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## **"Argh, even my kid is digitalised!" Commercial apps' effect on parent- teacher communication**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Researchers argue that Norwegian kindergarten teachers' autonomy and professional latitude today are under pressure as the sector's *market orientation* has led kindergartens to compete over *customers*. This can alter parent-teacher communication, enhance parent influence, and reduce pedagogical autonomy, as kindergartens may feel obliged to cater to their wishes. New communication apps can also contribute to this development as they grant parents real-time insight into everyday activities, potentially affecting the communication between parents and kindergarten teachers. This article explores variations in communication between two kindergartens with different communication practices towards parents. My findings suggest that apps centralise information from the kindergarten, make it more available for parents, and release time for more substantial face-to-face interactions, benefiting parent-teacher communication. No app communication causes some parents to miss crucial information because of some communication obstruction. However, the no-app approach generates more frequent face-to-face interactions, which offer

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the actors access to relational situations of information exchange, potentially benefitting the communication.

**Keywords:** Parent-kindergarten teacher communication, CCA, no-CCA.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the first Kindergarten Act (KA) was introduced in 1975, the Norwegian kindergarten<sup>22</sup> sector has met significant changes, becoming both marketized and more politically governed. The sector has gone from being a marginal to an important area of politics (Børhaug et al., 2018). Rules and regulations regarding kindergarten teachers<sup>23</sup> practice have accordingly become increasingly comprehensive, and they must deal with increasingly detailed management of their profession (NOU 2010: 8). At the same time, parental participation is both a right and a duty (The Kindergarten Act, 2005). The Framework Plan for Kindergartens (FPK) has also become more concise through the years (Børhaug et al., 2018). Finally, kindergarten teacher education has also evolved through measures to improve its quality (St.meld. 41 (2008–2009)).

The novel situation of (overall) overcapacity in the sector leads some kindergartens to compete over children to fill slots in a market-like situation with both private and public kindergartens (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2016).

All the above can affect the kindergarten teacher's roles and the relation between parents and kindergarten staff (Børhaug et al., 2018). In a parallel development, Commercial Communication Apps<sup>24</sup> (CCA) for communication between kindergartens and parents are increasingly being introduced (Børhaug et al., 2018; Jernes et al., 2010). Such apps provide parents with more insight

22 Norwegian kindergarten or Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is primarily for social pedagogical purposes. There are both private and public providers, and children between the ages of one and five can attend. ECEC is financially subsidized, but parents must pay a fee.

23 Kindergarten managers and pedagogical leaders must be trained as kindergarten teachers or have other three-year education leading to pedagogical expertise and a qualification for working with children (The Kindergarten Act, 2005). Pedagogical leaders work in teams with assistants to provide for groups of children. Assistants receive vocational training as childcare and youth workers at the upper-secondary level or are unskilled (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005).

24 Purchased apps for digital parent–teacher communication.

into kindergarten life and thus potentially affect the communication between kindergarten teachers and parents.

This is a study of two kindergartens with different parent communication practices – one utilising a CCA called *MyKid* towards parents (the “*MyKid* kindergarten”) and the other not using CCA (the “no-CCA kindergarten”).

The following research question thus emerges: *How do CCA and no-CCA affect the communication between parents and kindergarten teachers?*

## COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATION APPS

The use of CCA for digital parent-kindergarten communication has escalated in the Norwegian school and kindergarten sector throughout recent years (Børhaug et al., 2018; Rambøll, 2019). Some apps are developed by multinational IT corporations and sold to the sector (Daxap, n.d.; Kiddy, n.d.). Others are produced and sold by Norwegian IT companies (Sysco, n.d.; Vigilo, 2022) or by developers connected to the sector (PBLMentor, n.d.). Such apps are commercial and used in schools and kindergartens for centralising internal administrative and external communicative tasks. Parents download the app onto their phones to receive information and communicate with teachers.

*MyKid* is a CCA developed by the Norwegian IT company *Intutor Group AS* (Intutor, 2022) and has functions like attendance registration, sleeping lists, holiday and absence registration, activities, permissions, pictures and messages related to the individual child. It is a digital communication tool for parent–teacher communication, as well as an internal administrative tool for staff called *MyKid Backstage* (MyKid, 2022).

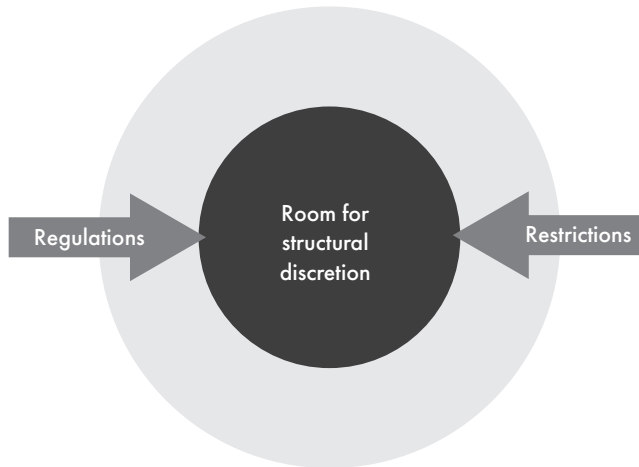
## LITERATURE

### Kindergarten teachers’ professional role

We can illustrate the kindergarten teachers’ professional role using Robert Alexy’s (2002) differentiation of professional discretion into a *structural* and an *epistemic* dimension.

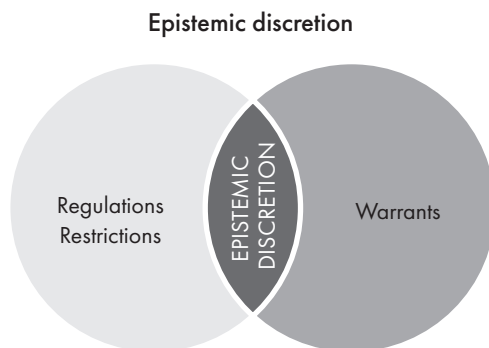
Discussing this conceptual pair, Grimen and Molander (2019) describe *structural* discretion as an *area* where professionals choose between different courses of action based on professional sense. Ronald Dworkin (1997, p. 31) defined *structural* discretion as: “[...] [structural] discretion is at home in only one [...] context; when someone is [...] charged with making decisions subject to standards set by a particular authority”. Using Dworkin’s metaphor, *structural*

discretion is like the hole in a doughnut (Molander, 2011). It exists “as an area left open by a surrounding belt of restrictions” (Dworkin, 1997, p. 31). According to this model, restrictions like state micromanagement and parental influence interfere with the kindergarten teacher’s pedagogical autonomy. They can, however, use the *doughnut hole* as a form of leeway for professional discretion.



**Figure 12.1** Illustration of structural discretion.

An *epistemic* understanding of discretion, in contrast, is to *resonate* under conditions of uncertainty (Grimen & Molander, 2019, p. 181). To resonate means trying and finding answers to different questions. The professional needs norms of action to do what is necessary in different situations, and these norms of action work as what Toulmin (1958) calls *warrants*. A *warrant* is a rule of interpretation, justifying the step from premise to conclusion (Grimen & Molander, 2019, p. 183). For kindergarten teachers, “quality enhancements”, specifications, alterations of the mandate and formal qualifications of the profession and sector – as well as parental influence – may improve their reasoning or *warrants* and thus strengthen their professional discretion.



**Figure 12.2** Illustration of epistemic discretion.

A new factor that may affect the teachers' professional role is various *interactional* and *dialogical media* that are fundamentally intertwined with social action (Silverstone, 1997). *Media* can be considered both communicative and environmental, enabling dialogue and defining new contexts for social interaction (Silverstone, 1997). This type of mediation can thus be seen as involving both tools for action and systems of constraints (Silverstone, 1997), in parallel with the *epistemic* and *structural* dimensions of discretion cited above. CCA can be such a medium, involving both rules and resources for the actors using it.

### The role of parents

Parental influence, as representation and participation, is institutionalized by law<sup>25</sup> (The Kindergarten Act, 2005). In many kindergartens, parents are well-educated, verbally assertive, and can be considered *demanding* (Vedvik, 2020). Parents can also be considered in a positive manner as more engaged in everyday kindergarten life, as long as they acknowledge the teachers' pedagogical integrity (Vedvik, 2020).

Moreover, an overall overcapacity has emerged in the kindergarten sector, granting many parents increased freedom of choice. This may indirectly affect everyday life in kindergartens through parents' comparisons and demands. Parents have increasingly taken on a role as *consumers* or *users* due to the

25 There are, of course, variations between parents regarding how much influence they are granted (Børhaug et al., 2018). All Norwegian children have the right to a place in kindergarten, which makes the parent group diverse, and the potential for influence variable.

*marketisation* of the sector (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2016) as kindergartens are in a position where they must make themselves attractive<sup>26</sup>.

### **Professional-client relations**

As outlined in the introduction, the autonomy and professional discretion of kindergarten teachers are being pressured from different angles. There are several relevant analyses of professions and organizations to draw upon. Terence Johnson's (1972) analysis of *professional-client* relations is highly relevant. He describes a situation of *patronage* where the *consumer* defines her own needs and controls how they are met by the professional (p. 46). In a similar vein, Leicht and Fennel (2001, p. 106) describe situations where consumers control activities, timing, and costs of professional work, making them *sovereign*.

Bourgeault et al. (2011) hold that consumers can even gain countervailing power over an organisation as a whole. Eisenstadt (1959, p. 318) similarly argues that the more an organisation depends on its clientele not leaving for a competitor, "the more it will have to develop techniques of communication and additional services to retain its clientele and the more it will be influenced by different types of demands by the clientele for services [...] that are not directly relevant to its main goals".

### **Communication**

Previous research shows that kindergarten size (based on the number of kids) can affect the need for routinisation and standardised internal and external communication because larger units need simplification and increased formalisation to improve control and overview (Homme et al., 2020). Research also shows that formalised rules and routines regulating decision-making and pedagogical work are widespread, regardless of the size of the kindergarten (Børhaug et al., 2011; Skreland, 2016), partly caused by the documentation requirements in the FPK. Kindergarten size may nevertheless be relevant for implementing or deselecting apps because small, private kindergartens do not have the same budgets as the larger chains for equipment and new-fangled gadgets.

26 Please note that there are variations in the marketisation of the kindergarten sector, both regarding geography and whether the kindergarten is privately or publicly owned (Homme et al., 2020).

A common perception is that digital communication tools may alter relationships in general and parent-kindergarten teacher relationships in particular. Research into *how* this relation is affected is, however, scarce (Børhaug et al., 2018). The use of digital communication tools, like apps, has increasingly escalated in the public sector in general (Nielsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Nilsson, 2008; Pica & Sørensen, 2004), and the kindergarten sector specifically (Børhaug et al., 2018), with ambitions that “mobile technology” will modernise and streamline work processes and communication (Silvana & Sheng, 2008). By implementing such mobile technology, digital work is no longer bound to main offices and stationary computers but enables information access “on the go” (Nielsen & Jacobsen, 2012). In addition, analogue work is increasingly digitalised because of ambitions to streamline, centralise and modernise communication. We see the same tendencies internationally (Ryan, 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

### Selection

This study is a qualitative case study of two kindergartens with different communication practices towards parents. The selection method was thus strategic (Grønmo, 2016), with one of the selected kindergartens utilising the CCA *MyKid*, while the other did not use CCA.

The first kindergarten in the study is part of a large, resourceful, private, but non-profit chain of kindergartens (67 kindergartens in total, 128 children in the studied kindergarten and 32 children in each unit). It utilises *MyKid* as the central communication channel towards parents.

The second kindergarten is small (18 children), private, and not part of a larger kindergarten chain. Unlike the “*MyKid* kindergarten”, this kindergarten does not use CCA. It uses various forms of communication towards parents, including digital ones. The communication is, however, relatively un-routinised, as illustrated in the Findings section below.

### Interviews

Interview candidates were recruited using *snowball sampling*, whereby the initial research participants were asked to identify other potential subjects (Grønmo, 2016).

In the “*MyKid* kindergarten”, interviews were conducted with the general manager<sup>27</sup> of the chain, the assistant general manager of the kindergarten, two pedagogical leaders, one assistant, and three parents (one father and two mothers). It is important to note that the assistant interviewed only used *MyKid* to register children’s arrival and departure, sleeping time, answer short messages, and read information. In the “no-CCA kindergarten”, the owner was interviewed along with two kindergarten teachers (both pedagogical leaders), one skilled worker, and four parents (one parent couple and two mothers).

In the selected kindergartens, the initial plan was to conduct informal face-to-face interviews with the kindergarten owner and general manager, parents and staff to retrieve relevant empirical data about CCA implications on parent-teacher communication. The data collection started in the spring of 2020 yet was inevitably disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, some crucial interviews from the “no-CCA kindergarten” were made face-to-face (with the owner and with one parent couple). The rest were conducted by phone. Phone interviews may interfere with the communication situation between the interviewer and the respondent because they restrict relation-building and fluidity for both parties (Grønmo, 2016). However, they are also cost and time-effective, and enabled data collection completion despite the kindergarten sector being overwhelmed and the restrictions obstructing face-to-face meetings.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and the questions mainly revolved around CCA and no-CCA effects on parent-staff communication. The data are analysed by drawing on theory of professions, parents’ role as users and professional-client relations.

## FINDINGS

### Categorisation

The findings are organised on the basis of one main category: *Communication* – with the three subcategories *form of communication*, *routinisation* and *parent-teacher communication*. Following the study’s research question, the categories aim to provide research-based information regarding communication variations between the “*MyKid* kindergarten” and the “no-CCA kindergarten”.

27 The “*MyKid* kindergarten” in this study is a non-profit foundation which means that it has a general manager, not an owner.



### **Forms of communication in the "no-CCA kindergarten"**

The "no-CCA kindergarten" uses a Facebook group to post pictures of activities. Parents can comment and provide input. However, the information here is general, with pictures of plant boxes and children's backs. They also use Messenger for posting pictures and updates when on trips. Parents who do not wish to use Facebook or Messenger receive the same information via WhatsApp. The most frequently used communication tools are email and SMS for daily updates and information exchanges, in addition to face-to-face communication in delivery and pick-up situations. They also make occasional phone calls, and there is an analogue board on display with information, drawings and pictures. The pedagogical work is gathered in albums throughout the years and presented to the parents on the child's final day in kindergarten. Lastly, the owner uses a website as an "activity document" with pictures and information for the parents. The parents, however, viewed the owner as not digitally competent enough to utilise the website satisfactorily.

### **Routinisation of communication in the "no-CCA kindergarten"**

The data show that communication between the kindergarten and parents is generally un-routinised. The kindergarten owner states that formal parent meetings and parent–teacher conferences are the only routinised parent–staff communication channels. However, she is open to adjustments and flexibility and does not want the communication to be rigid. The interviewed parent couple pointed out that the monthly agenda is the only consistent information from the kindergarten. The parents do not have any routines in their communication towards the kindergarten.

### **Parent–teacher communication in the "no-CCA kindergarten"**

According to the owner, the actors experience a high level of face-to-face communication, which leads to open dialogue and good cooperation between staff and parents:

*Why can't we keep an open dialogue and talk? Instead of having everything in forms and systems and... no. Face-to-face. Then we get a good collaboration. Both with the parents and staff. (Owner, "no-CCA kindergarten").*

Some parents stated that face-to-face interactions with staff in pick-up situations provide personal information about everyday life in kindergarten. These interactions are a platform for dialogue, allowing staff to receive valuable parental input.

Some parents, however, wished for more day-to-day information regarding their children, such as daily pictures and stories. They expressed some criticism regarding the information quality: One father pointed out that he does not get information about his child's daily activity in kindergarten, as the child's mother does the pick-up. The mother often either forgets the information received during pick-up or forgets to convey it to the father, causing an information obstruction for the parents not involved in pick-up situations.

The father also pointed out that some emails from the kindergarten were very long, uncomprehensive and poorly formulated. He had given up reading these emails. Thus, some of the information sent from the kindergarten was either misunderstood or not being read at all. Clearing up misunderstandings and rewriting information could be time-consuming for the staff and potentially interfere with their pedagogical work. At the same time, communication is affected when parents cannot comprehend crucial information.

The owner furthermore states that they sometimes forget to update monthly plans and the information board. These are central channels for the kindergarten's general information and pedagogical documentation, and when they are not updated, neither are the parents. Also, the staff sometimes forget to give information to the parents. "Then it might come to mind on the bus trip home", according to one pedagogical leader. In these situations, the pedagogical leader informs parents over email in her free time.

One mother also described the relationship with the staff as somewhat problematic:

*We are very engaged parents, and we had a few challenges [...] regarding our child. I think that [...] the kindergarten made it escalate. There have been challenges. So the communication [from the kindergarten] was very active and sometimes pushy. If we agreed with the kindergarten, everything went smoothly, but if we disagreed or said "no" to some of the things they suggested, they became pushy, and we had to defend ourselves a lot. (Mother I, "no-CCA kindergarten").*

This statement shows that this mother and the kindergarten had some communication issues. From an analytical point of view, this might be caused by insufficient information and un-routinised communication because miscommunication causes conflicts.

Despite the emphasis on face-to-face communication, the kindergarten also uses Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, SMS, email and their website to communicate with the parents. The staff states that they communicate well via these channels, but parents think the owner lacks some technological competence in the utilisation. The updates are irregular, there is little information, and the pictures on the website are not downloadable.

Some staff members have been employed there for 25–30 years. This could cause professional rigidity while it, on the other hand, could improve the quality of the pedagogical work. Some parents describe the staff as “really good at improvising” and “changing the plans they initially had because something else becomes more important”, indicating flexibility and autonomy in pedagogical situations.

The kindergarten’s no-CCA approach makes the teachers gather pictures, information, and pedagogical work aimed at the parents throughout the years. This may strengthen the professional authority:

*[We] receive a really nice album [...] each summer. And it is getting filled each year. They get pictures from their entire time in kindergarten. It is really nice. [...] they are collecting [the pedagogical documentation]. (Mother II, “no-CCA kindergarten”).*

As for terminology, the owner refers to the parents as ‘parents’, not clients, customers or users. This wording could be seen as significant as a stance against the definition of *clientele* of a *care enterprise* that can leave for a competing organisation at any minute. This could thus be seen as a support for the kindergarten teachers’ professional latitude.

Some parents experienced a lack of information quality because it was absent, misunderstood, lost or forgotten. One mother also experienced a conflict-laden relation with the kindergarten regarding her child, which could be caused by miscommunication because of inadequate information. These are indications of a communication obstruction caused by issues regarding systematisation and quality of information. Clearing up misunderstandings and conflicts is also time-consuming for the staff, potentially interfering with pedagogical work. The no-CCA approach and pedagogical flexibility may, however, strengthen the kindergarten teachers’ credibility as pedagogical facilitators and increase their professional authority to use discretion. Face-to-face interactions also give parents access to relational situations to exchange information with staff, potentially benefiting the communication.

### **Forms of communication in the “MyKid kindergarten”**

In this kindergarten, *MyKid* is the central platform for communication between parents and staff and is mainly used for administrative and practical purposes and to present pedagogical documentation. The kindergarten uses *MyKid* to post their monthly and weekly plans, a digital information board, newsletters, digital “post-its” with short, important information, general information updates, pictures, videos, messages, and send emails via the app. They also keep sleeping lists and post pictures and activities related to the individual child. In addition, they communicate face-to-face with the parents in delivery and pick-up situations and call if children get sick during the day. The parents use *MyKid* for attendance registration, holiday and absence registration, and short messages about their child. They also communicate face-to-face with the staff in delivery and pick-up situations. The kindergarten has chosen not to use a function called “today” with information about daily activities. Regarding information about trips, the parents still get written notes on the wardrobe doors.

### **Routinisation of communication in the “MyKid kindergarten”**

The communication between the kindergarten and the parents is relatively routinised. Firstly, *MyKid* enables parents to register late arrival or absence directly in the app. Having practical information about all the children gathered in one place allows the kindergarten to plan the need for personnel at any given time. Pictures get posted several times a week, and children are registered upon arrival, information is posted daily, and the younger children’s sleeping time is registered every day. The pedagogues have allocated time during their workday to register information in *MyKid*. The app also shows which parents have not read the information, enabling staff to present information to these parents during delivery or pick-up situations. As some parents check *MyKid* infrequently, the staff stick written notes on their kids’ shelves with information.

### **Parent–teacher communication in the “MyKid kindergarten”**

Some parents had concerns *before* the implementation of CCA. One of them exclaiming: “Argh, [now] even my kid is [being] digitalised!” indicating that the parents had not been involved in the initial implementation.

My findings, however, show that the respondents afterwards think the app simplified practical communication. One parent described the app as useful because they “could register [their] child as sick instead of calling”. Another

parent stated that *MyKid* made it “easier to receive general information”. Moreover, there used to be a lot of slips of paper they had to bring home and remember, and many parents found it convenient to have everything in one place. One mother also stated that she “feels like I’m part of what is happening” because the information is more readily available.

The information via *MyKid* is downloadable and permanent, more readily available, and the parents can reach the staff “whenever about whatever”. The risk of losing information is reduced compared to the “analogue phase” before the implementation. This concentration of information on an app, however, places more responsibility to obtain information on the parents, thus raising expectations regarding the parental role. The kindergarten teachers use the app to “present pedagogical documentation directly to [the parents]”, and parents can access it anytime. The parents say they “[receive] more information than before”.

The staff stated that the app “makes the job a lot easier” because of “fewer elements to deal with”. Another respondent stated that it is convenient for the staff to communicate primarily digitally because it is easy to forget to pass on essential information to the parents in analogue situations. Further, the staff save time when they “do not have to answer so many questions [from the parents]” because most information is found in the app. One pedagogical leader also stated that they save time “not having to run around registering kids’ arrival and departure” and answer phone calls from parents calling about children’s absence. Parents can easily register this in *MyKid* at all hours of the day. According to the assistant, it is “[...] the pedagogues’ [...] responsibility” to write elaborate messages and post pictures as kindergarten teachers have assigned time to communicate through the app.

The general manager described the app communication as “formal”, “neutral”, and “systematic”. He stated that digital communication is not intended to build relationships, but frees time to build relations and more substantial face-to-face interactions.

The parents agree with this statement, and one mother said that “there is a softer tone” in the face-to-face meetings after the CCA came into use. Practical matters can be solved in the app, freeing time in the face-to-face encounters to talk about more substantial issues. *MyKid* is thus time-saving and convenient for both parents and staff, making information more available.

In this kindergarten, the general manager frequently uses the terms ‘customer’ and ‘user’ when referring to parents. These terms indicate an attitude

towards the parents and pedagogical staff that privileges the parents' consumer power.

As some parents check *MyKid* infrequently, the staff often does extra work sticking written notes on shelves, stealing time from pedagogical work. Some parents do not read these reminders either. Staff expressed some frustration that the information in the app is sometimes not read.

According to the general manager, the parents expect frequent and substantial information through the app. The anecdote below describes how parents in two different units compared the type of information they found in the app, leading one of the groups to demand more elaborate updates:

*[...] in one of our kindergartens [...] there were [...] two different units. [...] one [unit] communicated substantially [through the app] about what they did in the group, while the other [unit] did not communicate in this elaborate way. The thing is that in these two units, the children did the same things. The parents receiving the detailed information did not think about it, but the parents receiving neutral and "poor" information thought their children got too little. (General manager, "MyKid kindergarten").*

This led the general manager to push the second unit to expand their information. He explained that "the parents have great expectations of receiving frequent information from the kindergarten". Furthermore, "[t]he customer has a great need for information", and this information should be substantial.

Despite parents' demands for more information, the interviewed parents emphasised the importance of using the app "cautiously", meaning that too frequent app updates and detailed digital information can interfere too much with the teachers' daily professional work. One mother also stated that "it is important to find a good balance between useful information for the parents, and what [information] is just 'nice to have'". According to her, too frequent and elaborate information can give parents unrealistic expectations of the app's content and prompt the staff to update the app to please parents instead of being with the children. It is important to note that all the parents interviewed stated that they find the app updates too elaborate and frequent and that "many parents feel that it is a bit too much".

The staff have also made an active choice not to use the "today" function mentioned above because this provides incentives to talk about the day with the

parents during pick-up situations. Another reason is that some parents check *MyKid* infrequently and hence wish to have this information manually.

The respondents are comfortable with some degree of analogue information because total digitalisation may interfere with social relations and take time away from pedagogical work. If parents get unreasonably high expectations about the app's frequency and extent of updates, staff are worried they have to leave activities with the children to take pictures, thus losing focus of the pedagogical work.

*MyKid* simplifies sending and receiving information and makes pedagogical work more accessible for parents. Thus, the app is a documentation tool for frequent postings of information and pedagogical activities, making teachers account for their pedagogical work towards parents, potentially affecting their discretion. At the same time, *MyKid* can give kindergarten teachers more time to practice and facilitate pedagogical work and frees time for more substantial face-to-face interactions, making parents feel included and increasing their participation in communication situations. However, not all parents check the app, which seriously interferes with the communication, as *MyKid* is the primary source of information about everyday life in kindergarten. Also, the data show that it is essential that the staff is aware of how the app is utilised. When the information is well-considered – and parents check the app – it can be a resource for both parties. The parents found CCA convenient as it simplified practical communication and they appreciated the CCA/face-to-face-communication combination. However, excessive digitalisation can negatively affect professional discretion because it is time-consuming for staff. Excessive use of CCA can also negatively affect parent–teacher communication when the updates are too detailed and frequent.

## DISCUSSION

### Parent–teacher communication

The marketisation and regulation of the kindergarten sector could make the *enterprises* increasingly dependent on maintaining their *clientele*, potentially both threatening and strengthening the parent–teacher communication and pedagogical autonomy. According to Eisenstadt (1959), organisations must develop communication techniques to retain the clientele and meet their demands. *MyKid* can be such a communication technique to obtain market-power through service and quality.

My findings show that parents experienced *MyKid* as improving the information flow by centralising and streamlining practical communication, freeing time to address more substantial matters in face-to-face meetings. If parents utilise the app, parent–teacher communication could thus benefit. Parents can observe and check information and pedagogical activities through the app, granting them more insight into these situations. The CCA thus makes information from the kindergarten more available, enabling the parents to be more involved in everyday kindergarten life, enhancing their ability to participate and contribute. The teachers described the CCA as improving work efficiency, apart from the aforementioned cases of double work when certain parents did not check the app. At the same time, teachers used *MyKid* as a documentation tool to frequently present pedagogical practice directly to the parents. This could make the kindergarten teachers account for their pedagogical work and actions, thus decreasing their professional discretion. It could also negatively affect parent–teacher communication if the updates are too elaborate. If the utilisation of the app is balanced and well-considered, it could, however, be a resource for both parent–teacher communication and pedagogical work.

The general manager of the “*MyKid* kindergarten” frequently refers to parents as ‘customers’ and ‘users’. Such terminologies could put the kindergarten teachers in a state of mind where they feel *indebted* to the *clients* for choosing them over another kindergarten.

CCA, however, places more responsibility to obtain information on the parents, increasing expectations regarding their role. Their ability to get insight or provide input to everyday kindergarten life depends on whether they obtain CCA information. Parents must thus take an active part. Their ability to influence does not happen automatically.

The irregular dissemination of information – possibly caused by not using CCA – could reduce parental access to information and inhibit parent–teacher communication in the “no-CCA kindergarten”. There are also signs of a communication obstruction, causing some miscommunication and conflicts. There are thus indications that the parents in this kindergarten possess consumer *patronage* to a lesser degree. The parents describe the owners’ digital competence as inadequate, thus interfering with staff conveying information because it is either lost or misunderstood. Resolving these misunderstandings can interfere with pedagogical work because it is time-consuming. On the other hand, the data imply that the no-CCA approach and pedagogical flexibility strengthen



professional authority. Frequent face-to-face interactions give the actors access to relational situations of information exchange, potentially benefiting communication. The album presented to the parents once a year might also profit the parent–teacher relationship because it is personal and made with care.

The owner refers to the parents as 'parents', not clients or users. This terminology might strengthen the kindergarten teachers' professional latitude because it could provide a mindset where the parents are not seen as *clientele* of a *care enterprise* that can leave for a competing organisation at any minute. Such wording indicates different understandings of parental roles and parent–teacher relations between the two kindergartens, potentially affecting communication.

Documentation of pedagogical practice is not new, and parents in both kindergartens are granted parental representation and participation through KA. Nevertheless, CCA makes the documentation downloadable, permanent and centralised, and thus more accessible than before. As information is posted several times a week, *MyKid* grants parents a better insight into information from the kindergarten, allowing them a greater degree of participation in communication situations. They are given real-time access to information and pedagogical documentation through one single platform, and CCA thus makes the work of the *enterprise* more transparent. These elements show variations between the "MyKid kindergarten" and the "no-CCA kindergarten" regarding parent–teacher communication, in accordance with the theories cited above.

My data imply that excessive digitalisation caused by too elaborate app updates can negatively affect *structural* discretion and parent–teacher communication because it takes time away from pedagogical work and overwhelms the parents. *MyKid* provides parents with centralised and frequent access to practical information and pedagogical documentation, potentially making the kindergarten teachers balance the edge between market and authority. At the same time, parents are described as more engaged and knowledgeable by Vedvik (2020), indicating that parents' increased potential to provide input can be valuable for teachers' *epistemic* discretion and parent–teacher communication. If used cautiously, CCA can increase the information quality regarding pedagogical work, strengthening the profession. CCA makes the pedagogical documentation more available, increasing transparency. This transparency enables parents to offer valuable resources for communication and pedagogical work as long as parents obtain the information.

CCA thus entail both rules and resources for the actors using it, acting both as an engagement tool and system of constraint. Such *media* need to be understood

as fundamentally intertwined with social action (Silverstone, 1997). This is illustrated by one kindergarten teacher stating that *MyKid* has become a natural part of communicating with the parents. CCA could be a resource for *epistemic* discretion and parent–teacher communication because teachers select and formulate the general and pedagogical information conveyed through the app, thus controlling the information flow. Simultaneously, information transparency following the *MyKid* communication offers the parents access to quality information, increasing their potential for involvement and contribution. Following a *structural* understanding of discretion, CCA might narrow the *doughnut hole* for kindergarten teachers. The information transparency makes the teachers reflect on their pedagogical work and increase their professional awareness towards the parents. This can interfere with *structural* discretion because it allows parents to affect the content and manner in which the pedagogical information is conveyed. The respondents simultaneously state that CCA frees time for pedagogical work and more substantial encounters, which can be seen as leeway for *structural* discretion and communication.

In the “no-CCA kindergarten”, parents are not granted the same frequent and centralised information regarding day-to-day activities because of the kindergarten’s no-CCA approach. The data also show that some parents do not get information about everyday activities in kindergarten because they are not involved in pick-up situations. This can reduce parental insight and contributions, inhibiting parent–teacher communication, and make the teachers miss valuable input from parents at their *epistemic* discretion. Frequent face-to-face interactions might, conversely, benefit parent–teacher communication and teachers’ *epistemic* discretion, provided that parents and kindergarten teachers can attain such relational situations of information exchange.

Teachers in both kindergartens must deal with surrounding restrictions like Ministry of Education regulations and detailed government management (Børhaug et al., 2018). The teachers in the “no-CCA kindergarten”, nevertheless, has one less restriction affecting their *structural* discretion. One can argue that the no-CCA teachers possess more authority in the pedagogical product because pedagogical documentation is gathered over time before being presented to parents, limiting parental interference. Parents are not granted frequent insight into everyday kindergarten life and pedagogical work, strengthening the teachers’ *structural* discretion. Inefficiency caused by information obstruction, however, restricts both *structural* discretion and parent–teacher communication.

## CONCLUSION

*MyKid* makes practical and pedagogical information more available for parents, enabling them to participate and contribute in communication situations. The centralisation and streamlining of practical information frees time to address more substantial matters in face-to-face meetings, benefiting parent–teacher communication. The teachers state that CCA improves work efficiency – if parents access the information. Parents’ ability to gain insight and provide input is thus dependent on them actively obtaining the CCA information. It is also essential to find a good balance between beneficial and redundant CCA information for CCA to benefit the communication.

In the “no-CCA kindergarten”, there are signs of a communication obstruction causing some miscommunication and conflicts. The no-CCA approach leads to some irregular dissemination of information, interfering with pedagogical work and parent–teacher communication. Not using CCA can, however, also lead to more frequent face-to-face interactions, which benefits communication, as long as parents gain access to such relational situations of information exchange. There are also implications that the no-CCA approach strengthens professional authority and the parent–teacher relationship because the pedagogical work is gathered over time and personalised.

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