



CHAPTER
12

Government guidance on leadership of learning in early childhood education and care in Norway

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increased emphasis on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres in Norway as arenas for learning, and directors of the centres have felt an increasing pressure to make learning a higher priority. It is therefore necessary to look at how government agencies frame and define leadership of learning in ECEC. This research draws on a selection of policy texts and is based on a theoretical framework of theories on leader functions and management by objectives. The aim is to analyse how government guidance on leadership is connected to requirements on learning. The main finding is that there is a lack of connection between leadership and learning in the government guidelines and this means the ECEC directors have a high degree of freedom as well as responsibility in the leadership of learning.

Keywords: Leadership, learning, government guidance

SAMANDRAG

Dei seinare åra har norske styresmakter lagt stadig større vekt på barnehagen si rolle som læringsarena for barn, og styrarane i barnehagane har kjent eit aukande press for å prioritera barn si læring. Det er difor naudsynt å sjå på korleis styresmaktene definerer og legg rammer for leiing av læring i barnehagen. Denne studien er ein analyse av utvalde sentrale styringsdokument for barnehagen, basert på eit teoretisk rammeverk av teoriar om leiarfunksjonar og målstyring i offentlig sektor. Målet er å analysa korleis kravet om læring blir knytt saman med retningslinjer for leiing av barnehagen. Hovudkonklusjonen er at styringsdokumenta i svært liten grad viser nokon samanheng mellom leiing og læring, og at styrarane dermed har stor grad av fridom og ansvar når det gjeld leiing av barn si læring i barnehagen.

ABSTRAKTI

Viime vuosien aikana on Norjassa kasvanut kiinnostus päiväkoteja kohtaan oppimisen paikkoina ja johtajat ovat kokeneet kasvavaa painetta tehdäkseen oppimisesta tärkeämmän prioriteetin. Kuitenkin johtajuuden ja kasvatuksellisten tavoitteiden yhdistäminen voi olla haasteellista. Sen vuoksi on tarpeen tarkastella, kuinka hallituksen toimet raamittavat ja määrittävät johtajuuden edellytyksiä suhteessa päiväkoteihin oppimisen areenoina. Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee valikoiman poliittisia tekstejä ja tarkastelee tutkimuskysymystä Missä määrin ja miten kansalliset hallitustoimet määrittävät johtamista ja organisaatiota suhteessa päiväkotiin oppimisen areenana? Päätulos on, että hallituksen ohjeistuksissa ei löydy yhteyttä johtajuuden ja oppimisen välillä ja tämä merkitsee sitä, että varhaiskasvatuksen johtajilla on suuri vapaus ja vastuu johtaa oppimista.



INTRODUCTION

The developments in the ECEC sector and the significance of ECEC as the first step in a lifelong learning course require good leadership in the ECEC centres.¹ (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009, p. 34)

This statement from the Whitepaper, 'Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care' (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009) sums up and ties together two central requirements on Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres in recent years. There has been an increased emphasis on ECEC centres as arenas for learning, and directors of centres have felt a growing pressure to make learning a higher priority. (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2011; Pedersen, Mari, Haukedal, Hofslundengen & Fossøy, 2013) Hence, there are two parallel demands on the centres. On one hand, the centres are expected to take a greater responsibility for children's learning, on the other hand, there is also a very clear expectation of having good leadership.

For the directors in the centres this means that there is an expectation that they should be 'good leaders of learning' with a competence on developing their centres as a learning arena for children. From the director's point of view, it will be important to understand what these requirements mean in practice, and how they can be linked together. To fulfil the authorities' expectations and goals, it will be important to be knowledgeable about the content of these requirements and understanding of how government agencies frame and define 'good leadership' and learning. In order to gain this understanding,

1 Author's translation, original Norwegian text: "Utviklingen innenfor barnehagesektoren og barnehagens betydning som første trinn i et livslangt læringsløp stiller krav til god ledelse i barnehagen."

it is necessary to study how the educational authorities guide or instruct the directors in this work.

Although there has been little academic interest in leadership in ECEC, there is a growing literature in the field (Gotvassli, 2013), and some research has also been conducted on children's learning in ECEC. However, there is little or no research about the relationship between these two important factors. What kind of leadership should the directors of the centres conduct to meet the expectations on the organisation and leadership of ECEC centres as learning arenas? And what do the government guidelines in the ECEC sector tell the leaders of the centres about leadership of learning? This leads to the following research question:

To what extent and how do national government agencies and bodies define managerial and organisational approaches to ECEC centres as an arena for learning?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The research draws on theories of leader functions. Directors in ECEC centres perform four main leader functions: Pedagogical, human resource (staff), administrative and external (strategic) functions (Adizes, 1979; Bleken & Røtnes, 2005; Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2011; Gotvassli, 2013; Moen & Granrusten, 2013). These functions will partially interact and partially intervene in each other. Pedagogical functions in this regard involve the responsibility of defining and achieving the pedagogical objectives of the ECEC centres. The director needs to ensure that the entire organisation is involved in the development of the centres' educational platform. Bleken and Røtnes (2005) place pedagogical leadership as the main focus compared to the other functions in order to underline that this is the core of leadership in ECEC centres. Human resource functions involve the development of competent employees through motivation, setting expectations and ensuring ethical standards. Administrative functions involve the implementation of laws and regulations imposed by owners and the government. In addition, administrative functions involve the development and implementation of support for other functions, such as payments and purchases, maintenance, work plans and information and planning systems. This chapter analyses the policy texts in light of these theories in order to reveal what kind of leadership that is accentuated in the government guidelines, including what kind of leadership functions are emphasised in the policy documents and how these functions are connected to the leadership of ECEC centres as learning arenas.

Although this chapter is about the leadership of learning, it will not analyse views on learning in the policy documents specifically. This project focuses on leadership in ECEC, how directors of centres are expected to be leaders of learning and to organise centres as learning arenas for children. The primary focus is therefore on leadership not on learning. The analysis is dealing with how leadership can be conducted to meet the requirements and expectations towards centres as a learning arena for children. Nevertheless, learning is also a necessary focus, but in examining theories of learning and on views on learning they will be discussed using earlier research in the field.

The *Framework Plan* states that the Norwegian ECEC tradition has a clear focus on taking “a holistic view of care, upbringing, play, everyday activities and learning”. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 11). ‘Formation’ (‘Danning’ in Norwegian, from the German concept ‘Bildung’) is the most central concept in the *Framework Plan*, and the ECEC centres will support the children’s formation through care, play and learning. This means that in ECEC there is a broad approach to children’s learning and a holistic view of learning, where learning is closely interlinked with care, play and formation. (Haug & Storø, 2013; Lillemyr, 2005, 2013).

ECEC centres in Norway as pedagogical centres are based on a strong social pedagogical tradition. This approach to learning is based on children’s interests. It emphasises learning through play and learning in relation to other children. This tradition is still strong in Norway, but over the last years there has been a tendency towards seeing ECEC more and more as preparation for school (Bennett, 2005; Grøset, 2010; Hogsnes, 2007).

The developments in ECEC sector also must be discussed in light of Management by Objectives (MBO) in the public sector. Over the last decades MBO, or New Public Management (NPM) has been an important principle of the organisation of public services in many countries (Lægreid & Christensen, 2011). Although some recent reforms have moved away from this concept, NPM still plays an important role in administrative practices in Norway (Hansen, 2011; Moen & Granrusten, 2013). NPM is based on indirect control instead of direct governance and by decentralising power and authority (Øgård, 2014), and was introduced as reforms aiming at modernisation of the public sector (Hansen, 2011).

The theory that underlies the practice of MBO in Norwegian government is originally from North America and are based mainly on Drucker’s (1955) theories of MBO (Utdanningsforbundet, 2013). A central reason for Drucker theories of MBO was the need to counteract fragmentation

and individualisation in organisations that were dependent on working for common, overarching goals. According to this theory and later refinements, there are three different integrated components in MBO (Drucker, 2007; Johnsen, 2007). These are formulation of goals, participation (participation of employees in formulation of goals and decision making) and lastly results based assessments (feedback on results).

ECEC has also been a part of this change in public organisation and management and the ECEC sector has moved from autonomy to MBO (Greve, Jansen & Solheim, 2014). One reason for this is a stronger emphasis on ECEC as a part of lifelong learning and as a preparation for school. This has resulted in more similarities with schools when it comes to organisation and management (Greve et al., 2014). The governmental agencies have taken more interest in the sector over the last years, and early childhood affairs have become an important part of political debates on a national level (Skjæveland, 2014). This is one explanation of the shift from autonomy to MBO for the sector as a whole. When it comes to each individual ECEC centre, the question of autonomy might be somewhat different.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research is based on document analysis, inspired by critical discourse analysis. Some central policy documents have been analysed to explain what kind of guidance the directors receive from the governmental agencies on the leadership of ECEC centres as learning arenas. First and foremost the analysis looks at the *Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*, laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research. It is the most central policy document in the ECEC sector in Norway and has the status as the national curriculum and regulatory framework. The Framework Plan is a regulation to the ECEC national law (The 'Kindergarten Act' in the Government's official translation), and the law itself will also to some degree be drawn into the analysis (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). In addition to this, some other relevant policy documents are also included in the discussion. These are a selection of official reports from the Norwegian Government and White Papers from recent years dealing with ECEC (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009, 2013; Øie, 2012).

Discourse analysis is a way to examine how meaning is created. There are several theories of discourse and approaches to discourse analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Central to all of them however, is a focus on language and the ability to reflect the reality. The term discourse is

occasionally used as an explanatory category, where discourse becomes the cause of beliefs and actions which again produces certain social and cultural practices. Furthermore, the term can be used as critical ideology, as an approach to reveal and analyse the dominant voices and ways of understanding the present in a concrete text, for example, in a text concerning ECEC policy (Ulleberg, 2007; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis aims to describe, explain, criticise and to reveal what is implicit or hidden in policy texts (Fairclough, 2010). It is also an interdisciplinary approach, where one combines a linguistic analysis with knowledge of the context in which discourse takes place (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). This approach to discourse analysis is an attempt to unite concrete empirical linguistic analysis with an analysis of the context. According to Fairclough (2010), concrete text analysis forms the basis of the reflective analysis, but this is not sufficient. The researcher must also include an analysis of the relationship with social processes and structures. It is thus a combination of textual analysis and social analysis and the method attempts to make visible the relationship between language and the surrounding society (Fairclough, 2010).

Power and hegemony are important concepts in Fairclough's method, and this is also central to this study. The policy documents exercise power, not just formally but also through the way that concepts and phenomena are defined and explained. The language and the use of concepts in the policy documents thus lay the ground for the hegemony of certain meanings, concepts and interpretations of leadership of learning.

In this chapter, critical discourse analysis method is not followed to the letter, because this is a very limited analysis on a rather small collection of empirical source material. Rather, the analysis is based Fairclough's linguistic analysis, his understanding of how a text only makes sense in a larger context as well as on the emphasis on power and hegemony.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All ECEC centres in Norway are obliged to base their activities on the values established in the Norwegian Kindergarten Act, and the law defines what the duties of the ECEC centres are.² In the first chapter, which is about the

2 The Norwegian term for ECEC centre is 'barnehage', and they are centres for children aged 1–6. In the official Norwegian documents about ECEC which is published in English language, 'barnehage' is consequently translated to 'kindergarten'. The directors of the ECEC centres are called 'Head teacher' in the policy documents.

purpose and content of ECEC, it is stated that the centres shall ‘safeguard the children’s need for care and play, and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development.’ The promotion of learning is one of the key duties of the ECEC centres. The law also states that the ECEC shall have ‘adequate pedagogical and administrative leadership’ (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005, chapter V, section 17). The ECEC is required to have a head teacher who is a trained ECEC teacher or has other relevant college education for working with small children. The law also states that centres should have pedagogical leaders that must be trained as ECEC teachers.³ These requirements mean that the leaders in the centres should have pedagogical education, and cannot have a background as general leaders or managers. Hence, the law presupposes educational skills among the leaders in the sector (Gotvassli, 2013).

The *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* is a regulation to the Kindergarten Act, laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research. The framework plan provides ‘guidelines on the values, content and tasks’ of ECEC (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 4). The aim of the Framework Plan is ‘to give head teachers of kindergartens, pedagogical leaders and other staff a binding framework for the planning, implementation and assessment of the activities of kindergartens’ (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 4). As learning is one of the core activities in the centres one might therefore expect that the plan would give some advice or guidance on the centres leadership of learning.

Taking a closer look at the Framework Plans’ statements about the directors’ responsibilities (in the plan the director of a centre is called ‘head of the kindergarten’), this topic is only mentioned a few places in the plan. Under chapter 1.7, ‘Kindergartens as pedagogical undertakings’:

Kindergartens shall have a pedagogical leadership. The head teacher of the kindergarten and the pedagogical leader have particular responsibility for the planning, implementation, assessment and development of the kindergarten’s tasks and content. They are also responsible for advising the rest of the staff so that they have a common understanding of the kindergarten’s responsibilities and tasks. The head teacher of the kindergarten’s role involves ensuring that individual staff members are able to make use of their skills. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, pp. 18–19).

3 ‘Pedagogical leader’ is an official job title that exists in all Norwegian ECEC centres. The pedagogical leader is a trained teacher with a bachelor’s degree and is the leader of a smaller group of staff and children in the centre.

The director's responsibility here is tied to an overall responsibility for the leadership of all aspects of ECEC, but not specifically to children's learning, and there is no particular link between managerial responsibilities and learning. Comparing the four leader functions mentioned earlier, it appears that pedagogical functions (production), human resource functions and external functions can all be found in this description of the leaders' duties, whereas it is harder to interpret administrative functions into these requirements. Nevertheless, there is a particular emphasis on educational leadership, on the centres' 'production', in that the director has a particular responsibility to develop the centre's content and tasks. One of the few concrete requirements mentioned, the director's guidance of the staff, is not connected specifically to children's learning, but is according to Gotvassli (2013) and Børhaug and Lotsberg (2011) also a part of the pedagogical function, the centre's 'production'.

The framework plan also includes a description of the director's responsibility when it comes to planning, documentation and assessment.

Heads of kindergartens have a particular responsibility for implementing and leading the kindergarten's work on planning, documentation and assessment. Pedagogical leaders are responsible for the planning, documentation and assessment of work with the group of children for whom they are responsible. Supervisors of kindergartens and pedagogical leaders are responsible for ensuring that the aims and framework of a kindergarten are clear to the staff, that staff develop a shared understanding of the aims, and that parents receive reliable and sufficient information about the activities of the kindergarten. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 44)

Here, all of the four leadership functions are represented in the responsibilities of the director and pedagogical leader. Some of the tasks are delegated from the director to the pedagogical leader. Research by Moen and Granrusten (2013) confirms that this requirement is also observed in practice. But again, pedagogical functions are emphasised, especially related to establishing targets for the centres' activities, supervision of the staff and assessment of the work being done. Therefore, some emphasis on human resource functions is evident. Entrepreneurial or strategic leadership is included with the emphasis on the directors' responsibility to clarify goals for parents. The administrative function, as described by Gotvassli (2013) and Børhaug and Lotsberg (2011) is less clear, but in requirements related to documentation, administrative responsibility is noticeable. None of the requirements for the director is related to leadership responsibilities for children's learning; they are not even connected to ECEC as a pedagogical undertaking, only to the overall responsibility for the centres goals and activities.

Some of the leader's responsibilities are delegated to the pedagogical leader. This work is connected directly to the group of children, and thus can be linked closest to children's learning. But the pedagogical leader's responsibility is only related to planning, assessment and documentation. Not even here, in the explanation of the requirements for those who have responsibility for the daily work with children is anything said about the leadership of children's learning. The *Framework Plan* states that pedagogical leaders are supposed to perform leader functions, such as planning and daily leadership of both staff and children in their group. However, still relatively few of the many aspects of the ECEC leader functions are highlighted and emphasised in the plan.

A more specific requirement is connected to the centre's annual plan. All centres have an obligation to publish an annual plan for the centre, and the head of the ECEC has "responsibility for the content of the annual plan in terms of learning areas" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 46). The annual plan is supposed to contain information about how the ECEC will work on care, formation, play and learning of the children (Gotvassli, 2013). The annual plan is intended to be a tool to help ECEC staff to run activities in a conscious and specified manner, be a starting point for parents' opportunities to influence the content of the ECEC, a basis for municipal supervision of the ECEC, as well as a source of information about the pedagogical work of the ECEC to the owners, politicians, municipality, partners of the ECEC and other stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 46).

All of the four leader functions are present in the director's responsibilities for the annual plan. The development and implementation of the annual plan thus implies a responsibility for developing ECEC as a learning arena for children. And it is also stated that the director has the overall responsibility for this. It is thus also a requirement that underlines the director's responsibility for the leadership of children's learning. But there are no further guidelines for how this responsibility should be performed. Hence, this requirement is also related to a general responsibility for the contents of the ECEC centre.

The last of the directors' requirements in the plan is also the one which is most closely associated to children's learning, although this connection is not very strong.

The head of the kindergarten has overall responsibility for the pedagogical activities being assessed in a planned, systematic and open manner. She or he must ensure that the assessments are carried out with the understanding of the parents and the staff group. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 47)

Here it is emphasised that the director has overall responsibility for the ECEC centre as a pedagogical undertaking. Learning is a central part of the pedagogical activity. 'Formation through care, play and learning' is the core of ECEC as pedagogical undertaking. This is the most direct link between leadership and learning in the *Framework Plan*. But it is only connected to the *assessment* of the pedagogical activities, and not to children's learning in the form of organising, planning or conducting learning activities. In relation to the four managerial functions, it is clear that this is all about the centres' 'production', about pedagogical leadership (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2011; Gotvassli, 2013). But it is also a clear responsibility for personnel management and entrepreneurship, or strategic leadership. This applies primarily to the educational work.

As can be seen, there is not a very clear connection between the leader responsibilities in the policy documents and the leadership functions, and the requirements for the leaders are explained in a rather general manner. However, there is an emphasis first and foremost on the pedagogical functions, and to some degree on the human resource functions. This is not surprising, as the pedagogical function is considered to be the core function in leadership of EEC centres (Bleken & Røtnes, 2005; Moen & Granrusten, 2013). The focus on pedagogical functions might be interpreted as a way of emphasizing leadership of learning. But the directors' responsibilities for the ECEC as a pedagogical undertaking have only an indirect link to the recent emphasis on the responsibility for children's learning. In the part of the *Framework Plan* where children's learning is most explicit that is, in the seven learning areas, the leaders' responsibilities are not mentioned at all.

According to the *Framework Plan*, an ECEC centre's program is meant to be built on a holistic pedagogical philosophy, with care, play, learning and formation being at the core of activities (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 5). In order to make it easier for the centres to plan a varied and comprehensive pedagogical programme, the Framework Plan divides the learning content into seven learning areas that are of central importance to experience, exploration and learning. The Framework Plan takes a very broad perspective on learning where social and linguistic skills are important, and these skills are present in all seven learning areas. (Haug & Storø, 2013; Lillemyr, 2013). The division into seven learning areas can be seen as a way of organising learning in the ECEC centres, which in turn will be helpful to the leaders of the centres. Surveys conducted among directors confirm that they find this helpful in their efforts to organise learning activities (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009). For each learning area, there are

formulated goals for the centres effort to promote children's development and learning. However, the ECEC centres have a great degree of freedom when it comes to how to achieve these goals, which is a clear illustration of MBO.

This shows that there is a lack of connection between leadership and learning in the government guidelines. The guidelines say a lot about learning. The *Framework Plan* says something about leadership and the ECEC leaders' general responsibilities, but they are to a very small degree connected to the leadership of children's learning. Hence, the ECEC directors have a high degree of freedom, as well as responsibility in the leadership of learning. This freedom and responsibility is also underlined in the Framework Plan:

'Kindergartens are pedagogical centres that shall be planned, documented and assessed. Individual kindergartens are free to choose methods and scopes...' (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 44). The high degree of freedom and autonomy also indicates that the authorities have a high degree of confidence in the ECEC directors' expertise and competence.

The trust in the staff' competence is an inevitable part of MBO. Efforts to strengthen leadership has been tightly connected to the implementation of this principle of organisation of public services (Lægneid & Christensen, 2011). Norway's public sector, as in many other countries, is highly influenced by MBO (Hansen, 2011). According to Johnsen (2007), the theory of MBO was distorted when it was introduced in Scandinavia in the 1980s. This includes the notion that it is only politicians who formulate goals. In Norway, MBO is seen as a political management instrument that creates separation between politics and administration, it is the politicians who formulate goals and the administration that operationalise them (Utdanningsforbundet, 2013). However, in real life, the distinction between politics and administration is not always as clear. There has been relatively little attention to how goals should be formulated and communicated to the sector to in order to establish a practice where the goals are understood, and the results could be achieved by relevant and accepted methods.

The directors won't find any concrete instruction in the government guidelines on how to conduct leadership of learning. But this is unlikely to be expected in a sector based on the principles of MBO. According to MBO, the exact intention is that there should not be any instructions on how to achieve the objectives. Nevertheless, it is striking that two important and simultaneously enhancing requirements for ECEC, responsibility for learning and requirements for good leadership, are not connected in any way in the government guidelines in the sector.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis shows that the government guidelines say very little about leadership of learning. Hence, the ECEC directors have a high degree of freedom, as well as responsibility in the leadership of learning. This responsibility will increase in the near future. The conservative government that came into power in 2013 has signalled an even heavier emphasis on learning in ECEC in the future. If the governmental agencies put forward more demands and expectations on the ECEC centres, without following up these demands with corresponding guidelines, it will be even more difficult for the leaders in the centres to fulfil the expectations from the educational authorities. The lack of connection between leadership and learning in the government guidelines, underlines the need for further research on leadership and management of ECEC centres as learning arenas.



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