

Special Issue: Kindergarten Pedagogy and Policy

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This special issue of *Nordic Studies in Education* focuses on kindergarten pedagogy and policy within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in a Nordic context. The relationship between pedagogy and policy consists of manifold and contradictory values, knowledge, and practices – some of which have given rise to considerable changes and discussion. Diverse stakeholders have engaged in conversations on the development of these values as political choices, and the consequences that the expressed priorities will have on future kindergarten pedagogy. In contrast to many other European countries, the Nordic kindergarten tradition has its own identity – a pedagogy independent of – and often in opposition to – pedagogical practices in schools. However, this division between kindergarten and schools is changing.

In 2006, Norwegian kindergartens became a formal part of the educational system. In 2011, the term “upbringing” (*oppdragelse*) was removed from the general curriculum and replaced with the term “Bildung” (*danning*). This change marks a transformation in kindergarten pedagogy (practice, theory, research) from an independent field of pedagogy towards a pedagogy defined by the rhetoric of school. The latest curriculum changes in Norwegian kindergartens in 2017 clearly emphasize the function

of kindergartens as an integral part of the educational pathway and as preparation for schooling. Similar developments can be seen in the other Nordic countries. In 2004 in Denmark, kindergartens became legally required to produce educational curricula. In both Sweden and Iceland, kindergartens are seen as part of the educational system. In contrast, in Finland kindergartens are placed under the Ministry of Social Affairs, however they offer a pre-school program for children 6 years and older intended to prepare the children for school. Experiencing this historical development towards a “school like” pedagogy in the Nordic kindergarten model, a central question emerges: what challenges and which changes are important for the development of Nordic kindergarten pedagogy in the twenty-first century?

The changes described have received attention from various voices within the field of kindergarten pedagogy, several of whom have expressed concern over, opposition to, and criticism of a lack of reflection on the consequences of these changes on the children who represent the future of the Nordic region. Facing these challenges head-on, this Special Issue of Nordic Studies in Education has a wide scope and addresses various aspects of current Nordic kindergarten pedagogy, early childhood education and care policy. Through contrasting theoretical perspectives, the contributions in this issue highlight the theme of kindergarten pedagogy and politics. Directly or indirectly, the articles present challenges to the political development of kindergarten policy and the changes facing kindergarten pedagogy. By offering multi-faceted theoretical perspectives and different approaches to research, we believe that these articles have the potential to contribute to the future development of Nordic kindergarten pedagogy.

In the first article, “Barnehager som konkurrerende virksomheter” (Kindergartens as competing businesses), Hanne Fehn Dahle presents aspects of competition between kindergartens, in a situation where the number of kindergarten-age children continues to drop due to declining birth rates. In Norway about 50% of children go to private kindergartens, in contrast to the other Nordic countries where about 80% of children go to public kindergartens. Competition is likely to be more frequently experienced in Norway. Drawing on Freidson’s (2001) theory on professionalism, the article focuses on the ways in which teachers in Norwegian kindergartens experience and assess this competition. The empirical data stem from interviews with 18 teachers employed by large private kindergarten enterprises. Freidson identifies the types of logic evident in the field: the logic of the market, the logic of bureaucracy and the logic of the profession. The analysis demonstrates that while the teachers identify most closely with the “third logic”, that of the profession, they face a competitive market regulated by supply and demand. Thus, they find themselves caught in the tension between, on one hand, the ethical values inherent to the profession, stressing their own professional judgement and the interests of all the children, and on the other, the owner’s need to win the competition, leading to product orientation, marketing, and secrecy.

In the second article, “Säkerhet samt upplevelsebaserat lärande i en variation av lärmiljöer – två centrala policyer i mobila förskolor” (Security and experience based

learning in a variety of learning milieus – two central policies in mobile preschools), Katarina Gustafson, Danielle Ekman Ladru and Tanja Joelson present new knowledge on pedagogical practices in mobile preschools in Sweden and how they relate to policy. This knowledge is relevant to a Swedish context, where the number of mobile preschool busses has increased due to demographic changes and urban planning, as well as early childhood institutions that wish to move their pedagogical practices to different spaces. The article's objective is to analyze how professionals working in mobile preschools talk about their specific pedagogical practices and its potential. Moreover, the authors look at what policies the professionals express as central to everyday routines and activities in their specific mobile preschools and how these are put into practice. Analyses show how a *security policy* and an *experience based learning policy* are intimately interwoven in mobile preschool professionals' talk about everyday pedagogical practices. It also shows how pedagogues in mobile preschools *do policy*, as national policy, local guidelines and routines are constantly interpreted, discussed and put into practice in the mobile preschool unit.

In article three, "Mot en ny satsing mot flerspråklighet – en analyse av språkpolitiske føringer i barnehagens styringsdokumenter" (Towards a new commitment to multilingualism – an analysis of language policy guidelines in early childhood education policies), Elena Tkachenko and Katrine Giæver discuss how language policy for multilingualism in Norwegian early childhood education has changed over the last 30 years. Drawing on discourse analysis of central official policy documents from different time periods between 1996–2018, they discuss the change towards a monolingual language policy. The analysis shows controversies and inconsistencies in the policy and they critically question this development. However, the current early childhood curriculum, Rammeplanen 2017, emphasizes opportunities to support multilingual children and opens up for a language-as-resource approach where linguistic and cultural diversity are seen as an enrichment for the entire group of children.

In the article "Climbing, hiding, and having fun: Schoolchildren's memories of holistic learning in Norwegian kindergartens", Teresa K. Aslanian, Anne Kristin Andresen and Turid Baasland consider how holistic learning environments in kindergartens provide opportunities for experiential learning that previously took place in the home and community. As children are reportedly spending more time engaged in sedentary activities and less time outside playing, The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) in 2010 emphasized that ECEC institutions in Norway had taken over functions which previously took place in the home and community, necessitating an education that provides "another and more comprehensive competence". The authors of the article report on a retrospective interview study with Norwegian schoolchildren, in which they were asked about what they remember from their time in ECEC. Using Biosocial research that combines expertise and perspectival understandings from the biological and social sciences, their ambition is to begin a discussion on what "another and more comprehensive competence" may look like and how it can support children's learning.

Anne Beate Reinertsen's article, "Barnehagepedagogikk som det å vise nomadisk venting" (Kindergarten pedagogy as showing nomadic waiting) presents what the author calls immanent knowledge practices, non-linear pedagogies and politics. In a landscape of evidence-based research as well as evidence-based education, Reinertsen proposes taking a not-knowing stance, showing patience and practicing radical doubt, in order to be able to take the child's position. She states that this might develop into a strong source of energy for change and learning. Today kindergartens seem to be colonized by experts and politics. In this article, a voice is given to unconscious knowledge processes without removing the same processes from logical reasoning or justification. Her hypothesis is that complexity requires closeness to the practice field. Reaching goals of meaning making and knowledge creation, learning and development depend on opening up to the art of not knowing, expressed as nomadic waiting. Provisional processes crossing provisional borders enable translations and interpretations beyond known vocabularies in unfinished channels. Education needs new grounds, humble foresights, doubting researchers and politics that make this possible.