

Consequences of staff composition in Norwegian kindergarten

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Abstract: The main question in this study is related to how the composition and formal competence of staff can affect the division of labor in Norwegian kindergarten. The article discusses the distribution of activities between kindergarten teachers and assistants, and what characterizes the two groups' responsibilities at work. The study is based on a survey representing kindergartens from all over Norway, and is part of a national research project¹. Division of labor is weak. The findings are discussed using a frame factor theoretical approach (Dahllöf 1967, Lundgren 1981). It is argued that several factors affect how staff utilize the scope of action in kindergarten.

Key words: Composition of staff, kindergarten teachers and assistants, division of labor, competence

Criteria for educational quality

Kindergarten has become a significant contribution to the Norwegian welfare state, and is expected to comprise care, experiences and play. Development, learning, growth and formation are the main objectives (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011). As a consequence there are strong political expectations that kindergarten should be associated with professionalism and educational quality in order to ensure that children are provided with optimal opportunities to learn and develop. These expectations of quality are today widespread throughout Europe (Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012; Miller & Cable, 2011; OECD, 2006; Peeters, 2008). What constitutes such educational quality has been the subject of change over the years (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

The main question in this study is related to the composition and formal competence of staff and the consequences these factors have for the quality of Norwegian kindergarten. Only about 32 percent of staff are qualified kindergarten teachers, given opportunities to develop academic and professional knowledge during years of specific formal education². The remaining staff are kindergarten assistants with no formal job requirements. This composition of staff could represent a

¹ The "MAFAL"-project. "*Mastering the role as kindergarten teacher in a field dominated by laymen.*" Cooperation between researchers at Volda University College and Oslo and Akershus University College. Supported by the Norwegian Council of Research

² Kindergarten teacher training leads to a Bachelor's degree.

challenge to educational quality. Nevertheless, the relationship between staff quality and learning outcome is complex and not so well researched.

The present study is based on a survey representing kindergartens from all over Norway, and is part of a national research project³. The main research question in the article is the following: How does the composition of staff affect the distribution of activities and responsibilities in Norwegian kindergarten, and how can the existing practice be explained? To answer this research problem we look into three sub-questions:

- How is labor divided between kindergarten teachers and assistants?
- What characterizes kindergarten teachers' and assistants' activities and responsibilities?
- Which tasks are more suitable for which group?

These issues have been a topic of discussion and have partly been studied earlier, also in the Scandinavian context. Compared to the other Nordic countries, the proportion of educated professional individuals in Norwegian kindergarten is low, and has been perceived as a possible threat to kindergarten quality (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2010; OECD, 2001, 2006, 2012). After a political initiative whereby the number of kindergartens in Norway had gradually expanded so that all children in principle could attend, attention was directed towards staff competence as the crucial element to ensure quality (Aukrust & Rydland, 2009). The Office of the Auditor General of Norway, for instance, concluded that staff competence in Norwegian kindergartens is a barrier to intentions of offering high quality (Riksrevisjonen, 2009). To improve kindergarten quality, a public committee recently suggested increasing the number of educated staff in kindergartens (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012). In addition, several studies point to the lack of hierarchy amongst staff in kindergarten, including the limited division of labor (Ekström, 2007; Gustavson & Mellgren, 2008; Løkken, 1992; Olsen, 2009). Researchers within the "MAFAL-project" have, for instance, concluded that the division of labor is weak (Haug & Steinnes, 2011; Løvgren, 2012; Smeby, 2011; Steinnes, 2010). A study by Løkken (1992) reveals that one has been aware of these tendencies for many years.

On a more general level the topic of professionalization of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been addressed by several researchers within the EU area (Cable & Miller, 2008; 2011; Moss, 2008; Peeters, 2008; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011; Urban, 2008), showing the challenges of professionalization in a partly deprofessionalized field. This implies a contradiction between how professionals are expected to work to achieve curriculum-defined goals and the character of the work in the ECEC field. Kindergarten work is mostly relational, with caregiving and supervision as central elements. Interaction appears to be more important than content (Broström, 2006). In such work, predefined goals are difficult to measure and general, objective criterias are lacking.

Theoretical approach

The immediate expectation would be that differences in competence also will characterize division of labor, and what kind of activities and responsibilities kindergarten teachers and assistants are engaged in. Here we initially argue that competence cannot function in a vacuum. It is related to and affected by a range of variables in kindergarten that can promote or obstruct the impact of the kindergarten teacher's competence. This notion can contribute to broadening the discussion about how staffs'

³ The "MAFAL"-project.

competences have an influence on educational quality in kindergarten. Michael Eraut's division between individual and cultural knowledge (Eraut, 2004) is one way of illustrating the tension created by the present staff composition. Cultural knowledge represents common ways of doing and reflecting, based on mutual experiences. Kindergarten has traditionally been a close-knit working community, where kindergarten teachers and assistants have been working side by side and where such cultural knowledge is continually being developed through observation, cooperation and informal guiding. This kind of knowledge and collective tradition can be challenged by the knowledge the kindergarten teachers bring with them to the workplace. Such individual knowledge is gained through education, work and life experiences. The tension between the different types of knowledge is especially distinct if it clashes with the established tradition. Nevertheless, it seems that a main challenge is that it is difficult to achieve a breakthrough for individual knowledge in kindergarten (Steinnes 2010). This may represent a challenge to kindergarten teachers' professional activity.

The relevance of higher education is in general debated within theories of professions. One argument is that higher education does not contribute to relevant professional competence. In this line of thought the main function of higher education is to regulate the admission to a profession, and to make sure that the individuals share the profession's central values and attitudes (Smeby, 2008). An alternative interpretation is that higher education in general can contribute to developing professional competence. A relevant question then is how does this apply in the case of kindergarten teacher education. Dalli et al. (2012) accentuate the fact that a new conceptualization of professionalism is required to reflect the complex realities of professional practice in kindergarten. They suggest that the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner would be helpful in explaining this conceptualization, but extend the perspective to... *a critical ecology of the early childhood profession* (p. 7).

Another approach is to turn to the frame factor theoretical approach. Its intention was to explain results achieved in school, and the crucial question was to understand what regulated teaching (Dahllöf, 1967). Urban Dahllöf's study from 1967 concluded that teaching was dependent upon certain conditions that he called frame factors. Teachers could not control these factors, for instance the number of students, the degree of homogeneity between students, time at their disposal and so on (Dahllöf, 1967). Based on further studies it is said that in institutions like school and kindergarten there is a scope of action constituted by three formal frame factors (Lundgren, 1981). They are the rule system (laws), the frame system (resources) and the goal system (curriculum) (figure 1). Within the limits of these regulations, staff are free to choose content and activities for the children, how to put them into effect and to decide the sharing of responsibilities among the staff. The regulating factors define the educational space and opportunities for what it is possible to do, but they do not determine the choices. In other words, teaching is a consequence both of the scope of action constructed by frame factors that teachers cannot control and the individual choice of action within these regulations. Together these structures represent opportunities, but they do not decide practice (Sheridan, 2001).

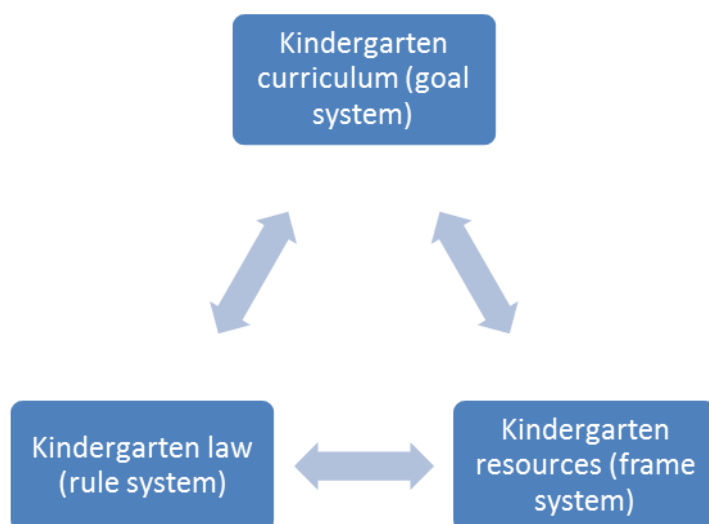


Figure 1 A frame factor model

Staff competence is associated with each of the three frame factors. The three systems interact, but they are also disparate. Formulated intentions often differ from how they are experienced and practiced. In addition, there also are controversies and ambiguity within and between each of the three systems, as we will go into later.

Kindergarten competence is formally linked to the rule system, because a paragraph in the Act on Day Care Institutions stipulates that in kindergartens a minimum of 1/3 of staff are required to be qualified kindergarten teachers. Competence is also a part of the frame system, because competence can be seen as a resource for kindergartens, and specific resources are made available for a certain number of staff. It is also a part of the goal system, because of established educational tradition as well as curriculum formulations about staff qualifications and kindergarten quality. How competence functions then is dependent upon the interplay between the three frame systems and what possibilities staff see in it for their own action.

For a better understanding, we here introduce some characteristics of each of the three systems, as they now appear. Each of them also deals with aspects that for decades have dominated debate, practice and policy in the ECEC field in Norway.

The rule system

Since 2009, all children of more than one year of age have had a formal right to attend kindergarten in Norway. Early childhood education and care is a municipal responsibility, but kindergartens can be owned by private interests. The financing is based on a combination of funding from the state, the municipality and parents. In the first Act on Day Care Institutions (Barne -og familiedepartementet, 1975), the ratio between kindergarten assistants and kindergarten teachers was determined to be two to one, and this is still the case.

The goal system

Kindergarten in Norway has experienced being in a squeeze between being «partly home, partly school» (Jansen, 2007). Childhood and kindergarten have been described as a specific and independent period in life with a value of its own, different from other periods. Kindergarten is child-

centered, and the main task has been to offer opportunities for free play and social activities, and not for the teaching or transmitting of knowledge (Målrettet arbeid i barnehagen, 1982; Broström, 2006). The revised curriculum from 2006, however, also accentuates the importance of children's learning and the importance of kindergarten as preparation for school. The paragraphs formulating the objectives of kindergarten and of the school were brought much more in line with each other. Formulations about learning content in kindergarten are now close to the wording for subjects in the national curriculum for school, organized in the same categories though formulated in different words. This has been interpreted as a break with tradition, and has been met with strong resistance (Østrem, 2007) and apparently with a considerable amount of uncertainty amongst kindergarten staff (Berge, 2012).

The frame system

In short, the conditions of the frame system reflect how kindergarten has been made capable of respecting and satisfying the regulations in the other two systems. In the process of establishing today's full coverage of kindergartens from the 1990's onwards, lots of structural aspects became important, many of them dependent upon prevailing resources. In this period the topics of group size, opening hours, the ratio of children to staff, the number of staff in a department, organization, equipment, area, buildings and so on, became indicators of quality and they still are. They were partly state-regulated and partly regulated by the kindergarten owner. The foundation for the expansion was laid in the changes to the Act on Day Care Institutions of 1995, where organizational flexibility and adjustment to the users' needs were emphasized. On the one hand it was desirable to develop new institutions as fast and cheaply as possible. On the other hand it was necessary to create structures of quality.

In 2010, 90 percent of the children aged 1-5 attended kindergarten and 86 percent of them full-time (more than 40 hours a week)⁴. This development has been mostly due to the parents working full-time, combined with an increasing accessibility of places in kindergartens.

In the following we present a study of the division of labor between kindergarten teachers and assistants, and discuss the results according to the elements in the model presented above.

Method and data

As part of the MAFAL-project, a nationwide questionnaire was distributed to 1000 randomly selected kindergartens in spring 2009. The heads of kindergarten were asked to distribute the questionnaire to both assistants and pedagogical leaders and to return a minimum of one and maximum three forms from both groups. The response rate was 59 % of the kindergartens, representing 1357 assistants and 1192 pedagogical leaders. The number of pedagogical leaders that are educated kindergarten teachers is in our material 998. The remaining group has other kinds of similar and approved college education or has a dispensation from the educational requirements laid down in the Act on Day Care Institutions (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2005). These are not included in the analyses. The educational level amongst the assistants is low, and 55 percent of them have no pedagogical education at any level. About 9 percent have different kinds of pedagogical qualifications at various levels, and there is an overrepresentation of educated assistants (a category named *skilled workers*, assistants educated at secondary school level) in the material. The percentage of educated skilled workers here is 36. In general the percentage is about 13 percent (Gulbrandsen 2007). This might constitute a challenge to

⁴ "Statistics Norway"

the representation, based on an assumption that the heads possibly have chosen the most dedicated employees (Smeby, 2011). Nevertheless, when comparing answers from assistants with different kinds of education, we find limited variations. Hence, we have reason to believe that we in this survey have data that can provide interesting and important knowledge about the research question.

Results

We present results on four issues: Staff education, tasks during working hours for pedagogical leaders and assistants, pedagogical leaders and assistants' involvement in different activities, and what they see as the most important areas of competence for kindergarten staff. As expected, and as shown above, the level of qualifications differs considerably between the groups, and the educational level is lowest amongst the largest group of staff. These are also the ones who are spending the greatest amount of time with the children, according to figure number 2.

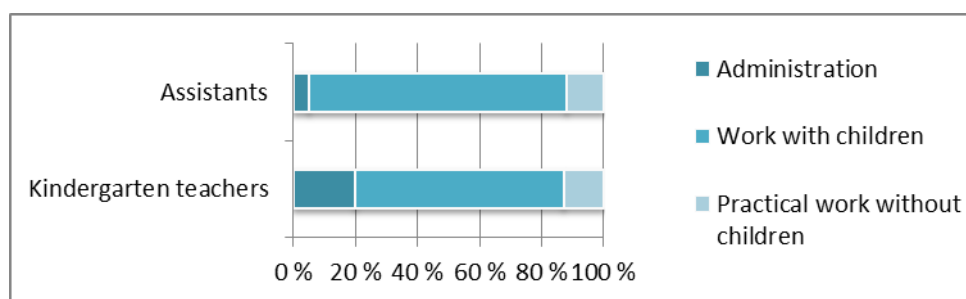


Figure 2 Distribution based on time related to work categories

How much time do you spend on the three categories of work? Percentage. Assistants N=1357, Kindergarten teachers N= 998

While the kindergarten assistants estimate that they spend 81 percent of their total work hours working directly with the children, the kindergarten teachers report that 66 percent of their time is dedicated to this kind of work ($P < .01$). The assistants spend five percent of their working hours on administration, while the amount of such work for kindergarten teachers is 20 percent ($P < .01$). It should be noted that pedagogical leaders until recently have had four hours of planning time per week incorporated in their terms of employment. The level of practical work without children is about the same for both groups, representing 11-12 percent of their total working hours.

Kindergarten teachers and assistants were asked to what extent they are involved in specific activities, and the answers show some distinct tendencies (figure no. 3). Kindergarten teachers are more engaged than kindergarten assistants in parent conferences and discussing difficult issues with parents, duties related to their responsibilities as leaders. In addition they are more than kindergarten assistants involved in what can be defined as specific and specialized pedagogical work closely related to teaching, such as giving special education, teaching five-year olds and chairing at circle time. In no activity are kindergarten assistants more involved than kindergarten teachers. In the remaining activities the two groups participate to about the same degree. One conclusion then is that the division of labor is weak.

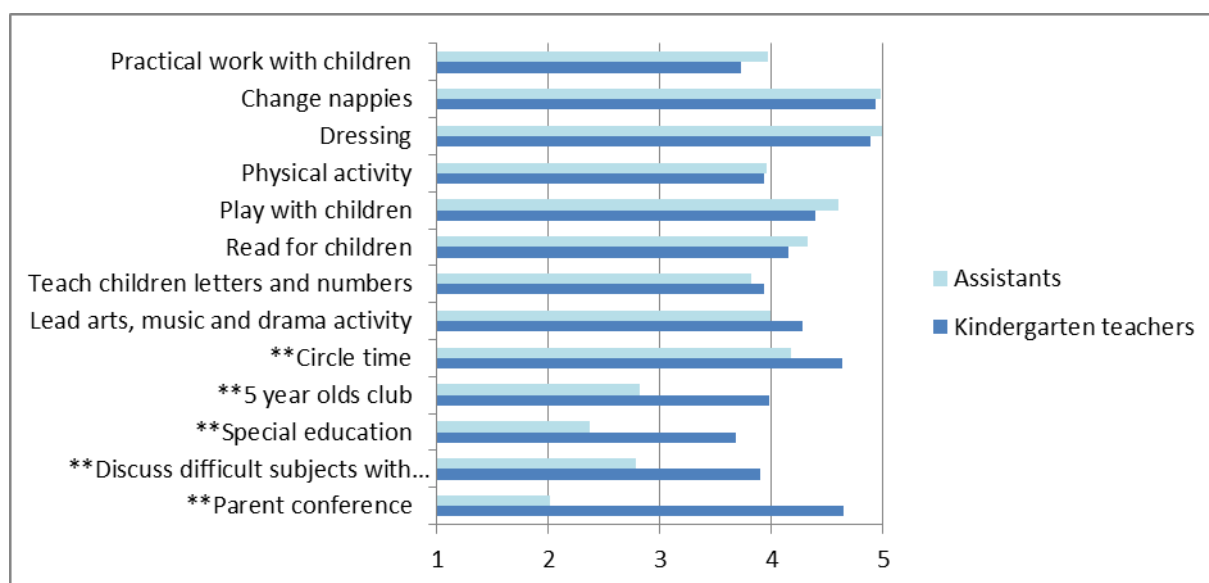


Figure 3 Staff involvement in activities in kindergarten.

Involvement in activities in kindergarten; 1: never, 5: often. Mean values, ** $P < .01$ Assistants $N=1357$, Kindergarten teachers $N=998$

When asked what activities or tasks are more suitable for, respectively, kindergarten teachers, assistants and both, the answers are in accordance with what the two groups themselves have reported that they actually do in kindergarten. There is a consensus that leadership responsibilities and specialized and clearly defined pedagogical activities such as giving special education, teaching five-year olds and chairing at circle time are most appropriate for kindergarten teachers to do. Relating to the remaining items both groups express that they are equal, which implies that no activity is defined as being more suitable for kindergarten assistants.

The following question concerns what constitutes the most important areas of competence for kindergarten staff. The areas were defined as professional knowledge, practical skills, values/attitudes and personal abilities (Figure no. 4).

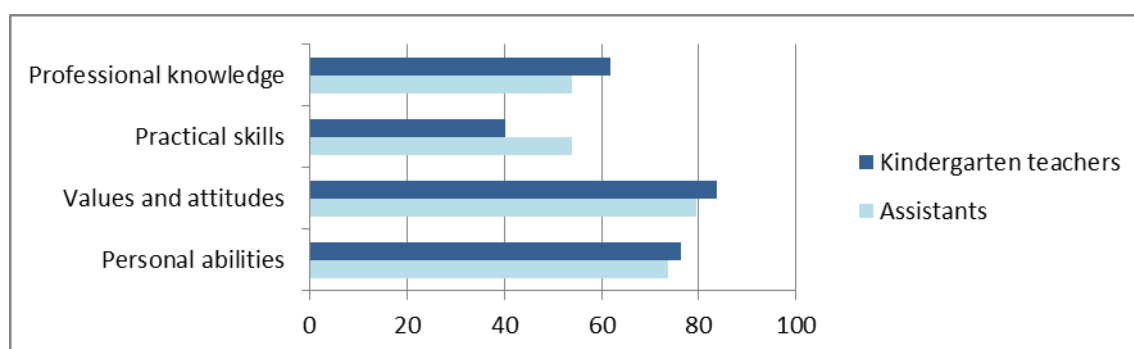


Figure 4 The importance of defined areas of competence

Note: Defined areas of competence: In percentage of those who find each area very important on a scale varying from not important at all to very important. Assistants, $N=1357$, Kindergarten teachers $N=998$, ($P < .01$). Mean values

The figure reveals that the most important areas for both groups are personal abilities and having the right values and attitudes. The most striking difference is between these areas and professional knowledge and practical skills, and the differences are significant ($P < .01$) within both groups. Between the groups, there are significant differences in all areas, where the kindergarten teachers attach higher values in each area. The exception, and also the most extensive differences revealed between kindergarten teachers and assistants, concerns practical skills; the assistants find this more important than the kindergarten teachers do ($P < .01$). The assistants find practical skills and professional knowledge equally important, while the kindergarten teachers rate practical skills lowest. This could imply that practical knowledge is more important to the assistants than to the kindergarten teachers.

Short summary

From these data we extract several main conclusions in answer to the research questions presented initially.

- There is a limited division of labor in kindergarten between kindergarten assistants and kindergarten teachers.
- Kindergarten teachers are more than kindergarten assistants engaged in leadership responsibilities and specific and clearly defined pedagogical activities. In the remaining activities the two groups participate to about the same degree.
- There is a consensus that leadership responsibilities and specialized and specific pedagogical activities are better suited for kindergarten teachers. They also agree that in the remaining activities the ideal is that the two groups should participate in the work to about the same extent.
- Both groups value general insight and qualities that are not very dependent upon formal education as being the most important competences for kindergarten staff rather than specific and expert competences offered through formal qualifications. Kindergarten teachers rate practical skills lower than kindergarten assistants, but both groups value professional knowledge about the same.

Discussion

Even though the similarities between the two groups in how they respond to the questions presented are extensive, one must take into account that these do not fully explain the question of division of labor. The analyses give no information that could reveal the intentions behind and the quality of action. Having a formal education, it is reasonable to expect that kindergarten teachers might have other intentions behind their actions than the assistants, and that they will perform their duties in a different manner. Kindergarten teachers are in this perspective expected to behave in a more reflected and professional manner. To what extent this is the case, we cannot tell from the current data. However, our main concern here is how to understand and explain the results from the analyses, based on the information at hand and by using frame factor theory as an explanatory model. A key issue in frame factor theory is that the elements are closely connected to each other (Dahllöf 1998; Lundgren 1981). The theory is presented as a model of thinking and investigation. Dahllöf (1998) has emphasized that the potential in this approach is the possibility of developing and adjusting this way of thinking to the actual research topic, and to create new explanatory models. Consequently,

we are using the model based on our understanding of the frame factors, and with reference to the model in figure 1 we will present three scenarios that could explain the above findings.

Kindergarten ideal and tradition

The first scenario is connected to all the three frame factors above, and the scope of action in this understanding reflects the traditional ideals of kindergarten. The division of labor appears to be in accordance with established kindergarten *ideals* and *traditions* and supported by at least some parts of the kindergarten *curriculum*. It also conforms with kindergarten *rules and structures*. The composition of staff is in accordance with the law, and the structural elements in kindergarten such as working plans and the like are adapted to these practices. In short, this is what should be expected in Norwegian kindergartens, this is how the division of labor in kindergarten is supposed to function according to ideals and tradition. The notion that everybody should be able to do almost everything regardless of formal qualifications could be an expression of a tradition of trivialization and an undermining of the pedagogical content in kindergarten (Bae, 2004). A consequence of this tradition could be that the kindergarten teachers' professional knowledge is displaced. It could also affect the learning culture of kindergarten in a way that is not in accordance with official expectations (Mørkeseth, 2012). In a normative view this is a most serious situation. The basis of such a normative view places a considerable responsibility on the kindergarten teacher as the guarantor of pedagogical work of high quality.

The Norwegian kindergarten has traditionally reflected an ideal of equality (Børhaug et al. 2011; Olsen 2011; Steinnes 2010; Ødegård 2011). The organization has been grounded in a model with a close resemblance to family life, and the homelike environment reflects a notion of harmony (Mørkeseth, 2012). This explains the priorities of competence areas, personal abilities, values and attitudes as being of more importance than formal professional competences (figure 4), which is also reflected in kindergarten teacher education. The culture seems to be loosely linked to educational theory and is directed much more by practical and personal knowledge (Riksaasen, 1999). Students' own personal experiences are valued more highly than their professional knowledge. In this perspective, kindergarten teacher education has qualified kindergarten teachers for what is the established kindergarten practice.

The kindergarten curriculum (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011) emphasizes the importance of creating a common culture and understanding among the entire staff in order to generate quality in the kindergarten. One of kindergarten teachers' most important competences, therefore, is to supervise kindergarten assistants according to the ideals represented through tradition and curriculum. A close-knit working community provides opportunities for knowledge development through extensive cooperation and informal guidance offered by kindergarten teachers to assistants (Seland, 2009). By supervising the assistants in their work performance, kindergarten teachers are expected to make them capable of performing work of high quality. This way the assistants are given the opportunity to become complete participants in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

From the material we extract that specific pedagogical tasks, like for instance school-preparation activities, are viewed as being more appropriate for kindergarten teachers. The reason is probably that traditionally they have been seen as important pedagogical activities and have always been the specific responsibility of kindergarten teachers (Haug, 2013). In addition, the demarcation between this kind of tasks and other day-to-day pedagogical activities is rather obvious and therefore easy to define. In contrast to several countries in Europe which have a split system model where the distinction between childcare and early education is marked (Oberhuemer, 2005), the Norwegian model is integrated, including all children aged 1-6. The integrated model implies that caring and pedagogy are emphasized as something holistic, which might make it difficult to keep the content of these two areas apart from each other. This might have led to a rather invisible pedagogy where means and goals are difficult to identify and measure (Haug, 2005). According to the curriculum, kindergarten staff are expected to support learning processes during both formal and informal activities throughout the day. The patterns in the division of labor would then reflect this holistic

approach and be in accordance with political expectations and tradition. In addition, tasks like cooperation with the parents are typically the responsibility of leaders. This scenario is challenged by at least two alternative interpretations, related to structures and competence.

A structural explanation

A second way of understanding the lack of a clear division of labor in Norwegian kindergarten is associated with dominant existing structures, mostly connected to the frame system. The scope of action is regulated and restricted by structures and practical frameworks, and the division of labor is then a consequence of such factors. Most kindergartens have long opening hours and these have been increasing during recent decades. This is partly a result of the integrated «educare» model (Broström, 2006) and partly due to parents' need for supervision of their pre-school children during their own long working hours. A full day stay has become very common amongst Norwegian children (Løvgren and Gulbrandsen, 2012). At the same time, the kindergarten teacher ratio has stayed about the same for at least the last forty years (ibid). Furthermore, kindergarten teachers have been given responsibilities for a lot of tasks that are not related to pedagogical work with the children, like administration and practical work, as is reflected in the data material (figure 2). These findings are supported in research by Børhaug et al. (2011) and Seland (2009). In addition, there has been an increase in imposed new tasks like formal documentation of different kinds, which can contribute to distancing the kindergarten teachers still further from working directly with the children.

Long opening hours combined with a low kindergarten teacher ratio force the kindergarten teachers to distribute work tasks without regard to formal qualifications, since the assistants spend more time in direct contact with the children during the day. To get the work done, the kindergarten teachers have to rely on the assistants' ability to work independently when the kindergarten teachers themselves are not present. This is not necessarily seen as ideal, but is done almost by force. To enable kindergarten to achieve the tasks expected of it, a low division of labor is both the consequence and a necessity.

Børhaug et al. (2011) point out that if the pressure of time is high, having fixed routines provides predictability for the staff and minimizes insecurity. They also indicate that if equality is a central value for kindergarten staff, this social-pedagogical thinking could make it easier for kindergarten teachers to gain support for their ideas. Ethical principles that emphasize the equal value of individuals could also affect the division of labor by emphasizing that all tasks are of equal importance (Børhaug et al. 2011, Gustavson and Mellgren, 2008). Seen as consequences of kindergarten organization, the division of labor is legitimized by the priorities of competence areas among kindergarten teachers and assistants. This follows when personal abilities, values and attitudes are seen as being of greater importance than formal professional competence and practical skills (figure 4).

It is possible to choose other ways out of this time squeeze. Such changes might include increasing staff or introducing a far more distinct hierarchy of labor by, for instance, establishing pedagogical core time in kindergarten. The former has primarily financial consequences, while the latter is related to some overarching structures. Pedagogical core time would imply a solid break with the integrated tradition. Seland (2009) warns against the consequences of letting economic rationality determine pedagogical practice, and asserts that this could lay the foundations for a quite new organisation model where pedagogical work is restricted to certain activities and parts of the day. This would represent a solid break with the Norwegian model and pedagogical tradition.

Competence challenges

Within the frame factor theory it is emphasized that the scope of action is not predefined, but will be affected by the individuals involved, and by their individual competencies and priorities. The third scenario suggests that the kindergarten teacher suffers from a lack of legitimacy with regard to his or her professional knowledge, and that this has consequences for the division of labor. In this case, the scope of action will tolerate and even reward professional competence, while the kindergarten teachers

are not able to establish this as the basis for the staff's activity in kindergarten. As mentioned before, Norwegian kindergarten design has used family life as a model. This constitutes a challenge to the professionalization of the field and to the recognition of the kindergarten teacher's professional competence. To be a parent does not formally require other competences than those that come from growing up. What is important in child upbringing is what ordinary parents can manage. So why should there be a need to professionalize this field? Professionalization might even constitute a threat to the role of parenthood.

As our data show, both kindergarten teachers and assistants value general insights and personal qualities as the most important competences for kindergarten staff. When the relevance for work is weak, the professional qualifications will have limited or no effect. The national evaluation of kindergarten teachers' education in Norway 2010 (NOKUT, 2010) indicates that students identify with the kindergarten culture, more than with a common culture of the kindergarten teacher profession. The core competence of the kindergarten teacher profession is not easily identified, and research by Steinnes (2007) shows that when kindergarten teachers were asked to define this core competence, many found it difficult to answer. Moreover, the boundaries of the kindergarten teachers' knowledge base are not necessarily unambiguous and there might not be consensus about these boundaries. This also is a reason why kindergarten teacher education has been labeled as invisible (Riksaasen, 1999). With reference to Basil Bernstein, the framing and classification are weak when it comes to the relations between theory and practice. In this context the students' own personal and private experiences and beliefs become crucial (ibid). These findings are supported by several researchers (Bayer & Brinkkjær, 2006; Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006). The kindergarten teacher education is composed of a lot of different subjects, and seems to suffer from the lack of a core subject that could support the process of professionalization of the kindergarten teacher's profession.

Another possibility is that kindergarten teacher education emphasizes competences that are relevant for kindergarten work, but that the kindergarten teachers do not have the personal strength and support to introduce these as the institutions' fundament and to overcome established traditions, ideologies and structures. Several facts from kindergarten teacher education support such a conclusion. Students recruited to kindergarten teacher education have low grades from upper secondary school. The amount of effort they put into their studies is poor, but most students manage to pass their exams (NOKUT, 2010). Consequently it can be argued that this kind of teacher education does not provide the relevant and necessary competencies on an individual level. Even if the education has provided relevant competencies, the individual could be facing difficulties. One challenge might be that kindergarten teachers are not allowed to achieve a breakthrough for their professional knowledge. Resistance could be experienced with relation to societal expectations and general structures, but also within the frameworks of each kindergarten and will affect the scope of action for the individual kindergarten teacher. Being a majority of the staff, the assistants are allowed quite considerable resistance to changes if they disapprove of these. The resistance to changes in kindergarten structures will depend on the cost both to the individual and to society.

Conclusion

From our data it is not possible to conclude which of the three explanations presented above has most credibility. We have presented arguments that make it probable that all three alternatives for the choice of activities within the scope of action are valid. In that case, the limited division of labor is explained by a combination of established kindergarten tradition, strong practical structures and kindergarten teachers' weak professional competence. To be able to change this pattern then, the suggestion has been made to increase the number of kindergarten teachers. On the basis of our discussion here, this might not be sufficient to change the division of labor. To increase one group's individual competence will not necessarily change kindergarten's collective notions and activities. This will only meet one of the factors that regulates the scope of action. We will recommend changes related to all the three explanations presented here, that is changes in kindergarten teacher education, educational courses for kindergarten assistants combined with long-term work-based developmental projects in kindergarten.

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