

SPECIAL EDITION

IS THERE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO HANDLE CHILDREN UNDER THREE IN ECEC?

Children under three in Early Childhood Education and Care: Introduction to a special edition

Jan-Erik Johansson Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Oslo, Norway

E-mail: jan-erik.johansson@hioa.no

Prepublished 26 October 2013, Published 29 October 2013.

Children under the age of three are joining Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) like never before in many countries. This means that we need to address questions about knowledge available on young children's life in ECEC, and how to create good practice in ECEC institutions. In comparison with other educational fields, there is relatively little research on children under three in ECEC. There are also new perspectives developing, where the child already from birth is perceived as an interacting and active participant. On one hand there is a strong need for more research in this field, but on the other hand, we must not forget that there is knowledge available already, as in the report Carmen Dalli and her colleagues¹ presented in 2011.

That is why in December 2011 a one day international seminar "*Children under three in Early Childhood Education and Care: Nordic and international perspectives*" was organized

1. Dalli, C., White, E. J., Rockel, J., Buchanan, E., Davidson, S., Ganly, S., Krus, L., & Wang, B. (2011). *Quality early childhood education for under-two-year-olds: What should it look like? A literature review*. New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

at the *Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences*². It was also a meeting for a European group of scholars who have met biannually to exchange experience about ECEC and children under three.

The idea was to give a glimpse into research in the field, and seven of the thirteen contributions from the seminar are now presented in this special edition. The contributions are presented in the same order as in the conference. A key to all presentations is the importance of good quality interaction between adult and children - and not surprising, that the quality of the services provided varies substantially. Relational perspectives that points to the fundamental importance of child-adult relationship are not new, but the strong theoretical and empirical research that has developed the last 50 years, is a recent fact that still not have been a part of common sense

2. The seminar was in cooperation with *Norwegian Social Research*, NOVA, Oslo, and ESFR, *European Society on Family Relations*, as a part of two research projects funded by the *Research Council of Norway*: "ECEC as an Arena for Educational Research", and "ECEC as a Part of the Chain of Care for Children under Three".

and common practice in families, among staff and in policies and ECEC settings.

Colwyn Trevarthen, emeritus prof., University of Edinburgh, Scotland presented "*What young children know about living and learning with companions*". There has been an important shift from an outsiders view on young children into the insight that the young child is active and in interaction already from birth. In the last 50 years crucial information from naturalistic infancy research has made evident the original vitality of human imaginative intention from within the body, its eagerness to use the world as other persons do, with their feelings, and especially the young child's inventive story-sharing without words. It becomes obvious that these inborn talents motivate cultural learning, and that they are active in every culture.

Maritta Hännikäinen, prof., University of Jyväskylä, and Niina Rutanen, post doc scholar, University of Tampere, Finland presented "*Important themes in research on and education of young children in day care centres: Finnish viewpoints*". First the results of a small-scale survey to key Finnish researchers in the ECEC field is presented. The survey is also an introduction of two on-going qualitative case studies of everyday life of toddlers in Finnish day care centres. In line with the survey findings, these case studies emphasize the importance of the relational, social nature of children; the importance of an educational community and of the sensitivity of the adult for children's wellbeing in day care groups.

Anne Greve, ass. prof., Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Oslo, Norway. "*Play for learning and learning for play: Children's play in a toddler group*". There is a concern that children's right to play is restricted as a result of the Norwegian governments' focus on school preparation. Play and learning are rights embodied in the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. This article discusses how play and learning are organized in everyday life in a Norwegian toddler group. Some claim that there is not enough structure and that there should be more teaching and assessment in order to facilitate early intervention in Norwegian kindergartens. This article suggests the problem rather is lack of teachers with adequate education and too large child groups.

Florence Pirard, maître de conf., Department of Education and Training, Université de Liège,

Belgium. "*Constructing practice on evolutionary knowledge in ECEC*". This article discusses the importance of knowledge in ECEC and also the role of knowledge dissemination. Starting in the question of giving more freedom to children's movement, this topic is used in a Belgian curriculum. It is important to consider practice not as an application of theory, but as a co-construction in a complex process that combines with other resources in a context. It discusses the importance of going further than the mere production of knowledge in order to create appropriate practice in ECE.

Konstantinos Petrogiannos, prof., School of Humanities, Hellenic Open University, Greece. "*Early childhood education and care in Greece: In search of an identity*". Despite considerable improvements in ECEC during the last two decades in Greece, the availability of services especially for children under 3 years of age, continues to be limited compared to other European countries. There is a set of issues linked to the current situation of ECEC in Greece such as a number of socio-cultural elements that outline the connection between family structure and childcare coverage; the types of ECEC arrangements and participation rates; and the issue of quality and the major problems linked with this. Finally, findings from research are presented, including the link between quality and developmental outcomes.

Ellen Os, PhD scholar, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Oslo, Norway- "*Opportunities knock: Peer-relations during meal-time in toddler groups*". In socio-cultural perspectives, adults are seen as mediators of cultural beliefs and practices. A study of ECEC settings shows that meal-time represents opportunities for teachers to facilitate togetherness between toddlers. The teachers may facilitate sharing, passing food, routine practices such as singing, and conversations. The results indicate variations between child- and group-oriented approaches, and accomplishing meals in an effective way. The child- and group-oriented approaches are marked by encouragement of toddlers' initiatives and teachers supporting peer-interactions. Raising teachers' consciousness about their contributions to children's peer-relations seems to contribute to better practice.

Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, prof., Sonja Sheridan, prof., and Michael Hansen, lecturer, Gothenburg University, Sweden. "*Young children's experiences of aesthetics in preschool*".

This article investigates young children's experience of aesthetic activities in preschool. The result is based on preschool teachers' mapping of what toddlers are offered or take initiatives to, in the field of aesthetics. Data on the quality of the participating preschools based on the EC-ERS scale are also used and linked to children's aesthetics experiences. The result shows that there is a large variation between the amount and kind of aesthetic activities in preschool that young children can participate in.

At last I present the titles of the presentations from the seminar which are not published:

Carmen Dalli, prof., University of Wellington, Victoria, New Zealand: *"Love, care and professionalism: Why we must engage emotionally when we teach under-three year olds"*.

Sylvie Rayna, maître de conf., Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, Université Paris 13, France:

"Welcoming the under 3's and their families: Participative experiences"

Marjatta Kallialla, lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland: *"Look at me! Does the adult truly see and respond to the toddler in Finnish day-care centres"*

Lars Gulbrandsen, prof., NOVA, Oslo, Norway: *"New demands on teacher education to work with children under three in ECEC"*.

Anette Emilson, ass. prof., Linnæus University, Sweden and Eva Johansson, prof., Stavanger University, Norway: *"Resistance and conflict: Educational challenges and inspirations in working with young children in preschool"*.

Tullia Musatti, research director, National Research Council, Rome, Italy: *"Toddlers' cognitive and social experience in ECE centre"*.

Ole Henrik Hansen, research ass., Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark: *"The small child's need for caring and educational environment: A challenge for the preschool teacher"*.

Many thanks to all presenters and contributors!

Oslo 29 October 2013
Jan-Erik Johansson