



THE ABECEDARIAN APPROACH WITHIN AN INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODEL – A DANISH PILOT STUDY

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EECERA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019

Symposium F13, 22 August 2019

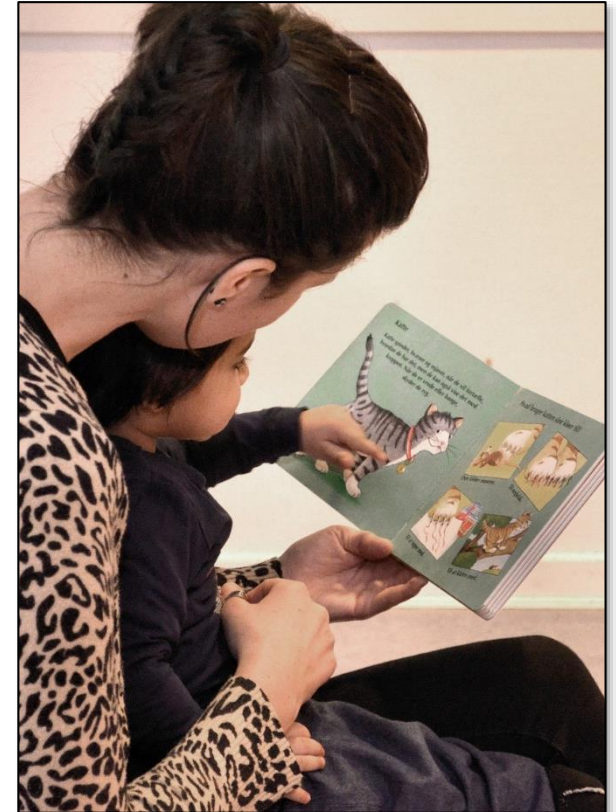
Thessaloniki, Greece



OBJECTIVES

To examine a new blended professional development approach for nursery and family daycare professionals working with children 0-2 yrs old.

Does this approach and model make sense within the Danish universal daycare context and can it improve professional learning and ECEC quality?



Larger question: can it increase ECEC quality and thereby reduce disparities in educational outcomes?

BACKGROUND – ECEC QUALITY & CHILD OUTCOMES

- Participation in high-quality ECEC programs improves outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children
- A few model ECEC programs in the US have shown positive, long-term effects (Reynolds et al. 2007; Schweinhart et al. 2005; Ramey 2018)



- In Europe, the EPPE study also demonstrated beneficial effects of high quality ECEC provision (Sylva et al., 2004)

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

- Existing consensus regarding the importance of a highly qualified workforce for ECEC quality (Milotay, 27.08.18)
- Extensive survey of primarily US-based research (Pianta et al. 2009) & a systematic review of European studies (Jensen & Rasmussen, 2016) show that PD matters in terms of improved child outcomes
- In order for ECEC as a whole to be able to meet European objectives of strengthening child outcomes for *all*, enhanced and continuous PD (both pre-service and in-service) is crucial (Jensen & Iannone, 2016)



ECEC QUALITY – TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH

- Lack detailed information on PD programs

“It is not the qualification per se that has an impact on child outcomes but the ability of better qualified staff members to create a high-quality pedagogic environment.”

-- OECD, 2012



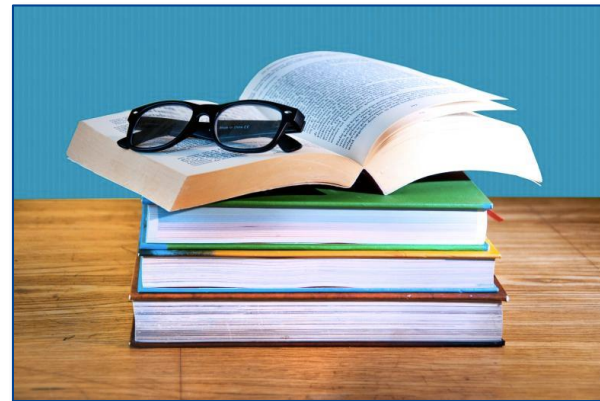
- Early educators generally not taught how to put theoretical knowledge of child development & learning into practice (Early et al, 2009; Bodrova & Leong, 2001; Sheridan et al, 2009)
- Need to look into ECEC curriculum & PD approaches that have proved to be effective & flexible (not prescriptive)

TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH – THE PILOT PROJECT

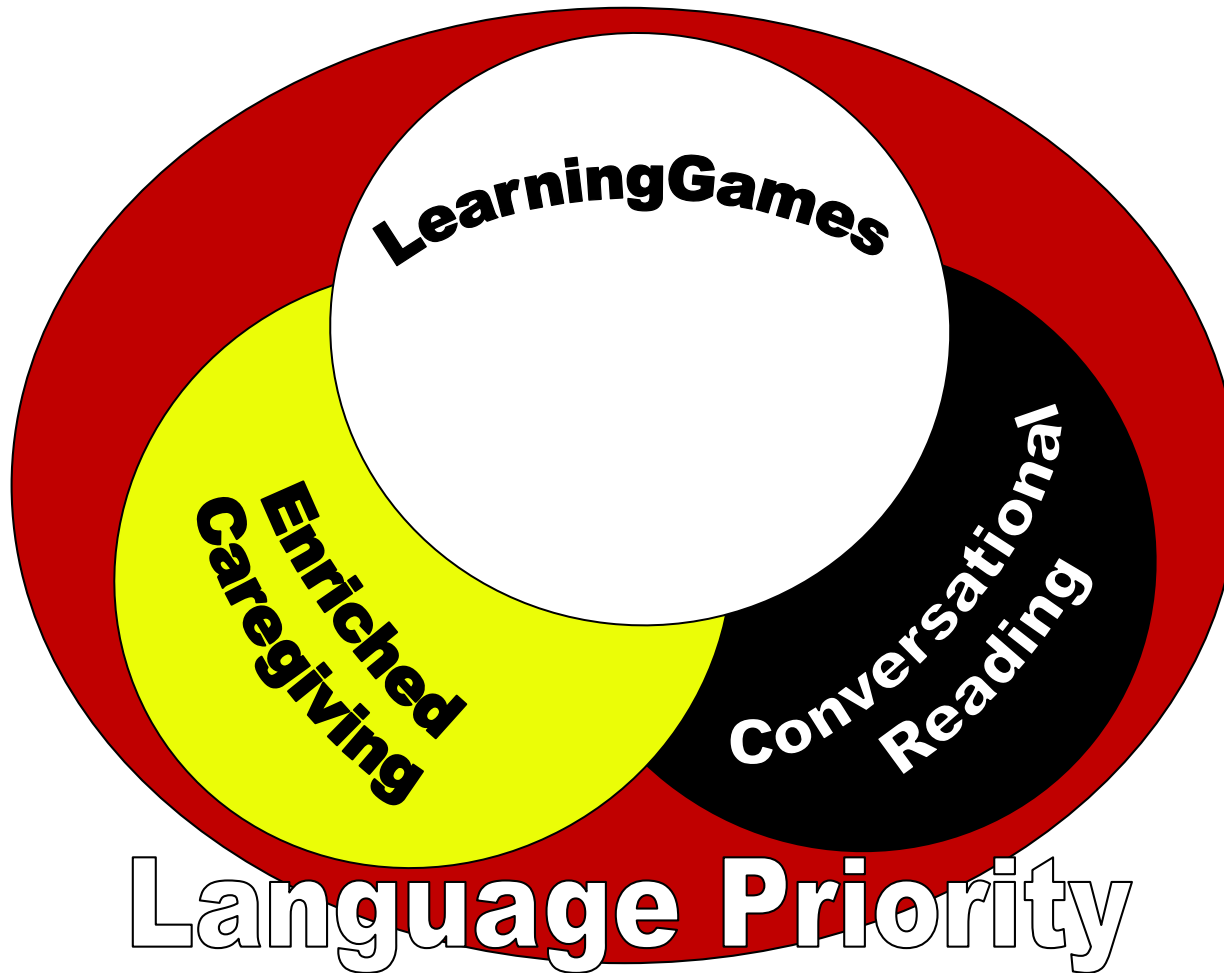
Pilot study merges the **Abecedarian Approach** to ECEC with the Danish professional development model **VIDA**



THE PILOT PROJECT - THEORETICAL & CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND



THE ABECEDARIAN APPROACH



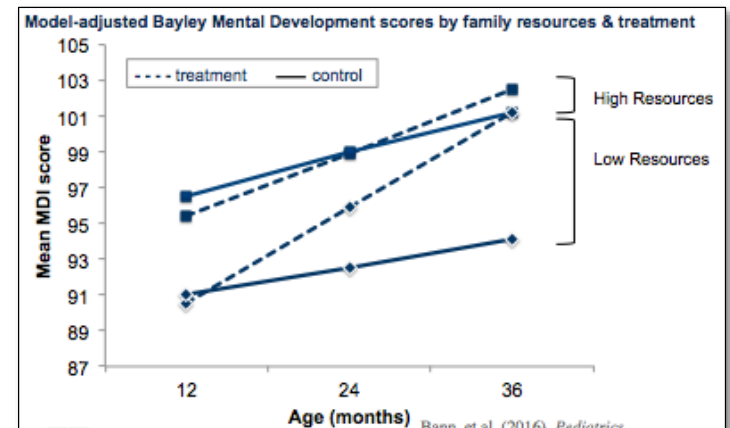
THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE ABECEDARIAN APPROACH

- **Vygotsky** – concepts of adult-mediated activities & scaffolding
- **Piaget** – developmental progression as described in his stages of cognitive growth
- **Scaife & Bruner** – model of joint attention
- **Dewey** – experience-based learning
- **Bronfenbrenner** – social relationships & development



EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE – ABECEDARIAN APPROACH

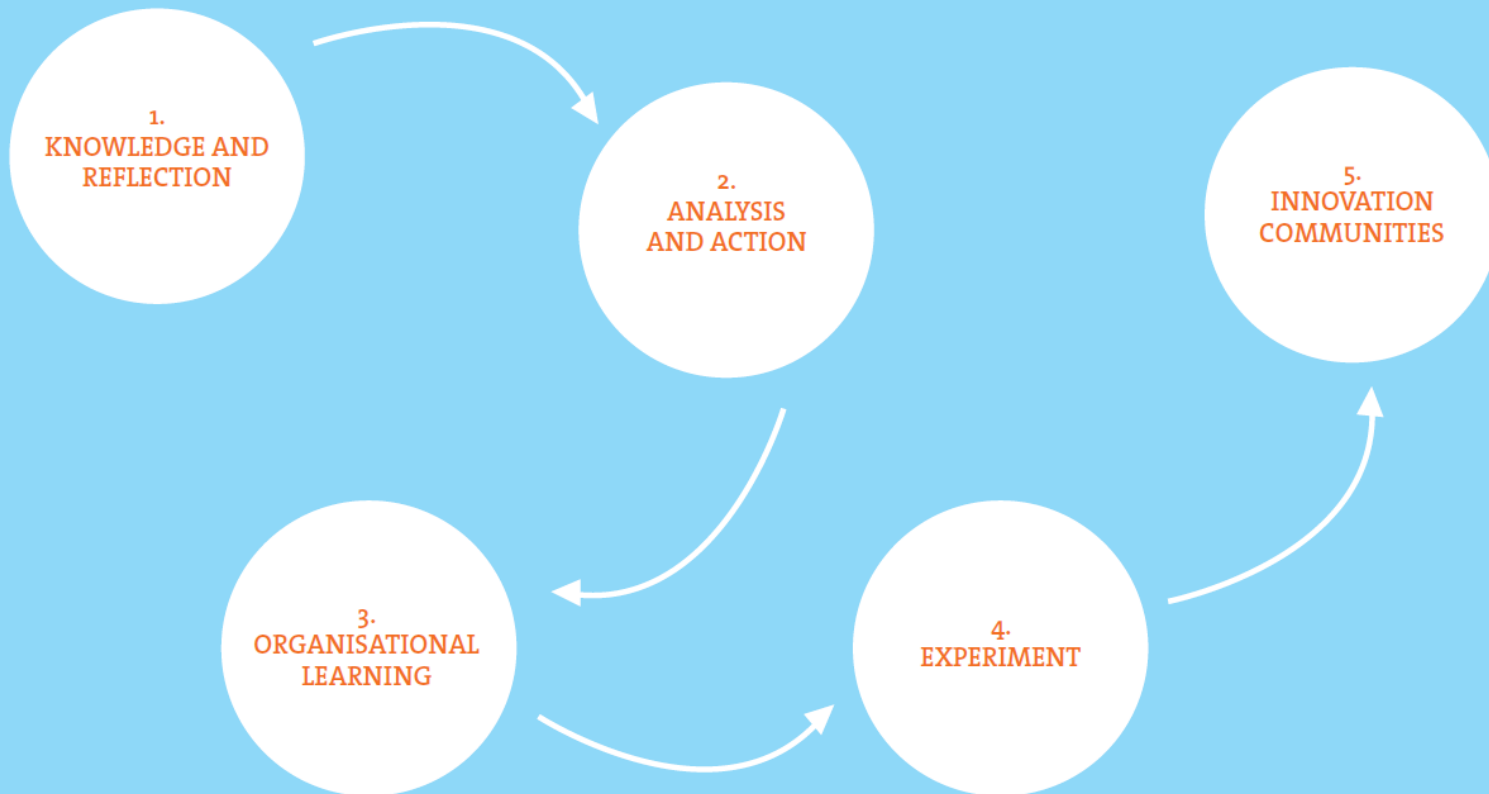
- Over 40 years of scientific research
- 8 RCTs: different groups, delivery methods, lengths of treatment, countries
- 100s peer-reviewed journal articles
- Early & long-lasting benefits
 - Better cognitive dev beginning at 18 mos
 - Higher reading & math achievement
 - 4-fold increase university graduation
 - Better adult health
 - Reduced criminal behaviour
 - 13.7% ROI



THE VIDA MODEL OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

- Professionals work with connecting & **reflecting** on theoretical **knowledge** about inclusion with their own practices & experiences
- Professionals bring examples from own practice to **analyze** & set new goals (**action**)
- Professionals share & develop new ideas within their ECEC setting (**organisational learning**)
- Professionals **experiment** by systematically putting new ideas into practice (1 month at a time)
- Professionals share & create new ideas across ECEC settings (**innovation communities**)
- 2-year CPD project enabled professionals to change practices



PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION – 5 STEPS

Jensen, B. (2014). VIDA Summary of results 2013, p. 11.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF VIDA

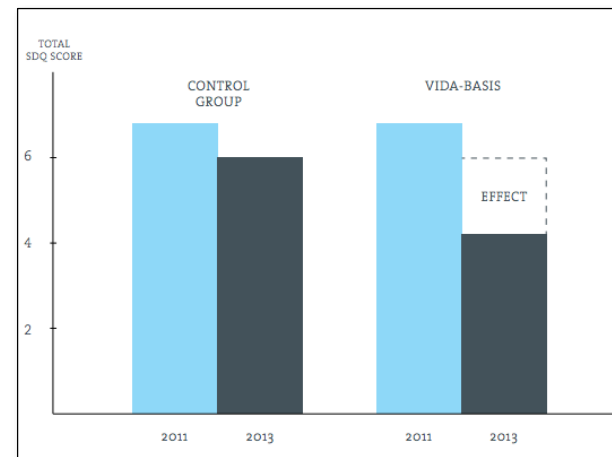
- Theories of organisational knowledge (**Krogh**, 2011)
- Communities of practice (**Wenger**, 1998)
- Expansive learning (**Engeström**, 1998)
- Social development & interaction theory (**Vygotsky**, 1935/1978)
- Experience-based learning (**Dewey**, 1938)
- Social inequality (**Bourdieu & Passeron**, 1990)

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON VIDA

- RCT findings:
 - Improved 3-5 yrs children's socio-emotional development
 - Significant reduction in problems with peer relationships for ethnic minority children
 - Significant reduction in problems with peer relationships for low-income children
 - Parental involvement in VIDA had positive effect on reducing child behavioural problems

(Jensen, Jensen & Rasmussen, 2017)

- Case study found improved professional qualification on both individual & organisation learning levels with focused, systematic, & knowledge-based efforts to change practices (Jensen and Brandi, 2017)



THE PILOT PROJECT – THE MERGED APPROACH

- Similar theoretical bases of child development, learning, & interaction
- Similar original focus on addressing social inequality
- Both approaches have been proven to be effective & flexible

Pilot first steps:

- Translate & adapt content & PD materials of Abecedarian for Danish context
- Refine VIDA framework & develop tools
- Field test with 2 different groups of professionals (nurseries & family daycares)

** Funding & support from TrygFonden's Centre for Child Research*





THE PILOT STUDY – CONTENT

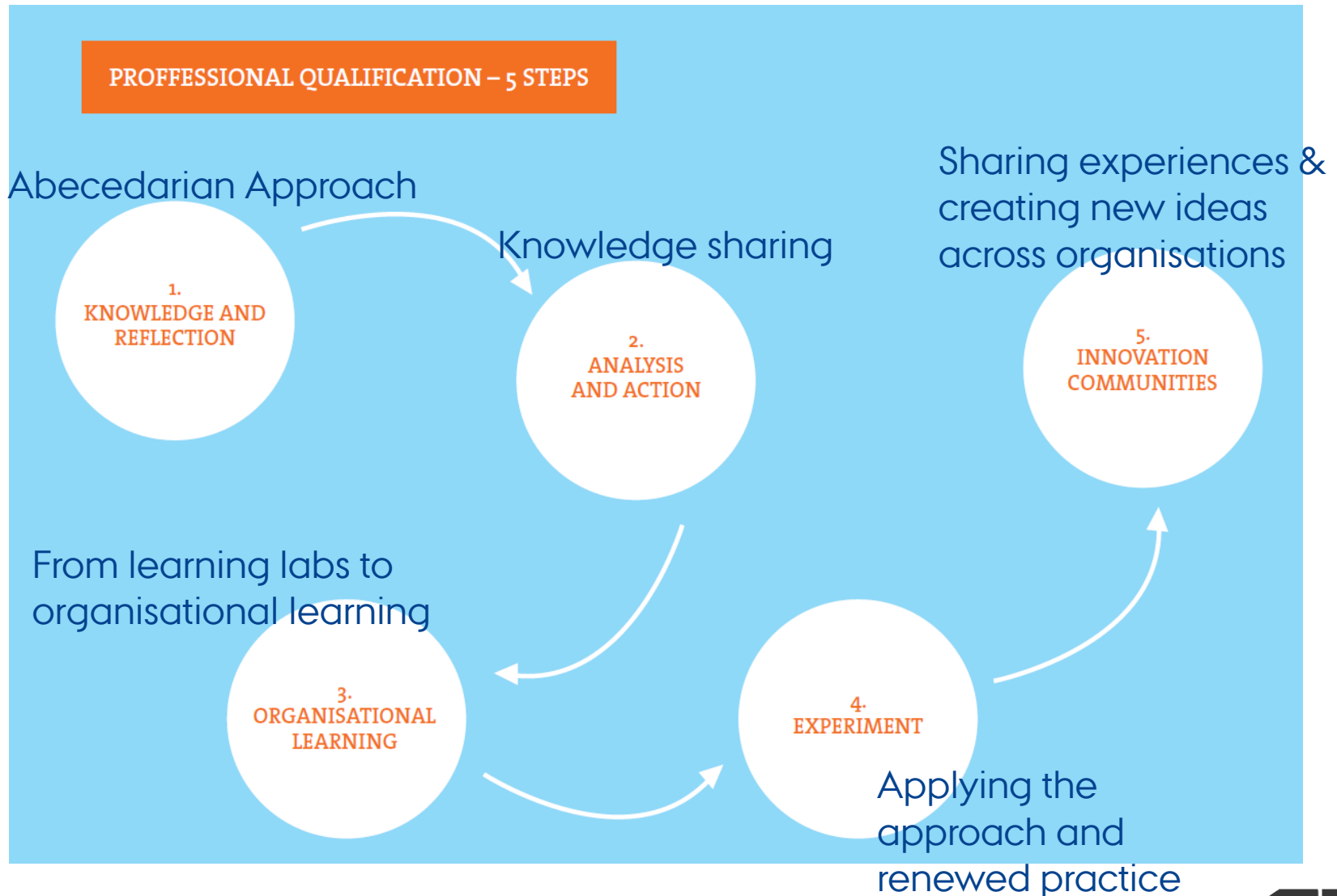
- Workshops focus on theoretical approach to high quality ECEC, pedagogical renewal, transforming everyday practices
- Abecedarian Approach content & strategies focusing on adult-child interaction & relationships
- Professionals work with all children in an intentional, systematic, knowledge-based & individualized manner & in very small groups (new Danish legislation in 2018)
- Educational & organisational change within the entire institution
- Inter-organisational communities for sharing & learning
- Pilot = 4 months of training (VIDA = 2 years)



THE PILOT STUDY – CPD

- Kick-off Seminar and workshops for daycare managers
- Four scenarios – 1 per Abecedarian element (each 3 weeks long) based on a model of interplay between education (1 day), training in practice (1 week) and reflection and evaluation (1/2 day)
- A course for managers (1 day) on facilitation processes of organisational learning and change
- One period (1 month) of implementation & practice without education workshops
- Follow-up workshops on ‘Lessons Learned’ & experience sharing for managers & participants





The original VIDA model :Jensen, B. (2014). VIDA Summary of results 2013, p. 11.

PARADIGM, METHODOLOGY, & METHODS

- Social constructivist paradigm
- Participatory approach
- Sample: 5 nursery centres + 5 family daycare groups
- Ethics: informed consent, anonymity & confidentiality of information maintained



DATA & ANALYSIS

- Quantitative data = Abecedarian Approach implementation checklists & a measurement of organisational learning capacity
- Qualitative data = anthropological observations & interviews, and self-reported planning & evaluation records
- 5 categories of analysis: 1) Program implementation, 2) organizational learning & leadership, 3) use of materials & tools, 4) professionals' motivation & will, and 5) perceived challenges & frustration
- Data was compared across & within nursery centers and family daycare homes
- Analyses & findings: validated by various researchers independently, triangulated, & framed with participants' views & contextual data

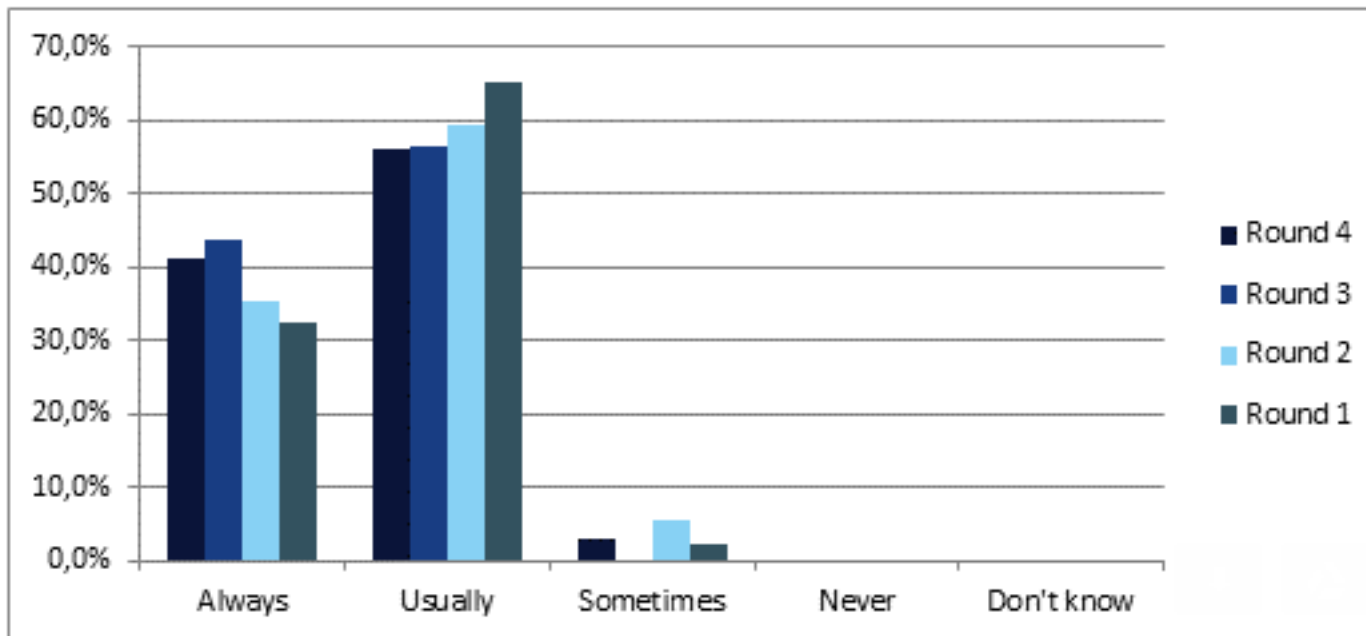
ANALYSIS

Table 3.3 Implementation checklist response rates.

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Survey 4
Overall	94%	81%	80%	71%
Course participants	94%	94%	94%	83%
Course non-participant	93%	79%	79%	68%
Family daycarers	90%	75%	80%	75%
Nursery-school teachers	96%	92%	96%	73%

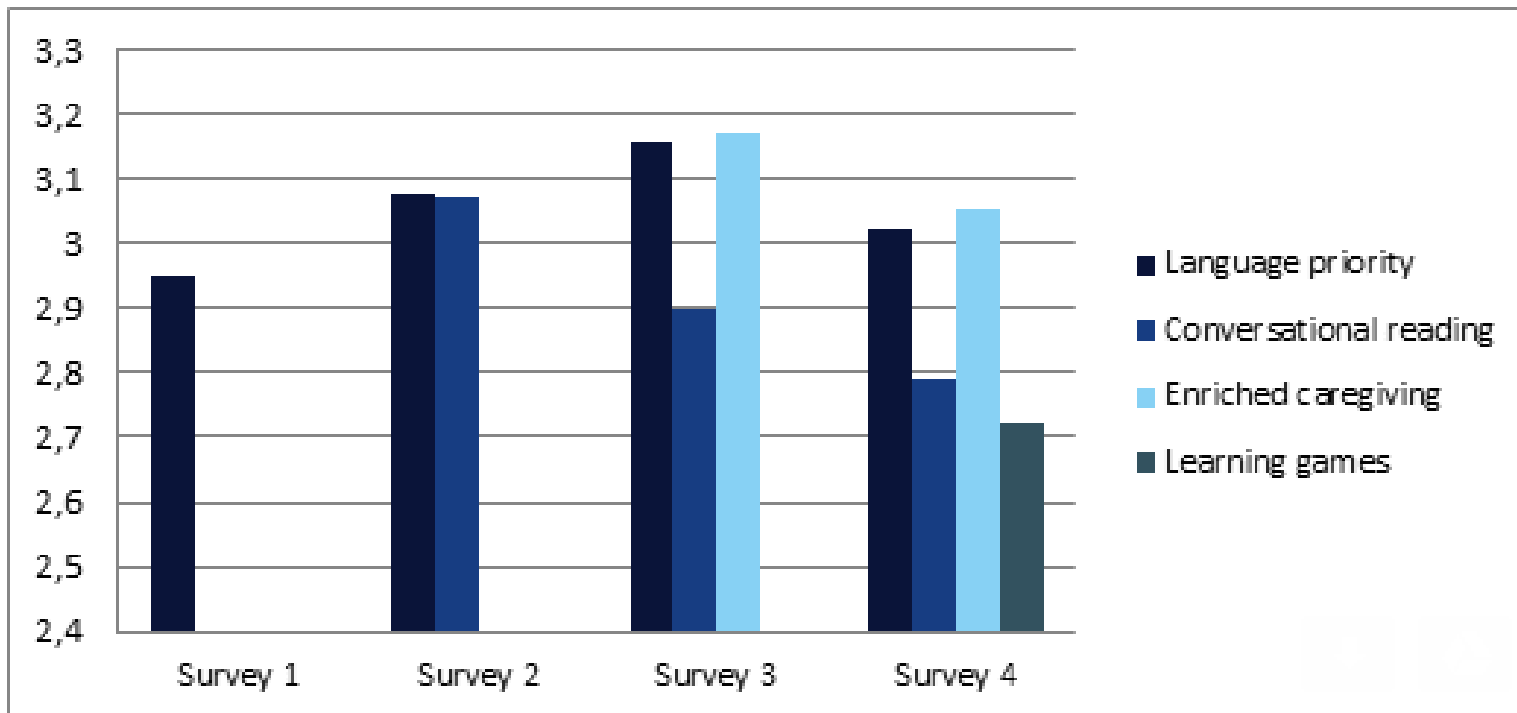
ANALYSIS

Figure 3.3.1 Responses to question 1 in Language Priority: "Emphasize language in every event of the day."



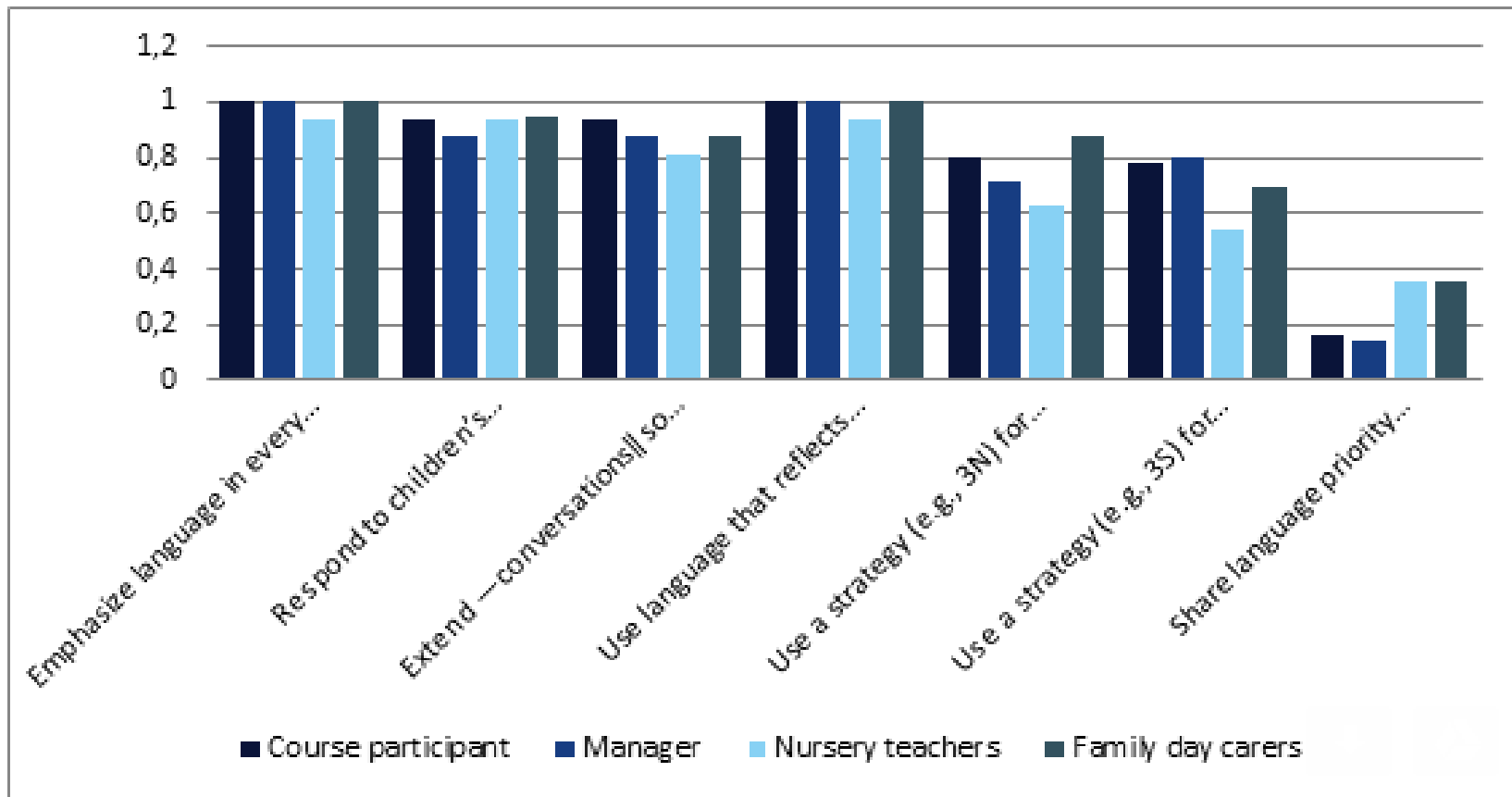
ANALYSIS

Figure 3.3.2 Weighted theme scores, across surveys.



ANALYSIS

Figure 3.3.3 Respond "Always" or "Usually" in survey 1 on Language Priority, by staff group.



FINDINGS FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES

- All nursery centres and family daycare homes implemented all four elements of the Abecedarian Approach to some degree
 - Nursery centres = high degree of implementation
 - Family daycares = varying degrees of implementation in both concentration (how often the approach was used) & consistency (how regularly it was used)
 - Issue: self-report was higher than seen in observation & interviews
- All participants had favorable impression of Abecedarian Approach; all said it made sense to them & to their work
- All appreciated the merged approach & indicated that the materials were helpful
 - Issue: some had reading difficulties
 - Issue: some of the implementation tools proved to be challenging, especially for family daycarers (difficult to understand, to fill out, & took too long)
 - Family daycarers were not used to working with writing, so articulating their work in this manner was challenging for them

CONCLUSIONS I

Does this approach & model make sense within the Danish universal daycare context and can it improve professional learning?

- This approach & model made sense to ECEC professionals in the Danish context
- It improved educator knowledge, skills, engagement, motivation, & teamwork and also increased critical reflection & self-awareness



CONCLUSIONS II

Can this approach & improve ECEC quality?

- As this approach & model improved educator skills, interactions & organisational learning, it should also improve ECEC quality (not measured in the pilot)
- The identified issues will need to be explored further
- The merged approach will be further refined in light of these findings
 - New tools, including videos & iPads
 - More involvement (of participants, municipality, consultant & managers) in planning



DISCUSSION

Issue: the current political situation in Denmark – national curriculum, economic challenges, discourses on staff:child ratios, etc.

- *Will this approach work in a broader European (or even larger) context?*
- *What are the challenges connected to the organisation of & collaboration between professionals of differing backgrounds & settings?*
- *What are the challenges in relation to practice and policy?*

THANK YOU!

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With special acknowledgement to

- > Marlene Vita Kristensen, collaborator on qualitative data & analysis
- > Jakob Arendt KORA (VIVE) on quantitative data & analyses.
- > Funder: TrygFonden's Centre for Child Research

