

Moen, K. (2022). Educators' strategies in value conflicts in religiously diverse kindergartens in Norway. I: K. Smith (Red.), *Inquiry as a bridge in teaching and teacher education. NAFOL 2022* (p. 105–122). Fagbokforlaget.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55669/oa120405>

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Educators' strategies in value conflicts in religiously diverse kindergartens in Norway

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ABSTRACT

In kindergartens with religious diversity, educators sometimes face discrepancies of values. Balancing between normativity and openness in inclusive practices towards new people and their values is demanding and requires good ethical judgment from the practitioners. This paper is based upon a study of kindergarten teachers' strategies in situations of value tensions between teachers and parents in two kindergartens in Norway. The approach is hermeneutical, and the aim is to understand more about the professional practice through analysis of semi structured interviews with six teachers. The kindergarten teachers used three strategies: rejection, adaptation and compromise. These strategies come with different nuances and different justifications. The paper discusses the strategies in the light of a theory by Berger and Zijderveld (2009) and the principle of what is in the best interest of the child. The paper concludes that all three strategies may be necessary in order to avoid relativity or exclusion. Furthermore, it points at the importance of educators' ethical and professional

reflections and discussions in order not to take their own traditions and norms for granted.

Keywords: kindergarten teachers, value tensions, religious diversity, strategies, ethical judgment

INTRODUCTION

In the kindergarten Rowen, many children aged four to six want to paint their nails, and the staff help them. Ahmed also wants to do this, and he asks kindergarten teacher Rasmus for permission. Ahmed's family has moved to Norway a few years ago, and Rasmus knows that Ahmed's father does not want his son to wear nail polish. The kindergarten teacher, however, doesn't want the boy to be excluded from the community of playing and laughing children. He accepts Ahmed's wish and paint his nails and the boy is happy. But before the father comes to fetch his son in the afternoon, Rasmus removes the polish from Ahmed's nails.

Kindergarten is an arena for encounters between different persons with a diversity of values, as this story exemplifies. Kindergarten teachers, parents and children may be influenced by different value systems and various degrees of practice, but they all meet in the kindergarten. As professional educators, the staff in kindergarten have an ethical responsibility towards children and adults. When one person meets another person, the ethical demand to act in favour of the other person is fundamental, as the Danish philosopher Knud Løgstrup (1997) emphasizes. In addition, The Norwegian Kindergarten Act demands that the staff acts in the best interest of the child (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 8; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1989). This principle is an ethical guiding star in Norwegian kindergartens. The teachers are committed to teach in line with the normative values of the national Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2017).¹⁰ In a society of increasing cultural and religious diversity, the framework plan poses high expectations on educators concerning inclusive practices in kindergartens. This leaves the teachers with many new choices in a field of little experience. The professionals must deal with values as guidance to help them

¹⁰ See the next section.

act. This and other factors put kindergarten teachers under pressure and challenge them in various ways, as the opening story from my material indicates.

This paper investigates practice in this complex field and studies how the professionals deal with challenging situations where they experience discrepancies in practice. Discrepancies are interesting objects for studies because values are at stake. Important insights may be hidden in discrepancies, according to the Norwegian philosopher Anders Lindseth (2015, p. 47). The lead question in this paper is: Which strategies do educators in a religiously diverse kindergarten use when they meet parents who have values that differ from those of the kindergarten? As a kindergarten teacher educator of religion and ethics (RE), I study values with both specific religious connotations and values in general. The material stems partly from my thesis "Kjærlig kamp" [Loving battle] (Moen, 2021), and in the following I will present some theoretical and methodological perspectives before presenting and discussing the material.

VALUE BASE OF NORWEGIAN KINDERGARTENS

In Norway, 92.8 % of all children aged one to five attended kindergarten in 2020, and more than 19 % of these are children from linguistic and cultural minorities (Statistics Norway, 2021). The Norwegian kindergarten is part of the Nordic kindergarten tradition which emphasizes learning through play (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). In most kindergartens, a holistic approach to children's development through *Bildung*, care, socialization and free play is emphasized more than structured learning activities. Also, "kindergartens shall work in partnership and agreement with the home" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7).

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2017) gives guidelines for content and tasks for the kindergartens. It resembles a curriculum with normative formulations like "the kindergarten shall". Hence, this plan forms the value base for the kindergartens, and the purpose clause explicitly states that:

kindergartens shall build on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist traditions such as respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of thought, compassion, forgiveness, equality and solidarity – values which exist in various religions and world views and which are entrenched in human rights law (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7).

Core values mentioned in addition, are: “care, security, belongingness and respect and enabling the children to participate in and contribute to the community [...], democracy, diversity and mutual respect, equality [included gender equality], sustainable development, life skills and good health” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 7). Kindergartens shall be inclusive and “shall use diversity as a resource in their pedagogical practices and support, empower and respond to the children according to their respective cultural and individual circumstances” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 9). Hence, kindergarten staff are obliged to teach and practice a lot of values.

Nevertheless, the framework plan is not concrete, and the teachers must use their own pedagogical judgment in practice, not least in situations where one cannot practice all values equally. The actual practice in kindergarten within this field of normativity is interesting material for research. The aim here is not to control, but to understand the practitioners, their challenges and how to guide them.

VALUES AND VALUE-ENCOUNTERS

The concept of values is wide and has many aspects. Values are seen as virtues or as goods; they may be personal or community-based, they may be fundamental, intrinsic values or instrumental (Sagberg, 2012, pp. 51–53). They are not objects in their own right, but they show themselves through actions and words. Attitudes and fundamental pedagogical thinking are closely related to values. Cultural practices and wishes may also be mixed with values, and in some cases, it may be difficult to sort out what are fundamental values and what are cultural customs. Values are often connected to religions and views of life (Asheim, 2005), even if persons are not always aware of the connection. As a working tool for the study, I define values as conceptions and attitudes that are important, fairly stable and with a guiding function in life (cf. also Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012).

Values have crucial importance for institutions of education (Biesta, 2010, p. 15). They form the foundation of the institution and at the same time guide the practice. Nevertheless, values in kindergarten has been a field of only minor research interest until the last decade (Johansson et al., 2015; Johansson & Thornberg, 2014). The Swedish researcher Eva Johansson has, together with several partners, contributed strongly to this research in the Nordic countries. They have found that values such as care, democracy, discipline, and competence values are dominant values in Nordic kindergartens (Einarsdóttir et al., 2014;

Emilson & Johansson, 2018; Johansson et al., 2018; Puroila et al., 2016). These studies have, however, to a lesser extent focused on religious related values or value discrepancies between staff and parents in kindergartens.

Previous research in the field of diversity in kindergarten show that educators in kindergartens experience that cultural diversity may be a challenge, especially concerning cooperation with immigrant parents. Findings in studies from Bergsland (2018), Hellman and Lauritsen (2017), Herwartz-Emden (2020) and Lauritsen (2011) show the same tendencies. Research from several countries by Krogstad and Hidle (2015), Kuusisto (2011, 2017), Kuusisto and Lamminmäki-Vartia (2012), Puskás and Andersson (2018) and Schweitzer (2020) show that some of the kindergarten teachers feel insecure and lack knowledge about religions. When religion and world views are included in the diversity issues, educators often find it even more challenging. According to the researcher Olav Hovdelien (2018), more research into religious aspects of kindergartens is needed in order to focus on these challenging issues in the field of practice. The religious aspects are important to investigate because this field may be seen as a marker for the kindergartens attitude to inclusion (Moen, 2021). In the long run, there are some risks of fundamentalism, fanaticism and lack of respect if these topics are not sufficiently reflected upon when children are young (cf. Berger & Zijderveld, 2009).

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor claims that we live in “a secular age”, and that this point is important in order to understand the western world (Taylor, 2007). Several sociologists of religion has described our time as a *religiously complex time* where *plurality* is an even more describing word than secularity. *Plurality* includes both a secular and a religious understanding of life and a great diversity of world views and ways of practicing religions (Berger, 2014; Furseth, 2015). In the extension of this plurality of religions and world views comes a plurality of values.

The sociologists Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld have a theory that might shed light upon the practice of value encounters. They see three different patterns in the way people respond to other religions or world views (Berger & Zijderveld, 2009). This theory may, as the authors mention, be transferred into the field of values. Hence, I will briefly present their theory here and use it as theoretical concepts in the analysis and discussion of the empirical material.

- a) The first alternative is the *exclusivist* one, to exclude positions that are different from one's own because one's own religion is the truth.

- b) The opposite position is *pluralization*, where one wants to go as far as possible in accepting truth also in other traditions than one's own.
- c) The last position is in the middle and is called *inclusion*. Here, inclusion is to continue to confirm the truth-claim in one's own tradition, but to be willing to accept the possibility of truth in other traditions as well as in your own. One may leave elements in one's own tradition and integrate non-essential elements from other traditions into one's own life. (Berger & Zijdeveld, 2009, s. 38–43).

Practitioner's encounters with challenging situations with parents are connected to the professional ethics. The Norwegian ethicist Svein Aage Christoffersen (2011) underlines that ethical judgment is developed through a constant interchange between theory and practice. The main ethical concern for people working with other people is to respond to the ethical demand that comes from the other person. This is emphasized by Løgstrup and his concept "the ethical demand" (1997). He underlines that to answer this tacit demand, to which there are no formulas, maturing beforehand is necessary. These perspectives are important regarding the implications of my study, even if the ethics is not the primary scope in this paper.

My study aims to close the knowledge gap by studying values related to religions, in addition to values in general, in the kindergarten teachers' practices in situations of value discrepancies in a religiously complex time.

HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH AND METHODS IN THE STUDY OF DISCREPANCIES OF VALUES

The main approach of the study is hermeneutical in order to understand what the practitioners do in demanding situations, not to criticize or just describe. The lesser known work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers: Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe* (1948), has provided an important theoretical key in my hermeneutical work. Among other aspects, his emphasis on hermeneutics as an interchange between listening and suspicion, is important (Ricoeur, 1981; cf. Ugglå, 1999).

This paper is based on a focused ethnographic study of two kindergartens with religious diversity, the Rowen and the Oak. This is an ethnographic method that is focused in time and themes, which is made possible thanks to video observations which gives much information in shorter time than an ordinary

observation (cf. Knoblauch, 2005). It requires that the observer is both an outsider, but also acquainted with the institution. Both kindergartens had many immigrant or refugee families with relatively short time in Norway, some newly arrived and most of them with less than five years in their new country. Mainly, the immigrant children had Muslim and diverse Christian affiliations, according to the teachers.

In this paper, I focus on the semi-structured interviews with six kindergarten teachers – one male and five females, four of them aged between 30 and 50, one in her 50s and one in her 20s. All of them were majority Norwegians. The study had formal approval through the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and to safeguard the interests of the participants, all the names are anonymized.

The core of the material here is created by thematic analysis of six narratives. I wrote these narratives based on the teachers' short stories about situations where they experienced that parents' values were different from their own. Frequency and emotional intensity was decisive for the selection of themes and stories, together with general impressions during observations in the kindergartens. Some of the narratives include utterings and stories from several educators. Thematically, the narratives are divided into three areas: gender equality, the kindergarten's mandate, and religion-related values. In a larger picture, however, all of these are connected to religious values, for instance in an Islamic context, gender issues are part of religious themes. The study was conducted inductively with a primary focus on an open encounter with the empirical material. The analysis showed that the kindergarten teachers' actions could be divided into three main strategies, and in this paper I present some parts of the narratives as examples of these strategies.

THREE STRATEGIES IN VALUE ENCOUNTERS IN KINDERGARTEN PRACTICE

One of the findings in the material is that in their daily work, kindergarten teachers rank values, consciously or unconsciously. This became visible in the choices they made. The research question asks what strategies the educators used when they met parents who had values that differed from those of the kindergarten? The analysis shows that the educators used one of the following strategies: a. rejection. b. adaptation or c. compromise.

I will explain the strategies with some nuances and examples:

A. Rejection

In situations where parents' values were rejected by the kindergarten teachers, I found two different justifications:

1. In some situations, the parents' values were rejected on the basis of fundamental pedagogical values. For instance: When parents wanted the kindergarten to be more like a school with more effective teaching, they were rejected by the kindergarten teachers, most explicitly by Renate and Elise. Elise in the Oak told that she had tried to guide a mother who did not approve of the kindergarten's practice of a lot of free play with few structured activities, but she still didn't agree. The kindergarten teacher emphasized the necessity of trying to understand and respect each other in spite of their differences and disagreements regarding these pedagogical values. All the kindergarten teachers whom I interviewed wanted the kindergarten to be a place for learning through play (cf. among others Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). This represented core professional values for the educators.
2. In other cases, some immigrant parents' upbringing values were rejected because of the kindergarten teachers' own cultural norms or codes for good upbringing. An example of this is when the kindergarten teacher Renate in the Rowen spoke about some immigrant mothers who treated their three-year olds as babies and still fed them with milk from nursing bottles. Renate said she had tried to give them advice to stop this practice, "because when you are three years old, you *should not* drink from a nursing bottle!" In my interpretation, Renate argued as if her own cultural norms were universal fundamental values and should be taken for granted.

B. Adaptation

In the Rowen, I found *adaptation* surprisingly often used. In several situations, the kindergarten teachers made many adaptations and accepted parents' value-based wishes concerning avoiding pork, putting the hijab on little girls, avoiding handshakes with the opposite gender, and similar. Even when it came to values such as gender equality, they made adaptations. For instance, some conservative Muslim fathers did not respect Rigmor, the female head of the kindergarten. They did not want to come into her office or accept that she was the leader of the institution. In this situation, the kindergarten appointed a male teacher as

deputy. This arrangement made the fathers accept the kindergarten, continuing to send their children there.

During the interview, Rigmor justified this action by stating that it was a sacrifice in the best interest of the children. The alternative would cause them to stop sending their children to any kindergarten due to the fact that no kindergarten in the area had a male manager. According to her judgment, that would have been a worse alternative than downgrading the value of gender equality. Nevertheless, this decision came with a cost: in the interview, Rigmor expressed both with and without words that she was sad and had mixed feelings about it.

C. Compromise

I interpret the previously mentioned nail polish story as an example of compromise. The kindergarten teacher Rasmus had to take several considerations in this situation. He chose to compromise when he prioritized Ahmed's wish to join the other children in a playful and exciting activity and then removed the polish before the boy's father arrived. He prioritized his own and the kindergarten's values of gender equality, empowerment of the child, and the value of fellowship. This choice, however, downgraded the father's values, the values of openness and honesty and the value of cooperation with the parents.

These strategies and acts require discussion, first in relation to the theory by Berger and Zijdeveld, secondly in relation to normativity and the principle of what is in the best interest of the child.

DISCUSSION

Choices and strategies in theory and practice

Berger (2014, p. 8) describes how the pluralization of society leads to de-institutionalization. In a modern or post-modern plural society as ours, one has to respond to questions and make choices that our foremothers did not have to. This situation leaves us with a lot of choices, even in the domain of values. Still, some values are integrated and taken for granted; we do not have to make choices or think about them, while other values are open to choice – they are not taken for granted (Berger & Zijdeveld, 2009, p. 17). Kindergartens are normative institutions with fundamental values that shall guide the kindergartens' practice. Nevertheless, in value conflicts, kindergarten teachers have to use their ethical judgment and figure out what to do (Norwegian Directorate for Education

and Training, 2017, p. 55). In these situations, the teachers' own ranking and interpretations of values decide what strategy they choose and what they do.

The theory by Berger and Zijdeveld (2009) regarding strategies in plural religious encounters has some similarities with the findings in my material from the kindergartens. Both attempt to describe what strategies a person may have when encountering another belief or value than he or she held previously. Berger and Zijdeveld make this connection between religious belief and values explicitly: "Pluralization, however, affects not only religion, but also morality. And the pluralization of values, which are the foundation of morality, is more difficult to cope with than religious pluralization" (Berger & Zijdeveld, 2009, p. 23). On this basis, I want to discuss some differences and some similarities between the concepts of Berger and Zijdeveld and my concepts from kindergarten.

Strategy A. rejection has many similarities with the exclusivist position of Berger and Zijdeveld; The kindergarten teachers argued that their own tradition or their own values were the best. Hence, they did not wish to change practices. This resembles the exclusivist position of Berger and Zijdeveld where one holds on to the truth claim in one's own religion (Berger & Zijdeveld, 2009, p. 38).

In Berger and Zijdeveld's theory, both the pluralist and the inclusivist positions are, with different nuances, some form of openness towards the other person's belief (Berger & Zijdeveld, 2009, pp. 39–40). If we transfer this theory to my material, strategy B. adaptation also took place in two different ways in the Oak and the Rowen.

1. A new value was accepted and was allowed to live side by side with the existing value. This is called a *value pluralization*: a movement towards several different values living side by side.

For instance, avoiding pork was implemented as a new habit in both kindergartens. When something has become a new habit, one no longer has to make an active choice about it. Avoiding pork was a topic with no problematic emotions or hesitance, contrary to some of the other issues. I interpret this practice as value pluralization: the value of avoiding pork was accepted as well as the value of eating pork and all sorts of meat. In the Rowen, a value pluralization takes place in more areas. In the Oak, value pluralization was rare, except in the case of pork meat.

The previously mentioned story of female or male management in the Rowen is a surprising example of value pluralization: adaptation in this case led to the value of gender-specific roles (interpreted as women should not be leaders) living

side by side with the value of gender equality. One could interpret this as a kind of opposite assimilation: The kindergarten was eager to change to fit the new situation, leaving their traditions behind. The kindergarten leader, however, interpreted this as a flexible arrangement for the children to be able to stay in kindergarten. Hence, value pluralization also comes with different justifications.

2. The other way adaptation is taking place, according to Berger & Zijderveld, is the inclusivist position: a person integrates elements of new values into her or his own life.

For instance, in the Rowen, the kindergarten teacher Renate had spent so much time with Muslim children who spoke negatively of pork meat, that she herself had started to dislike pork meat and would not eat it anymore. This was a surprising finding, and it emphasizes that influence and impact goes both directions in a kindergarten. In teacher education, the education and impact from the adults to the children in kindergarten is usually in focus. This little story, however, tells a more nuanced story of what happens in practice when people with different values meet and influence each other.

The strategy of compromise (C) that was found in the nail polish story has no equivalent in Berger and Zijderveld's theory. I found that kindergarten teachers ranked values in their daily work, because in the end, some values were more essential for them than others. This compromise may be problematic because some values were downgraded. Rasmus chose what he considered to be in Ahmed's best interest. The father's set of values or the value of honesty was not equally important for Rasmus when he made that decision. Nevertheless, Rasmus's choice of listening to the child's voice can also be interpreted as an act in line with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013 no. 53), which points to the child's voice as an important element in finding what is in the best interest of the child.

Rasmus's form of compromise is not a typical compromise in a narrow definition of the phenomenon.¹¹ His act could be interpreted as cowardness or deception. Judging from my experiences in the field of practice, I wonder if this strategy is more common than the samples in my material suggest. This kind of debatable compromise is not what most people want to tell about in a research

11 An example of a definition is compromise as "a way of reaching agreement in which each person or group gives up something that was wanted in order to end an argument or dispute" ("Compromise", n.d.).

interview. Rasmus was surprisingly honest during the interview, and this led to this nail polish story. This is a strategy in an ambiguous, probably unconscious and less investigated area.

If one assesses this compromise as a bad decision, the reason is probably that (s)he has other priorities regarding the values that were upgraded or downgraded. If one person has the value of honesty as taken for granted, it may be provoking that the kindergarten teacher made the decision to downgrade it. Nevertheless, difficult situations demand that some values are prioritized over others. That is exactly what makes these situations interesting and demanding.

When Rasmus reflected about this story afterwards, he realized that he downgraded the father in front of Ahmed, but still, he confirmed his own decision:

I still think that it was right in that situation, with that child, then. I really think so. [...] The most important for me was that the boy should not feel excluded, so that became more important for me. He got nail polish after all.” (Rasmus in interview, my translation)

The teacher is conscious about his ranking of values and that the ethical judgment is contextual, and he has the courage to confirm what he did. In complex ethical situations, several things may be simultaneously true.

One could ask why the educators did not form more new habits in order to avoid choosing. I think this relates to emotions and timing. More controversial issues in society, such as gender equality or the use of hijab, are not so easily changed into new habits in a kindergarten. In less controversial topics, like food, this is easier due to experience with special diets. When the question of avoiding pork was first introduced in kindergartens, they were, however, regarded as problematic (Lauritsen, 2011). Time passes and new habits are established.

Normativity and strategies for an inclusive practice in the best interest of the child

In most of the narratives analysed, it seemed like parents' and the kindergarten teachers' judgment of what is in the best interest of the child differs. This principle is the core principle in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1989, art.3). Accordingly, it is a basic principle in the Kindergarten Act in Norway (2005), and

this principle takes precedence over parents' rights (Glaser, 2018, p. 61). The principle is undefined, dynamic and contextual (Haugli, 2016, p. 52). Hence, it is impossible to describe in detail universally what is in the best interest of a child. It will and must depend on time, situation and cultural context. Nevertheless, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provides some comments on important elements in assessing what is in the best interest of the child. It emphasizes among other aspects the right to be listened to and the child's religious, cultural and world view affiliation (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013 no. 53 and 55).

When parents and teachers have different opinions about what is in the best interest of the child, there is, however, a tendency that some of the teachers in my material seem to think that they know what is best. There are exceptions; Rachel, for instance, the youngest employee in the Rowen, was much more open towards traditions and upbringing values other than traditional Norwegian ones. She emphasized that all parents do what they think is in the best interest of their child. This might indicate that a greater degree of openness and change is on the way. Nevertheless, it is a challenge if kindergarten teachers perceive the principle as if they own it. The Norwegian childhood researcher Anne Trine Kjørholt points to the same problem when she emphasizes that the contextual principle is comprehended as if the content is taken for granted and not sufficiently reflected upon in the kindergartens (Kjørholt, 2016, p. 284).

In general, Norwegian kindergartens have a strong tendency towards consensus and harmony (Emilson & Johansson, 2018, p. 943). This may be one of the reasons why the staff discusses questions like differences and discrepancies about what is in the best interest of the child only to a minor extent. Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that opposites are necessary in order to evolve. Opposite interpretations and views can bring possibilities for new understandings, enriched communication and new insights (Ricoeur, 1974; cf. also Uggla, 1999, pp. 67, 250). Discrepancies as places where important insights are hidden, in Lindseth's words (2015, p. 49), points in the same direction: We should embrace differences and disagreements instead of being afraid and hiding them.

Differences and value conflicts actually exist in kindergarten, and they need to be visible and clarified in kindergartens, not to be hidden in an attempt to seek harmony (cf. also Otterstad & Andersen, 2012, p. 15). Open discussions concerning what is in the best interest of the child when the parents and the kindergarten staff have different values would benefit the quality of the

kindergarten. Ethical reflections ahead of crises are needed in both education and in workplace settings.

One could ask if the tendency towards adaptation in the Rowen had to do with the wish to harmonize, to give up their own values in order to make cooperation with the parents easier. However, the Rowen was a kindergarten where the staff had numerous relevant discussions. They argued and had disagreements about how to solve value tensions and experiences of discrepancies when parents had values and claims that went beyond the ordinary traditions of the kindergarten. Hence, I interpret the situation in the Rowen as more genuinely open towards differences, disagreements and changes.

In the other kindergarten, the Oak, they had fewer stories about discrepancies and everything could seem more harmonious. However, there were fewer stories of adaptation, few discussions among the staff concerning the new situation with immigrants, and most traditions continued as normal. All in all, I interpret this as the tendency towards harmony and lack of awareness and discussions about differences.

To reflect on what is in the best interest of the child, all of the three previously discussed strategies may be necessary, even rejection. The kindergarten teachers were convinced that the Nordic model for kindergarten pedagogy, with *Bildung* and learning through play, were in the best interest of the children. On that basis, they rejected parents who wanted the kindergarten to be more like a school and they were frustrated by parents that expected the kindergarten to be “a storage space” for their children while themselves being at work. A consequence of the undefined principle is that there is no final answer to whether the different actions and strategies were in the best interest of the children.

It is easily accepted that adaptation and compromises are good strategies in order to create an inclusive community. Is adaptation and value pluralization in every aspect of the kindergarten's life the answer to the question of inclusion and different values in the kindergarten? According to the purpose clause and the framework plan, with phrases like “kindergarten shall...” or “the staff shall...” throughout the document, the kindergarten is expressively normative. The consequence of this normativity is that one cannot allow every value in the kindergarten. If every value is equal and everything is as good as another, this means relativization, which is the opposite. The Norwegian professor of religious education Helje K. Sødal claims that the purpose clause is superior to the consideration towards the parents. She says that “if they [the parents] want the

kindergarten to impart values that go against the values of the purpose clause, it must be rejected" (Sødal, 2018, p. 26, my translation). When I, like Sødal, acknowledge the normativity of the kindergarten, a rejection of values may be necessary in order to avoid everything becoming relative in the institution. The value base cannot be everyone's decision to make.

Based on my analysis, I will claim that if rejection is justified by a personal cultural code or a feeling of disgust, it is not an ethically good enough reason to reject another person's values. This is not an inclusive practice. But if the rejection is justified by fundamental values in the kindergarten, a rejection may be necessary. Even in an inclusive kindergarten.

CONCLUSION

This study presents which different strategies the professionals have at hand in value tensions in kindergarten, and discusses different nuances of and justifications for these strategies.

The answer to the research question is that the kindergarten teachers use both rejection, adaptation, and compromise in situations with value conflicts with parents. All three strategies may be necessary in order to balance between normativity on the one hand and openness in inclusive practices on the other. Nevertheless, whether rejection is a good strategy depends on the justification. If the rejection is based on fundamental values, it is a necessary act in order to maintain the values of the kindergarten. But if the rejection is based on a person's own cultural norms or codes, it is hardly an ethically valid act.

The study emphasizes that the principle of what is in the best interest of the child is contextual and requires discussion in kindergartens. Kindergartens are important arenas for value education and for inclusive practices. The complex task is to balance between normativity to avoid everything becoming relative, and openness in order to have an inclusive practice. One needs to balance the normative values of the kindergarten, the values of parents and children and one's own values. This demanding task requires sound ethical judgment. An ever-evolving judgment requires knowledge, awareness, courage to face disagreements and an open mind towards differences (cf. also Christoffersen, 2011). Ethical reflections and discussions among the staff provide better options for this than trying to hide and harmonize between differences. The process of developing a mature ethical judgment in order to respond to situations of discrepancy ought to be done in times of peace, ahead of critical situations, as Løgstrup (1997) emphasizes.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has two implications for practice in kindergartens:

- First, it underlines the importance of making differences and disagreements visible in the kindergarten, and it emphasizes discussions among the staff.
- For this purpose, it is crucial that the kindergarten teachers have good ethical judgment. Hence, the second implication is the need to develop ethical judgment. Mature judgment requires repeated reflections and discussions about practice in interchange with theory (Christoffersen, 2011).

The study brings new insights into kindergarten research and contributes to a topic of current challenges. Still, more research needs to be done in this complex field to raise practitioners' awareness about what is needed in demanding situations in the field of value tensions.

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