



CHAPTER
11

Early childhood landscape in Norway and reflections on Australia and Finland

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Norway has a long history of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The first institution, the so-called Children's Asylum, was established in Trondheim in 1837. When the Act of Early Childhood Centres was adopted in 1975, the building of Early Childhood Centres (ECCs) increased substantially. Today Norway has different solutions for an ECC, both private and public ones (47% public), including institutions for children up to five years, as the age of school entrance since 1997 is six. Both private and public provisions are supported by the state. However, the municipality has the overall responsibility for the ECCs, independent of whether private or public. In recent years, Norway has developed close to full coverage, meaning that all children who wish can have a place in an ECC. From 2005 a maximum price was set for parents, as the expenses are covered in three ways; by the state, the municipality, and the parents.

For the first time in history, a National Framework Plan was developed in 1996, including guidelines for all ECCs. Also see *Starting Strong I*, published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001), for information and critical comments on the Norwegian systems for early childcare, related to other countries (also see OECD, 2013). From 2005 the ECCs were administratively moved to the Ministry of Education and Research, and the ECC was now considered the first step in the formal educational system. All these aspects are heavily influencing leadership.

A new *Framework Plan* for ECCs was published in 2006 and revised five years later (Ministry of Research and Education, 2011). Recent white papers (White paper no. 41 2009, and White paper no. 24, 2013) state that quality

should be highlighted in the ECCs. Therefore ECCs should develop stimulating learning environments for children as indicated in the Framework Plan. The emphasis on learning has lately been of increasing interest in the sector, although the learning aspect is also highly debated. The Framework Plan 2011 includes the formulation of The Act of ECCs of 2005 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2008), and states:

The ECC shall in cooperation and shared understanding with the home attend to children's need for care and play, and promote learning and "bildung" (German for personal formation), as fundamental to an all-round development (translated from Norwegian)

This is understood as what is called a society's mandate. However, it is momentous to see the concept of *learning* in a broad perspective, including acquisition and application, and comprising individual processes in a social context (Lillemyr, 2007, p. 103), according to how it is also seen in the national Framework Plan and the white papers. Though, learning in a broad perspective has to be considered closely related to the concept of play, even if they are two different phenomena (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006; Lillemyr, 2009). Moreover, the Framework Plan includes seven broad themes outlined for all ECCs to work with during the year, such as "communication, language and text", "arts, culture and creativity", "amount, space and form" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011, p. 38 ff.). Importantly for leadership, in the *National Framework Plan* the organisation as learning arenas for children and the development of ECCs as learning organisations, has long been clearly emphasised. However, these two learning perspectives have recently been much debated (Gotvassli, 2013), based upon varied perspectives on play and learning in early years education (Lillemyr, Dockett & Perry, 2013), and based upon recent research on leadership (Børhaug, 2015).

According to the Act, the ECC director has to be educated as an early childhood education teacher (bachelor) or other educational competence. All educational leaders need to be educated as an early childhood education teacher, with responsibility for a certain amount of children (related to children's age). Within these frames, the leadership structure can vary substantially. Recently there has been a strong tendency, not least based on economic reasons, towards larger ECC units. Consequently, the organisational structures have also been changing. However, in Norway there has been a lack of research on the topics of management and leadership in ECCs (Guldbrandsen, Johansson & Nilsen, 2002), with a few exceptions (Gotvassli, 1990; Børhaug et al., 2011). In particular, little attention has been

paid to the relation between leadership and the way in which ECCs organise learning for children. Adopting and translating changing demands may in this case, involve adjusting core processes in ECCs.

In a discussion of learning organisations and of *the learning leader*, Schein (2010: 297) was particularly interested in understanding how leaders manage cultural change and develop new leadership strategies in response to societal changes and new organisational demands. As a consequence, from 2012 several university colleges at several locations in Norway, a national program for the further education of ECC directors was established, to develop their competence according to recent demands and challenges. Additionally, new research into the recent changes and tendencies and their consequences is required in Norway. Learning seems to be a central concept in this concern.

REFLECTIONS ON AUSTRALIA

Studying leadership that improves learning in a span from birth to 12 years Marsh shows the importance of getting better connections between early childhood and schools through: a shared language for learning and leadership, establish effective teams, and the leader's presence. In Norway too, research on connecting leadership to improve learning between ECCs and schools is needed. So the research of Marsh will be relevant to pursue in Norwegian settings as well.

Australian research indicated that directors in early childhood centres modelling inclusive leadership styles and facilitating distributed leadership can be influential in building professional relationships among staff. In Norway it would be of interest to examine if this can be a way for directors to inspire staff to promote children's learning.

Research based on a social systems perspective, showed conditions that nurture educators' professional learning when change is necessary, are created through complex interrelationships between leadership, collaborative professional development and attention to centre organisation. Furthermore, the Australian research on mentor teacher programs will be useful to Norwegian readers as well when looking for professional pathways to improve leadership roles.

REFLECTIONS ON FINLAND

Meta-analysis of ECEC studies in Finland focusing pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership, and leadership in changing ECEC organisations might

be interesting to Norwegian readers in relation to getting ideas to examine director's responsibilities more thoroughly. Research on the educational leader's responsibilities for promoting children's learning is scant so far. Moreover, distributed pedagogical leadership also needs further research in Norway.

Recent legislative proposals (National Board of Education) are responsible for drawing up an ECE curriculum, which will require municipalities to develop It it particularly interesting for Norwegian readers to learn from the Finnish research on ECE leadership with capacities for curriculum implementation and pedagogical change, and to see if distributed pedagogical leadership could be an efficient strategy for this. It might also be interesting for Norway to pursue research on joint leadership as an alternative to complex hierarchical leaderships of large ECCs.

Interview research for developing leadership at the end of in-service leadership training programs in Finland is relevant and interesting in relation to the situation in Norway with several national programs of further education of ECC directors that is established. This research might provide ideas for developing directors' competence according to the contemporary demands and challenges, and to see if it's possible to foster opportunities for novice leaders to learn from the more experienced ones.



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1 ECCs in Norway are called Kindergartens, in Norwegian “barnehager” (ECCs for children aged 0–6 yrs.)