

Update from Norway

Elisabeth Backe-Hansen

Norway -

- 5,5 million inhabitants
- 14-15 percent from countries outside of Norway, either being born in other countries or being born in Norway with parents and grandparents from other countries.
- Around 60.000 children in each cohort – thus our study aims to include just below 1,5 per cent of the child population in the three age groups
- 19 counties, most densely populated around Oslo and least densely populated in the three Northern counties
- 424 municipalities, half have 5 000 inhabitants or less and many of these are in Northern Norway
- 98 per cent of the children attend municipal primary schools (year 1-7, from 6 years onward) - By the way our strategy is similar to the Estonian with regard to the kind of schools we excluded

Status

- We are in the middle of having questionnaires returned and entering the data
- Last count before Easter was between 550 and 700 questionnaires had been received per age group, and 300 to 350 questionnaires per age group entered into the data template. Work is going on continuously.
- We are still waiting for some questionnaires from schools who have received them and not completed the study, as well as replies from a few tardy schools who have received consent forms from the parents and not come back with the number of questionnaires they need

Sampling strategy

- Our first strategy misfired; it consisted of going directly to the schools in three counties. It was chosen so as to be easily physically available to the researchers.
- The second strategy consisted of contacting the municipal school authorities first, then selected schools in all counties.
- The school authorities functioned as gate-keepers, and could instruct or recommend that the schools within their remit participated. This was important because Norwegian schools are over-loaded with mandatory reporting and projects, often with no recompense for the extra work entailed. Thus a majority of the schools we contacted still refused to participate, while some participate just because they have been told to

Sampling strategy ctd.

- Norway is characterized by having lots of small and local primary schools, where all our children go, and the number of schools to involve had to be seen in relation to our available resources.
- We concluded that around 40 schools would be manageable, averaging 25 pupils per age group per school.
- We wanted to invite 2 000 children per age group since we estimated a participation rate of 50 % based on former experiences. This has been done.
- In Norway children aged 12 or younger are never allowed to participate without active parental consent. 12-16 is an intermediate age, and they can consent above the age of 16. In other words our situation resembles that of the German team

Sampling strategy ctd

- We used data from the Directorate of Education about schools size to select schools
- We started with schools all over the country where there are around 50 pupils or more at each age level (two classes or more), and continued with schools where there are around 25 pupils or more at each age level.
- I do not yet have the full list of schools who actually return questionnaires

Comments on the sample

- There should, however, be a good distribution of schools from rural and urban areas, schools from all over Norway, large and small schools, and schools with immigrant children to encompass what is known about regional and other differences in achievements on national tests. Also the distribution of boys and girls seems OK so far
- However, it remains to be seen if we are able to include some schools from Oslo within the time frame. We have schools from other large cities
- And it remains to be seen how we can deal with a reasonable stratification of the sample. For instance, Norway does not have free schools lunches as an indicator of economic situation.

Comments on the data collection

- I think the data collection has gone well once we landed on a functional strategy. It is primarily a question of using sufficient time to follow up the schools and being available for questions which may arise
- Also, we are totally dependent on the schools' managing to conduct the study as there are no resources to travel to the schools and help them out
- As the schools do not get any compensation, we are also dependent on their enthusiasm to do this on top of lots of other studies or activities going on.

Concrete strategy

- The schools have kept the list of participating children, and have numbered the questionnaires according to instructions from us – this to ensure confidentiality. The children put their questionnaire in an envelope which they could seal if they wanted to.
- The teachers were instructed how to conduct the survey, which included reading all the questions aloud to the 8-year olds, and the first page to all children. We underlined the children's right to consent after their parents had consented. We will ask the schools to answer a short questionnaire about the procedure and the questionnaire afterwards.
- We will also write very short reports to each of the schools and give it to them together with the country report

Translation issues

An example: The word **”relationship”** (forhold)

- This word is fully translatable to Norwegian, but did not function well during the pilot and is obviously better for adults
- Tamar and I had many discussions about alternatives, I tried going via the German translation etc.
- In the end I asked my 10-year old grandson what he would say if I asked him what kind of relationship he has to his teacher. His response was: ”I cannot have a relationship to my teacher – he is male!” In other words, the word relationship denotes a romantic relationship to him
- So, I ended up asking ”how are you with your teacher”, which seems to be OK

Some response issues

- Some of the children living in two families (so far up to around 20 per cent of the participants) ticked of their belongings etc. in both places, thus giving two answers to these questions
- Some children for instance ticked both 9 and 10 (same end of the scale), and some both 2 and 8 (opposited ends of the scale)
- Some – or many – children seemed to choose one response alternative and stick to it, creating a response set, possibly skewing the answers too positively

More generally

- Norwegian is the language of instruction for all the participating children
- However, we cannot guarantee that all immigrant participants really understood all the questions – in the pilot, I experienced that some of these children knew Norwegian but did not know it in another sense, so here we have been dependent on the teachers' ability and motivation to help the children
- I think we need to discuss the language aspect more generally, to identify challenges remaining after the good work done to equalize words and expressions

Comments from the children

- I decided to give the 10- and 12-year olds the opportunity to comment on the questionnaire, as there was space left over in the printed versions. Some of the children, and more 12- than 10-year olds, have given very good comments which reflect that while some like participating in these exercises, others do not –

Comments concerned

- Positive responses: that we as grown-ups are interested in what children think and feel
- That we can learn from what the children say
- More critical responses: that questions are tricky, that they are a bit difficult, that they might be too intrusive
- Concerning method: why we ask the same questions several times, for instance with regard to safety...

Thank you for your attention!

