



## Brief

# “The pee-pee is haram!” A study of how staff in kindergartens work with Islam

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This article explores how five kindergarten employees work with Islam in the kindergarten. Islam is the second largest religion in Norway, and most employees in kindergartens encounter Muslim children and parents. The Norwegian Kindergarten Act (2005, § 1) states that collaboration and close understanding with parents and guardians should form the basis for the work being done in the kindergartens. This entails that kindergarten staff take into account the religion of the child’s home. The Framework Plan for kindergartens (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017) states “religion, ethics and philosophy” as one of seven learning areas in the kindergarten, and among other things establishes that the kindergarten should teach children about the religions represented in their group. This means that if there are Muslim children in the kindergarten one of the employees tasks is to work with Islam.

Previous research shows that this is a neglected learning area in the kindergarten, and that the staff do not always know what religious affiliation the children in the group have. The research also shows that many kindergartens do not celebrate non-Christian religious festivals despite having children from other religions in the group. This article seeks to steer the focus away from what is not being done, to what is actually being done regarding Islam in kindergartens. How do the kindergarten employees work with Islam, and what do they succeed with in this work?

In order to answer this question I have interviewed five employees, all working in kindergartens with Muslim children. This is a small study and cannot be used to generalize about how most Norwegian kindergartens work with Islam. It can however be used as a basis for reflection and conversation about this theme, both in this article and in kindergartens. It can also be a foundation for further research on the topic.

Using theoretical perspectives from Jürgen Habermas (2006), Meredith B. McGuire (2008) and Olav Hovdelien (2019), I explore my findings focusing on lived religion, religious vs. secular language, and how kindergarten staff practice secularism. The findings show that different kindergartens work with Islam to varying degrees, but all of them have some working relationship with this religion, in particular the religious practices. Parental cooperation, avoiding generalization, and making space to talk about religion are factors that the informants believe contribute to success when working with Islam in kindergartens. The findings also show how having Muslims in the group of children can contribute to changing the kindergarten itself. Islam, by virtue of its visible religious practices, forces the employees not only to focus on religion, but also having to negotiate and reflect upon religion in the kindergarten.

**Keywords:** *diversity; Islam; religious practice; secularism*