ECEC professionalization – challenges of developing professional standards

Anton Havnes

Centre for the Study of Professions, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

Anton Havnes

Centre for the Study of Professions, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applies Sciences, PO Box 4, St. Olavs pl., 0130 Oslo, Norway

anton.havnes@oslomet.no

Tel.: +4767235367

ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0002-9469-5039

Anton Havnes is professor of professional studies at Centre for the Study of Professions, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science. He has 12 years experience as early childhood teacher with children from 1 to 6 years of age. His phd is on student learning in higher education. Research interests are learning and assessment in higher education, professional qualification and professional learning and development. His research covers a range of professions: teachers, early childhood teacher, nursing, engineering and social work.

ECEC professionalization – challenges of developing professional standards

Within the early childhood education system, early childhood teachers are the weak element in two hierarchies, the governance hierarchy and the epistemological hierarchy. From the perspective of early childhood teacher professionalization, this is a paradox because professionalism is intrinsically linked to a relatively high degree of professional autonomy and control over one's work. However, professional autonomy must be built on a set of professional standards – or commons – that clarify the values, priorities and knowledge that are shared among the professionals. In this project, a researcher (the author) and a group of early childhood teachers have worked out a set of professional standards for early childhood teachers, with Norway as context of analysis. The article aims to conceptualise what early childhood teachers view as the core of their professional practice. It conceptualises the attempt to develop professionalism 'from within' that professional practice, expressing professional standards from the perspective of professionals.

Keywords: ECEC professionalism; early childhood teacher role; professionalization; professionalism; professional knowledge; early childhood education

Introduction

As early childhood education and care (ECEC) has gained increasing political attention and expanded dramatically, ECEC has been transformed from being an area of professional autonomy to the subject of state-mandated guidelines (Bleken 2005, 22; Oberhuemer 2005, 2). Increasing specifications of ECEC provision have followed: national curricula; enhanced state regulation, municipal and institutional management; quality criteria; accountability systems and documentation. While making it more explicit what ECEC is and what purposes ECEC serves, the scope and level of top-down governance and control have both increased (Hordern 2016). Stronger policy

involvement has reinforced what Oberhuemer (2005, 12) labels 'managerial forms of professionalism' – professionalism 'from above' that represents a hierarchical relationship between policy and practice.

Another process of ECEC professionalization from above is situated in the system of ECEC qualification and research: the relationship between higher education and ECEC practice. The transformation from a vocational, practice-based education to academic study has enhanced the emphasis on academic knowledge and scholarly enquiry and weakened the emphasis on practical skills and personal experiences in ECEC as in other professions (Sullivan 2005). It has established what Urban (2008, 141) describes as an epistemological hierarchy in which knowledge is assumed to be '*produced* (academic research, scholarly debate), *transmitted* (professional preparation, pre- and in-service training) and *applied* (practice)'.

However, there is also an increasing engagement among ECEC professionals themselves to make their professional knowledge and skills explicit and pursued in research (Dalli 2008; Hallet 2013). These initiatives emphasise bottom-up processes in which professionalization is situated in professional learning and development from within the professional setting. They are often associated with what Oberhuemer's (2005, 13) labels 'democratic professionalism', which foregrounds 'collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders'.

In this account, ECEC professionalism is positioned in a triangular relationship between policy, research and the profession itself (Figure 1), each of which has particular values, priorities and approaches. In policy, the emphasis might be on ECEC provision as a means for enhancing 'lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability' (European Commission 2011, 1), which implies engagement with short- and long-term social and economic outcomes. Research tends to

prioritise cognitive knowledge, theorising, reflection and critical thinking, emphasising

engagement with the cognitive underpinnings of professional practice from diverse

disciplinary fields (Sullivan 2005). In ECEC practice, the local institutional practices of

interacting with children, educational leadership, relationships with parents and

professional skills are foregrounded (Dalli 2008; Miller, Dalli, and Urban 2012;

Oberhuemer 2005). The emphasis is on engagement with 'clients', colleagues and local

knowledge and practice. Furthermore, these different agentive positions vary in social

position, rank and authority. Politicians and managers, researchers and ECEC

practitioners are not equals within the social system of ECEC provision. In this

triangular system, ECEC professionals are the weak element with respect to setting the

agenda and decision-making in both of these two sets of hierarchies; governance and

epistemology. Some researchers draw particular attention to the significance of

engaging with the tensions of ECEC professionalisms inherent in the policy-driven

governance hierarchy (e.g. Urban 2014, 2016). The emphasis of this analysis is on

tensions of ECEC professionalism inherent in the epistemological hierarchy. Both

orientations represent a system approach to ECEC and pinpoint the need of ECEC

practitioners to raise their voices and clarify their competences, priorities and

professional values – not as individual efforts but by a joint collective professional

agenda.

National curricula; strengthened state, municipality and institutional management; quality criteria; accountability systems, and documentation

Professionalism "from above"

Academic knowledge and academic enquiry Weakened emphasis on practical skills and personal experiences

Policy　　　　**Research**

Governance hierarchy

Organisation: Accountability

Occupation: Knowledge, skills, values

Epistemological hierarchy

ECEC practice

ECEC professionals in terms of their own conceptualisations of professional competences

Organisational professionalism

Occupational professionalism

Professionalism "from within"

Figure 1. ECEC professional triangle, expanded by core elements and emerging governance and epistemological hierarchies inherent in ECEC system. Some elements of the model to be elaborated below.

Paradoxically, the voices of those who are directly engaged in ECEC practice play a minor role in setting ECEC quality and professionalism standards. It is a paradox because the very notion of professionalism is intrinsically linked to a relatively high degree of professional autonomy and control over one's work (Brante 2010). The legitimacy of professional autonomy rests on the assumption that professionals possess knowledge and skills considered relevant for that practice (Hordern 2016). Abbott (1988, 8) emphasises occupational jurisdiction and division of labour, defining professions as 'exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases', adding that professional status typically presupposes higher education qualification.

Metaphorically speaking, ECEC professionalization implies that ECEC teachers will or should stand up from their relatively weak position in the ECEC system to claim

professional independence and a stronger position within both the governance and epistemological hierarchies. By staking a claim to professionalism, ECEC teachers also face the challenges of claiming authority in a context populated by a range of other 'important stakeholders, such as parents and politicians, still sending stereotypical gendered messages to the preschool teachers and the wider constituency, which … downgrade [ECEC teachers'] professionalism, leadership and social status' (Jónsdóttir and Coleman 2014, 221). Not least, with professionalization come licencing and obligations regarding particular tasks and responsibilities. As a consequence, some restructuring of responsibilities and division of labour within the multi-occupational ECEC workforce may follow.

This paper is part of a research and innovation project aiming to strengthen the dialogue between higher education and research. This article pays particular attention to the voices of ECEC teachers in articulating the core of ECEC professional knowledge and skills, the standards of the profession. It takes as a starting point the principles that ECEC professionalism remains in its formative stage, professionalism thus has not been fully achieved and it is uncertain if, or to what degree, ECEC teachers can or will achieve the status of a full-fledged profession (Brante 2010; Smeby 2011, 2014). The key question raised is: how do ECEC teachers articulate their shared set of core knowledge, skills and values on which ECEC practice is (or should be) grounded? To explore this question, a project was designed in which a researcher, nine ECEC teachers from three institutions and two educational consultants set out to develop a coherent and complementary set of ECEC professional standards.

The present study contributes to the discourse on ECEC professionalism by giving ECEC teachers an opportunity to articulate their own professional standards. Instead of developing a new set of predefined professional requirements, these

standards are meant as a negotiable set of professional norms. From this perspective, professionalization is a matter of critically reflecting on the knowledge and skills that constitute ECEC professional practice, explicating them and communicating them externally to ECEC teacher education and research, authorities, parents, other stakeholders and the general public.

A fundamental premise is that professionalism presupposes a collective approach, shared knowledge and values and an open and critical democratic debate among professionals themselves. Whether these standards will ultimately become accepted professional standards within the ECEC community can only be determined by how the standards are interpreted and (possibly) appropriated by the professional community.

Professional standards in context

The Norwegian context

The context of the project is the Norwegian ECEC sector. The overall ECEC policy document, the national Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2006/2011), specifies a set of themes or content areas: ensure care of children, sustain play, support formation (*Bildung*), enhance learning, support friendship and group interaction and promote communication and language. Each area is briefly described followed by a bullet list of 'to do' and 'to emphasise' formulations indicating how 'the staff shall' work. The particular responsibilities of the pedagogical leader (ECEC teacher) and the institution leader are described under separate headings. There is also a sector law and regulations specifying elements like staffing regulations, staff-children ratios, building standards, state funding, health issues and planning tools addressed to ECEC institutions and their owners.

The specific role of ECEC teachers is only addressed in terms of organisational responsibility. When there are two ECEC teachers in a group, there are no explicit expectations of the one who does not hold the institutional position of pedagogical leader beyond what is expected of all staff, qualified or otherwise. Notably, there is a growing interest among municipalities, ECEC institution owners and Norway's Ministry of Education to increase the number of ECEC teachers in ECEC institutions. This trend accentuates the need to articulate more clearly professional ECEC competence and the standards of the profession across diverse institutional positions.

Historically, the notion of ECEC professional standards has not been an issue in the Norwegian context.[i] However, the discourse on ECEC professionalization is emerging, partly based on studies of ECEC as site for professional learning and development (Eik, Steinnes, and Ødegård 2016), but also from both within the ECEC professional community itself and from policy-makers. In other countries, the professionalization debate has been more at the fore of ECEC research (Miller, Dalli and Urban 2012), driven to some extent by concerns about the introduction of professional standards from above and by policy-makers (Osgood 2006). As a consequence, international research on ECEC professionalism largely addresses the tension between policy and professional practice (Osgood 2010, 2012; Urban 2016) and professionalization becoming a matter of dealing with policy (Löfgren 2015).

Professional standards from above

An examination of the international ECEC landscape reveals that professional standards typically represent top-down, externally given and predefined requirements, quality criteria, procedures and accountability measures, all expressed in policy documents (e.g., Kinos 2008; Oberhuemer 2005; Osgood 2006, 2012; Urban 2008).

For example, in the UK, the national Early Years Professional standards lay out six requirements that those with Early Year Professional Status must meet:[ii] knowledge and understanding, effective practice, relationship with children, communication and working in partnership with families and carers, teamwork and collaboration, and professional development. These six areas are specified in a total of 39 National Standards, all formulated as outcomes and intended to be specific, explicit and assessable.

Australia has a shared set of professional norms for ECEC and all school teachers, with seven standards, each specified in four to seven focus areas (each focus area illustrated by 'illustrations of practice' videos) and defined by descriptors on four levels: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead.[iii]

In New Zealand, national standards for kindergarten teachers are integral to the Kindergarten Teachers, Head Teachers and Senior Teachers' Collective Agreement,[iv] and distinguish three levels: beginning teachers (graduated but not certified), fully registered teachers and experienced teachers. Three areas are specified: learning and teaching, learning environment and communication, each of which has four to six sub-themes with short descriptors for each of the three levels of experience. There are sets of additional professional standards for head teachers and senior teachers, which add up to five levels of ECEC professionalism. In all cases, in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, these professional standards are articulated mainly as descriptors of the professional's competence. There is a more or less explicit approach to assessing and certifying ECEC-teachers inherent in the standards, which could lead to tensions between standards as support for practice and standards as tools for governance, for control of professional practice and for certification purposes.

The dominance of professional standards serving governance and control has caused considerable dispute (e.g., Osgood 2006; Urban and Dalli 2010; Urban 2008, 2016). For instance, Urban and Dalli (2010) find that, rather than top-down models based on the search of certainty, there is a need to 'gather, document, disseminate and theorise [experiences from early childhood practise] as *practice-based evidence*' (173). This implies paying attention to the nature of ECEC practice, the continual juggling and uncertain nature of ECEC pedagogy (Osgood 2010, 2012) and the unique combination of education and care, formulated as 'educare'', that characterises ECEC practice (Oberhuemer 2005). However, the challenges of ECEC professionalization are also linked to the multi-occupational ECEC workforce. It is from the position of taking the challenges of ECEC practice as a starting point that this project was developed.

Professionalization from within

Across three recent Norwegian doctoral theses (Eik 2014; Ødegård 2011; Steinnes 2014), a shared finding was that what ECEC teachers find most challenging was leading the pedagogical practices of a multi-occupational workforce in which most staff do not have the ECEC teacher qualification. ECEC teachers find it difficult to articulate their knowledge, make it visible to colleagues, describe and justify how they work and make their practice into an object of analysis and evaluation. In a work context characterised by horizontal collegial relationships (often labelled a 'flat structure') voicing professional knowledge is particularly problematic (Eik, Steinnes, and Ødegård, 2016). These findings are paradoxical from a professionalization perspective, because 'professional work requires a knowledge base that is both 'articulable' and a 'collective asset' (Hordern 2016, 2). Professionalism presupposes some level of shared understanding of practice that is communicable and can form the basis for collaboration and critical reflection, initially within the professional group but also externally.

The ECEC workforce is multi-occupational. ECEC teachers and other staff work alongside one another, often with equally shared responsibilities (Jónsdóttir and Coleman 2014; Karila and Kinos 2012; Steinnes 2014). The 'within-perspective' indicates that ECEC professionalization needs to be based on a ground-up, democratic and agency-oriented model of professionalism (Hordern 2016). Professionalization is strongly influenced by Oberhuemer's (2005) concept of 'democratic professionalism', which emphasises 'collaboration and co-construction of knowledge among stakeholders' (Jónsdóttir and Coleman 2014, 211).

Taking this kind of position in her study of Early Years Professionals in the UK, Clark (2012) finds that a key to understanding ECEC professionalism lies in developing a concept of catalytic leadership. Catalytic leadership is characterised by multivoicedness, the bridging of research and practice rather than organisational leadership, influence rather than authority and recognition of potentiality rather than imposing norms from above (393). Another UK study of Early Years Professionals (Hallet 2013) describes ECEC professionals as a distinct learning community engaging in reflective dialogue and the development of professional identity. Five aspects of leadership are depicted: common attribute of being visionary and passionate about working with children,'; take role as change agents to improve pedagogy and practice; taking a role as reflective practitioners in 'dialogue with others to change and modify practice'; acting as reflective practitioners; and engaging in the ECEC learning community (Hallet 2013, 319-322). In an interview study, Dalli (2008) identifies three core aspects of ECEC professionalism emphasised by ECEC teachers in New Zealand: pedagogical strategies and style; professional knowledge (e.g., theories of early childhood education, knowing the ECEC curriculum, reflective practice); and collaborative relations with colleagues, parents and beyond the institution.

Theoretical perspectives

Professionalism implies a discourse that extends beyond the internal work setting. A professional is not only responsible for his or her own actions and local institutional practice, but also represents a collegial professional group that spans institutions. Professionals act in accordance with a shared set of knowledge, skills and values that stand up to collegial scrutiny. Drawing on this basic idea, a core intellectual resource for exploring professionalism is situated in the sociology of professions, in which three perspectives on professionalism are underscored (Sciulli, 2005; Havnes and Smeby, 2014). In the first interpretation accentuated professionalism is typically described as a value system, often with an altruistic orientation and strong commitment to the interests of the patients, clients or users of their services (Parsons 1959). Later, a critical approach emphasised professions as self-interested groups protecting their own interests (Johnson 1972). The third interpretation, developed in the 1990s, is associated with an 'appeal to "professionalism" as a motivator for and facilitator of occupational change' (Evetts 2003, 395). From the perspective of this new professionalism, the authorities, policy and institutional management are the stronger elements, while professionals' autonomy, discretion, self-evaluation and self-control represent the weaker parts. The distinction between professional autonomy and institutional governance and control is a classic issue in the sociology of science, raised by Etzioni's (1969) analysis of the so-called semi-professions.

Given the intention of this project to make the voice of the ECEC professional explicit and to explore the potential for professionalization from within, we bear in mind Evetts' view that a profession is 'a generic group of occupations based on knowledge' (Evetts 2003, 397). Returning to the classics, the significance of knowledge is more than apparent; it is the very core of professionalism. For instance, Etzioni (1969,

xiii) argues that the relationship between administrative (policy-based) and professional autonomy is 'largely affected by the amount and kind of knowledge the professional has'. A core question follows: what characterises work that requires a professional approach and what characterises the relationship between knowledge and practice in the professions?

Etzioni (1969) and Evetts (2003) both emphasise the link of professional practice to dealing with uncertainties and risks, in some cases very serious (e.g., medicine, military), in other cases less immediately dramatic, but with important potential long-term implications. A 'genuine' professional situation, Brante (2010, 861) argues, is one where 'professionals possess knowledge of mechanisms for various phenomena but have to make delicate judgements about which ones are the optimal to use, how they should be used [and] how a context must be altered to make the right mechanisms work'. Professionalism implies knowledge-based sense-making and intervention(s) in particular and uncertain situations. Quoting Durkheim (1964), Brante (856) emphasises that the task of professionals is 'not merely to paraphrase the traditional prejudices of the common man but to give us a new and different view of them [. The professional] must consequently be on his guard against his first impressions'.

What kind of knowledge is professional knowledge? Abbott's (1988) definition of professionals applying general knowledge to particular cases underscores the interaction between general, scientific knowledge and the 'reading' of uncertain and potentially risky situations as a key dimension of professional practice. A professional, then, is a mediator 'between science and object' (Brante 2010, 864). Science, Brante argues, 'studies its object by *observing*, manipulating and discussing it. Science theorizes by providing the object with a conceptual apparatus, by classifying it into a

discursive formation' (848–849). Professionals intervene by transforming the object. Through 'practices of implementation, professionals mediate between science and its object' (Brante 2010, 849). The professional act is a product of practical synthesis, in which specific components of professional knowledge are identified as significant in a particular situation and enacted upon in such a way that the act is aligned with the knowledge base of the profession and what the situation requires and affords (Grimen 2008). It may require both reflectiveness and immediacy and may be explicit and codified or implicit and embodied, thus resembling Aristotle's notion of phronesis (Eikeland 2008).

Coming back to the professional triangle and ECEC teachers' relatively weak position within the political and epistemological hierarchies in which they find themselves, a core question is identifying the ground on which ECEC professionalism can develop and how ECEC professionalization relates to policy-oriented and knowledge-oriented hierarchies. In the context of research on ECEC professionalism, Urban and Dalli (2012) argue that 'it is the practice – or actions – that are the site of professionalism' (160), and, quoting Van Manen (1977, 205), 'being professional in this field means "linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical"'. The question, then, is what competences are needed to handle a work context characterised as a constant juggle, balancing of multiple tasks and demands, 'a buzz of activity', a collection of 'trivial routines' and need of 'permanent attention' to or 'awareness' of the situation (Urban and Dalli 2012, 162). In these terms, ECEC professionalism would span the full complexity of making discursive formations of ECEC practice (Brante 2010) and be attuned to actual, developing situations. Notably, in a situation of emergence professionals also need also to be aware of other persons' (e.g. children, staff) attunement to the situation (Rommetveit 2003).

Methodology

This development of professional standards from within implies a small-scale process of articulating professional ways of interacting with the complexities of everyday ECEC practice. Methodologically, it can be described as participatory research (Bergold and Thomas 2012; Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), which is 'geared towards planning and conducting the research process *with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study [and implies] the convergence of two perspectives—that of science *and* of practice (Bergold and Thomas 2012, 192). Participatory research is often directed at including underprivileged groups and requires a democratic social and political context, a safe place in which participants can disclose their views and experiences. A key aim is 'the reconstruction of [the participants'] knowledge and ability in a process of understanding and empowerment' (Bergold and Thomas 197). In this context, including ECEC teachers in developing ECEC professional standards could ideally also be a process of empowerment.

To pursue these intentions, ECEC teachers[v] from three ECEC institutions, all employed by a nationwide private, non-profit ECEC provider, took part in developing ECEC professional standards. The institutions were recruited by the ECEC provider's professional development department to be engaged in a series of sub-projects within the wider contact of increasing the relationship between ECEC teacher education (including research) and professional practice. A short one-page orientation regarding the project was sent to potential participants. Recruitment of ECEC teachers was done by the institutional leader, selection being based on a combination of individual ECEC teachers' experience and interests. However, notably they represented their institution and work in between meetings was expected to include the wider group of ECEC teachers in the institution. Two pedagogical consultants had the role of coordinators, but

took part in the development of the professional standards on equal terms as other participants. The ECEC teachers had from 1 to 23 years of work experience from ECEC, most of them first as non-qualified assistants before ECEC qualification. The majority were male, which reflected the relatively high proportion of male ECEC teachers in these institutions. While there was no gender-related dissonance in the raising of issues, discussions or decisions made in the course of the project, a gender bias in the results cannot be ruled out.

At the first meeting, the project's intentions were discussed. All participants agreed on the need to make ECEC teachers' knowledge and skills more explicit for the professional group itself, within the institution and externally. However, the notion of ECEC professional standards was unfamiliar to the participants. Examples of professional standards from the UK (ECEC, schools, nursing), Australia (ECEC and schools) and New Zealand (ECEC) were provided to the participants as illustrations; they showed the most interest in the UK professional standards for nurses and midwives, The Code (NMC 2015). While professional standards for teachers typically are set by governing authorities, The Code is formulated by the professional organisation itself.

The group met by-monthly 8 times over a period of 18 months – each meeting lasting for about 3 hours – discussing and developing drafts. Between meetings, the ECEC teachers worked on the project as groups within their own institutions, often including a wider group of ECEC teachers. The researcher summarised previous discussions and new contributions from the ECEC institutions, and prepared drafts for the next meeting. The outcome or result of the research process was a set of ECEC professional standards that gradually emerged through full group meeting discussions,

discussions in the ECEC institutions and the researcher's summaries and analysis of a series of drafts of professional standards.

At the first meeting of the full group, three core questions were raised: What characterises ECEC teacher competence? What do we, as ECEC teachers, expect of ourselves and our colleagues? What are the essential aspects of ECEC daily practice? The responses to these questions from all institutions were distributed to the full group prior to the next meeting as a platform for further discussion. Emerging drafts were discussed during subsequent meetings and within the three ECEC institutions between full group meetings. From relatively long lists of bullet points an increasingly structured version of the document developed through a process of proposing and critically discussing statements and naming and clustering overarching themes, which again opened up space for the discovery of new, more specific formulations. Finally, we had a nested set of standards at three levels of specificity.

In this process, the ECEC teachers played the key role in deciding what was to be included, the formulation of standards and the format and structure of the document. The primary input and the final say were theirs. They were co-producers – or rather the key producers – of these professional standards. They were also co-authors of the dissemination of the research to the professional field; the full set of Professional Standards (Havnes et al. 2017a) accompanied by an article situating the project and the professional standards in the context of ECEC policy and practice (Havnes et al. 2017b). These are both results of the project published in a professional magazine reaching out to nearly 100 percent of Norwegian ECEC teachers. Also, the project group has also jointly prepared a set of PowerPoint presentations about the project for both professional and academic groups. The key role of the researcher (who spent 12 years as an ECEC teacher) was to moderate and summarise the discussions, collect new

drafts from the ECEC institutions, coordinate drafts and prepare the materials for each meeting.

There were two validation processes in which more ECEC teachers from a wider range of ECEC institutions were invited to comment on the draft. At an early stage a preliminary set of headings and general descriptions of each topic were discussed and commented on by a group of about 40 ECEC teachers from all 9 ECEC institutions taking part in the wider innovation project. In addition to an open discussion, groups made suggestions on flip charts regarding what could be included under each topic. The second validation took place once a full draft had been completed; ECEC teachers from 9 ECEC institutions.

With respect to research ethics, in this participatory research methodology there is no clear distinction between the roles of 'informant' and 'interpreter'. The role of authorship overlaps with being informant in that the results and the publication of the results addressed to the professional field has been co-authored by all participants (Author, co-authors, 2017 a, b). There is no clear distinction between the data and the results or between 'informants' providing the data and the interpretation of the results. The results evolved in the process of developing and negotiating the drafts until a final set of professional standards. However, while the results and the publications for the professional field has been co-authored by the researcher and the ECEC practitioners, analyses presented in this article (e.g. the literature review and theorising) represents reflections beyond the shared project and is the researcher's (author's) responsibility.

Results – professional standards

The main result of this project is the ECEC professional standards document that are published in the Norwegian ECEC teacher magazine. The secondary result is the jointly authored article also published in the ECEC teacher magazine (alongside the standards).

In the context of this article there is space only to illustrate excerpts of the professional standard (translated into English) (Tables 1 and 2) and a short summary of the article. The final result – the PowerPoint presentations – are not referred to here.

A series of challenges arose that forced decisions to be made in the process of developing the document. For instance, the structure of the document, the genre of the statements, the scope of themes and the volume of the document all came up for serious discussion, but there is not space here to address how these issues were discussed and solved in the project in any depth here. However, some comments emerging in the validation process will be briefly addressed.

Professional standards – a proposal

The ECEC professional standards address four overarching areas: prioritising children, leading pedagogical practice, developing the broader organisation and promoting professionalism. For each standard, four to five sub-themes are outlined (Table 1) that make more explicit the referents of the various standards. For each of the 17 sub-themes, a series of 2 to 7 more specific action-oriented statements of professional practice are articulated.

Table 1. ECEC professional standards, themes (translated)

The ECEC teacher prioritises children	The ECEC teacher leads the pedagogical practice	The ECEC teacher develops the organisation	The ECEC teacher promotes ECEC professionalism
The ECEC teacher	The ECEC teacher	The ECEC teacher	The ECEC teacher
• prioritises play • stands up for the child • facilitates development of friendship, belonging and equity • builds and maintains a learning environment with caring and emotionally accessible adults	• takes on the role of a distinct, democratic pedagogical leader • plans the pedagogical work • works with all staff in an inclusive way • adopts a developmental approach	• is engaged in developing the whole institution • is engaged in a collegium of ECEC teachers within the institution • works systematically in developing ECEC practice • deals actively with policy documents • is committed to effective management of the institution	• is committed to his or her professional responsibilities • takes a professional approach to dealing with situations • establishes and maintains collaboration with other professions in the interests of the children • involves parents

Table 2 exemplifies the format of the three levels of articulations of ECEC professional standards (10 out of 18 'you' formulations specify this theme). In total, there are 75 statements at the most direct level that clarify the practical implications of the professional standards. As ECEC practice is so manifold, their relevance as individual statements will vary across institutions, over time and for individual ECEC teachers and cannot individually be attributed the status of full-fledged standards. The professional standards represent a set of four broad norms with a hierarchy of implications.

Table 2. ECEC professional standards – example

The ECEC teacher prioritises children

The ECEC teacher makes the interests development of children the first priority, shows good pedagogical practice and is a role model for other staff and parents. The ECEC teacher establishes and maintains a supportive pedagogical environment and has a keen eye for each individual child, the group of children and the interaction between children and staff.

The ECEC teacher prioritises play
> You consider children's play as the basic foundation of all plans, and you observe and support children in play
> You see and use the potential for learning inherent in play
> You are aware of and develop all staff members' competence in play
> You organise, motivate and inspire a rich and manifold play environment in which you participate actively
> You create a communicative environment in which children can express themselves in diverse forms of communication and actively explore and develop their language

The ECEC teacher stands up for the child
> You actively acknowledge and appreciate that each child is acknowledged and appreciated – every day – not talked about behind the child's back or criticised in someone else's presence
> You defend the child if he or she is insulted or misunderstood, even if by a colleague or other adult
> You support children in conflict situations
> You create the foundation for good dialogue with external bodies, other professionals and parents

The ECEC teacher supports development of friendship, community feeling and equality
> You observe the children's interactions and take measures when needed

---

Article addressed to the professional field

The joint article exposes the proposed Professional Standards for public debate across the community of ECEC teachers in Norway. It emphasises the need of ECEC teachers to raise their voice by expressing their professional competence, priorities and value. Another point made is the need of looking at the particular roles and responsibilities ECEC teacher have and need to express towards policy, research and ECEC teacher education, and society (incl. parents). In particular the relevance of making professional standards explicit for professional and institutional development in the ECEC sector is

highlighted, but also guidance of non-qualified staff and collegial discourse among ECEC colleagues within and across institutions.

Validation

As noted above, there were two steps of validation. While there were uncertainties as to what was meant by professional standards in the early validation process, we received a number of suggestions. With one exception, all comments in the second validation were supportive of the project of developing ECEC professional standards, as expressed in terms like: 'Reading this makes me proud of my job', 'we can see how extensive and important our work is', 'it covers the essence of our work as ECEC teachers' and 'this makes it easier to identify deviation and initiate measures to ensure good practice among all ECEC teachers'. There were a few comments on specific level three statements that led to some changes. One concern was raised among the positive responses: the standards are so extensive that 'they might seem a bit overwhelming in a busy day of work, sometimes we have to think that what we do is good enough'.

The critical comments (in one response) raised concerns about the very undertaking of articulating professional standard: 'The ECEC teacher's tasks and responsibilities are defined by national regulations (Framework plans for ECEC and for ECEC teacher education); 'Professional standards cannot secede from the social mandate (law, regulations and work instructions)'; 'Articulation of professional standards can only be relevant in the context of qualification', not for ECEC teachers; 'The standards are at a low level, matter of course and look like work directives'. Both sets of comments helped pinpoint crucial aspects of articulating ECEC professional standards, framing how they are communicated, and the challenges of implementation.

Discussion

This project's development of ECEC professional standards shows that ECEC teachers are capable of articulating core aspects of ECEC professional knowledge, skills and values and illustrates their priorities. The validation indicates that these articulations of professional standards are shared to a large extent across the wider ECEC professional community. The publication of the ECEC professional standards in a professional journal and a website will illuminate how the ECEC community as a whole will react to the proposal.

The professional standards also demonstrate the expansive and nested nature of ECEC professional practice and professional knowledge and skills, which is apparent in the structure of the proposed professional standards. However, it is a somewhat different nesting than Urban1s (2014, 4-5) agenda of analysing the ECEC system at four levels; individual, institutional, inter-institutional and governance. In contrast, but not in conflict with the system levels described by Urban, the professional standards articulate the professional object, or field of professional practice. This set of professional standards, developed by ECEC teachers, makes explicit their professional orientation, priorities and values from their position as practitioner in the ECEC system. A nested system of professional practices emerges – working with children, working with all staff, working with the ECEC teacher collegial group, and engaging with strengthening the profession as social agent. The latter level includes engaging actively in promoting the values of ECEC teachers and strengthen their position in both the epistemological and governance hierarchies. The professional standards represent a proposition for what Brante (2010, 863) labels 'the professional object' that constitute ECEC teacher professional practice and makes the ground for clarifying the fields of knowledge that professional practice is grounded upon – or need to be grounded upon.

The headings are articulated in singular grammatical form. The singular form emphasises that while the professional standards are general and collectively shared, they are upheld by individuals in the unfolding of their daily practice. This fundamental principle is reinforced in the third-level statements by the systematic use of 'you' and the action or activity orientation of the statements. However, while addressing individual responsibility, the professional standards are grounded on the idea that they can only be maintained by ECEC teachers working at four interrelated levels: pedagogical practice with children (including parents and the children's life situations); pedagogical leadership of the workforce; institutional development; and engagement with the collegial professional community within and beyond the institution. The interrelatedness of these levels also includes working across boundaries such as child/adult, ECEC teachers/other staff, workforce/institution, ECEC institution/other institutions and the authorities. In such boundary work, ECEC teachers are prepared to manoeuvre across, balance or make decisions in contexts of diverse, potentially conflictual interests, values and priorities. Given these contexts of risk, having what is best for the children upfront in the mind of the ECEC professional is particularly essential. Such risky situations appear on a daily basis and need to be identified, interpreted and dealt with professionally. In these respects, the professional standards resonate with the needs of professionalization from within, yet 'within' also implies 'across'. Likewise, the term 'democratic professionalism' also expands beyond the concrete interactive setting.

A basic premise underpinning this project is that ECEC professionalization presupposes that ECEC professionals take, and are allotted, a stronger position within the professional triangle (Figure 1) and make their voices clearer and stronger in the governance and epistemology hierarchies. As the main foundation of professionalism is

knowledge, strengthening ECEC professionals' position within the epistemological

hierarchy is essential. If, as is argued in the sociology of professions, the main factor

underpinning professions is knowledge, then not only applying but also challenging

research must have real privilege. This approach to developing ECEC professionals

calls to mind Brante's (2010) notion of the professional as a mediator between science

and the object of work. Figure 2 is a modification of Brante's alternative model of the

professional triangle, where the attention is on professionalism from an epistemological

perspective. It is a potential model for illustrating key aspects and challenges of

professionalism from within the context of ECEC teachers standing up in the

epistemological hierarchy where research and higher

education have traditionally had stronger roles. The

proposed ECEC professional standards, if and when

appropriated by the collegial ECEC community, can

play a role in renegotiating the role of ECEC teachers

and the significance of professional practice in ECEC
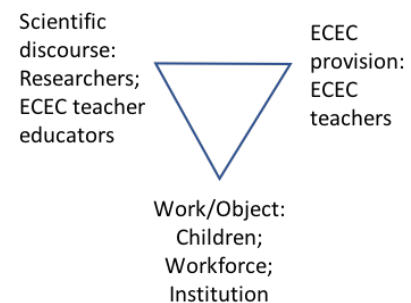
teacher qualification and research.

Figure 2: Professional triangle, adapted from Brante (2010).

However, building on the insights from new professionalism (Evetts 2001,

2003), the most critical issue concerning the articulation of professional standards 'from

within' might be what status such a document can claim to have in a context with a

wide range of diverse policy documents intended to influence the quality of ECEC

provision. The issue is briefly addressed in the introduction to the standards, but

remains very much unresolved. The critical responses resonate with Evetts' (2003)

distinction between organisational and occupational professionalism and

professionalism from above and from within.

In the terminology of new professionalism (e.g., Evetts 2003), the emphasis would be on 'occupational professionalism' in contrast to 'organisational professionalism', on developing professionalism from within rather than from above. From the perspective of the set of professional standards developed in this project, 'from within' is a highly expansive term that includes the individual, the local workforce, the local institution and the profession with its boundaries with other professions and occupations. Professionalization is development on the individual, local practice, institutional and system levels.

Conclusion

In this project, the development of a set of ECEC professional standards was not aimed at replacing or competing with national regulations in Norway, such as the ECEC Framework Plan or the curriculum and learning outcomes descriptions of ECEC teacher education. Instead, it sets another agenda: how do ECEC teachers articulate – for and among themselves and externally – what is essential in their pedagogical practice and knowledge, skills and values to do their job with quality. Proposing ECEC professional standards from within might contribute in paving the way for a system of discourse in which ECEC work is observable, negotiable and thus the object of critical discourse from the perspective of ECEC professionals themselves. However, as Figure 1 illustrates, the ECEC professionals' perspective is merely one among at least three valorised perspectives in the hierarchies that affect ECEC professionalism. ECEC professional standards may thus prove a useful tool for raising ECEC teachers' positions within the governance and epistemological hierarchies. As part of a project of strengthening the voices of ECEC teachers in the relationship between ECEC teacher education and the professional field, the professional standards do not prescribe or define the ECEC teacher education curriculum. Yet, with a stronger ECEC professional

community voicing their professional standards expanding the partnership across the higher educations and the field of professional might be useful for both parts – and also impact of policy and governance.

References

Abbott, Andrew. 1988. *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bergold, Jarg, and Stefan Thomas. 2012. "Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 13 (1): 191–222.

Bleken, Unni. 2005. *Førskolelærer og leder: en kompleks og viktig oppgave* [ECEC Teacher and Leader: A Complex and Important Task]. Oslo: Pedagogisk forum.

Brante, Thomas. 2010. "Professional Fields and Truth Regimes: In Search of Alternative Approaches." *Comparative Sociology* 9 (6): 843–886.

Brante, Thomas. 2014. *Den profesionella logiken: Hur vetenskap och praktik förenas i det moderna kunnskapssamhellet* [The Professional Logic: How Science and Practice Unites in the Modern Knowledge Society]. Stockholm: Liber.

Clark, Rory McDowall. 2012. "'I´ve never thought of myself as a leader but…': The Early Years Profession and Catalytic Leadership." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 20 (3): 391–401.

Cornwell, Andrea, and Rachel Jewkes. 1995. "What is participatory research?" *Social Science & Medicine* 41 (12): 1667–1676.

Dalli, C. 2008. "Pedagogy, Knowledge and Collaboration: Towards a Ground-up Perspective on Professionalism." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 16 (2): 171–185.

Durkheim, Emile. 1964. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: The Free Press.

Eik, Liv Torunn. 2014. "Ny i profesjonen. En observasjons: og intervjustudie av førskolelæreres videre kvalifikasjoner det første året i yrket" [New in the Profession: An Observation and Interview Study of ECEC Teachers' Further Qualification during their First Year in the Ioccupation]. Phd diss., University of Oslo.

Eik, Liv Torunn, Gerd Sylvi Steinnes, and Elin Ødegård. 2016. *Barnehagelæreres professionslæring* [ECEC Teachers' Professional Learning]. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Eikeland, Olav. 2008. *The Ways of Aristotle: Aristotelian Phrónêsis, Aristotelian Philosophy of Dialogue, and Action Research*. Bern: Peter Lang Publishers.

Etzioni, Amitai. 1969. "Preface." In *The Semi-Professions and Their Organizations: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*, edited by Amitai Etzioni, v–xviii. New York: The Free Press.

European Commission. 2011. *Communication from the Commission. Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow*. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0066:FIN:EN:PDF Retrieved 13 November 2017.

Evetts, Julia. 2003. "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism: Occupational Change in the Modern World." *International Sociology* 18 (2): 395–415.

Evetts, Julia. 2011. "A New Professionalism? Challenges and Opportunities." *Current Sociology* 59 (4): 406–422.

Freidson, Eliot. 1994. *Professionalism Reborn*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Hallet, Elaine. 2013. "'We all Share a Common Vision and Passion': Early Years Professionals Reflect upon their Leadership of Practice Role." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 11 (3): 312–325.

Havnes, Anton, Eyvind Bonde Frydenlund, Ida Christine Flaten, Øivind Hornslien, et al.. 2017a. Profesjonelle standarder for barnehagelærer – et forslag [Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers – A Proposal], *Første steg* 4/2017. https:/www.utdanningsnytt.no/forste-steg/.

Havnes, Anton, Eyvind Bonde Frydenlund, Ida Christine Flaten, Øivind Hornslien, et al. 2017b. Profesjonelle standarder for barnehagelærer [Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teacher], *Første steg* 4/2017: 40-43, https:/www.utdanningsnytt.no/forste-steg/.

Hordern, Jim. 2016. "Knowledge, Practice, and the Shaping of Early Childhood Professionalism." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 24 (4): 508–520.

Jónsdóttir, Arna H. and Marianne Coleman. 2014. "Professional Role and Identity of Icelandic Preschool Teachers: Effects of Stakeholders' Views." *Early Years* 34 (3): 210–225.

Karila, Kirsti, and Jarmo Kinos. 2012. "Acting as a Professional in a Finnish Early Childhood Education Context." In *Early Childhood Grows Up: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession*, edited by Linda Miller, Carmen Dalli, and Mathias Urban, 55–69. Dordrecht: Springer.

Kinos, Jarmo. 2008. "Professionalism – A Breeding Ground for Struggle: The Example of the Finnish Day-Care Centre." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 16 (2): 224–241.

Löfgren, Håkan. 2015. "Learning in Preschool: Teachers' Talk about their Work with Documentation in Swedish Preschools." *Journal of Early Childhood Research 15*(2): 130-143.

Manen, Max van. 1977. "Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical." *Curriculum Inquiry* 6 (3): 205–228.

Miller, Linda, Carmen Dalli, and Mathias Urban, eds. 2012. *Early Childhood Grows Up: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Molander, Anders and Lars Inge Terum. 2008. Profesjonsstudier – en introduksjon [Studies of Professions: An Introduction]. In *Studies of professions*, edited by Anders Molander & Lars Inge Terum, 13–27. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

NMC (Nursing & Midwifery Council). 2015. *The Code. Professional Standards of Practice and Behaviour for Nurses and Midwives*. London: Nursing & Midwifery Council.

Oberhuemer, Pamela. 2005. "Conceptualising the Early Childhood Pedagogue: Policy Approaches and Issues of Professionalism." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 13 (1): 5–16.

Ødegård, Elin. 2011. *Nyutdannede pedagogiske lederes mestring og appropriering av barnehagens kulturelle redskaper* [Newly Graduated ECEC Teachers' Mastery and Appropriation of the Early Childhood Institution's Cultural Tools]. PhD diss., University of Oslo.

Osgood, Jayne. 2006. "Professionalism and Performativity: the Feminist Challenge Facing Early Years Practitioners." *Early Years* 26 (2): 187–199

Osgood, Jayne. 2010. "Reconstructing Professionalism in ECEC: The Case for the 'critically reflective emotional professional.'" *Early Years* 30 (2): 119–133.

Osgood, Jayne. 2012. *Narratives from the Nursery: Negotiating Professional Identities in Early Childhood.* London: Routledge.

Parsons, Talcott. 1959. "The School Class as a Social System." *Harvard Educational Review* 29 (4): 297–318.

Rommetveit, Ragnar. 2003. "On the Role of 'A Psychology of the Second Person' in Studies of Meaning, Language, and Mind." *Mind, Culture and Activity* 10 (3): 205–218.

Sciulli, D. (2005). Continental sociology of professions today: conceptual contributions. *Current Sociology, 53*(6), 915-942.

Smeby, Jens-Christian. 2011. "Profesjonalisering av førskolelæreryrket?" [Professionalization of the early childhood teacher occupation." *Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv* 17 (4): 43-58.

Smeby, Jens-Christian. 2014. "Førskolelæreryrket vil neppe utvikle seg til en profesjon." [The early childhood teacher profession will hardly become a profession.] *Første steg* 2014/1: 10-19.

Steinnes, Gerd Sylvi. 2014. "Common Sense or Professional Qualifications? Division of Labour in Kindergartens." *European Early Childhood Research Journal* 22 (4): 478–495.

Sullivan, William M. 2005. *Work and Integrity. The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Urban, Mathias. 2008. "Dealing with Uncertainty: Challenges and Possibilities for the Early Childhood Profession." *European Early Childhood Education Research journal* 16 (2): 135–152.

Urban, Mathias. 2014. "Not Solving Problems, Managing Messes: Competent Systems in Early Childhood Education and Care." *Management in Education* 28 (4): 125–129.

Urban, Mathias. 2016. "At Sea: What Direction for Critical Early Childhood Research?" *Journal of Pedagogy* 7 (1): 107–121.

Urban, Mathias, and Carmen Dalli. 2012. "A Profession Speaking and Thinking for Itself." In *Early Childhood Grows Up: Towards a Critical Ecology of the Profession*, edited by Linda Miller, Carmen Dalli, and Mathias Urban, 157–175. Dordrecht: Springer.

---

[i] The ECEC teachers' union (which is also the school teachers' union) has developed a shared

set of professional ethical standards for ECEC and primary and secondary school teachers

(in Norwegian):

https://www2.utdanningsforbundet.no/upload/Lærerprof_etiske_plattform_plakat%20A3%20bm_ny%2031.10.12.pdf Retrieved 13 November 2017.

[ii] UK: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-teachers-standards Retrieved 13

November 2017.

[iii] Australia: https://www.aitsl.edu.au. Retrieved 13 November 2017.

[iv] New Zealand: https://education.govt.nz/school/running-a-school/employing-and-managing-staff/collective-agreements/kindergarten-teachers-head-teachers-and-senior-teachers-collective-agreement/appendix-b-national-professional-standards-for-kindergarten-teachers/

Retrieved 13 November 2017.

[v] At the outset three ECEC teachers from each institution were invited to participate. In the

course of the project there were some changes in the group. Some moved on to other

institutions and in some of the institutions more ECEC teachers took part than in others. Ten

ECEC teachers are co-authors of the final set of professional standards.