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Documentation in Institutional Contexts of Early Childhood

Normalisation, Participation and Professionalism

Springer VS

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Introduction: The Ambivalence of Documentation in Institutional Contexts of Early Childhood

Maarit Alasuutari, Helga Kelle and Helen Knauf

> On the highway below, the school bus rolls past without stopping.
>
> I am only seven, but I understand that it is this fact, more than any other, that makes my family different: we don't go to school.
>
> Dad worries that the Government will force us to go but it can't, because it doesn't know about us. Four of my parent's seven children don't have birth certificates. We have no medical records because we were born at home and have never seen a doctor or a nurse. We have no school records because we have never set foot in a classroom…. (Westover 2018, pp. xiii–xiv)

This is a quote from Tara Westover's biographical book 'Educated: A Memoir'. The book tells about the author's childhood in the 1980s and 90s in a family who separated itself from broader society. The book became a US bestseller the year it was published, and it was soon translated into several languages. One of the reasons for its popularity is probably the fact that it describes a life and childhood outside of formal institutions. In contemporary society, a childhood without health care or schooling and a life without identity records is extraordinary. Indeed, the extraordinariness of such a childhood and family life demonstrates

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to us how 'normal' the involvement of a child and his or her parent(s) in various childhood institutions has become, at least in the global north. In the research literature, this phenomenon is denoted the institutionalisation of childhood (e.g. Näsman 1994; Zeiher 2009).

In addition to its illumination of the institutionalisation of childhood, Westover's text demonstrates a key aspect of any institution's functioning, that is, its recording and documentation (cf. Ferraris 2013; Smith 2005). Westover describes how her parents avoided any documentation of their children in institutional records. Without documentation, the children did not exist from the viewpoint of any institution, not even the state. Consequently, those institutions had no power over the children or the family. In philosophy, Maurizio Ferraris (2013) presents the argument that institutions, institutional objects and institutional actors, such as children and teachers in schools, are constructed by documents.[1] The focus of this book is on documents and documentation in early childhood institutions. This edited volume particularly considers those early childhood institutions in which children and parents are typically involved. In other words, the individual chapters deal with public institutions such as early childhood education and care, schooling, health care and social welfare services, and they share the same starting points. First, documentation is considered as constitutive in any institution, and it is thus essential to the existence and functioning of every institution. Second, documentation is understood as possessing agentic power in institutions. Therefore, the key interest of the book is research into the ways in which documentation becomes productive in situ in early childhood institutions. Whilst drawing on various theoretical viewpoints and applying data from different national and early service contexts, the studies presented here explore the ways in which documents and documentation may be consequential in childhood and in the practices of early childhood institutions. The chapters illuminate recent transnational trends in relation to early childhood: that is, how observing, recording and assessing children's activities, their learning, development and health have become an integral part of everyday life in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions, in early prevention and intervention contexts, in school entry procedures and in alternative care settings. In these institutions and procedures, the documentation can include different authors and take different forms, it can fulfil different prevailing aims and be oriented towards different addressees.

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[1]Here, it is important to differentiate between an embodied human being and human being as a social actor. The latter is what the theorization of Ferraris (2013) refers to.

1   Documentation and the Changing Institutional Contexts of Early Childhood

Documentation, as a term, encompasses very different instruments and procedures. Many forms of documentation are based on observations that can be carried out systematically and in a standardised way, or that are conducted unsystematically and openly. The field of documentation includes tests, assessments and screenings as forms that emphasise evaluating and measuring. Documentation also includes process-oriented forms that focus less on the outcomes and more on the dialogue between the children and the professionals and also on reflections by the children themselves. Often, however, the different forms of documentation cannot be clearly separated in practice, and a continuum can be observed between documentation and assessment. The contributions in this volume reflect this diversity and the shifts between assessment and documentation. As was mentioned earlier, documentation is essential for the existence of any institution (Ferraris 2013; Smith 2005), including the early childhood services. It is also a common experience that the amount of documentation has increased in these institutions–due to both professional interests and external requirements. This increase in documentation can be linked to a worldwide change in organisational expansion, which in addition to increasing the number of organisations, has expanded and differentiated their internal structures (Meyer and Bromley 2013). This has also happened in arenas such as education. The growth and complexity of contemporary organisations is rooted in a worldwide cultural rationalisation based on scientification (including the growth of the psychological sciences), individual empowerment and education. Moreover, both professionalisation and accounting have become important in depicting organisations as structured and legitimate actors. The changes in early childhood education and care (ECEC) over the past two decades—the context of many of the chapters in this volume—seem to follow the path of organisations as described above. In quantitative terms, the number of ECEC centres has increased significantly in many countries, as has the amount of time that children spend in them. From a qualitative point of view, a paradigm shift from care to education may be observed as a priority task. This change has partly been driven by an image of the child emphasizing her agency, capability and learning competency. Against this backdrop, it is seen to be important to take advantage of the educational potential of the early years—and to account for it. With this consideration in mind, the observation of the development of children has gained in importance. It now seems important to closely document children's developmental progress as well as their deficits. With the aim of the optimal promotion of the individual child, early childhood

has increasingly become a professionally attended and supervised phase of life. At the same time, the accompanying documentation is a reflection of the growing institutionalisation of childhood and the professionalisation of pedagogical staff.

2 The Thematic Viewpoints of This Book

The contributions to this volume provide an overview of the manifold forms of documentation in the institutions of early childhood. However, they also include different approaches to the critical reflection of documentation and its requirements. The chapters consider documentation in various early childhood institutions and in national and service contexts from three viewpoints: as a means of normalisation, as being interlinked with participation, and as reflecting a changing professionalism.

2.1 Observing and Assessing 'Normal' Development

Many recent programmes in contemporary societies have established instruments for assessing early childhood development in different institutional contexts. These programmes are oriented towards the prevention of developmental disorders and therefore refer to the notion of 'age-appropriate' (Kelle 2010) development in its various dimensions. This notion is grounded in the normalistic knowledge provided by the bio-medical, psychological, pedagogical, and—as the chapter by Ahrenkiel and Holm in this volume shows—the linguistic disciplines. From a knowledge-sociological perspective, and against the backdrop of the probabilistic orientation of modern societies, one can distinguish, as Link and Hall (2004) suggest, between 'normative norms' and 'normalistic norms', where the latter are represented by statistical data for age groups, such as average, low or high values and standard deviations in relation to the population measured (cf. also Turmel 1997). These norms and data form the template for comparison in preventive governmental programmes, which are increasingly applied to *all* children at particular developmental stages or in the transition process from one institution to another. As Foucault highlighted, these measures and measurements constitute the means of governing early childhood by continually drawing distinctions between 'normal' and 'deviating' child development. These result in differentiated approaches to treating children who are categorized as either the one or the other in (educational) institutions. Link and Hall (2004) also hint at the subtle discursive transition from normalistic grounds to normative orientations and

judgements. Contemporary societies apply 'risk screening' soon after birth with the intention of preventing endangerment to children's well-being and in order to provide support for needs as early as possible (cf. chapter by Kelle). Development diagnostics are conducted in kindergartens and preschools in order to implement language and other support measures in the light of the competencies regarded as necessary in the children's (near) future as schoolchildren (cf. chapters by Ahrenkiel and Holm; Plum and Schmidt). Assessments are applied in the process of transition to school (cf. chapter by Heiskanen) and for school entry diagnostics (cf. chapter by Schweda) in order to enable institutions to react adequately to the needs of children starting school. In all of these contexts, it is evident that normalistic, evidence-based knowledge and the identification of risks to 'normal' development, both as embodied in observation and in assessment instruments and documents, interfere with the normative decisions made by childhood institutions. The chapters in this section consider how observation, screening and assessment documentation constructs and generates knowledge about child development, whether within the instruments in general or in their practical application to particular cases.

Helga Kelle focuses on the risk screenings that are applied as instruments of early prevention and intervention immediately following birth by health care institutions in Germany. This study draws particularly on institutional ethnography (Smith 2005), which approaches power relations as conveyed through texts. Documents such as screenings based on risk statistics are considered to regulate institutional practice by establishing links beyond the particular context to extra-local, political programmes. Kelle's examination illuminates aptly these links between political programmes of prevention and the institutional practices in her research context, while it also demonstrates the hybrid character of the screenings. As a socio-technical instrument, the risk screening appears to produce 'objectivity', but simultaneously, it hides the various interpretation requirements to its users.

Annegrethe Ahrenkiel and *Lars Holm* analyse how language development knowledge is conceptualized in two comprehensive reports from Denmark's preschool sector, reflecting its largest research and development programme. Taking a policy ethnography perspective, they problematise how, by depending on a conceptualisation of language that focuses on specific measurable linguistic elements, certain groups are constructed as being 'behind' their age group's average. The authors criticize how the implementation of age-appropriate benchmarks for each child's language development results in a decontextualized and simplified notion of language that stands in contrast to the complex language competencies that children perform in everyday practice and possibly, in a language other than Danish.

Maja Plum and *Lene K. S. Schmidt* also explore the developmental assessment tools implemented in Danish kindergartens, making use of a multi-sited ethnographic approach. They do not analyse a specific instrument but focus on the figure of the present and the future as one that is embedded more generally in various assessment tools. Their central argument is that the documentation of child development in kindergartens enacts a passage through which ideas of the child in a future setting are inscribed into the present one. Thus the practices of observing, assessing and documenting child development in the ECEC create a way of seeing the children, as Plum and Schmidt argue, in which their future school context and its necessities are already ever-present in the preschool institutions. However, their ethnographic reconstructions also show how this effect is contested and produces resistance in every-day ECEC practices and among staff and parents.

Noora Heiskanen focuses on children's transition to school and the role of documentation in this process. In applying a discourse analytical approach, she analyses transition documents from two Finnish municipalities with a focus on how 'appropriate information' on children to be transferred to school is constructed in the municipal document forms. The study shows that the forms refer to child psychology's normative understanding of child development, and that children are most often described by their lack of capabilities. The term 'school readiness' ascribes individual competencies to children and pinpoints the institution's expectations for children's adaptivity to school.

Anna Schweda explores the school entry proceedings that last for fifteen months in Germany (Hesse) from an ethnographic perspective. She asks how diagnostic documents unfold their potential as actors and explores their impact on the processing of educational decisions in the institutional context. She analyses the construction logic of a diagnostic instrument and follows the document's institutional path from its start, when diagnostics are performed and forms filled out, to the discussions among staff who make (selective) educational decisions regarding school entry children. Schweda describes how, in the course of this long process, an interplay of communicative contextualisation and de-contextualisation of the information inherent to the documents takes place. Nevertheless, this process results in what she calls a 'documentary substrate', meaning that children are finally categorized as either 'problematic' or 'fit' in terms of the expectations embodied in the diagnostic instruments and in the professional knowledge of primary teachers.

In referring to the distinction between 'normal' and 'deviant' development in situated assessment practices, all studies in this section show how normalistic knowledge and normative educational decisions interfere in childhood institutions. In referring to diverse governmental programmes involving early childhood

in different European countries, the studies also anticipate and adapt themselves to the perspective of power relations that is also discussed in the next section.

2.2   Children's Participation in Documentation

Documentation in early childhood institutions is often interlinked with participation by children and parents. In early childhood education, this is particularly salient when discussing pedagogical planning and documentation. Several widely used documentation practices, such as pedagogical documentation using the Reggio Emilia approach (Dahlberg et al. 2007), learning stories (Carr and Lee 2012) and portfolios (Knauf 2017), are proposed to facilitate the participation of children and parents and to give them a voice regarding the children's learning and education. In the social welfare and child protection services, the participation and voices of the children and parents are topical, for example, when planning for a child's care, as shown by Biffi and Montà in this section.

Whilst it may aim to allow or increase the participation of children and parents, documentation is essentially intertwined with issues of power. On the one hand, it is applied to address the power relations between children and adults. In other words, it is used to change the generational order that approaches children as minors and as receivers of the education provided by teachers, other childhood professionals and parents (Leonard 2016), as these are all considered to have more appropriate knowledge than the children themselves. For example, in early childhood education institutions, by 'listening' to children (Rinaldi 2005) or by making them 'visible' (Carr and Lee 2012) through documentation, children are considered to achieve agency in their own learning. On the other hand, documentation is applied to level the power relations between the parents and the childhood professionals: parents are given 'a say' through their involvement in different forms of documentation. For example, parents may be expected to take part in the evaluation of their child's character, behaviour and development (Alasuutari and Karila 2010; Markström 2011). They may also be expected to participate in drafting a pedagogical plan for their child (Heiskanen et al. 2019). In the literature, a more equal parent-professional relationship is often denoted a 'partnership'.

Even though the different forms of documentation aim to give more room and agency to children and parents in childhood institutions, they govern the ways in which the child or parent can be within these institutions. Documentation can indeed be understood as one of various societal technologies that achieve certain outcomes in relation to subjects' conduct (e.g. Rose 1999); particular subjectifi-

cations and identifications are proposed for those involved in the documentation (e.g. Karila and Alasuutari 2012). Thus, while documentation may empower and be benevolent, it may also restrict, constrain and become a requirement. This latter aspect of early childhood documentation is rarely discussed in the research literature on early childhood institutions. In this book, Elfström Pettersson's study touches on it.

Most of the research involving documentation and participation assumes that participation and power concerns only human actors. As was described earlier, the chapters in this volume also consider documentation as potentially agentic and powerful in childhood institutions. They do not, however, assume that the power of documentation would be deterministic. Instead, they acknowledge—and illuminate—the potential of human actors to resist and change the course of actions proposed by documents. Smith (2005) and Ferraris (2015) are examples of scholars who represent this type of approach in their theorisation regarding the power of documents. While both underline the essential role of documents and texts in institutions and in constituting what is social, both propose that to become powerful, any text needs to be 'activated' (Smith 2005) or 'validated' (Ferraris 2015) in human action. In the chapters in this section, the power of documents is examined, particularly in practices and situations that involve children and concern the children's participation.

Katarina Elfström Pettersson poses a question about what may happen with documentation when children take an active part in it. The context of her study is a Swedish preschool where pedagogical documentation is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and is underlined as a means to promote the children's voices. She applies the concept of intra-action (Barad 2007) to her examination of the power of the documents and the other actors. Through ethnographic data, Elfström Pettersson demonstrates how something other than the expected emerges when teachers involve the children in the documentation. Intra-actions between the different aspects and actors within these situations enable different things to happen. This chapter highlights the tension between enabling through documentation and requiring the children's participation in it.

Anne-Li Lindgren and *Sofia Grunditz* take us back in time to a Swedish preschool in the 1930s by presenting an examination of detailed child observations conducted by student teachers and inspired by the teaching of Vienna-based child psychologist Elsa Köhler (1879–1940). They focus on 'looking practices' reported in the data and take the children's actions in looking as their starting point. The findings demonstrate that the looking practices of the children and adults were interrelated in many ways. Neither the observers nor the observed were detached; instead, ways of looking were essential aspects of the exchange

of communication that was happening. The historical perspective provided by Lindgren and Grunditz highlights, among other things, the importance of adult observers paying attention to the ways in which children strive to be participants in documentation practices—as they still do today.

In their study on alternative care settings, *Elisabetta Biffi* and *Chiara Carla Montà* deal with the strong impact of written language on children's participation in documentation. Children living in alternative care settings often experience their rights as fragile and their interests as being set aside. In these delicate situations, documentation can play a key role in ensuring and supporting children's participation. Against this backdrop, Biffi and Montà explore the area between 'being spoken for' and 'speaking for oneself'. The authors point to the need for adults to bridge the contradiction between their being responsible for children on the one hand and their supporting the children's process of becoming autonomous persons on the other hand. Documentation can be a barrier in this dilemma, but it is also a potential resource.

The chapters in this section illuminate the complexity of the documentation process and its interactional character. From moment to moment, the changing of the interactional roles of those involved in the documentation can illuminate how participation through documentation is frequently not an either-or issue. Instead, while it may allow participation in some regards, in other ways, documentation may be, or may be experienced as, a requirement or constraint.

2.3   Constructions of Professionalism

The third section of the book deals with the question of how the professional self-image of pedagogues is related to documentation. It picks up the topic of power relationships that was also examined in section two: professional action in educational institutions develops along power structures and seeks appropriate ways to deal with these power relations. Professionalism, however, involves more than just the power relationship between the professionals and the children or their parents. The question of professionalism also relates to self-conceptions of pedagogical expertise and to notions regarding the function and sense of one's work.

At the same time, professionalisation is closely linked to the transformation of early childhood institutions from care to educational institutions. All four contributions in this section of the book focus on essential documentation practices introduced with the aim of improving quality and educational orientation: the ECEC plans in Finland, observation and documentation as a whole and the digital form of documentation as implemented in Germany.

Maarit Alasuutari presents the results of a study in which discussions between professionals and parents are closely examined. Interview transcripts from a case study are viewed to determine the role of the documents underlying the discussion (concerning the ECEC plan, which is binding in Finland). The analysis demonstrates how the ECEC plans themselves become actors in these discussions. Alasuutari shows how the documents both formally structure the talks and set a content agenda.

The professional observation skills of pedagogues are the focus of *Sandra Koch* and *Marc Schulz's* contribution. They situate the process of establishing observation and documentation in day-to-day care in the context of the comprehensive transformation of an institution providing care to an educational institution. The appropriation of ocular centric techniques is seen here as an essential moment of the professionalisation of educational staff.

Sofie Areljung and *Janette Kelly-Ware* suggest 'professional risk' as a key concept in understanding and demonstrating how the ideals of early childhood education, the nature of what is documented and the forms of documentation intertwine and together govern what teachers will reify as acceptable behaviour and desirable learning. Their starting point is the institutional power of early childhood education teachers as expressed through their (pedagogical) documentation: where they select which actions and whose actions they will make visible. By drawing on the concept of 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) and by building on Alasuutari's work (2014) as well as on their own previous work, they present two case analyses, one from Sweden and the other from New Zealand. Areljung and Kelly-Ware underline the need for teachers to recognise and challenge the professional risks of documentation in their work.

Finally, in Chapter 12, *Helen Knauf* discusses the changes that accompany the digitalisation of documentation by focusing on digital portfolios in early childhood education. It becomes clear that digital forms enable an advanced level of documentation in relation to the quality and quantity of the portfolio entries. At the same time, digital documentation also makes it possible to closely monitor and document the actions of children.

3   Conclusion

In contrast to the widespread 'best practice' and 'how-to-do-documentation' approaches relating to early childhood, this edited volume adopts a different stance on the practices and instruments of documentation in institutions of early childhood. In applying a variety of analytical approaches, the chapters present

a problematising perspective and question the widely accepted claim of documentation as increasing reflexivity, (professional) self-reflection and thereby, quasi automatically, (pedagogical) quality. In a theoretical perspective that asks how the increase of reflection by documentation interrelates with particular claims regarding 'normal child development', the 'legitimate' performance of power and 'right professionalism', the chapters of the book show the (normative) productivity of documentation in institutional contexts of early childhood.

This opens a perspective into the ambivalence of documentation in institutional fields. The normative claim of participation is consensual in ECEC for instance, but the precise forms of observation and documentation also prompt professional staff, parents and children to participate in a particular way (and not in others). Each documentation approach thus determines what is the preferred form of participation, and by definition, excludes others. The chapters grounded in ethnographic research not only show adaptation but also resistances to these methods, which some participants may feel and act upon. If one refers not only to a normative, but also to an analytical concept of participation, the indigenous 'participants in practices' (Bollig and Kelle 2016) are particularly challenged by the agency that documents and standardised forms increasingly perform in the institutionalised fields of early childhood, albeit in early prevention and intervention services, in governmental assessment programmes, in ECEC institutions and in preschools. This challenge was reflected on early in the social scientific literature by Gubrium et al. (1989), who spoke of the 'descriptive tyranny of forms' in the context of professional practice, and this is reflected in the contributions to this edited volume. The other side of the coin, as the chapters also reveal, is a challenge to participants in the institutional contexts of early childhood to find creative and varied uses for documentation and self-confident ways of dealing with it.

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Assessing 'Normal' Development

Risk Screenings After Birth in the Context of Early Support

Helga Kelle

Abstract

Constructions of risk childhood based on youth welfare and health statistics have led to the establishment of a complex of practices in welfare states over the past 15 years that are internationally known as 'early prevention and intervention'. The chapter presents a document-analytical case study on the socio-technological instrument of risk screenings already applied in Germany shortly after children's birth in institutional contexts as, for example, maternity clinics. Referring to institutional ethnography approaches, the analysis focuses on the questions of how the document as a 'standardised artifact' guides and preconfigures the assessments, which practices are inscribed in it and how it presents itself as 'institutionally actionable'. The chapter shows the knowledge-technological construction of a continuum between prevention and intervention inherent in the instrument, which results in ambivalences and contradictions for practices of early support.

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International and historical research indicates that (early) childhood has increasingly being regarded as 'risk childhood' in Western countries since the end of the nineteenth century when important socio-political achievements such as the prohibition of child labour were adopted (cf. Turmel 2008; Brown-Rosier 2009; Dekker 2009). Over the past 15 years, a complex of welfare practices (Baader and Kelle 2019) has emerged internationally, known as 'early prevention and intervention' and supported by new legal regulations that enforce and modify the construction of modern childhood at risk—and the complementary construction of 'normal' child development (cf. Nybell 2001; Olin Lauritzen and Sachs 2001; Bollig and Kelle 2013). Current health statistics identify primarily children of socio-economically weak, educationally disadvantaged and/or single parents, and those with a migration background as eminent 'risk groups' for various developmental 'disorders'.

The German Federal Child Protection Act (*Bundeskinderschutzgesetz*: BKiSchG; Bundesgesetzblatt 2011) came into force in 2012. It is characterised by a double orientation: on the one hand, a regulation and standardisation of the procedures for assessing the endangerments to the welfare and well-being of the child in suspected cases should be achieved. Within the framework of the state protection mandate, the Code of Social Law (*Sozialgesetzbuch VIII,* § 8a) regulates the possible interventions of the youth welfare services and family courts and prescribes binding procedural standards. In this context, the understanding of child protection is a narrow one. On the other hand, the Act contains decisive provisions for the establishment of early support, including various services for parents in the first three years of their children's lives. These services should be implemented nationwide by local authorities and are understood as an 'early, coordinated and multi-professional offer'[1] (BKiSchG, Art. 1, § 1, Para. 4) and, above all, as preventive measures—and, in this sense, implement a broad understanding of child protection. This regulation resulted in an expansion of preventive development observations at a very early age and increasingly in the emergence of observation networks. In addition to gynaecologists, doctors in maternity clinics and paediatricians during early check-ups, specialists for child protection and family midwives may now also look at young children from a child protection point of view and share documents with other professionals.

The calculation of risks[2] for the future development of children plays an important role in this context. In Germany, the categorisation whether a family

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[1]All German citations in this chapter were translated by Helga Kelle.

[2]In this chapter, an ethnographic perspective is applied and the concept of 'risk' is referred to as it occurs in the field of study. The author does not mean to define or conceptualise it herself.

belongs to a 'risk group' is of great importance regarding the offer of early support or not (cf. Sann 2014). For this reason, the question already formulated in the text of the law arises as to 'how, in individual cases, risks for the development of children and adolescents can be identified at an early stage' (BKischG, Art. 1 (3) sentence 2).

Our pilot study in the field of early prevention and intervention in Germany shows that various screening instruments can be found, such as 'risk screening' (Kindler 2010; Botzenhart 2013), '*Risikoinventarbogen*' (Kratzsch 2018; cf. also Metzner and Pawils 2011 on 'risk inventories' as a collective designation), 'stress screening' (Belzer et al. 2018), 'perception form for child protection' (Künster et al. 2011; Thurn et al. 2017), 'psychosocial early warning system' (Fisch 2015), 'parent stress screening for assessing endangerments to the child's well-being' (EBSK; Eichler et al. 2014) and 'paediatric reference form for the assessment of psychosocial support needs (U3-U6)' (Barth and Renner 2014).

The overview analysis of a small sample ($n = 16$) for this article—irrespective of the instruments' names—confirms the assumption that the instruments show a high degree of consistency regarding the underlying risk factor indices. Against this background, an instrument will be selected as an example and analysed in detail. The analysis focuses on the empirical questions of how the document as a 'standardised artifact' (Wolff 2008) guides and preconfigures the assessments in concrete ways, which practices are inscribed in it and how it presents itself as 'institutionally actionable' (Smith 2005). In the following, the context, origin and function of risk, stress and support requirement screenings in early prevention and intervention will be discussed (1), followed by a discussion on the state of research regarding such instruments (2) and an explanation of the methodology and heuristic concepts (3). The main part contains the detailed analysis of the selected screening instrument (4). The central results are discussed in the conclusion.

1   Context, Origin and Function of Risk Screenings in Early Prevention

Efforts are undertaken in Germany to establish, expand and instrument early support nationwide at various levels of regulation: federal, state, regional, district and local. In 2006, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs initiated an action programme for preventive child protection and the establishment of 'Early Support' for parents and children; the National Centre for Early Support (NZFH) was founded within this framework. The Federal Child Protection Act of 2012 estab-

lished the NZFH as the coordinating body for the Federal Initiative for Early Support.

The NZFH regards itself in the role of offering a steering and service facility at federal level which is dedicated to the qualification and professionalization of specialists, advice on the development and quality management of communal preventive child protection concepts, and the development and evaluation of various competence profiles of professionals and instruments for the practical instruction, implementation and documentation of early support. In the period from 2007 to 2010, the NZFH initiated a series of model projects and accompanying research on the development of municipal early support (Renner and Heimeshoff 2010; Biesel and Urban-Stahl 2018, p. 305), at that time often referring to the concept of 'social early warning systems', which is considered obsolete today. In this context, work has already begun on the development of risk screening forms. One example is the 'indication form for an in-depth conversation' ('*Anhaltsbogen für ein vertiefendes Gespräch*'; Kindler 2010), which was developed in the model project Good Start in Child Life ('*Guter Start ins Kinderleben*') on the basis of a meta-analysis of international risk statistical instruments, which were geared primarily to risk factors for child welfare endangerments. This approach was also chosen because no 'epidemiological primary data of risk factors and evidence for child neglect and abuse in early childhood' (Thurn et al. 2017, p. 300) are available for Germany to date.

Preventive child protection does not basically refer to risk factor catalogues other than interventional child protection. This may seem logical and is not surprising, but it must be pointed out here that the construction of a continuum between preventive and interventional child protection—already laid out in the internationally handy formula 'early prevention and intervention'—is supported by referencing knowledge technologies such as risk factor indices.

A possible way of developing such instruments, thus, is in interdisciplinary and multi-professional model projects within the framework of the Federal Initiative for Early Support. Instruments are developed under scientific guidance which can then be implemented more widely after positive evaluation. The rationality of supporting the development of instruments at the federal level is that instruments which can be used nationwide could emerge from this, i.e. the municipalities could benefit from not having to accomplish the development work themselves. The instruments' potential for nationwide application is trusted, especially when 'evidence-based' risk factors are included. This is an indirect form of governance: child and youth welfare services are municipal tasks in Germany that cannot be regulated directly by federal legislation, therefore, federal policy programmes

provide for the diffusion of instrumental offers and their inherent problem and problem-solving constructions.

Against this background, we will continue to trace a finding in the main investigation that is already apparent in our pilot study. Despite the existence of published instruments, many municipalities seem to develop their own documents and materials, such as registration forms, checklists, guidelines, handbooks and 'decision trees'—and this would be the second way of the emergence of screening instruments. In addition, it can be assumed that they use parts of published instruments and compile them in new ways. Why the municipalities do not use the instrumental offers from the NZFH (and its model projects) or regard them, at least, in need of modification is a question that deserves further empirical exploration.

In the procedures for clarifying suspicions of endangerments of a child's welfare, risk assessments have the function of informing the decision as to whether or not such endangerments exist (or are on the verge of existing) in a specific case. Then, if necessary, the decision is made regarding the form of intervention. Risk and support requirement screenings inhere a different function in early support: they are intended to help clarify whether 'help is needed for a good start in child life', as expressed in the indication form mentioned above. Or they are intended 'to facilitate access to a family midwife or family paediatric nurse and to pass on the first criteria for the appointment of a family midwife or family paediatric nurse to the Child Protection Service'. It is expressed thus in a large city's registration forms that are given to maternity clinics, gynaecologists, family doctors and paediatricians, who are, thereby, put into service for the intercession of families who need to be offered early support. While, in the first case, it is a matter of determining the necessity of governmental intervention, which derives from the state protection mandate, can curtail parental rights and can only be justified by the existence of an endangerment of a child's welfare, in the second case, it is 'only' a matter of securing and organising access to support, which can basically be used voluntarily. In principle, it would be conceivable that after the birth of their child, parents would be comprehensively informed about the range of early support available and asked to assess whether they need it or not, and that access would then be organised on the basis of the parents' personal assessment. On the contrary, the central functional provisions mentioned in the documents indicate that the determination of the need for help as such already requires professional support. The formulation that access to early support should be 'facilitated' for parents implies that it may otherwise be 'difficult'. It also twists the idea that the instruments should, conversely, create (diagnostic) access to these families.

The simultaneous similarities in the references to risk factor indices *and* differences in the functions of risk assessments in interventional and preventive child protection give rise to the (document-) analytical question of how precisely these similarities and differences are inscribed in risk screenings and what ambivalences this may produce.

2   State of Research on Risk Screenings in Early Prevention and Intervention

Studies on the practical use of (standardised) instruments of risk assessments in the field of child protection and intervention have increased in recent years. The concept of 'decision-making tools' (Gillingham and Humphreys 2010; Høybye-Mortensen 2015) circulates in (socio-pedagogical) research literature as an inclusive concept that has not yet finally answered the question regarding what kind of instruments these are exactly; the term 'decision-making systems' (Burns et al. 2017) opens up a broader research perspective than that on 'tools'. Bastian and Schrödter (2015, p. 276), referencing the Anglo-American research literature, differentiate for professional judgment formation in social work between 'actuarial procedures, on the one hand, and clinical or consensual procedures', on the other hand. While the former refer to the formation of judgements by recourse to risk statistical instruments, the latter refer to interpretative methods of professional case understanding and collegial case consultation. According to the findings of Metzner and Pawils (2011), the instruments used are largely 'hybrid forms' that include both evidence-based predictors and consensus-based assessment criteria.

A standardisation of child protection procedures and the (critical) debates on this have taken place internationally earlier than in Germany. White et al. (2009) took a critical look at the 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF), introduced in England after the enactment of the Children Act of 2004, which was intended to provide a nationwide uniform survey of support needs of children and to standardize child protection practices using information and communication technologies. The CAF is part of an 'Integrated Children's System' which serves to 'provide an electronic record of professionals' involvement with children from first contact to case closure' (White et al. 2009, p. 1199). The authors regard the CAF as 'people forms', technologies that describe and categorise people. Against this background, they reconstruct the demands the CAF places on professionals and show how it interacts with contextual sense-making and case stories. In these