

INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR OUTCOME-ORIENTED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Supporting young children's acquisition
of socio-emotional competences, early
literacy and numeracy, and facilitating their
transition to primary education

*A TSI project for
Lower Saxony
(2024-26)*



Niedersächsisches
Kultusministerium



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Acronyms

AG	Advisory Group
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
SG REFORM	European Commission Reform and Investment Task Force
DPD	Detailed Project Description
ECAR	Europe and Central Asia Region
ECARO	Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EU	European Union
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage (England)
JFMK	National Conference of Ministers responsible for youth and elementary education
KMK	National Conference of Ministers responsible for school education
LS	Lower Saxony
MK	Ministry of Education of Lower Saxony (<i>Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium</i>)
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (England)
SG	Stakeholder Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
TOR	Terms of Reference
TSI	Technical Support Instrument

Introduction

To support reforms for outcome-oriented pedagogy in Lower Saxony's elementary education and the transition to primary school, the Ministry of Education requested support from the European Commission through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) to build a framework as a reference point and guidance to strive for children to achieve. The TSI is the EU programme that provides tailor-made technical expertise to EU Member States to design and implement reforms. The project is funded by the European Union and technical support is provided by the Early Childhood Development section of UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, in co-operation with the European Commission. On the side of the authorities of Lower Saxony, the project is led by the Ministry of Education and is supported by stakeholders from the areas of ECEC provision, professional training and primary education.

In this report, UNICEF presents a set of **interim** recommendations based on the consolidated findings from the **“As-is” analysis of current practice on the systematic support of competence development in early childhood education and care and the transition to primary education in Lower Saxony** (Project output 5) and the report on **Good practice from European countries on supporting outcome-orientation in early childhood education and care** (project output 6) that will feed into the development of the Framework (project output 7) and the Final recommendations (project output 9) for implementation of the framework, which will focus on implementation and will identify medium and long term actions including a focus on the competences of pedagogues, capacity strengthening needs, resources and governance.

These interim recommendations consider initial needs for the establishment and development of outcome-oriented pedagogy in ECEC settings, which learning and development outcomes should be pursued by outcome-oriented pedagogy and what may be needed for pedagogues to support outcome-oriented ECEC provision in Lower Saxony.



2. Recommendations

As outlined in section 1, the focus of these recommendations is on:

1. how outcome-oriented pedagogy can be established and developed in ECEC settings
2. which learning and development outcomes should be pursued by outcome-oriented pedagogy
3. what pedagogical support is needed to achieve outcome-oriented ECEC provision in Lower Saxony.

2.1 Establishing and developing outcome-oriented pedagogy in ECEC settings

Recommendation 1: Develop a framework for outcome-oriented ECEC to operationalize the Orientation Plan

The overall recommendation on how to establish an outcome-oriented pedagogy is to develop a guide to align pedagogical practice and system-level goals around development and learning outcomes for children, anchored in the Orientation Plan, its annexes and other relevant education legislations, mandates, policies, principles and values.

Context	Discussion	Conclusion
Lower Saxony (LS) has an Orientation Plan ¹ which builds on the <i>Niedersächsisches Gesetz über Kindertagesstätten und Kindertagespflege (NKiTAG)</i> ² to serve as a guidance framework for ECEC settings to develop institutional-specific educational concepts. A key challenge is the gap between the existing guidance framework and practical implementation.	ECEC curriculum frameworks can be based on a specific pedagogy, prescribing certain practices, values and beliefs to ECEC staff (OECD, 2021, p. 65). Features or characteristics of curriculum frameworks such as their coverage, principles, goals, learning areas and material resources, can affect process quality by promoting conditions that allow all children to develop relationships with peers, ECEC staff, space and materials, parents and family, and the community in a consistent way throughout their ECEC experience (Edwards, 2021). Within the European Union, the Czech Republic and Estonia demonstrate robust examples of curriculum frameworks for ECEC which define the sector's core principles, provide pedagogical direction, create space for settings to develop and adapt their own concepts while maintaining alignment with the framework's core principles.	Even though Lower Saxony should consider the development of a curriculum with education standards for elementary education and the transition to primary education, the legal provisions of §§2-4 NKiTAG and § 22 SGB VIII as well as the recommendations of the Orientation Plan are a good starting point for the development of a hands-on guidance framework as a practical tool for pedagogues to provide a clearer vision for learning, pedagogical practice, learning outcomes for children (ie. Literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional competence), and how they might be attained.

¹ Orientierungsplan für Bildung und Erziehung im Elementarbereich niedersächsischer Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder

² Lower Saxony Act on Child Day Care Centres and Child Day Care



Context	Discussion	Conclusion
	Estonia's "National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions" shows broad pedagogical principles, and pre-school institutions have considerable autonomy in selecting specific pedagogical approaches. The comprehensive framework defines expected learning outcomes for children, while maintaining a play-based, holistic pedagogical approach. Established in 2008, it provides a foundation for early childhood education while allowing individual institutions to develop their own curricula based on local needs and children's abilities. The curriculum framework explicitly defines expected learning outcomes for children, providing clear developmental targets. Estonia exemplifies good practice through its clear learning outcomes and provides Estonian practitioners with clear guidance for competence development whilst preserving the holistic, child-centred ethos essential for early years education.	It would also provide a scaffold to assist practitioners to develop their own, more detailed curricula, relevant to their settings and the children and families attending, and to track progress on children's development or achievement of learning outcomes. The framework should include principles that reflect current discourse and contemporary theory and perspectives around children's learning and ECEC pedagogy including such as principles of education for sustainable development, inclusiveness and meta-skills, with basic elements to support pedagogues to structure learning and development experiences in ECCE settings.

2.2 Learning and development outcomes to be pursued by outcome-oriented pedagogy

Recommendation 2: Within the outcome-oriented framework, define a skills framework for young children's Learning and Development Outcomes to describe the competences and articulate the skills progression that pedagogues could strive for children to achieve

In the context of Lower Saxony, **learning and development outcomes** are competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that children achieve through the enabling of self-efficacy and (learning) experiences. This definition captures the integrated and complex learning and development of children and the different ways and rates at which children learn. These can be used to report on or observe children's competence development and can be collected through direct observation of children. They can also be used to guide and inform pedagogy, and to help families understand children's developmental status.



Context	Discussion	Conclusion
Some elements of outcome-oriented pedagogy in ECEC already exist in Lower Saxony. The <i>NKiTAG</i> outlines broad developmental goals for ECEC, and the Orientation Plan outlines general goals to be achieved for children, these are not linked with specific competence levels (skills) that pedagogues should strive for children to achieve during elementary education and the transition to primary education.	Evidence suggests that frameworks can enhance process quality when they establish broad developmental goals, while also incorporating skill-specific targets and overarching skills that may not be tied to specific competences but help children to build competences and adapt across contexts or develop lifeskills. Broad developmental goals, particularly those that prioritize children's well-being, are often seen as more suitable for early learning environments (OECD, 2011). Scotland's Meta-Skills Progression Framework outlines some of these innate, timeless, higher-order skills that create adaptive learners and promote success in education. However, evidence also supports the inclusion of targeted skill development, even in early childhood, with curricula that incorporate specific goals related to early literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning shown to foster positive outcomes and supporting children's competence development in these areas (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017). An emerging perspective within ECEC advocates for an integrative and more nuanced approach to competence development, which would build on effective and complementary principles for supporting the development of a range of early cognitive and social emotional competencies (NASEM, 2024). In line with the European Commission's recognition of literacy and numeracy as key skills required to strengthen the foundation for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2025) this project aims to focus on competences such as socio-emotional competence, early literacy³ and early numeracy⁴. In the Czech Republic, England, Estonia and Slovenia, the ECEC frameworks outline a set of key competences and define specific areas of expected learning outcomes for ECEC in flexible rather than prescriptive approaches to outcome development.	As this project aims to enable pedagogues to support children in realising their potential and to achieve a high level of competences especially in skills relevant for lifelong-learning such as socio-emotional competences, early literacy, and numeracy. To track these competences they could be broken down in a defined skills progression framework with suggested indicators to help pedagogues identify the milestones towards which a child is progressing and to provide the learning environments to achieve these milestones. Defined learning and development outcomes may serve as a foundation for developing pedagogical concepts in ECEC settings as well as support practices for professionals and parents to support the full growth and development of children in elementary education and transition to primary education.

³ In the early years, literacy includes a range of modes of communication including music, movement, gesture, dance, song, drama, storytelling, visual arts, digital literacies, and media, as well as listening, talking, singing, viewing, reading, and writing.

⁴ This broadly includes understandings about numbers, patterns, measurement, time, spatial awareness and chance, and data, as well as mathematical thinking, reasoning, and counting



Context	Discussion	Conclusion
	For instance, the Czech Republic defines key competences as the foundation for specific expected learning outcomes that guide educators in supporting children's acquisition of essential skills. Similarly, England's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework establishes requirements for ECEC in terms of learning and development areas and early learning goals organized around four specific areas of literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts. Estonia's framework also explicitly defines learning outcomes for children, providing clear developmental targets across all subject fields, and Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) has literacy, numeracy, and certain aspects of health and wellbeing as designated competences.	Tracking competence development and pursuing the goal of making a child achieve the milestones of its development can be a source of job satisfaction and constructive learning. It can be a guideline and inspiration to build and develop pedagogical concepts which are based on play and meaningful interactions with individual children and their group as a whole in order to engage and enable them in mastering socio-emotional development, literacy and numeracy (Burchinal, 2022).
The ECEC sector in LS has a strong emphasis on socio-emotional development in children, suggesting that socio-emotional competence is recognised as a critical component of ECEC.	Research finds the early childhood period critical for helping children to develop social and emotional competences through which children acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (OECD, 2025). These competences are crucial for a child's overall development and success in life and can be woven into everyday early learning activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and cooperative games (Knaub, 2025). An example of good practice is England's EYFS which organizes learning around three prime areas, one of which is socio-emotional development and within this there are several defined skills. Another example is of Denmark's which has social development as a designated competence which is broken down to outline the respective skills for teachers to strive for children to achieve.	Socio-emotional competences are key for lifelong learning and include the multi-faceted range of skills such as knowledge of emotions, emotional regulation, social skills, self-management and responsible decision-making which enable children at a very young age to interact effectively with others and achieve positive outcomes. Learning needs to reflect the complexities of real life and give prominence to the life-roles that learners will face after they have finished their formal education. Being able to regulate emotion, engage in positive interactions with others, and manage one's own behaviour and actions are crucial skills that impact children's learning success. This can be underpinned and strengthened by principles which encompass contemporary issues such as well-being, sustainability, participation, partnerships, diversity and inclusion, among others.



Context	Discussion	Conclusion
The 'as-is' analysis found that reference to literacy in pedagogical concepts is around 'language and speaking'. In Lower Saxony, literacy is not taught formally in ECEC settings and does not feature prominently in pedagogical concepts. It is generally integrated throughout daily ECEC activities. The as-is-analysis showed that primary teachers regarded language and literacy as the domain in which children were less proficient than in socio-emotional learning and numeracy when entering school.	The European Commission recognizes literacy as one of the basic skills which are the foundation of the key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2025). Early literacy is crucial in early childhood as it forms the foundation for future academic success, strengthens cognitive development, and fosters a love for learning, ultimately impacting a child's ability to navigate the world and participate actively in society. Various definitions of literacy recognise the importance of literacy in empowering the individual to develop reflection, critique and empathy, leading to a sense of self-efficacy, identity and full participation in society. They also refer to the development of a community of readers within schools, where social interactions around text encourage both the development of habits of mind (Brunner & Tally, 1999) and positive attitudes towards reading within the classroom learning ecology (Brown & Deavers, 1999); (Luckin, 2008); (Reinking & Bradley, 2008); (Zhao & Frank, 2003). Within the transformational nature of outcome-oriented education, early literacy is understood developmentally as being emergent. For example, in Ireland (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009, p. 54) emergent literacy is concerned with children developing a growing understanding of print and language as a foundation for reading and writing. This definition views emergent literacy through children's play and hands-on experience and how children see and interact with print as they build an awareness of its functions and conventions. Similarly, (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 849) define emergent literacy as 'the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing'. An example of good practice is the Czech Republic Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary which emphasizes the development of reading literacy which is underpinned by the concept of emergent literacy.	Broaden conceptualisation of literacy from language education and support to include emergent literacy and incorporate the interconnectedness of oral language and reading and writing within early literacy. The different rates at which children develop would be considered by placing vocabulary development at the forefront of early literacy (Neuman S., 2011). For children for whom German may be an additional language, this may involve intensively building their oral language capacity in German, up to the level required for success in literacy and in other areas of the ECEC⁵. The transformational nature of ECEC would require young children to be conceptualized as 'builders' of meaning (Pearson, 2009) and would include specific reference to key components of emergent literacy such as word recognition, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension and the development of writing and spelling, to processing of information as well as print and digital texts. Interaction between children and pedagogues should always be used to build language skills and comprehension throughout all activities and learning opportunities.

⁵ This level is called the cognitive academic language proficiency or CALP (Cummins, 2000) and is different from, and takes longer to develop than, basic interpersonal communication skills



Context	Discussion	Conclusion
	Another example is England's EYFS which outlines literacy as a distinct learning area underpinned by the principles of emergent literacy.	This requires pedagogues to be a role-model for the use of language and to have the skills to engage children in communication and interaction.
The 'as-is' analysis found that mathematical activities are integrated in the various learning activities in ECEC settings with limited integration setting-level pedagogical concepts. None of the pedagogues and only 4% of setting leaders who participated in the analysis indicated that 'mathematical understanding' is one of the three most essential areas for children to develop through their participation in ECEC. Nonetheless, primary school teachers rated competence levels of children in the transition to primary school higher than language skills.	The European Commission recognizes numeracy as one of the basic skills which are the foundation of the key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018). It is a vital aspect for children's daily life skills, and overall development, laying the foundation for mathematical understanding and problem-solving abilities as well as future academic success. In the Czech Republic Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary emphasizes the development of mathematical literacy. In England's EYFS, mathematics is a specific and distinct area underpinned by concepts of emergent numeracy e.g. it is expected that children should develop a deep understanding of numbers to 10 (including their composition), recognize quantities without counting (subitize) up to 5, and explore patterns within numbers such as odds, evens, and doubles, etc. Also, Estonia distinguishes maths as an individual learning area, underpinned by emergent numeracy e.g. a 6-7-year-old child is expected to count between 1 and 12, understand basic addition and subtraction up to 5, group objects by characteristics, and recognize geometric shapes	Define and describe competences in early numeracy which pedagogues should strive for children to achieve. Within outcome-oriented pedagogy, early numeracy should aim to develop numerical skills in young children and to improve their knowledge and understanding of early mathematical concepts. Early numeracy is an umbrella term that encompasses several skills such as verbal counting, knowing the number symbols, recognizing quantities, discerning number patterns, comparing numerical magnitudes, and manipulating quantities i.e., adding and subtracting objects from a set (Raghubar & Barnes, 2017). In elementary education, it plays an important role in later mathematics success, overall learning and quality of life. In recent years, analyses of data from large national longitudinal databases such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, have shown that children's mathematical knowledge at school entry is the strongest predictor of both later math success as well as success in other academic domains (Raghubar & Barnes, 2017). Competence in this area would also strengthen and support the transition to primary school.



2.3 What pedagogical support is needed to achieve outcome-oriented ECEC provision in Lower Saxony

Recommendation 3: Within the outcome-oriented framework, emphasize pedagogical approaches and learning that focus on competence development, while providing flexibility to allow the right pedagogical approaches to emerge and contribute to process quality.

In the context of this project, **outcome-oriented pedagogy** involves educators planning for children to achieve learning and development outcomes as a team, thinking from the perspective of the child and collaborating closely with children and their families. It further involves the designing and re-designing of learning environments in support of children's learning based on continuously observing and documenting children's progress as well as constantly self-reflecting on the effectiveness and effects of pedagogy in the setting. Outcome-oriented pedagogy must take care that all children feel safe and well. Its ambition is to ensure that each child can realise its full potential by scaffolding self-determined learning and enabling self-efficacy. Taking children's needs, learning pathways and circumstances of life into account, outcome-oriented pedagogy systematically encourages and challenges every child throughout elementary education with a child-centred attitude to acquire the competences needed for a successful transition to primary education. An outcome-oriented approach to pedagogy infers a transformational approach (Spady, 1994, p. 18) which recognises children as active participants of learning through relational and play-based pedagogy, thereby demonstrating significant learning in context.

Research emphasises the need to understand pedagogy as an interactive process between staff, children and the environment, rather than as a top-down process (Edwards, 2021). In the absence of a curriculum, pedagogy is a basis for ECEC by encompassing the notion of instruction, or how material (e.g. content) may be taught according to the meaning and purpose of education (Ligozat & Almqvist, 2018).

Context	Discussion	Recommendation
Both the <i>NKiTaG</i> and the <i>Orientierungsplan</i> emphasize explorative self-learning and play based experiential learning in everyday activities, and adaptability of guidelines at the setting level.	The recognition of play-based learning, particularly through guided play activities is a core element of ECEC (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013); (Skene, 2022), and most ECEC pedagogical approaches are founded on active and intentional pedagogy, play-based pedagogy, children's cultural participation and environmental care and protection.	Within the framework, define a skills outline for pedagogues that suggests the professional competencies needed by ECEC pedagogues to implement outcome-oriented pedagogy.



Context	Discussion	Recommendation
Practitioners who participated in the study described implementing relationship-oriented approaches, building trust and establishing emotional safety taking precedence over competence development, which is a key feature for outcome-oriented pedagogy aimed at supporting the development of literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional competences in children. This suggests that the current guidance and professional training may not be providing sufficient structure for pedagogues to systematically plan for support and document children's progress toward competence development needed for a successful transition to primary education.	An outcome-oriented approach to pedagogy infers a transformational approach (Spady, 1994, p. 18). which recognises children as active participants of learning through relational and play-based pedagogy, thereby demonstrating significant learning in context. As children's cognitive and socio-emotional competences can be achieved using various methodologies, there is limited consensus on which pedagogical approaches have the best chance of influencing learning. In some cases, ECEC curriculum frameworks prescribe certain models and practices, limiting variability in implementation and avoiding concerns around inconsistent quality. In other cases, flexibility is preferred, as it enables responsiveness to community-specific values, and thus enhances process quality. A balance between these can be found in curriculum frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies, while still allowing for local adaptation (OECD, 2021a). Denmark's ECEC system exemplifies effective balance between structure and flexibility in pedagogical approaches. The ECEC framework provides pedagogical direction without prescribing specific methods, enabling responsiveness to local community values and needs. This balanced approach aligns with evidence suggesting that frameworks which endorse preferred pedagogical strategies while allowing contextual adaptation can effectively support process quality (OECD, 2021a).	This framework should be coherently linked with the children's skills progression framework, with clear guidelines which emphasise learning outcomes, endorse pedagogical strategies or approaches and a shared understanding of priorities (while preserving practitioner discretion) to support pedagogues to plan for learning and to develop pedagogical concepts that provide stimulating experiences for children. The framework should outline the skills that pedagogues need (and should acquire) to support children to acquire core competences in an age-appropriate way. This will enable pedagogues to support children in achieving milestones of their development for each of the competences that are the focus of the framework using preferred strategies. The goals that LS has for children can be attained through an overlap of basic concepts of 3 different pedagogical approaches including social pedagogy⁶, school readiness⁷ and outcome-based⁸ approaches.

⁶ This approach stresses content and quality of practice rather than assessing children's achievement levels. It highlights the importance of dialogue between adults and children, as well as creative activities with discussions and reflections (Wall, Litjens, & Taguma, 2015).

⁷ This approach emphasises preparing children for primary school, e.g. by developing children's early literacy and mathematics development. The pedagogy is aligned with primary schooling (Wall, Litjens, & Taguma, 2015).

⁸ This approach sets specific aims and strategies for teachers to achieve outcomes for children, e.g. literacy and numeracy skills, specific subject knowledge, intelligence quotient (IQ) scores as well as children's socio-emotional and soft skills, such as motivation to learn, creativity, independence, self-confidence, general knowledge and initiative (Wall, Litjens, & Taguma, 2015).



Context	Discussion	Recommendation
	The Czech Republic's Framework Educational Programme (FEP) also exemplifies a balanced approach by providing clear, structured guidance and practical support materials for curriculum implementation based on constructivist principles and play-based learning, while encouraging kindergartens to develop context-specific implementations. This approach fosters both consistency and responsiveness. Through its National Pedagogical Institute, a range of comprehensive implementation resources and concrete tools support planning by bridging the gap between curriculum intentions and classroom practice through specific guidance across multiple priority areas. These resources enhance practitioners' capacity to translate curricular aims into effective pedagogical interactions, thereby supporting improved learning outcomes for children.	At the core, it is important to articulate pedagogy within a framework for outcome-oriented ECEC to include a clear set of learning outcomes which refine concepts of what constitute stimulating experiences for children. Socio-emotional competence development Guidelines need to include strategies to support pedagogues to facilitate children's development through strong positive relationships and supportive learning environments are the foundation for social-emotional development. At the core of building socio-emotional competence among young children is therefore the relationship between the pedagogue, the child and their respective families, as well as having a positive learning environment (Willis & Schiller, 2011). Pedagogues need skills for helping children build confidence and develop a positive self-identity. Pedagogues need skills to build partnerships for learning with children and their parents. They need to be able to meet children's interests and to engage with them in communication that is meaningful and supportive for children in order to help them to feel safe, to grow and to glow. Pedagogues also need the skills to win children for new experiences outside their comfort zone, to deal with frustration and to teach children who they are.



Context	Discussion	Recommendation
		Literacy competence development The most fundamental factor for building literacy skills in children is a rich linguistic and literacy environment characterised by 'an explicit focus on improving the language and literacy skills needed for early school success' (Neuman & Dickinson, 2011). Guidelines should outline the key pedagogical skills which are essential for supporting children's literacy development to be developed step by step through everyday interaction that is meaningful for a child and that makes it want to engage in communication, thus using and refining its language skills - be it in the context of activities such as supporting make-believe play, storybook reading and discussion. Being a role-model for good use of language will be key to promote vocabulary development and assisting children in developing written language. Factors to consider for the development of literacy skills include the amount and quality of language interactions with pedagogues, the quality of instruction, and the use of one-to-one or small-group interaction. Key remains the relationship and the collaboration between pedagogues and parents, to ensure they can also adequately support their children.

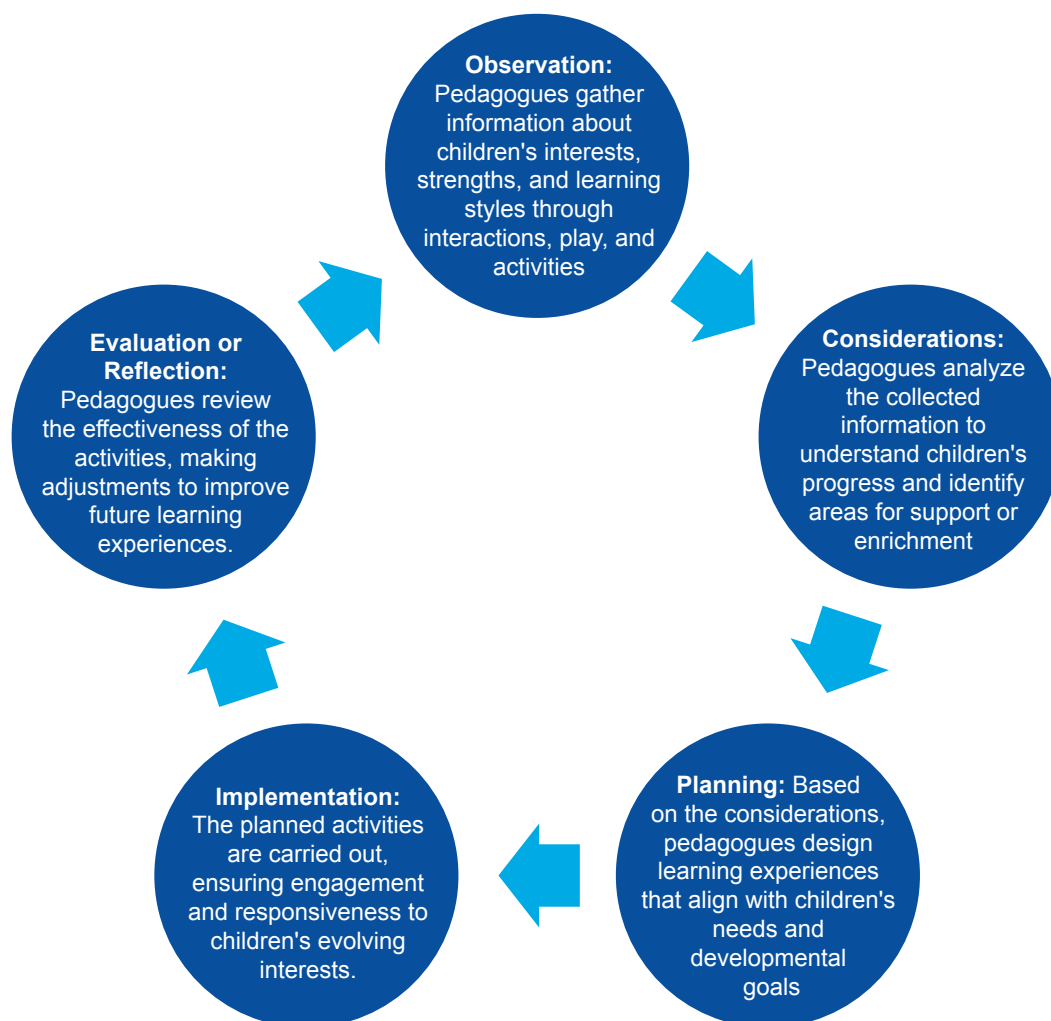


Context	Discussion	Recommendation
		Numeracy competence development The guidance for pedagogues needs to have a collaborative focus on teaching and learning of numerical concepts. It should include opportunities for pedagogues to notice children's engagement in numerical concepts and responses to numerical ideas. Because learning early numeracy occurs in the context of children's play (Seo and Ginsburg, 2004), pedagogues need to understand how mathematics learning is promoted by young children's engagement in play, and how best they can support that learning. The guidelines need to stress numerical sense-making with clear goals, and with reference to people and relationships, the learning environment and the children as learners (National Council for Curriculum Assessment).

Recommendation 4: Develop clear guidelines for a cyclical approach to planning for learning among pedagogues

Planning for learning allows staff to think and act long-term and systematically regarding their pedagogical practices. It also supports continuity and progression for each child and for the groups of children. Planning must be based on knowledge of the children's well-being and all-round development, individually and as a group, and is therefore based on observation, documentation, reflection, systematic evaluation and conversations with children and parents (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2017).

Cyclical planning in ECEC settings ensures that learning experiences are continuously refined to meet children's developmental needs. The process typically follows a structured cycle that includes observation, consideration, planning, implementation, and evaluation/reflection. It also fosters flexibility and responsiveness, allowing pedagogues to refine their pedagogical strategies based on feedback, and supports child-centered learning, ensuring that activities are tailored to individual and group needs.



Strengthen self-reflection as a strategy for self-assessment to support pedagogues to plan for learning

Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of the alignment process through self-reflection and adjusting as needed can help improve the quality of ECEC. Reflective practice involves a cyclical process where practitioners consciously analyse their observations, consider the implications for their pedagogic approaches, and make informed adjustments to their planning for learning.



Context	Discussion	Recommendation
Professionals in ECEC across Lower Saxony demonstrate a strong shared commitment to reflective practice as a vital tool for fostering children's learning and development. While time constraints pose challenges to consistent implementation—particularly in public settings—their recognition of reflection's value highlights a promising foundation for outcome-oriented ECEC. Beyond the observation, documentation and reflection of children's development, the quality of outcome-oriented ECEC in the entire setting should also be regularly reflected and (self-) evaluated.	Reflective practice represents a bridge between observation and action, ensuring that documentation serves not merely as a recording exercise but as a catalyst for responsive pedagogical development. In outcome-oriented ECEC provision, this can be particularly valuable as it enables practitioners to critically examine the relationship between their pedagogical approaches and children's developmental progress, allowing for targeted adjustments to practice that can enhance specific learning outcomes. Research also suggests that systematic documentation and analysis of educational practices through self-assessment promotes professionalism among early childhood practitioners (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, & Musatti, 2012). Denmark's approach to internal evaluation is an example of good practice through its legislative foundation, structured support tools, and emphasis on professional reflection rather than compliance. The requirement for regular evaluation focused on pedagogical environments rather than individual children creates systematic improvement cycles while maintaining developmentally appropriate practice. The Self-Assessment Tool provides a structured framework that supports practitioners in identifying strengths and development needs, aligning with research showing that self-evaluation significantly contributes to practitioner skill enhancement (OECD, 2015) and leads to greater awareness of pedagogical processes (Sheridan, 2001). Furthermore, the emphasis on balancing documentation requirements with practical implementation acknowledges potential tensions while ensuring the process remains meaningful.	Strengthening supportive structures and capacity for reflection could unlock greater consistency in observation-informed planning, ensuring that pedagogical insights translate into impactful learning experiences for all children. Self-reflection informs future practice in ways that demonstrate an understanding of each child's learning, development and wellbeing, leading to pedagogical decisions and actions that are transformative. This involves a cyclical process where pedagogues consciously analyse their observations, consider the implications for their teaching strategies, and make informed adjustments to their educational planning. The outcome-oriented ECEC framework, should include clear guidance and strategies for self-reflection for practitioners to assess their own performance (individual level) and the quality of their pedagogy, and practices (setting level) as case studies, and create opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and improvement. By creating 'case studies of practice' pedagogues can question and critique their practice (Cochran-Smith, 2012, p. 46).



Context	Discussion	Recommendation
	Scotland's self-evaluation framework also demonstrates good practice through its explicit focus on pedagogical reflection. The "How good is our early learning and childcare?" framework includes specific quality indicators examining pedagogical practice, while "Realising the Ambition" emphasises critically reflective practice as central to improvement. The system's collaborative reflective cycle—examining what works, what difference it makes, and what could be developed—creates a structured process for translating reflective insights into improved pedagogy, reflecting evidence that systematic pedagogical documentation promotes professional growth and improved practice (Picchio et al., 2012).	



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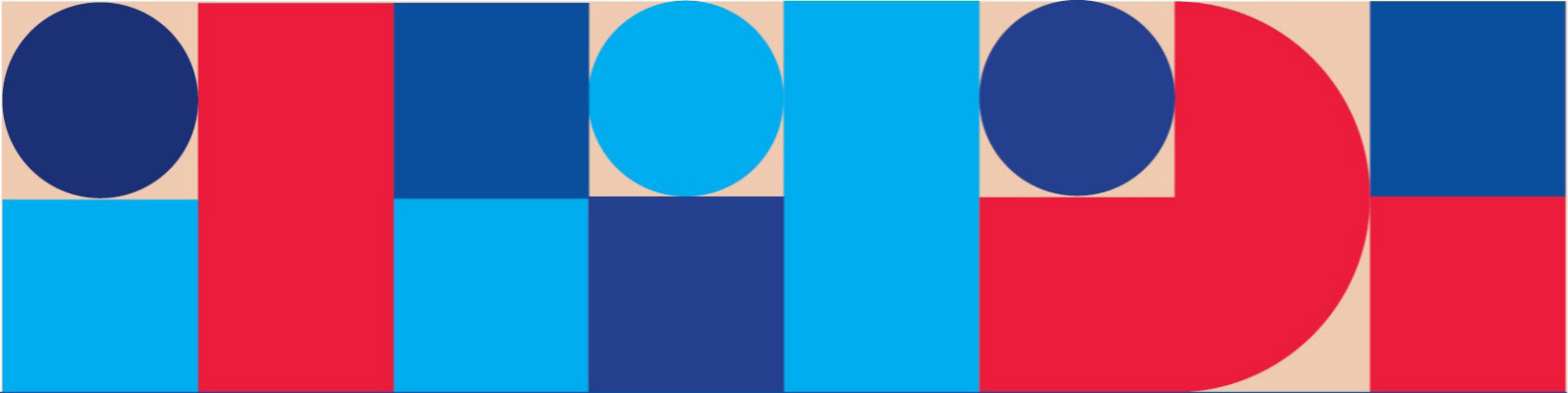


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