

# Study finds language, achievement benefits of universal early childhood education <sup>[1]</sup>

Lessons from Norway's universal child care starting at age one

**Author:** Boston College

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Chestnut Hill, Mass. (2/21/2018) - Universal child care that starts as early as age one improves language skills for young children, especially those from low-income families, according to a study of Norway's child care system by a team of researchers led by Boston College Lynch School of Education Professor Eric Dearing. Offering high-quality child care beginning at age one is reducing early achievement gaps in Norwegian communities, the team reported in a recent edition of the education research journal AERA Open.

As the ranks of children in Norway's universal child care program increase, the language skill gap between rich and poor children narrows, according to the study of more than 60,000 children. "This has very important implications for early education policy in the United States, where we are debating how early to start and whether preschool should be provided to all children or exclusively target low-income children," said Dearing, a professor of applied developmental psychology who is also a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Center for Child Behavioral Development at the University of Oslo.

The study, titled Estimating the Consequences of Norway's National Scale-Up of Early Childhood Education and Care (Beginning in Infancy) for Early Language Skills, reported findings including:

- Norway's publicly funded early education and care for all children has led to improvements in children's early language skills, particularly for children from low-income families
- By age three, the language improvement of low-income children attending early education and care has led to a significant narrowing of the gaps in the language skills between low-income and high-income children
- The narrowing of achievement gaps has been greatest in low-income Norwegian communities that made large increases in the number of children attending early childcare centers

"While many state-funded preschool programs in the U.S. do not begin until age three or later, this study provides some of the first large-scale evidence that public early education for children as young as age one can be critical for children's language skills," said Dearing.

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Dearing conducted the project with Norwegian scholars Henrik Daae Zachrisson of the University of Oslo and Arnstein Mykletun, of the University of Tromsø and Harvard Medical School researcher Dr. Claudio O. Toppelberg.

-reprinted from EurekAlert!

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