

Leadership for Learning

The New Challenge in
Early Childhood Education and Care



edited by
Per Tore Granrusten, Kjell-Åge Gotvassli,
Ole Fredrik Lillemyr, & Kari Hoås Moen

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Queen Maud's University College, Norway



INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.

Charlotte, NC • www.infoagepub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress
<http://www.loc.gov>

ISBNs: 978-1-64113-160-5 (Paperback)

978-1-64113-161-2 (Hardcover)

978-1-64113-162-9 (ebook)

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Printed in the United States of America

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FOREWORD

Jillian Rodd

This anthology of research articles showcases findings from a major government-funded research project (Management for Learning: Challenges Facing ECECs in Norway) and analyzes aspects of leadership of learning across various Norwegian early childhood care and education contexts and levels. It is edited by a distinguished group of academics from several Norwegian universities, Per Tore Granrusten, Kjell-Åge Gotvassli, Ole Fredrik Lillemyr, and Kari Hoås Moen, and includes contributions from five other active, esteemed and internationally published Norwegian academic researchers.

The scholarly collection of evidence-based studies offers insight into current thinking, theory, practice, factors, and challenges affecting leadership responsibilities for the implementation of recent Norwegian government policy initiatives for the provision and practice of seamless early childhood care and education. As such, the implications drawn from the data-driven findings have international relevance for improving the leadership of young children's learning in contemporary early childhood care and education settings around the world.

Early childhood education and care, along with its contribution to the development of individuals and society, has become the object of exceptional attention from the governments of many countries. This has focused international interest on its profile, and drawn attention to the importance

Leadership for Learning:

The New Challenge in Early Childhood Education and Care , pp. vii–xiii

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of this dynamic, specialist field. Indeed, the provision of high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) through a highly skilled professional early childhood workforce has become a “global policy imperative” (Sumison et al., 2015), and consequently the focus of increasing government attention, thinking and action. As a result, few national public authorities and related bodies take key decisions concerning major changes to ECEC direction, policy and practice in their own country without reference to what is happening abroad (Rodd, 2013).

Given the increasing politicization of the global ECEC community, it is essential that the influences of national policies and practice, especially within the context and impact of shifts in public and market-based service ECEC provision, be understood by those responsible for leading the delivery of such services. Consequently, there is a growing appetite within the early childhood professional community for learning about and comparing the ways different societies and cultures apply understanding about and expertise in leadership to the challenges of enhancing young children’s learning in modern ECEC settings. Today, those who are concerned about raising the quality of provision and enhancing young children’s learning look to countries whose best practice is recognized internationally.

Norway is one such country, having enjoyed a lengthy reputation for the provision of high quality, holistic ECEC for its families by a highly qualified workforce. Norway’s leadership in ECEC is spotlighted regularly by the international early childhood community, as well as by those international bodies responsible for research, policy development, training and quality assessment. Recently, the Norwegian ECEC sector has been responding to significant changes in government policies for the direction of early childhood services. Specifically, these include the rapid expansion of ECEC provision in an increasingly market-based environment, and demands for greater professionalization of the early childhood workforce.

In Norway, effective leadership is considered vital for the achievement of key government aims for ECEC, which currently focus on enhancing quality, expanding availability and pursuing affordability. The pressure of ensuring high quality universal ECEC raises questions about how best to achieve it. Given that capable leadership is recognized as the way forward by many governments and most ECEC professionals, including those of Norway, there is considerable interest in exploring who is or should be responsible, and at what levels, for leading such challenges, and how best leaders can guide and support those early childhood practitioners charged with achieving the current aims of their national governments.

In addressing these and other issues, this book’s collection of fourteen articles is organized into three key sections, each of which focuses around a particular theme. Part I introduces and contextualizes the Norwegian and international early childhood landscape, in and against which the research

studies were conducted. To set the scene, Gotvassli and Skjæveland identify a range of factors (both international and specific to Norway) that impact on present-day ECE provision. An overview of theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin the research studies orients readers to the multiplicity of perspectives incorporated in this publication. Importantly, Gotvassli and Skjæveland draw attention to the fact that research about leadership in ECEC should recognize that it is a structural as well as process-related phenomenon, emphasizing the influential interplay between governance, leadership and professionalism in this increasingly privatized sector.

Lillemyr's theoretical exposition articulates the vital relationship between leadership and young children's learning, how they interact in the traditional Norwegian context of child (as opposed to outcome) focused care and play, and examines the development of the concept of learning from its origins in the disciplines of psychology and educational psychology. Then, given the Norwegian government's recent policy requirement for EC centers to become learning organizations for both adults and children, he discusses the role that competent leadership offers for organizing, guiding and supporting children's learning through the implementation of the government's national curriculum (The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks in Kindergartens).

Part II focuses specifically on the critical issue of Governance, addressing the evolution of the ECEC sector and the recent prioritization of learning in Norway's mix of public and private provision. Governance, a theme that is picked up in a number of the articles, poses questions about the allocation of responsibility for decision-making and delivery across government departments, levels of government, and the public and private sectors.

Børhaug's three contributions to this section focus on different points of potential tension between governance and professionalism. First, the compelling issue of professional jurisdiction is examined, that is, who has the power to make and enforce decisions about what and how young children should learn. Second, the potential impact of government control versus the professional autonomy of qualified ECEC leaders for enhancing children's learning is raised. The role of governance is explored in the Norwegian context of public and private provision, the prioritization of learning, and capacity building. Finally, he investigates the potential for conflict arising from a reduction in pedagogical autonomy over pedagogical approaches to children's learning from the gradual integration of EC centers into larger, more formal organizational structures.

Skjæveland looks at questions about how ECEC professionals' traditional responsibility for learning is transferred from centralized authorities to organizations and individuals at local levels. Currently, the focus of leadership responsibility in Norwegian ECEC provision is to fully imple-

ment recent government policy changes, including the prioritization of learning. Accordingly, he explores what factors influence ECEC leaders' discretionary choices about the way in which they interpret and implement the national curriculum in their centers. The nexus between the critical role of governance and the professional autonomy of qualified ECEC leaders who translate, modify and apply policy guidelines to fit local requirements and contextual realities is identified.

The eight articles in Part III offer in-depth data analyses of various aspects of leadership and their roles in enhancing learning. Gotvassli deconstructs some different perspectives on leadership and asks two pressing questions for ECEC leaders and professionals around the world: what form of leadership is most effective in ECE contexts and how is effectiveness measured? These two critical issues underpin quality assessment and improvement in ECEC settings worldwide.

Moen's quantitative study explores the interplay between leadership responsibility for promoting children's learning, fostering staff development and addressing organizational and structural issues that support both. She again raises the issue of EC teachers' professional autonomy and decision-making regarding what and how children learn in the implementation of the national curriculum and framework, and then poses questions about the impact of pedagogical leadership and practice on promoting learning in both ECEC professionals and children. The extent to which staff development activities for ECEC professionals influence the way in which they work to improve children's learning is also assessed.

Moen goes on to report findings from a multi method research project focused on stakeholder views and expectations about how ECEC leaders best lead children's learning. She examines two important questions for ECEC professionals: how do leaders perceive, manage and address stakeholders' expectations about the function of leadership and children's learning; and how best can leaders act as effective advocates for professional and pedagogical values with diverse stakeholders? Given that stakeholders come from a range of communities and organizations at local and national levels, meeting diverse expectations can be a challenging leadership responsibility for ECEC leaders in many countries.

Following on, Moen and Gotvassli investigate the impact of the increasing politicization, governance and privatization of Norwegian ECEC on learning. They propose that these factors have challenged ECEC's traditional value base, resulting in some degree of controversy and tension between stakeholders' expectations about and approaches to learning in the public and private sectors. The findings indicate that, while the contexts (that is, the sectors) may be different, expectations about and issues relating to learning are similar. The authors point out that dissent can

bring about cross-sector conversations, debates, dialogues and exchanges of ideas and practices that benefit staff development and improve quality.

The issue of quality reform in ECEC, a pressing concern in many countries today, is the focus of Vannebo and Gotvassli's multimethod research study. Currently, in Norway, ECEC leaders are responsible and accountable for implementing government policies, which include ensuring that their centers are committed to the provision of quality services and are perceived as legitimate learning organizations. Using data collated from policy document analysis, surveys and interviews, these authors address several vital questions related to quality reform, including the impact of service expansion on the structure and quality of work in EC centers; the impetus for quality reform; the impact of prepackaged educational programs and standardized quality assessment tools; and the ways in which leaders adjust the implementation of such tools within their centers. The implications from these comprehensive research findings will resonate with those ECEC professionals who are accountable for raising standards and committed to quality reform.

Granrusten argues that the recent changes in government policy and direction for reforming Norway's ECEC sector call for changes to customary leadership approaches and styles. In particular, the Norwegian's government's endorsement of a leadership ideology called New Public Management for reforming ECEC has been influential in the broadening of ECEC leaders' responsibilities. Consequently, professional interest has shifted from distributed leadership to focus more on strategic leadership as a means for effectively meeting ECEC leadership and pedagogical responsibilities with different stakeholders, across levels and arenas. Granrusten's analysis of interview data indicates that ECEC professionals' understanding about what constitutes strategic leadership in ECEC contexts varies greatly and, for it to be effective, more staff development and educational programs for ECEC leaders would benefit its adoption, enactment and impact.

Bøe and Hognestad adopt a practice-based approach to the study of leadership in EC centers, focusing the core function of pedagogical leadership. Their research findings, collected through the innovative methodology of shadowing, suggest that the enactment of pedagogical leadership in Norwegian EC centers actually is embedded as an integral element of everyday, informal leadership. Their data illustrate how everyday leadership, including pedagogical leadership, is a multidimensional and reflective practice that embodies constant interpretation, ethical judgment, and adjustment.

Finally, Gotvassli, using data collected from a national survey of ECEC directors, explores the function of pedagogical leadership in the development of Norwegian EC centers as learning organizations. This chapter examines the extent to which ECEC professionals understand how their pedagogical work contributes to the development of a learning organiza-

tion, what type of staff development activities promote the process, and the role leaders play in transforming EC centers into learning organizations. Their findings indicate that learning by experience, learning collectively, maintaining organizational identity, and integrating individual learning capacities are regarded as important elements in transforming EC centers into learning organizations.

In the increasingly globalized and politicized early childhood community, it is essential that early childhood professionals become familiar with the status quo and the current concerns and challenges of their peers and colleagues in other countries. International literature plays a major role in the recognition of the importance of sociocultural contexts. Opportunely, publications such as this one, become an important route and resource for early childhood professionals who wish to access a rich body of diverse research theory and evidence-based findings that deconstruct, analyze and illuminate key issues and practical solutions, which may have meaning for and be applicable to a range of sociocultural contexts. Additionally, this professional resource offers access to theory and research findings that would otherwise be unavailable to those of us who are not fluent in, and consequently unable to access, the body of professional literature published in Norwegian.

This anthology of research articles offers an opportunity for existing and aspiring early ECEC leaders, as well as those responsible for research and policy-making, to:

- access a body of national leadership research and theory that relates specifically to ECEC contexts,
- pursue interest in international and contextual approaches to leadership in the provision ECEC services,
- expand their knowledge base about the structure and process of leadership in ECEC settings,
- initiate professional conversations and debates about leadership that may bring about consideration of new options,
- explore new directions and challenges relevant to policymaking, research and practice in ECEC settings,
- inspire ECEC professionals to research their own practice and experiment with cutting edge approaches to the provision of services for young children and families, and finally,
- support and strengthen leadership as an integral and undisputed element of the delivery of professional, high quality ECCE services around the world.

While these country-specific research findings contribute to the growing body of international knowledge and research evidence about effective leadership in ECEC, they also challenge readers to assess their own country's reform agenda and accepted ECEC assumptions and practices against Norway's new direction in ECEC policy, delivery and practice.

Most of these Norwegian researchers are active members of and contributors to the collaborative endeavors initiated by the Finnish-based International Leadership Research Forum in early childhood (ILRFEC; www.ilrfec.org). Each of them has a first class reputation for their academic and research work within Norway as well as within the international ECEC leadership research community.

This anthology of research articles is therefore an invaluable resource for early childhood policymakers, professionals, and researchers who wish to learn about Norway's esteemed approach to ECEC, develop greater understanding about theoretical bases, cutting-edge practice and enactment of leadership in different sociopolitical and ECEC contexts, and apply relevant research findings and learnings about leadership to their own leadership and early childhood community.

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