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Possibilities and challenges in sustained capacity-building in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions: ECEC leaders' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions' opportunities to build a learning organization and master future innovations by focusing on core components, implementation drivers, leadership, and collective collaborative systems.

The paper is based on results from semi-structured interviews with ten ECEC leaders from three different municipalities in Norway that had taken part in the Being Together (BT) innovation five years earlier.

Three areas were identified as crucial for the continuation of ECEC teachers' capacity building: (1) a strong focus on implementation processes and sustainability; (2) transformational leadership; and (3) developing professional learning communities. Potential challenges to building capacity in ECEC institutions include the variety of educational backgrounds among ECEC staff members in Norway and too little time to create professional learning communities.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood education and care; collective collaborative systems; professional learning communities; sustained capacity-building; transformational leadership

Introduction

There is a lack of research on the organizational conditions that influence the successful implementation of innovations in ECEC institutions (Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Durlak 2010; Griffin 2010). Few programmes reach the continuation phase or become integrated into teachers' daily practice once the project is terminated (Ertesvåg et al. 2010; Fullan 2016). Thus, creating sustained collective and individual capacity-building in ECEC institutions by focusing on core components of the intervention and implementation drivers (Blase et al. 2012; Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012) is vital for building a learning organization that enhances children's development (Hall and Hord 2015; Stoll et al. 2006; Waters, Payler, and Jones 2018). When the organization has established evidence-based methods for how to implement new practices according to

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ECEC development at any time, the quality of ECEC and children's learning potential may rise (OECD 2015).

ECEC teachers in Norway have a three-year bachelor's degree from university. In a group of 7–9 children under 3 years old, the norm is one ECEC teacher and two untrained staff members. In a group of 16–18 children over 3 years old, there is normally one ECEC teacher and two assistants (OECD 2015). Every child has the right to participate in an ECEC institution in Norway, and more than 90% do so (OECD 2015). Norway has committed to early intervention (Report No. 18 to the Storting (White Paper) 2010–2011). Even so, many children with special needs do not receive sufficient help in a timely manner (Report No. 19 to the Storting (White Paper) 2015–2016). ECEC staff members in Norway are expected to increase professionalism by participating in capacity-building initiatives that prepare them to plan and implement high-quality interventions (OECD 2015). Hence, innovations in Norwegian ECEC institutions are increasing. The aim of this article is to examine the conditions that help ECEC institutions successfully continue the capacity-building process they started when phasing in the principles of the *Being Together* (BT) innovation five years earlier (Omdal 2018). The BT innovation prepared the participating institutions to become learning organizations capable of phasing in new innovations, such as the new Norwegian ECEC Framework Plan (Ministry of Education and Research 2017), which, since August 2017, has committed every ECEC institution in Norway to certain content and tasks.

The Being Together innovation began with financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The intervention involved approximately 1,000 Norwegian ECEC institutions and 3,000 supervisors from 50 municipalities in Norway. Often, the supervisors were the leaders of the ECEC institution. They had completed a tutor-training programme that prepared them to build capacity in their staff groups. One key BT issue focused on preventing social and emotional problems and building social competence in children aged 1–5 years through the use of an authoritative adult style in the ECEC institution (e.g. Baumrind 1991; Ertesvåg 2011; Larzelere, Morris, and Harrist 2013; Wentzel 2002). An *authoritative* adult who balances being both warm and demanding towards a child cultivates the child's ability to develop a secure pattern of attachment with a caregiver (Bretherton 1992). In contrast, adults may be *neglectful* (demonstrating low warmth and low control), *authoritarian* (demonstrating low warmth and high control) or *permissive* (demonstrating high warmth and low control) (Baumrind 1991). Warmth combined with clear expectations has been shown to enhance children's learning and social development (Hamre and Pianta 2005; Walker 2008). Other key BT issues involved using collectively oriented methods to reach common goals and developing implementation knowledge in order to phase in new content to the ECEC. The continuation of BT as a capacity-building initiative in the ECEC is grounded in recognized international research, such as *implementation theory* (Blase et al. 2012; Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Durlak and DuPre 2008; Fixsen et al. 2005; Fullan 2016; Greenberg et al. 2005), *organizational theory* and theory on professional learning communities, transformational leadership and collective orientation (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour 2005; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Leithwood 2018; Stoll and Louis 2007b). The theoretical framework emphasizes the relationship between two goals: first, high-quality interactions and communication among staff members, and second, individual and collective professional growth.

The first goal of this follow-up research is to search for strategies and structures that sustained change processes in the ECEC system beyond the implementation period. In this paper, we have elaborated on the BT intervention's core components of *implementation, organizational learning and capacity building* and the programme principles *consistency and continuity*, referring to common learning processes among staff members with or without formal training, the importance of integrating new innovations with former actions and introducing new staff members to common goals and practices in the institution (Omdal 2018). As part of investigating the ongoing learning process in BT institutions, the second goal is to search for how the BT experience and learning processes influenced how ECEC leaders planned the process of meeting national obligations following the initiation of the new Framework Plan for kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research 2017). It is crucial to be able not only to implement a specific innovation but also to make use of the knowledge and experience the institution gained from one intervention in order to successfully phase-in another one. The third goal is to investigate how the leaders elaborated a professional learning community across ECEC institutions by exchanging ideas and experiences with the BT core components to collectively reach a higher professional level.

Conceptual framework

We focus on conditions that can affect sustainable change. First, we discuss the concepts of *implementation and sustainability* and then elaborate on *transformational leadership* and *professional learning communities*.

Implementation and sustainability

'Implementation consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, programme, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change' (Fullan 2016, 67). There is a clear correlation between the quality of the implementation process and the effect of the intervention (Durlak and DuPre 2008). Thus, during the last 10–15 years, implementation quality has received an increasing amount of attention in the research literature (Durlak 2015). Blase et al. (2012) describe two central concepts and approaches when trying to understand the implementation process: core components of the intervention and implementation drivers. Core components consist of the main content of an intervention and describe *what* is supposed to be done. The key components must be clearly identified if they are to be put into practice. Implementation drivers represent the infrastructure and describe *how* to achieve a transformation from theory to practice in the organization. If the core components are not implemented effectively, it becomes difficult to continue the intervention. If the innovation has been implemented successfully and receives a positive response from participants, then sustainable development is possible (Fullan 2016; Huggins and Evans 2018). Even so, there are personal and institutional threats to continuation. The extent of collective efforts, systematic planning and leadership entail risks and possibilities for sustained change in the organization. *Consistency* means that professionals stick to the key principles of the innovation irrespective of contextual conditions and that all colleagues commit to a joint vision and share the same attitudes and actions. *Continuity* means that participants succeed in maintaining

their commitment to the capacity-building system over time and manage to integrate and develop new actions in conjunction with the existing ones.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership refers to ‘a leader’s ability to inspire, motivate and intellectually stimulate each staff member’ (Aarons, Green, and Miller 2012, 157). Fixsen, Van Dyke, and Blase (2019) highlight transformational leadership as crucial for implementation processes. Sustained capacity-building depends on strong management of the change process. Effective transformational leadership is assumed to consist of five categories or domains with certain connecting practices: (1) setting directions, (2) building relationships and developing people, (3) developing the organization to support desired practices, (4) improving the instructional programme, and (5) securing accountability (Leithwood 2018). When setting directions, it is crucial to ensure that the entire staff group develops and shares a common vision and to identify specific, short-term goals acknowledged by each colleague. Developing people and building strong relationships depends on the leader’s ability to facilitate trusting communication and reflections among staff members, to encourage colleagues to learn from each other and share ideas and to reassure the group of the safety of exploring new practices. To develop the organization, the leader should emphasize building up and structuring a collaborative culture and distributing leadership. Enhanced distributed leadership and collaborative learning processes are recommended by Waters, Payler, and Jones (2018). Leithwood (2018) also argues that the leader must allocate resources in favour of the institution’s goals and vision, and he or she should emphasize networking with other institutions to stimulate professional learning communities (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour 2005). The leader might improve the instructional programme by offering instructional support, monitoring specific practices in accordance with their aims and minimizing distractions along the way. The last domain comprises the leader’s responsibility to develop the ECEC organization in line with national and local political guidelines.

Professional learning communities

Professional learning communities (PLCs) refer to a group of people sharing, critically examining and questioning their own practice in a continuing, collaborative, inclusive, reflective, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way (Mitchell and Sackney 2000; Stoll et al. 2006). PLCs intend to constantly seek and share learning and continuously improve ongoing practice in accordance with new knowledge. The result of this collective effort is assumed to be an increase in the effectiveness of professionals who develop positive learning environments for children’s wellbeing, learning and growth. Creating PLCs means establishing shared values and a joint vision, learning collectively and experiencing a supportive and shared leadership that develops a clear structure and certain ways of cooperating and sharing personal practice (Hall and Hord 2015). Creating staff capacity through PLCs appears to facilitate sustainable improvement. Professionals who find themselves immersed in constant change processes more easily tolerate new strategies and ideas being implemented within the organization at any time (DuFour et al. 2010). Educational leaders are responsible for developing PLCs (Stoll and Louis 2007a). This presupposes that

they know how to do so. Bolam, Stoll, and Greenwood (2007) underline that leadership is a critically important factor in stimulating individual and collective learning, using resources effectively, building learning structures, ensuring loyalty to the vision and implementing strong assessment processes. An effective method for developing leadership is to organize learning networks with other leaders (Jackson and Temperley 2007). Running learning networks is relatively resource-intensive but provides access to other environments and cultures that, in turn, can promote development in each organization.

Materials and methods

Sample and data collection

The ECEC leaders of ten randomly selected ECEC institutions from three different municipalities in southern and western Norway participating in the BT programme agreed to participate in individual semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors approximately five years after implementation. The interviewees were BT supervisors with substantial insight into the core components of the innovation and had long careers within the ECEC system. The mean age of the participants was 48 years, and all were women. Their ages ranged from 40 to 60 years. Their mean job experience in ECEC institutions was 18 years and ranged from 6 to 25 years. Their mean experience as ECEC institutional leaders was 9 years and ranged from 3 to 23 years. All participants had an ECEC bachelor's degree. Six participants had completed continuing education in management, and eight had completed continuing education in other subjects, such as special education, coaching and toddler pedagogy. Each participant participated in a network group for ECEC leaders in their municipality.

The interviews aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of some ECEC leaders' experiences with the continuation of the BT capacity-building, how their learning from the innovation had influenced their leadership and structures for incorporating new policies and procedures in the ECEC institution, and their strategies for creating professional learning communities across ECEC institutions. Data were collected and then analyzed to discover whether and how the institutions had continued their professional development after implementation of the BT key principles.

How the interviews were conducted

The semi-structured interviews with ten ECEC leaders were conducted over two months in Spring 2018 in the informants' local environments. Before the interviews were conducted, the participants gave their informed consent to take part in an interview, in accordance with the ethical guidelines given by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2006).

We have endeavoured to interpret their 'real world experiences' (Denzin and Lincoln 2018) as objectively as possible. Our goal was to interpret the actions and social world from the informants' own perspectives (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Bryman 2016). Qualitative interviews enabled us to go into detail, get close to the informants' lifeworld, and develop knowledge about a relatively under-investigated area of the ECEC system by focusing on implementation knowledge (Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Griffin 2010).

The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide (Brinkmann 2018) consisting of specific themes, such as transformational leadership, implementation drivers, sustainable development, incorporating new innovations into existing ones, continuing capacity-building in the ECEC staff group and building professional learning communities. The main themes had several follow-up questions arising from relevant evidence-based literature in the field. We posed relatively open-ended questions when introducing each theme to search for the interviewees' spontaneous stories and experiences related to the focus area before searching for more specific answers (Blossing, Roland, and Sølviik 2019).

Data analysis

In our process of data analysis, we have focused on two of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) analytical issues: data condensing and concluding descriptions. First, the interviews were accurately transcribed from iPod recordings and then transferred into the qualitative software programme NVivo (Richards 2002). After gathering all the data and importing them into a separate data file in the software, we categorized and thematized relevant interview citations into so-called NVivo 'nodes'. Consistent with a deductive approach, the nodes arose from previous research in the field reflected in the interview guide, identified as leadership, sustainability and professional learning communities. We also included recurring findings across interviewees in accordance with an inductive approach. Second, crucial node-related citations from the interview transcripts were gathered and incorporated into the results section of the paper. Third, the main tendencies and any interesting deviations were searched for in relation to previous research and relevant theoretical perspectives before concluding and suggesting any implications for practice. One possible limitation of the study was that the interviewees appeared highly competent in their sustained capacity-building. They may have accepted our research invitation already feeling confident as leaders. Unfortunately, we failed to find ECEC leaders who seemed less successful. Consequently, the interviewees' stories appeared to verify the theory rather than disprove previous research. The barriers identified in sustained capacity-building seemed unique to each participant's ECEC context.

Validity and reliability

Regarding the validity of the interviews, it seemed as if the interviewees were able to view their job performance from the outside, to observe their colleagues' work at the institution and to have discussed the focus areas of the research with their colleagues during the change process. It seemed that the interviewees felt free to share their experiences, as we managed to establish a relaxed conversational environment. When interpreting the data, the interviewees' answers were compared across cases and with previous research to discover any variations and to compare them against established theory. Concerning the reliability of the study, the method and key areas of the interview guide are described above. The interview questions derive from previous research and established theory in the field. The selected ECEC leaders and their respective institutions are not necessarily representative of all institutions that took part in capacity-building.

Results

The follow-up study aimed to identify possibilities and challenges in the continuation of the key principles of the BT programme; this part of the study was based on the perspectives of ten ECEC leaders in three Norwegian municipalities. As indicated in the conceptual framework and methods section, we investigated three areas pertaining to successful continuation and sustainability in the ECEC institutions five years after the end of the programme period: (1) implementation and sustainability; (2) transformational leadership; and (3) professional learning communities. The interviewees' quotations are identified by indented paragraphs in the text. Possibilities and challenges in each area are highlighted.

Implementation and sustainability

The interviewees argued that the authoritative teaching style (Baumrind 1991) was the most influential core component of capacity building. Five years after the implementation, the ECEC leaders continued to discuss, within the staff group, how to balance control and warmth; they felt that the issue had been settled among their colleagues, who had changed their attitudes from thinking of a child as 'difficult' to realizing that the child's difficulties were the adults' responsibility.

The staff members had developed a shared vision in their practice and agreed they had to improve constantly. The ECEC institutions had created implementation capacity that helped them to work towards common goals and plans in the continuation phase:

We agree on the goals and how to reach them. Then, we go out training and reflect on whether our intentions really happened (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

It's essential to follow an implementation plan, to have everyone with you from the very start and to make a good progression plan (ECEC leader in a municipality in south Norway).

Barriers to sustainability

The ECEC leaders discussed staff turnover as a threat to the continuation of a shared vision:

The greatest challenge has been maternity leaves. It's a real barrier when colleagues are absent for a year or two (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

You need a good plan and a strong structure for implementation. You need to keep people in the flow. You need to stay committed no matter who comes in and discuss important topics in the community to reach common values and get everyone working with you (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

Transformational leadership

The ECEC leaders set the direction of sustained capacity-building. They built on their successful experiences from the BT implementation when the ECEC had upcoming policies they were supposed to phase-in and engage with:

We use time to clarify the core components and get everyone with us. We refer to previous success with innovations to make the staff feel safe and help them understand (ECEC leader in a municipality in west Norway).

After attending BT, the ECEC leaders were more aware of preventing distraction and constantly communicating the staff's goals:

It's crucial to define clear goals on your way. If you don't know where you're going, it'll be hard to motivate others to reach the target (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

The interviewees highlighted the important administrative and supportive role of the municipality leader in adhering to the programme principles:

We have a municipality leader who found this helpful and prioritized it. She has always been a little ahead of us. Everybody has taken courses, even temporary staff (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

The BT training programme had given the ECEC leaders many tools; it had taught them how to lead the staff effectively and make them engaged and committed to capacity building by highlighting continuity and clarity. The ECEC leaders felt that BT had given them more capacity to supervise colleagues and draft new interventions, making them more resilient as leaders:

I've been more aware of myself as a leader and how to get everyone working with me. By working continuously and with clear leadership with specific goals and a structured plan, it helps me to lead my staff. In addition, I must follow them up to ensure continuous commitment (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

Barriers to transformational leadership

The interviewees felt that capacity building among colleagues was time-consuming, needed to be a continuous priority, and was dependent on their leadership. They needed to be patient with their colleagues and had to remain in charge themselves in order to be good role models:

Sustaining capacity-building depends on the leader. You must expect something from your colleagues. The leader has to follow-up the activities. I ought to own the content and meet each colleague where she or he is. I should suggest what we could do, take the initiative, develop systems, raise capacity, take an active part in the implementation process and help the ECEC teacher set priorities (ECEC leader in a municipality in west Norway).

Professional learning communities

The BT innovation was an inspiration for developing better cooperation between ECEC institutions in the municipality. The ECEC leaders actively exchanged experiences, ideas and plans to establish common values and ideas across institutions. They emphasized their own responsibility to obtain funding for continuous capacity-building across ECEC institutions in creating professional learning communities:

We have had funding for sustaining capacity-building. We have had common day courses connecting all the ECEC institutions in the municipality (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

We're three ECEC leaders who meet regularly. We decide on common approaches and share experiences and tips. When making an implementation plan, we work together to make a structure for it. When the Framework Plan came, we worked together, discussed and shared thoughts (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

The ECEC leaders worked with staff groups in other ECEC institutions to discuss theory and practice across institutions and get to know different ECEC cultures and traditions:

Joint visions, values and discussions create a sense of community. We sit in on each other's institutions. I have staff meetings in another institution, and another ECEC leader comes to us (ECEC leader in a municipality in southwest Norway).

The participants highlighted everyone's collective responsibility to familiarize themselves with capacity building. The staff members had a positive attitude towards new learning and connected it with previous knowledge and their own practice:

Everyone is supposed to join the same courses to have the same competence and basis for reflections and training in the institution afterwards (ECEC leader in a municipality in west Norway).

Barriers to professional learning communities

If the staff group failed at the implementation, they would struggle with its continuation. Problems occurred if someone in the staff group did not reflect sufficiently on their own influence on their colleagues, children or parents, or did not work towards a shared vision:

We have talked a lot about the fact that we are no stronger than the weakest part. If someone in the department does not fulfil their job, the children will experience bad practice several hours a day (ECEC leader in a municipality in west Norway).

Discussion

This study focuses on possibilities and challenges in ECEC institutions' sustained development after the implementation of the BT innovation. What was it that helped the ECEC staff to successfully adhere to the programme principles after the BT implementation was terminated, and what were the challenges to sustained capacity-building? Given the results, the success factors in the continuation process were (1) *a strong focus on core components and implementation drivers*, (2) *transformation-oriented leaders*, and (3) *developing professional learning communities*.

Strong focus on core components and implementation drivers

The results indicated that the ECEC organization had incorporated knowledge about implementation processes (e.g. Meyers et al. 2012) and implementation quality delivered to participants through the BT innovation. The ECEC teachers and leaders seemed to have managed to transfer their acquired knowledge, as they implemented the content of the new Framework Plan for the Norwegian ECEC system (Ministry of Education and Research 2017) successfully and with strong individual and collective self-efficacy (Leithwood 2018). They had brought their learning from BT regarding how to point out core

components and make structured implementation plans. The leaders had managed to build a system that prepared their staff groups to implement long-standing change; they made long-term plans and motivated their staff members to integrate the innovation principles into existing structures of the ECEC institution (e.g. Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Fullan 2016) consistent with a learning organization undergoing constant change.

Five years later, the ECEC institutions in BT had increased their knowledge about implementation drivers (Blase et al. 2012). The ECEC leaders had started to see themselves as driving forces of implementation processes. Even so, the ECEC leaders mentioned some barriers to sustainability in accordance with Greenberg et al. (2005). The importance of including new staff members in the same capacity-building and prioritizing making enough time to follow-up with colleagues was highlighted in the continuation phase. After the end of BT, the leaders emphasized loyalty to a shared vision.

Transformational-oriented leaders

The interviewees revealed that they had managed to sustain their organizational improvements over the years. They emphasized the importance of very clear, written implementation plans (Meyers et al. 2012), routines and structures in the organization (Fixsen et al. 2005), which enabled them to succeed in continuing to focus on the core issues of the intervention after the implementation phase had finished (Fullan 2016). Leaders had set clear directions, consistently challenged the staff, followed up, and demonstrated how to use the same implementation methods when phasing new projects into the continuation phase of the ongoing BT capacity building (Leithwood 2018).

The ECEC leaders had taken the lead in collective capacity-building among the staff (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). The leaders had worked diligently to end up with highly engaged colleagues who felt a strong personal and collective responsibility for sticking to the main ideas of the institution and fulfilling the plans. Thus, the leader ensured that the key principles were part of the institution's culture and were firmly established.

It had been important for the leaders to set the direction and prevent distractions given the complexity of innovations constantly being implemented in ECECs (Leithwood 2018). They had to keep the process on track and prevent distraction and fatigue among staff members by creating a good framework and structures that would be understood by the participants from the start. This was time-consuming. The leaders had also organized themselves into leader networks across ECEC institutions, exchanging ideas and plans for the sustainable development of their organization (Hargreaves and Fink 2006; Jackson and Temperley 2007).

Developing professional learning communities

The ECEC leaders felt that the systematic exchange of ideas and plans with other ECEC institutions in the municipality had made their mission more engaging and resulted in better implementation processes. The leaders had committed themselves to sticking to the core components and structures they had agreed on, as they regularly met to evaluate their experiences during the implementation of different priorities in the community. The system they had managed to create through professional learning communities facilitated

common learning processes and common visions that are viewed as essential in all innovations (Hall and Hord 2015; Leithwood 2018; Stoll et al. 2006). A crucial task for the learning organization is to reach a shared vision and demonstrate a congruent practice in the institution (Hargreaves et al. 2018; Stoll et al. 2006). In their capacity-building in the institutions, the leaders highlighted everyone's importance and responsibilities in working towards a common vision. The leaders had highlighted support across ECEC institutions for observing each other's practices, thus giving colleagues in other institutions constructive feedback and learning from one another to prevent blind spots in their own traditions. A threat to these professional learning communities was professionals who did not realize how they influenced children and adults in the institution and followed their own routines.

Conclusions

The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has strongly advised creating ECEC teacher capacity to promote a quality learning environment in Norwegian ECEC institutions (Report No. 24 to the Storting (White Paper) 2012–2013). Although Norwegian childcare has enjoyed a good reputation, research exploring the quality of Norwegian toddler childcare suggests the need to improve the quality of ECEC institutions (Bjørnstad and Os 2018). Since implementation theory contains key ideas for how to develop sustained capacity-building in ECEC institutions (Durlak 2015), it is assumed that ECEC quality will improve if ECEC leaders are offered continuing education focused on implementation knowledge.

This follow-up study showed that the active use of collaborative systems and sustained professional training and coaching (Blase et al. 2012; Joyce and Showers 2002) efforts by ECEC institutions in adopting new policies resulted in an organization that was in a state of constant change. Potential challenges to building capacity in ECEC institutions include the variety of educational backgrounds among ECEC staff members in Norway and a lack of time to create professional learning communities. Fortunately, the organization included innovative professionals who were able to adapt new practices into existing structures of the institution. The study highlighted the need to focus on preventive innovations not only in schools but also in the ECEC setting to ensure a high-quality learning environment for children younger than school age, in accordance with early intervention policies (e.g. Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Report No. 6 to the Storting (White Paper) 2019–2020; Report No. 18 to the Storting (White Paper) 2010–2011).

Implementation theory is not taught adequately during the three years of ECEC teacher education in Norway. Thus, a lack of knowledge about how to effectively transform new ideas, theories and core components into practice in institutions will make it harder to develop a professional learning organization prepared to master future innovations (e.g. Blase et al. 2012; Domitrovich, Moore, and Greenberg 2012; Durlak and DuPre 2008; Greenberg et al. 2005; Ministry of Education and Research 2017). Hence, future ECEC research should emphasize the continuation of innovations in the ECEC system to promote sustained capacity-building among ECEC teachers and leaders (Hall and Hord 2015; Leithwood 2018; Waters, Payler, and Jones 2018) and better outcomes for the youngest children.

One of the study's possible limitations is that the interviewees' answers may have been affected by their strong ownership of BT innovation. Another limitation is that the two interviewers may have influenced the participants differently, even though they used the same interview guide and procedures.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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