

## WATANABE



Now we will start out discussion. I need to make an apology to the audience. Due to the limitation of time, we cannot take questions from attendees. The presenters' email addresses are indicated on the documents presented, and you can personally follow up if you have some questions.

The theme of this symposium is "What can we find by international comparison of ECEC?" So in other words, through this international survey, we can recognize our own country's ECEC's characteristics, learn from others, and reflect on the findings to improve quality of our own country's ECEC. We have already learned quite a bit from the presentations and the survey reports; furthermore, in this discussion we would like to talk about the two focus points, which are probably of bigger interest for Japanese ECEC policies and practices. Mr. SUGIURA will propose two topics of discussion and we would like to get comments from Ms. SLINDE and Ms. BALFALI. In conclusion, I would like to ask Professor AKITA to give suggestions to Japanese ECEC stakeholders. So let's start the discussion topic. Mr. SUGIURA please.

## SUGIURA

The previous presentation regarding training in Norway included that teachers and assistants are quite active in participating in professional training, and Norway has a long history. It's not regulated, it's not stated in by laws or anything, but it's really part of a long history, and a long tradition in Norway ECEC. So I would like to know the practices related to that and also career advancements for ECEC staff. Could you please comment on Norway's practices?

## SLINDE

Thank you for the question. Yes, talking about the tradition, I think it's an understanding of the importance of qualification and it's growing on us, actually. So when the staff is saying that they feel valued by the children and parents, and that they also feel not so much valued (in the society). But still, there's a reflection of value in the reflections of the society. I think that the acknowledgement of the staff competencies as the key factor for quality, it's been something that we (have come generally to) understand.



In terms of having the possibility of participating in continuous professional development, I was really happy to see that so many had participated and that was across the different groups. And I think that there is something about the structure that allows participation in professional development to actually happen. And the tradition that we have developed over some years now is that 5 days a year kindergartens close in order for the staff to (plan and) do professional development. It might be a factor, I

don't know yet, but we will look into it and see if that is actually the factor that enables everybody to participate. This is in combination with the national strategies that we have put in place over the last years in order to raise the competence. So it means that in combination with local possibilities, and the owners accepting this professional development and even supporting it, and also the parents accepting and supporting the professional development; these combinations increase the possibility of participating in professional development activities. What we are challenged by, is actually that we have a staff composition that is not as unitary as you have. This means that we need to have different measures for different groups. And this is what we try to do throughout our competence strategy. So it means that we put in something for the assistants that are not formally trained, and we put in something for the assistants that are vocationally trained, we put in some measures for the kindergarten teachers, and we put in some measures for head teachers. And what we can also see that when we now put in the further education for the teachers and head teachers, they should be at the master's level. So we are trying to do a kind of collective lift for all the groups at the same time. This is the ambition of the national strategies and it has to be combined with a local understanding to enable this happening.

A new factor has been actually that we've also put in some extra money for buying (compensating the owner so that they can put in replacement) out the staff that goes for further education. So it's not enough to only provide a study place, but you also need to have some means in order to enable them to go. And that has been very, very successful.

#### **WATANABE**

Thank you very much, Ms. SLINDE. How about from other participating countries? Ms. BELFALI, can you comment?

#### **BELFALI**



Staff professional skill and competency development was something that was a part of my presentation. How can we formulate more systematic training programs so that we can give better support for staff to take the training? What makes it difficult is that there are no substitute teachers to take over during their absence and it's expensive. We need better support for kindergarten, also for system. For example, in a country like Estonia which did not participate in the Starting Strong Survey, 35 hours per year of training is already provided. And the cost is covered by the kindergarten where the staff works. Estonia has set it up so that it's easier for staff to

participate.

And professional skill improvement can come in various ways. As Professor AKITA mentioned, for example, teachers document what happens with children and self-reflect on their practices with their peers. This may not be considered a part of professional development, but that type of activity very much can contribute to the

quality improvement of their teaching. It's not formal training, but in the daily practice of childcare provision I think ECEC systems can extend their support in this area.

#### **AKITA**

We have now, in Norway, a new continuous professional development with ICT, so can you talk about that?

#### **SLINDE**

I can talk about the different ways of structuring for continuous professional development. So in the staff survey, what we could see that there are a number of ways of approaching continuous professional development. One will be sort of doing the peer consultation. Another would be having an expert coming in and guiding on the practices. It will also be online courses. As we have seen now, for example, when we are putting in place measures combined with regulation, such as on the wellbeing and the anti-bullying strategy, the learning and wellbeing environment. In that strategy we are composing online modules that are combined with designing something that is targeting the centre itself. So there are multiple ways of going in and developing support programs for professional development that aims to answer the needs of (professional development for) staff.

What will be supported is kind of national resources, if you will, that can be implemented on the local level in combination and with the support of teacher education. So it's the universities and colleges, in addition to the national centres that are collaborating with the municipalities and with the owners and with the head teachers to develop good programs.

So, if we are conducting a new TALIS Starting Strong Survey in 2024, I really hope to see an increase in the combination and in the use of online mentoring because I think that there is a combination between the face to face and the online that is going to make us reach all the groups even more and even more broadly than we do today.

#### **WATANABE**

Thank you. Now let's go to the second topic. Mr. SUGIURA, please.

#### **SUGIURA**

As Ms. SLINDE just mentioned, this survey itself was conducted in 2018 and the next survey is going to be in 2024. Moreover, in 2018, the survey was taken but the results will be presented in two pieces, and this is the first time. We will have a next presentation. We are really looking forward to new findings.

Well, let's go to the next topic. The biggest focus on this survey result is the practices at the site, and communication with the



children. We found a lot of that. I also presented in Japan, we have solid result that Japanese ECEC teachers consider playing with children to be very important. And, they often position myself at the children's height when talking or listening. That is really the characteristics of Japanese ECEC teacher. It would be very interesting to be able to observe these changes in practice, if we could repeat the survey in the future. Now, Ms. SLINDE, Can you talk about the daily practice in Norwegian ECEC Center including background policy?

#### **SLINDE**

Well, I presented to you the holistic pedagogical philosophy that we have that underpins our practices, and it's "play based" and "child centered". And so we were really, really surprised to see the results from the survey because actually we thought they would have ticked off the play at a much higher level than they did. And I think that actually I think we need to unpack, we need to combine these findings with the results of the implementation evaluation of the new curriculum because our curriculum is actually what should guide our practices. What we could see from the Starting Strong Survey is that beliefs form and influence practices. And I think that is the take away message from the report, that actually it is important what kind of beliefs the staff has.

It is also important, and this is just intriguing because I had to sort of think of it for this discussion, it's about that "emotional" or "pro-social". It's intriguing for me that we didn't find emotion being ticked off more in the Norwegian setting. It was more pro-social. But looking into the wording of our curriculum, we use the words "solidarity", "helping others". It's more pro-social, it's empathy that we underscore in our discussion on the social-emotional development of the child and of the group whereas when you were presenting previously, Dr. AKITA, you presented emotion as one of the aspects. So it might be reflecting different practices, but it might also be about what kind of languages we steer them by.

Could I also say something about the language development? Having so many children now with another cultural and linguistic background, it means that the policies and the politicians and the politics have been really, really discussing language developments heavily. It means that our staff, when they are ticking this off so much, this is because we have a high political awareness of the importance of language development in order to be part of the democracy and partake in society and in the child group. So really, that emphasis comes across. Again, it means that not only beliefs but also policies will affect practices.

#### **WATANABE**

I think Ms. SLINDE pointed out two important things. One is the terminology has great significance. Another is a gap between the actual practice and the awareness. Starting Strong Survey is a survey on awareness. So it tends to focus on awareness if there is a gap between the two. So, Ms. BELFALI, could you explain your survey scheme for handling these situation?

#### **BELFALI**

Yes, Ms. TOVE just mentioned that this is the first survey and when we interpret we have to think , how we can

make a better survey next time and how we can design so that the results will be reflected in the policy? That's a very important challenge and proposal. But I want to emphasize that we started from zero. It's the first international comparison of ECEC staff. We really went through some difficult time but we could complete the survey with success. I think this survey enables international comparison and it's a very important result. Everyone here was involved in Japan including Mr. SUGIURA and Dr. AKITA, together with experts supported us. As a results, we got very good data. We should say "bravo" in French. I think Japan can be proud of its engagement and achievement.

Meanwhile there are some challenges that we would like to improve for the next survey, as Professor AKITA mentioned. For example, what kind of child outcome and practice do we expect in ECEC centres? That should be different from country by country. Western countries and Eastern Asian countries have different expectations vis-a-vis their children to have. The kind of questions that we have geared is in the direction toward attaining certain outcomes. That's how we have worded it in our questionnaire. So we would like to modify the survey in the future so that we can see a broader perspective and definitions of practice.

And on the ECEC site, what kind of interaction are children having with their environment and with their teachers? That's quite important in terms of assessing the ECEC quality in order to promote social and emotional development, having children share about their feelings, and supporting the children when they are having difficulties. Helping building relationship between the teachers and children is important. This may be a very important perspective to have when assessing our ECEC practice. Of course, we do need to analyze further, and we would like to reflect on our findings to get ready for the next one.

#### **WATANABE**

Thank you very much. Mr. SUGIURA, would you like to add something?

#### **SUGIURA**

National Institute for Educational Policy Research conducts a variety of international surveys, not just those for ECEC, so I think it is my own task to make the most of these synergies. In addition, many European countries participated in the OECD surveys, and comparisons between European countries have been undertaken for a very long time. I think it is important for Japan to participate actively in these communities and contribute from Japanese perspectives.

#### **SLINDE**

Really, the findings that you presented now with the Japanese talking about play in this respectful manner, and also talking about being at the eye level with the children, I think it's an important lesson to us all. So even though we thought that we were at the same level, we were not. You were much, much better when we compare. So it means really that having Japanese experiences, coming into the development of the international discussions and the surveys, I think it's very, very important. There is a tradition that you have been putting forward here that I

think is also interesting to follow. And for all the countries, we had different traditions.

So the uniqueness, the diversity, the complexity of the early childhood sector, it's still there. We cannot do away with it but it's actually a richness. When we try to compare, we try to find some commonalities, but at the same time it's enriching that they are diverse and different. So thank you to Japan.

#### **WATANABE**

Thank you very much for the comment. Professor AKITA, you wanted to add something?

#### **AKITA**

Not a question but I want to make a comment about contextual aspects, in addition to the terminology challenge, regarding class size, and the number of children in a group. This survey revealed that there is a great difference between Norway and Japan. It does not mean that Japan is better than Norway, or otherwise, but it really matters what kind of policy is desirable in each country's system.



Making group size smaller and increasing the individual interaction between children and teachers, or making group size larger and increasing the interaction among children definitely have influence on the policy about interaction. I think that is reflected on the value and system of the country. As Ms. TOVE talked, if the group size is larger, teachers have more frequency to warn their children. Meanwhile, I think it's one way of thinking that teachers should think about such things more seriously. So, in this survey, I think it's important to consider not only comparing internationally but also clarifying the kind of system which can contribute to interaction between adults and children and commonalities across countries.

#### **WATANABE**

I guess Dr. AKITA means that it is not enough just only to compare figures or percentages but also to keep each country's particular context in mind when we carry out international surveys.

#### **AKITA**

I'm very interested in learning from BELFALI. OECD has vast amounts of survey results from various different comparisons, country to country. I would like to know how the OECD would like us to utilize this data, and guidelines to read the outcome of the survey. I would think that you had a certain idea because this is not meant to rank country by country. For example, in the beginning phase of the PISA survey, some people misunderstood the survey results were just ranking of participating countries. But that's not so, right? That's quite an important point too.

## **BELFALI**

As TOVE was also saying, once we start comparing country by country, once we start seeing different methods in ECEC, we'll start to find commonalities. We can learn expand from that. That was the whole point of this survey. This time the scope was for the leaders and the staff of kindergarten and childcare centres. This is not a country ranking of practices. The OECD gives attention to our survey structure so that our outcome can be reflected in each country's policy. That would inform the policy makers and researchers on how to improve in their policy making and curriculum building. Thank you very much.

## **WATANABE**

You know, in any symposiums like this, when the discussion is becoming more interesting, we are almost out of time. We have only 5 more minutes, and I would like to ask Professor AKITA to give us a closing comment. Japanese ECEC stakeholders who are here in this auditorium would be glad to hear your insights from the survey results and/or this symposium.

## **AKITA**



Sure, today we have a lot of researchers and training institution staff here today. I'd like researchers participating this symposium to think deeply about what Ms. BELFALI presented today and how you can associate your research topics and findings with actual Japanese policies. Researchers have their own field of interest and it's quite important.

But I think we need to reflect our findings on policy in the future. In addition, when conducting international survey, the budget of the country really counts. For example, in this TALIS Starting Strong Survey, the number of countries which examines the childcare of children under 3 years old is only four. If more countries will participate in this area, we can learn a lot more. I think it's important to make use of much evidence taken from the international survey on making policies about early childhood education and care.

So today we talked about two topics during the discussion session. One is the training, and the other is practice. In Norway, they close the kindergarten for 5 days a year to have staff participate in workshop for continuous professional development. In Korea, as Ms. MUGYEONG reported, if the kindergarten teachers take the 1 year sabbatical, they can receive the subsidy. Actually it is not easy for staff working in ECEC Centers in Japan to take one week off. As Ms. TOVE said "structure", we need to think about how to build structure for continuous professional development in Japan, learning from other countries' practice. It's also important for every participating country to learn how to make policies and how the teachers' practice them from other countries.

Regarding as for professional development, it's easy to focus on individual teachers receive and how can they

develop their qualities and competencies. However, it would be better to discuss based on the results of this survey, how should each center design the structure of professional development system in the future through dialogue with these findings about other countries. It leads to enrichment of ECEC Center and community. We should not just look at the survey results and say “Oh, this is a high score” or “This score is low”. Not only policy maker, but also each center and ECEC teachers should consider to re-examine the obvious, explore other possibilities, and review the value of their practice based on the results of surveys. Thus this symposium is the first step, and that is the significance of the survey. Of course, research and analysis have next challenges and limitations, but we need to discuss wisdom that goes beyond the limitations. I guess my time is up. Thank you.

#### **WATANABE**

Thank you professor AKITA for keeping the time. So it was a short panel discussion but I think it was fruitful. So this closes the panel discussion. Thank you so much to the panelists.