



## Brief

# What Do the Teachers Do? The Division of Labour Between Early Childhood Teachers in Kindergartens With Increased Teacher-to-Child Ratio

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The article sheds light on how increased teacher density creates new opportunities for division of labor and professionalization in kindergartens. A national regulation from 2018 increases the required percentage of early childhood teachers among staff in Norwegian kindergartens. The regulation indicates that pedagogical competence and quality are seen in context. However, there is a need for more knowledge about how quality, pedagogical competence and staffing are linked at kindergarten level. This article examines how responsibilities and tasks are distributed among teachers in kindergartens and what impact different ways of division of labor and responsibilities may have on the teaching profession's jurisdiction within the field of early education and care. The article is based on data from a comparative case study in eight kindergartens in 2017 and 2018, four municipally and four privately owned, which all had a higher proportion of teachers prior to the 2018 regulation. The data consists of interviews with kindergarten heads, early education teachers, skilled workers, and assistants. In addition, representatives of the two owners are interviewed. The analysis is based on perspective on the system of professions (Abbott, 1988) and shows how the division of labor is based on objective and subjective problem definitions of early childhood teachers at the kindergarten level. Some define division of labor based on established practices, while others define new division of tasks and areas of responsibility. One consequence is that the teachers in the various kindergartens are assigned different tasks and responsibilities, and some are given more specialized responsibilities related to, for example, the thematic areas of the national framework plan, pedagogical leadership,

and personnel management, while others define teacher tasks to support the generalized pedagogical leadership role. Negotiations on work tasks at the local level can enable and challenge the professionalization of kindergarten teachers. Thus, we find that the national government authorities' ambitions to strengthen competence and thereby quality in the early childhood education and care sector can be solved in various ways. The analysis indicates that an increased proportion of kindergarten teachers among staff does not necessarily strengthen specialization of professional practice. Further, the work of determining the profession's ambition with the teacher staffing regulation is yet still to be developed and defined. The division of labor processes are constantly changing, and this calls for further research that can provide updated knowledge about how an increase of early childhood teachers among staff in kindergartens can strengthen competence, professionalization and pedagogical work in kindergartens.

**Keywords:** *division of labor; kindergarten teacher; subjective problem definition; professionalization*