

CHAPTER 5

Quality and Legitimacy in ECEC Mapping: How Can Mapping Contribute to the Protection of Children and Their Families?

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Abstract: In this chapter I discuss the quality and legitimacy of mapping in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and how the mapping and cooperation with the parents can be a bridge-builder to the Child Welfare Services (CWS). I use data from my doctoral dissertation on how mapping is included in the pedagogical practice of ECEC assistants and teachers, with a focus on whether and to what extent this process takes children's perspectives into account (Midtskogen, 2022). Through participatory observation and individual interviews with parents and ECEC employees, I find that there is no standardised mapping with specific quality requirements for ECEC institutions today. It is interesting to discuss the quality and legitimacy of the ECEC institution's dynamic mapping process because such mapping can have implications for the family's path to the CWS at an early stage, contribute to the family's resilience process and prevent dangerous situations for the children. I direct the analyses and interpretation of the findings towards the extent to which the mapping process includes elements that fulfil the requirements of deliberative theory, such as the involvement of affected parties, argumentation, discussion and transparency (Læret & Skivenes, 2016; Oterholm, 2003; Eriksen & Weigård, 1999). Thus, this chapter contributes knowledge about the right to child and family participation in the mapping process in Norwegian ECEC institutions and how the institution's mapping can be part of a comprehensive developmental process for the family, serving as a bridge to the CWS and other child and family services.

Keywords: child protection, ECEC, mapping, deliberative theory

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been increased attention on cooperation between welfare services in cases involving complex challenges for children, young people and their families. The Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS) face challenges in helping families where the scope of the problem is extensive. The challenges are referred to as wicked problems, i.e., they appear complex and stubborn, and cross different areas of responsibility (Fauske et al., 2016; Fauske et al., 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). The problems often begin in early childhood and the support system fails in trying to deal with these cases (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2017, p. 40). Early intervention for children and young people has long been a guideline from the Norwegian authorities. Early intervention, increased user participation and cross-sectoral cooperation are regarded as key instruments for preventing the development of wicked problems. In preventive work, welfare services are dependent on families receiving help to mobilise the support that may exist in their own social networks and local surroundings. Early cooperation between parents, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions and the CWS can enhance the municipality's ability to provide help at a time when the family has a limited scope of problems.

The family is central to the entire Norwegian and Nordic ECEC project. In the preamble to the Norwegian Kindergarten Act (2005, Section 1), parents are given the right to have an influence on everything that takes place in the ECEC institution. ECEC operations are based on values such as holistic thinking about the child, protection, the reduction of risk and early intervention for children who need special follow-up. The Kindergarten Act (2005) provides guidelines for systematic mapping of children's needs for educational adaptation and for uncovering neglect, violence and abuse. Uncovering deficiencies in children's care situations and the need for measures by the CWS is a different process to mapping children's needs for educational adaptation and needs for support in ECEC activities. ECEC institutions must be aware of circumstances that may lead to measures being taken by the CWS (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 46). Uncovering neglect takes place during a screening process that may result in a decision that the child and family are offered help or required to take action by the municipal CWS.

ECEC institutions have no guidelines for which procedures mapping processes should follow, other than requirements to cooperate with parents

and to take the child's best interests into account. The CWS's decision-making processes are carried out in accordance with several procedural requirements, with clear expectations that children, parents and others with a bearing on the decision are allowed to express their opinions and argue for their views on the issues raised. According to Læret and Skivenes (2016), the principle of the best interests of the child is central to child welfare decisions. This is also an overriding principle in ECEC legislation (the Kindergarten Act, 2005) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). The four procedural requirements for child welfare decisions are based on deliberative theory. These requirements entail that 'affected parties must be involved', 'relevant information and knowledge must be consulted', 'there must be time and space to assess and discuss information and arguments that have been produced', and 'there must be forms of transparency' (Læret & Skivenes, 2016, p. 38). Within deliberative theory, the decision-making process itself is central. Through an open process with clear argumentation from the parties, the best arguments win and these form the basis for the decision. According to national and international requirements for good administrative practice, decisions that affect citizens must safeguard the legal security of those affected (Fimreite & Grindheim, 2007). In the CWS's and ECEC institution's mapping of the child's situation, the legal protection of children and parents is an important consideration.

The legitimacy and quality of ECEC mapping work is relevant for the legal protection of children and parents but is also important because the responsibility for preventive work for children and families lies with the municipality (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2022). Problems affecting children, adolescents and families should first and foremost be solved locally. All municipal welfare services for children and young people are legally obliged to carry out work using a preventive and interdisciplinary approach.

In this chapter, I discuss the quality and legitimacy of ECEC mapping and how mapping and cooperation with parents can be a bridge-builder to the CWS by considering four procedural requirements that Læret and Skivenes (2016, p. 38) derive from deliberative theory.

In the next section, I will explain previous research and the ECEC's social mandate and dynamic mapping, and the requirement for the best interests of the child in this context. I then explain the four procedural requirements within deliberative theory and a methodological approach

to collecting and analysing my data before presenting and discussing my findings.

Research on cooperation between the CWS and ECEC institutions

Little is known about what ECEC institutions as measures for the CWS specifically offer to the individual child beyond being a compensatory measure (Christiansen, 2015). There is some research on notes of concern from ECEC institutions to the CWS that is relevant to my discussion (Baklien, 2009; Backe-Hansen, 2009; Nilsen, 2013; Haugset et al., 2015).

Baklien (2009) identifies barriers to cooperation between ECEC institutions and the CWS in her study. Barriers such as confidentiality, lack of resources, physical distance, and lack of knowledge and understanding of each other result in a lack of trust. Trust on the part of ECEC institutions is reduced because of the CWS being perceived as a closed system. In addition, the study showed that the agencies disagreed on measures: the CWS was criticised for either doing too little or initiating interventions that were too drastic. The CWS, on the other hand, stated that ECEC institutions waited too long before sending a note of concern related to situations that were perceived to be unsolvable. Moreover, the CWS believed that ECEC institutions have unrealistic expectations of what the CWS can do.

In her study of the cooperation between ECEC institutions and the CWS, Backe-Hansen (2009) found that ECEC managers wanted increased competence in talking to parents and children before and after notes of concern had been sent to the CWS. The managers wanted to strengthen academic competence in what to look for in the children and knowledge of the different cultures that the children come from. The managers also wanted a more visible and open CWS that visits ECEC institutions both at parent meetings and staff meetings, and they wanted a permanent contact person who they could cooperate with in the municipal CWS over time. Finally, the managers stated a desire to discuss concerns anonymously and have access to interdisciplinary meeting places where representatives from ECEC institutions and the CWS could participate.

Nilsen (2013, p. 159) claims, after her investigation of 34 cases where ECEC institutions sent notes of concern to the CWS, that there is a need for more knowledge about ECEC staff's competence in identifying children

about whom there is reason to be concerned. The boys, who account for a higher proportion of the notes of concern, often exhibited behaviour that was visible and considered problematic by ECEC staff. According to Nilsen, there is a need for more knowledge about whether ECEC employees note concerns in cases that lie within the 'grey area', and whether they have competence in detecting problems in children who are quiet and aggressive. In addition, Nilsen argues, more knowledge is needed about how parental cooperation takes place in situations that can lead to notes of concern being sent to the CWS.

In their study, Haugset et al. (2015) found that ECEC managers felt that they had insufficient competence in talking to children and parents in difficult situations, and that they were afraid of the consequences of sending notes of concern to the CWS. Some were afraid that their relationship with the parents might be damaged, and they were also afraid of becoming personally involved in these cases.

The sending of notes of concern by ECEC institutions to the CWS seems to be a growing trend. Moreover, a large proportion of these notes of concern are followed up. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, 93.5 per cent of them were further examined in 2021. Approximately 5 per cent of all notes to the CWS come from ECEC institutions. In the case of notes of concern for children aged 3–5 years, 18 per cent come from ECEC institutions (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, 2021).

In my own study, I found that ECEC institutions rarely sent notes of concern to the CWS. The employees had a high threshold for cooperating with the CWS, and they perceived the service as inaccessible. At the same time, I found examples of how ECEC teachers cooperated with families, making the ECEC involved as an important partner in the protection of children and the prevention of serious abuse in care situations.

The ECEC institution's social mandate and the principle of the best interests of the child

In the ECEC institution's social mandate, as stated in Section 1 of the Kindergarten Act (2005) and in the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, pp. 7, 9), ECEC institutions are a collaborative project with parents. Key social policy

objectives are to reduce social inequalities, contribute to early intervention, have a health-promoting and preventive function, and must contribute to even out social inequalities (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 2). Within their mandate, ECEC teachers must identify the developmental needs that exist within the whole group of children and in individual children. All educational practice – and mapping – shall take place in a way that considers children’s right to participation based on age and maturity, and safeguard children’s integrity, cf. the Kindergarten Act (2005, Section 3).

The ECEC teacher is to work in an evidence-based and systematic way to map, assess and document relevant data in order to safeguard the children’s holistic development. Important ethical norms in mapping are openness and cooperation with children and parents (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 1). The ECEC teacher must have an ongoing dialogue about the child with the parents and make it possible for both parties to ‘[...] regularly [...] exchange observations and assessments related to the individual child’s health, well-being, experiences, development and learning’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 29).

I found in my study that ECEC employees try to carry out dynamic mapping. The characteristic of this mapping is that it is part of the employees’ pedagogical practice and takes place in an interaction between mapping, assessment and intervention in ECEC everyday life (Lyngseth, 2020b, p. 62). Mapping is carried out by having different conversations with the child and parents, and through various forms of observation and discussions related to assessments. Dynamic mapping is closely related to pedagogical documentation. The ECEC institution’s documentation may, for example, consist of records of observation of the children that are under discussion. Taguchi (2015) emphasises the necessity for ECEC teachers to highlight and be critical of their own practice (p. 62), and to get close to the children’s reality and enable themselves, first and foremost, to interact with the children, but also with the parents, through communicative acts. The work method safeguards an understanding of children as competent and that competence is situational in the relationship between children and adults, in line with what resilience research points out as a significant factor (Rutter, 2012, 2013).

Eriksen (2018) argues that the principle of the best interests of the child has both an individual orientation, the best interests of the individual child, and a collective orientation, the best interests of the whole group of children. The concept of the best interests of the child constantly opens up

for new knowledge about children's development and existing measures. Professionals who work in services and in arenas for children are thus allowed a great deal of professional judgement.

Various services for children, including children's homes, should contribute to universal, selective and indicative prevention of problems (Norwegian Directorate of Health, 2022). The indicative level of prevention is aimed at individuals with a high risk of disease or high level of symptoms. Children living in a failing care situation may have a high risk of disease or show a high symptom level, even if their surroundings observe unclear and different signals coming from them. The mapping must be justified, it must be targeted and requires informed consent from the parents (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 39). The justification may be based on observations of worrying signals the child gives, observations of interaction and communication between the staff and the child, observations of the child's interaction skills with other children and of the communication and interaction between the child and the parents.

The ECEC institution cooperates with the child health clinic and the municipal educational psychological counselling service (PPT) on several aspects of preventive work related to children's health and educational development needs. The child health clinic is a discussion partner and will, among other things, assist in follow-up of children's physical, mental and social health, particularly through providing support for the parenting role (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 16). The PPT is to assist ECEC institutions with the assessment and follow-up of children (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Sections 34 and 35) and guidance to staff when they request it, cf. the Kindergarten Act (2005, Section 33). The work carried out by ECEC institutions, health clinics and the PPT in relation to children and families is focused on providing help to address challenges and prevent problem development. The effect of this assistance is important for the family's development process and for assessments made by the CWS regarding further protection and risk mitigation for children. It is the coherence and cooperation between the collective group of services including the ECEC institutions, health clinics and the PPT that may be challenged when municipalities are given overall responsibility for preventive work. A duty to cooperate with the child and family services clarifies the principle that the protection of children primarily takes place through clear cooperation with the child's family.

Four elements of deliberative theory

In my analysis of what parents and staff in my study said about mapping in ECEC institutions, I used the four procedural requirements that Læret and Skivenes (2016) used in connection with child welfare decisions. Parents are important partners for ECEC institutions when it comes to understanding children's development and safeguarding children's needs and legal protection. Habermas' discourse theory and the deliberative understanding of decision-making are based on a view of subject-subject relationships between people in dialogical relations (Eriksen & Weigård, 1999). In his discourse theory, Habermas advocates coercion, equalisation and equality between participants in a democratic society with deliberative politics (Eriksen & Weigård, 1999, p. 234). An important question is whether it is possible to fulfil these ideals in a context where demands for the protection of children are one of the central tasks. The use of Habermas' discourse theory has been discussed previously. Oterholm (2003, p. 219) questions whether Habermas' theory of discourse is at all possible to use in child welfare in view of the theory's starting point in coercion, equality and equalisation of power between private and public parties. Habermas advocates a coercive process in which the parties are assumed to have legitimate rational opinions in matters that concern them. A decision-making process with the ideal of a coercive dialogue between affected parties offers opportunities to meet due process requirements, such as children's and parents' statutory right to participation in matters that concern them. Within Norwegian society and services for children and young people, the principle of equality is a high priority even if not everyone is equal. The four procedural requirements (cf. Læret & Skivenes, 2016) are part of a decision-making model where dialogue between the parties forms the foundation. Oterholm's (2003) article was written during a period in which there was a strong focus on public and professional discourses on participatory practice, children's rights and especially child welfare as an agency. Much has happened since 2003, particularly in relation to children's constitutional right to participation (Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway, 1814, Section 104), early intervention vis-à-vis families with children and demands for clear and documented trade-offs related to children's right to protection and children's right to family life, cf. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the principle of the best interests of the child.

Oterholm (2003) points out that gender equality, coercive freedom and power equalisation still present challenges because processes related to children's development and the prevention of serious situations are always complex. Ideals of coercive freedom, equality and equalisation are challenging to fulfil in all services for children and young people that are intended to safeguard the principle of the best interests of the child and protect it from neglect and abuse, partly because the relationship between private and public parties will always be asymmetrical when it comes to the protection of children. However, ideal requirements can serve as guidelines for good communication between the public sector and the parties involved, and for children and parents when participating in the decision-making processes that concern them. Communicative action is central to Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy and may well function as an ideal of good administrative practice in the encounter between welfare services, children and families. A deliberative approach to decision-making processes involving children is more important than ever because children's legal protection is strengthened and welfare services are required to document their work processes, including documentation of how children and the child's family are involved. This means that children, young people and parents should be given discursive spaces to participate in the way they are able to in circumstances that concern them, where both they and the professionals are given opportunities to broaden their horizons of understanding of what the situation for an individual child is about.

Norway's view of the intrinsic value of childhood and children as legal subjects has been strengthened through legislation in recent years. It is as influenced that children and adults are socialised and re-socialised continuously. It is through the interaction between people that society is both maintained and developed, and knowledge is transferred between subjects and between generations. On this basis, our understanding is characterised by temporality because new knowledge leads to new understanding. Læret and Skivenes (2016) link this temporariness to decision-making processes in child welfare work where new insights may lead to new decisions, but also to questions about the quality and legitimacy of the process that has taken place.

Mapping in ECEC institutions also has a temporal aspect. What the informants in my study said about their mapping work can be perceived as a preliminary understanding of both the children and themselves as professionals. A form of temporariness is a prerequisite in dynamic mapping,

where part of the core is precisely that people influence each other within activities in progress, and that employees acquire new knowledge about the children that leads to a new understanding of them. The temporality of selective and indicative mapping where all parties are involved is shown through arguments and counterarguments and the unified understanding of the situation of those involved.

The essence of deliberation is that all parties should be involved in providing views and arguments in decision-making processes. The process must be conducted openly, and the quality and legitimacy of the decisions depends on how the process has taken place. In this context, rational arguments are about the correspondence between knowledge-based arguments and the perception of how reasonable they are. Arguments and counterarguments are expressed by the parties involved and discussed and weighed up, and both evidence-based and experience-based professional judgement is included in the assessments that lead to decisions and conclusions. The decisions are legitimate and of quality when the arguments of the parties concerned are discussed freely and openly, and when no rational counterarguments can be cited to the decisions. Transferred to mapping in ECEC institutions, quality assurance of the decision-making process will depend on transparency related to assessments of the child and the parents, the participants in discussions, how everyone's views are treated and how the ECEC institution justifies its mapping.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the four procedural requirements for child welfare decisions that Læret and Skivenes derive from deliberative theory are that 'affected parties must be involved', 'relevant information and knowledge must be consulted', 'there must be time and space to assess and discuss information and arguments that have been produced', and 'there must be forms of transparency' (2016, p. 38). As they point out, these requirements lie within established Norwegian and international administrative principles of considering legality, publicity, the possibility of contradiction, objectivity, equal treatment, predictability, prudence, privacy and proportionality (Fimreite & Grindheim, 2007, pp. 68–69; Læret & Skivenes, 2016, p. 38). All four procedural requirements constitute a standard that is also relevant for ECEC institutions' selective mapping of children. Both children and parents are affected parties and important sources of knowledge. ECEC institutions must obtain views and arguments from parents, cf. the principle of legality, the principle of privacy, the principle of freedom of information and the contradictory principle. The exercise of the ECEC institution's professional judgement and justifications must be

open, clear and knowledge-based, cf. the principle of objectivity and the principle of prudence.

A research project on the mapping of children in ECEC

Mapping of children and parents must be justified, targeted and based on informed consent. The parents shall, as the ECEC institution's partners and by virtue of their parental responsibility, share their assessments of what the child needs (Children Act, 1981, Sections 30 and 31). Teachers must therefore listen to parents about their views of their children and what they need in order to meet the requirements of the Kindergarten Act (2005). It is the parents' and ECEC staff's experiences with and perceptions of the cooperation between them that are interesting here.

I obtained data from two ECEC institutions in the research project on how mapping of children in ECEC is included in the staff's pedagogical practice and whether the child's perspective is taken into consideration in mapping (Midtskogen, 2022). I conducted individual qualitative interviews with four parents, seven ECEC teachers and seven ECEC assistants, as well as participating as an observer at staff meetings. The content of the interviews used in this chapter deals with what parents and staff reported on mapping and cooperation between them. Data from participant observation contain discussions the staff had about the ongoing mapping of the children. All interviews and participant observations were recorded and transcribed into text afterwards.

The analyses were conducted with interpretation, primarily to interpret and understand what the informants said and did, but the four procedural requirements of involvement, argumentation, discussion and openness derived from deliberative theory gave the analyses a direction.

Findings

I present the results according to the four elements derived from deliberative theory as mentioned above.

Openness and involvement

I found that the informants in ECEC institutions generally talked little about mapping and parental cooperation. The cooperation between home

and ECEC institution takes place to a small extent beyond the ongoing dialogue morning and afternoon when the children arrive and are picked up. It is up to the individual ECEC teacher whether the parents are informed about the start of mapping. Consent is not obtained from the parents prior to selective mapping, and they are not informed to any great extent about knowledge the ECEC institution acquires about the child in a mapping context.

The staff gave no description of conversations with children being included in the mapping process beyond the communication that takes place during daily activities.

During participant observation, I also found that the teachers tried to use dynamic mapping that involved alternating mapping, assessment and interventions. The mapping consisted of various conversations, observations and discussions. Assessment consisted of discussions of content from observations and conversations that had been conducted and took place between a qualified educator and two assistants. There was little discussion of the employees' knowledge of children and parents at staff meetings.

During the interviews, parents stated that they wanted more frequent cooperation with the ECEC institution and a dialogue that gave both parties in-depth knowledge about the children. One parent questioned whether the staff were unsure what they thought of their children and said, 'Yes, and that the employees go a little more in depth and ask what something is really about. The dialogue is good, but maybe they're also uncertain.' The parents stated a wish to get a clearer overview of their child's ECEC situation and said that they experienced variation among staff about what everyone was concerned with and what assessments employees made.

The staff said that many parents were uncertain and worried about whether their children were functioning according to age-related expectations. The parents wondered if the staff were uncertain about what they thought about the children and whether the staff met the children's needs in everyday life. However, the picture painted by such mutual uncertainty was not clear-cut. One of the ECEC teachers said that she and the parents usually asked the same questions about whether the child needed educational adaptation and developmental support (Midtskogen, 2022, p. 169), but that it was the ECEC institution that must create a space to talk about children's needs related to conditions such as mental health problems in parents (p. 97). One ECEC teacher talked about her approach towards struggling families. She conducted both child and parent conversations and facilitated cooperation

to strengthen the resilience processes of families and individuals. Children's conversations offered children participation and increased the likelihood of a sense of security for the child, where their experiences were listened to in a way that gave them the opportunity to understand the situation in a better way (Kjørholt, 2005; Sommer et al., 2013).

How the mapping processes on the part of the employees took place gave me a general impression of a universal level where the process was linked to general perceptions of a child's functioning in the children's community in the ECEC. Findings from participant observation at staff meetings showed that there was a continuous need for new observations of the children under discussion. Mapping was generally linked to the dynamics of everyday life through alternate mapping, assessment and intervention, without clear systematics or direction, or any specified procedural requirements. Both parents and staff described their impressions of the child in quite a lot of detail, but the parties shared little of the knowledge they had with each other. As such, ECEC institutions do not appear to be clear collaborative projects between educators and parents about processes that should clarify what children need. The parents' and ECEC teachers' knowledge of the child was not sufficiently reconciled to a common direction for the support the child needed.

Consultation

I found that ECEC institutions cooperated little with other services and rarely used the opportunities available to other services to consult on questions and issues related to children's functioning and situation. There was little cooperation and few discussions with the child health clinic. The PPT and special needs educators are generally little used by ECEC teachers because they perceive that the service has a narrow understanding of what the cause of the children's problems may be (Midtskogen, 2022).

ECEC institutions have a duty to send notes of concern about children's care situation, cf. the Kindergarten Act (2005, Section 48), but this duty is only triggered by a serious concern where children are exposed to a situation that could harm their development and which the CWS may implement measures to prevent. The ECEC teachers and assistants I spoke to said that they cooperated little with the municipal CWS, and ECEC teachers reported instances where the CWS was not readily available for dialogue and cooperation. The reason for limited collaboration was also somewhat evident in the informants' accounts about the opportunities they had to

use the municipality's interdisciplinary team. These are teams composed of the municipal medical officer and representatives from child welfare, the PPT and the health clinic. The informants said that they believed that there were too many services represented in such teams. It was also reported that it could be difficult to maintain the anonymity of the child and the family when parental consent was not obtained to discuss issues in the interdisciplinary team.

The ECEC teachers had their own internal municipal network groups where they could discuss issues, but the group members rarely met, they were numerous and took place outside ordinary working hours. It was therefore not a given that the ECEC teacher could participate in the network group.

Deliberation

An essential part of decision-making processes in deliberative theory is the deliberation itself – the assessments and discussion of information and arguments, and aspects related to conducting mapping.

There is a clear pattern in the data material that the time spent on follow-up of individual children and academic discussions is insufficient. Among the many challenges in ECEC everyday life, too many children per employee were mentioned, there was little agreement in the staff group about what a child needed, discussions were given low priority and, in discussions, the same thing was discussed repeatedly. Much of what happened in connection with assessments was explained by a practice characterised by old habits and routines where the mapping did not appear clear. Many informants stated that they did not know what to do if the child showed a need for support. One of the ECEC teachers claimed that the topics discussed went on in a recurring circle and she wanted more progress in the discussions with an external supervisor. Factors mentioned included reflecting on what they observed, how mapping could be systematised and what support for children and parents might be appropriate to provide.

Discussion

Sufficient time and competence for mapping, testing pedagogical measures and assessments of what has been carried out are necessary in order to deal with a collective orientation towards the principle of the best interests of

the child – an orientation towards the whole group of children. Time and competence are also needed with an individual orientation towards the best interests of the child, where mapping will result in documented decisions about appropriate actions in relation to children's needs in ECEC and decisions that can, for some children and parents, make ECEC institutions a bridge-builder to the CWS. It is this interaction and cooperation between the ECEC institution and the CWS that my discussion is aimed at.

I find that mapping in ECEC institutions at universal, selective and indicative levels overlaps (Midtskogen, 2022, p. 44). This means that the employees appear unclear as to what the mapping process is focusing on at any given time. Arguments in favour of universal – general – mapping being the most prominent form of mapping and continuing over time are that it can be a way of safeguarding children's personal integrity and reflects the ethical principle in ECEC legislation that it should not screen children more than necessary (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 39). Another argument is that it is only possible to identify the needs of children when they are identified over time in ECEC and contribute to clarity regarding the children's need for assistance. The counterargument is that children and families are unnecessarily prevented from getting the help needed because the underlying causes of the children's and parents' problems are not known or possible for the ECEC institution to detect. Children's behaviour can thus be understood and assessed based on individual attribute explanations by the staff and the unknown factors behind children's behaviour caused by neglect are overlooked.

Oterholm (2003, p. 217) points out, within the context of the CWS, that according to Habermas' discourse theory, these four procedural requirements can be regarded as ideal-typical for 'ensuring normatively correct decisions', but that in a child welfare professional participant-oriented practice they encounter some dilemmas, particularly related to the ideal of a coercion-free dialogue. One example Oterholm (p. 218) cites with reference to Schanning (1993, p. 183) is that participation does not automatically imply that one says what one believes. There will always be uncertainty associated with the parents' openness about the situation they find themselves in and whether they refrain from sending notes of concern because they are uncertain about the CWS's use of power against them.

In the context of mapping in ECEC institutions and investigations by the CWS, participation, awareness of the use of power and communicative competence are about good qualitative practice and possible sources

of error. Good mapping involves awareness of what can lead to misinterpretation of results. A source of error may arise if the cooperation between parents and staff is such that the parents do not communicate views on the child's and their own needs, concerns and wishes. There is no important information that must be considered in the mapping process, which makes it difficult to quality assure employees' perception of the needs of the child and the parents. Another source of error is that individual employees allow information about children and parents to be influenced by their own preconceptions (Lyngeth, 2020c, p. 73). This entails misinterpretation of the content of conversations and observations in that different observations are not seen in context, and that procedural requirements such as openness, the participation of those involved and contradiction are not followed.

As an important partner for the family and the CWS, ECEC institutions are to be clear in their use of professional frameworks of understanding when assessing a child's situation and needs as part of a whole centred around the child, and as an important part of assessments of what is in a child's best interests, cf. the Kindergarten Act (2005) and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017).

In line with the procedural requirements of deliberative theory, professionals must incorporate the parents' knowledge about the child and what the child expresses. This is knowledge that the employees can discuss, but they must also create room for deliberation with the parents so that they as affected parties get to take part in the argumentation that is to take place and fulfil the principle of contradiction.

The ideal of coercive communication presents dilemmas and challenges for all services for children and young people, because the services should contribute to the best interests of the child, where children's right to protection from neglect, violence and abuse is a key element. The concern of the ECEC institution regarding the possible risk of violence or serious abuse of children, which may result in sending a note of concern to the CWS without the knowledge and willingness of the child and parents, is an example of an area where professionals are given the power to intervene in the best interests of the child. At the same time, such a situation must be documented and the absence of children's and parents' rights to participate shall be justified by knowledge-based discretion, cf. the principle of privacy and legality.

A mapping process in line with deliberative procedures requires competence because observations, assessments and arguments must be elucidated in an evidence-based manner. The data material in my study gives reason to ask whether the level of competence in Norwegian ECEC institutions is high enough, since ECEC teachers constitute just over a third of employees. It may also be asked whether ECEC teachers could contribute to better health and life skills for the children if they had more competent colleagues to cooperate and discuss with.

Haugli problematises the normative nature of the principle of the best interests of the child. She argues that ‘Normative positions about what is best for children in general or for a particular child can be based on academic arguments, on values, ideologies, prejudices, ignorance or totally unfair arguments’ (2002, p. 325). She also points out that local variations in the use of the principle based on the individual’s professional judgement take place along a continuum where assessments are characterised by arbitrary work on the one hand and professional and knowledge-based judgement on the other (Haugli, 2002).

Norwegian researchers Børhaug et al. (2018, p. 41) refer to studies that address the fact that habitual and routine pedagogical practice in ECEC institutions is related to how strong the individual employee’s professional judgement is. Strong professional judgement must be based on discussion that is characterised by academic, practical and ethical knowledge, and it is conceivable that an evidence-based approach in discussion is reduced because only one-third of the employees are ECEC teachers while the rest of the employees are assistants.

Close to 60 per cent of children at risk develop satisfactorily despite risks in the home. Childhood and resilience research (Rutter, 2012, 2013) warns against drawing clear links between symptoms of high risk in children and mental difficulties and disorders later in life. The research suggests that it is important to look at protective factors, such as ECEC institutions, which can help to protect children at risk. Cooperation that entails a systematic process in which the contradictory principle is followed – where children and parents as involved parties are allowed to express their views and arguments – is necessary to safeguard the rule of law. However, such cooperation is also valuable from a developmental perspective because children develop in different directions depending on how they react to risk factors and protective factors; this is an individual orientation to the principle of the best interests of the child (Midtskogen, 2022). An important goal

in mapping and decision-making processes is to focus attention overall on the family. That all parties involved are heard can increase the possibilities for the family's experience of meaning on a day-to-day basis, enabling them to understand what is happening, attain satisfaction and act and find solutions to the challenges that exist and arise, in accordance with Antonovsky's (1979) concept of 'sense of coherence'.

ECEC teachers have told me that they are critical of cooperation with the CWS (Midtskogen, 2022, p. 117). One finding from Haugset et al.'s (2015) research is that the staff point out possible negative consequences for the relationship with the parents if they contact the CWS. An ECEC teacher in my study talked about parents who were questioned by ECEC staff in regard to the care situation in cases where the parents had mental health problems and help was needed. In these situations, the ECEC teacher followed the requirements for the involvement of those affected, safeguarded privacy, openness and prudence, and enabled consultation of relevant information and knowledge with an individual assessment of the child's best interests. In this way, the ECEC teacher contributed to the ECEC institution's mapping as a way to cooperate with the CWS and as part of a possible development process for the family. Ljones et al. (2019) claim that there is little concrete definition of what advice and guidance as an intervention entails for the parents who receive the intervention. Documentation from the ECEC institution's mapping can help to make cooperation between the family and the CWS more concrete. Documentation can also help to streamline the compensatory role of ECEC institutions by giving children more specific support rather than just general care. Finally, mapping and documentation can help to concretise the content of parental guidance and assess which agency can provide this guidance.

Haugset et al. (2015) found that ECEC managers claimed that staff have insufficient competence in talking to children and parents about difficult topics and situations. Backe-Hansen (2009) found that ECEC institutions needed more knowledge about what the staff should pay special attention to in the children, and that the managers wanted a more open and visible CWS.

I found that the staff did not conduct defined conversations with children about possible difficult topics and situations during the mapping process. The absence of such conversations with children limits the possibility of meeting the norm of considering the best interests of the child, because the child's right to speak based on age and maturity is a legal right.

The staff in my study generally said little about the visibility and accessibility of the CWS, but one assistant claimed that the threshold was high for sending notes of concern to the CWS and that they were perceived as 'scary' (Midtskogen, 2022, p. 117). One of the ECEC teachers I spoke to confirms Backe-Hansen's findings about insufficiently accessible CWS but has knowledge about children and parents she has acquired through conversations with and observations of them. This ECEC teacher performs her work in a different way than her colleagues and in a way that contradicts what Haugset et al. (2015) found about a lack of competence in child and parent conversations among their informants. The ECEC teacher I spoke to is personally involved and does not feel that assistance from the CWS necessarily has unfortunate consequences for the family. Quite the opposite, it is precisely such assistance that parents may find useful. She thus also acknowledged what parental cooperation may look like in situations that can lead to notes to the CWS, as Nilsen (2013, p. 159) asks for knowledge about. The ECEC teacher described a practice that shows an approach to the family where she used evidence-based judgement and gave clear and open reasons to parents, cf. the principle of objectivity and the principle of prudence. In addition, she safeguarded the legal security of children and parents, cf. the legality principle, the privacy principle, the principle of freedom of information and the contradictory principle. These administrative principles provide guidelines for how professional practitioners and welfare agencies should manage their power. Ideals of equal treatment and participant-oriented communication are central when the principles are complied with. Sound management practices are in line with Habermasian ideals of coerciveness, equalisation and equality (Eriksen & Weigård, 1999), but these will never be included as absolutes because children have the right to protection from neglect, violence and abuse.

The ECEC institution's mandate means that it has a responsibility for universal, selective and indicative preventive work. This is intended to prevent problem development in children and families at risk. If the parents do not consent to an indicative assessment of their child, the staff must nevertheless make an assessment and, if necessary, discuss issues with other services to clarify what the needs are and who has the most appropriate mandate to investigate these further. Families' needs for assistance must be solved locally with as little intrusion as possible and should follow the requirement to consult relevant knowledge within a decision-making process, such as the mapping process.

National and international research shows that there is too narrow an understanding of what the need for assistance is for children and families in a child welfare context (Connell-Carrick & Scannapieco, 2006; Pelton, 2015, p. 31; Ljones et al., 2019). A narrow understanding would be, for example, an understanding of the care situation as limited to the psychological attachment between child and parent. In a broader and more complex understanding of the family's need for assistance, stress factors in life, such as a lack of social integration, challenging living conditions and the parents' mental health, as well as the connection between a failing care situation and low income, will be factors that attention is directed towards. This is internationally established knowledge about factors related to risk, protection and the development of resilience (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013; Rutter, 2012, 2013).

Knowledge about neglect, violence and abuse is part of the professional knowledge base for ECEC teachers and is something they must prevent, discover and manage information about. The municipal CWS is both an important discussion partner and a partner regarding concerns and possible needs related to deficiencies in the care situation, cf. the Kindergarten Act (2005, Sections 18-2, 46 and 48). The ECEC institution's assessment of the seriousness of concern for a child will depend on the quality of the screening process. High-quality mapping is necessary to contribute to knowledge about what problems consist of and how extensive they are. The ECEC institution's duty to be aware of circumstances that may lead to measures by the CWS (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 46) includes advising parents about the services provided by the CWS and assisting in establishing contact. The ECEC institution's mapping and cooperation with parents may be part of a route towards the CWS and other support agencies, such as family counselling services, at an early stage for the family when the problems are likely to have a limited scope. In the cases concerned, documentation from the mapping of the child and family within the ECEC institution's mandate may provide important knowledge when the CWS investigate the situation more closely to safeguard the family.

To prevent the development of problems that are difficult to manage in the family, the cooperation between ECEC institutions and the CWS based on a knowledge of resilience will be important for the child and the parents, because both organisations will help the family to deal with challenges. The family is dependent on the presence of people who have skills that can help them to develop good mental, physical and social child health

despite the perceived risk, that is, that the children develop resilience and receive support in development and change processes. The early efforts of ECEC institutions are important in this context.

The ECEC institutions' and the CWS's positive perception of each other is important if the ECEC institution is to meet the requirement for the duty of attention on matters that may lead to measures by the CWS (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 46). This duty entails a requirement for ECEC institutions to inform parents about the municipality's CWS and its ability to provide support to the family. When the municipal administrations have been given overall responsibility for preventive work for children, young people and families, with the intention that help should primarily be provided locally, such administrative responsibility may provide opportunities to redistribute the efforts from the CWS to other services, cf. what Fauske, Bennin and Buer describe in Chapter 1, 'Children, Family, and State: Changing Relationships and Responsibilities', about the responsibility of all services to help children strengthen relationships in their daily lives and network.

Conclusion

The ECEC institution's mapping is legitimate by virtue of the Kindergarten Act's (2005) guidelines to help reveal whether children are living in a situation that may lead to measures taken by the CWS. Analyses of the data material in the study on which this chapter is based (Midtskogen, 2022) show, in the context of deliberative theory, that both the quality and legitimacy of mapping processes can be strengthened through greater openness and clarification at the start and completion of mapping at a selective or indicative level. Mapping can be strengthened as a decision-making process through more involvement of the affected parties. It is conceivable that both legitimacy and quality can be strengthened by the ECEC institutions and the CWS becoming better acquainted with each other, where in particular the ECEC institutions' duty of attention as part of an individual orientation to the principle of the best interests of the child (the Kindergarten Act, 2005, Section 46), that is, informing parents about the CWS as a body and what measures it can offer, becomes clearer among staff and parents.

Since the municipalities have an overall responsibility for preventive work aimed at children, young people and families, ECEC institutions can be included as a relevant partner for children and parents. The mapping

that takes place in ECEC institutions and the documentation that accompanies it can provide a natural route to the CWS's measures where the scope of problems may be relatively limited, and where the family and the CWS can establish contact with other services to clarify which of them can most adequately contribute the help the family needs.

My own research and that of others shows that a strengthened collaboration between ECEC institutions and the CWS is valuable for facilitating children and family resilience processes at an early stage and preventing the development of serious and complex problems (Fauske et al., 2016; Fauske et al., 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Viewing ECEC mapping at a selective or indicative level as a decision-making process, as is customary in the CWS, can contribute to early cross-sectoral efforts to prevent the development of a serious and complex scope of problems for families.

Author biography

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