

Exploring professionals' perceptions of a districtwide implementation of a CLASS-related intervention in the Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care System

by

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Summary

Given that 98% of Norwegian children attend early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres (Statistics Norway, 2023), ECEC quality influences children's development considerably (Burchinal et al., 2008a; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Considering the large number of children attending Norwegian ECEC centres, it constitutes a unique arena in which interventions may be implemented from a public health perspective (Holte, 2016). Recognising that interaction quality is a key factor in children's development, it is essential to focus on measuring and strengthening interaction quality in ECEC. Research in this field seeks sustainable structures to measure interaction quality and further develop ECEC staff's interaction competence to give children a health-promoting start in life.

The first years of life are a period of tremendous development. Research conducted over several decades has increased our awareness of how crucial children's early experiences are for their well-being and further emotional, cognitive and social development and learning (Siegel, 2020). The unique architecture of each child's brain architecture develops during the first years of their life (Shonkoff, 2013), and interaction quality is a key ingredient in children's well-being and development (Siegel, 2020).

Despite an expanding body of literature demonstrating that interaction quality influences young children's development, little is known about how educational professionals experience using tools for measuring interaction quality for professional development. In addition, little is also known about management teams' experiences of implementing districtwide interventions whose main aim is to evaluate and provide feedback on interaction quality between staff and children.

This dissertation's main goal was to better understand the educational professional's experiences using a Classroom Assessment Scoring

System intervention (CLASS: Toddler and Pre-K) in Norwegian ECEC. This dissertation includes three studies. *Study I* provides insight into Norwegian educational professionals' perceptions of and reflections on the use of the CLASS instrument as a structure for professional development. *Study II* explores educational professionals' perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges associated with using CLASS in the Norwegian social pedagogical tradition. These findings, taken in tandem with existing developmental theories, suggest that a new hybrid perspective on pedagogical traditions is required to expand the field theoretically. Finally, *Study III* constitutes a follow-up study of *Studies I* and *II* and examines district managers' experiences of leading the implementation of a CLASS-related intervention.

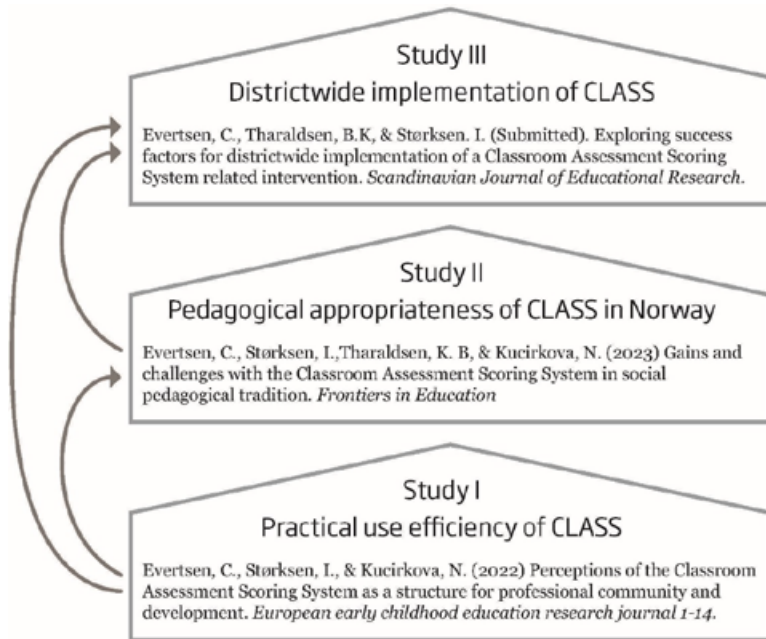


Figure 1 The dissertation studies' processes

Study I

This study explores Norwegian educational professionals' perceptions of and reflections on their use of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K and Toddler for professional development. Focus group interviews (n = 22), group interviews (n = 4) and in-depth interviews (n = 3) were conducted online, and conventional content analysis was performed using NVivo 12 software. The professionals reported that CLASS contributed to positive structures for professional community and development within which both individual and collective learning occurred. The content analysis yielded four main categories: *A shared professional platform*, *Professionalisation*, *Quality in practice* and *Outcomes for children and parents*. The professionals express that CLASS structure improved communication and collaboration between the early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres and support systems. Overall, the findings contribute new knowledge regarding educational professionals' experiences of CLASS as a tool for professional development, sense of community, improved collaboration and more thoughtful classroom practice.

Study II

This second study explores educational professionals' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with using CLASS within the social pedagogical tradition in Norwegian ECEC. Focus group interviews (n = 22), group interviews (n = 4) and in-depth interviews (n = 3) were conducted online, followed by conventional content analysis. ECEC professionals perceived CLASS as contributing to their pedagogical understanding and practice. At the same time, the introduction of CLASS prompted them to reflect on the pedagogical value of *the social pedagogical tradition*, which they wished to preserve and protect, and the specific elements of the *school readiness tradition* that they wished to include in their pedagogical understanding of high-quality pedagogy.

The findings, along with existing development theories, suggest that a new hybrid perspective on pedagogical traditions is required to theoretically expand the field.

Study III

Study III, which represents a follow-up study to Studies I and II, explores district managers' experiences with success factors for districtwide implementation of a CLASS-related intervention. The findings from the first two studies sparked our interest in exploring how the district's management team has planned and led the implementation of the CLASS-related intervention, with a particular focus on perceived success criteria. This qualitative study explored the district management group's (DMG) experiences of planning and implementing the intervention and the various processes applied to ensure the intervention's success. Six intervention managers from a single district participated in the study ($n = 6$), and conventional content analysis was performed using NVivo 12 software. The analyses resulted in four main categories: 1) Foundation; 2) The DMG; 3) District-specific adoption of the intervention, and 4) Stimulating a collective move. The results indicate that successful districtwide implementation requires careful preparation, planning, organisation, guidance and attention to detail at the system, centre and individual levels.

List of Studies

Study I

Evertsen, C., Størksen, I., & Kucirkova, N. (2022). Professionals' Perceptions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System as a structure for professional community and development. *European early childhood education research journal*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2031245>

Study II

Evertsen, C., Størksen, I., Tharaldsen, K. B., & Kucirkova, N. (2023). Gains and challenges with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in a social pedagogical tradition [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.965174>

Study III

Evertsen, C., Tharaldsen, B.K., & Størksen, I. (Submitted). Exploring success factors for districtwide implementation of a Classroom Assessment Scoring System related intervention. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.

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1 Introduction

The early years of life represent a time during which the foundation for future learning and development is established, a valuable time during which development-promoting environments should be facilitated as a priority (Blair & Raver, 2012; Meaney, 2010; Shonkoff, 2013). In recent decades, researchers have unanimously agreed that high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is important for children's development opportunities and well-being, from both a present- and future-oriented perspective (Evertsen et al., 2023; Pluess & Belsky, 2010; Tuastad et al., 2019).

ECEC employees' interaction competence lies at the core of the concept of quality. Interaction competence must embrace any opportunities for development that the employee gives to the child. Through interactions, employees stimulate children's socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Given the fundamental importance of high-quality interaction for children's well-being and development, it is unsurprising that researchers and managers in the ECEC field are seeking qualified assessment tools for interaction quality. The validated assessments currently used to determine interaction quality are often developed in US or UK contexts. CLASS is one of the most widely used and recognised measurement instruments for interaction quality. Among the various assessment tools used to enhance quality, CLASS offers the most accurate prediction of children's outcomes (Sabol et al., 2013). At the same time, several researchers have noted that European countries may

experience challenges when using assessment tools developed in the USA and UK (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2020; Ishimine & Tayler, 2014), given that the education systems are structured differently and values and priorities vary between countries (Alvestad et al., 2009). While only a small number of studies have explored the application of CLASS in different cultural contexts, the results indicate that cultural challenges may arise (Barnes-Najor et al., 2021; Pastori & Pagani, 2017). In addition to addressing cultural challenges, it is also vitally important to ask whether assessment tools developed in the context of one educational system can contribute something valuable in other educational systems and contexts. Therefore, in this thesis, the main goal was to explore educational professionals' perceptions of CLASS in Norwegian ECEC.

1.1 Norwegian early childhood education and care system

All children in Norway have the right to attend ECEC from the age of one (The Kindergarten Act - Section 12 a). The state partially subsidises Norway's ECEC, and ECEC attendees from low-income families are fully subsidised. This universal ECEC system allows everyone to participate in ECEC, irrespective of their socio-economic status, and the statutory right to ECEC attendance and the universal subsidised system has allowed most Norwegian children aged between one and five years to attend ECEC. At the time of writing, in 2023, 93% of children aged 1–5 is attending ECEC daily. In terms of age-based subgroups, 88% of Norwegian children aged 1–2 attend ECEC, and as many as 97% of children aged 3–5 attend ECEC (Statistics Norway, 2023).

The Norwegian ECEC system is framed by the Norwegian framework plan (FWP) (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), which is dominated by essential principles stemming from the social pedagogic tradition. Children's needs for care and security are the core values in educational work. At the same time, the Norwegian FWP lays down guidelines for relationship quality to be the employees' primary tool to create security, to facilitate learning on the socio-emotional, social and cognitive

levels. The FWP emphasises centre leaders' responsibility to work systematically to improve ECEC quality.

1.2 Research on Norwegian ECEC quality

Although Norwegian ECEC centres are often considered to be among the best in the world, research has highlighted uneven ECEC quality in Norway (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2020; Bjørnstad et al., 2020; Rege et al., 2018). Areas such as 'standards for play materials' (Bjørnstad & Os, 2018), caregivers' basic interaction skills (Bjørnstad et al., 2020) and teachers' sensitivity to children's participation in learning settings—particularly with respect to allowing the children to talk (Ree & Emilson, 2019)—are surprisingly less consistent than expected. Another concern in Norwegian ECEC is that children typically spend 60% of the time engaged in free play, with the teacher absent for 45.5% of the time (Karlsen & Lekhal, 2019). This highlights the need for productive and culturally appropriate approaches to evaluating interaction quality in Norwegian ECEC as well as the more pressing need to acquire knowledge about suitable structures to create learning communities that motivate staff to further develop their skills in interacting with children with the aim of promoting high-quality ECEC. CLASS may serve as a useful assessment tool in this context. Recent Norwegian studies have shown that CLASS, as a framework for staff guidance, provides opportunities for staff to develop their

relational skills in ECEC (Buøen et al., 2021). Furthermore, interaction assessment tools that include professional development opportunities for employees can foster motivation among ECEC staff (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2023).

1.3 Why is Norway a suitable context for research on CLASS?

CLASS is a validated and widely applied observational tool that is used worldwide and has been studied in many countries (Allen et al., 2013; Hamre et al., 2014; Hamre et al., 2013; Mashburn et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2002). While CLASS provides the most comprehensive prediction of children's outcomes (Sabol et al., 2013), whether it aligns with Norwegian ECEC culture remains to be determined. As mentioned, several researchers have pointed out that European countries may encounter challenges when implementing assessment tools developed in US and UK contexts (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2020; Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Several studies have explored CLASS in different cultural contexts and the results indicate that cultural challenges may indeed arise (Barnes-Najor et al., 2021; Pastori & Pagani, 2017).

Despite the focus on cultural differences, Norwegian districts have adopted CLASS as a tool to evaluate the quality of interaction and hence use the observations as a starting point from which to create a professional learning community. Managers thus search for instruments that can help them to develop

interaction quality in ECEC, and the FWP requires managers to create learning organisations whose responsibility is to work systematically to further enhance ECEC quality. Traditionally, observational tools are generally not extensively used in Norway ECEC. The research reported herein was conducted in the first Norwegian municipality to have implemented CLASS for all ECEC centres and their support services.

Discussions regarding the use of CLASS outside the US typically take place among researchers and academics, while education professionals' experiences with new assessment tools are rarely explored, despite the fact that their professional experiences are valuable and should be highlighted in the knowledge base on the use of CLASS outside the USA. In this thesis, therefore, I wished to explore their experiences and professional reflections on using CLASS in Norway in addition to understanding what district managers consider to be the key criteria for success when implementing such an ECEC intervention.

2 Theoretical and empirical framework

Educational science is an interdisciplinary field, as various academic disciplines, such as pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy and history, collaborate to shed light on children's development and needs. Interaction quality in ECEC is often studied within a developmental psychology and systems theoretical framework, which has its origins in understanding children's needs for emotional caregiving and support to ensure their healthy development. This knowledge forms the basis for studies on interaction quality in the field of education. The work reported in this dissertation is grounded in relational developmental systems (RDS) theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Overton, 2015) and socio-cultural developmental theory (Bruner, 1984; Vygotsky, 1980), which provide a framework for the integration of the biological, behavioural and environmental aspects of human development.

2.1 Socio-cultural developmental theory

Vygotsky's socio-cultural development theory provides another perspective for the dynamic understanding of an individual's development in a mutual interaction with the person's context (Vygotsky, 1980). This theoretical perspective suggests that people develop through interaction with their surrounding environments, in dialogue with one another and using socio-cultural tools that mediate these interactions (Vygotsky, 2001). The socio-cultural perspective regards learning and development as processes that take place using

language and through participation in social practices (Säljö, 2001). The proximal development zone, which is central to this theory, is understood as the area between what a person can manage independently and what the individual cannot manage, even with help. As such, it encompasses everything that an individual can manage with scaffolding from others (Bruner, 1984). Throughout this thesis, the socio-cultural learning theory will serve as the basis for the understanding of a multi-level scaffolding process for development.

2.2 Relational Developmental System theory

Research into children's development is often guided by the RDS (Overton, 2015). This paradigm recognises that children's development is dependent on bidirectional and multi-level interactions between multiple factors at each level of development (Bornstein & Leventhal, 2015). This theoretical understanding focuses on the factors that actively shape individual development as dynamic and continuous bidirectional collaborations across several levels of influence (e.g., epigenesis, behaviour and development) and continue to shape the child's development (Overton, 2015). RDS understands all human developmental as a bidirectional and dynamic process of individual–context relationships that are all mutually regulated. The child and its environment are inextricably linked, and the contributions from both the environment and the child are essential to understanding its development (Bornstein & Leventhal, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sameroff, 2009). RDS provides the basis for the understanding of the child's human need

for high-quality interactions with adults to ensure healthy individual development.

The bioecological model of development is among the frameworks that are found within the RDS paradigm. It contains four principles: processes, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The model understands development as a proximal process that consists of interactions between the person and their surrounding context. The environment is hierarchically organised and composed of interlinked systems—a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem—with the understanding that humans surround themselves with various systems that interfere with each other. The different systems stand in relation to and mutually influence one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

2.3 Child development in a Neuropsychological perspective

In recent decades, research on infants and young children has provided a fuller understanding of how early experiences impact brain development and future mental and physical health (Schore, 2005; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Children are particularly easily affected during the first years of life (Bowlby, 2018). Brains form over time (Siegel, 2020), and the brain's basic architecture is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. During the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections form every second (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child., 2007).

Following this period of rapid proliferation, connections are reduced through pruning, which allows brain circuits to become more efficient (Hart, 2011). While the early years are the most active period for the establishment of neural connections, new connections may continue to form throughout an individual's lifetime. Because this dynamic process never stops, it is impossible to determine what percentage of brain development has occurred by a certain age. More importantly, the connections that form early on provide a strong or weak foundation for later relationships and development depending on the quality of early interactions (Shonkoff et al., 2012; Siegel, 2020).

2.4 Epigenetic

Epigenetics highlights the complex mutual interaction between a child's genes and their environment. New research has demonstrated that environmental influences can affect whether and how genes are expressed. For example, scientists have discovered that early experiences can determine how genes are 'turned on and off' and whether some genes are expressed while others are not (Meaney, 2010). During development, the DNA that constitutes our genes accumulates chemical markers that determine how much or little the genes are expressed. This collection of chemical markers is known as the epigenome (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child., 2010).

Although genes provide the blueprint for the formation of brain circuits, these circuits are reinforced by repeated use. A significant ingredient in this developmental process is safe and nurturing interactions between

children and their parents and other caregivers in the family or community (in this case, ECEC employees) (Meaney, 2010). The brain does not develop optimally without caregivers who provide reliable and appropriate responses (Shonkoff et al., 2012; Siegel, 2020), which may lead to disparities in learning and behaviour. Ultimately, genes and experiences work in concert to construct brain architecture (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child., 2010).

The epigenome may be affected by positive experiences, such as safe and responsive relationships and opportunities for learning, or negative influences, such as environmental toxins or stressful life circumstances, which leave a unique epigenetic ‘signature’ on the genes (Meaney, 2010). These signatures may be temporary or permanent, and both types affect how easily the genes may be switched on or off. The optimal approach to supporting children, therefore, is to foster safe and responsive relationships and reduce stress to build healthy brains from the beginning, helping children to grow up to be healthy, productive members of society (Meaney, 2010; Shonkoff, 2013).

2.5 ECEC quality

ECEC facilitate a unique setting in which healthy early childhood development may be fostered among large swathes of the rising generation. In acknowledging the importance of the earlier years of life and the need to promote nurturing interactions with others to support healthy brain development (Child., 2007, 2010), ECEC centres can ensure that all children have the opportunity to enter into development-

promoting relationships and interactions and even out social differences (Burchinal et al., 2008b; Solheim, 2013; Zachrisson & Dearing, 2015). High-quality interaction in ECEC settings can contribute to children's well-being, learning and mental health, which, in turn, can prevent future mental health challenges in the long run and even out social differences from a public health perspective (Holte, 2016).

Evidence increasingly suggests that high-quality ECEC promotes children's health and development, both physically and mentally (Belsky et al., 2009; Burchinal, Kainz, & Cai, 2011). High-quality ECEC matters for all children (Engvik et al., 2014; Melhuish, 2011) and can have substantial impacts on children's early learning (Yoshikawa et al., 2013), and short (Rege et al., 2021) and long-term outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy (Melhuish, 2011). Moreover, high-quality interaction and care in ECEC settings is particularly crucial for children at risk (Brandlistuen et al., 2015; Burchinal et al., 2011; Solheim, 2013; Zachrisson & Dearing, 2015).

2.5.1 Concepts of relations and ECEC quality

The understanding of quality in ECEC is largely based on developmental psychology, educational theories and child development research. Interaction quality is often considered to be the main ingredient in the concept of quality (Hamre et al., 2013; Slot et al., 2015; Sylva et al., 2006). The terms 'relations' and 'interactions' are closely related. Interactions constitute all meeting points (sequences of interaction) between two individuals (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005a). Interactions

vary in length and often consist of a combination of verbal and physical communication. These interactions may be understood as the building blocks of relations. Relations develop based on the quality of interactions (Wubbels et al., 2014), in this context between children and adults.

The most commonly used approach to defining ECEC quality is to divide the concept into two variables: structural quality and process quality (Pianta et al., 2010; Pianta, La Paro, et al., 2008; Slot et al., 2015). Process quality refers to the child's day-to-day experiences in the ECEC setting (Slot et al., 2015) and constitutes aspects of children's interactions with their teachers and peers (Hamre et al., 2013; Slot et al., 2015). Process quality concerns all interactions in which the child participates in ECEC contexts (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005b) and is considered to be the proximal determinant of child development (Pianta et al., 2003). The variable structural quality includes structural characteristics such as children's group size, children-to-teacher ratio and teachers' qualifications (Slot et al., 2015) and physical and organisational environment and the various resources at ECEC centres' disposal (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Process quality in ECEC has a tremendous significance for children's outcomes (Sabol et al., 2013) and has been proven as the main ingredient in ECEC quality (interaction quality) in the form of safe, sensitive and stimulating child-adult relationships (Pianta et al., 2003). In all studies of this thesis, interaction quality is defined in accordance with Wubbels et al. (2014) description of relations and interactions and Slot et al. (2015) understanding of process quality.

2.6 Measuring interaction quality in ECEC

Several tools are currently available to assess quality in ECEC. The purpose of evidence-based assessment-tools is to verify ECEC quality while simultaneously identifying each ECEC centre's strengths and limitations for further development. In the USA, assessment tools that combine systematic observations with employees' professional development are referred to as Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) (Sabol et al., 2013). The aim is to both observe and provide feedback or professional development to foster learning among ECEC teachers.

The Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), Caregiver Interaction Profile (CIP) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Toddler have been used to evaluate interaction quality in Norwegian ECEC (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2023; Bjørnstad et al., 2020; Bjørnstad & Os, 2018; Buøen et al., 2021; Drugli & Berg-Nielsen, 2019). Norwegian research has investigated the associations between interaction quality and child development and has found surprisingly low or absent associations (Eliassen et al., 2018; Løkken et al., 2018). One reason for this may be the cultural context in which these studies have been conducted (Norway), which differs from the assessments' original context (i.e., the US). Studies from other countries have shown that classroom quality, as assessed by CLASS, is linked to various academic, social and behavioural outcomes during children's early years as well as for children finishing preschool and in first grade (Hamre, 2014; Howes et

al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2006; Sabol et al., 2013). A recent study found that high interaction quality scores measured using CLASS Toddler correlated with the development of children's self-regulation skills (Salminen et al., 2021).

CLASS) has been tested to a considerable extent internationally (Allen et al., 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004) and to a limited extent in Norway (Buøen et al., 2021; Drugli & Berg-Nielsen, 2019; Lekhal et al., 2020). CLASS focuses on adults' competence and ability to create developmentally stimulating environments for all children in the ECEC. CLASS does not focus on students' individual skills or development levels but rather measures the quality of the context that is created around the children attending the ECEC centre. Research interest in Norwegian ECECs' use of CLASS as an assessment tool for ECEC practitioners' professional development has increased, and lately we have seen some new studies (Buøen et al., 2021; Evertsen et al., 2022; Evertsen et al., 2023). CLASS is a standardised observation system focused on analysing teacher-child interactions (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman 2004; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The CLASS system is based on the theoretical framework of Teaching Through Interactions (TTI). TTI is anchored in systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where human *interaction* is the most important component for children's development and growth (Hamre et al., 2014; Hamre & Pianta, 2007).

Given that its scores are linked to various academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes, the growing popularity of CLASS is

unsurprising. However, this instrument was developed in a context characterised as a school readiness tradition, which contrasts with the social pedagogical tradition seen in most Nordic countries (OECD, 2006). Over the last few decades, several quality assessments for ECEC have been developed internationally, most in the US context. The international application of CLASS may thus be problematic, as these measures were normed against US populations in a school readiness tradition (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Quality assessments, therefore, do not automatically translate to other contexts, such as the Norwegian or Nordic understanding of high-quality ECEC (Bjørnstad et al., 2020). European countries may encounter challenges in attempting to implement ECEC quality assessments unless appropriate adjustments are made to ensure their suitability in different contexts (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Few qualitative studies have examined employees' experiences of CLASS and cultural differences in ECEC, with the exception of a couple of studies (from Italy and the US) showing that cultural misalignments may occur (Barnes-Najor et al., 2021; Pastori & Pagani, 2017). Norwegian ECEC must consider international research critically, given that education systems are structured differently and concepts, values and priorities may differ across contexts (Alvestad et al., 2009).

2.7 Pedagogical ECEC traditions

ECEC pedagogy has been divided into two main traditions: school readiness tradition (SRT) and social pedagogical tradition (SPT). These traditions have different origins and are also referred to in various ways.

Despite their different theoretical angles and objectives, it is worth investigating whether these traditions have elements in common and whether the traditions are united in any aspects. Newly arising traditions, such as the playful learning pedagogy (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009), integrate aspects from the social pedagogical tradition, such as child centredness, playfulness and learning in natural context, with the more intentional pedagogy encountered in school readiness traditions.

The school readiness tradition, also referred to as the Anglo–American construct (Biesta, 2013), the social investment model (Tuastad et al., 2019), the academic–instructivist approach (Sylva et al., 2016), the pre-primary approach (OECD, 2006), the cognitive child paradigm, the academics paradigm, instructional pedagogy (Klitmøller & Sommer, 2015) and the early education approach (Ringsmose & Brogaard-Clausen, 2017), is prominent in English-speaking countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the United States), France and the Netherlands. *The social pedagogical tradition*, which is also referred to as the Continental and German construct (Biesta, 2013), the child-centred model (Sylva et al., 2020; Tuastad et al., 2020), the whole child paradigm (Klitmøller & Sommer, 2015), the constructivist approach (Sylva et al., 2016) and the social pedagogical approach (OECD, 2006; Ringsmose & Brogaard-Clausen, 2017), is practiced in the Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland), several European countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and New Zealand. The school readiness tradition follows the developmental psychology theoretical tradition, focused on preparing children academically for

school and future life. The tradition is characterised by its sharp focus on cognitive stimulation through instructional learning, child assessment and benchmarks (Sylva, 2016), and the related research has often been quantitative (OECD, 2006). Meanwhile, the social pedagogical tradition has its theoretical foundations in child sociology and developmental psychology. Its focus is on children's lived experiences in the here and now, whereby children's free play and intuitive initiative are anchored as core values (Sylva, 2020). The pedagogical principle is free play, and the main goal is children's socio-emotional development (OECD, 2006). Scholars and teachers within this tradition are largely opposed to the school readiness tradition, arguing that a more holistic and broad preparation for life is key to healthy child development (Sylva et al., 2020; OECD, 2006; Biesta, 2013). However, there are also scholars advocating for a building a bridge between the two traditions (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Tuastad et al., 2019), by integrating aspects from the social pedagogical tradition with aspects from the school readiness traditions.

2.8 Professional learning communities in ECEC

A professional learning community can be understood as a group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision. Who support and work with each other, finding new ways to enquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches (Stoll, 2010a). Work undertaken with the aim of enhancing professional learning communities (PLC) tends to wander between three overlapping approaches: first, the

whole ECEC approach (i.e., the entire ECEC centre is operating as a learning community); second, a within-ECEC centres approach (i.e., groups are responsible for being active learning teams); and third, an across-ECEC centres approach (i.e., a collaborative between teachers in ‘centres to centres’ in network learning) (Harris & Jones, 2017). Furthermore, PLC’s characteristics are shared values and vision, collective responsibility for children’s learning and development, collaboration focused on learning, group as well as individual professional learning, reflective professional enquiry, openness, networks and partnerships, inclusive membership and mutual trust, respect and support (Stoll et al., 2006).

Teachers who are part of a well-functioning professional learning community tend to be more reflective on their professional practice and more willing to innovate in the classroom, and a professional learning community can improve teachers’ professional practice and contribute positively to educational quality (Evertsen et al., 2022; Harris & Jones, 2017).

To develop a PLC, all employees must proceed in a common direction, ensuring that the community is structured for a collective orientation change process (Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2018). Establishing collective learning processes is complicated, but the impact may be substantial when organisations succeed (Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2018). Despite its complexity, established routines and processes may promote PLC, including optimising resources and structures to promote

the PLC; promoting professional learning; evaluating and sustaining the PLC; and leading and managing to promote the PLC (Stoll et al., 2006).

The learning processes, activities and conditions supporting the PLC build capacity for learning in professional communities. Fullan (2010) uses the term ‘collective capacity building’ to describe this; it is argued that collective learning processes significantly impact change processes to a greater extent than individual endeavours. Systemic capacity depends on harnessing and channelling collective energy (Stoll, 2010b). Collective capacity building requires that all actors in a system pull in the same direction so that, over time, a shared professional language and a common understanding of the theoretical basis may develop. When the improvement work takes place collectively in an organisation, each employee will learn through collaborative processes with others. This will ensure enhanced access to knowledge and, in the next stage, collaborative processes will foster commitment, constituting a strong individual and collective capacity (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).

In understanding individual and collective capacity in learning communities, the terms ‘individual’ and ‘collective self-efficacy’ are closely linked (Bandura, 1997; Leithwood & Beatty, 2007). Capacity in relation to educational change may be understood as the power to engage in and sustain learning of people at all levels of the educational system for the collective purpose of enhancing students learning (Stoll, 2010b). Individual and collective self-efficacy in educational settings may be understood as the extent to which a teacher believes they have the

capacity to affect students' performance. Self-efficacy is a personal *belief* about one's ability or capacity rather than one's actual ability or capacity (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007). Individual self-efficacy beliefs are associated with strong positive relationships, perceived personal competence and employee organisational commitment (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Moreover, teachers' low levels of self-efficacy have been associated with feelings of stress (Parkay et al., 1998). By contrast, teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to adopt new classroom practices and are also more likely to remain in the profession (Harris & Jones, 2017). An overall assumption is that PLC may be fundamental to teachers' individual and collective capacity and may promote both individual and collective self-efficacy.

2.9 Districtwide implementation

Existing research attests to the association between high-quality CLASS implementation in ECEC and positive outcomes in terms of both children's development and teachers' professional development (Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Pianta, Mashburn, et al., 2008). If interventions are to be implemented beyond a single ECEC centre, on a larger scale, the terms *districtwide*, *systems intervention* (Blase' et al., 2012; Fixsen et al., 2019) or *community approach* are often used (Fixsen et al., 2005; Moore et al., 2022). These approaches encompass the entire community as the unit of change. District infrastructure, coordination and leadership all enhance the likelihood that an intervention will be successful (Moore et al., 2022). This requires

professional community collaboration on multiple levels within the district to reduce the likelihood of fragmented implementation (Greenberg et al., 2003). Schoolwide and districtwide approaches are also commonly used terms in implementation science (Humphrey et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2016).

All these approaches focus on the community as the unit of change and aim to integrate interventions into daily interactions and practices. This illustrates how multiple setting levels in the community using collaborative efforts that include all staff, teachers, families and children are necessary for a high-quality implementation process (Meyers et al., 2015; Oberle et al., 2016). The systemic approach helps create a supportive context in which effective interventions may be introduced and maintained for all students and moves away from piecemeal and fragmented approaches to implementation toward an approach that is comprehensive and coordinated in terms of both planning and implementation (Greenberg et al., 2003). The framework highlights (a) interrelated domains, (b) short- and long-term attitudinal and behavioural outcomes; (c) coordinated strategies that enhance student development and academic achievement; and (d) district, state and federal policies and supports that promote the quality implementation (Oberle et al., 2016).

3 Research questions (RQ)

The first two studies in this dissertation originate from the same group of participants. *Study I* examines educational professionals' experiences with CLASS as a system for professional development. *Study II* examines education professionals' reflections on using CLASS in the social pedagogical tradition. More specifically, the aim is to illuminate the participants' reflections on how CLASS fits into Norwegian ECEC practice and whether the CLASS can contribute something in a pedagogical context and whether the CLASS framework should be altered for closer alignment with the Norwegian educational tradition. *Study III* explores the district's management experiences with districtwide implementation process of the CLASS-related intervention. The research questions that guided each study were as follows:

Study I

RQ 1: *What are the perceptions and reflections of education professionals regarding CLASS as a system for individual and collective learning in Norwegian ECEC?*

Study II

RQ 2: *How do Norwegian CLASS observers and observed staff perceive the use of CLASS in the social pedagogical ECEC tradition?*

Study III

RQ 3.1: *How did the district's management group plan and execute the districtwide implementation of a CLASS intervention?*

RQ 3.2: *What aspect of the implementation process did they identify as particularly important with respect to ensuring a successful intervention?*

4 Methods

This PhD study adopts a qualitative methodological framework. Several qualitative interviews were conducted where I seek to understand the interviewee's experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2022). The design enables flexibility and change, in light of the mutual influence between the problem, data collection, theoretical framing, analysis and interpretation (Bryman, 2016; Maxwell, 2012). The dissertation has its theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology and social constructivism (Johannessen et al., 2016; Welsh, 2013). This doctoral research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus it was not possible to collect data as initially planned due to shutdowns and restrictions. Therefore, the data collection procedure changed from dialogue to digital interviews in Studies I and II. Study III was conducted after the COVID-related lockdowns, meaning that physical meetings could be held to facilitate dialogue interviews.

4.1 Phenomenology

Through a phenomenological approach, the goal is to seek to understand the meaning of a phenomenon as witnessed through other people's eyes. Such studies explore how participants perceive the world from their own subjective perspectives, exploring their experiences, perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon in question. This is thus an interpretive perspective (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The approach

differs from other methods in light of its combination of psychological, interpretive and ideographic components.

The purpose of phenomenological studies is to explore various (psychological) phenomena as they occur for people in specific situations in everyday life. Furthermore, the desire to extract meaningful essences from the phenomenon focuses on people's experiences of the phenomenon at hand (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). In this thesis, I want insight into educational professionals' personal perceptions of using CLASS based on their own experiences. This requires that we open to the phenomenon as described by setting aside the pre-existing assumptions we—the researchers—have about the phenomenon. The degree to which one believes such preconceptions may be set aside and idea regarding which aspects are necessary to understand the phenomenon vary between theorists (Bengtsson, 1999).

4.2 Social constructivism

Social constructivism is based on phenomenology and distances itself from the idea that society may be regarded as an objective quantity (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). The perspective points out that we must understand reality as created in society by various social factors. This understanding makes room for explanations as to why people may have different perceptions of the 'same' phenomenon (Tjora, 2021). Research contexts using interactions, such as focus group interviews, to generate data are closely linked to symbolic interactionism (Tjora, 2021) and a social constructivist view of science. When choosing focus group

interviews for data collection, I hope that the participants' stimulation of one another provides opportunities to foreground several aspects of their experiences and reflections. Symbolic interactionism (interactionism) emphasises interpersonal interaction as a central society-forming unit. Social situations are highlighted in a bid to understand how situations arise and form the basis for further interactions, socialisation, norms, cultures and societies (Tjora, 2021).

4.3 Qualitative research

All studies in this dissertation were conducted within a qualitative methodological design. This design seeks to understand the interviewee's experiences from the individual's perspective. The qualitative interview technique is particularly suitable when seeking insight into people's thoughts, feelings and experiences (Maxwell, 2012)—in this case, the reflections and experiences of professionals working with CLASS in ECEC and experiences of leading the districtwide implementation of a CLASS-related intervention. Focus groups and individual interviews were deployed to explore these perspectives.

4.3.1 Focus group interview

The focus group interview (FGI) is one of the most widely used methodological approaches in qualitative studies today (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Krueger & Casey, 2015). The purpose of conducting a focus group is to understand how a group of people think about a

question, idea, product or service. Focus groups are typically used to gather opinions, and the participants are selected because they share specific characteristics that relate to the focus group topic. As such, it is appropriate to carry out several FGIs in a given study (Lune & Berg, 2017) to identify perception trends and patterns across the different group discussions. Following the interviews and careful and systematic analysis, the discussions yield clues and insights into how the groups' members perceive the phenomena at hand. A focus group study must be carefully planned to be successful. The moderator's abilities and knowledge of group interviews and group processes are crucial in ensuring that the database assembled based on FGIs is of high quality. (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Lune & Berg, 2017).

Proper use of FGIs offers several benefits. One of the advantages concerns the researchers' opportunity to save time and money compared to individual interviews conducted among all informants from the same group. Furthermore, the moderator and assistant moderator are permitted to interact directly with the study's informants. This allows the assistant moderator to clarify and probe the participants' responses and ask follow-up questions during the interview. Assistant moderators can give conditional answers, ask follow-up questions and observe nonverbal signals (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Stewart et al., 2009). The open format facilitates the collection of a large and rich body of data based on the participants' own expressions. This provides opportunities to discover essential connections, establish more profound levels of meaning and identify subtle nuances in expressions and utterances. FGI does not

necessarily provide the same depth as individual interviews, but a skilled moderator allows the informants to respond and build on the input and words of others in the group. This synergistic effect associated with the group setting may yield data and ideas that might not have emerged from individual interviews. The participants' personal perceptions can fuel each other's experience of sharing (Lune & Berg, 2017). In this thesis, the participants are part of a collective CLASS-related intervention; it is, therefore, a good opportunity to gather individual perceptions in a collective context.

4.4 Participants

A municipality in southwestern Norway had implemented a CLASS-related intervention to combine systematic observations with employees' professional development (i.e., QRIS approach) prior to this study's commencement. Purposeful sampling was performed for all studies.

4.4.1 Study I and II

For Studies I and II, participants were invited through the municipality's e-mail system, but their consent to participation was submitted directly to the University of Stavanger's document control centre. As such, the municipality's ECEC management was not privy to the final participant list. All CLASS staff had three to five years of experience with this instrument in ECEC centres and all certified CLASS observers constituted the sample universe, and we developed explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria in the sampling process (Robinson, 2014). In this

context, for Studies I and II, the sample universe involved Norwegian ECEC employees who had experience of the systematic use of CLASS. Therefore, the inclusion criteria were that one must be CLASS-certified (observer) and/or have been observed with CLASS for a minimum of three to five years.

Figures 2 and 3 visualise the sample criteria and characteristics of participants in Studies I and II.

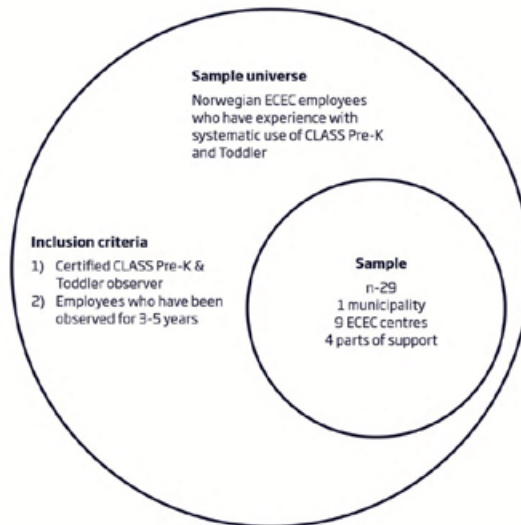


Figure 2 Sample universe and inclusion criteria for Studies I and II (inspired by Robinson, 2014).

In total, 29 educational professionals signed up for Studies I and II. The participants represented Educational Psychological Services (EPS), the Resource Centre (which supports ECEC centres catering to children with special needs), the Centre for Multilingual Children, ECEC directors, ECEC headteachers and assistants in ECEC centres. All participants were female, and they represented nine different ECEC centres and four different sectors of the support system. In Study III, six people were members of the management team for the implementation, and all of them signed up for this study.

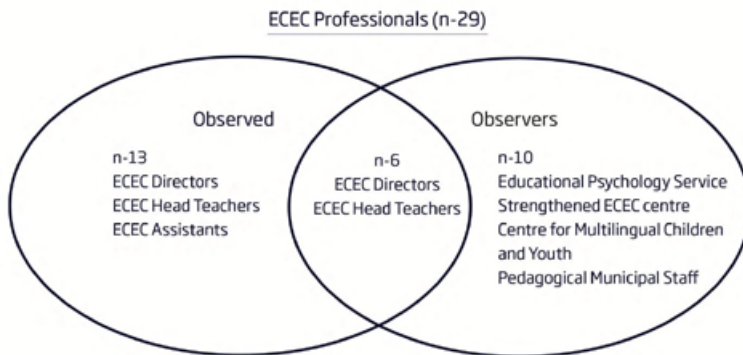


Figure 3 Participants in Studies I and II.

In the participants group, 13 females were being observed, 6 females were both observed *and* observing, and 10 females were observers.

To ensure that the number of participants in the FGIs was sufficient to facilitate meaningful analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2015), all consenting

candidates were invited to participate. Four FGIs (n = 22), two smaller group interviews (n = 4), and three individual interviews (n = 3)—all online—were conducted (total n = 29). Initially, we planned for 4–6 FGIs to include all participants. However, owing to sick leaves and scheduling issues, new group and individual interviews were set up to prevent attrition from the study.

4.4.2 Study III

For Study III, all leaders at municipality level involved in leading the implementation of the CLASS intervention were invited to participate. The sample universe involved leaders who had experience of working in the management group responsible for the districtwide implementation of the CLASS intervention. Therefore, the inclusion criterion was that one must be involved in leading the implementation process on a district level. All six signed up for the study. One FGI (n = 5), and one individual interview (n = 1) were conducted, all during physical meetings (N = 6). The individual interview was set up to avoid attrition associated with sick leaves.

4.5 Data collection and procedure

4.5.1 Study I and II

For Studies I and II, an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide was developed based on pilot interviews. The interview guides were piloted in three rounds, with an ECEC leader, head teacher and assistant. During

the pilot interviews, some time had been set aside to allow the informants to give feedback on which questions worked well and which needed improvement, and this feedback informed adjustments made to the interview guide. The final interview guide varied slightly between those who had used CLASS to observe others and those who had been observed and received feedback through CLASS (see Appendix). The main author and an assistant moderator conducted Studies I and II online in accordance with FGI guidelines (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The interviews were held online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kucirkova et al., 2020) The main plan was to divide the material based on participant groups (ECEC teachers versus participants from other units). However, during the analysis process, it became obvious that the topics did not vary between groups but rather that there were two main topics within the common material. Therefore, the material was divided according to topic: 1) CLASS as a structure for professional development and 2) Gains and challenges associated with CLASS in an SPT context.

4.5.2 Study III

For Study III, an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide was developed based on experiences and findings from the previous studies. In particular, the participants' mainly positive experience of CLASS as a structure for professional learning piqued our interest. The participants' nuanced reflections on the use of CLASS in SPT also drove us to gain deeper insight into how the DMG had implemented the CLASS-related intervention in the district. The main themes in the interview guide

concerned the DMG's experiences with success criteria in the districtwide implementation process. All leaders at district level who had been involved in planning and carrying out the implementation were invited to participate. All six agreed to participate in the study. One analogue FGI and one in-depth interview were conducted. Both the moderator and assistant moderator participated in the FGI. The in-depth interview consisted of a moderator and a participant. The in-depth interview was conducted to prevent dropout.

4.5.3 Procedures across all three studies

Extended FGIs were held for all three studies (Berg et al., 2004), which included introducing the interviews' main topics to participants before the interviews took place. This allowed participants to reflect on their personal opinions before the interview, thus increasing the likelihood that they would express their opinions more fully during the interview and thus increasing the trustworthiness of the data (Breen, 2006). Each interview for both data collections lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed by the main author who was leading the interviews.

4.6 Data analysis

This thesis analyses seek to obtain insight into how an individual understands a given phenomenon in a particular context. The phenomena one wishes to explore are typically related to experiences that are significant to the person, such as an important life event or the

development of a meaningful relationship. Given the exploratory design of this PhD study, a conventional content analysis was selected.

4.6.1 Conventional Content Analysis

The analytical process was initiated by closely reading the transcripts several times to compile the first draft of initial themes (Harding, 2018). I and the co-authors then refined the themes and their interconnectedness. To validate the findings, supervisors read through the raw data separately and discussed the final analyses and agreement of the key themes.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage involved the establishment of codes, followed by themes and, finally, high-level categories that emerged from the data using inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). A conventional content analysis was performed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) using NVivo 12 software. The analysis focused on the qualitative saturation of meaning rather than the quantification of utterances. On occasions when the findings from the focus groups concurred with one another, the data were categorised within the same dimensions and narrowed down to categories and subcategories (Patton, 2002). In cases of disagreement between the authors, the findings were discussed again until a consensus was reached.

In Studies I and II, all interviews were first analysed individually. All interviews from all groups were then analysed cross-sectionally. After the cross-sectional analyses, two overarching topics emerged: 1)

educational professionals' experiences with CLASS as a framework for professional development and 2) participants' reflections on the use of CLASS in Norwegian ECEC tradition. In Study III, the group interview and the single in-depth interview were analysed separately and then analysed cross-sectionally. We performed a member check via e-mail in all studies (Miles et al., 2020), which gave the informants an opportunity to provide feedback on the initial analyses thus increasing the trustworthiness of the findings. None of the participants indicated any disagreements or need for change.

4.7 Ethical considerations

This research project has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, now called Sikt: <https://sikt.no/en/home>). Despite this approval, the project incorporates several aspects related to ethical choices through research practices that it was necessary to take into consideration prior to, during, and after the interviews (NESH, 2016). Research and ethics should always interact with one another (Israel & Hay, 2006). The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, 2019) must approve all research that involves personal data, which includes any information that can identify individuals (Johannessen et al., 2016; NSD, 2019). I made audio recordings during the interviews, and I established contact via e-mail to make arrangements with the informants regarding the time of the interview and to send the pre-interview materials in advance. It was necessary to apply to NSD for approval of the project

and to comply with the Privacy Regulation's (GDPR) guidelines regarding personal data throughout the study.

4.7.1 Informed consent

To ensure that the requirement for informed consent was met, an information letter about the study was attached to the e-mail distributed to the invited informants. The information document was designed based on NSD's guiding template for information writing to ensure that key elements were included (NSD, 2019). The information letter detailed the study's content and purpose, what participation would entail and how privacy would be safeguarded and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Furthermore, written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews. After the participants signed the consent form, information was repeatedly given about the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time if they so wished (NESH, 2016). This structure is referred to as *continuous process consent* (Allmark, et.al., 2009). The participants were reminded of their right to withdraw before the study was initiated, at the start and end of the interview itself and after the interviews. This process safeguards the participants' autonomy by allowing individuals to consider their participation and contribution (Rhodes, 2005).

4.7.2 Confidentiality

It was a priority to treat all collected information regarding personal matters confidentially. Personal data were anonymised in any work

containing the data material for publication and dissemination (NESH, 2016). To ensure anonymisation, the participants' names were replaced with a numeric code. All data are anonymised to the extent that no individuals can be recognised. Furthermore, the Norwegian language was converted to English when reproducing the quotations for publication.

Information about identifiable individuals was stored securely. The information from the studies will not be kept longer than is necessary to carry out the purpose of the processing, in line with NESH (2016) guidelines. For secure storage of personal data in all studies, all audio files, transcripts, coding and analyses were stored on an encrypted area on my personal PC. The participants were informed that all personal information, audio recordings and transcripts would be deleted when this overall PhD project has been formally completed.

5 Results

5.1 Main findings Study I

This qualitative study aimed to explore Norwegian ECEC professionals' perceptions and reflections concerning the use of CLASS (Pre-K and Toddler) for professional development. After conducting the FGIs (n = 22), group interviews (n = 4) and in-depth interviews (n = 3) online, a conventional content analysis yielded four main categories: *A shared professional platform*, *Professionalisation*, *Quality in practice* and *Outcomes for children and parents*. All four main categories have subcategories. The shared professional platform category is interpreted as a foundation for the other categories in a hierarchical representation. The CLASS structure provided staff with a shared professional platform that included a common language and collective knowledge, which, in turn, led to professionalisation in terms of a shared community both within centres and between centres and the support system.

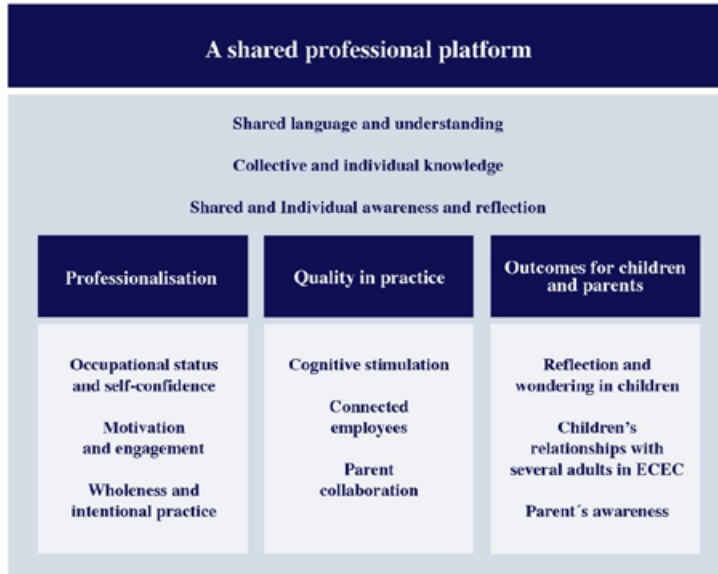


Figure 4 Main findings from Study I

The overall findings suggest that the ECEC professionals believed that CLASS contributes to positive structures that support professional community and development. The study's findings contribute to new knowledge on how ECEC professionals experience CLASS as a tool for professional development, fostering a sense of community, improved collaboration and more thoughtful classroom practice.

5.2 Main findings Study II

Study II explored Norwegian ECEC professionals' perceptions of CLASS (Pre-K and Toddler) in the social pedagogical tradition. Focus group interviews (n = 22), group interviews (n = 4) and in-depth interviews (n = 3) were all conducted online. A conventional content analysis indicated that the use of CLASS expands ECEC professionals' understanding of both pedagogical traditions' value. The conventional analysis refers to three main categories that systematically categorise the participants' experience of gains and challenges associated with the use of CLASS in SPT.

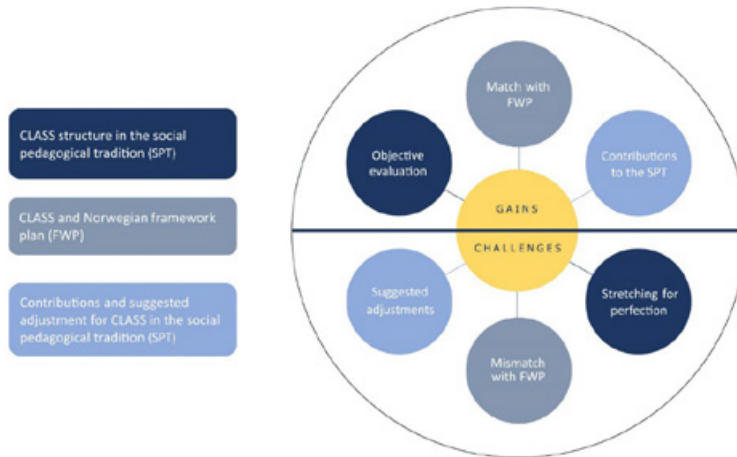


Figure 5 Main findings from Study II

The findings indicate that ECEC professionals perceived CLASS as contributing to their pedagogical understanding and practice. At the same time, the introduction of CLASS enhanced ECEC professionals' awareness regarding the pedagogical value of the social pedagogical tradition (SPT), which they wished to preserve and protect, and the specific elements of the school readiness tradition (SRT), which they wished to include in their pedagogical understanding of high-quality ECEC pedagogy.

Motivated by the study's findings, we included an extended discussion section. A suggested hybrid model of pedagogical traditions in ECEC is discussed based on this finding.

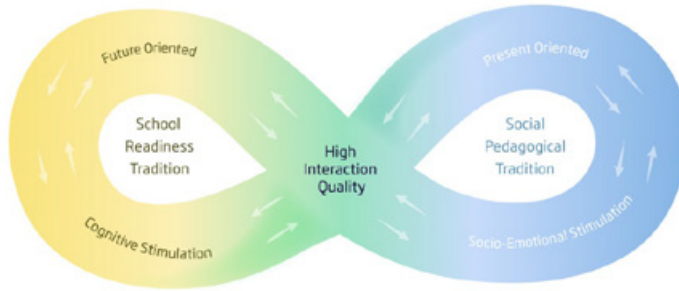


Figure 6 A hybrid model: High interaction quality focus, drawing on the best aspects of the two pedagogical traditions.

The suggested model emphasises that children's cognitive and socio-emotional development mutually influence one another. Children's needs for socio-emotional *and* cognitive stimuli for optimal development should be the focus of ECEC pedagogy, irrespective of traditions. A hybrid model can challenge the current dichotomies in educational approaches.

5.3 Main findings Study III

Study III is a follow-up of Studies I and II. Findings from the previous studies triggered our curiosity about the district management's experiences of implementing the CLASS-related intervention in the district. The study explored the DMG's experiences of planning and implementing the intervention and the various processes applied to ensure the intervention's success. One FGI (n = 5) and one in-depth interview (n = 1) were conducted. Conventional content analysis resulted in four main categories: 1) Foundation, 2) The DMG, 3) District-specific adoption of the intervention, and 4) Stimulating a collective move.

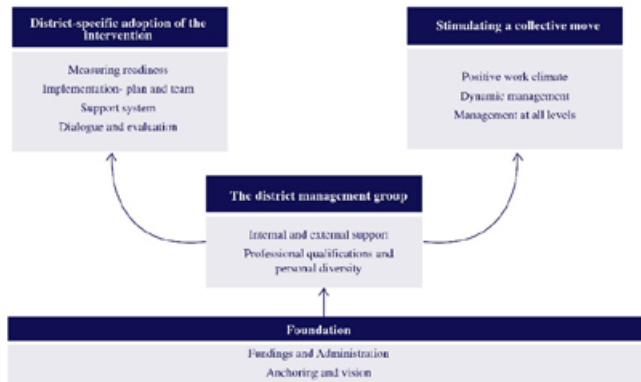


Figure 7 Main findings from Study III

The results indicate that successful districtwide implementation requires careful preparation, planning, organisation, guidance and attention to

detail at the system, centre and individual levels. The results reflect that districtwide implementation requires a foundation of financial resources and district anchoring so that the DMG can facilitate a successful implementation. Furthermore, the DMG's composition should be diverse in terms of both professional qualifications and personal qualities, and it is of great importance that DMG have the support of external professionals. The findings emphasise that DMG should establish structures for professional development in which managers are supported to be led and succeed in a collective professional community.

6 Discussion

The main research question guiding this thesis concerns how educational professionals perceive CLASS, both as a structure for professional communities and in terms of its overall fit within the SPT as well as how the DMG planned and implemented the CLASS-related intervention.

6.1 CLASS as a structure for PLC

The findings indicate that educational professionals overall perceive CLASS as a positive structure for professional development and community across ECEC organisations, support services and professional positions. At the start of the data collection process, we had a preconceived notion that the different professional groups and parts of the ECEC system would experience CLASS differently. The analyses soon revealed that this expectation was incorrect, and the experiences across all groups were surprisingly similar. There may be several reasons for this; for example, perhaps the management in the municipality has implemented the CLASS-related intervention to such a high quality that the structure in development with CLASS as a tool has reached all parts of the ECEC system. Other studies point out that organisational structures created to allow teachers to be continuously reflective significantly enhance teachers' professional development (Leithwood, 2019; Stoll, 2010b).

This may also be due to the fact that the CLASS tool itself is broad and suitable for all occupational groups and parts of the ECEC system.

CLASS is built upon the theory of teaching through interaction (TTI) (Hamre et al., 2013) which will make sense for the vast majority of people who work with children through interaction quality. The TTI framework and CLASS may help to systematically operationalise interaction quality—something that teachers and other professionals in ECEC need. When new structures meet the employee's needs, the likelihood that they will experience the new change as positive increases (Fullan, 2010).

The findings revealed that CLASS contributed to professional development for *all* ECEC employees who participated in the study. This is a surprising finding. The fact that educational assistants find CLASS to be as valuable as the teachers, managers and external professionals is a positive sign. In Norway, managers and teachers are traditionally sent on courses while teaching assistants are held back to care for the children in the absence of the teachers. The districtwide implementation seems to have given the assistants a feeling of being valuable and competent.

6.2 CLASS in SPT

This study's findings primarily indicate well-reflected ECEC professionals who are able to perceive nuances in relation to what they value in SPT and which aspects of SPT can contribute something valuable to Norwegian ECEC pedagogy. In this paper, the dimension of emotional support is not prominent in the findings, which may be somewhat surprising given that emotional support is fundamental for the SPT (OECD, 2019; Tuastad et al., 2019). The participants did not seem

to discuss this dimension much, since they express that the CLASS framework takes care of this dimension and that they are, therefore, more concerned with exploring which parts of the CLASS framework can contribute something new and valuable in SPT; hence the focus on high-quality cognitive stimuli. Participant 4.3 stated *‘I agree that the socio-emotional aspect must of course be fundamental. But I also think that was what we were best at before we got CLASS’*. Participant 4.4 described it as follows: *‘the cognitive development is very useful for us. Because this is perhaps where we have performed worst on a general basis... when it comes to challenging the children on their own thinking and mindset. It’s not what we’re used to’* (Evertsen et al., 2023, p. 19).

It became clear that the participants’ ECEC-related values are challenged during the implementation of the new intervention, especially related to children’s need for cognitive stimuli. Several participants mentioned that some children can experience everyday life in Norwegian ECEC as dull or unengaging. The EPS mainly expresses this understanding. EPS describes that they observe that the vulnerable children now have a more varied and positively nurturing ECEC everyday life. This is caused by the fact that staff in the ECEC centres now take the initiative to arrange activities that challenge the children more cognitively than they did prior to the CLASS intervention. This indicates that the CLASS-related intervention can promote a high-quality learning environment for children with special needs in ECEC. It is still uncertain whether the entirety of the CLASS-related intervention or the partly new focus on children’s needs to be challenged cognitively affects these experiences.

Recent Norwegian research has documented a more passive form of learning, whereby the children must listen to the staff to learn something new or the teachers do not plan activities which promote cognitive stimulation (Baustad et al., 2018; Ree & Emilson, 2019a).

We designed an extended discussion section based on the participants' in-depth reflections (see article for more details) regarding their new understanding of the balance between children's basic needs for emotional support and the possibility of cognitive stimulation. Along with the participants' reflections, we were also inspired by *dynamic skills theory* (Mascolo & Fischer, 2015), which provides an in-depth theoretical psychological framework for a complete understanding of children's development. The dynamic skills theory describes psychological acts as integrated processes, and highlights that there is no such thing as a simply cognitive or emotional or conative or behavioural processes, they are integrated into each other (Mascolo & Fischer, 2015). The intention in applying the hybrid model was to reflect on the balance in children's need for healthy development and to highlight the fact that interaction quality should always be the guiding principle across all educational contexts, regardless of pedagogical tradition.

A surprising finding to have emerged in this study is the participants' feedback that they wish to be observed more often. They appear to recognise the value of the observational basis for personal and collective development. The observations seem to have become an opportunity for them to learn more about their practice and, at the same time, become

observant of their influence on children through the quality of the interaction between themselves and the children. This interpretation of the employees' sense of psychological security and motivation to learn may be related to the fact that leaders in the ECEC centre and at the district level have facilitated a high-quality implementation process (Domitrovich et al., 2008; Oberle et al., 2016), which brings us to this dissertation's third article.

6.3 *Leading a districtwide implementation of a CLASS-related intervention*

The findings revealed that one success criterion was to create structures and frameworks throughout the district that would allow leaders at all levels to receive support and access new knowledge to help them lead and develop PLC in their own centres. From a socio-cultural learning perspective, the process may be understood as fulfilling a scaffolding function during the implementation of the CLASS intervention (Bruner, 1984; Vygotsky, 1980) and as a chain of scaffolding for all involved. The external professional supported the DMG during implementation to enable them to provide scaffolding for and support the ECEC leaders. Furthermore, ECEC leaders used scaffolding to support the local teachers in their work with children, and a more conventional scaffolding process occurred during this interaction (see Figure 8).

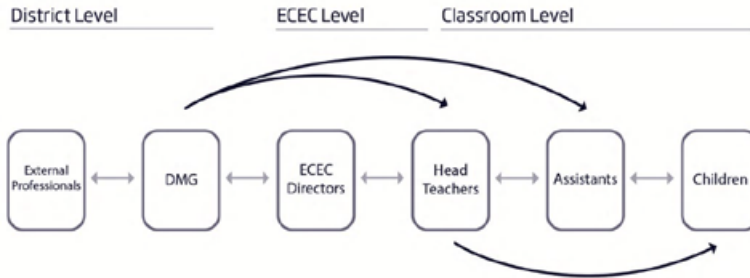


Figure 8 The chain of scaffolding provided during the districtwide implementation of a CLASS intervention.

Scaffolding, as it pertains to the learning community, may thus be understood on several levels in the context of this municipality's implementation of the CLASS intervention. The process suggests a scenario wherein all managers at all management levels were supported in leading their groups of employees and teachers were enabled to provide scaffolding for the children's learning. It thus appears that the overall scaffolding chain is intended to support leaders as they lead. The provision of support to everyone so that they may lead contributes to sustainable management, and the experience of having support to lead can in turn enhance collective efficacy (Hargreaves et al., 2018). Collective efficacy, which may also be understood as organisational capacity (Meyers et al., 2012), increases the likelihood that leaders will perceive themselves as capable of achieving what is expected of them as leaders in the intervention (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Salas-Rodríguez & Lara, 2022).

The study's findings regarding the DMG's experience of needing support for external professionals has received less attention in previous research and literature. In general, implementation science focuses on supporting staff working in the field (Domitrovich et al., 2012; Fullan, 2010) rather than supporting the DMG. The DMG perceived personal and professional diversity as necessary to create a competent DMG. The fact that the informants emphasise a positive climate in the management group is exciting. Previous literature has frequently demonstrated that managers must foster commitment and create a positive environment for the employees in the district (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Meyers et al., 2012). However, these findings also show that a positive climate must be developed internally in the DMG, suggesting the need for a greater focus on the composition of the district's management team to ensure that they have the necessary support to lead a district's implementations. The external professionals may be understood as the DMG's own support system. It is a support system that provides professional content not only for the intervention but also for the implementation process. Therefore, this may be interpreted as a small external support system for the management group in the district, which provides the DMG with the skills required to establish a solid and evidence-based support system for all employees in the community.

6.4 All themes across all studies

Figure 9 summarises the main themes of this thesis.

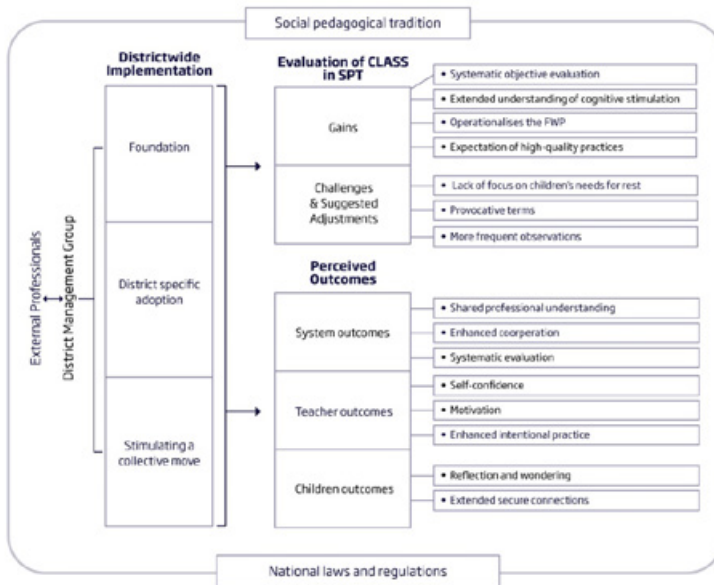


Figure 9 A visualization of the main themes of this thesis

In summary, the themes from all studies in this thesis may be regarded as interconnected (see visualisation in Figure 9 above). This figure is not intended to capture all details of the studies, nor to provide an exact explanation of the causal mechanisms at play during the implementation of the CLASS-related intervention in the municipality. Rather, the figure traces several broad lines of possible interconnectedness. As can be seen in Figure 9, the DMG created a foundation (paper II) for positive outcomes at several levels (paper I), and professional reflections of gains and challenges among the participants (paper II). Thus, in general, the

work performed by the DMG is thought to precede the work in the ECEC centres both in time and in actual professional development, and it is believed to be fundamental to the overall implementation, as has also been described in the literature (Domitrovich et al., 2012; Oberle et al., 2016).

The outer frame visualises the framework conditions for the Norwegian ECEC context. State guidelines, such as legislation and FWP, govern Norway's ECEC. The FWP emphasises ECEC leaders' responsibility to systematically work to improve ECEC quality and to create a learning community. Furthermore, the FWP states that children in ECEC should be given opportunities to develop their social–emotional and cognitive skills through high-quality interactions. The FWP has been developed in the SPT, which permeates the FWP's content. One assumption is that FWP content, to a certain extent, governs ECEC managers' motivation to search for tools, such as CLASS. As the study participants stated, directors and headteachers reported that the implemented CLASS-related intervention helped managers to operationalise the Norwegian FWP.

On the left of Figure 9, the overall themes from the study, including the DMG, are visualised. The success criteria for leading a districtwide implementation of the CLASS-related intervention include a solid foundation, their district-specific adoption and their efforts to stimulate a collective move. The DMG expressed that support from external professionals was crucial for districtwide implementation and for leading

the process in the community. This topic warrants further investigation in future research, as it is currently lacking in the existing literature. In the present study, the external support granted to the DMG emerged as highly important criteria for a successful process. The quality of the districtwide implementation process has likely influenced how district employees experience the CLASS-related intervention. This is visualised by the arrows in the middle of the figure. The initiation of the work in the DMG preceded the work in local ECEC centres in time; thus, their work appears to be foundational. The foundational work described by the DMG in Study III may be understood as the framework conditions for the education professionals' experiences of the CLASS-related intervention in the district. The positive descriptions in Study I and the nuanced understanding of gains and challenges that emerged from Study II testify to a high-quality implementation process.

The abundant and nuanced descriptions offered by the informants in Studies I and II confirm that the employees have sufficient experience to perceive connections between FWP and the content of the CLASS framework and further work systematically with professional development.

The main themes of Study II are detailed at the top right of the figure. Education professionals reflect both gains and challenges from the CLASS-related intervention in SPT. The challenges and gains they describe are relevant for the future use of CLASS in the Norwegian ECEC context and have been given a balanced visualisation in the figure.

The participants reported that they performed better during the observations than they typically do in practice. However, the consensus was that this was not of any major consequence given that their reflection around the practice outline was helpful to them, and their improved performance during the observation suggests that they understand the necessary components of high-quality practice. As such, the employees can obtain insights into how they might provide the high-quality interaction they exhibited during observation. Moreover, the observers appeared uncomfortable giving low scores and thus have ‘embellished’ the scores. This indicates that the observation scores achieved in this context are not valid and are inappropriate for use in quality testing. Interestingly, the participants agreed they would like to be observed more frequently. This may assume that more frequent observations will allow teachers to become more relaxed and natural while they are being observed. If this is the case, observations may offer a more realistic impression of daily practice in ECEC. The abundant descriptions that the participants gave attest to the fact that earlier in the process, they were permitted to discuss freely and offer nuanced portrayals rather than black-and-white thinking about the use of CLASS. Their nuanced understanding has possibly also contributed to all the positive experiences that they have accomplished in alignment with CLASS as a structure for professional communities.

Study I’s findings indicate that DMG has successfully implemented a CLASS-related intervention that is perceived as beneficial for all ECEC professionals in the district. The visualisation is intended to highlight the

fact that the education professionals in the district express that the implementation of the CLASS-related intervention has reached ECEC at all levels: system level, teacher level and child level. The participants reported engaged examples of how children and teachers have benefitted from the intervention, based on their experiences; Participant 9.1 revealed, *'It's quite clear. There are so many who have become professional, solid, and safe staff.* Participant 2.1 described when children were very responsive and engaged during a visit from a storyteller: *'Then I thought: Oh yes, it works in real life too. It's not just the staff who change, but we see it in the kids too!'* (Evertsen et al., 2022, p. 14).

The question of which educational traditions offer the 'best' basis for children's development in the ECEC context remains a subject of debate. It is recommended that ECEC focus on current research and established knowledge about children's holistic development while prioritising quality interaction as the primary tool for stimulating children's development. Our hybrid model acknowledges children's need for socio-emotional and cognitive stimuli to promote healthy and holistic growth. It also recognises that cognitive abilities can positively influence children's emotional growth and resilience and that children's emotional abilities can influence their cognitive capacity (Evertsen et al., 2023; Hart & Lindahl Jacobsen, 2018; McClelland et al., 2000). Children's behaviours are understood as integrated processes mediated by the quality of the interactions in their surrounding environment rather than simply cognitive–emotional or cognitive–behavioural processes; any

action that affects the world necessarily involves some integration of meaning, feelings, needs, and motor actions (Mascolo & Fischer, 2015). Considering the participants' enhanced understanding of this, the results indicate a new play and learning environment that is characterised by high-quality interactions in the participating ECEC centres. Interactions that facilitate high-quality socio-emotional and cognitive stimulation will, according to these psychological theoretical insights, support children's development from a holistic perspective.

6.5 Methodological considerations

The three studies' respective limitations are mentioned in in each article. This section details several general methodological issues associated with the studies' design, reliability, and validity.

6.5.1 Study design

In all three studies, the participants were invited to participate through a purposeful sampling process. Participants who had specific experience with CLASS within a specific municipality were invited to take part in the study. This self-selection process may generate self-selection bias. All three studies included participants selected through self-selection recruitment, and whether the self-recruited participants differ from those who do not agree to participate is questionable. It is timely to reflect on whether the participants in the study are above-average engaged and positive about CLASS, and to what extent this self-selection bias affects the study's findings.

These three qualitative studies were designed as explorative interview studies, a design that is suitable for exploring real-life experiences and beliefs at first hand, which provides rich information about a given phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The FGIs reflected the educational professionals' perceptions, experiences and reflections through the questions that were asked in line with the studies' purpose. The FGIs and the individual interview in this dissertation contributed perspectives on both the individual and collective levels. The nature of the FGI approach allows the participants to share reflections and responses to one another and can stimulate the discussions in different ways, yielding a data assemblage with real depth and broadening the information shared compared to other data collection processes. However, the FGI approach also has several disadvantages: the subjective nature on the dynamic within the group owing to fears relating to negative sanctions and social desirability have been shown to limit the participants' sharing of their personal opinions (Smithson, 2000). In these studies, group pressure may have led to collective, uniform opinions. Several measures were taken prior to, during and after data collection to minimise conformity, including the role of the moderator, extended interviews and member checks.

The open-ended questionnaires required the educational professionals to adopt a retrospective view, requiring the participants to recall their experiences with CLASS. This relies on memory processing and can affect data quality owing to recall bias (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). To minimise recall bias, all interviews were conducted during the period in

which they were actively working with CLASS and implementing the CLASS-related intervention.

The conventional content analyses implemented in all studies represented an active decision designed to maintain the participants' subjective and unique perspectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This inductive analytic approach allowed the emergence of key concepts from which the codes were identified. All the codes were based on the participants collective perceptions related to the individual studies' RQs. The desire to know more about participants' experiences with CLASS on several levels and topics indicated that such an analytic choice was adequate.

Several methodological questions arose regarding the digital interviews that were necessary due to COVID-19 and the associated national lockdown. In the interview guide, an additional question was added about how all the participants experienced found the digital group interview experience. Without any systematic analysis of the data, it may appear at first glance as though one is both gaining and losing something. We gained several informants when the procedure for data collection was changed. Participants from EPS went from one to seven on the same day that they received information that the interviews would be digital.

6.5.2 Researcher positionality

From 2019 to 2022, I had a role as a university consultant in the district in which I collected the data. Some may argue that it is a disadvantage,

but it also has its advantages: for example, I know the district's work from the inside. Most of the questions in the interview guide deal with a period prior to my involvement in the district's work. Data from all studies in the thesis point to nuanced considerations, which may be interpreted as indicating that the participants felt sufficiently safe to express themselves freely.

As I conducted the interviews with those who had been involved in the CLASS intervention in the municipality, I endeavoured to reduce any potential researcher bias. This prompted me to consider my role as moderator during the interviews by focusing on the importance of avoiding any leading questions. The participant was made aware of my double role, and I highlighted the fact that all their opinions and experiences with CLASS constituted a central contribution. It is hoped that this openness to some extent reduced any potential bias with respect to the results and may support their trustworthiness (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This does not mean that the researcher did not influence the participants in these studies but rather it demonstrates the effort that was made to minimise such influences.

6.5.3 Validity

Several steps may be taken to ensure validity. Prospective reflexivity aims to ensure the credibility of results by minimising the likelihood that the researcher will bias the study (Miles et al., 2020). The researcher must practice continuous reflexivity to carry out the research in an ethical manner. Procedural ethics is not sufficient when dealing with ethically

crucial moments (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). No single ‘reliable ethical formula’ can be applied to qualitative research interviews, but researchers are advised to engage in continuous reflection (Allmark et al., 2009). Reflexivity has several meanings in the sciences (Bryman, 2016). Reflexivity may be framed as a ‘useful conceptual tool for understanding both the nature of ethics in qualitative research and how ethical practice in research can be achieved’. Reflexive research is a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not only in relation to the research methods and data but also for the researcher, the participants and the research context. The process requires transparency and sincerity (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Descriptive validity is concerned with keeping participants’ statements and expressions free for the researchers’ interpretation (Maxwell et al., 2009). The term ‘credibility’ similarly refers to the researcher’s efforts to handle experiences and perceptions so that they are recognisable to those who participated (Miles et al., 2020). In all three studies, actions were taken to preserve descriptive validity. All interviews were audio-recorded to preserve the data, promoting *interpretive validity* (Maxwell et al., 2009), which involved preserving the participants’ integrity with respect to their perspectives, intentions and communications of meaning. Throughout all interview sessions (excepted the individual ones) a second researcher assistant observed, took notes and asked follow-up questions if anything was unclear to prevent any loss of expression or reflection. A summary of each interview was provided to the participants at the end of the interview, giving them the opportunity to point out any

points of disagreement or misunderstanding. After each interview, a debriefing took place among the researchers to identify potential sources of misinterpretation that may have reduced the interpretative and descriptive properties and credibility of the data. Furthermore, a member check was conducted via e-mail, urging the participants to provide feedback if the findings were not in line with their own reflections on the interview's content. This was intended to secure descriptive and interpretative validation from the participants and to support trustworthiness of the data analysis. (Miles et al., 2020).

In preparing the interview guides, pilot interviews were conducted with the aim of optimising the discussion in the upcoming focus group interviews. The open-ended interviews with the guides were piloted in three rounds. The piloting resulted in adjustments to the interview guides for optimisation. Extended interviews were also held. The process involved distributing reflective questions to the participants in advance of the interviews to encourage participants to share their personal opinions in the group and thereby support the finding's credibility (Lune & Berg, 2017). Furthermore, after the analyses, the author read back through the transcripts to verify that the patterns identified could be traced in the original data (Harding, 2018). In all three studies, we performed separate readings of the transcripts. Moreover, one of the authors who did read the transcripts and the findings performed the analysis separately from the other authors. The process of justifying findings with a separate author may serve as an effective safeguard against any bias inadvertently introduced by the other authors (Harding,

2018). The question of whether the studies' results are generalisable builds on considerations of whether the same process may be applicable to similar samples and contexts (Maxwell et al., 2009). If so, the results can have value for other situations with other participants by advancing our understanding of multiple relevant situations (Miles et al., 2020).

6.6 Contributions and practical Implications

According to this thesis, education professionals perceive CLASS assessment as a valuable tool for professional development, increased motivation and self-confidence. These findings suggest that CLASS, when appropriately implemented, can be a useful tool for developing interaction quality in ECEC. It is important to remember that it is not necessarily the CLASS tool itself that promotes this experience: as Participant 6 stated, '*CLASS is just a tool. You must build something around it.*'. Participant 5 informatively continues, '*We had several study visits here where everyone sits and waits to see how we do CLASS observations. But our intervention is so much more than that. After all, it is about professional development and implementation*' (Evertsen, submitted, p. 18). The assessment tool requires implementation-competent managers who can create a holistic structure around CLASS. Therefore, it is essential for the practice field to establish systems that promote development to work holistically with CLASS. A focus on implementation, management and guidance appears to be crucial in this holistic approach. In the context of a recent national study, it appears that the CLASS assessment tool requires the establishment of professional

learning communities to affect both the quality of interaction (Buøen et al., 2021) and ECEC staff's motivation and self-confidence (Evertsen et al., 2022). Furthermore, other interaction assessment tools, such as CIP, also affect ECEC employees' motivation (Baustad & Bjørnstad, 2023). This finding, together with the studies described in this thesis, prompts reflection as to whether it is the assessment tools themselves or the PLC structures surrounding them that increase perceived motivation and professional self-confidence for ECEC employees. Regardless of such reflection, it is vital that the practice field establish structures for PLC when CLASS is used for systematic work to promote interaction quality in ECEC. This is supported by established literature within implementation research. It is easier for any intervention to be effective when a sound support system is in place. The content of the intervention may be of high quality, but if structures for a support system are not established, the intervention will likely be largely ineffectual (Greenberg et al., 2005). This attests that having an evidence-based intervention is insufficient to ensure successful implementation (Albers et al., 2020).

An interesting implication for practice also emerged regarding the possibility of CLASS-related intervention to improve cooperation between ECEC centres and their support services. Findings from Studies I and II indicate that if the CLASS intervention is implemented widely in the district so that all support services are included, the possibilities for a common professional platform are enhanced. Such a professional platform provides a common language and professional understanding. The participants reported that this has improved collaboration between

ECEC staff and the support services, whereby guidance is experienced as more effective based on sound professional discussions wherein the interlocutors understand one another differently to before. This means that the field of practice can use knowledge from all the studies in this thesis as a starting point to create effective collaborations to benefit children in ECEC, particularly vulnerable children who require support services expertise. Research has demonstrated that vulnerable children in the ECEC are particularly influential in terms of the quality of the provision (Belsky, 2009; Burchinal et al., 2008a; Zachrisson & Dearing, 2015).

6.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Within the theoretical framework of the RDS and socio-cultural development, there is a common dynamic understanding of how children's development is mediated through mutual interactions in interpersonal contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on children's need for high-quality interactions. Future research in the ECEC context should examine how children themselves understand and experience interaction quality. In a recent Norwegian study, the researchers investigated children's reflections on their own needs when rejected from play in ECEC settings (Nergaard, 2022). Similarly, if a child-friendly approach is adopted within the topics of this thesis, it could be valuable and compelling to explore the children's thoughts regarding what they need from employees to experience feeling safe and cared for and what they need from adults in terms of learning new things. In seeking knowledge

from the children themselves through, for example, interviews, observations, and child-adapted questionnaires, it may be possible to obtain insight into whether the children's experiences of high-quality interactions change across different age phases and gender or as a result of personal differences.

Furthermore, there is a continuous need for further research on the different nuances at play in the districtwide implementation of interaction quality interventions. In this context, it will also be useful to seek knowledge from all employees in the district and to examine what they perceive as necessary criteria for a successful implementation. Both surveys and interviews may be useful methodological approaches for acquiring knowledge about the staff in ECEC centres and all the support services' experiences with what they require from their managers to be motivated to operationalise new interventions or initiatives. The districtwide focus within implementation research provides the knowledge that can ensure a greater likelihood of success in future implementation processes (Oberle et al., 2016) and thus enhance the likelihood that the planned quality increases will reach the children in the target destination. This knowledge may help to reduce the science–practice gap (Lyon et al., 2020). More specifically, in ECEC, this can contribute to give more children—regardless of their circumstances—equal opportunities for positive development and well-being.

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8 Study I

Professionals' Perceptions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System as a structure for professional community and development

Professionals' Perceptions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System as a structure for professional community and development

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored Norwegian ECEC professionals' perceptions and reflections concerning the use of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K and Toddler for professional development. Focus group interviews (n=22), group interviews (n=4), and in-depth interviews (n=3) were conducted online. Conventional content analysis was performed using NVivo 12 software. The professionals reported that CLASS contributed to positive structures for professional community and development within which both individual and collective learning occurred. The content analysis yielded four main categories: *A shared professional platform*, *Professionalisation*, *Quality in practice* and *Outcomes for children and parents*. The CLASS structure improved communication and collaboration between the early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres and support systems. Overall, the findings contribute to new knowledge on how ECEC professionals experience CLASS as a tool for professional development, sense of community, improved collaboration and more thoughtful classroom practice.

KEYWORDS

ECEC quality; content analysis; professional development; Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS); empowering communities

Introduction

The global research community in early childhood education and care (ECEC) emphasises the importance of high-quality education in ensuring safe, playful and stimulating learning environments for all young children. Several quality rating systems for ECEC exist, among which the Classroom Environment Scoring System (CLASS) is particularly popular (La Paro, Hamre, and Pianta 2012). Norway offers subsidised day care in regulated ECEC centres to all children aged 1–5 years. Norwegian ECEC centres are often considered to be among the best worldwide by virtue of their broad accessibility and their adherence to the Framework Plan (Ministry of Education and Research 2017), which focuses on holistic development through care, play and learning. Nonetheless, the varying quality of available ECEC facilities continues to pose a challenge for Norway's ECEC system (Alvestad et al. 2019; Bjørnstad and Os 2018; Lekhal, Wang, and Schjølberg 2013; Rege et al. 2018).

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The OECD (2019) encourages ECEC providers to adopt a systematic approach to data collection on process quality to facilitate subsequent quality development in local settings (OECD 2019). This entails motivation to search for tools to simultaneously assess interaction quality systematically and give staff an opportunity for tailored guidance and individual development. CLASS has been used to measure process quality and provide staff with adapted guidance in selected Norwegian ECEC centres to ensure children's optimal development. However, the feasibility and appropriateness of using CLASS in Norway has not yet been fully assessed. This study explored Norwegian ECEC professionals' perceptions of the use of CLASS for professional development.

Despite the large body of *quantitative* research studying the associations between various aspects of CLASS and the outcomes for children (Burchinal et al. 2008; Howes et al. 2008; Mashburn et al. 2008), qualitative analyses of teachers' experiences of CLASS as practitioners are lacking. In this paper, we complement the existing literature with data from interviews with teachers and ECEC professionals to document users' experiences of CLASS with respect to observation, feedback and professional development. In-depth knowledge of teachers' perspectives is critical to promoting the high-quality effective implementation of CLASS in daily ECEC provision. A qualitative approach can provide knowledge and insights into whether the profession perceives the CLASS system as a meaningful tool to promote professional development, from the perspectives of both the observers and the observed staff who receive guidance based on CLASS scores.

Sociocultural learning theory

This study is underpinned by sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky 1980), which suggests that people develop through interaction with their surrounding environments, in dialogue with one another using sociocultural tools that mediate these interactions (Vygotsky 2001). The sociocultural perspective views learning and development as processes that take place through the use of language and participation in social practices (Säljö 2001). This sociocultural view of learning permeates the Norwegian ECEC system and its Framework Plan (Ministry of Education and Research 2017) and, as such, guided our study design.

ECEC quality

In Norway, 92.8% of children attend an ECEC facility (SSB 2021). As part of the welfare state, ECEC is intended to provide a foundation for enhancing life skills and health (Ministry of Education and Research 2017). To achieve this goal, however, ECEC staff must engage in high-quality interactions with each child in their settings (Burchinal et al. 2008; Cadima et al. 2020; Dalli et al. 2011; Evertsen et al. 2015; Moser et al. 2017; Pianta et al. 2003). Although the concept of quality in ECEC may be difficult to define and might depend on an individual's subjective perception (Sheridan 2001), the literature shows consensus that high-quality interactions between children and adults pave the way for healthy child development (Shonkoff 2010; Siegel 2020). We conceptualise high quality in terms of approaches that are beneficial for children's development and well-being (Engvik et al. 2014; Melhuish 2011) and that have a substantial positive impact

on children's early learning (Rege et al. 2019; Yoshikawa et al. 2013) as well as long-term outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy (Melhuish 2011).

Individual and collective learning in ECEC organisations

To achieve high-quality practice in ECEC, staff must participate in a professional development learning community (Roland and Ertesvåg 2018). Learning is most fruitful when staff collaborate in continuous learning processes over extended periods and when professional staff develop a shared approach to their daily practice (Fullan 2014). It follows that systems may change significantly when learning becomes collective (Flaspohler et al., 2008; Senge 1999), and when all staff develop and learn new approaches together with the aim of delivering high-quality pedagogical services (Flaspohler et al. 2008). Developing knowledge in an organisation is closely linked to sharing and community, which requires a common professional language (Stålsett 2006). Human interaction can be understood as taking place in the language, and that common professional language is thus an essential source for the development of a professional community (Skjervheim 1996). This typically ensues when staff develop a 'tribal language' of common concepts and theories that they actively use in their daily work. To achieve this, centre leaders must initiate change processes in which staff learn together and continuously reflect on their pedagogical approaches (Dufour 2016) and that support them in connecting theoretical perspectives with their daily practice (Roland and Ertesvåg 2018).

Capacity can be defined as 'the skills, motivations, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to implement innovations, which exist at the individual, organisation, and community levels' (Wandersman et al. 2008), and it encompasses the power to engage in and sustain change processes for the purpose of enhancing learning for all (Stoll 2010). Capacity must be developed both individually and collectively among staff, indicating that all staff acquire new knowledge, gain new resources and seek new motivation (Flaspohler et al. 2008; Wandersman et al. 2008).

CLASS as a system for individual and collective learning in Norwegian ECEC

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta et al., 2008) is a validated observation instrument. Based on the empirical importance of high-quality environments for children, CLASS was developed as an observational instrument, designed to assess classroom processes. The CLASS scales were constructed based on a review of literature on teacher education, quality in ECEC, and observational research focusing on classroom dimensions that relate to child outcomes (La Paro et al. 2004). The instrument is based on the theoretical framework of Teaching Through Interactions (TTI) which is anchored in systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), closely compatible with sociocultural learning theory where human *interaction* is the most important component for children's development and growth (Hamre et al. 2014; Hamre and Pianta 2007).

The main goal of the observational instrument is to assess interaction between children and adults (Pianta et al. 2013). CLASS Toddler (18–36 months) consists of eight dimensions organised into two domains (Emotional and Behavioural Support, and Engaged Support for Learning) (La Paro et al. 2012). CLASS Pre-K (3–5 years) comprises ten dimensions organised into three domains (Instructional Support, Classroom

Organisation, and Emotional Support) (Pianta et al. 2013). Observations are scored on a seven-point scale: scores 1 and 2 indicate low quality; 3, 4 and 5 represent medium quality; and 6 and 7 denote high quality. An average score is calculated for each domain based on the scores on the dimensions belonging to the domain.

A Norwegian West Coast municipality used CLASS to gather observations and to give feedback with a view to strengthening their ECEC centre's quality prior to this study's commencement. To date, 62 centres have participated, together with the ECEC support services, including the Pedagogical-Psychological Service (PPS), the ECEC Resource Centre (which can be called on for extra support), the Centre for Multilingual Children and the municipality ECEC administration. ECEC staff have participated either by being observed or by observing other practitioners' using CLASS. The initiative consisted of various training elements, such as lecture days, certification of observers, local guidance and network group discussions. A total of 24 staff from ECEC centres and support services completed the CLASS certification and were thus ready to observe centres. Observation with CLASS provided the basis for a CLASS report, and the centres thus received individual and system-level guidance. This municipality's implementation of CLASS as a system for professional development allowed us to explore the participants' own perceptions, experiences and reflections regarding CLASS—from the perspectives of both the observers and the staff who were observed and received guidance. Our explorations were guided by the following research question: *What are the perceptions and reflections of education professionals regarding CLASS as a system for individual and collective learning in Norwegian ECEC?*

Method

Owing to the lack of empirical research on professional educational experiences with CLASS, a qualitative, explorative research design was selected. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted researchers to engage with new data collection methods (Kucirkova et al. 2020). For our team, it meant adapting analogue interviews to online interviews. Online focus groups, group interviews and individual interviews were considered appropriate as they can generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences with new interventions or systems (Krueger and Casey 2015; Morgan 1993) and because they generate collective understandings of the phenomenon under study (Lune and Berg 2017).

Participants

Invitation to participate in the study was distributed through the municipality's email system, but participants' consent to participate was submitted directly to the University of Stavanger document control department, so that the municipality's ECEC management was not privy to the final participant list. All staff who had worked with CLASS for four to five years in the municipality's ECEC centres and all certified CLASS observers were invited to participate. This resulted in 196 ECEC professionals being invited to attend. Among these, 29 ECEC professionals signed up for the study. This procedure was chosen because, at that time, only this municipality in Norway had the experience of implementing CLASS in all parts of the ECEC system. Considering that the ECEC

employees were invited during a situation with many restrictions caused by COVID 19, we invited everyone who met the inclusion criteria and included all those who were willing to participate.

The participants represented PPS, the Resource Centre, the Centre for Multilingual Children, municipality ECEC administration, and teachers and assistants in ECEC centres. All participants were female and came from nine different ECEC centres and four different sectors of the support system. To ensure that the number of participants in the focus group interviews was sufficient to facilitate meaningful analysis (Krueger and Casey 2015), all staff who returned the consent forms were invited to participate. Four focus group interviews ($n = 22$), two smaller group interviews ($n = 4$), and three individual interviews ($n = 3$)—all online—were conducted (total $n = 29$). Initially, we had intended to conduct 4–6 focus group interviews that included all participants. However, owing to some participants' sick leave requirements and scheduling issues, we set up new group and individual interviews to avoid high attrition rates.

Data collection and procedure

An open-ended, semi-structured interview guide was developed based on pilot interviews. The interview guides were piloted in three rounds, with an ECEC leader, teacher, and assistant. During the pilot interview, some time had been set aside for the informants to give feedback on which questions worked well and which needed improvement, and this feedback informed adjustments to the interview guide. The interview guide varied slightly between those who had used CLASS to observe others and those who had been observed and received feedback through CLASS (see Appendix). The main themes concerned the professionals' experiences of and reflections on CLASS in the Norwegian ECEC context. Extended focus group interviews were held (Berg et al. 2004), which included introducing the interviews' main topics to participants before the interviews took place. This allowed participants to reflect on their personal opinions before the interview, thus increasing the likelihood that they would express their opinions more fully during the focus group interview (Breen 2006). The main author and a moderator assistant conducted the interviews online based on focus group interview guidelines (Krueger and Casey 2015). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 min and was audio-recorded and transcribed by the main author who was leading the interviews.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), and all ethical recommendations were adhered to throughout. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and all quotes are anonymized. Practical and ethical reflections on digital data collection in this study are partly presented in Kucirkova et al. (2020). In addition, to study the digital interview process closely, we added questions in the interview guide focusing on participants' experiences of the digital focus group interviews (Evertsen et al., forthcoming).

Data analysis

The main author initiated the analytical process by closely reading the transcripts several times to compile the first draft of initial themes (Harding 2018). The second co-author then refined the themes and their interconnectedness in discussion with the first author. To validate the findings, the third author read through the raw data separately and discussed the final analyses and agreement of key themes with the other two authors.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage involved the establishment of codes, followed by themes and finally high-level categories that emerged from the data using inductive category development (Mayring 2000). A conventional content analysis was performed (Fauskanger and Mosvold 2014; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) using NVivo 12 software. The focus of the analysis was on the qualitative saturation of meaning rather than the quantification of utterances. On occasions when the findings from the focus groups concurred with each other, the data were categorised within the same dimensions and narrowed down to categories and subcategories (Patton 2002). In cases of disagreement, the researchers discussed the findings again, searched for relevant quotes and agreed on the final categories.

All interviews were first analysed individually. All interviews from all groups were then analysed cross-sectionally. After the cross-sectional analyses, two overarching topics emerged: (1) ECEC professionals' experiences with CLASS as a framework for professional development (presented in this article), and (2) participants' reflections on the use of CLASS in Norwegian ECEC (will be published elsewhere, Evertsen et al., in process). The researchers also performed a member check (Miles et al. 2020) via email, which gave the informants the opportunity to provide feedback on the initial analyses. None of the participants indicated any disagreements or need for change.

Findings

The content analysis yielded four main high-level categories: *A shared professional platform*, *Professionalisation*, *Quality in practice* and *Outcomes for children and parents*. Each main category includes three subcategories (themes). The category *A shared professional platform* was deemed to constitute a foundation for the other three categories and was therefore chosen as the dominant category.

Figure 1 visualises the findings to provide an at-a-glance overview of the main categories (Miles et al. 2020). To strengthen the findings' trustworthiness, all quotes from the interviews have been translated so as to reflect the original Norwegian content as accurately as possible (Helmich et al. 2017). To preserve participants' anonymity, numbers are used to represent the interview to which each respective participant belongs.

Discussion

This study's main aim was to explore education professionals' perceptions and reflections concerning CLASS as a system for individual and collective learning in Norwegian ECEC. The overall findings suggest that the ECEC professionals interviewed believed



Figure 1. The study's main findings.

that CLASS contributes to positive structures that support professional community and development.

A shared professional platform

Participants perceived CLASS as a system that provided them with a professional development community. This category is interpreted as a foundation for the other categories, since the CLASS structure provided staff with a shared professional platform that included a common language and collective knowledge, which, in turn, led to professionalisation in terms of a shared community both within centres and between centres and the support system, improved quality in practice and positive outcomes for parents and children. Participant 1.4 expressed her experiences as ‘... a common knowledge for all (...) we all go in the same direction’.

The results suggest that the introduction of CLASS stimulated a common pedagogical language and understanding. Participant 5.1 said, ‘What I believe works best (...) is that we get a common language, that we have the same concepts in ECEC centres and as support systems.’ This resembles what Dufour (2016) refers to as a ‘tribal language’ of common concepts and theories that staff actively use in their daily work. The findings further suggest that the new knowledge and the common professional language raised awareness of and prompted reflection on pedagogical actions among participants. When collective

learning occurs in ECEC organisations, staff develop a shared understanding (intersubjectivity) in their daily practice (Roland and Ertesvåg 2018). The tribal language (Dufour 2016) affords the opportunity to develop a common focus and awareness and can be understood as part of the precondition for learning that extends from the individual to the collective. Individual learning can instigate change, but significant system-level changes occur when learning becomes collective (Fullan 2014). As Participant 5.7 said,

What I think is very positive about using CLASS is that all kindergartens in the municipalities (...) work with the same thing and have a shared platform ... it is not the case that every centre sits alone and does its own thing but that we have found something that we know is good for children's development. Using CLASS as a foundation is a strength. And it's good for me from the support system who guides and gives courses in centres and can link what I'm talking about to CLASS, because then the ECEC staff know what I'm talking about.

Participant 1.2 reflected, *'I believe that common language is the key (...) to getting everyone involved.'* It was clear from the participants' reflections that developing capacity was about gaining new knowledge and seeking fresh motivation, which, in turn, contributed to greater professional commitment. Research suggests that in such situations, staff can experience positive change in an upward spiral, both individually and collectively (Flaspholer et al., 2008; Meyers et al., 2012; Wandersman et al., 2008).

Professionalisation

This category captured participants' responses that were characterised by motivation, commitment and the experience of an improved and holistic collaboration between ECEC and its support system. Several ECEC teachers remarked that CLASS had elevated their status as staff in ECEC. As Participant 4.2 observed, *'I absolutely think it helps to improve the quality of kindergartens and that this raises our profession ... In a way, it helps to get rid of the attitude that anyone can work in ECEC. The extent of our work, I think CLASS is helping to bring out.'* Participant 1.4 confirmed the importance of professional competence in ECEC: *'ECEC is not the same now as it was many years ago. There is much more quality in the work than some might think. So, it raises the quality, and does something with the status of the ECEC.'* Participant 1.1 observed, *'Because our profession is a low-status profession, and we are constantly fighting to show the world all the good things we do ... and I think this has helped us ... Because it's getting more professional.'*

The introduction of CLASS offered participants the opportunity to communicate with the outside world within which they practice pedagogy and education in ECEC centres in a way that is similar to yet different from how teachers in schools practice. Participant 9.1 remarked, *'We are teachers like them (ref to teachers in school), except that we have a different approach.'*

Several ECEC staff expressed that being observed and receiving feedback renewed their awareness of pedagogical practices, leading to enhanced motivation and commitment and increased self-confidence. Participant 1.3 said, *'It is motivating to receive feedback, and then you usually get a lot of positive feedback. Then you also get feedback that will make you develop, and that gives motivation ... so there is a lot here that is motivating for the individual and the team.'* The participants noted that CLASS and its common

language raised the quality of their collaboration. Coaching and guidance tend to be of higher quality when all involved use the same language and understand one another as a single community. Participant 8.1 noted, 'I can use it both for guidance in the ECEC group and for writing reports... can use some of the words in CLASS and then people know what I mean.'

A shared experience reported by participants was that as part of their increased sense of professionalisation, they planned their educational activities more thoughtfully and intentionally. The activities were constructed to provide learning opportunities, although they continued to focus on the children's learning process. Here, the intention or purpose of their profession was essential: 'We have become very intentional in our pedagogical approach. What is the purpose? What do we want children to experience and learn?' (Participant 4.1).

Quality in practice

Participants reported that with the use of CLASS, the quality of their pedagogical approaches has improved: '... the staff focus on how they work. And that is what develops the quality, I think ...' (Participant 1.3).

In line with one of the main domains in CLASS—instructional support—ECEC staff focus on stimulating children's cognitive development during play and daily activities. Participant 4.5 observed, '... It's about giving the children a chance to talk, both to speak and think for themselves.' The participants experienced improvements in their stimulation of children's language and reflective conversations and in the quality of interaction between each staff and child. As Participant 4.4 put it, 'Actually, start asking those (reflective) questions when they are young, so that they get used to that way of thinking' The practitioners wanted to stimulate children's sense of wonder, and in the interviews, they reflected on CLASS's contribution to this professional intention: 'CLASS has certainly helped to ... raise that understanding... In the past, when we have had circle time, we have preferred to just teach, and the children became passive ... Now there is more focus on interactive sessions.' (Participant 9.1); 'CLASS has helped with this. You become more aware that you are not at home; you are at work. You must use words; you must use language.' (Participant 3.2).

Participants reported that to ensure high-quality interactions, they had become more aware of children's signals and needs. Participant 9.1 revealed, 'It's quite clear. There are so many who have become professional, solid, and safe staff...' Responsive teaching of this nature is in line with what the literature describes as foundational for child development and well-being (Shonkoff 2010; Siegel 2020). ECEC centre staff reported that they provided more guidance to parents than before, attributing this to a new sense of security in their roles, achieved through new knowledge, motivation and self-confidence as part of a professional ECEC community. Participant 1.4 reflected on how they had chosen to communicate the CLASS dimensions to parents: '... we have chosen to inform the parents about which dimension we focus on. Information about what the dimension contains, and how we work, may also help the parents ... So, it is to raise awareness among parents too ... There has been a lot of positive feedback from parents.' Our findings further indicated that the individual and collective learning achieved through CLASS has, from the participants' subjective perspectives, enabled them to deliver

high-quality pedagogy to children and to engage in a richer and more meaningful dialogue with parents.

Outcomes for children and parents

Participants in this study reported that CLASS has contributed to changes in their practice. Participant 2.1 said, *'The children are more involved in everyday life than they were before. The staff are better at engaging children. They ask in a different way. They are more present.'* The participants reported that the children reflected at a higher level than before after the CLASS system was introduced. In Participant 2.1's experience, children were very responsive and engaged during a visit from a storyteller: *'Then I thought: Oh yes, it works in real life too, it's not just the staff who change, but we see it in the kids too!'* This may relate to the previous categories, which revealed the professionals' enhanced awareness of children's language stimulation and cognitive expansion through adult-child conversation. The participants also reported that several children sought different adults for security, comfort and confirmation. Participant 2.1 noted, *'... now the children approach all the adults in the group'*. This reflects the influence of a shared community among adults on the children in their classes.

A central dimension in CLASS is emotional support; thus, CLASS guides teachers towards sensitive and supportive practices. Results indicate that children related to more adults as their safe caregivers and that the staff also observed improved parent collaboration. Teachers were more confident than before both in their pedagogical roles and in guiding parents. Parents listened more attentively to their professional advice, which could potentially further enhance child development. Participant 1.4 said, *'They (parents) get examples of things they can also use and do at home ... It raises parental awareness a bit too. And that's what they say themselves, that they become a little more conscious themselves as well.'*

Practical implications

The participants in this study expressed positive perceptions of CLASS in the Norwegian ECEC context. The shared professional structure contributed to professionalisation and quality in their daily practice, which positively influenced children's development and collaboration with parents. A common language (Dufour 2016) and continuous learning processes over an extended period of time (Fullan 2014) at the system level (Senge 1999) might provide opportunities for significant collective learning in ECEC organisations. Although this small-scale study's findings should not be generalised to other contexts, we cannot disregard the possibility that the application of CLASS as an evaluation and feedback system in other contexts *may* have similar effects. Despite the fact that this is a small-scale study the findings may contribute to a more nuanced debate regarding the use of ECEC quality assessment tools as CLASS. In a ECEC field dominated by qualitative research methods (Alvestad et al. 2009) some might have feared that quantitative assessment tools such as CLASS fail to capture the complexity of quality. Findings from the present study indicate that CLASS may have many strengths when it is applied to a sociocultural context e.g. by using it for more than just a grading system. Findings support an idea of CLASS as a facilitator of professional learning communities which

is actually in line with the sociocultural learning perspective, where learning for ECEC professionals occurs during interaction and dialogue with colleagues and other ECEC organisations. Quality assessment tools are currently mainly used to verify quality in ECEC in Norway but should also be considered used for professional learning and development.

Study limitations

Given the study design, we cannot know whether the unique CLASS structure contributed to the positive results or whether similar perceptions might have been reported with other quality measurement systems. The participants may also have reflected positively on CLASS's use as part of an overall implementation of change processes in their practice. Such change processes are often characterised by positive attitudes towards the pursuit of new goals (Fixsen et al. 2005; Greenberg et al. 2005). As a consequence of the sampling process in this study, self-selection bias may have occurred. Participants who volunteered to this study may be professionally committed and positive to the use of CLASS in the municipality. It is also important to acknowledge that the participants were interviewed at the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced their experiences and sense of need for a shared community and platform.

Summary and future research

The present study expands on existing research with its investigation of the qualitative aspects of CLASS and contributes to current research by highlighting ECEC professionals' perceptions regarding the use of CLASS. Results indicate that the CLASS system functions as a structure for learning on the collective and individual levels, for practitioners, children and their parents in Norwegian ECEC services. Future research would benefit from a broader approach to the study of CLASS in ECEC, for example, by asking the children themselves about their everyday experiences in relation to the domains and dimensions of CLASS. Since CLASS is applied so widely in ECEC contexts worldwide, it is important to understand its application as well as its benefits and possible limitations for children.

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Appendix

Interview guide with CLASS observers

- (1) What do you think about CLASS's use as a quality measuring instrument? What do you think about CLASS as a tool for feedback and development?
- (2) CLASS has three domains: emotional support, classroom organisation and instructional support. Do you experience the domains as useful in terms of development work and quality goals in ECEC centres?
- (3) Are there aspects of CLASS that you consider to fit well or less well with the Norwegian context or with the Norwegian Framework Plan?
- (4) What advantages and disadvantages do you perceive in the use of systematic tools to observe the care and learning environment provided by kindergartens?
- (5) Is there a need for adjustments in CLASS or the Norwegian kindergarten context with respect to promoting children's emotional and cognitive development?

Interview guide with ECEC staff who have been observed and who receive guidance through CLASS

- (1) What is your opinion about CLASS as a tool for feedback and development?
- (2) Are there aspects of CLASS that you consider to fit well or less well with the Norwegian context or with the Norwegian Framework Plan?
- (3) What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using systematic tools to observe the care and learning environment in ECEC centres?
- (4) How does it feel to be systematically observed and to receive guidance based on the CLASS observers' observations?

9 Study II

Gains and challenges with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in a social pedagogical tradition



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Gains and challenges with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in a social pedagogical tradition

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Introduction: This qualitative study explores how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals' perceptions of gains and challenges using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS, Pre-K and Toddler) within the social pedagogical tradition in Norwegian ECEC.**Methods:** Focus group interviews ($n=22$), group interviews ($n=4$), and in-depth interviews ($n=3$) were conducted online, followed by conventional content analysis.**Results:** The findings indicate that ECEC professionals perceived CLASS as contributing to their pedagogical understanding and practice. At the same time, the introduction of CLASS enhanced ECEC professionals' awareness regarding the pedagogical value of the social pedagogical tradition (SPT), which they wished to preserve and protect, and the specific elements of the school readiness tradition (SRT), which they wished to include in their pedagogical understanding of high-quality ECEC pedagogy.**Discussion:** The findings suggest that the use of CLASS expands ECEC professionals' understanding of the value of both pedagogical traditions. Finally, inspired by the present study's findings regarding interaction quality, the research team proposes a hybrid model of pedagogical approaches in ECEC.

KEYWORDS

pedagogical tradition, Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), interaction quality, cognitive development, socio-emotional development

Introduction

During recent years there has been a growing international interest in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) quality amongst educational researchers (Burchinal et al., 2011; Zaslow et al., 2011), parents, and policymakers. Various stakeholders are interested in monitoring everyday ECEC practices to ensure best practice for all children (Ishimine and Taylor, 2014).

ECEC quality assessments define areas of ECEC, such as communication between teacher and children, as widely agreed-on quality indicators that can feed into professional development and higher-quality practice (Ishimine and Taylor, 2014) and increase

employees' reflection on their practice (Evertsen et al., 2022). However, no consensus has been reached regarding the appropriateness of the global application of standardised assessments of ECEC, particularly in relation to cultural complexities and problems relating to the validity of instruments migrating outside their cultural frames (Pastori and Fagan, 2017).

ECEC quality assessment and early childhood staff observation is relatively new phenomena in Norway, and the research team sought to determine how professionals perceive such systematic observation tools in their pedagogic practice. In our previous work, the perceptions and reflections of educational professionals regarding CLASS as a system for individual and collective learning in Norwegian ECEC were studied (Evertsen et al., 2022), but we did not go in-depth into their reflections regarding pedagogical traditions. A controversy regarding what ECEC quality is has been identified and social investment arguments from the school readiness tradition, have been heavily criticised in Norway, especially amongst scholars (Lustad et al., 2019). It is important to illuminate the voices of ECEC practitioners related to this important issue. Therefore, in the present study, we explored how ECEC professionals' perceived gains and challenges using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which derives from a school readiness tradition (SRT), within the social pedagogical tradition (SPT) of Norway.

The sociocultural learning theory

This study is nested in sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1980). The sociocultural approach to learning permeates the Norwegian ECEC system and its framework plan (FWP; Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This learning theory suggests that individuals develop through interactions with their surrounding environments and in dialogue with one another using sociocultural tools that mediate these interactions (Vygotsky, 2001). Sociocultural learning theory views learning and development as processes that occur through language and participation in social practices (Säljö, 2001).

Norwegian social pedagogical context

The Norwegian ECEC has been considered to belong to the social pedagogical tradition (SPT; OECD, 2006). The Norwegian FWP emphasises core values, such as childhood, democracy, diversity and mutual respect, equity and equality, and sustainability in the curriculum (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The Norwegian FWP guides ECEC centres to provide all children with equal opportunities for socio-emotional and cognitive development. One of the main goals of a recently launched quality strategy is to ensure high-quality ECEC provision for all children, regardless of their place of residence or which ECEC centre they attend (Ministry of Education, 2021). This may be achieved through planning, observation, documentation, and systematic

assessment of daily practices. According to a government mandate, Norwegian ECEC centres should be learning organisations and should conduct systematic observations and evaluations, and they should work continuously to improve their pedagogical quality (Ministry of Education, 2021). Before this government mandate, few assessment tools for observation of ECEC quality have been applied in Norway, and there is a need to evaluate such tools for future use.

Children in Norwegian ECEC have the right to play, learn, build friendships, and be surrounded by staff who engage in safe and positive interaction (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). These objectives require that ECEC staff possess high-quality interaction skills. It is thus necessary to assess interaction quality to ensure sustainable learning environments for both children and staff. However, although the national government focuses on interaction quality in Norwegian ECEC, considerable variation in quality persists across centres (Rege et al., 2018; Alvestad et al., 2019).

Surprisingly, children's rights to participate fall short of the FWP recommendations. A Norwegian study found that children in ECEC lacked opportunities to actively participate in learning activities (Ree and Emlison, 2019). Other research shows that children receive relatively weak teacher support in learning and language development (Drugli and Berg-Nielsen, 2019). A study of 22 ECEC staff members found that their primary focus was on children's emotional needs in their reflections on quality in ECEC and that they exhibited a 'taken for granted attitude' to children's learning and development (Baustad et al., 2018). Overall, research highlights a weak or absent interaction quality in Norwegian ECEC, particularly regarding instructional support, and the need for further investigation into potential improvements.

ECEC educational traditions

ECEC pedagogy has long been divided into two main traditions: the school readiness tradition (SRT) and the social pedagogical tradition (SPT; OECD, 2006). The two traditions have different origins and different emphases. Despite their different theoretical angles and objectives, it is worth investigating whether these traditions share commonalities and whether some aspects unite the traditions (Lustad et al., 2019). SRT is prominent in English-speaking countries, France, and the Netherlands. SPT is practiced in Nordic countries, some European countries, and New Zealand. Even though both traditions are based on developmental psychology there are some clear differences. SRT focuses on preparing children academically for school and future life and is characterised by a high focus on cognitive stimulation by instructional learning, child assessment, and benchmarks (Sylva et al., 2016). SPT focuses on children's lived experiences in the *here and now*, children's free play, and children's own initiative to play and learn (Sylva et al., 2016). Free play is this tradition's chief pedagogical principle, whereby the main goal is to support children's socio-emotional development. Scholars and teachers

within this tradition oppose the SRT believing that a more holistic approach is key for healthy child development (Biesta, 2013).

There are also clear differences in the goal of the traditions. SRT's main societal goal is to provide all children with equal opportunities for future development and growth. ECEC in SRT contains a more formal education than in the SPT (OECD, 2019; Sylva et al., 2020). The differences also become evident in the traditions' frameworks and curricula. SRT's curricula have clear child outcome standards and are highly structured and precise (OECD, 2006), whilst SPT's curricula traditionally do not contain benchmarks, and autonomy is encouraged at both the child and ECEC centre levels (OECD, 2006).

Despite the well established notions of the two traditions there seems to be a growing integration of some of the goals from SRT in Norwegian ECEC. The SRT's aims to provide all children with equal life opportunities through early intervention for all children. The Norwegian FWI states that ECEC centres should contribute to evening out social differences and act as places that protects and respects children's rights. Furthermore, the FWI's latest edition specifies that ECEC centres should stimulate children's learning in seven thematic areas (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 47). Although the differences between SRT and SPT have been widely acknowledged (OECD, 2006), other new, emerging pedagogies integrate child-centred aspects from SPT, with the more goal-oriented pedagogy that characterises SRT: 'Playful learning or guided play actively engages children in pleasurable and seemingly spontaneous activities that encourage academic exploration and learning. Here, teachers using guided play have a set of learning goals in mind...' (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009, p. 27). A playful learning approach has been suggested in a new Norwegian curriculum (Storksen et al., 2018; Rego et al., 2021). Cognitive stimulation within this tradition is characterized by children being engaged in meaningful activity in interaction with others (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Thus, it is not enough to arrange cognitively stimulating activities, children also need to be active, engaged, see meaning, and interact with other children and with teachers. Previous Norwegian research has shown that children have lacked opportunities to actively participate in learning activities even during planned learning activities (Ree and Emilson, 2019).

CLASS Pre-K and Toddler

There is a trend in Norwegian ECEC towards the use of CLASS to assess and support professional development, e.g., in two new research and development projects (Språksterk 1-5, 2022; Trygg for tre, 2022). A recent study showed that Norwegian ECEC staff improved their interaction quality through CLASS (Toddler) observations, feedback, and guidance (Bauen et al., 2021). Other than these studies, CLASS has not been widely applied in Norway until now. Thus, there is a need for more research in this field.

The standardised observation system is based on the theoretical framework of Teaching Through Interactions (TTI)

which is anchored in systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where human interaction is the most important component for children's development and growth (Hamre and Pianta, 2007; Hamre et al., 2014). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; La Paro et al., 2012) is an observation tool designed to measure the quality of interaction between staff and children in education. The observation tool is frequently used to collect data in research but is also developed to create learning opportunities for teachers with the aim of strengthening the quality of learning environment for children in education. CLASS has the focus on the adult role and on the employees' responsibility to facilitate and support all children's development of security, learning and well-being (Hamre et al., 2014).

CLASS Toddler (18–36 months) consists of eight dimensions organised into two domains (Emotional and Behavioural Support, and Engaged Support for Learning; La Paro et al., 2012). CLASS Pre-K (3–5 years) comprises 10 dimensions organised into three domains (Instructional Support, Classroom Organisation, and Emotional Support; Taastad et al., 2019).

CLASS scores are linked to various academic, social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes, and its growing popularity is thus unsurprising. However, this instrument was developed in a context characterised by a SRT, which contrasts with the SPT seen in most Nordic countries. It is therefore important to gain knowledge of teachers' perceptions of gains and challenges related to the use of CLASS in Nordic ECEC contexts.

Cultural differences in the use of quality assessments

In recent decades, several quality assessments have been developed in ECEC internationally, although most measurements come from the US context. The links between CLASS and the social pedagogical principles can be seen through the emphasis on learning through interactions, a focus on emotionally supportive relationships, and through the regard of children's perspectives, and thus CLASS is based on theoretical principles that coincide well with social pedagogical principles. Still, it is nevertheless developed in a school readiness context, and cautions should be taken when adapting this tool to new contexts (Pastori and Pagani, 2017).

It has been pointed out that European countries may meet challenges with ECEC quality assessments unless appropriate adjustments are made to ensure their suitability in different contexts (Ishimine and Taylor, 2014). Norwegian ECEC must consider international research critically since education systems are structured differently, concepts may have different meanings, and values and priorities differ across countries (Alvestad et al., 2009). Therefore, quality assessments do not automatically translate to other contexts, including the Norwegian or Nordic understanding of high-quality ECEC (Bjornestad et al., 2020).

Few international qualitative studies have explored staff perception of CLASS and cultural differences in ECEC, except for some studies from Italy (Pastori and Pagani, 2017) and the US (Barnes-Najor et al., 2021), which indicate that cultural

misalignments may occur. Hence, it is important to study CLASS's application in other contexts, such as Norway, particularly amongst its hands-on users: ECEC teachers and their support system (Pedagogical Psychological Service (PPS), the Resource Centre, the Centre for Multilingual Children and municipality ECEC administration).

The current study

A municipality in southwest Norway implemented CLASS to create a professional community for ECEC employees. As a result, the municipality implemented CLASS, focusing on employees in ECEC and the support systems around using CLASS observations for adapted guidance and professional development. The municipality has 35 certified CLASS observers who conduct annual observations in 67 ECEC centres. The trained and certified CLASS observers comprise head teachers, directors, and employees from the ECEC support system. CLASS observations are conducted with the CLASS Pre-K and Toddler manuals once a year for each centre. Certified observers visit several centres but do never carry out observations in their own centre. Each observation lasts 15–20 min with subsequent scoring in to the CLASS scoring sheet, and this routine is carried out four times. After the observations, the observer arranges a meeting with the headteacher where they receive oral feedback and a written detailed observation report for the given observation. The head teacher is responsible to communicate the report to other employees in the classroom, and to discuss and make goals for further professional development. Furthermore, the municipality has employed 70 facilitators whose main task is to support professional development on a daily basis in the ECEC centres, based on the theoretical framework of the CLASS dimensions and observation score.

This study aimed to explore how Norwegian ECEC professionals perceive gains and challenges using CLASS (Pre-K and Toddler) in the SPT. The municipality in which this study was conducted pioneered in the use of ECEC quality measures and feedback for teachers in Norway and were the first Norwegian municipality to introduce CLASS in ECEC (Toddler and Pre-K). This municipality's implementation of CLASS allowed us to explore the participants' perceptions of and reflections on CLASS from the perspectives of both the observers and the observed staff (who received guidance).

Our research question was: How do Norwegian CLASS observers and observed staff perceive the use of CLASS in the social pedagogical ECEC tradition?

Materials and methods

Given the lack of empirical research on ECEC professional experiences with CLASS in Norwegian ECEC environments, a qualitative explorative interview study was conducted. The data

were collected in 2020. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic obliged researchers to engage with new data collection methods (Kucirkova et al., 2020) and analogue interviews had to be replaced with online interviews. Focus group interviews, group interviews, and individual interviews were considered appropriate for generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences with new interventions or systems (Kraeger and Casey, 2002; Kraeger and Casey, 2015) and collective understandings of the phenomenon under study (Morgan, 1993; Lane and Berg, 2017).

Participants

A municipality in the southwest of Norway implemented CLASS to gather observations and feedback to strengthen their ECEC centres' quality prior to this study's commencement. Purposive sampling was performed, and participants were invited through the municipality's email system, their consent forms was submitted directly to the administration of the University of Stavanger. Thus, the municipality's ECEC management was not privy to the final participant list. All staff with 4–5 years' experience with CLASS in ECEC centres and all certified CLASS observers were invited to participate. This resulted in 195 ECEC professionals being invited to attend. Amongst these, 29 educational professionals signed up. The participants represented Pedagogical Psychological Service (PPS), the Resource Centre, the Centre for Multilingual Children, municipality ECEC administration, and teachers and assistants in ECEC centres. All participants were female and came from nine ECEC centres and four different sectors of the support system.

To ensure sufficient participants in the focus group interviews to facilitate meaningful analysis (Kraeger and Casey, 2015), all consenting candidates were invited to participate. Four focus group interviews ($N=22$), two smaller group interviews ($N=4$), and three individual interviews ($N=3$)—all online—were conducted (total $N=29$). The interviews were organised based on the participant's professional role. Initially, we planned for 4–6 focus group interviews including all participants. However, owing to sick leave and scheduling issues, new group and individual interviews were held to prevent attrition from the study. The various online interview formats gave the participants rich opportunities to contribute and express themselves (Kucirkova et al., 2020).

Data collection and procedure

An open-ended, semi-structured interview guide was developed. The questions varied slightly between CLASS observers and those who had been observed and received feedback through CLASS, see Appendix. The main themes concerned the professionals' experiences of and reflections on the use of CLASS in the Norwegian ECEC context. The interview guides were piloted with an ECEC leader, a teacher,

and an assistant. Participants gave feedback on which questions worked well or needed improvement, and the interview guide was adjusted accordingly. Extended focus group interviews were applied (Berg et al., 2004), where the interviews' main topics were presented to participants in advance. This allowed participants to reflect on their personal opinions before interview, thus increasing the likelihood that they would express their opinions more fully and freely during the focus group interview (Breen, 2006) and hence increase the trustworthiness of the data (Berg et al., 2004). The main author conducted group and individual interviews, whilst the main author and a moderator assistant conducted the interviews online based on focus group interview guidelines (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Each interview lasted 60–90 min and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

The main author closely read the transcripts several times to compile the first draft of the initial themes (Harding, 2018). The second co-author then refined the themes in discussion with the first author. To validate the findings, the third author read the raw data separately and discussed the final analyses and agreement of key themes with the other authors.

The analysis comprised three stages. The first involved the establishment of codes, followed by themes, and finally high-level categories were defined using inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). A conventional content analysis was performed (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Fauskanger and Mosvold, 2014) using NVivo12 software. The qualitative saturation of meaning, rather than the quantification of utterances, formed the basis of the analyses (Saunders et al., 2018). The material was narrowed down to overarching categories and subcategories (Patton, 2002). The researchers agreed following several rounds of discussion, resulting in the final categories presented below.

All interviews were analysed individually and then cross-sectionally. Two overarching topics emerged from the cross-sectional analyses: (1) ECEC professionals' experiences with CLASS as a framework for professional development, and (2) participants' perceptions regarding the use of CLASS in the SPT. Results related to the first topic have been reported previously (Eivertsen et al., 2022), and results related to the second topic are reported in the present study. A member check was performed via email to increase the findings' trustworthiness (Miles et al., 2020) and give the participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the initial analyses. The member check revealed no disagreement or need for change.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), and all ethical recommendations were followed

throughout. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point without any negative consequences for them or their professional roles.

Results

The content analysis yielded three main high-level categories: (1) CLASS structure in the social pedagogical tradition (SPT), (2) CLASS and Norwegian framework plan (FWP), and (3) Contributions and suggested adjustments for CLASS in the social pedagogical tradition (SPT). Each main category included two subcategories (themes): gains and challenges. To provide an at-a-glance overview of the main findings (Miles et al., 2020), Figure 1 visualises the results of the analyses. As it is crucial to translate quotes in a way that reflects the original content (Helmich et al., 2017), the quotes have been translated to reflect the original Norwegian content as accurately as possible whilst maintaining idiomatic English. To preserve the participants' anonymity, each informant was assigned a number.

Main category 1: CLASS structure in the social pedagogical tradition

Subcategory 1: Objective evaluation

The participants considered CLASS's contributions to continuous objective observations and feedback positive. Furthermore, they expressed the view that assessments are reinforced using trained and certified CLASS observers and the CLASS framework, which is research-based and thus helps avoid subjective judgement when practitioners receive feedback on their own practice. As participant 3.1 observed, "...it's somehow not their point of view... they have a marker and indicator to follow and put aside what they think... which makes it very objective. They do not interpret between the lines or know the staff."

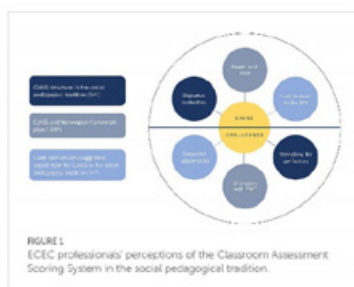


FIGURE 1
ECEC professionals' perceptions of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in the social pedagogical tradition.

The participants reported that the objective assessment helps determine the staff's professional strengths and areas for improvement. The participants described this as motivating. Participant 1.1 said, "...getting feedback is motivating, and it is *enriching*." The participants reported that the CLASS structure has contributed to establishing a quality standard for adequate pedagogical practice, which further creates constructive expectations of staff and amongst staff. Participants 4.2 and 6.1 described it as "...it is very specific and clear on what is expected of the adult..." and "...the big advantage is that through CLASS we have defined quality standards () what is expected of staff, and how this may be facilitated."

Participants reported that CLASS is a helpful tool to align with various intentions in the FWP's content and national guidelines by systematising pedagogical practice. Participant 6.2 described the ways in which feedback was handled prior to CLASS: "I [ss] maybe you should have been a little better with... now observers give examples of what they have seen, and then they connect this to the different dimensions in the feedback." Participant 1.3 continued, "This is what develops quality, I think. That we focus on what we do... what is good and what is not so good? What do we need to improve?"

Subcategory 2: Stretching for perfection

Some participants reported that they pulled themselves together during the observations. Participant 2.3 experienced it as follows: "I do not think you would have seen the same thing if you put up a camera, so to speak. I'm absolutely sure. People pull themselves together () I do not think it completely represents the truth." Others pointed out that it was crucial that they were allowed to be in development, and that the CLASS scores are not necessarily representative. Participant 2.1: "We've talked a lot about this - whether it's real or not. Then we landed on that it really does not matter... [it is] more important to talk about why the result was as it was () It may be false, but it's good."

Participants reported a tension associated with being observed, but that it is also fun and exciting, giving them opportunities to learn new things. Participants 1.4 and 3.1 described it as follows: "Some people thought it was scary that we should be observed. But as you do it, you become much more confident" and "It gave me a lot of food for thought. I get tips for things I could say more of and get even more out of the thing I was doing."

Participants reported that observation scores are often not representative of daily practice, but that it does not necessarily matter, because the observations facilitate reflection and awareness of what one should strive for. The observers reported that it can sometimes be uncomfortable to give medium or low scores, and that in some cases it leads to them 'embellishing scores' to avoid the discomfort that may arise when communicating results to the ECEC centres. Participant 5.2 openly described how the dissemination of scores can be unpleasant: "The fact that I have to sit face to face and say what I do not think was so good makes me score them a little higher than maybe what I would do if it was a video... I do not think I am as strict as I should be."

Main category 2: CLASS and Norwegian framework plan

Subcategory 1: Match with the Norwegian FWP

Most participants highlighted CLASS's understanding of care and its significance as coinciding with the framework plan's guidelines for children's right to care in Norwegian ECEC. The participants used concepts such as sensitivity, interaction, and relationships, which constitute care according to the FWP. The participants further described a connection between CLASS's focus on cognitive stimulation and the FWP's requirements relating to children's rights to play and learn. A newly educated participant (2.4) experienced it as follows: "I came straight from college, and read CLASS, and wondered what's new here? We learned this in lectures and it is in the Framework Plan. This is just another way to... make it more specific." A more experienced participant (2.3) stated, "I absolutely think it is easy and draws threads to the FWP: both for care, play, education, and learning. I see connections between dimensions and domains in CLASS." Participant 2.5 observed, "...the framework plan says that we should have learning, so this is something we need to become even better at, I think." Participant 4.1 continued, "...in the framework plan you can see that the staff should promote wonder and philosophical thinking among children, and CLASS helps with that."

Participants reported that CLASS has helped them to systematise the assessment of their own practice and document their educational activities and has given them a systematic approach to learning organisation, in accordance with the FWP's requirements. CLASS's contribution was described by participant 6.2: "It has become even more clear to many what planning is. It's not just sitting there making annual plans, but it's being structured in what you do with the kids. And how you have prepared yourself. CLASS has, to a much greater extent, made this part of the framework plan visible to us. Learning has emerged more in the new framework plan, and CLASS specifies it." Participant 2.2 says, "Then there is also the fact that you have documentation of it (the pedagogical work)."

Subcategory 2: Mismatch with the Norwegian FWP

Participants' perceptions regarding the misalignment between CLASS and the FWP mainly concerned children's need for rest and relaxation during a day. Participant 5.5 stated, "There is a fairly large focus on how efficient and organised the adults are, but the FWP says that there should also be time for peace, rest and relaxation, and there is no goal for that in CLASS." Furthermore, participants miss the topic of parental collaboration from the CLASS manual, since this is considered valuable in the SP1. Participant 6.1 pointed out, "The theme of parent collaboration is not present in CLASS."

The participants reflected on the CLASS term *productive* and expressed the belief that children must also be given the opportunity to "just be" without adults continuously eliciting their active participation in activities. Participant 8.1 reflected, "How do

we create the conditions to be fluctuations in the day, where we are down and calm? I think it is often something we forget, or miss, it is a time when they (children) have time off!"

Participants believed that the concepts of *productivity* and *classroom*, frequently mentioned in CLASS, do not correspond with the Norwegian pedagogical tradition. They offered rich descriptions of the challenges that the terms from the SRT can pose to the SPT. Participant 5.7 reflected, "They call the kids *students*, and they talk about *classrooms*, while we have *children* and *kindergarten*. And we are *playing*, and we are *outside*... instead of having a specific lesson... we have a more holistic learning... I also think of *productivity*. I think it is a bit problematic when I give feedback, because in the manual the criteria are that you should *squeeze* as much instruction into the days as possible, and then I think: shall we? I do not think so. I think the kids should learn, but I am critical!" Participant 4.1 continued, "...*productivity!* (laughs)... find another word! It sounds like we are working in a factory." Some participants said that although they saw a connection, they feared that CLASS would impose a school readiness culture onto Norwegian ECEC. Nevertheless, most participants believed that CLASS's focus on cognitive stimulation would not necessarily lead to a school readiness approach but rather would add valuable input to the Norwegian ECEC.

Main category 3: Contributions and suggested adjustments for CLASS in the social pedagogical tradition

Subcategory 1: Contributions to the SPT

The participants experienced that the CLASS content coincides with the FWP regarding high-quality interactions. There was a joint agreement that emotional support is a foundation for cognitive stimulation, and emotional support was highly emphasised. As participant 4.5 expressed, "the emotional support is definitely the most important." The participants did not describe the emotional support in more detail but were clear about its significance. This may be because they focused on new elements that CLASS had contributed to in the SPT. As participant 4.3 stated: "I agree that the socio-emotional must, of course, be there as a foundation. But I also think that was what we were best at before we got CLASS."

All participants were positive that the SPT in Norwegian ECEC is somewhat challenged in the intentional facilitation of cognitive stimulation. Children's natural search for learning opportunities is central to Norwegian ECEC. Participant 5.6 described the need to create more exciting activities for children: "I think that the Norwegian ECEC offer too few exciting toys and activities for the children... it can get a little boring. The children deserve a little more variety, more creativity, a little more exciting new things sometimes. So that they become a little more like 'wow!', and feel like starting an experiment or whatever it should be." The participants discussed planning more exciting activities for the children with the intention that the children would enjoy more

opportunities to be cognitively challenged. Participant 4.4 said, "... the cognitive development is very useful for us. Because this is perhaps where we have performed worst at on a general basis... when it comes to challenging the kids on their own thinking and mindset. It is not a standard we are used to." Participant 4.1 continued, "the cognitive topic has been the most useful." In the reflection on cognitive stimulation and the fear surrounding the school readiness approach, participant 5.2 said, "I agree that that we (the children) do not need to learn something in all situations, or that we need to focus like that. At the same time, I think it is very exciting with these dimensions (cognitive stimulation) precisely because we in Norwegian ECEC may have had an idea that it (ECEC) should not be school. They must be allowed to play, not learn. Maybe we have separated these two things a little too much." Participant 5.1 continued, "Getting more learning into Norwegian ECEC is not necessarily negative either." Participant 6.2 envisaged a new expanded understanding of child development: "They affect each other both ways (ref to cognitive and emotional development). The cognitive affects the socio-emotional and the socio-emotional affects the cognitive. They go together. Almost like in an eternity circle." Participant 5.7 pointed out, "It is good that we are being challenged to do a little more than we are used to... by talking, asking questions in the way that we learn through CLASS. I think it is positive in many ways and provides good learning." Participant 5.1 added, "I often think that it is the Norwegian ECEC model that should be adjusted a little." Hence, the participants perceived commonalities between the CLASS framework and the FWP's focus on children's right to participate in ECEC. Participant 5.6 said, "CLASS is very concerned that the adult should be actively participating and happy to provide input and do all these things that promote engagement in the kids, participation and learning." Participant 4.3 observed, "In our kindergartens we have been used to the kids going and finding what they want and playing and such. But after we started with CLASS, we have become more aware of creating stations... so that things are a little more accessible and the adults are at the different stations and are involved and active there... which may be a little American... but I think it's a good thing...."

The participants also found it positive that CLASS observes the employees (the adults) and not the children. Participant 4.5 said, "(CLASS) is more about us adults, what opportunities we give the kids." Participant 4.2 also had some thoughts on this: "We think it was very exciting that the relational and quality of the staff is measured. Because we (adults) are the most important tool in kindergartens."

Subcategory 2: Suggested adjustments

The participants reflected on what they believed were necessary adjustments to CLASS in the SPT. Reflecting on changes or adjustments that the participants wish to see in future work with CLASS in Norwegian ECEC, some participants (who work with the youngest children) emphasised that they wish to see CLASS toddler include the planning and structure dimension, similarly to CLASS Pre-K. Participants 2.4 and 6.2 said, "I notice

that organisation does not apply to the little ones. It is silly... you organise at least as much in a toddler group" and "For toddlers, there are only two dimensions () it is just as important with planning, organisation, and structure for the youngest."

Most participants wanted more frequent observations. At the same time, they wanted the post-observation feedback to be given to everyone observed and not only the head teacher. Participant 1.2 expressed, "I think the whole group should be present when the report is presented. There is a lot of communication which can be lost when only the head teacher is sitting there." Participant 3.2 observed, "I remember that people were more comfortable and relaxed the second time they were observed. I think to myself that if it had happened a little more often... then it would have become more natural."

Discussion

This study's main aim was to explore ECEC professionals' perceptions concerning the use of CLASS in the SPT. The findings suggest that the ECEC professionals perceived CLASS as contributing to enhanced understanding of high-quality ECEC pedagogy, particularly in relation to the important balance of cognitive and emotional stimulation of children. At the same time, the introduction of CLASS prompted them to reflect on the pedagogical values of the SPT that they represent and that they wish to preserve.

CLASS structure in the social pedagogical tradition

The findings indicate that CLASS positively contributed to objective classroom observations and feedback. The assessments seem to be further strengthened using trained and certified CLASS observers and the research-based CLASS framework. In their opinion, this helped them avoid "personal perception" when they received feedback on their own practice. The objective pedagogical assessment that CLASS offers is a new way of working with quality improvement in Norway. Traditionally, quantitative research has not been prioritised in Norwegian ECEC, and therefore systematic observations have been rare in research and practice (Alvestad et al., 2009). Furthermore, the findings indicate that the objective assessment contributes to specifying the staff's professional strengths and areas for improvement, and participants describe this as motivating. However, participants describe that the observed groups may often be "decorated as a bride" (a Norwegian term for pretending to be better than you are) during the observations. The participants reported that they put on a performance during the observations. Other studies also suggest that this may be a challenge (Delaney and Krepps, 2021). The participants seemed to express that it was not wholly negative if some participants stretch for perfection during observation, as this facilitated learning, reflection, and awareness of what

high-quality practice is. Furthermore, observers report that it can sometimes be uncomfortable to give medium or low scores, and that in some cases it leads to them "embellishing scores" to avoid discomfort in their dialogue with teachers. These findings may indicate that the implementation of CLASS at a municipal level creates learning communities and conscious practice with the intention of enhancing ECEC's quality rather than facilitating credible and accurate assessment of ECEC quality (e.g., for research).

CLASS and Norwegian framework plan

Participants observed that the CLASS structure is a helpful tool that facilitates alignment with various objectives in accordance with the FWP's content and national guidelines by systematising pedagogical practice. Children's right to participate is a fundamental value in the Norwegian ECEC tradition (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The participants reported perceiving commonalities between the CLASS framework and the FWP (e.g., a focus on children's right to participate in everyday practices). It is interesting to note that some participants worry that tools developed in a SPT will limit children's opportunities to participate. But at the same time, they also reported that the focus on cognitive stimulation in the CLASS framework has provided children with more opportunities to think for themselves and express their own way of thinking. A previous Norwegian study revealed that teachers, although trained in the SPT, did not allow children to participate actively in learning situations (Roe and Emilson, 2019). Other Norwegian researchers have indicated a need for tools that can enhance staff competence in planning cognitively stimulating activities (Baustad et al., 2018). In a study related to the present study, teachers expressed new understandings of cognitive stimulation through their use of open-ended questions in everyday situation, transforming these moments into learning opportunities for children (Evertson et al., 2022).

Contributions and suggested adjustments for CLASS in the SPT

The findings indicate that the participants want to preserve the SPT. Education professionals are encouraged to critically evaluate pedagogical tools adapted from other pedagogical traditions (Alvestad et al., 2009; Barnes-Najor et al., 2021). The present study's participants would like to see changes to CLASS that deal with practical elements, such as the frequency of observations and how feedback is given. At the same time, they point out the terminology used and the value of allowing children to "just be." Nevertheless, all participants agree that the SPT faces challenges with the intentional facilitation of cognitive stimulation. The participants discussed planning more exciting activities for the children, whereby children should be given cognitive

challenges, an opportunity that often appears to have been overlooked in Norwegian pedagogical practices (Blaustad et al., 2018; Drugli and Berg-Nielsen, 2019). Being challenged to stimulate children's cognitive development led participants to reflect on the complexity of children's development. Somewhat surprisingly, findings from a previous study indicated that CLASS—deriving from the SRT—imbued teachers educated in the SPT with greater confidence in devising learning situations that facilitated high levels of child participation (Evertsen et al., 2022).

A middle way focusing on high quality interactions

Although elements from the SRT and SPT are often described as mutually exclusive (OECD, 2006), this was not this study's main finding. The present study offered an opportunity to study the perceptions of professionals in the SPT whilst they implemented a quality assessment system adopted from the SRT, and their experiences do not appear to confirm a clear boundary between the two traditions. This study's findings suggest that CLASS, with its focus on interaction quality, lends itself to a hybrid model that combines the SPT and SRT in ECFC.

Other researchers have seen the potential for Norwegian child policy to combine elements from both the SPT and the SRT into a united model (Tuastad et al., 2019). Our findings support this perspective. However, we propose an expansion in terms of a new hybrid model of the two traditions—with the idea that the two pedagogical approaches can be understood as a flexible continuum with a high degree of cultural variation. A hybrid model would facilitate a dynamic understanding of children's development, recognising the overlap between traditions. Namely, both the SRT and the SPT strongly value children's well-being and development and claim that learning occurs during human interaction (OECD, 2019). A hybrid model could provide space to preserve cultural values, whilst possibly remaining open to the use of elements from the other traditions' understanding, where the focus regardless of tradition is high interaction quality. A hybrid model may enhance further dialogue between scholars from different pedagogical traditions rather than cementing a universal way of thinking.

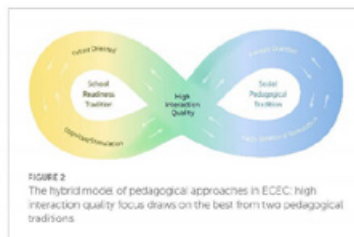
Our suggested model is inspired by the present study's findings emphasising that children's cognitive and socio-emotional development mutually influence one another. Children's socio-emotional and cognitive development is important for healthy and holistic growth (Shonkoff, 2013; Hart and Lindahl Jacobsen, 2018), and the expansion of cognitive abilities can positively affect a child's emotional growth and resilience (McClelland et al., 2000). Furthermore, the suggested model fits well with dynamic skills theories. Mascolo and Fischer (2015) state that "Psychological acts are integrated processes. There is no such thing as a simply cognitive or emotional or conative or behavioural processes; any action that affects the world necessarily involves some integration

of meaning, feeling, needing, and motor action." (Mascolo and Fischer, 2015, p. 117). Similarly, we may see modern pedagogical approaches from the SRT and the SPT as mutually enhancing rather than mutually exclusive. Our hybrid model highlights children's need for socio-emotional and cognitive stimuli for optimal development, keeping in mind children's best interests in both the present and the future. This hybrid model is best understood within *sociocultural learning theory*, where children's proximal developmental zone for emotional and cognitive development needs to be maintained (Vygotsky, 1980; Bruner, 1984). Sociocultural theory together with contemporary theory of child development concerns the delicate balance between how much stimulation the child "tolerates" on one hand and actually needs on the other hand (Vygotsky, 1980; Hart and Lindahl Jacobsen, 2018). Cognitive stimulation in this hybrid model is not understood as school preparation in terms of giving children work sheets etc., but by supporting and expanding children's wondering, their reflections, and their interests in phenomena in the world around them through high quality interactions. A hybrid model can challenge the current dichotomies in different educational approaches by raising awareness of which elements from both traditions should be preserved. High quality interactions are at the centre of all child development, as displayed in Figure 2.

Study limitations and future research

Self-selection bias often represents a threat to small qualitative studies. The participants who volunteered may have been professionally committed and overly positive to the use of CLASS in the municipality.

Research environments and the field of practice require deeper exploration of pedagogical traditions and their significance for the field of practice. It is necessary to study children's collective and individual needs for emotional and cognitive stimulation from pedagogical and psychological perspectives, as such knowledge can benefit children in ECFC. It is further necessary to investigate children's subjective perceptions on what high interaction quality is for them.



Child-centred values relating to children's need for emotional and cognitive stimulation should be a priority for research and development within ECCE. Our findings and the hybrid model could feed into updated research and theory to guide future high-quality practices in ECCE.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

This study was reviewed and approved by NSD – Norwegian centre for research data. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in the study.

Author contributions

CE is the main author of this scientific article and has been responsible for planning and preparing research questions and interview guides, carrying out data collection, analysis and writing of the manuscript. IS participated in planning and preparing research questions and interview guides, the analysis process, and the manuscript's writing. KT participated in the manuscript's writing. NK participated in planning and preparing research questions and interview guides, the analysis process, and

the manuscript's writing. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Interview guide with CLASS observers

1. What do you think about CLASS's use as a quality measuring instrument? What do you think about CLASS as a tool for feedback and development?
2. CLASS has three domains: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. Do you experience the domains as useful in terms of development work and quality goals in ECEC centres?
3. Are there aspects of CLASS that you consider to fit well or less well with the Norwegian context or with the Norwegian Framework Plan?
4. What advantages and disadvantages do you perceive in the use of systematic tools to observe the care and learning environment provided by kindergartens?
5. Is there a need for adjustments in CLASS or the Norwegian kindergarten context with respect to promoting children's emotional and cognitive development?

Interview guide with ECEC employees who have been observed and who receive guidance through CLASS

1. What is your opinion about CLASS as a tool for feedback and development?
2. Are there aspects of CLASS that you consider to fit well or less well with the Norwegian context or with the Norwegian Framework Plan?
3. What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using systematic tools to observe the care and learning environment in ECEC centres?
4. How does it feel to be systematically observed and to receive guidance based on the CLASS observers' observations?

10 Study III

**Exploring success factors for districtwide
implementation of a Classroom Assessment
Scoring System related intervention**

**This paper is not included in the repository because
it is not yet published.**

Appendices

Appendix 1 – First entry

Intervjueguide: Erfaringer med kommunal implementering av CLASS.

- 1) Hvordan planla dere implementeringen av CLASS i kommunen?**
 - Hva ble viktig for dere i denne prosessen?
 - Hvilken betydning hadde utviklingen av implementeringsplan i initieringsfasen?
 - Hvorfor/gi eksempler?

- 2) Hvordan gjennomførte dere implementeringen i kommunen?**
 - hvordan vil dere beskrive forholdet mellom det dere planla og det som dere faktisk fikk gjennomført?
 - ble det lagt implementeringsplan? Hvem utarbeidet den, og hvem fikk ansvaret for gjennomføring?
 - Hvordan ble ledelse distribuert utover i alle ledd for å ivareta at planen ble gjennomført?
 - Hva ble viktig for dere i denne prosessen?
 - Hvorfor/gi eksempler?

- 3) Hvordan utviklet dere USB støttesystemet?**
 - Har støttesystemet hatt betydning for hvordan CLASS ble mottatt og omsatt i praksisfeltet? i så tilfelle, hvilken?
 - Hva opplever dere har vært suksesskriterier ved støttesystemet?
 - Opplever dere at CLASS kan «stå alene» uten støttesystemet? Hvorfor?

- 4) Hva anser dere som suksessfaktorer for å få til en implementering av CLASS på kommunalt nivå?**
 - Hvis du må velge ut tre suksesskriterier for en vellykket kommunal implementering- hvilke tre kriterier velger du da?

Appendix 2 – Second entry

Fokusgruppeintervju med observatører - CLASS Protokoll

Fokusgruppe ID:		
Dato: Klikk her for å skrive inn en dato.		
Moderator: Cecilie Evertsen		
Assisterende moderator: Ingunn Størksen		
Sted: Universitet i Stavanger		
<input type="checkbox"/> NSLA	<input type="checkbox"/> Annet: Klikk her for å skrive inn tekst.	
Antall deltakere: Velg et element.		
Tid brukt på fokusgruppen:		
Start:	Slutt:	Totalt (min.):

Innledning

Velkommen til denne fokusgruppen og en stor takk til dere for at dere stiller opp for å snakke om deres erfaringer fra bruken av CLASS i barnehagen de siste årene. Mitt navn er Cecilie Evertsen-Stanghelle og jeg er stipendiat ved Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø og atferdsforskning. Med meg har jeg Professor Ingunn Størksen som også jobber ved NSLA.

Det vi skal gjøre i fokusgruppen er å utforske deres erfaringer med bruk av CLASS for utvikling av kvalitet i barnehagen. Vi ønsker spesielt å forstå hvilken nytteverdi bruken av måle- og utviklingsinstrument som CLASS har for utviklingen av omsorgs- og læringsmiljøet i deres barnehager og/eller hvilke svakheter og/eller begrensninger dere erfarer ved bruken av CLASS. Vi ønsker også å få innsikt i deres erfaringer og forståelser av bruken av CLASS i lys av Rammeplanen, og vår nordiske forståelse av barndommens egenverdi.

Dere innehar viktig førstehåndskunnskap om nytteverdien av bruken av CLASS. Vi er spesielt opptatte av hvilken verdi dette har hatt for dere i praksis, i det daglige arbeidet med barn. Derfor er det viktig for oss at hver og en av dere forteller oss om deres erfaringer så åpent som mulig. Husk at det er ingen riktige eller gale svar og at vi er her for å lære av dere.

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Informasjonen vil kunne brukes til å få en dypere forståelse av bruken av internasjonale måleinstrumenter som CLASS i norsk barnehagekontekst. Resultatene vil kunne anvendes på ulike måter, både som del av en tilbakemelding til fagstaben i Sandnes kommune og til Læringsmiljøsentret om styrker og svakheter ved CLASS som måleredskap for kvalitet i Norske barnehager. Funn fra disse intervjuene har som formål å bli publisert i et internasjonalt tidsskrift.

Dere har muligens sett at vi har en del teknisk utstyr i rommet. Vi gjør lydopptak av fokusgruppen for at vi ikke skal gå glipp av viktig informasjon. Folk sier ofte veldig nyttige ting underveis i slike fokusgrupper og vi klarer rett og slett verken å notere eller huske alt som blir sagt. For at diskusjonene i fokusgruppen skal foregå på en god måte er det viktig at kun en person snakker om gangen.

Vi er på fornavn i denne fokusgruppen, men vil ikke navngi noen i presentasjonen av våre resultater. All informasjon hver enkelt av dere oppgir i løpet av intervjuet behandles konfidensielt og uten direkte eller indirekte gjenkjennbare opplysninger knyttet til en enkeltperson.

Vi har satt av 1 ½ time til dette intervjuet, men lengden vil kunne variere avhengig av hvor mye dere har å fortelle.

Noen spørsmål før vi begynner?

Vel, la oss begynne. Vi har plassert noen navnekort på bordet foran dere for å hjelpe oss å huske hverandres navn. La oss ta en kort runde rundt bordet. Fortell oss hva du heter og hvor du jobber.

- 1. Hvordan opplever dere at CLASS fungerer som kvalitetsmål?
Hvordan opplever dere at CLASS fungerer som verktøy for tilbakemelding og utvikling?**

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:

Hva var du/dere skeptiske til med tanke på CLASS ved oppstart av prosjektet? Hva tenker dere nå?

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Hvilke styrker så du/dere med tanke på CLASS ved oppstart av prosjektet? Hvilke styrker ser dere nå?

2. CLASS har tre domener; Emotional support, Classroom organization og Instructional support. Opplever du/dere domene som nyttige med tanke på utviklingsarbeid og kvalitetsmål i barnehagen?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:

Hvorfor var den/disse domene nyttige?

Hvordan kommer dette til uttrykk i praksis?

3. Er det aspekter ved CLASS som oppleves som om de passer godt, eller ikke passer, med den norske konteksten eller med den norske Rammeplanen?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål

Hvorfor var disse tingene lite nyttige?

Hvilke deler av CLASS opplever dere er forenelig med Rammeplanen?

Er CLASS forenelig med vår nordiske forståelse av barndommens egenverdi?

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4. Hvilke fordeler og ulemper ser dere ved bruk av systematiske verktøy for å observere omsorgs og læringsmiljøet i barnehagen?

5. Er det behov for justeringer ved CLASS eller den norske barnehagekonteksten for å fremme barns emosjonell og kognitiv utvikling?

Hvilke endringer ønsker du å se?

Hvorfor akkurat disse endringen?

Appendix 3 – Third entry

Fokusgruppeintervju med observerte og som mottar veiledning gjennom CLASS.

Protokoll

Fokusgruppe ID:		
Dato: Klikk her for å skrive inn en dato.		
Moderator: Cecilie Evertsen		
Assisterende moderator: Ingunn Størksen		
Sted: Universitet i Stavanger		
<input type="checkbox"/> NSLA	<input type="checkbox"/> Annet: Klikk her for å skrive inn tekst.	
Antall deltakere: Velg et element.		
Tid brukt på fokusgruppen:		
Start:	Slutt:	Totalt (min.):

Innledning

Velkommen til denne fokusgruppen og en stor takk til dere for at dere stiller opp for å snakke om deres erfaringer fra bruken av CLASS i barnehagen de siste årene. Mitt navn er Cecilie Evertsen-Stanghelle og jeg er stipendiat ved Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø og atferdsforskning. Med meg har jeg Professor Ingunn Størksen som også jobber ved NSLA.

Det vi skal gjøre i fokusgruppen er å utforske deres erfaringer med bruk av CLASS for utvikling av kvalitet i barnehagen. Vi ønsker spesielt å forstå hvilken nytteverdi bruken av måle- og utviklingsinstrument som CLASS har for utviklingen av omsorgs- og læringsmiljøet i deres barnehager og/eller hvilke svakheter og/eller begrensninger dere erfarer ved bruken av CLASS. Vi ønsker også å få innsikt i deres erfaringer og forståelser av bruken av CLASS i lys av Rammeplassen, og vår nordiske forståelse av barndommens egenverdi.

Dere innehar viktig førstehåndskunnskap om nytteverdien av bruken av CLASS. Vi er spesielt opptatte av hvilken verdi dette har hatt for dere i praksis, i det daglige arbeidet

Appendices

med barn. Derfor er det viktig for oss at hver og en av dere forteller oss om deres erfaringer så åpent som mulig. Husk at det er ingen riktige eller gale svar og at vi er her for å lære av dere.

Informasjonen vil kunne brukes til å få en dypere forståelse av bruken av internasjonale måleinstrumenter som CLASS i norsk barnehagekontekst. Resultatene vil kunne anvendes på ulike måter, både som del av en tilbakemelding til fagstaben i Sandnes kommune og til Læringsmiljøsentret om styrker og svakheter ved CLASS som måleredskap for kvalitet i Norske barnehager. Funn fra disse intervjuene har som formål å bli publisert i et internasjonalt tidsskrift.

Dere har muligens sett at vi har en del teknisk utstyr i rommet. Vi gjør lydopptak av fokusgruppen for at vi ikke skal gå glipp av viktig informasjon. Folk sier ofte veldig nyttige ting underveis i slike fokusgrupper og vi klarer rett og slett verken å notere eller huske alt som blir sagt. For at diskusjonene i fokusgruppen skal foregå på en god måte er det viktig at kun en person snakker om gangen.

Vi er på fornavn i denne fokusgruppen, men vil ikke navngi noen i presentasjonen av våre resultater. All informasjon hver enkelt av dere oppgir i løpet av intervjuet behandles konfidensielt og uten direkte eller indirekte gjenkjennbare opplysninger knyttet til en enkeltperson.

Vi har satt av 1 ½ time til dette intervjuet, men lengden vil kunne variere avhengig av hvor mye dere har å fortelle.

Noen spørsmål før vi begynner?

Vel, la oss begynne. Vi har plassert noen navnekort på bordet foran dere for å hjelpe oss å huske hverandres navn. La oss ta en kort runde rundt bordet. Fortell oss hva du heter og hvor du jobber.

1. Hvordan opplever dere at CLASS fungerer som verktøy for tilbakemelding og utvikling?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål:

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Hva var du/dere skeptiske til med tanke på CLASS ved oppstart av prosjektet? Hva tenker dere nå?

Hvilke styrker så du/dere med tanke på CLASS ved oppstart av prosjektet? Hvilke styrker ser dere nå?

Hvordan kommer dette til uttrykk i praksis?

2. Er det aspekter ved CLASS som oppleves som om de passer godt, eller ikke passer, med den norske konteksten eller med den norske Rammeplanen?

Oppfølgingsspørsmål

Hvorfor var disse tingene lite nyttige?

Hvilke deler av CLASS opplever dere er forenelig med Rammeplanen?

Er CLASS forenelig med vår nordiske forståelse av barndommens egenverdi?

3. Hvilke fordeler og ulemper ser dere ved bruk av systematiske verktøy for å observere omsorgs og læringsmiljøet i barnehagen?

4. Hvordan oppleves det å bli systematisk observert og motta veiledning på bakgrunn av CLASS observatørens observasjoner?

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Oppfølgings spørsmål

Hva er fordelene med systematisk observasjon og veiledning?

Finnes det utfordringer ved dette?

Opplever dere noe endring i praksis?

Hva endres?

Hvorfor tror du denne endringen er kommet etter bruk av CLASS?

Appendix 4 – Fourth entry



Meldeskjema / Evaluering av kvalitetsmål i norske barnehager / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer
201684

Vurderingstype
Standard

Dato
11.02.2022

Tittel

Evaluering av kvalitetsmål i norske barnehager

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Universitetet i Stavanger / Fakultet for utdanningsvitenskap og humaniora / Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø og atferdsforskning

Prosjektansvarlig

Cecilie Evertsen

Prosjektperiode

01.03.2020 - 14.07.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 14.07.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#)

Kommentar

Personverntjenester har vurdert endringen registrert 08.02.2022.

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 11.02.2022.

Behandlingen kan fortsette.

Endring:

Det er lagt til et utvalg 4.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige personopplysninger, særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om helseforhold frem til 14.07.2023

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG UTVALG 4

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

For alminnelige personopplysninger vil lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a.

For særlige kategorier av personopplysninger vil lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

Personverntjenester vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningens:

- om lovlighet, rettedighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålshbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelige angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke

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viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål

- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet.

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Vi vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

Personvernjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Ved bruk av databehandler (spørrskjemaleverandør, skyfagring eller videosamtale) må behandlingen oppfylle kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art. 28 og 29. Bruk leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådfare dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilken type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

<https://www.nsd.no/personvernjenester/fyll-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

Du må vente på svar fra oss før endringen gjennomføres.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Kontaktperson: Gry Henriksen

Lykke til med prosjektet!

