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'A long way to get here and a long way to go': a case study on changing lunch meal practices in a Norwegian kindergarten

Baizhen Ciren^{a,b}, Eli Kristin Aadland^{a,b}, Aihua Hu^{a,c} and Hege Wergedahl^{a,b}

^aKINDknow—Kindergarten Knowledge Centre for Systemic Research on Diversity and Sustainable Futures, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway; ^bFaculty of Education, Arts and Sports, Department of Sport, Food and Natural Sciences, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway; ^cDepartment of Pedagogy, Religion and Social Studies, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway

ABSTRACT

This article presents a case study on changing food practices from traditional cold sandwich meals to hot meals in a Norwegian kindergarten. Data were sourced from interviews, complemented by non-participatory video observation and observational notes. Building on Fullan's model for understanding a change process, this paper presents the initiation, implementation, continuation and results of such a change, and identifies three key factors that contributed to the successful change in practices in the case kindergarten. These factors are: (1) shared leadership in the change process; (2) the support for change from the parents; and (3) children's (as change partners) involvement and participation. The conclusion section of the paper discusses the implications of the findings for kindergartens and educators in terms of how to facilitate a locally relevant and context-specific change. In addition, this paper illuminates children's agency and their indispensable roles in the change implementation in particular, and sheds light on the importance of their involvement to increase the likelihood of a successful change.

KEYWORDS

Change; lunch practices; early childhood education and care; Norway; case study

Introduction

Change is a prominent feature of today's early childhood education and care (ECEC) landscape (Douglass 2016; Haslip and Gullo 2018). Driven mostly by external forces (Goffin 2013), the ECEC programmes and individuals constantly have to change and adapt to changes. Haslip and Gullo (2018) opined that the changing landscape is largely due to the dynamic nature of trends characterised by continuous changes in demographics, increased focus on accountability, advances in research that inform early childhood education, and global trends affecting ECEC.

Early childhood as an important phase for developing dietary habits, eating behaviours and food preferences acquired during the early years of life can extend to adulthood (Ventura and Worobey 2013; Nekitsing, Hetherington, and Blundell-Birtill

CONTACT Baizhen Ciren  baci@hvl.no

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2018). Therefore, changing policy, environment, and practices focused on food and healthy eating within ECEC can positively impact children's health, thus the quality of early childhood. However, although being perhaps one of the most important aspects within ECEC, food practices are rarely discussed under such a changing landscape. Internationally, the major arenas for changes in the ECEC have been the programmes, curriculum framework, systems and policy reforms (Ebbeck and Yin Chan 2011; Liu and Pan 2013; Madondo 2021; Linda and Susan 2016), and much of the available research on changes in ECEC settings focus on the change in pedagogical approaches (Aspden, McLaughlin, and Clarke 2021; Thao and Boyd 2014), and teachers' professional development in improving practices (Peleman et al. 2018; Winton, Snyder, and Goffin 2015). Research often examines the changes driven by external societal forces and their impacts on the organisations and individuals in ECEC – in other words, there is a lack of studies on the intentional actions from within the field. Moreover, although there are many intervention studies on healthy eating in early childhood settings (De Bock, Breitenstein, and Fischer 2012; Manios et al. 2012; Mikkelsen et al. 2014); those programmes were often designed and implemented by researchers from outside, and the dominant research perspective in ECEC tend to overlook the educators' initiative in the much taken-for-granted routine activities.

In Norway, 93.4% of children aged between 1 and 5 years attend kindergarten (Statistics Norway 2021). The National Guidelines for Food and Meals in Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate of Health 2018) provide professional advice and recommendations on kindergarten food practices, and the individual kindergartens have the autonomy to decide how meals should be arranged in their contexts under the framework of this guideline. It is common for kindergarten to serve open sandwiches with toppings for lunch prepared by the teachers, since only 15% of kindergartens have kitchen staff, and very few have food delivered by catering services (Greve et al. 2019). Kindergartens often have limited food budgets, with headteachers reporting the economy referring to kindergartens' financial position as one of the most significant factors for the food offered in kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate of Health 2012). In addition, the cultural aspect of convenient and quick meals dominates in kindergarten practice (Øvrebø 2017), and food and meals are not prioritised in many kindergartens among other pedagogical tasks. As a result of these factors, many kindergartens may not have the resources or the motivation to change food practices.

This article describes an intentional change in food practices initiated by the educators in one Norwegian kindergarten. This study builds on Fullan's change model and what he called 'change in practice' (Fullan 2016, 28), which occurs on multiple levels, and aims to understand the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of change. Fullan's change model has been chosen because it represents the idea that change is a complex, non-linear, and dynamic process, and it serves as helpful means of understanding and making sense of a more complex process of a change (Fullan 2016). In his change model, he concluded three phases (initiation, implementation and institutionalisation or continuation). In his way of conceptualisation, the change outcomes refer to different types of results from the perspectives of the organisation and the students (Fullan 2016). In order to comprehend the change, we also take inspirations from Hargreaves and Shirley (2009)'s approach to change, which sees change through a democratic manner and takes the educators strongly into account as a part of the change process. We are inspired by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) 's

model of change which acknowledges children as partnership in change. In addition, collective efforts from all parties involved in the change appears to hold considerable promise for a change to generate, as much previous evidence suggesting a change process cannot be accomplished without active support from leaders at all levels (Stoll et al. 2006; Mulford and Silins 2003). Therefore, a closer look at the roles and responsibilities of the teachers and children in the change process seem to be required in our study to understand the change in the case kindergarten. The detailed analysis of the materials according to Fullan's change model will be described in the analysis section.

Our goal of the present study has been to explore how a change in practices can take place in the ECEC setting by examining how the lunch practice changed in the case kindergarten. This study focuses on two overarching research questions: (1) How does the case kindergarten create pathways for the change of lunch practice? And (2) What are the factors that supported the case kindergarten's development of such change? We address these two questions by giving special attention to the individual's roles in the change process.

Methodology

This research adopted a case study methodology, which allows for an in-depth understanding of a complex issue in a particular real-world context (Crowe et al. 2011; Grauer 2012; Yin 2018; Stake 2005). This study follows Stake's (Stake 1995, 2013) approach to case study that is qualitative and aligned with a constructivist and interpretivist orientation. The present case is of interest because: (1) this is an ongoing intentional change initiated within the kindergarten, (2) having a full-time chef preparing hot meals for children is not a common practice in Norwegian kindergartens; and, more importantly, (3) the successful change in the case kindergarten may inspire others to facilitate a locally relevant and context-specific change. Therefore, we draw special attention to the uniqueness of the case, and what can be learned about the case (Stake 2005).

The case

This study was carried out in a public kindergarten owned by the municipality in a large city in Norway. The kindergarten has around 70 children aged one to five. Data were collected in the Blueberry and Cranberry departments with children aged three to five. In each of the departments, there were around 18 children. Children came with their own breakfast, while lunch and afternoon snacks were served. In this kindergarten, lunch meal practices changed from *smørelunsj* (a *smørelunsj* usually consists of coarse bread with toppings such as sliced vegetables, margarine, or cheese) prepared by the kindergarten teachers to *varmlunsj* where the chef prepares hot meals for the children. This change represented a transition from a self-serve style where the children served themselves and passed food to their peers, to a table service where the teachers helped with the arrangements. This change occurred a year before the study was conducted.

Data collection

In February 2020, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers, one chef and one headteacher (see participant list in Table 1). The interviews lasted from 45

Table 1. Participant demographic data.

Participant	Position	Years of Experience
Blueberry Department		
Participant 1	Apprentice	1
Participant 2	Pedagogical leader	13
Cranberry Department		
Participant 3	Assistant	8
Participant 4	Pedagogical leader	8
Participant 5	Head teacher	20+
Participant 6	Chef	16 years as a restaurant chef 1 year in this kindergarten

to 80 mins each and were audio recorded. In addition, 11 h of video clips were taken off the lunch mealtime over a week. The videos were recorded from three tables in three different rooms. An observation protocol was designed prior to the fieldwork and filled out during the observation. The protocol included details of the mealtime organisation, children's food consumption and interaction.

Ethical considerations

The research project was assessed by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (approval no. 752147). Written consent was obtained from all the staff who were interviewed. In addition, written consent to the video observation was obtained from the children's parents and written or oral consent was obtained from everyone who was present during the video observation. The consent forms were collected with the help of the pedagogical leaders of each department.

Seeing children as competent research participants (Theobald 2017), we found it necessary and important to get the children's assents. A storybook in the Norwegian language was created to introduce the research to the children and was presented on the second day when the first author visited the kindergarten. All children were informed about the research process and asked about their willingness to participate. Children who did not participate were arranged in different rooms by the teachers for their everyday mealtime. Since each department used two tables in two rooms before the research, the natural eating environment made the arrangements easier. No other modifications to the setting were made.

Data analysis

The interview material served as the primary data source for this paper. The study's qualitative thematic analysis utilised a hybrid approach of the data-driven inductive and the theory-driven deductive analysis informed by the work of Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). This hybrid approach of the inductive and deductive approach was chosen by the researcher to be best able to answer our research questions. The analysis consists of two parts based on the two research objectives. The first part aimed to describe how the lunch practices changed in the case kindergarten. For this part, a code manual was developed, based on Fullan's model for understanding a complex change process (2016). Four broad code categories formed the code manual (initiation, implementation, continuation and outcomes), as shown in Table 2. The present study takes this model with four broad phases to examine the change process in greater depth. Additionally,

Table 2. Codes developed a priori from the template of codes for the first part of analysis.

Code Label	Definition	Description
Initiation	The process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change (Fullan 2016, p. 55).	Mention of a decision by an individual or the group which leads to the change based on the given circumstances and conditions.
Implementation	The first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice (Fullan 2016, p. 55).	The details of the process of putting the initial idea into practice new to the people attempting or expected to change (Fullan 2016, p. 67).
Continuation	Whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition (Fullan 2016, p. 55).	Mention of the sustaining of such change in terms of staff interests, internal and external support etc.
Outcomes	Refers to several different types of results. Especially from the recipients' perspectives and the organisation (Fullan 2016, p. 56).	Results could include, for example, the recipients' acceptance and attitudes; satisfaction on the part of staff and parents; or improved problem-solving capacity of the kindergarten as an organisation (Fullan 2016, p. 56).

the inductive approach which allowed for any unexpected themes to develop during the coding process (Boyatzis 1998) followed the creation of the code manual.

The second part of the analysis aimed to identify factors that supported the case kindergarten's development of an effective change. For this part, a separate code manual was deduced from Fullan's model of identifying main factors affecting the change process (Fullan 2016), the search of the literature on organisational and educational change and the initial read of the raw interview data. The code manual relating to the second part was written in Table 3. An inductive approach was followed for the second part of the analysis as well. The inductive coding started with the first author reading and rereading the materials multiple times to identify initial codes. Initial coding was followed by pattern coding (Miles, Michael Huberman, and Saldaña 2014, 79) to group and summarise the codes. And a reviewing and revising of the codes were followed to looking for themes and findings in each category.

The videos were initially viewed repeatedly by the first author in order to generate an overall understanding of the video data. Following this, the first author selected some video clips that were of interest in terms of the research objectives for discussion in the group meetings with the other authors. The selected video clips captured multiple perspectives and enabled the authors to analyse the children's food consumption and their participation in the mealtimes. Two rounds of meetings were held. The first author took notes during the meetings, she then coded, summarised and categorised them after the meeting.

Findings

In order to discuss the relevance and implications of the findings in this study, we present the change process under the following themes: (1) societal condition and the change initiative; (2) the implementation of the change; (3) the change as a constant state; and (4) the outcomes of the change. We briefly describe the parents' and teachers' satisfaction with the change, children's consumption of the 'new' foods and their participation in the 'new' meal situation as outcomes of the change in the case kindergarten.

Table 3. Codes developed a priori from the template of codes for the second part of analysis.

Category	Code	Definition	Purpose/ meaning of code
C1: Initiation	The headteacher's role	The headteacher's individual characteristics and the role of the headteacher in developing and initiating the change in the kindergarten.	Identifying the headteacher's role in the change initiation.
	The role of teachers	Whether the teachers are in favour of the change, and how they coordinate the change initiation.	Identifying the teachers' roles in the change initiation.
	Government policy and funding	Whether the government policy initiate the change programme in the kindergarten.	Identifying the direct and indirect impacts of government policies on the initiating of the change in the kindergarten.
C2: Implementation	The headteacher's role	The headteacher's role in the implementation.	Identifying the headteacher's role in the change implementation.
	The role of teachers	The strategies and actions the teachers adopted in the change implementation.	Identifying how the teachers contributed to the change implementation.
	The engagement of children	Whether the children act as active participants in the process of implementation.	Identifying the children's roles in the implementation.
	Role of the parents	Partnership with parents and parental engagement in the implementation process.	Identifying the role of parents in the implementation.
	Role of the chef	The chef's role in designing a menu, and partnership with the other actors	Identifying the role of the chef in the implementation.
C3: Continuation	The headteacher's role	The headteacher's efforts on the continuation.	Identifying the headteacher's influence on the continuation.
	Continuing assistance from other actors (teachers, chef, and children)	Whether the other actors are committed to the change, and their efforts in the change continuation.	Identifying the support and interests from the other actors on the continuation.
	Institutionalisation of the change	Whether the change has been built into the kindergarten structure.	Identifying the institutionalisation of the change in the continuation phase.

Societal condition and the change initiative

According to the headteacher, the kindergarten staffing norm introduced by the Norwegian government in August 2018, which stipulated the minimum number of staff per child in kindergartens, contributed to a shift to a chef era in their kindergarten. The government did not initiate the shift, but it enabled conditions that allowed for a change in the kindergarten's staffing structure, thus making it possible to have a chef in the kindergarten. The staffing density in the kindergarten was lower than the proposed staffing norm; therefore, the headteacher suggested hiring a staff member to work in the kitchen.

The chef scenario is explained and contextualised within the broader dynamics. Further, it is clear from the interviews that the headteacher's vision and personal interest serve as essential drivers of the change:

My father is a chef; I have always enjoyed making food since I was a little girl ... When I began working with children, I used to bake bread for them; they got freshly baked bread almost every day ... I always thought that if I ever work in a kindergarten where we have a kitchen, I would like to centralise the kitchen work, to take the resources from the departments to make one kitchen. (Participant 5)

The headteacher talked about her personal interests and how her past experiences of working in kindergartens and baking for children triggered her motivation to engage in food work. Also, instead of having small kitchens in each department, she had a vision of having one kitchen in the kindergarten where she can pool resources and centralise services to ensure better food provision. During the interview, she also pointed out that her aim was to provide food that was ‘not very boring’ and make children ‘look forward to sitting down by the table and eating the food served’. The headteacher expressed that the children’s best interest was her guiding principle for initiating the change.

While there was an opportunity that would possibly support the change, her idea was also fully embraced by the teachers in the kindergarten:

They thought that would be wonderful, not having to leave the children to prepare the meals, do the dishwashing and all those things. But it meant that they needed to have one or two more children on their hands because he [the chef] is counted in the [staffing] norm. (Participant 5)

Implementation of the change

The implementation of the change involved a cycle of actions (Figure 1) that were constantly refined. The headteacher adopted an approach in which they could try out ideas in a developmental matter. The implementation cycle started with the logistics of preparing to hire a chef. Due to the long hiring process, a substitute was recruited to work in the kitchen. The first trial with the substitute lasted for around four months and was not very successful. After closely monitoring and reflecting on the process, the headteacher noted that what she initially thought were essential criteria for the position, such as having a pedagogical background, became less relevant. Instead, the competencies of budgeting and financial management, healthy meal planning and targeting available money effectively were found to be more important. Therefore, the first trial led to a more thorough consideration of the qualifications required for the position. The

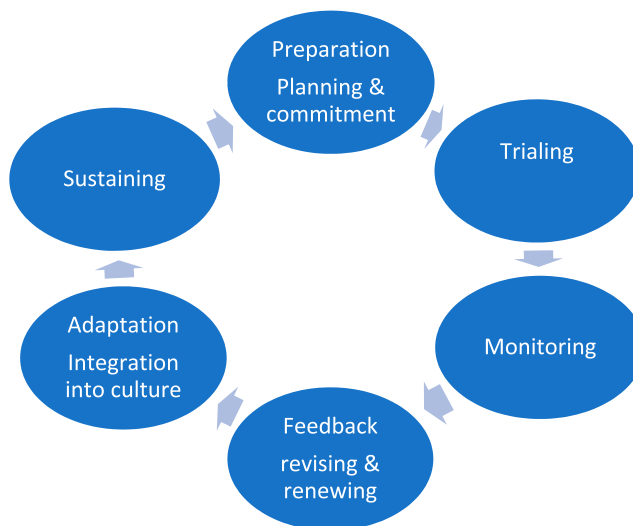


Figure 1. The Implementation Cycle in the Case Kindergarten.

second trial started when the current chef joined the kindergarten. The hired chef only worked in the kitchen, and his role was to take care of all food-related arrangements in the kindergarten. After he started, he developed a menu based on the advice from the Directorate of Health, taking into consideration both the children's preferences and the healthiness of the food. He described 'thinking about what children like, and how can we make it healthier'.

Once the trial began, the teachers closely monitored how the implementation of the change progressed by paying attention to the children's reactions and their acceptance of the food. According to the teachers, the transition was very smooth in the Cranberry department; the children liked the meals from the start. However, in the Blueberry department, the change in food practices presented some challenges to both the teachers and the children. One of the most significant challenges noted by the teachers from the Blueberry department was getting the children to accept unfamiliar foods:

It was very unfamiliar to almost every child, so they were a bit reluctant to try. There were a few children who liked almost everything, and a few who didn't want to touch the food. The children in between, they tasted it, and they were a bit sceptical, so it was a big change. (Participant 2)

One of the obstacles to implementing the change that the teachers noted was feeling uncertain about how to manage children's refusal of the food. They were concerned that the children might not get enough food; therefore, they reverted to providing some smørelunsj for those who refused to eat the hot meal. As participant 2 explained, 'in the beginning, when they didn't like the food, we made them something that they were used to and familiar with'. However, they found that the children who had accepted the warm meals cooked by the chef began to imitate others' behaviours and request the bread meal. This solution was not successful, and the teachers struggled for some time to get the children to like the food in the kindergarten. One of the teachers said,

I think the 5-year olds are very good at trying things, and they tell the 3-year olds to taste it, it is very good. When I do it, they will be like you are an adult, and you do everything, but when 5-year olds tell them that to taste it, they do it because they think they are big and very smart. (Participant 4)

According to the teacher, accepting new and unfamiliar foods was difficult for children in the beginning, especially the younger ones. But the older children in the group acted on their behalf and serve as role models for the younger children in the same group.

After a few staff meetings, they decided to repeat the menus to help children to accept the foods. Repeating the menu was a major breakthrough, according to the teachers. The menus were updated based on consultation with the headteacher and feedback from the teachers and the children. The children could draw their favourite foods or ask the teachers to write down their favourite meals and deposit these preferences in a small 'mailbox' outside the kitchen. The teachers expressed a great deal of confidence in offering the same food every second week and updating the menus, and they felt empowered to introduce the new dishes considering that the children had tried or at least seen the food before.

In addition to repeating the menu, some of the teachers also mentioned the strategy of collaborating with the parents. One simple practice they talked about was to inform

parents about the food being served in the kindergarten by hanging the menu on the front door: ‘when they pick up their children, they [the parents] can see it on the door. So, they can make plans to avoid serving them [children] the same food for dinner’ (Participant 3). The teachers talked about this simple practice as a way to share information with parents and establish home–kindergarten communication on food provision. For example, one teacher shared that:

We asked the parents to say good things about the meals, and they supported our work ... One time I sent them emails telling them that the kids were eating so well and suggested that they tell their kids that they were so good at eating many different foods. The next day, the children came to me and said, “my parents said I am so good at eating vegetables at kindergarten; they were proud”. (Participant 4)

The teacher explained that by providing positive feedback on the children’s eating behaviours, the parents could support their children in accepting the new food provided by the kindergarten. According to the teacher, parental support was positive. Their support plays an important role in reinforcing the desired behaviours, and therefore, in the adoption and institutionalisation of the change process.

Change as a constant state

As such, the kindergarten integrated the updated menus in its routine lunch provision and the teachers facilitated the logistics for the adapted strategy. The practices were built into their daily work in the kindergarten for more than a year. The headteacher shared,

We have not come that far yet. But we are working on it. When I came here, we only had glasses, no colours, no patterns, no nothing. So I bought those small colourful cups. I think this is the start of making the meals more attractive; you can talk to the children about the colours, the animals ... (Participant 5)

According to the headteacher, change is a constant state; she expressed that they were searching for new ways to make further improvements, incorporate new ideas and move forward. By examining and reflecting on their practices, the teachers also mentioned adding more artefacts to the lunch table:

We were discussing that maybe we should get some flowers on the table; that will make the mealtime more positive ... And that is something we are planning on, because now it is not a very nice table, is only the food [which is nice]. ... During the circle time we have some artefacts, but why not on the table? We may also bring the children to decorate the table. (Participant 4)

In addition, the headteacher expressed a wish to serve more meals at the kindergarten in future:

My aim is to serve all the meals. As it is now, the children bring their own breakfast, but I hope to be able to offer breakfast; it will be more equal, equality between the children ... If we also provide breakfast, we will make sure that the children get the same food during the whole day. (Participant 5)

Furthermore, the teachers talked about involving children in food preparation such as cutting vegetables. According to the teachers, this was something that they had done in

the past, but it was pushed aside by other activities. They expressed the wish to reimplement it in the routine. As the headteacher said, ‘children like to take part, and they like to help. I think it’s a very positive thing to do. They are happy when it is their turn to go to the kitchen. We want to restart it’.

Outcomes of the change

Several different types of results from the change were noted in our research. We first present the outcomes from children (both as change recipients and change partners) in our study, and next we present the outcomes from the adults reported by our participants.

1) Children’s consumption of the ‘new’ foods and their participation in the ‘new’ mealtime

To investigate the outcomes for the children, we turned to our video observational data. As we were not able to document children’s experiences throughout the process, we kept the focus on children’s food consumption and their participation in the mealtime at the time when this research was conducted.

It was observed that children indicated acceptance of the foods verbally and non-verbally. Some children said ‘it is delicious’ to the teachers, while others just sat and ate the food in front of them. Most of the children requested a second helping or when the teacher asked if they wanted more, they raised their plates. Most of the children seemed to like the foods served and ate everything on their plates.

The way in which the children participated in the mealtime was consistently structured and shaped by the kindergarten’s demands. Therefore, we aimed to find out how the changed food practices made ‘new’ demands on the children to adapt to the ‘new’ meal situation. It seemed that the children understood what was expected from them due to the consistent experience of participating in the change process. It was observed that the children waited patiently for the teachers to serve the food. During the meal, they actively engaged in the mealtime by participating in conversations and in both teacher-initiated and child-initiated play activities. A wide range of topics about food, the weather, families, clothes and dressing, and events such as trips were discussed during mealtime. The children also touched and played with the food on their plates, for example, as per our observation, children sometimes played guessing game with a touch of the food by their hands. By participating in the new routine activity and engaging in play activities and conversations, the children contributed to the creation of the ‘new’ meal situation.

1) Teachers’ and parents’ satisfaction with the change

The teachers mentioned that the parents provided positive feedback on the food. One of the teachers said, ‘the parents are very happy about the food offered here, and they even ask the chef for recipes of the dishes to make them at home’. (participant 4)

The teachers said that they were satisfied because they got more quality time with the children:

I heard and I know how much people appreciate that we have a chef working here, because he makes good food. Before we were the ones who had to make the food, we were one less adult in the department [to be with the children]. (Participant 1)

The teachers also shared that they were happy to observe the children's improved physical health:

I think they are more active, and there are not so many who are sick now. I don't know if it is because of the meal, but I think maybe the meal is helping, because they are eating so much food and vegetables. (Participant 4)

Although the teachers generally expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the outcomes of the change, one of the teachers brought up some concerns connected to the change, stating that 'we lost something in the meantime'. As she further explained,

When we had smørelunsj, they [the children] always talked to each other, like 'could you please send me the butter?' They poured milk for each other; they had more interactions ... I liked that about that setting. Now it is about hygiene, because if the children help themselves with serving, we don't get to keep the leftovers. So, yea, that's too bad, that's two-sided; it is also bad to throw food away. (Participant 2)

The teacher explained that as the new meal situation requires that they serve food for the children, the social dynamics during the meal have changed. The practices put demands on both the teachers and the children to construct and re-construct the meal situation.

Discussion

The change in this kindergarten involved different stages, including initiation, implementation, and continuation, and the implementation involved cycles of processes, including preparing, trialling, monitoring, revising and renewing, adapting, and sustaining. This case study shows what a successful change in food practices may look like in Norwegian kindergarten settings, and it may inspire others to facilitate change especially intentional changes initiated within the kindergarten regarding food practices and changes of all kinds. Our findings highlighted the children's consumption of food and participation in the mealtimes, and perceived outcomes from the teachers and parents as results of the change. By analysing the change outcomes from the children, teachers, and parents' feedback reported by the teachers, our study showed that the change in lunch practices in the case kindergarten was embraced by all parties and embedded in its culture thus a successful one.

By carefully analysing the change process in each phase according to the code manual developed, we identified three key factors contributing to the successful change in lunch practices in the case kindergarten. The factors are (1) shared leadership in the change process; (2) support for change from the parents; and (3) children's (as change partners) involvement and participation.

Leadership is regarded as a key driver of change and quality improvement in ECEC (Sims et al. 2015). Going beyond a traditional positional leadership discourse, in her work on an early education leadership development programme, Douglass provided a more nuanced definition of leadership as 'a process of influencing change to improve

early care and education, and not reserved just for those with a formal leadership position' (Douglass 2018, 387). Our findings supported this and suggested that shared leadership is an essential factor for the change in the case kindergarten. As co-creators of change, people in different positions in the kindergarten played a leading part in the change process, and we argue that they collectively led the change. In the invitation phase, the headteacher played a critical change leader role, she formulated a vision and moved to actualise it by hiring a qualified chef. The headteacher served as an important driver of the change and was backed by the teachers and the national policy reform on staffing. Once the process had started, the chef came on board, and he was actively engaged in the implementation process. The chef brought in his expertise and shared collaborative responsibilities with the teachers and the children to develop a menu that was acceptable to the children. The teachers, as 'the ultimate arbiters of educational change (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009, 88), played a critical role especially in the implementation and the continuous improvements. In the implementation, they have worked with the headteacher, the chef, and children on implementing the change and creating an effective strategy and solutions for children to accept the new food. In the continuation, they put active efforts with other change actors to sustain the change and sought further innovative ways to make further improvements moving forward.

In addition to the shared leadership, we identified that support from the parents is crucial. Previous studies have indicated that parental involvement is an important determinant of children's food intake in kindergartens (Hoppu et al. 2015). In our study, parents responded positively to the change initiation, they received information about their children's food consumption in the kindergarten and supported the teachers' efforts. Both Fullan and Hargreaves talked about the involvement from beyond the professional environment in change, and the conjoint efforts of the teachers and parents in educational change (Fullan 2016; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009). Earlier research has also concluded that positive partnerships between teachers and parents can support health promotion in the ECEC (Luecking, Dobson, and Ward 2020). Also, our study showed that by actively participating in the change process, children, as partners in change, made demands yet uniquely contributed to the change in the kindergarten. We have highlighted in a previous article how children can act as change agents and exercise their agency to create change not only in their kindergartens but also in family meals at home (authors, forthcoming). This current study highlighted children's contribution in the decision-making of the food that served to them, the actual food consumption and the co-creation of the social setting. In addition, although peers' influence on children's food consumption was often considered negative, in line with other studies (Rageliené and Grønhøj 2020), our findings indicate that this influence can be positive and could be used in encouraging children's acceptance of unfamiliar foods. This modelling in changing their peers could be as powerful as those used by the teachers, as also pointed out by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009).

Furthermore, we argue that the strategies they adopted in response to changing situations and requirements, such as repeating their weekly menus and facilitating an environment that allowed children to play with food were appropriate, with evidence to support their efficacy. Previous research has shown that taste exposure increases children's acceptance of various foods (Nekitsing, Hetherington, and Blundell-Birtill 2018; Holley, Haycraft, and Farrow 2015). The findings of our study were consistent with

this and suggested that if the food is repeatedly presented and children are encouraged to try small bites, they will eventually accept initially rejected foods. Previous studies have also indicated that feeling the texture of foods and playing with them support the acceptance of food and help to increase the variety of food intake (Nederkoorn et al. 2018; Coulthard and Sealy 2017).

Conclusion

The push for change has never been more important and relevant than in today's environment of inevitable change during the global pandemic. By presenting a successful change in food practices in a case kindergarten, this study may inspire kindergartens and educators to facilitate a locally relevant and context-specific change. This study has implications for engaging in a change in practice. First, since policy documents create conditions for institutional practices and change, policy must be grounded in local realities, giving ample room and supportive resources for kindergartens to interpret it for local use and thus make active choices according to their local needs. Second, the teachers' central role in driving change in ECEC should be recognised and supported. Third, aside from the critical roles that the change actors in ECEC play in the change process, parental involvement and collaboration should be encouraged. Finally, change recipients as change partners' participation in the change process should be highlighted to sustain a change; kindergartens should integrate effective and innovative practices to promote children's involvement.

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