Extensive study of children’s development - The Stavanger Project

For eight years, almost 1400 children in Stavanger will be observed in various areas of development. Development within language, motor skills, maths and social skills, will be mapped while the children are in their natural environment. The Stavanger project “The Learning Child” is an extensive and unique study.

The project will contribute to increased knowledge about children’s development when the children are aged two and a half to ten years. When the children are in school, skills in reading, writing and maths will be seen in the context of their development in preschool age. In this way, researchers wish to identify early development factors which can promote or hinder their academic development.

Interdisciplinary focus

– The developmental areas which we normally split children’s development into, are very closely connected, says professor and project manager Ann-Mari Knivsberg at the Reading Centre at the University of Stavanger.

– Traditionally we’ve operated with a split into development areas, which has been necessary to obtain in-depth knowledge in the different areas. But an interdisciplinary project gives us the opportunity to look at the whole child in a different way, she says, and continues:

– Within each of our disciplines we’ve felt the need for a common approach.

Safe surroundings

In the project, observational material used by schools and nursery schools is used as a basis for talks with parents and assessments of the children. The parents need to give their consent for the data to be used for research.

The aim is to get 1400 two and a half year olds into the project within the next three years. Observations will proceed over three months, and the children’s mastery will be observed in many different situations. Then new observations will be made when the children are four and a half, seven and a half and nine and a half.

– By having the children observed by someone close to them, we obtain more real information than if strangers observe them. Additionally, those close to the children understand more of the situation the children are in, says associate professor Elin Reikerås at the Reading Centre, who is responsible for the maths part of the project.

– It is important to stress that these are observations, not tests. When the observations are structured, the pedagogical staff find it easier to do their jobs, regardless of the fact that they are collecting data for the Stavanger Project.

Better quality

The Stavanger project is a collaboration between the university and the Stavanger borough council. The council contributes with, among other things, practical adaptations and financing.
By participating in the Stavanger project we want to further improve the quality of the council owned nursery schools, says Mona Kopperstad, head of nursery schools in the Stavanger borough council.

The council also regards it as important to contribute to the development of research based knowledge. Specifically, we expect documented results which show that the use of systematic observational methods catches vulnerable children, so that they can be followed up and measures implemented.

The project group:

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- Inger Kristine Løge - Associate professor, dr. scient., Centre for Behavioural Research, UiS
- Elsa Kaltvedt - Assistant professor, Department of Early Childhood Education, UiS
- Unni L. Borg - Executive advisor, schools, municipality of Stavanger
- Anne Elisabeth Dahle - Assistant professor, the Reading Centre, UiS
- Unni Borg - Adviser
- Bjørg Danielsen Jølbo - Adviser