

# Special educational needs practices in preschool: A practice from an architecture perspective

Natallia B. Hanssen, Nord University, ORCID

## ABSTRACT

The present study explores special educational needs (SEN) practices for children with developmental language disorder (DLD) in Belarus and Norway. The theory of practice architectures, which was first presented by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), is used to portray a comprehensive picture of the SEN practices employed in Belarus and Norway. Drawing on empirical data from several studies, the results of this research were analyzed through the theoretical lens of practice architectures and placed into three categories: material–economic, social–political and cultural–discursive arrangements. In this way, the architectures of the SEN practices that were studied in both countries are demonstrated and compared. The results consider the questions of the development of preschool staff “intercultural competence”, “perspective consciousness” and the promotion of a dialogue among the professionals involved in SEN practices concerning how to improve support for children with DLD.

## INTRODUCTION

In both Belarus and Norway, about 4-10% of preschool children, most of them 5-6 years old, have DLD as their primary difficulty. These groups receive the most attention in terms of special educational needs (SEN) assistance (Nordahl, 2018; Bal & Drozdova, 2010). SEN assistance has also been described as a *practice* and is commonly undertaken to provide adapted support and education for children with DLDs. However, in both Belarus and Norway, there are different understandings about what SEN practices are. SEN practice has come to mean simply “what is done” and is coined in everyday phrases like “best practices”

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(Druznin, 2009; Hausstätter & Reindal, 2016; Khitruk, 2017; Nordahl, 2018). SEN practice has also been described as knowledge, meaning and language (e.g., Hanssen & Hansén, 2017; Gajdukevich, 2016; Steinnes, 2014), as the social relations associated with staff–child relationships, namely emotional and instructional support (Hanssen, 2017; Nordahl, 2018). Moreover, SEN practice is depicted as the physical space, which creates visible physical frames that form, shape and create the context for the SEN practice and entails the involved rooms and materials such as furniture, decorations and so forth (Hanssen & Hansén, 2017; Nordin-Hultman, 2004). In addition, SEN practice is understood from the perspective of “policy” as a statutory right and assistance for children who need adapted support or education (Code on Education in the Republic of Belarus [CE] 2011, Art. 14; Kindergarten Act [KA], 2006, § 19). Thus far, the diversity of these definitions shows that SEN practice can somehow be reduced to one of these aforementioned aspects; hence, there is a lack of multidimensionality regarding what SEN practice truly entails.

In both of the studied countries, governments, agencies and academics have significantly claimed that the one-sided perspective of SEN practices may hinder an expanded conception of SEN practices and may result in understanding SEN practices as “floating across the surface”. This superficiality of SEN practices may blindly disrupt children’s language, learning and social development. Moreover, the perfunctory ways of carrying out SEN practices can also mirror the challenges in the representation and identification of the preschool staff as professional practitioners in their work with children who have DLD (Belokurskaja, 2010; Hanssen, 2019; Groven, 2013; Nordahl, 2018).

Therefore, it is timely to consider a framework that can promote a more complex view of SEN practices and that can assist practitioners in underpinning and developing their practices, making preschools a high-quality arena of development and giving children with DLD appropriate qualifications for further learning, social development and future work life (Bishop, 2017; Belokurskaja, 2010; Hanssen, 2018; Khitruk, 2017; Nordahl, 2018).

Responding to this demand, via a comparison between Belarus and Norway, the current article specifically explores the following questions: *How are the SEN practices in preschools orchestrated? Which possibilities and obstructions exist in the development of those practices in preschools?*

Studies aimed at utilizing the potential of comparing SEN practices in traditional Eastern and Western European countries are still sparse (Hanssen, 2017).

Therefore, comparisons of two countries, such as, in the current case, Belarus and Norway, are of particular interest. These countries represent diverse social, political and ideological contexts. Therefore, a comparison of them can help contribute to the literature by providing an additional perspective, demonstrating a variety of views and multidimensionality of SEN practices. Using a comparison is an epistemological strategy, a powerful conceptual mechanism for sharpening attention of several attributes, unique qualities complexities and illustrations of how SEN practices occur in different contexts (Kubow & Blosser, 2016; Stake, 2005). In this way, the hidden assumptions that construct and shape practices may be uncovered, thereby encouraging a conscious and fruitful discussion about what underpin, form and constrain practices (Kubow & Blosser, 2016).

The main reason that guided the selection of the studied countries is that the author has a personal interest, background and understanding of preschools and SEN systems in both Belarusian and Norwegian culture and languages.

SEN practices are heterogenic and complex phenomena, originating in the combined influence of diverse traditions and disciplines (Hanssen, 2018; Nicolini, 2013). Striving to avoid ambiguity and confusion over terminology and to find lenses that make it possible to comparatively examine SEN practices, in the current article, SEN practices are explored by conceptualizing them as a specific kind of practice in terms of a theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon, Francisco, & Kemmis, 2017). The present article proposes the possibility of applying the theory of practice architectures in SEN contexts as both a theoretical grounding and a conceptual framework, steering analyses towards an exploration of the constituents of SEN practices.

The first part of the current article exposes the theoretical foundation for the selected topic by providing an overview of the current research. Arguments are then presented for the selection of the two countries, along with a description of the contexts in each country. The selected research methodology and analytical approach are described and analyzed, which is followed by a brief presentation of the results, along with discussion and conclusions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Language difficulties are defined in various ways, and the terminology used in both countries studied greatly varies. Aiming at reaching a consensus to decide on better ways of diagnosing and referring to children with language

difficulties, the more specific term DLD has become prevalent (Bishop, 2017). However, the term DLD is not a single condition where every child is the same. Children present a whole range of different types of problems, thus affecting grammar, semantics or use of language or speech sounds, working memory and ability to produce words. Hence, the term DLD can be used for children who have persisting problems with language in their everyday life in the absence of a specific biomedical conditions (Bal & Drozdova, 2010; Bishop, 2014, 2017). In both Belarus and Norway, a DLD diagnosis is included in the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Mental Disorders (ICD-11). Still, clinicians and practitioners are unsure about the use of diagnostic criteria, particularly regarding preschool-age children (WHO, 2019). Therefore, the present study focuses on children receiving SEN assistance because of a DLD, which is consistent with the official diagnostic criteria but comes without a formal diagnosis (Bishop, 2017; Hanssen, 2017, p. 3; 2019).

### **SEN practices seen through the features of the theory of practice architectures**

SEN practice is a heterogenic and complex phenomenon that originated from the combined influence of diverse traditions (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017; Nicolini, 2013). These traditions include an Aristotelian conception of praxis as action demonstrating moral goodness in what is done, the Marxist understanding of praxis as a socio-historical, sensuously human activity aimed at cognition and transformation of the world, and Lave and Wenger's distinction of practice as a set of relations among persons, activities and the world over time (Kemmis et al., 2014; Nicolini, 2013). Broadening Schatzki's (2002) theory of practices as a set of doings and sayings, Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) defined practice as socially established cooperative human activity involving utterance and forms of understanding (sayings), modes of actions (doings) and ways in which people relate to one another and the world (relatings), which all happen together in various ways (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 8). Drawing on Kemmis' (2008) theory, SEN practices are interpreted as the various ways preschool staff conduct SEN activities in both mainstream and special settings (doings), the various expressions, words and language staff use to describe, interpret and explain what is going on in their SEN work (sayings) and the relationships (relatings) that are also assigned to ensure connectedness and support between the preschool staff, children and other individuals and

objects involved in the SEN practices (cf. Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 57; Mahon et al. 2017, 34; Hanssen, 2019, p. 3).

For a more comprehensive view of practices in general, one must consider practices as bound within the site of the practices. Kemmis et al. (2014) emphasized that practices do not occur in a vacuum; instead, they are shaped by and shape the prefigured arrangements that together constrain and enable practices (sayings, doings and relatings) and make these possible (p. 31). The theory of practice architectures identifies cultural–discursive, material–economics and social–political arrangements that here are referred to as the architectures of practice (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 57). Practice and architecture are connected and always enmeshed with one another, thereby constituting the ‘three dimensions of intersubjectivity’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 23) or ‘spaces’ (Mahon et al., 2017, p. 11).

From the theory’s outset, cultural–discursive arrangements and sayings are realized in the semantic space, and here, focus is placed on the *cultural–discursive arrangements* that enable or constrain what is relevant for preschool staff to say and think when describing, interpreting and justifying their SEN practices (*sayings*). The development of SEN practices depends on the cultural arrangement as well, for example, the [preschool’s] culture, which is defined by Kelchtermans (2006) as the deep level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the members of an organization (p. 230). The individual culture gives each practitioner room for individual choice, but this can be considered isolating in that there is a lack of common understanding of what SEN practices are and how they should be implemented. The individual culture can also be considered dynamic and creative, encouraging new thinking in SEN practices (Finkevich, Veremejchik, & Pavlukovec, 2015; Groven, 2013; Eik, 2014). The close-knit ‘family’ community is another common culture; it focuses on nurture and common views in SEN practices – working together in harmony. The common culture that follows the ideal of equality sees preschool staff’s own personal experiences as more important than their professional knowledge, justifying the idea that their personal abilities, values and attitudes are more important than formal professional competences (Steinnes, 2014). However, the development of such a culture may weaken the qualified preschool staff’s confidence in their own knowledge and displace an individual culture. Groven (2013) noted that a common culture can come with a ‘blueprint’ nature, emphasizing solutions that are linked to more popular views on special needs education. The power of

the cultural arrangement can both contribute and counteract children's learning and the quality of SEN practices.

Cultural–discursive arrangements may also include various discourses. For example, consider preschool staff working within the discourse of “special needs education”. Haug (2016), Nordahl (2018) and Khitruk (2017) found that this discourse is realized in sayings such as the conflict between categorical (individual and diagnostic solutions) and relational perspectives (inclusion and social relationships) in special needs education, and that this is the main point of contention, showing that special needs education suffers from a legitimacy crisis. This lack of clarity makes SEN practices conceptualized differently with contrasting overtones of meaning (Hanssen, 2018; Nordahl, 2018). This controversy may lead to the trivialization and an undermining of SEN practices in preschools, and the possibility for the autonomic sayings and thinkings of practitioners may be seriously undermined by this (Beach & Bagley, 2013, p. 390). As such, the “special needs education” discourse has the potential to blind what is actually happening and reinforce stereotypes; for example, special needs education's power to displace children threatens the pathway to inclusion, and children's learning can hence be disrupted (Hanssen, 2018; Vargas-Barón, Janson, & Mufel, 2009).

Another example is related to the contradictory discussion and significant criticism of the validity and usability of DLD as a diagnostic category. As mentioned before, there is still considerable variation and insecurity among clinicians and practitioners regarding the understanding and interpretation of diagnostic criteria, particularly regarding preschool-age children (Bishop, 2014, 2017). The power of this discourse may potentially enable and allow a consensus in diagnosing and referring to children with language difficulties (Bishop, 2014, 2017).

Material–economic arrangements and doings are realized in the physical space-time, and in this context, attention is paid to the *material–economic arrangements* that enable and constrain what, when, how and by whom SEN activities can be done (doings) at a certain time and in what environment (Kemmis et al., 2014). Again, taking SEN practices as an example, the material and economic arrangements may involve resources such as decorations, furniture and architecture of rooms and how they are maintained (Hanssen & Hansén, 2017). Aforementioned resources, along with the economic situation of each country and as well as socioeconomic status of employees and children enable and constrain what is done in the SEN practices (Kemmis et al., 2014). For example, carefully selected, systematized SEN activities that contain

preplanned elements and objects in accordance with the activities can influence and maximize the stimulation of children's language development. On the other hand, diffuseness and instability of the prefigured elements may obstruct the provision of SEN activities, constraining children's access to the experiences of stimulating their language development (Hanssen & Hansén, 2017; Hanssen, 2019; Nordin-Hultman, 2004).

Social-political arrangements and relatings are realized in the social space, and in the current article, attention is paid to the *social-political arrangements* that make possible and constrain how individuals working in a preschool connect to each other (relatings), along with the rules and roles in an organization and how these relate to national policies (Kemmis et al., 2014; Mahon et al., 2017). In the case of SEN practices, the power of social arrangements is visible in the differences and asymmetries or similarities and symmetry found in the division of duties and responsibilities shared, for example, between preschool staff in a way that supports children with DLD or does not support the children. Preschool staff can poorly divide the labor and responsibilities, yet at the same time, the clear character of division of duties and responsibilities may be present (Mazovko & Kravcova, 2017; Steinnes, 2014; Steinnes & Haug, 2013). On the one hand, the lack of clarity can give rise to instability and the diffuseness of the practices that are implemented, thus challenging the quality of help practitioners can give. On the other hand, the clear standards regarding the division of responsibilities of preschool staff can contribute to developing sustainable and functional SEN practices through which practitioners seek improvement for children with DLD (Hanssen 2017, 2018; 2019).

Another important feature of social-political arrangements stems from political directives and governance. The implementation of SEN practices into actual practice largely depends on political arrangements, such as how the national laws and curricula for preschools guide and shape SEN practices. Several studies have reported that loose directives may result in an unsystematic variety of individual practices without a common understanding of what these practices are and how they should be handled (Hennum & Østrem, 2016; Hanssen & Hansén, 2017). Indeed, these directives may give each practitioner autonomous room for individual choice, but this room can be considered isolating in terms of a lack of common understanding of what SEN practices are and how they should be implemented (Groven, 2013; Thoresen, 2015). However, uniform ways of governance may reduce professional autonomy, thus generating conformism and

a mechanical and reproductive practice. As a result, it is difficult to make changes from the top echelons of ministries to the bottom where specific SEN practices occur (Mazovko & Kravcova, 2017; Shipickaja, 2014; Vargas-Barón et al., 2009).

## **CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In the following, I will expand on the current understanding of SEN practices by looking at the Belarusian and Norwegian preschool contexts, examining the overarching values of preschool education, legislative frameworks and principles for providing SEN practices.

Both in Belarus and in Norway, the principal aim for preschool is to contribute to children's development, learning and formation (Code on Education in the Republic of Belarus (CE) 2011 Art. 2; Kindergarten Act (KA) 2006 § 1).

Looking at the laws in these countries, SEN practice in both countries is seen as SEN assistance and a statutory right for children who, according to expert assessment, need adapted support or education (CE, 2011 Art. 14; KA 2006 § 19). The Belarusian education culture is slowly moving towards inclusion. Therefore, the large number of children incorporated into SEN practices are still placed in full-time or part-time segregated groups for children with similar disabilities, and these groups are integrated into ordinary preschools. Parents can individually or in consultation with the preschool apply for an assessment of their child's needs. Based on a psychological, medical and educational assessment at a regional centre – the Correction and Development Training and Rehabilitation Centre (DC) – the child's need for special educational assistance is assessed (CE, 2011 Art. 279; Art. 265). A specific professional competence is available and required at all stages of the SEN assistance – from the assessment of the child's needs to the implementation of SEN assistance (CE, 2011). Nonetheless, in the case of Belarus, special attention to individual support to meet the specific needs of children is given, and orchestration and implementation of SEN practices may lead to a discrepancy between the requirements for inclusion and the realization of it in practice (Hanssen, 2019).

In the Norwegian system, inclusive educational settings are already well established, and children with DLD attend ordinary preschools. Parents may individually or in consultation with the preschool request that the Educational and Counselling Service (PPT) – an independent, expert authority – assess their children's need for special education assistance. Based on the expert assessment of the PPT, the preschool owner makes a decision to grant or deny the request for special

educational assistance. This assistance consists of individual facilitation and is included in ordinary preschool education, focusing on the equality and inclusion of all learners. In the Norwegian KA (2006), it is not specifically stated that special qualifications are required to provide SEN assistance. In addition, a person with pedagogical education should initially give SEN assistance (KA, 2006). In practice, though, the preschool staff – with or without the proper education – will often carry out SEN activities, while the employees of the PPT and other external competence agencies contribute with counselling and guidance to staff, parents and children. The criticism here is that the lack of clarity can be challenging for all parties involved when it comes to anticipating the kind of help a SEN teacher can give (Hausstätter & Reindal, 2016). Indeed, the general unclear law may impede stable and lasting dispositions for SEN practice (Hanssen & Hansén, 2017).

The two countries seem to share similar values, as manifested by their overarching principles for education, as well as the statutory right for children with DLDs to obtain special educational assistance. Despite some similarities between Belarus and Norway, the differences are obvious and principled and could be assigned to historical and cultural traditions, ideological foundations, material-economic situations and the social and political character of the countries (Hanssen & Hansén, 2017). One of the most noteworthy differences is that Belarus still lacks consciousness of the inclusion principle and therefore is slowly moving towards inclusion, while in Norway, inclusion is already well established as a fundamental principle of all activities in the entire education sector (Arnesen, 2017; Hannås & Hanssen, 2016). Another remarkable difference is that Belarus has clear standards regarding the qualification requirements and the division of responsibilities of preschool staff. Highly skilled professionals are available and required at all stages of SEN assistance, from assessing the child's needs to implementing SEN activities (CE, 2011). The Norwegian system does not specifically state that special qualifications are required to provide SEN assistance, being characterized by vague formal divisions in labor between qualified and unqualified staff (KA, 2006). Therefore, differences in the countries' solutions concerning the orchestration and implementation of SEN practices in preschools are the most visible.

## **THE STUDY: ORCHESTRATION OF SEN PRACTICES**

The current study is based on a larger study that aimed to deepen the understanding of, expand knowledge about and gain a nuanced insight into the SEN

practices for preschool children with DLD in Norway and Belarus. The empirical basis for the current chapter is a comparison of two cases – one from Belarus and one from Norway (Yin, 2014). The case study approach focuses on preschool staff and how they described, perceived, carried out and related to the people and objects when conducting SEN practices (Hanssen, 2019). The preschool staff who were responsible for planning and carrying out SEN activities for children with DLD were chosen. Altogether, 10 informants presented a long and relevant description of working within the chosen area and were recruited from five different public preschools in each country. To achieve my aim, several instruments were used for data collection, such as semistructured interviews, video observations and video-based conversations. The semistructured interviews were carried out with five preschool employees in each country. Each interview lasted between one and a half and two hours and included the employees' educational background and professional interests, descriptions and perceptions of SEN practices, along with the specific tasks and key experiences or challenges from their SEN work. The data also include video observations of four to six individual and group SEN activities that were carried out with each employee. The observable SEN activities in each country were organized both as individual and group sessions. The groups were about the same size: approximately four to six children. However, the group sessions in Belarus included only children with DLD. In contrast, the sessions in Norway were individually adapted to each respective child and included other children without DLD. The focus was on the visual representation of video observations when the staff were implementing the SEN activities: physical environments (rooms, furniture, objects and decorations), the organization of the activities (regulation and planning), SEN activity phases (beginning, introduction, performing, summarizing and evaluating), and the organization of the events (singing, dancing, drawing, listening and games).

Finally, in an attempt to gather the perspectives of the preschool staff on the data and validate my interpretations of the observed SEN activities, the next step was returning data to the field for comments and discussion (Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab, & Soeffner, 2006). Thus, 20 video scenes with Belarusian and 18 with Norwegian employees were chosen and used as a base for conducting video-based conversations. This selection was made in connection to Pianta's (1999) theory on describing relationships, and the scenes showing emotional and instructional support were of particular interest (Hanssen, 2017). While watching the selected video together, the employees were asked to assume what

was happening, how they would describe it and how they would explain and understand it. They were also asked to describe several other examples from similar situations (Hanssen, 2017).

All gathered qualitative material was transcribed in the participants' respective native languages, analyzed and then reported in several publications (cf. Hannås & Hanssen, 2016; Hanssen & Hansén, 2017; Hanssen, 2017; Hanssen, 2018; Hanssen, 2019). The results from these studies have helped to shed light on several important aspects of SEN practices in both countries (for details see Hannås & Hanssen, 2016; Hanssen & Hansén, 2017; Hanssen, 2017).

In accordance with the aim of the current study, the collected empirical material was reanalyzed to produce new insights into how SEN practices are orchestrated. The two national datasets were again reanalyzed on three levels: an individual level, a case level and a macro level across the two cases (Hanssen, 2018; Hanssen, 2019, p. 7). A qualitative content analysis (QCA) with a deductive approach was used (Elo & Kyngös, 2008). The theory of practice architectures' main concepts of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* were applied as the frames of unconstrained categorization (Elo & Kyngös, 2008; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). The data were coded according to the chosen categories. The first step was to organize the data through open coding to seek emerging themes and subcategories; this process identified the features of the sayings, doings and relatings. The next step was to more systematically search for consistent categories. The preliminary themes were compared for similarities and differences, and when they shared a similar meaning, they were grouped into the same category. Finally, by following the same process again, the dominant features of the sayings, doings and relatings that constituted SEN practices were identified (for details, see Hanssen, 2019, p. 9).

A summary of the findings regarding the orchestration of the SEN practices depicted in the Belarusian case showed SEN practices as strongly marked and monolithic with an apparent and theorized conceptualization of practice (sayings), a consistent sense of coherence in the doings and clearly defined hierarchical and authority-framed relationships (relatings) among the people involved. Here, the SEN practices have been established and steady, and the preschool staff described, perceived and experienced performing these practices as pleasurable.

The Norwegian case represents a SEN practice with vague contours, with a diffused and unclear conceptualization of practice (sayings), and a heterogeneous sense of coherence in the doings and symmetrical and nonhierarchical

relationships (relatings) among the people involved. Here, the SEN practices are difficult to identify, and the position of SEN practices is vulnerable and labile. The preschool staff described, perceived and experienced these practices as a point of contention in their work.

The aforementioned results provided a framework for a narrowed structuring of the SEN practices studied in both countries (cf. Hanssen, 2018, 2019). Consequently, the orchestration of the SEN practices that differ between Belarus and Norway in such conspicuous ways constitutes a more complex and multidirectional picture than I managed to show through these lenses aimed at “seeing” practices. Here, Mahon et al. (2017) suggested that the orchestration of practices constitutes a more complex and multidirectional picture. Therefore, the current chapter moves the focus forward and discusses which possibilities and obstructions exist in the development of SEN practices in preschools. In the next section, I discuss how the cultural–discursive, material–economic and social–political arrangements appear to impact, form and inform what practitioners can say, do and how they can unfold various relationships in SEN practices (cf. Kemmis et al., 2014).

### **PREFIGURING THE CONDITIONS OF SEN PRACTICES: POSSIBILITIES AND OBSTRUCTIONS**

From the perspectives of the preschool staff, when it comes to the prevalent and influential *cultural–discursive arrangements* that prefigure SEN practices, the discourses framing the image of the child were the most significant.

According to the employees, specific interpretations of the concept of *child* in Norway seem to be associated with motherhood and home. Work with children may often be more related to practical issues and nurturing rather than educational experiences. The preschool staffs’ role can also frequently be seen as leaning on maternal instincts, giving children protection and personal experiences. This interpretation potentially constrains the importance of formal professional competence and the possibilities of the role and legitimacy of preschool staff as qualified and knowledgeable agents in the SEN practices, instead directing focus to a nurturing approach involving emotion and personal commitment and support (Hanssen, 2017, 2018; Hennem & Østrem, 2016; Steinnes, 2014; Thoresen, 2015). The power of this discourse seems to legitimize the impression that the implementation of SEN practices is something that “everyone” can do.

This seems to challenge the understanding of what SEN practice is and what the practitioners as professionals represent in preschools (Hanssen, 2018; 2019).

In Belarus, the concept of *child* is also associated with motherhood and home. However, it seems that children are not always seen as equal, competent, potential resources and contributing and creating subjects. It seems that practitioners first perceive children as the objects of educational activity, to whom a specified activity is directed as receivers of knowledge and as receivers of prescriptions of regimes and only thereafter as a personality. This interpretation promotes a conviction that schooling and the achievement of results should be maximized. In essence, only highly skilled professionals are required to accomplish work with children. As such, specialized professional competence is valued more highly than personal experiences of the employees (Belokurskaja, 2010; Brikova, 2014; Mazovko & Kravcova, 2017). A distinct identification and representation of staff as professional practitioners can be interpreted as reflecting the idea that children with DLD are so “special” that they need specialized teachers and “special” training. The risk may lie in the power that a discourse can have on specialists’ behavior, in particular on their orientation as they talk to the child with a DLD, listen to the child and treat the child using special measures (Hanssen, 2018; Vargas-Barón et al., 2009).

These examples reinforce claims that SEN teacher education and preschool teacher education in each country qualify professionals for what is their own interpretation of the discourses framing the concept of the child, thus maintaining certain practices without any possibility of redefining them to increase the quality of support for children with DLD (Gajdukevich, 2016; Hanssen, 2018; Steinnes & Haug, 2013).

From the perspective of preschool staff both in Belarus and Norway, the *material-economic arrangements* of SEN practices were strongly emphasized through their activity and work. According to the employees in both countries, economies strongly shape what they can do and how they unfold various SEN activities. The Belarusian and Norwegian staff were interested in developing and updating their own professional competence and teaching practice. However, in Belarus, this was a challenge in that the employees themselves would have to pay for various courses, course materials, instruments and other tools they thought useful in language-stimulating work with children. In Norway, a lack of time and economic support was expressed, which primarily concerned the frequent updating of their own professional competence and teaching practice. It seems

that preschools in both countries lack economic systems and procedures that enable them to maintain and develop SEN competence among the staff. These examples highlight how the arrangement of economic support that prefigure practice, can constrain what employees who carry out the SEN practice can do in real ways.

The material resources are another very real material–economic arrangement that was outlined by the staff in both countries. The staff expressed that availability of resources such as books, furniture, audio-visual equipment, facilities and so forth as influencing the organization and implementation of their SEN practices. However, a lack of resources was mentioned as a hindrance for the development of SEN practices both in the Belarusian and Norwegian cases.

Ultimately, the material-economic conditions of the SEN practices have the potential to shape what practitioners do and do not do, impacting the development of children’s support and also the employees’ possibilities to update their own professional competence (Groven, 2013; Khitruk & Ponomareva, 2014; Steinnes & Haug, 2013).

The *social–political arrangements* can be seen at work in the preschools’ functions, rules and roles and in the shared understandings preschool staff have about how to interact with particular SEN practices (Kemmis et al., 2014). An example of a thoughtful consideration of these arrangements is evident in how the practitioners were positioning themselves within SEN practices. In the Belarusian case, the distinct frames and boundaries of SEN practice reflect the practitioners’ “visible” positioning. This can give the impression that preschool staff feel enabled to achieve the tasks expected of them, which also most likely contributes to the employees maintaining a high level of self-esteem and sense of mastery. However, as the system moves towards inclusion, employees may be reluctant to abandon what is considered their role in favor of a more inclusive system of services. As such, the potential to create a basis for the development of sayings and doings concerning inclusive SEN practices must be considered as very fragile (Hanssen, 2018; 2019; Khitruk & Ulianova, 2012). Ongoing efforts for the recognition of the professional status of employees, as Khitruk and Ulianova (2012) claimed, should now also be focused on being “generalist and ready for inclusion”, so resistance is expected regarding abandoning their status and professional role in favor of a more inclusive system of service.

In the Norwegian case, the looser frames and boundaries of SEN practice mirror challenges in the representation and identification of SEN practices as

any one specific practice. To some extent, my results cohere with previously reported research showing that looser frames and boundaries of practice confirm the “invisible” and diverse position of the practitioners and can give rise to instability and diffuseness of the implementation of SEN practices, thus challenging the quality of help SEN practitioners can give and threatening rather than supporting children with DLD (Groven, 2013; Hanssen, 2019; Hausstätter & Jahnukainen, 2014). The position of the practitioners can also be attributed to the emerging trend of considering special needs education as polarized and as a threat towards the realization of inclusion (Arnesen, 2017; Nordahl, 2018). As such, these contradictions may lead to a discrepancy in the ways preschool staff define themselves as professionals and legitimize themselves as competent, and this discrepancy may bring out the observed tendency towards having a low level of self-esteem and a good amount of exhaustion and insecurity in their SEN practices (Hannås & Hanssen, 2016; Hanssen 2019; Hennem & Østrem, 2016).

In concluding this article, I reemphasize that sustainable SEN practices are a central challenge in both countries. As shown through selected examples, the theory of practice architectures offers various perspectives on SEN practices, having the conceptual approach, scope and potential to define, influence and change these SEN practices. Despite this, there are a number of limitations in the current study and to using the theory of practice architectures in this context that should be acknowledged.

There are limitations to what a theory or a certain method of analysis can offer. Indeed, there is a risk of picturing SEN practices in such a contrasting way that a clear distinction might appear reductive and simplified. The profiles could be seen as too simple to capture the complexity of reality. Moreover, interpreting practices through the “architecture” metaphor runs the risk of providing an overly superficial placement of the results in a seemingly schematic and strictly framed figure (Hanssen, 2018). The current article focuses on SEN practices and practices` prefigured arrangements from the preschool staff’s point of view. The perspectives of families, children and other actors involved in SEN practices were not included. As such, the one sidedness of this perspective may have hindered an expanded understanding of SEN practices and conceivably impeded several different ways of interpreting SEN practices (Hanssen, 2019).

Despite these critical limitations, the divergent profiles express an assembled densification of characteristic and obvious features of SEN practices, thereby

showing how the prefigured arrangements enable and constrain these practices in their respective countries.

In conclusion, the current article leads to several suggestions. First, it is necessary to have a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity in the arrangements surrounding SEN practices in both countries. It is important to clarify a basic view of what SEN practices are and how they should be enacted when different considerations conflict with the understanding and functions of those practices now and in the future. Second, an attempt to open a dialogue aimed at redefining and changing preschool conditions to support children with DLD is needed. The current study is the first to compare empirical data from Norwegian and Belarusian preschools. Therefore, the research sits in a unique position: it may help preschool employees in both countries deepen their “intercultural competence” and “perspective consciousness”. This competence and consciousness might equip practitioners with the expertise to systematically explore the issues influencing their own SEN practices (as well as those of others) and develop discussions about who they are, what they can do and what they will do in the public exchange of opinions concerning special needs education and inclusion.

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