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The Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care institution as a learning arena: autonomy and positioning of the pedagogic recontextualising field with the increase in state control of ECEC content

Mette Nygård

Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education and NTNU, Departement of Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

When the responsibility for ECEC institutions was placed under Ministry of Education and Research in 2006, the ECEC institution as a learning area was brought in to the foreground in early education and care policy. Norwegian ECEC institutions have been subject to a greater degree of state control, and we can ask if the state is trying to undermine the profession's autonomy through a strong degree of control over the content in education. This article is based on interviews with eight preschool teachers with long experience working in ECEC institutions. I will illuminate their subjective experiences of the ECEC institution as a learning arena for children, and discuss how they position themselves as agents due to a greater degree of state control. Thus, the relation between the pedagogic and the official recontextualising field will be discussed. Autonomy and the concept of framing will be central.

KEYWORDS

Early childhood education and care; Bernstein; learning; framing; profession; autonomy; positioning

Introduction

The Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions have undergone significant changes over the last 10 years. In 2006, the responsibility for ECEC institutions was placed under the Ministry of Education and Research. The Framework Plan for the Content and Task of Kindergartens was also revised that year, and the subject areas in the Framework Plan were given a clearer connection to the subject areas in the curriculum for the Norwegian primary and secondary school *Kunnskapsløftet* [Knowledge Promotion Reform]. These changes brought the idea of the ECEC institution as a learning arena more into the foreground than had previously been the case, and learning has also been brought closer to the quality concept (Biesta, 2011; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2010; Gulbransen & Eliassen, 2013; Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012; Nygård, 2015; Østrem et al., 2009). In the new policy for Norwegian ECEC institutions, learning is also linked to economic concerns by focusing on future human capital (White Paper no. 16, 2006–2007; White Paper no. 41, 2007–2008; White Paper no. 24, 2012–2013). Thus education and economic planning have been more tightly linked together (Qvortrup, 2012).

Norwegian ECEC policy builds on complex and at times contradicting learning discourses (Nygård, 2015, 2016), and different agents will be interested in establishing premises for the type of knowledge

that should be assigned societal legitimacy (Bernstein, 2000/1995). This conflict plays out in different arenas. Bernstein (2000/1995) distinguishes between the official and the pedagogical recontextualising field. The official recontextualising field is directly controlled by the state authorities, for example through legislation and bureaucratic regulations, while the academic pedagogy community constitutes the pedagogical recontextualising field. Bernstein claims that through strong control the state is attempting to weaken the pedagogical recontextualising field and reduce its autonomy over the construction of the pedagogical discourse (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 33).

Although the official guidelines for the content of ECEC are more comprehensive and detailed than earlier, there is no clear line from political ambitions to pedagogical practice (Bernstein, 2000/1995). Cuban (1993) claims that evidence of curriculum reforms and political pressure is scarcely to be found in practical work, and Hopmann (2010) believes that tradition and culture influence what is happening on the practical level more than political decisions. The degree to which political guidelines impact practice is difficult to measure. By interviewing preschool teachers¹ with long experience in ECEC institutions I will illuminate their experiences and subjective understandings of the changes in the ECEC as a learning arena over the last 10–15 years. My aim is to describe if and in what way external regulations influence the preschool teachers'

autonomy through an analysis of how they position themselves as agents. The research question for the article is: *In what way do preschool teachers position themselves as agents viewed in the light of the increase in state control of the content in ECEC institutions?* Bernstein's concept of framing is put to use as an analytical tool to illuminate the relation between external regulations and the preschool teachers' positioning.

Political context

When the responsibility for Norwegian ECEC institutions was assumed by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2006 it formally became part of the learning pathways. ECEC institutions have also been given greater attention on the political level, both nationally and internationally, and this has led to a greater focus being placed on ECEC institutions as a learning arena. According to Hennem, Pettersvold, and Østrem (2015, p. 308), there is also a keener focus on children's goal attainment, which may lead to learning being more structured and goal oriented.

The higher expectations for learning outcomes of children in ECEC institutions (Greve, 2015; Nygård, 2015, 2016) may be tied to the fact that societal development in recent years has become more knowledge-intensive and differentiated (Adolfsson, 2012; Gulløv, 2012; Kampmann, 2013; Korsvold, 2008; Krejsler, 2013; Steinsholt, 2009). Early efforts, language and mapping of skills are central discourses in today's ECEC policy (White Paper no. 16 (2006–2007); White Paper no. 41 (2008–2009); White Paper no. 24 (2012–2013), and more explicit expectations are being set for what a child should be able to do and know at various points in time.

Norwegian ECEC policy demonstrates continuity and diametrical opposites, and also lies in a field of tension between pedagogical identities and knowledge seen in relation to the knowledge society of the future and to economic growth, but at the same time also to social competence, democracy and solidarity (Nygård, 2016). Even if the state determines the overriding content of ECEC institutions, the content is continually being debated and undergoing continuous change (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012). The degree of transmission also depends on the degree of state and local-authority control and how knowledge manifests itself in different ECEC institutions and through practices (Bernstein, 2000/1995). The type of understanding and interpretation the preschool teachers have in terms of learning, and the profession's degree of autonomy in its practice, are key points of discussion in this article.

Profession

The term 'profession' may be defined as 'a professional work category united by decisive influence and autonomy when it comes to defining the contents, quality criteria, control mechanism, education, certification and ethics of work' (Frostenson, 2015, p. 21). A profession generally has a specialised education (Molander & Terum, 2008) and performs its work on behalf of society. This work or the profession's duties are defined in a social mandate (Grimen, 2008). The position of preschool teacher is a professional work category, tasked with carrying out duties on behalf of society and obliged to administrate society's interests in close cooperation with the homes of the children. What is in the children's best interests must be a fundamental consideration for the performance of the profession (section 1 of the Kindergarten Act, 2005; The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, 2011). Preschool teachers are thus a connecting link between society and the individual, and accordingly has different and complex interests to uphold.

Performing a profession may be understood as a place where skills and policy meet (Østrem, 2015, p. 263). A person working in a profession may thus be claimed to be in a field of tension between various types of responsibility. We may distinguish between professional responsibility and accountability. Professional responsibility is connected to trusting that a performer in the profession will act according to moral knowledge and judgement, while accountability refers to how a performer in a profession is obliged to deliver results based on predetermined goals. These results are checked by others outside the profession.

Since the 1980s, preschool teachers have increasingly been given additional tasks and their work methods have been changed as a result of bureaucratisation and the management by objectives system (Korsvold, 1997), and more and more demands and formalised procedures are added to their mandate (Børhaug, 2011). As ECEC institutions have become part of the national education strategy and more closely linked to the knowledge economy, this may have contributed to changing the conditions relating to the performance of the profession for preschool teachers. Global competition and optimisation of human capital are exerting greater pressure on how agents such as preschool teachers may facilitate for children to develop their competence to become 'creative, innovative and enterprising agents' (Krejsler, 2013, p. 72). Therefore, preschool teachers have landed in a tension field between a number of expectations and requirements (Greve, 2015; Østrem, 2015).

The pedagogical discourse and the concept of framing

Bernstein (2000/1995) described rules which shape social construction of the pedagogic discourse and its varying practices. He sought to explain the internal logic of pedagogic discourse and how different forms of communication may help to maintain the various discourses. Pedagogic discourse is defined as 'a rule which embeds two discourses; a discourse of skills of various kinds and their relation to each other, and a discourse of social order' (Bernstein, 2000/1995, pp. 32–33). The pedagogic discourse thus includes rules which create skills, rules regulating relationships to each other and rules creating social order.

State control may establish the premises for pedagogical practice by, for example, having a Framework Plan. Strong state control gives strong frames for communication, while weak guidelines conversely give weak frames. Framing refers to the relationship between *transmitters* (the preschool teachers) and *acquirers* (the children). Bernstein developed models where the structure of the pedagogic discourse was analysed so that the pedagogical practice could be described. Framing may therefore be described as a way of realising a discourse (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 80).

A more detailed explanation of this will be provided and discussed in the next section.

Selection and method

One of the goals of my research project was to illuminate the experiences preschool teachers talk about when it comes to possible changes relating to the ECEC institution as a learning arena. I therefore interviewed eight preschool teachers with experience ranging from nine to 25 years in ECEC institutions. I interviewed selected preschool teachers from four municipalities, where the ECEC institutions had different structures and ownership, including municipally run, privately operated, and base and unit organised institutions.² The informants also worked with different age groups.

The interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. I applied a semi-structured interview guide (Kvale, 2012, p. 143). This means that I had drawn up an overview of various topics and proposals for key questions I wanted to ask. The main topics in my

interview guide were centred on how a regular day in the ECEC institution looks like, the informants' reflections about the ECEC institution as a learning area and children's learning, the ECEC institution's priority area, and how the informants relate to political priority areas. I was also open for the informants to introduce topics I had not prepared in advance. My concern was therefore to be attentive to follow up what the informants focused on. The interviews were recorded on a tape-recorder and then transcribed. The information from the study is treated properly due to the guidelines of the Norwegian National Research ethics committees.³ The data material is handled confidentially, meaning only the researcher can identify the responses from the informants. All the informants have been made anonymous and no one can find out what preschools or teachers have participated in the study. In the reproduction of my data material fictitious names have been used.

I will shortly present the eight informants. *Inger* graduated in 1989, and started to work in an ECEC institution right away. In all, she has worked in the same ECEC institution for 19 years, both as a preschool teacher and as a head teacher. *Sigrid* and *Berit* work in the same ECEC institution. *Sigrid* worked both as an assistant and as a skilled worker before she graduated as a preschool teacher in 2000. *Berit* graduated as a preschool teacher 25 years ago and has worked in two different ECEC institutions before she started in this institution. *Karen* graduated in 2007, and has worked in the same institution since then. *Stine* and *Linn* work in the same institution. *Stine* graduated in 2006, and has worked in this institution since 2012. *Linn* started to work as an assistant in the late 1980s, and graduated as a preschool teacher in 2004. *Elise* and *Torun* also work in the same institution. *Elise* graduated in 2003, and *Torun* graduated in 1997. Both *Elise* and *Torun* have worked as assistants and preschool teachers. *Torun* has worked in the same institution since 1990.

In the schematic outline below, the informants are presented together with information about the various institutions. I would like to clarify that this is not a comparative study. The selection of institutions and informants is made to obtain a composite and diverse data material based on an idea that various municipalities and institutions promote various focal areas, and thus, various opportunities for preschool teachers positioning.

| Name | Children age | Ownership | Type of institution | Municipality |
|--------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Inger | 3–5 years old | Privately operated | Unit organised | Large |
| Sigrid | 0–3 years old | Municipally run | Base organised | Middle-sized |
| Berit | 3–5 years old | Municipally run | Base organised | Middle-sized |
| Karen | 3–5 years old | Municipally run | Base organised | Large |
| Stine | 0–3 years old | Municipally run | Unit organised | Small |
| Linn | 3–5 years old | Municipally run | Unit organised | Small |
| Elise | 0–3 years old | Municipally run | Unit organised | Small |
| Torun | 3–5 years old | Municipally run | Unit organised | Small |

To summarise, these informants are suitable to illuminate the increase in state regulations and how preschool teachers are positioning themselves in consequence of the increase in state control content.

Analysis

The transcribed interviews were read several times and then systematically analysed. To gain an overview of the data material I initially undertook a thematic analysis so I could analyse themes across the material (Mason, 2002; Thagaard, 2013, p. 181) both to visualise the width of the material and the material in its entirety. I therefore categorised the material into various topics, like *state control, children's learning, content, the ECEC institution in relation to school, how to work with the subject areas in the Framework Plan, municipal priorities, and so on*. I would like to point out that the aim was to preserve a holistic perspective in the material, and therefore the information from each respondent was kept in the context it originally appeared in. The thematic analysis was nevertheless useful for gaining an overview of the material and for highlighting similarities and differences between the statements made by the informants.

After obtaining a thematic overview of the material, I applied Bernstein's code theory, emphasising *framing* (Bernstein, 1975/2003, 2000/1995), to describe the topics which emerged from the thematic analysis. Framing describes various forms of control which regulate and legitimise communication in pedagogical relationships, meaning how things are spoken about and what type of space is constructed. Framing is therefore used to analyse different forms of legitimate communication and to illuminate relationships within a context (Bernstein, 2000/1995). As mentioned above, Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 13) distinguishes between two systems of rules which are regulated by the framing: the rules for social and discursive order (Bernstein, 1975/2003, 2000/1995). The rules for discursive order, the *instructional* discourse, refer to the nature of control over the selection of communication, its sequencing, its pacing and the criteria (Bernstein, 2000/1995, pp. 12–13). The instructional discourse is always embedded in the rules for social order, the regulative discourse. The rules for social order forms relationships take in pedagogical practice, as well as expectations for conduct, character and manner (Bernstein, 1990). In the case of strong framing (+Fe) the expectations for conduct and behaviour are high, while in the case of weak framing (–Fe) the expectations are low (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 13).

In this article, the instructional discourse is related to various skills that are considered as important, priorities, pacing, criteria and evaluation. Rules for

social order are related to expectation of conduct, character and manner both to the children and the preschool teachers. The internal value of framing (\pm Fi) describes the degree of influence a child has on learning, and the external value of framing describes whether the preschool teachers have a low (+Fe) or high (–Fe) degree of control over the communication/pedagogy in the transfer context, i.e. the relative autonomy of the teachers based on external regulations.

Important findings from the study will now be presented and discussed according to Bernstein's framing theory.

Presentation and discussion of findings

ECEC institutions have been subjected to a higher degree of state control, and due to this have followed a stronger classification of the ECEC institutions. This means stricter obligations when it comes to content, staff competence and the type of knowledge to be transmitted (Nygård, 2015, 2016). A higher degree of state control of content and the type of knowledge to be transmitted in ECEC institutions are overriding premises for the findings that are presented. Below I will illuminate how preschool teachers position themselves in relation to the stricter guidelines.

Social order: acceptance of mandate

The preschool teachers I have interviewed experience that in the course of the last 10 years increasing demands have been set on the performance of their profession. According to the informants, changes linked to the mandate and content have been particularly prominent after ECEC institutions were placed under the Ministry of Education and Research. The changes mean that they have more governance documents from the state and local authorities that they are obliged to comply with (+Fe). More governance documents imply clearer guidelines for the content of ECEC institutions as well as more demands on the competence of the staff (+Fe). The changes have been experienced as positive for most informants. Elise and Stine have expressed the following thoughts about the change:

Earlier the ECEC institution was like 'a second home'. There was a sofa in the corner, like, in 2000 when we started here. With potted plants on the table and high table and high chairs [...]. Now we have decorated here in a completely different way. We want it to be an institution of learning. We're not housewife substitutes any more, we're preschool teachers! We are educators! (Elise)

We have shifted much of the focus, like 'service staff' and housewife substitutes. We don't dry and wash

clothes here anymore, we don't. This is something the parents look after. The parents have the full responsibility for all the practical matters to do with their child, everything from the water bottle, clothing and more of the meals. They still get what they pay for in the form of what things cost, but we have moved on so that we can have focus on the educational aspect of our job. (Stine)

The preschool teachers have implemented measures relating to the furnishing in the ECEC institution and practical chores to promote and highlight the ECEC institution as an educational institution. They want to have greater focus on the educational aspects of their job by highlighting their role as educators and the ECEC institution as an educational institution.

Classification, which in this case means governmental control over the content of ECEC, establishes premises for the social space. The strength of the classification creates social divisions, and these in turn establish different identities and voices (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 12). Classification thus forms the awareness in the acquisition of the preschool teachers' identities and regulates communication in educational relationships ($\pm Fe$), for example between the preschool teachers or between the preschool teachers and the children.

Different values of framing lead to different expectations relating to conduct, character and behaviour. Strong framing of practice (+Fe) may be said to create higher expectations for the preschool teacher's identity and way of being, such as promoting oneself as an educator by changing the work methods and ways of speaking about one's profession. Stronger classification of the content (Nygård, 2015, 2016) may therefore be claimed to have contributed to strengthening the regulation discourse (+Fe), hence establishing a clearer hierarchy and expectations for the preschool teachers conduct (Bernstein, 2000/1995).

Different possibilities for positioning: halfway between and resistance?

Expectations for conduct and behaviour are also influenced by how much control the local authority has over the ECEC institutions and the demands and expectations the head teacher has for the institution to be a learning arena. The strength of this regulatory control ($\pm F$) is thus important for the opportunities preschool teachers have to position themselves in the performance of their profession.

Linn experiences that the introduction of additional governance documents has changed the conditions relating to what one is expected to be working on when it comes to children's learning. She finds

that the formal learning activities (+Fi) are what the local authority recognises:

I feel that it may be the planned activities that are highlighted externally. But we who work here know that this might not be where all learning takes place, you know? For some, the activities are the most important learning arena, but for someone who is not always attracted to the activities, then for example role play may be the most important learning arena. Thus in a way it's a question of balance. I feel that we're good at making activities and this type of learning visible. But the learning we know takes place in role play is more difficult to make visible.

Several of the informants experience that the planned learning that can be *documented* is what is recognised externally, but they have personal experience of children learning in different ways and in different contexts. As this learning is not as easy to document, they find that it is not recognised in the same way as more 'measurable' results. Rather than change her practice by introducing more planned learning activities and evaluating the learning outcome, Linn and her colleagues have chosen to work with their own competence to be able to document the learning that takes place in all situations for the different children. She states that no skill has more value than another, and recognises each child's interests and individual development. She does acknowledge, however, that this may be a challenging way of working with learning, and it may be difficult to gain recognition for this type of documentation externally.

Inger has also felt the pressure to work more with planned learning, and also confirms that this changed with the implementation of the Framework Plan in 2006:

With the Framework Plan in 2006 there was an even stronger focus on learning and subject areas. We felt it was expected [by the state and local authorities] to change the ECEC institution so it would be more like a school [...]. But we did it in our way, then. Not as literally as it might have been interpreted.

Inger states that with the new Framework Plan and the increased state and local-authority control of the ECEC content, new governance programmes were introduced and also clearer guidelines were provided for what and how the children were to learn (+Fi). Even though she felt pressure from the state and the local authority, in her institution they worked to design their practice based on a more comprehensive understanding of learning based on children's playing and interests (-Fi). As mentioned, Inger was the head teacher in a privately operated institution, and therefore had more influence framing the content than the other informants. Despite that, it became difficult to maintain such a practice because the framing of their professional performance had been restricted. Inger and Linn therefore both believe that they must fight,

both with the parents and the local authority, to gain recognition for this way of working with learning.

To summarise, one could say that all of the informants experience that there is now a greater focus on overriding goals for the ECEC institution as well as on the subject areas in the Framework Plan. They experience that there has been an increase in guidelines relating to what should be carried out in the ECEC institution, and that various authorities and stakeholders establish stricter demands on working with children's learning (+Fe). Stronger classification of the ECEC content implies clearer rules for realisation, which means that the acquirer has less control over selecting what is to be communicated, and sequences, criteria and control of the social base which makes transmission possible (Bernstein, 2000/1995, pp. 12–13). With more direct control over the educational content and methods, we will see a stronger framing of the practice. This means that preschool teachers have less control over selecting content (+Fe) and that the children have less control over communication in an educational context (+Fi). At the same time the opportunity for selecting content in the day-to-day affairs at (\pm Fe) will vary according to the varying degrees of control over the content and expectations for conduct and behaviour in the profession. Not least, the opportunity to choose content will vary and depend on how feasible it is to rebel against the regulating discourse.

The fight for hegemony over the pedagogical discourse is therefore playing out in various recontextualising fields, but the question of what kind of discourse is appropriate today is more conditional on ideology in the official recontextualising field and the relative autonomy in the pedagogical recontextualising field (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 53). The data material shows that practice is designed in different ways depending on the degree of control over the content. The degree of autonomy therefore varies from one ECEC institution and one municipality to the next. Who is victorious in the struggle over the pedagogical discourse will be decisive for how the practice is designed. Preschool teachers hence position themselves differently as agents according to their assignment. I will illuminate this by highlighting the reflections of preschool teachers on changes to their mandate, with the primary focus on their experiences linked to the ECEC institution as a learning arena for children.

Selection over communication: what is valid content?

Most of the informants find it positive that the ECEC institution has been given more and clearer guidelines from the political level, and also find that this gives the institution a richer content. The preschool

teachers are working with a higher awareness of teaching and learning than previously, and they want to render the learning that actually occurs on a day-to-day basis more visible. Sigrid states that 'we have to document and prove what the children learn' to both increase the understanding of the ECEC institution as a learning arena, and to show the politicians what is being done. Sigrid states that they are working more systematically with children's learning than earlier, and that they have improved their skills in planning good learning processes in the day-to-day affairs. This experience is also shared by Berit:

We set aside that time between 9 and 10.30 am. Then we have full focus on the children. Then there are no telephone calls, and nobody can come and intrude, because then we are there for the children. And we also try to do that at all other times, but we have allocated time each day where we must have focus on the children's learning processes.

Berit states that parts of the day in are controlled by the adults, where they plan activities within certain frames. Artwork, playing with building blocks or planned outdoor activities are highlighted as activities where adults participate as active facilitators. They stay close to the children to be able to motivate and challenge them to explore and solve problems. Berit says that they are not too interested in having the children acquire specific skills; rather they want to stimulate the children's creativity and their active search for knowledge.

The preschool teachers document the children's learning processes in both planned activities and in less planned activities. Sigrid says that they are working every day to make the ECEC institution a good learning arena for the children, and that they are aiming to work even better to maintain the focus on what and how they work with the children's learning. Karen also offers some thoughts on this:

Being busy with one thing over time, but in so many different ways, really helps us adults keep track and remain focused. Because there are so many tracks to follow. But there's something about staying on something, really, even if it's nice with side tracks too, but these are not what we should keep our focus on. So we try to be a bit goal-oriented too.

Working with children's learning in this manner is not a random exercise. Karen is not striving to help the children to acquire specific skills, and states that she wishes to be in dialogue with the children and satisfy their interests and involvement, thus stimulating development, creativity and learning. Karen also chooses to follow some tracks and skip others. Selection, i.e. *what* content should be selected and should be omitted, as well as the sequence of the content in terms of what comes first and what comes next can thus be more easily controlled. The

structure of the pedagogy hence gains a stronger framing (+Fi), which means stronger control over the content and the sequence of what is to be gone through (Bernstein, 1975/2003, p. 89), as well as clearer expectations for behaviour and what should be communicated (Bernstein, 2000/1995, pp. 12–13). The structure of the pedagogy is also influenced by the degree of control at the local-authority level when it comes to what should be learnt in ECEC institutions and how this should be evaluated.

The degree of control and more stringent evaluation rules

The value of the framing and the way discourses are transformed in a specific context depend on the extent to which the ECEC institution is subjected to control from both the state and the local authority, how the preschool teachers position themselves, and how they understand and facilitate for children's learning. Through the interviews it has emerged that some local authorities have stronger control than others over what should be learnt and how this should be evaluated. The degree of control by different levels is thus decisive for the opportunities preschool teachers have to form the ECEC institution as a learning arena. Torun states that in her institution they have to determine the knowledge level of the children before they start school:

We have a measuring practice at the local authority where we measure what the school starters know and can do, including in mathematics, social skills and language. More of these things are on the way, I think. (...). We simply sit and test, and have points. We have forms we use. The head teacher is the one who arranges for this, and enters it in the records and so on. And then she can go back and see where the scores were highest, or lowest.

Traditionally, ECEC institutions have been an arena where there has been a comparatively weak degree of external and internal framing in terms of what is put on the agenda, its pacing and evaluation criteria (Bernstein, 2000/1995; Korsvold, 1997). Measuring specific skills, such as language and mathematics, implies stronger classification between subject fields as well as expectations for the acquisition of knowledge. This will help determine the structure of the education and the context that knowledge is transferred and acquired in.

Obligatory documentation of the test results in specific skills of children is an example of strong local authority control, which according to Bernstein (2000/1995) leads to strong external framing (+Fe). The internal framing also becomes stronger (+Fi), which will impact the relationship between the preschool teachers and the children. Strong external framing may cause children to lose

control over the communication in a transmission context more easily, and may lead to more focus on evaluation of knowledge instead of the children's learning processes (Bernstein, 2000/1995). Measuring children at stipulated times create the risk of embedding expectations for what children should be able to master at specified ages. Different children therefore risk being subjected to equal requirements for the skills they should have at a particular age.

To summarise, it can be claimed that the preschool teachers I interviewed experience that stricter guidelines have been established as well as additional expectations from various sources that establish the requirement to work with more planned learning activities. Additionally, there are more demands to document the learning that occurs in various ways. How work is done with children's learning and what should be documented depend on the degree of autonomy the preschool teachers have in relation to state- and local guidelines. The preschool teachers have various expectations and various possibilities for positioning within the realm of state control and local authority. The pedagogical recontextualising field's degree of autonomy varies thus with the strength of external regulations (Bernstein, 2000/1995). The shaping of the ECEC institution as a learning arena varies with the degree of control from different levels, but also as a result of which expectations the preschool-teacher profession has for the content and their own performance of the profession. This will be discussed below.

Discussion: the autonomy of the pedagogical recontextualising field

As a result of stronger classification of the ECEC institution content, I have argued that the internal and the external value of framing have become stronger. Through the performance of the profession and through the profession's encounter with children, the state and local authority guidelines have been transformed (Bernstein, 2000/1995; Clarke & Newman, 1997). Various values of classification between the ECEC institution and the local authority, and different understandings of the learning concept, leave transformation and reinterpretations unequal in different ECEC institutions. Due to this, the preschool teachers have positioned themselves differently. Two preschool teachers to some extent accept the strong local-authority guidelines, three actively resist the stronger goal-directed learning, whilst three systematically work to strengthen the ECEC institution as a learning arena while also maintaining that the children's active and creative search for knowledge is most important.

The majority of the informants have a relatively large degree of autonomy to personally frame the content in the ECEC institution. This is in accordance with how the ECEC institution traditionally has been shaped. Preschool teachers have traditionally had autonomy in the form of pedagogical freedom and absence of control. With a low degree of state control and few governance documents to deal with, there has been a high degree of pedagogical freedom and the opportunity to choose educational methods. Professional responsibility has therefore been linked to moral knowledge and judgement, and the profession generally has enjoyed trust in the performance of its mandate (Østrem, 2015). In many ways this form of autonomy also has a strong position today. At the same time, some of the preschool teachers I interviewed have to deal with several assessment criteria relating to children's goal satisfaction. Even if this is not as prominent as in primary and lower secondary school, there is still a tendency in this direction, for example by testing school starters in some municipalities.

In this context, lines may be drawn between what kind of autonomy should be assigned to the local level and how this should be controlled. The data material shows that different local authorities have different sets of requirements for ECEC institutions in their municipalities so that these institutions are subjected to varying degrees of local-authority governance and control. This means that the ECEC institutions have different requirements and different guidelines to comply with.

According to Mausethagen and Mølstad (2015), a more nuanced way of thinking about autonomy helps illuminate the dynamics between autonomy based on professional knowledge and an increasing degree of control over teachers' work. Although their perspectives are based on school research, they are usable also in an ECEC context. ECEC institutions are, like schools, a part of the Ministry of Education and Research, and are further obliged to comply with a governmental Framework Plan. As mentioned, there also is a clearer connection to the subject areas in the Framework plan and the national curriculum for knowledge promotion in primary and secondary education and training (LK06). It is still important to clarify that the guidelines in the Framework Plan are less structured than in the LK06.

Mausethagen and Mølstad (2015) distinguish between three forms of autonomy. The first form of autonomy is designated *autonomy as pedagogical freedom*. This means that the state defines and controls the goals of education, while the teachers control the methods. Mausethagen and Mølstad (2015) assert that this form of autonomy has come under an increasing degree of pressure with the introduction of stronger control over curricula and the state's need

for control and management of professional practice. In most of the ECEC institutions in my study, there were still no established guidelines for learning outcomes. The preschool teachers I interviewed felt that they generally had freedom to choose their teaching methods. Autonomy in the form of pedagogic freedom is still under pressure because of stronger control over curriculum and practice (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015), which implies stronger values of framing.

The second dimension of autonomy is prominent when the opportunity for teachers to assume responsibility for the performance of their profession is questioned through increased control of the outcome of the education, where the aim is to increase quality and efficiency (Aasen, Prøitz, & Sandberg, 2013). This form of autonomy is seen together with autonomy as pedagogical freedom, but the will and capacity of the teachers to manage themselves is questioned. If there is not enough internal control, the external control will increase (Molander & Terum, 2008). This form of autonomy may be demanding because new requirements and expectations for the performance of their profession will arise, and practice must be exercised and justified in view of this. Thus this means both an internal and an external control over the work of teachers (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015, p. 38).

As mentioned, the majority of preschool teachers I interviewed felt that they generally had freedom to choose their teaching methods. At the same time, they worked more systematically with learning based on different focal areas, and children's learning processes were documented in different ways. They had still the freedom to live up to these demands by arranging for children's learning processes based on children's needs and interests. Instead of introducing instrument to measure children's learning, they changed their practice and behaviour to create good learning processes for the children. As mentioned earlier, they had a resistance to target oriented content in ECEC institutions, and worked to find their way of working within the framework that was set. Although these preschool teachers have a large degree of autonomy, it can still be said that the increased level of state and municipal control has changed the preschool teachers practice due to increased focus on children's learning.

In addition, two of the informants had to report results to the municipality. This is in context with the third form of autonomy Mausethagen and Mølstad (2015) presents. This form of autonomy focuses on the kind of autonomy that may be permitted on the local level and how this is to be controlled. Therefore, the relationship between local and central state control is key here. This form of autonomy also illuminates changes in

curriculum control and principles relating to local autonomy which have long had strong standing in Norwegian policy (Aasen et al., 2013). Today, the local authorities have been given greater responsibility for education with increased requirements for documentation of this responsibility. In addition to the reinforcement of local responsibility and development, the demands for documentation represent a new element (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015). By registering results to the municipality, the results are made visible externally. Such a practice may reduce the profession's autonomy further because it applies increased focus and pressure to gain satisfactory results on tests.

The relation between the official and the professional recontextualising field

It is important to emphasise there is no direct line between the official and the professional recontextualising field. A discourse is transformed through several stages and is created through time, text and space. Each time a discourse shifts from one position to another, space is liberated for ideologies and the discourse is ideologically transformed (Bernstein, 2000/1995).

Clarke and Newman (1997, p. 83) assert that change is not an unavoidable product of economic and political forces, but that change depends on the power of the profession and other stakeholders in the sector. They consider change processes as 'shaped by the interplay of power and interests rather than the inevitable product of macro-economic and political processes' (op. cit.). When ideas change, it is due to the struggle over the content (Bernstein, 2000/1995; Clarke & Newman, 1997), so that it is in the transmission context that an ideological space comes about where discourses are transformed. A higher degree of state control of the ECEC content will nevertheless restrict the ideological space of the profession and its opportunity for change. An increasing obligation to document children's learning may also erode the autonomy of the pedagogical recontextualising field, meaning that the profession will have less control over its own conditions and work content (Molander & Terum, 2008).

As more power is given to the ECEC directors and the local authority, the autonomy of the profession is reduced (Lundström, 2015). Lundström also claims that the state has gained more power through demands for goal attainment, evaluation and systematic quality activities. Increased requirements for control and accountability may end up making the performance in the job of preschool teachers more standardised and rationalised (Apple, 2007), and will also position preschool teachers as 'curriculum deliverers' (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015, p. 38). This

means delivering a predetermined content based on externally defined requirements.

The context for transmission of a discourse and the meaning a discourse creates in time, text and space will have consequences for the approach to learning in ECEC institutions and the knowledge that children should have. Bernstein (2000/1995) maintains that any discourse produces an imaginary average age, which he in turn linked to the acquisition and rate of expected acquisition. Maintaining a log and evaluating learning outcomes may make teaching more outcome-oriented (Bernstein, 2000/1995). With a higher degree of goal-directed activities, a stronger value of the internal and external framing and a reduction in the profession's autonomy, there is reason to believe that learning will become universal and less context-based, thus giving children with different starting points similar expectations at specific ages. A consequence of this may be that expectations for the rate of expected acquisition will be the same for all children, regardless of context, background, aptitudes and needs (Nygård, 2016). There is, moreover, reason to assume, based on this limited study, that the increased focus on learning will occur at the expense of children's freedom to play and blossom through their talents. The question is whether this is a development that is moving in the desired direction.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, curriculum reforms and political pressure are scarcely to be found in practical work (Cuban, 1993), and tradition and culture influence the practical level more than political decisions (Hopmann, 2010). Even though ECEC institutions are experiencing pressure from several quarters, Berge (2015, p. iii) claims that ECEC institutions are 'enmeshed in profound ideas and ideals with roots that do not easily allow themselves to be changed to keep pace with political and pedagogical trends'. The preschool teachers I have interviewed have formed their own practices based on their personal pedagogical platform in interaction with the culture and tradition prevalent in the institution they are working in. The interview material shows that the preschool teachers would prefer to highlight and raise the status of the ECEC institution as a pedagogical institution and their role of educators, whereas the informants position themselves differently in relation to different guidelines for content.

Different positioning appears to be linked to the preschool teachers' degree of autonomy at different levels. Due to the fact that they all have to comply with the same governance documents, the various possibilities of positioning seem to arise from local authorities and the particular institution. Within

these local frames, the preschool teachers have different opportunities shaping ECEC institution into a learning arena. When they have to comply with more governance documents, their autonomy will be restricted, and consequently, their possibilities for positioning.

White Paper no. 19 (2015–2016), which was recently published, will be used as a foundation for a new Framework Plan that most likely will be implemented in 2017. One of the measures mentioned in the White Paper, is that there should be more systematic work on learning. This signals that the state's control over the ECEC institutions will increase to an even higher degree, and there is a risk that the professional responsibility will be overshadowed by the obligation to deliver predetermined outcomes that are to be checked by others outside the profession. Profound ideas and ideals in the profession may therefore be changed or relegated to the background by political trends and decisions, and the opportunity of preschool teachers to position themselves within given frameworks may be even more constrained.

Based on what the preschool teachers in my study have stated, a clear Framework Plan may contribute to highlighting and raising the status of the ECEC institution as a pedagogical institution and the preschool teachers' role of educators. Thus, it is important that they are able to establish their own practice in interaction with the specific context they act within (Bernstein, 2000/1995). Therefore it is crucial that the preschool teachers maintain a large degree of trust and autonomy in their professional performance.

Notes

1. Preschool teacher is a professional work title which requires a bachelor-degree in early childhood education and care.
2. Unit organised means that children are divided into fixed and stable units and usually have their own area in the institution. Base organised means that children are gathered in to several base areas. The rooms in a base organised institution are used in flexible ways.
3. <https://www.etikkom.no/en/ethical-guidelines-for-research/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/b-respect-for-individuals/>. Downloaded 09.01.17.

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