national monitoring system was implemented to track and safeguard the NQF. The monitoring system was part of a multi-level package of reforms involving a variety of elements. Furthermore, this reform package was aligned with the objectives set by the government of the time, which primarily addressed a clearer and more unitary design of the ECEC system (see Sims et al. in this volume).

The *National Early Childhood Development Strategy (ECD)* developed by the federal government served as a common framework for various areas of the reform agenda and was passed as a law throughout all states and territories in Australia. This happened, as Sims et al. describe, within a very short time. While the federal organizational structure required a process of political consultation between the stakeholders, it is apparent that the reform initiative was largely driven by the federal government. Hence, a negotiation of shared goals, like they where implemented with the national ECD strategy as a new governance structure, just happened to limited extent.

However, stakeholders at all levels (government representatives, scientific experts, ECEC staff, service providers and families) were involved more closely in the creation of the *National Quality Framework* (NQF). However, Sims et al. state that again, the time allocated for a critical reflection over the elements of the NQF (e.g. *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) or *National Quality Standard*), and for the scientific support and monitoring of the implementation process was too short.

According to the authors, the low acceptance and identification among ECEC professionals and an inadequate backing from parents is a result of this lack of time. In addition to the challenging process of developing the monitoring system, further problems emerged when the NQF needed to be transferred into practice, particularly with respect to the EYLF. Despite a largely positive attitude towards this framework and a two-year acclimatization period, Sims et al. note that that "educators were still struggling to understand and use the EYLF" (cf. Sims et al. in this volume, 32). The reasons for this are ultimately rooted in a lack of opportunities for continuing training and professional development (cf. Sims et al. 2015, 81ff.). Contrary to the necessary preconditions for creating a 'competent system' (cf. Urban et al. 2011, 51), these were simply omitted. At this point, the example of Australia illustrates the importance of creating acceptance in the ECEC field. One possibility to support this acceptance can bee the involvement of ECEC staff in the developing process of the frameworks and the instruments mentioned. Furthermore, the solid preparation and training of ECEC professionals is crucial for introducing new curricula and (quality) goals as well as for implementing systematic quality work into their daily practice.

To avoid problems like a low acceptance or poor identification among ECEC staff, a different procedure was adopted in Flanders (Belgium). Although the initiative for introducing regulated quality development and assurance was also initiated by the superordinated regional government and

was thus likewise be characterised as a top-down process, a broadly based process of involvement in organizing the proceedings accompanied its development and implementation.

In Flanders, a new Act (*new Flemish Parliament Act*) aimed at continuing to minimize existing differences between private commercial and publicly funded child day care services. By the introduction of a unitary quality development and assurance system the law also intended to guarantee equal opportunities for all children (cf. e.g. van Nieuwenhuyzen in this volume; Peeters 2013). A discourse-oriented procedure with the involvement and participation of the various stakeholders in the field was adopted when the pedagogical framework as a basis for the following quality processes was developed. This framework is thus based on a shared understanding of quality, and acts as an overarching link between the stakeholders.

The development of this basis was crucial for building the necessary acceptance in the field, and for the coordination of actions between the stakeholders within the development and implementation process. Based on the pedagogical framework, three quality instruments were prepared. Each serving different purposes, they comprise a scientific, a monitoring and a self-evaluation instrument. The development of these three different instruments indicates that different needs and ideas (measurement, observation and development in practice) were vital to the process of coordinating actions towards the common objective of quality development and assurance. This was, in turn, accompanied by new assignments of roles and responsibilities.

According to van Nieuwenhuyzen, the core of this process of development and implementation comprises the principles of "transparency and participation. In fact, findings from the preliminary research underlined the need to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development and use of instruments to monitor, measure and improve quality" (cf. in this volume, 164). The participation of all relevant stakeholders (including representatives from politics, science, administration, inspectorats, professional associations, ECEC staff and parents) was organized on the basis of this assumption; since then the mentioned representatives have accompanied the process of developing a new monitoring system. This working context not only fosters a broadly based constructive exchange of ideas between stakeholders at the various levels of the ECEC system, but also encourages the establishment and critical review of a shared understanding of quality.

Compared to Australia and Flanders, Slovenia had already begun to take its first steps towards reforming its ECEC sector in the 1990s. In the wake of the country's independence, a range of reforms was initiated that significantly changed the educational sector: new central governance structures were established through transferring all ECEC responsibility to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, new regulations for early education and were implemented and a national curriculum for kindergarten was de-

veloped (cf. Požar Matijašič/Stanka Lunder Verlič in this volume; Marjanovič Umek/Fekonja Peklaj 2010).[179]

Those reforms and changes ultimately layed the foundation for today's efforts in setting up a unitary quality assessment and assurance system (QAA). The country thus serves as an interesting counterpart to Australia with respect to the time that was allocated for the development and implementation of an assessment and assurance system. In Australia, the same process was completed in only a few years; in Slovenia, however, the various system levels and stakeholders have repeatedly engaged in negotiations over roles and responsibilities and (common) objectives for decades, and changed or revised those according to the agreements that were achieved. Slovenia has retained its decentralized structure for ECEC despite the administrative merging of the ministries and the implementation of the curriculum for kindergarten at the national level (cf. Marjanovič Umek/Fekonja Peklaj 2010, 18). This is likewise reflected in the way the country has regulated quality development and assurance; it is based on a complex system where the various stakeholders and institutions are assigned to individual areas of responsibility. For example, external evaluation is primarily conducted by national institutions or authorities, while responsibility for international evaluation processes rests with the directors of the ECEC settings (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume).

The developments and efforts taking place in Slovenia – as well as in the other countries – illustrate that addressing quality in ECEC is a long-term and gradual process in which the stakeholders involved (must) repeatedly discuss and agree upon responsibilities, procedures and (common) goals and targets. Given the decentralized structures at the macro level and the complex distinctions between areas of quality assurance responsibility at micro level, "various systems (models) of QAA" have developed in Slovenia (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume, 71).

Based on already established structures, the government is currently testing a unitary system of assessing and assuring quality, which will also bundles existing systems under one conceptual framework. In this way it is tried to tackle the challenge of unifying quality assurance processes while also granting the autonomy of the ECEC settings. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič state: "Experiences so far have indicated that the development and implementation of such a model is a long collaborative process, which needs to be encouraged at national level, internalized by head teachers and preschool teachers, teachers and other professional staff in kindergartens and

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179 The White book on education in the Republic of Slovenia, published in 1996, set forth the conceptual foundations for the reform of Slovenia's entire educational system. Within its scope, for example, indicators for ensuring high-quality ECEC (e.g. small group sizes, qualified professionals) were proposed and discussed with the involvement of various stakeholder groups. This formed the basis for drawing up the Kindergarten/Preschool Act, passed in 1996 (cf. Marjanovič Umek/Fekonja Peklaj 2010). A national curriculum for kindergarten was finally introduced in 1999 with the goal of establishing binding fundamental principles for ECEC such as democracy and plurality (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume, 63ff.).

schools, and transferred to the learning population" (Požar Mati-jašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume, 73f.).

The development and implementation processes of the monitoring systems in Australia, Flanders and Slovenia provide illustrative examples of how coordination and negotiation processes between stakeholders and how various levels of responsibility can evolve within a (federal) multi-layered ECEC system. At the same time, the sequence in which development and implementation processes were initiated reveals similarities. The experiences revealed within the country reports point out that the development of monitoring systems requires a broad professional and political debate concerning chosen approaches, methods, instruments and common (quality) goals and targets. In the examples of Australia, Flanders and Slovenia, the development of quality assurance measures was decided by the national or regional government.

In all three cases a top-down process was thus chosen, initially based on the objectives of the respective governments – i.e. greater consistency of the early childhood education and care sector and equally high quality in ECEC services for all children. The decisions were specified in a first step and enshrined in law as an important constituent in the development of a reliable and solid national ECEC system (cf. Sims et al. 2015, 47). At this point, further relevant ECEC stakeholders, besides the political and administrative level, were involved to develop a (national) framework, that build a common basis for further steps within the process of developing a system of quality assurance.

To monitor and advance the development of quality, a shared understanding of what constitutes quality – bundling the different perspectives – is necessary. This, in turn, can only be developed in a *dialogue- and discourse-oriented process* (see Dahlberg et al. 2013; Schneider et al. 2015). Australia and Flanders developed a common understanding of quality for their ECEC frameworks. This understanding serves as reference point for instruments that assess and evaluate quality. While the national government in Australia allowed only a brief *period of time* for this (not always straightforward) process and the exchange between stakeholders was therefore only possible to a limited extent, in Flanders transparency and participation were accorded the highest priority. A long-term planning was used to allow enough scope for a discourse-oriented approach to develop approaches and instruments for quality assurance.

The question of which *(quality) goals and targets* are pursued by monitoring is directly connected with the development of a *shared understanding of quality*. The determination of these goals and targets is a key prerequisite for the introduction of a monitoring system and its differnt instruments (see e.g. Zaslow et al. 2009; Ishimine/Tayler 2014). Varying interests in ECEC monitoring can be identified, depending on the stakeholders' intentions and their perspective on quality. For parents, information on quality creates transparency and thereby supports their choice of an ECEC setting. For political stakeholders, monitoring results are particularly relevant for governing the system and for accountability with respect to the funding involved (cf. OECD 2015). In Australia an attempt is made to pursue two

objectives within their national system: developing and assuring quality, and monitoring/controlling the system. To achieve this, standards were introduced as a basis for measuring and evaluating all ECEC settings.

However, some difficulties arose in the attempt to create a system that incorporates varying, partly inconsistant goals and objectives that are not always easy to combine. At the same time, the process chosen in Flanders is an attempt to counteract those difficulties by using three different instruments. In Australia, it is planned to simplify rating processes in future by reducing the number of applicable quality standards (see Sims et al. in this volume). It is currently unclear whether this method will solve the existing conflicts, and thus the question of which direction will be taken to further develop the ECEC system.

The examples discussed so far indicate that the *involvement of ECEC professionals* in the implementation process is crucial and gains even more significance given that these professionals are assigned multiple roles in the implementation and the execution of monitoring systems: they are frequently the object of (external) evaluations on the one hand, while conducting (internal) evaluations themselves on the other. In addition, they are the ones who design and develop pedagogical practice and strive to align it to defined quality targets and standards. Particularly in countries and regions like Australia and Flanders, where the qualification levels of ECEC staff vary widely due to the split system and the extensive privatization of the child care sector (cf. Cheeseman/Torr 2009, 65; Peeters 2013, 8), the preparation and support of child care professionals goes hand in hand with the sustainability of monitoring systems. In the meaning of a 'competent system' (cf. Urban et al. 2011) the quality of ECEC does not solely dependent on individual professionals, but the expertise of these professionals is nonetheless an important prerequisite for the initiation and advancement of quality processes in the ECEC sector (see Rauschenbach/Riedel 2015, 10ff.; Sims/Waniganayake 2015, 189). In Australia ECEC staff had two years to familiarize themselves with the NQF; but uncertainties in dealing with the newly introduced elements of the monitoring system were noted later in practice. Požar Matijašič and Lunder Verlič likewise refer to difficulties experienced by ECEC professionals in classifying internal evaluations. In Slovenia, the establishment of expert cores to provide ECEC settings with support in conducting monitoring processes should solve this problem in future. Also van Nieuwenhuyzen identifies the support for professionals by expert guidance and coaches as one central element to be introduced in the Flemisch ECEC system for the future.

The aspects discussed here indicate the importance of the implementation approaches and strategies chosen for the success of a monitoring system – including its acceptance in the ECEC field. When comparing the countries, several factors emerge as being of key importance in the implementation process. These are time, the (ongoing) negotiation of a shared understanding of quality and an agreement over its operationalization (including the form of quantifiable standards or targets), the democratic and broadly based involvement of stakeholders from the ECEC sector and, finally, the preparation and consulting system for ECEC staff, especially dur-

ing the phase when monitoring systems are implemented to the phase when they need to be transferred into professional practice.

11.2.2 Execution of monitoring systems: How to run a system?

Systematic monitoring of quality in early childhood education and care represents a challenge for a number of reasons. In addition to funding and time requirements involved in conducting monitoring, the coordination and organization of various levels and stakeholders (in the sense of coordination of action, see section 11.2) can be identified as one of the main issues. A crucial role in this plays the division of responsibilities and competencies between different stakeholders along with the question of what (new) infrastructures are required and where it is possible to build on existing structures to create the necessary preconditions for conducting monitoring. But also for currently operating systems, the ongoing negotiation and communication of existing approaches, procedures and common objectives on quality monitoring remains of fundamental relevance. The countries presented in this volume draw on different experiences regarding their monitoring systems and approaches so far. At the same time, similarities can be identified that are of relevance for running a monitoring system in ECEC.

In this regard, Luxembourg introduced two main pillars for quality assurance at the national level: 1) regulations for governing structural quality in ECEC (the *ASFT Act* and a *Grand-ducal Regulation*), and 2) the national framework for non-formal education. These build the basis for the measures introduced in 2016 that are supposed to assure process and orientation quality. Quality development and assurance in Luxembourg is understood as a circular process which is implemented in several respects (see Achten/Bodeving in this volume). The realisation of quality development and assurance measures is designed as a discourse-oriented process and takes place in close collaboration and interaction between the various system levels. According to Achten/Bodeving, the basic assumption is "the conviction that to be successful, quality development and assurance must primarily be based on the proactive participation and motivation of pedagogical staff and providers" (see in this volume, 89). While political and administrative responsibilities at the national level primarily involve external evaluation, service providers and ECEC settings are engaged in quality processes through internal evaluations and the development as well as profiling of their pedagogical concepts. In addition, researchers undertake an overall evaluation which feeds into the further advancement of the ECEC system. Having introduced a circular quality process also implies that all levels are obliged to regularly review the basic pillars of quality development and assurance and adjust them where required. The law states that the national framework must be evaluated at three-year intervals, incorporating empirical findings from the ministries, service providers and municipalities. The national ECEC framework is then adjusted accordingly. Simultaneously, the pedagogical concept is approved at the level of the ECEC setting for a period of three-year. In its conception, the Luxembourgian monitoring system pursues an approach that takes account of the experiences of various stake-

holder levels for the (further) development of the quality assurance system. Moreover, in the execution of quality monitoring, foremost discourse-oriented procedures play an important role.

While Sweden has several years of experience in monitoring quality, with regard to conducting discourse-oriented procedures, there are some similarities between Luxembourg and Sweden. Since 2010, quality development and assurance in ECEC settings in Sweden has been mandated at the national level. The Swedish Education Act and the Curriculum for Preschool define overall goals and in addition to that offer a common orientation for all stakeholders for their efforts to improve quality. The stakeholders involved then decide which pedagogical methods or offers they want to apply to approach each of the goals (cf. Vallberg-Roth 2015, 21ff.).

At this point, two aspects that influence quality monitoring seem to be important: the decentralised organisation of Sweden's ECEC system, and the child-centred perspective of its preschool curriculum. It is seen as a high priority to consider each child as an individual and as a result ECEC provision "cannot be organised in the same way everywhere […]" (Skolverket 2010, 4). Therefore, the national goals defined in the preschool curriculum provide a common framework for this diversity and is based on a shared understanding of quality. This is further reflected in the aim of providing high-quality preschool education and care for all children (cf. Menke 2009). This requires centralised regulations, without overruling the existing areas of tasks and responsibilities in a decentralised system.

> *Researchers have argued that in a decentralized system, verification of outcomes in local school and preschool practices becomes more important in order to maintain national equivalency (e.g. Lundgren, 2006). Thus, decentralization on the one hand is met with recentralization on the other through increased control (Vallberg-Roth 2015, 60).*

As Sheridan stresses in her article, this tense relationship between decentralisation (for the design and execution of monitoring) and centralisation (for the definition of goals and recommendations of methods and instruments) requires an ongoing debate on how these goals might impact the pedagogical practice of ECEC professionals and what the intention of monitoring should be. Are monitoring procedures supposed to control pedagogical practice, or provide the impetus for quality assurance and further development?

One approach suggested by Sheridan to balance this tense relationship is to assign responsibilities to the exo and micro levels, the levels primarily involved in shaping the ECEC field, purposefully. In the execution of quality monitoring in Sweden municipalities (exo level) occupy a key position which is associated both with the macro (society, government) and micro (ECEC settings) levels (see Sheridan in this volume). At the same time, external evaluation both enables and supports an exchange of ideas between the macro and micro level. According to Sheridan, the connection between the different social systems, their collaboration and mutual influence is based on the political intention to initiate quality development within the ECEC system. For instance, the revision of national educational goals is

built on the findings of school inspectors during their work in ECEC settings. Sheridan uses the term *'systematic quality work'* to refer to this work, which represents the core of quality development and assurance in the Swedish ECEC system.

However, the interdependence and collaboration between the different levels of ECEC governance also give rise to conflict, as previous scientific surveys have shown (see Sheridan in this volume; Vallberg-Roth 2015). While constructive cooperation between the levels is intended, local regulations sometimes run contrary to the goals of the national curriculum. The challenges involved in realising a successful dialogue between different stakeholders are also visible in other areas. One example is that ECEC professionals are often critical of the methods prescribed by municipalities (s. Sheridan in this volume). As a result, the successful realisation of quality processes requires repeated exchange and debate concerning methods, procedures and objectives, which should be seen as an indispensable means for balancing perspectives and potential discrepancies between the various stakeholders and levels involved and as a crucial aspect of the *systemic quality work*. Similar to the Luxembourgian approach, as part of a predefined circular process, the various levels of the ECEC system are constantly brought into relation with one another, with the aim to further develop and assure quality in a collaborative process.

Similar to Sweden, the Netherlands has a decentralised ECEC system. However, one crucial difference is that due to the split system, in the Dutch system two ministries are responsible for quality development and assurance[180] of ECEC provision (see Jacobs in this volume; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015, 31). Also, a variety of statutory changes have resulted in a period of deregulating the ECEC sector, which was then been followed by a period of *re*-regulation. The Child Care Act (*Wet op de Kinderopvang*) was introduced in 2005 and focused on the principle of self-regulation at the level of service providers and ECEC settings, particularly with respect to quality assurance. Subsequent laws (2010, 2011 and 2012) reintroduced stricter provisions with enforceable standards for quality assurance, thus re-regulating the child care sector (see Naumann et al. 2013, 137; Aarssen et al. 2013, 41ff.).

Jacobs' article clearly indicates that an array of services and programmes has developed in both the education and the care sector, which also creates the impression of a fragmented and rather inconsistent ECEC system; an impression which is reinforced due to the division responsibilities between different sectors. At the same time, an increasing interdependence of responsibilities between the different system levels involved (national, municipal and ECEC setting level) in both sectors – education and care – can be observed. If a cohesive governance of quality is to be achieved, an expansion of such overarching system-wide collaborations appears to be necessary.

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180 Responsibility for conducting monitoring rests with the inspectorates, which report to the respective ministries.

Supervision[181] is used in the education and care sector as an instrument for quality assurance. The supervision is performed separately for each sector. This separation might be useful in some respects, since the local health services and the Inspectorate of Education focus their work on different areas and, thereby pursue different goals (e.g. the supervision of health and safety regulations and structural aspects vs. the supervision of the quality of educational services and programmes). Nevertheless, the areas that are supervised overlap sometimes, for example, where municipal health services inspect the quality at ECEC settings that also provide preschool services (e.g. with regard to the implementation of an accredited educational programme and evaluating its effectiveness, or applying observation or testing instruments for monitoring child development) (see Jacobs in this volume; Sylva et al. 2015, 74).

The main instrument that is used by the Inspectorate of Education for revising quality within settings is the supervision framework. Unlike the broad participation procedures that were applied in other countries, the preparation and current revision of the supervision framework lies primarily in the responsibility of the Inspectorate of Education. The need to modify and align the focus of the framework became apparent due to the empirical findings that were generated by the inspection procedure: "the Inspectorate sees a degree of stagnation in the quality of Dutch education" (Jacobs in this volume, 104). The goals and targets that were revised in line with the new framework are based on the (notion or concept) of *encouragement*. Meant by this is the encouragement of the settings to regularly review and systematically advance their offers (cf. Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2015). The revised framework is designed to provide the inspectors with a wider scope of items for evaluating the settings, which should thus provide a more comprehensive picture of the quality. A similar approach is applied in the revision of the supervision framework for local health services. Here it is also the aim to generate and provide broader information concerning the educational quality of preschool services.

Since too "little exchange of information" between the authorities (Jacobs in this volume, 97) was identified as a problem for quality assurance and development, a targeted partnership between local health services and the national Inspectorate of Education was recently launched. For the revision of the two supervision frameworks, a joint coordination process was chosen to avoid unnecessary duplication and to allow a clearer assignment of roles and responsibilities between the sectors. Jacobs' explanations indicate that the collaboration between the Inspectorate and the health authorities has improved.

However, it still seems challenging to establish functioning communication forms between the stakeholders and to achieve a shared understanding

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181 The term 'supervision' is preferred to 'monitoring' in the Netherlands ECEC sector and is used in this sense in public documents. Its meaning covers the same intention as 'monitoring' and 'evaluation', but ECEC monitoring requirements are set forth in the supervision framework (see Jacobs in this volume).

of quality and quality improvements. It can be assumed that these discrepancies are exacerbated by the governance context of a split system, in tandem with the increasing commingling and convergence of the service offerings in both sectors. Despite the efforts made to develop the supervision framework further, it thus becomes clear that within a multi-level system, processes of exchange and coordination reach limitations when it adheres to existing – and, in some cases, rigid – structures, roles and/or responsibilities. This might inhibit a sustainable governance of quality and its further development and assurance.

The examples of the monitoring systems in Luxembourg, Sweden and the Netherlands demonstrate the complexity of executing quality monitoring at the various levels of the ECEC system. By comparing the different monitoring systems presented in this volume some core aspects can be identified that may be relevant for the long-term establishment and conduction of such a system. The previous section, dealing with the development and implementation of monitoring systems, already underlined the importance of a shared understanding of quality as a basis for the stakeholders and levels involved. With respect to the realisation of monitoring, it seems relevant to define this understanding by setting **binding standards or targets.** These need to be enshrined in laws or regulations and in turn serve as a concrete foundation for the coordination of actions and as the common subject of monitoring systems.

This definition is not associated with a rigid understanding of quality; rather the execution of monitoring is dominated by discourse-oriented processes. This means the systems rely on a continued critical analysis of the preconditions for the establishment and assurance of quality in the ECEC sector. The three examples discussed in this section indicate that a **clear division of tasks and responsibilities** between the stakeholders and the system levels (in the sense of a 'competent system', European Commission 2011) can be an important prerequisite for sustainable quality development and assurance. Often the duties for external inspection or evaluation are located at the national level as well as the provision of a binding framework for quality monitoring.

Hence, it seems useful to establish **infrastructures and institutions**, such as inspectorates or authorities that are responsible for monitoring and for reporting the results to national governments. The subject of external evaluation generally is the ECEC setting, its concept, organization and the pedagogical practice of the staff. Furthermore, attention is paid to how the local (municipal) level fulfills its responsibilities. This is the case in Sweden and the Netherlands for example. Generally the local level takes on multiple functions in the role of both, a local government and a public service provider. These functions may include the provision of suitable quality monitoring methods and instruments (Sweden), the support for ECEC settings in developing concepts in accordance with national guidelines (Luxembourg), or the regulation of sanctions for service providers that fail to meet quality standards (Netherlands). Within the scope of self-evaluation procedures, the ECEC setting takes over a key role in the quality development and assurance process.

Sheridan's article also gives a hint to the fact that differing goals in quality monitoring, such as those of the municipalities on the one hand and the ECEC professionals on the other, may result in discrepancies, which simultaneously can cause problems in realising effective quality assurance measures. The approach of understanding **quality development as a circular process** (Luxembourg) seems to offer an important perspective: it implies a regular review of the targets, standards and, accordingly, methods and instruments applied in the execution of monitoring. Within this process of reviewing attention also needs to be paid to any (intended or unintended) influence on pedagogical practices and the question where modifications of targets, methods, instruments, etc. are required. A clear and transparent time frame for one "cycle" of the process – as in Luxembourg, spanning three years – may be useful to achieve a regular, systematic exchange of the experiences made by all stakeholders and levels involved. Such a critical review of the system itself seems to be an important prerequisite for its sustainable and effective execution.

11.2.3 Sustainability and effectiveness of monitoring systems: a contribution to quality assurance?

Monitoring systems are primarily introduced with the intention to further develop and assure quality in ECEC by using the aggregated and evaluated data gained from various levels of the ECEC system. However, the different articles in this volume give no clear answer to the question whether or not monitoring systems are effective and sustainable enough to fulfill this purpose. In fact, the changes in procedures and the modification of instruments that are mentioned in virtually each article indicate that a continuous clarification is needed with regard to the question which data and formats are useful for which stakeholders, and to which extent these data provide an informative picture of quality development in the ECEC system. The articles also describe different strategies of how the data is used and how results feed back into the ECEC settings and the pedagogical practices of staff. The results from quality monitoring may lead to sanctions and/or rewards (e.g. Australia, Netherlands, Luxembourg), or be used exclusively for evaluation reports (e.g. Berlin). Furthermore, some of the articles in this volume repeatedly refer to the dilemma that the data obtained are not always of direct use to the work of the various stakeholders, or that procedures are experienced as too bureaucratic and complex (see e.g. Sims et al. in this volume). To be able to evaluate the effectiveness of a system, it seems critical to address this observation and identify the benefit of the data for the individual stakeholders and their areas of responsibility. For that purpose, it needs to be clarified which data and information are useful for which stakeholder.

To govern a system effectively in the long-term, stakeholders from policy and administration especially require quantitative data providing insight into developments within a particular ECEC system. At this level, monitoring frequently focuses on pre-defined (national) structural quality benchmarks. (e.g. number and age of children in ECEC, group structure, number

and qualification of ECEC professionals). In this context, data are frequently sourced from national statistics like the data on child and youth welfare in Germany provided by the Federal Statistical Office (*Destatis*). Such statistics provide a pool of data for a systematic, targeted evaluation of the field. Thereby, it is possible to trace current changes and to identify areas of action at the system level.

However, in this volume, Schwartz notes that policymakers, who mainly make use of data on structural quality indicators, are also interested in more differentiated information on other aspects such as on indicators of process quality. In response to that interest, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) was commissioned by the national government and the Local Government Denmark (LGDK*)* to develop a system with different instruments for monitoring and reporting on quality within the ECEC system. This methodological 'toolkit', which ranges from narratives on daily routine practices to quantitative data on the language development of infants, represents an attempt to meet the various needs concerning the usefulness and applicability of data.

Moreover, the data that is generated through the use of different instruments helps to understand the complexity and meaning of quality across the different levels of the ECEC system. As Schwartz describes in her article, the data collected is not only intended to provide a general basis of information, but also to be context-sensitive and to initiate discourse on quality at all system levels. Thus, the challenge is to design and to consolidate approaches and procedures that are complementary.Therefore, data collected according to such a design provide an informative picture of developments in the ECEC field, while at the same time identifying areas where action is needed by the various stakeholders and levels involved. Most of the countries presented here (e.g. Sweden, Slovenia and Luxembourg) supplement their national statistics by performing external evaluations, for which inspectorates or authorities are established at the national level (see Section 11.2.1; 11.2.2).

At the level of pedagogical practice, data are mainly collected using processes of internal and/or external evaluation (supervision, inspection). Therefore, (evaluation) surveys, interviews with ECEC professionals or observations that apply specific, generally standardized procedures (including ECERS, CLASS) are applied most commonly (cf. OECD 2015). These forms of data usually provide a more detailed picture of the daily routine and workflow at an ECEC setting, the pedagogical practice (process quality) and the perspective of ECEC professionals. Internal evaluations, e.g. those concerning the implementation of curricula, are seen as an opportunity to encourage the reflection of pedagogical practice, and thus enhance the professional development and advancement of ECEC staff (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume). In this context, the effectiveness of practice is measured by the extent to which the processes and instruments support the ECEC professionals in delivering high pedagogical quality. In this respect, Schäfer/Eberhart underline the importance and usefulness of both forms of evaluation, internal as well as external, for the development of good pedagogical practice. In Berlin, pedagogical practice is

internally evaluated by the directors as well as the ECEC professionals at the setting. They are asked to evaluate their work by applying official materials and guidelines (cf. Schäfer/Eberhart in this volume).

With regard to external evaluation, the authors note that the attitude of the evaluators towards the ECEC professionals is central to its success: Criticism resulting from external evaluation was accepted as constructive and accordingly reflected in practice when the attitude of the evaluator was perceived as appreciative and approving (cf. Schäfer/Eberhart in this volume). The experiences from Berlin indicate that procedures initiating *development* (rather than *control*) processes or professionals find greater acceptance in practice. As a result, two aspects seem to be crucial for the promotion of quality processes: firstly, the basic attitude that drives evaluations – appreciative or controlling – and second, whether support is provided for dealing with evaluation results and improving practice. Since the promotion of the quality process is one of the key objectives of the monitoring system, it might be worth to acknowledge these aspects.

However, the effectiveness of a monitoring system is determined not only by the response of the ECEC professionals to the procedures and instruments applied but also by the concrete usability of the data collected for improving or changing practice. Schäfer/Eberhart's article on the Berlin model critically states that the results of the evaluation report are, for various reasons, just barely reflected and integrated into pedagogical practice. Despite the positive developments that result from evaluations, a systematic integration of the findings into pedagogical practice is still lacking. In turn this leads to questions on the sustainability and effectiveness of monitoring systems.

The Flemish instruments for evaluating pedagogical practice try to avoid this weakness through their design which implies a direct reflection of the observational results and thereby enhance improvements within staff's practices. This is one of the main strengths of the process-oriented approach that is the conceptual basis of the two Leuven scales – SiCs (*Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings*) and POMS (*Process-oriented Child Monitoring System*) – described in Laevers' article. "Process-oriented systems […] give a sense of purpose; it is within the reach of most practitioners to reflect on 'where' and 'when' the lower scores are observed, and from there what kind of changes in approach could improve the situation" (cf. Laevers in this volume, 185).

Hence, it seems useful when the reflection of evaluation results is embedded within the whole process and thereby opens up opportunities for intervention that are of immediate relevance for the daily routines of ECEC professionals. From Leavers perspective the effectiveness of a monitoring system is strongly related to the length of time between the evaluation and data collection, and the assessment and implementation of changes in practice. The author argues that this period of time needs to be short in order to have a positive effect. This claim is based on the precondition that ECEC professionals receive support from the director and provider of the setting and that they work within framework conditions that allow enough scope for action that fosters change. The Leuven scales mentioned above are

based on the two concepts of *well-being* and *involvement* that place the individual child in the centre of quality assessment. Thus, the question of how children feel in ECEC and to which extent they are involved in an activity is connected to the evaluation of quality. This also applies to very young children. One intention of the MeMoQ project in Flanders that reconstructs the perspectives of children aged three or above, was to develop a further instrument that complements the existing approach with by illuminating the perspective of under three-year-olds (cf. van Nieuwenhuyzen in this volume, 163ff.).

By focusing on the *well-being* and *involvement* of young children, the Leuven scales also deliberately distinguish themselves from procedures which, although child-focused, measure the children's stage of development or learning progress (*child outcomes*) along 'standardised' benchmarks. According to Laevers, the unique value of a process-oriented approach is that it turns the focus of evaluation and monitoring procedures not on the child's performance, but on the requirements and framework conditions of the ECEC system that – in turn – should benefit and foster the child. Interestingly, most of the monitoring systems described in this volume concentrate on measuring process quality in ECEC settings rather than measuring child outcomes.

Yet, the perspective of the child is taken into account in a different way. In Slovenia, for example, the project *Quality Assessment and Assurance of the Preschool Education* (*QAA*) involves the development of various instruments and procedures that are able to identify quality indicators and assess quality in ECEC services (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume). The children's perspective is primarily included through the settings' self-evaluations. Using semi-structured interviews, the children's perception of quality is recorded. The aim of this is to reconstruct children's perspective on the environment of the setting, the ECEC professionals, their relationships with peers, and the rules that apply to the group (cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume; cf. OECD 2015, 85). Thereby, children are given the status of independent participants in ECEC and are taken seriously in assessing quality aspects.

Since the acknowledgment of the child's perspective is enshrined within the Danish law on child care facilities, it is also taken into account when quality in ECEC is measured. In her article, Schwartz describes the efforts of EVA to develop approaches that strengthen the children's perspective in monitoring quality processes more systematically. For this purpose, EVA initiated the project *Pedagogues working with children's perspective* that applied the *Mosaic approach,* developed by Allison Clark and Peter Moss (cf. Clark/Moss 2011), in an explorative manner. The aim of the project was to use participatory instruments for recording the perspective of children in different daily situations in the ECEC setting. Thereby, the project enabled the reflection of the question how ECEC professionals manage to support children's effort to participate, develop and learn. By exploring the children's perspective on everyday life in the setting, a critical reflection and a review of the established pedagogical practices should be initiated. The aim was to

enable professionals to develop quality improvements that respond to the impressions that were gained by shedding light on the child's perspective.

Schwartz's descriptions provide a striking picture of the impact that this change of perspective had on the perception and practice of the ECEC professionals: "Most pedagogues expressed that they had gained a new understanding of working with children's perspectives. […] The new understanding was concerned with putting an effort into understanding the child's experiences and intentions as a basis for pedagogical support" (Schwartz in this volume, 122). Even though Schwartz also points to the challenges that arose throughout the process of interpreting the data generated by the *Mosaic approach*, the experiences from Denmark underline once again the importance of relating evaluation instruments, or rather the results achieved by them, to the daily pedagogical practice of ECEC professionals. But the change of perspective that was achieved by applying the *Mosaic approach* not only identified further areas of improvement in pedagogical practices and offers made to the child. It also shed light on the organisational structure of the settings, and thereby identified aspects which otherwise would have remained hidden from an adult evaluation perspective. The involvement of children's perspectives in monitoring procedures by using, for example, the *Mosaic approach* offers further potential for the design of approaches and instruments for quality development of ECEC that so far have been addressed insufficiently.

To sum up, it has become apparent that the sustainability and effectiveness of a monitoring system highly depends on the methods and instruments chosen to **generate the data and information**, their conceptual design and the implicit or explicit **aim and purpose** of the method used (tension between development or control). A further determining factor are, moreover, the ways the **findings** are fed back to the different levels of the ECEC system – from pedagogical practice up to the national governance level. An effective and sustainable monitoring system should be designed to be participatory, democratic and transparent and ensure that the perspectives and needs of all those involved in ECEC are considered (cf. EU-Working Group 2014; Mussati 2011, Urban et al. 2012). This might increase the motivation to make use of the information and data generated and hence empower quality processes in a number of different ways.

11.3 Interesting aspects for quality development and assurance in Germany

Due to Germany's multi-level system, the federal structure and the shared areas of responsibility in the child care sector, the federal government is primarily in charge of the framework legislation at the national level. Within this scope, the Day Care Expansion Act (TAG), passed in 2005, determines who is primarily responsible for quality development and assurance in early childhood education and care. Within Section 22a (1) Social Security Code VIII, it is regulated that public youth welfare providers must establish ap-

propriate measures to assure and develop the quality of services at their settings. This includes the development and implementation of a pedagogical concept as a basis for fulfilling their mandate to foster children. Furthermore, the law obliges providers to make use of evaluation instruments and procedures within their settings.

Thus, the governance responsibility of public youth welfare providers is clearly addressed. According to Esch et al. (2006), this legal provision was the first to encourage the idea that quality development and assurance are a matter of public responsibility: "Quality is thus not only the responsibility of the individual organizations (neither the settings themselves nor the service providers) but is defined as a duty in the public interest" (cf. ibid., 15). The actual design and implementation of this duty is the responsibility of the local providers of public youth welfare services (SGB VIII Section 22a (5)). This also explains the remarkable regional differences with regard to the quality of settings. Moreover, this is reinforced by diverging methods and instruments for the evaluation of ECEC practice (cf. Esch et al. 2006; Diller et al. 2005, 161ff.).

However, current data such as these from the *Ländermonitor* (see Bertelsmann 2016) or *Bildungsbericht* (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016), refer to weak points within the ECEC system. For example, in some cases, there are extensive disparities between the individual German *'Länder'* with regard to structural preconditions for ECEC provision. The status quo differs in terms of central quality indicators, such as qualification of pedagogical staff, staff-child ratio or local regulations governing the evaluation of pedagogical work. It is important to note that this diversity in the status quo neither meets the goal of supplying high-quality ECEC services to all children nor appears to support long-term advancement of quality.

The German National Study on Early Childhood Education and Care (*NUBBEK*), a nationwide study on care and education within and outside of the family, found out that the overall quality in ECEC settings is just mediocre. Furthermore, stagnation can be observed in the further development of quality throughout German ECEC settings since the end of the 1990s (cf. Tietze et al. 2013). Given the various initiatives over the past 25 years that were aimed at providing new impetus for quality development and assurance procedures, this is even more surprising. In this context the National Quality Initiative (cf. Introduction and Schäfer/Eberhart in this volume) is a prominent example, that promoted the development of a broad variety of concepts and procedures within the field (cf. Diller et al. 2005; Esch et al. 2006). The 'National Criteria Catalogues' that were developed as one of the key results of the project were hoped to initiate a (more or less) unifying process of quality development and assurance at a national level.[182]

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182 The initiative consisted of five projects that relate to different aspects of: I + II Quality working with children aged 0 to 6 (pädQUIS), III Quality and the situational approach (QuaSi), IV Quali-

Nevertheless, the discrepancies between the German *'Länder'* and the sobering findings of the *NUBBEK* study indicate that the efforts of the responsible providers, but also those of the *'Länder'* themselves meet their limits. In turn, the need for action that furthers changes in the national governance of quality in ECEC becomes apparent (in the sense of governance; cf. Section 2). At this point, the international examples in this volume present interesting and compatible aspects for the development of governance approaches and strategies to develop and assure quality in early childhood education and care services in Germany.

Taking those examples into account, the following points can be identified as relevant for governance instruments and mechanisms that enhance sustainable quality development:

1. **Quality as a discourse-oriented concept and monitoring as impetus for an ongoing democratic and transparent process of quality development**

Quality development and assurance processes seem to be effective when quality is implemented as a discourse-oriented concept. This means that quality is created as a result of ongoing fair and cooperative negotiations between policy makers, administration, ECEC practitioners and the family about questions like what constitutes a 'good' ECEC setting, what characterises 'good' pedagogical practice and which conditions are necessary to support and assure quality (e.g. as part of a 'circular process', see Achten/Bodeving in this volume). Hence, quality can be understood as a product created from discourse, practice and the attitudes of all stakeholders involved (cf. Dahlberg et al. 2013). Such kind of "quality development in discourse" (cf. Schneider et al. 2015) does not go without conflicts and is not a linear process. The crucial point is that the question of what constitutes 'good' quality in ECEC needs to be (self-) critical reflected on again and again. Thus, the aim is to encourage the negotiation of a common understanding of quality and acknowledge this as an ongoing process that continues beyond the development, implementation, and execution of monitoring systems.

According to this approach quality is closely linked to different contexts and the involvement of various perspectives, which simultaneously creates the necessary scope for innovation and enhancement within the context of the individual setting. However, this scope must be secured by means of binding goals and effective framework conditions that support the actual quality development in the ECEC system as a whole. Hence, it seems to be crucial to have an agreement on how to understand and define preconditions and requirements of 'good' pedagogical practice in ECEC. Scientifically elaborated indicators and dimensions of quality (structure, process, and outcome) and their importance for quality assurance can be seen as a helpful starting point for that, without claiming them to be incontestable.

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ty for pupils in day care (QUAST), V Quality of provider (TQ) (cf. Preissing 2003; Strätz et al. 2003; Tietze/Viernickel 2002).

Considering the argumentation of the introduction of this volume, it appears to be enriching to rely on an understanding of quality that involves both, discursive and effectiveness/impact elements (cf. the authors' Introduction of this volume). Herewith, it becomes clear that quality is neither a highly arbitrary and value-free nor a fixed concept that can be standardised.

In turn, continuous quality evaluation and monitoring can contribute towards bringing transparency to processes of quality development and assurance at the different system levels and the various stakeholders involved in them. Furthermore, an effective and sustainable monitoring system feeds the collected information into the process and thus delivers valuable impetus. Prerequisite for this is the willingness to review and – if necessary – modify the existing monitoring system at regular intervals. It thus appears worthwhile to establish – at federal, state, municipal and service provider level – the basis for a quality monitoring system that considers and integrates the various policy levels and perspectives involved. Evaluation and monitoring then constitute a central component of an ongoing, democratic and transparent quality development and assurance process.

2. Binding national quality goals as a basis for common value orientation and action

There are mainly three preconditions that guide the aspect mentioned before: Firstly, the overall goals and targets of monitoring processes (keyword: concepts of control or development) should be clarified. Secondly, the subject of these processes (e.g., structural, process or outcome quality) needs to be defined, and thirdly, the instruments, procedures, and data should be aligned to the goals and targets of the various stakeholders involved. As examined in Section 11.2, such a national quality framework needs to move beyond defining goals and targets to be fulfilled by the ECEC settings. It also has to provide impetus for the development of quality and a common orientation for actions and their leading values that are shared by all of the stakeholders involved and thereby guide the initiated quality processes.

Hence, from an academic perspective, the definition of binding quality goals and targets at national or federal level seem to be an important foundation for quality development and assurance processes. They offer an orientation for all stakeholders involved in ECEC. As the country examples have indicated, this sort of framing does not conflict with the idea of promoting and preserving the diversity of *concepts* that feature service providers and their ECEC settings (cf. Urban et al. 2011, 46). The binding nature of these goals and targets ultimately depends on how firmly they are anchored in policymaking and administration. A high level of commitment is established when they are set forth in law, such as in the form of binding quality criteria or standards. The aim of this kind of statutory regulation is to create a consistency within the activity orientation (which is not the same as a standardisation of action in practice). Hence, it seems to be important that statutory regulations can form the cornerstone of systematic quality development and assurance. As the country report from Australia demonstrates, such national quality criteria or standards can also be implemented in federal states.

Within the professional discourse in Germany, the call for greater regula-

tions of quality processes by law is not new (for example, cf. Altgeld/Stöbe-Blossey 2009; Ratermann/Stöbe-Blossey 2012). Only recently a change in this discussion has been marked by the interim report "Early childhood education and care – its advancement and financial provision" ('*Frühe Bildung weiterentwickeln und finanziell sichern*') that was written by the representatives of the federal working party "Early Education" (*AG Frühe Bildung*)[183]. The report is already pointing in the direction outlined here, since federal and state (*Länder*) policy representatives and representatives of municipal umbrella organizations have agreed upon common goals and perspectives on future development to further quality in ECEC (cf. BMFSFJ Pressemitteilung 2016). This is the first time that such kind of understanding has been reached concerning federally applicable goals of action, their relevant content and the financing necessary to achieve the planned quality improvements.

In autumn 2016, the report was integrated into policy negotiations between the responsible state ministries, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the Federal Ministry for Finance (BMF). In this context, a declaration was made about a greater financial support by the federal state concerning quality improvements in future. Furthermore, the working party 'Early Education' was required to elaborate a proposal for the further design and conduct of quality development processes, their legal anchoring as well as the financial coverage until spring 2017. One of the next steps will be to develop a joint strategy for all responsible stakeholders concerning implementation and financing of the agreed quality goals and their monitoring. Hence, it is assumed that this new policy initiative will contribute to develop and assure quality in the ECEC field within the next few years.

3. The development of suitable evaluation and monitoring instruments

The contributions from Australia, Flanders (Belgium) as well as Denmark underline the importance of the development or rather suitability of instruments for the whole process of quality development and assurance. The development of appropriate, practicable instruments is a great challenge, since they need to respond to the different actors involved in the ECEC field (e.g. ECEC staff or external evaluator/inspector), the specifics of the context of action and at the same time generate meaningful data. Within the synopsis of the contributions, it becomes apparent, that there cannot be

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183 In 2014, the German Minister of Family Affairs, Manuela Schwesig, joined with the state representatives of the Youth and Family Affairs Ministers' Conference to sign an agreement concerning a binding political process to improve the quality and financing of Germany's ECEC system (cf. BMFSFJ/JFMK 2014). In its wake, a working party led by two German states and the Ministry was set up to develop goals and targets for this process that would be implemented by all German states. Stakeholders from provider associations, trade unions, and experts from research and practice were also involved by a so-called "expert dialogue". In November 2016 the interim report was presented to the public, and thus became part of political debate (cf. BMFSFJ *Pressemitteilung* 15.11.2016).

just *one* instrument that fulfills all the different demands and objectives of developing and ensuring quality. Rather a distinction needs to be made about the intention of the instrument (internal or external evaluation, monitoring) and about the overall purpose of the generated data.

If an instrument should support the self-evaluation of ECEC staff and with this the reflection of the existing strengths and weaknesses, an instrument like SiCs (*process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings*) can be helpful (cf. Laevers in this volume). When the learning and development processes of the child are the main objective of the evaluation, the pedagogical documentation might be a useful instrument (cf. Sheridan in this volume). To gain insights into the child's daily experiences within the ECEC setting as well as his or her perceptions of the routines and projects offered, etc. the *mosaic approach* is an interesting instrument (cf. Schwartz in this volume). Standardised instruments, like ECERS or the Dutch supervision frameworks presented in this volume, are primarily interesting for external evaluations or inspections (cf. Jacobs in this volume).

Each of the mentioned examples covers a specific area of quality development and assurance and, thereby, offers an instrument that supports and furthers quality processes within the ECEC field. However, applying solely one instrument would not meet the challenge to assess the complexity and multidimensionality of quality in ECEC (cf. the authors' Introduction of this volume). According to this insight, it seems necessary to combine different methods and approaches in a reasonable way, so that it is possible to draw a holistic picture of the overall context. As outlined in the contribution of Schäfer/Eberhart, in Germany there also exist some promising instruments for developing and assuring quality. Nonetheless, a nationwide and systematic bundling of the data and information gained from the different levels of the ECEC system does not exist so far. At this point, contributions like the one from Ferre Laevers offer some interesting conceptional ideas. Hence, competent monitoring systems are not characterised by generating a broad range of data, but by systematically analysing the information gained, interrelating the findings and by reflecting this information back to the specific action context of each stakeholder.

4. Monitoring systems and participation

The contributions from the various countries show that a broadly based procedure of involvement, particularly in the phase of developing monitoring instruments and establishing procedures, can create and maintain a wide acceptance and willingness to participate in a quality development process. Furthermore, it has repeatedly been shown that rather than setting up one ultimate goal it seems to be reasonable to develop a range of instruments and procedures that provide a range of goals with the information needed. As a result, a multi-perspective approach can be pursued, that incorporates and strengthens the perspectives of children, ECEC professionals and of parents (cf. Ceglowski/Bacigalupa 2002; Musatti 2012). The articles from Denmark and Flanders have shown that approaches that value, e.g. the child's perspective, can represent a source of empowerment for children, and at the same time offer interesting insights for the staff and inspire their self-reflection.

The data that is generated provide a basis for an ongoing dialogue and ex-

change between the responsible stakeholders in the ECEC system. Looking at the German context, it seems worthwhile to discuss the design of the current federal quality process as an approach that is designed as a conceptual framework for the ECEC system, where a monitoring system at the federal level acts as a link in the multi-level system (e.g. in the form of the Slovenian approach to quality assessment, QAA; see Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume). In order to foster the participation of the different stakeholder groups (federal, state, municipal, service providers, staff, parents etc.) on the one hand and the sustainability of quality processes on the other, regular meetings between representatives of the various stakeholder groups offer the arena for a theme-based and focused exchange, and thus feed into a continuing discourse on quality development and assurance. The aim of a national monitoring system must be to keep an overview of data and information generated, their complex interrelationships and the connection between the individual data strands (cf. Arbeitsgruppe für Frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung der Europäischen Kommission 2014, 13). For Germany, the implementation of a federal monitoring system can help to establish a greater obligation to existing instruments and procedures, while at the same time the diversity of existing quality assurance concepts within the ECEC system can be maintained.

5. Framing monitoring systems and the establishment of infrastructures

With regard to the development and implementation of monitoring systems and their long-term existence, the factor 'time' plays a crucial role. It takes time to gain consensus between all stakeholders involved with respect to the approaches pursued, the concepts and procedures chosen for the execution of monitoring (e.g. internal evaluation) and the visibility of initial results and their connection to pedagogical practice. In addition, a stable infrastructure is needed to provide long-term support for these processes. Three aspects seem to be of particular importance:

- In all the ECEC systems described here, national quality agreements or goals are generally backed up by an appropriate infrastructure comprising institutions with expertise in the performance of monitoring and external evaluation (e.g. inspectorates). Furthermore, they have the purpose to distribute information, e.g. about new guidelines and regulations. Moreover, these institutions often process the results of monitoring procedures and publish them (e.g. ACECQA, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority). Thus, there is an institution which serves as a central hub for expertise and the dissemination of information. Even in a country with decentralised organisation, such as Sweden, where municipalities and service providers have a high degree of autonomy, the national inspectorate fulfills a key function that links the various quality developments and assurance processes and evaluates the general level of quality within the settings. A national 'contact' or information center could be promising for Germany's ECEC system, particularly given the federal structure and resulting diversity within this system. The coordination body could take over responsibility for organising the necessary par-

ticipatory procedures and professional discourse. However, this body should not be viewed as a way of withdrawing responsibility from the individual German states (*Länder*). Instead, it should support the advancement of quality within the system by supporting the communication and exchange between the different system levels and their stakeholders. Hence, this body can serve as a platform for coordination and communication and for fostering and guiding quality development and assurance processes within the system.

- Given the complex demands imposed by a monitoring system upon the various stakeholders, particularly those in professional practice, the different countries indicate the need to support and accompany both the implementation phase and the execution of quality monitoring. In the phase of implementing monitoring systems, it is up to the professionals to transfer an understanding of quality into pedagogical practice. For this phase, it is not just the factor of time that is crucial – as shown in the example from Australia – but also the adequate provision of continuing training programs and consultant services. The performance of internal and external evaluations also benefits from supporting measures (e.g. in the form of *expert cores*, cf. Požar Matijašič/Lunder Verlič in this volume, or *coaches*, cf. van Nieuwenhuyzen in this volume). Since Germany has a well established infrastructure of specialist consulting and consultation ECEC services, one further possibility would be to expand and advance this infrastructure for the purpose of quality improvements.

- Last but not least, solid structural framework conditions are a key precondition for conducting sustainable quality development and assurance concepts. Structural aspects such as staff-child ratio, the size and composition of groups and the qualification standards of the pedagogical professionals enable and foster high-quality in ECEC practice. They provide a strong foundation for the implementation and development of approaches, procedures and instruments that foster and support the development of quality in ECEC. Both national and international studies suggest that in many places the current structural framework of ECEC services leaves much, or even very much, scope for improvement (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016; Bock-Famulla et al. 2015; European Commission et al. 2014; Viernickel et al. 2015).

The country examples presented in this volume and their analysis from an educational governance perspective indicate a range of aspects that are of interest to the current debate on developing and assuring quality in the German ECEC system. Thus, the international comparison of monitoring systems, the chosen approaches and methods applied as well as the experiences of other countries offer the opportunity to identify relevant points of reference. They can generate important impulses for the national debate on how to achieve and sustainably ensure a competent, high quality ECEC system.

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