

The Professional Project among Danish Kindergarten Teachers: Its Nature and Consequences in the Current Context

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Abstract

This article describes ways in which the professionalization strategy among Danish kindergarten teachers is realised in practice by newly educated members of the occupation. It focusses on relations between gender and professionalisation and concludes that the professionalisation strategy is realised as, respectively, a female professional project and a male qualification project. The consequences of these two projects are discussed in terms of ways they seem to produce and reproduce kindergarten teachers' work. The article is based on ethnographic observations and interviews with newly educated kindergarten teachers employed in three different pedagogic institutions: day-care (0-6 years), after-school institutions (6-10 years) and club facilities (10-18 years).

Keywords

kindergarten teachers, professional project, gender, education, competitive state

1. Introduction

In Denmark, three interrelated processes are currently changing kindergarten teachers' work: (1) professionalization as formulated by the unions, (2) academisation as formulated by the professional schools, and (3) transformation of the welfare state as formulated by new public management. This article will focus on the interplay between the two first processes while discussing how these are made possible in a context defined by the third process. More specifically, the article will describe how newly educated members of the occupation, who to some extent can be expected to embody the academisation process, realise the professionalisation process defined especially by the biggest Danish union for kindergarten teachers, Børne-og Ungdoms pædagogernes Landsforbund (BUPL) (Note 1). This will happen from a gender perspective, thereby stressing the rather different ways in which male and female kindergarten teachers relate to formal education, abstract knowledge and the process of professionalisation. On the basis of the article's findings, it will be discussed what the consequences of the efforts towards professionalisation are in the current context, especially with regards to care work which has historically been the foundation of the occupation.

The article is structured as follows. First, the Danish context will be described and the three interrelated processes mentioned above elaborated on. Next, existing research that this research tries to supplement

will be presented. Third, a section on method follows. Fourth, the theoretical inspiration for the article will be described, including studies on the relation between professions, gender and professional projects. Fifth, an analysis will be presented of what will be called, respectively, a female professional project and a male qualification project. This analysis will focus on three themes having a bearing on these projects: (1) attitude and path to education, (2) institutional significance given to education, and (3) use of education in pedagogic practice. Finally, the article will be concluded and implications of findings discussed.

1.1 The Danish Case

In Denmark, many professionalisation strategies have been developed since the 2000s by occupational groups such as nurses, teachers, social workers and kindergarten teachers (Sygeplejeråd, 2002; Lærereforening, 2005; Socialrådgiverne, 2006; BUPL, 2006a). The strategies vary in their form and content, depending on the history of each occupational group, but common to them all is the objective to transform the occupation into a profession and thus gain greater societal recognition, status and economic reward. BUPL's professionalisation strategy can be characterised as ambivalent in the sense that they, on the one hand, recognise they are not a full-fledged profession like doctors and lawyers while on the other hand take measures which seem to reproduce a classic idea of what it means to be a profession. Their professionalisation strategy involves steps to increase the professional self-awareness among kindergarten teachers (including a better understand of their knowledge base); develop a code of professional ethics; strengthen the professional schools (University Colleges); invest money in research on kindergarten teachers; and develop alternatives to the ongoing transformation of the welfare state (BUPL, 2006a, pp. 9-10). Compared to other Nordic unions for kindergarten teachers—e.g., Utdanningsforbundet in Norway and Lärarförbundet in Sweden—BUPL can be said to lead the way when it comes to the development of a professionalisation strategy. In Norway, Utdanningsforbundet has developed a code of professional ethics, but they have not, as yet, funded research on kindergarten teachers (see e.g., Utdanningsforbundet, 2012). In Sweden, Lärarförbundet's efforts seem to be almost on par with BUPL. The former has developed a code of ethics, and together with other labour market parties they have formulated the “promilleprogram” which urges all municipalities to invest at least 1 0/00 of their funding in research on teachers' work (Lärarförbundet, 2011) (Note 2).

Concomitantly with these professionalisation strategies, the Danish education system for the above-mentioned occupational groups has been transformed from a locally based system with schools in almost every province to a system consisting of larger, fewer and more university-like institutions—the so-called University Colleges. This has happened as part of the Bologna process, but also to accommodate some of the wishes of the professionalising groups, including kindergarten teachers. Thus, the new title of “professional bachelor” has been granted to them, providing an opportunity for further education at the universities. Furthermore, the University Colleges are given research funds that enable members of the occupations to carry out professionally related research (Ministeriet for Forskning, Innovation og Videregående Uddannelser, 2013). Compared to Norway and Sweden, this

process occurred rather recently in Denmark: the process began around 2000 in Denmark while in Sweden and Norway it began in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively (Sirnes, 1998; Smeby, 2008). This suggests that the Danish case is a process of hyper-academisation of practically oriented occupations as other researchers have also noted (Eriksen, 1999, 2005; Hjort, 2005; Weber, 2002). In the programme for kindergarten teachers, this can be seen particularly in relation to the bachelor project. Before the reforms promoting academisation (2000), the students had to finish their education with a so-called “speciale” (a final assignment) giving high priority to reflections on practical pedagogic work and personal development; after the reforms the students now must finish their education with a bachelor project emphasising academic skills. Thus, with a quick transformation of the “special” into a bachelor project new kindergarten teachers are expected to become academics on the same formal standing as students from the “old” universities with a “normal” bachelor degree.

As these processes of professionalisation and academisation have taken place, a third and more far-reaching process has occurred: a change of the Danish welfare state into what has been called the competitive state (Pedersen, 2011; Hjort, 2012). This is an important change for the implicated occupations whose history and rise occurred as part of the construction of the welfare state (Weber, 2002; Mathiesen, 2005; Buus, 2001; Dahl, 2000). The welfare state constituted a condition for transforming their previously unpaid reproductive work carried out in the families into paid labour carried out as part of a universalistic-welfare-state ethos (Briggs, 1961). In the competitive state, a new work ethos has emerged. Taxation and public budgets are no longer seen as expenses that every citizen must accept as part of the common good, but as investments that every human resource is encouraged to make in the country as a global enterprise. As such, the state becomes a “board of directors” in a national enterprise, and the market becomes a means—not an end—of strategic management. In the same way, public servants are remained as employees who must appropriate a new productive work ethos, as opposed to their former reproductive or client-oriented work ethos. In Sweden, a similar process can be observed although the state is not transformed so much as it is rolled back in favour of privatisation (Lundahl, Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2013). In Norway, the welfare state so far seems to remain in its original, universalistic form although it too has been criticised and subjected to some of the same types of control as the ones inspired by new public management in Denmark (Langfeldt, 2007).

As mentioned, these three processes are seen as interrelated. Theoretically, they are understood as collective wills running coincidentally together in what seems to be a new historic bloc (Gramsci, 2007), replacing an older alliance between the welfare state and the—predominantly female—occupations it gave birth to. Empirically, especially the relation between academisation and professionalization will be studied by analysing how newly educated kindergarten teachers understand and use their education in their first jobs.

1.2 Existing Research

The Danish kindergarten has developed into an institution that handles three related tasks: upbringing, care and learning (Andersen, 2002; Kampmann, 2004; Nielsen, 2005, 2013; Brinkkjær, 2013; Kofod, 2007). Historically it arose at the end of the nineteenth century through figures such as Friedrich Fröbel, Hedwig Bagger and Anna Wulff. At that time it was first and foremost an institution for upbringing—more precisely the upbringing of poor working class kids whose fathers and mothers had to leave home and find work in the new industrial labour market (Nielsen, 2005, pp. 196-200). Gradually the kindergarten developed into an institution for everyone's children. This became possible through women's entrance into the labour market in the 1960's and 1970's (Andersen, 2002, pp. 321-34). In order to expand the workforce, the kindergarten had to expand and thus take care of more children than previously. During the last two decades, "learning" has been added to the goal of kindergarten as a relatively new task (Nielsen, 2013, pp. 86-88; Brinkkjær, 2013, pp. 55-58). Of course, learning has always taken place in the kindergarten, but a new and stronger focus on purposive, school-like learning has entered into the institution in step with the emergence of the competitive state.

New research has analysed and discussed the consequences of the stronger focus on purposive learning. From a point of departure in critical theory, Ahrenkiel, Nielsen, Schmidt, Sommer and Warring (2012) have analysed the new focus on purposive learning as part of a more general trend in which neoliberalism damages public sector institutions and introduces new meanings and purposes in line with market rationality. They describe how new policies split up work routines in kindergartens in order to document, evaluate and price different activities (Ahrenkiel et al., 2012, pp. 26-28). Furthermore, they describe how some parts of kindergarten teachers' professionalism (pånordisk, Faglighed) go unnoticed while other parts are recognized neoliberal policies.

In another point of departure in critical theory, Willig (2008, 2009) have described kindergarten teachers' suffering and lack of possibilities under neoliberalism. According to Willig, neoliberalism is a faceless enemy, a target that shifts position continuously (Willig, 2008, p. 78). Therefore kindergarten teachers direct their critique towards something more tangible—themselves—instead of their surroundings. In Norway, this finding has been elaborated by Hennum, Pettersvold and Østrem (2015). They describe how kindergarten teachers increasingly are gagged by their employers and thus cannot express their freedom of speech as public servants.

From a discursive perspective, Krejsler (2013) looks more positively at the new focus on purposive learning. He describes both possibilities and restrictions. According to Krejsler, the kindergarten has been circumscribed by new powerful discourses and chains of control reaching from EU agencies to the national and local level. These discourses and chains of control put pressure on the kindergarten teachers and their traditions even as they also represent new discursive possibilities. A similar finding is provided by Steines (2014).

Also from a discursive perspective, Plum (2011, 2013) and Togsverd (2015) focus on the consequences of new technologies involved in the attempt to document and evaluate purposive learning activities.

According to Plum, these technologies are important since they make kindergarten teachers see and value some activities and ignore others. Generally, the purposive learning activities are seen and valued while the non-purposive activities slip from the kindergarten teachers' perspective, according to both Plum and Togsverd. This finding is in line with Ahrenkiel et al. (2012) findings on kindergarten teachers' unnoticed professionalism.

The above-mentioned research is crucial to the contemporary discussion on what kindergartens are and should be. Generally, the literature focuses on the consequences of the new external demands made on kindergartens and kindergarten teachers, embodied in the task of purposive learning. To a lesser extent, the research describes the kindergarten teachers' own interests and actions in the current context. It is this agency perspective that I wish to adopt in my work by focusing on the professional project of kindergarten teachers. My aim is to draw attention to the fact that strategies of professionalisation may concur with... concur with and reinforce the rationality of the competitive state.

2. Method

The article is based on a now-ended research project (see e.g., Bøje & Nielsen, 2011; Bøje, 2013). Data for that project were collected during the period 2010-2012. In the project we carried out ethnographic fieldwork in three different pedagogic institutions where newly educated kindergarten teachers had recently been employed: day-care (0-6 years), after-school institutions (6-10 years), and club facilities (10-18 years). The day-care institution encompasses both crèche and kindergarten. It is a rather new institution in Denmark appearing for the first time in the 1980s (Weber, 1989). Since then it has expanded and today it is the most widespread institution for one- to six-year-old children outnumbering crèches and kindergartens as separate institutions (Væksthus for ledelse, 2011). The day-care institution has been promoted from both a pedagogical and economic perspective: pedagogically it is argued that this type of institution is capable of securing transitions from both crèche to kindergarten and from kindergarten to school. Economically it is cheaper to run than independent crèches or kindergartens.

The origin of the after-school institution has close relations to the origin of day-care institutions. After-school institutions became widespread during the 1980s and 1990s as politicians wanted better, smoother, uncomplicated transitions between school and other types of institutions designed for children of pre-school and school ages (children enter school at age six in Denmark). To accommodate this, after-school institutions were constructed on school grounds—often in basements or attics where they were cheap to establish. Club facilities have a somewhat longer history in Denmark. They can be traced back to the urbanisation of the 1950s when new generations of unemployed youth—mostly men—drifted on the streets without any clear purpose (Johansen, 1977). Club facilities became social education centres for these young people, engaging them in various activities and keeping them off the streets and away from criminality. Today club facilities have maintained a high profile as social education centres although the clientele is more mixed and not necessarily burdened with the same problems as the young people of the 1950s.

The first criterion for selecting these institutions was that they had recently employed newly educated kindergarten teachers. Secondly, we wanted institutions that to some extent represented the range of work done by kindergarten teachers in the field which in Denmark spans from work with one-year-old children to work with young people and even elderly people at residential homes.

We made ethnographic observations (Spradley, 1980; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2005) over the course of approximately two weeks at each institution. We shifted between a participant and non-participant observation role, and we mostly observed the newly educated kindergarten teachers while they carried out their work. We also observed other and more experienced kindergarten teachers in order to see differences and similarities between their professional practices. In total, we followed six newly educated kindergarten teachers: three women and three men, two in each institution.

Before and during the fieldwork, we carried out interviews with newly educated kindergarten teachers. Before the fieldwork the interviews were semi-structured (Brinkmann, 2009) and based on our working hypotheses; during the fieldwork they were of an ethnographic nature (Spradley, 1979) and focussed on what we had observed during the day. In total, we conducted twenty interviews with newly educated kindergarten teachers: fourteen with women, six with men, six to seven from each pedagogic institution. Furthermore, we conducted three interviews with leaders of the institutions in which we carried out our fieldwork. The newly educated kindergarten teachers were asked questions related to the following themes: (1) experience of education, (2) path to work, (3) current work practice, (4) expectations of the future. The leaders were asked questions related to the following themes: (1) the history of the institution, (2) path to work, (3) current work practice, (4) view on education.

Generally the relation between observational and interview data was constructed according to a triangulation principle (Andersen, 2005). That means the data were treated as different, but complementary types of (constructed) information yielding a broader and more comprehensive picture of the phenomena studied than each data set could in its own. The strength of the interview data was that they could tell us something about how the newly educated kindergarten teachers spoke and reflected on their professional practice. The strength of the observational data was that could tell us something about how the newly educated kindergarten teachers did their practice. Together, the two types of data could tell us something about the consistency or lack hereof between speech and practice. Both observations and interviews were analysed using a phenomenological/hermeneutic principle (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). On the one hand, we were interested in the newly educated kindergarten teachers' life world; on the other hand we were aware that we could only capture that life world on basis of particular assumptions, questions and preconditions. Procedurally the analysis was carried out in the following way: first, content was ordered according to what seemed to be prevalent themes; next, these themes were ordered according to persons—who said and did what, in which ways, and with what emphasis; finally, the analysis was informed by a theoretical perspective which gave further meaning to the preliminary findings (see below).

Our choice to do fieldwork in three different pedagogic institutions led us to focus on gender. The three

institutions mirrored a division of gender and labour that generally exists in the occupation of kindergarten teachers: the few male members (17-20%) tend to work with the older children or with vulnerable, criminal or in other ways “special” youth; the more numerous female members of the occupation (about 80%) tend to work with the younger and “normal” children. More precisely women make up some 83 percent of teachers in day-care institutions; 75 percent in after-school institutions; and 50 percent in club facilities (Note 3). By comparing our fieldwork data (Alexander et al., 1999), we became conscious of the ways in which gender divisions seemed to be reproduced in internal divisions of labour and, consequently, how women and men related rather differently to their education and work.

In this article, data from both observations and interviews will be used in order to describe the motives and actions through which newly educated kindergarten teachers relate to the professionalization process. Additionally, some quantitative data from other studies will be included in order to strengthen some of the arguments. I will choose observations and citations that I believe represent a pattern found in the relevant material: a gendered pattern of how male and female kindergarten teachers tend to relate to their formal education and to professionalisation. That pattern was unevenly distributed across the three pedagogic institutions; in the after-school institutions it was not very prevalent whereas it was highly prevalent when a comparison was made between newly educated kindergarten teachers employed in club facilities as opposed to newly educated kindergarten teachers employed in day-care institutions (see statistics above). In order to construct the gendered pattern as clearly as possible and derive explanations of this pattern, I will focus on data coming from club facilities and day-care institutions. I realize that this will happen at the expense of more detailed and nuanced analyses of male and female kindergarten teachers. However, I would like to stress that I do not see my findings as “natural”, necessary, or necessarily as prevalent in other contexts and countries. My aim is to show a pattern that may be recognisable and understandable in similar contexts, not to generalise in a quantitative or statistic manner (Larson, 2009).

3. Professions, Gender and Professional Projects—Theoretical Inspiration

The article is not based on a single grand theory regarding the professions, but on a broad body of work offering different theoretical insights to the phenomena studied. The sociology of professions has traditionally been blind to gender although gender may be seen as an underlying model onto which the definitions of the professions have been imposed. Talcott (1951, 1954, 1968) was one of the strongest advocates of the professions. He described the important functions they played in modern society, emphasised their superior knowledge and high technical competence, and developed a series of attributes distinguishing the professional from the lay person (Note 4). However, he never discussed the professions in terms of gender or gender inequality. Consider for instance that women were not admitted to universities until the end of the nineteenth century. By defining the professional as someone with a university education, Parsons implicitly defined the professional as a man.

The importance of gender is likewise ignored in the more critical literature on the professions. Weber (1978) is known for his concept on social closure: the tactics a social group may employ in order to distinguish it from others and thus gain monopoly on a restricted area of work (a jurisdiction). However, he never considered who could and could not perform the tactics of social closure in terms of gender. Johnson (1972) wrote an important book in which he criticised the professions for their monopolistic strategies. However, his critique did not encompass gender. It was restricted to a class analysis. Thus, gender has been—and to some extent still is—neglected in the sociology of professions.

More promising is the work of Rosemary Crompton (1987), and Witz (1992). As opposed to Marxist approaches giving priority to class, Crompton tries to develop Weber's concept on status in order to account for women's traditionally lower position in the labour market. She describes a so-called status matrix that can be used to "think through" women's status at home, in the professions, in professions working in organisations, and in the society at large. The idea is to compare the status of women in different spheres and thus account for women's lower status in the labour market. For instance, she argues that women's status in the professions may be the same as men's if they have the same credentials. However, women mostly work in professions associated with larger organisations—first and foremost the welfare state—and here something other than credentials count. What counts, according to Crompton, is an ability to participate in a male culture: "male culture tends to dominate in organisations ... and women are, as a rule, to be found in supervisory and/or managerial positions only when they are in charge of other women, or sufficiently low-status men" (Crompton, 1987, p. 423). Thus, if some women seem to have the same status as men due to their credentials, they may still have a lower status overall if they are dominated in larger organisations, at home, or in other social spheres.

While Crompton stresses the concept of status, Witz focusses on the specific closure strategies used by men against women and by women themselves in the medical field. Inspired by Larson (1977) (Note 5), she describes closure strategies as "professional projects", emphasising the fact that the phenomenon of "profession" is empirically ambiguous and also unclear as a concept. She distinguishes between closure strategies that are (A) a downward exercise of power involving a process of subordination, and (B) an upward, countervailing exercise of power (Witz, 1992, p. 45). In the first case (A), a dominant group exercises its powers vis-à-vis a subordinate group. In the medical field, for instance, men have historically used and had success with two specific variants of that closure strategy: (1) an exclusionary strategy, the most obvious example of which is barring women from universities, and (2) a demarcation strategy aimed at inter-occupational control. In the second case (B), a subordinate group seeks influence and power from a dominant group. In the medical field women have historically used and had some success with two specific variants of that closure strategy: (3) an inclusionary strategy, the most known example of which is the Florence Nightingale-like nurse who politely takes over some of the functions performed by the doctors, and (4) a dual closure strategy that aims at both usurpation (upwards) and exclusion (downwards). An example can again be found within the ranks of nurses, namely Mrs. Bedford-Fenwick's fight for a nurses' registration act (1919). This strategy involved both

legalistic and credentials tactics aimed at increasing the autonomy of nurses both upwards (towards medical men) and downwards (towards auxiliary personnel).

Thus, while women's closure strategies can contain elements of confrontation they are mostly of a dependent nature, according to Witz. She describes how female professional projects must typically "mobilise proxy male power" in order to become successful (Witz, 1992, p. 201).

In this article, Crompton and Witz will be used as thinking tools for understanding the nature of kindergarten teachers' professional project. The closure strategies (professional projects) described by Witz can be used as analytical concepts for understanding kindergarten teachers' actions. On the other hand, kindergarten teachers do not work in the medical field i.e., in close relation to male-dominated professions. Therefore their professional project may differ from that of nurses, midwives, radiographers, etc. In order to more closely understand the nature of kindergarten teachers' professional projects, Crompton's emphasis on status is vital.

The sex-typing of kindergarten teachers' work is substantial and with that comes a view of it as of low status—similar to housework, not needing qualifications, something anyone can do, etc. Via Crompton, kindergarten teachers' professional projects can be understood as a strategy for addressing and, if possible, reversing the negative status traditionally ascribed to this type of work. To do so, however, they must take up the paradoxical strategy described by Witz: mobilise proxy male power. In this article I will attempt to analyse education and particularly academic and abstract knowledge as a reflection of such proxy male power (see also Eriksen, 1999, 2005; Eriksen & Jørgensen, 2005; Hjort, 1984, 2005, 2012; Weber, 2002; Dahle, 2008). Through my analysis I will show that in order to distinguish and raise the status of their historically female work, female kindergarten teachers use education and abstract (historically masculine) knowledge in complex relations of practice (Note 6).

4. Analysis

As mentioned, the analysis will focus on newly educated kindergarten teachers and their way of realising the professionalization process emphasised by BUPL. This involves an analysis of three themes that all have a bearing on their actions: (1) attitude and path to formal education, (2) institutional significance given to education, and (3) use of education in pedagogic practice.

4.1 Attitude and Path to Education

As an overall pattern we found that the women in our sample were positive towards their education while the men had more mixed feelings. The women said that they enjoyed the atmosphere at the college, liked their teachers, delved into the subjects, became immersed in group work, etc. The men were more likely to have "some problems" with at least parts of the education, typically with what one of the men, Martin described as the following:

Well, I had a difficult time at college. I didn't like the papier maché creative kind-of-like atmosphere. The soft, progressive attitude from the 60s. I concentrated more on the assignments, on playing football and working in the club where I am also employed now.

Compared to this disparaging view of the “papier maché creative kind-of-like atmosphere”, the women more often used positively charged words to describe their experience. One of the women, Birgitte, said the following:

At my college they did a great deal to get us started. It was fantastic. There were introductions of how to study, how to take notes, all the subjects were introduced, and so on. They did an amazing job. The rest of the time was also great. The subjects opened a totally new world to me, and I just learned so much.

Birgitte describes her experience using positive words such as “fantastic”, “amazing”, “great” and a “new world”. Together such wording implies an attitude that is open, positive, aspirational and future-oriented—in this case oriented towards what the educational programme had to offer.

For many of the women that aspirational attitude arose from their professional backgrounds which most had found frustrating. The women in our sample had a variety of professional backgrounds—some were young (about 20 years and coming directly from high school), some were a bit older (about 30-40 years and coming from other types of work and educations), and a few were close to their retirement (arriving with a great variety of experiences and competences). Common to many of them, however, was the fact that they had worked as uneducated pedagogic assistants some years before their admission to the programme (Note 7). As pedagogic assistants, the majority had experienced exclusion from the more higher-responsibility tasks of their job—e.g., working with children with diagnoses, planning of curriculum, completing documentation and evaluations, etc. In order not to be excluded and to gain influence and responsibility, they now wanted to pursue education in this field. Lis’ description of her path to education expresses such a motive:

Well, I had been a pedagogic assistant for many years before I pursued professional education. I used to work in the primary school, with the youngest kids from six to ten years, and I kind of got tired of the attitude that “you’re just a pedagogic assistant”. Whenever there was something special with a child—a diagnosis, problems at home or the like—I was cut off and a teacher, psychologist or leader took over. And I didn’t think that was fair. I was often the one who was closest to the kids and still I couldn’t get any influence. So I decided to pursue more education.

Compared to Lis and other females with a similar path to the education, the men were more likely to begin the programme from a less dissatisfied background. Usually they also had some experience as uneducated pedagogic assistants, but as opposed to the women they had not experienced exclusion to a very high degree. Jesper’s description of the path to his education is quite typical of the men in our sample:

Well actually I have been in this profession since I was 18. I am now 33. At some point I decided to get more education. I felt that something new had to happen and now I’m glad I did it. I feel more competent, I have gained more power and, not to mention, a bit more pay.

Unlike the women, Jesper here uses the phrase to “get” the education. The women were more likely to say “pursue” the education. This small difference in wording reflects a greater difference in path and

attitude towards the education: while the women typically saw education as of great importance and a way to influence, the men were more likely to see their education as of less importance and not necessarily a path to greater influence. Their motive *could* be influence (expressed as *power* by Jesper above), but it was more likely to be motivated by economics and a need for qualifications.

4.2 Institutional Significance Given to Education

The same differentiation between the sexes occurred on an institutional level, and in that sense the institutions played a role in how professionalisation could be realised. Institutions perceived as female (such as day-care institutions) were generally more open and positive towards formal education than was the case in institutions regarded as male—that is, club facilities and to some extent after-school institutions.

The institutional significance given to education was apparent in the attitude towards the distribution of educated and uneducated members of the occupation. The official opinion of BUPL is that two thirds of the work force should be educated and one third uneducated (see e.g., Bertelsen, 2004). However, in institutions for older children, criminal, socially disabled or other “special” children this opinion is not widely shared. In fact, BUPL offers little support for these institutions. Instead, employees often prefer a different, competing union, Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund (SL), which puts less emphasis on formal education and professionalisation (see e.g., Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund, 2013) (Note 8). In line with this, Uffe Lund and Kirsten Weber (2001) write the following about the typical club worker who used to work only part-time:

The typical club worker, whose spirit is still alive, is the burly male worker who, from personal and social dedication, spends his spare time among the young people in the local youth club ... Their background [and recruitment criteria] is still work experience and human competences rather than school knowledge and formal education (Lund & Weber, 2001, pp. 10-11, my translation).

As opposed to such a priority structure where life experience is valued above formal education, formal education is indeed the recruitment criteria for female kindergarten teachers working in “normal” pedagogic institutions. These criteria comprise the official policy of BUPL stating that at least two thirds of the pedagogic work force should be educated. The female leader of the day-care institution in which we carried out our fieldwork said the following about BUPL’s policy: “well, it is sometimes hard to obey, but we do it in general. It would be silly of us not to because then we would undermine our own authority as kindergarten teachers”. In contrast the male club-leader said the following about BUPL and its policy:

I’m not a member of BUPL. I used to be, but I got so pissed with them that I gave up my membership. They want to control it all, and they think you are a better worker because you are educated. I don’t agree with that. I pick my workers from the streets, when they are young and willing to show they can do something with the kids. Then I form them, and eventually they can choose to get more education if they feel like it.

While the female leader of the day-care institution acknowledges the official policy by BUPL and sees

it as silly not to follow, the male leader of the club facility takes a clear stance against BUPL and elaborates on his alternative views and priorities.

In the pedagogic institutions, female as well as male, education played a role in defining an internal hierarchy of the different groups of educated and uneducated employees. In the day-care institutions we found that education played a significant role in attaining a position at the top of the hierarchy whereas it played a less important role in the male pedagogic institutions, especially in club facilities. Thus, in the day-care institutions we encountered what we believe is a relatively new work category highly dependent on education as a form of capital: namely what was called “the room-responsible pedagogue”. This is a leading kindergarten teacher with responsibility for, for instance, attaining the aims formulated in the national curriculum. In several cases the position as the room-responsible pedagogue was taken up by a newly educated kindergarten teacher despite the fact that older pedagogic assistants of greater seniority were still working in the same room in the same institution. These cases contradict a pattern that has formerly been prevalent in Danish kindergartens (Bayer & Brinkkjær, 2003) and probably still is in some: that new comers, despite their educational background, begin at the bottom of the hierarchy in a community of practice.

4.3 Use of Education in Pedagogic Practice

One of those newly educated kindergarten teachers employed as a room-responsible pedagogue was Helene. When asked about this role in an interview she did not express much ambivalence. Rather, she saw it as natural that she would take on this role due to her position as the only educated kindergarten teacher in the room:

Well, there is a reason why people pursue education. We learn things about children, we learn different methods, and I definitely think that we should be in charge. We know what suits the particular target group, what doesn't suit, we can explain why we do this and not that, etc. So we should definitely be in charge.

In line with this belief, Helene tried to distinguish her practice from the one performed by the uneducated pedagogic assistants. She did so by adopting a classic, technical professional practice in which abstract knowledge gained from her education was used to design practice (Parsons, 1968; Wilensky, 1964). More precisely she operated with rather clear distinction between two types of pedagogic practice, namely what she called “pedagogy” and “child-keeping”. She understood pedagogy as part of a professional practice whereas she understood child-keeping as an unprofessional practice—simply looking after children and doing practicalities. The following is from an observation of one of the activities she described as pedagogy.

As opposed to “free play” a new and structured activity, which is called “assembly”, occurs at 11 o'clock. This activity implies that children and kindergarten teachers—not the pedagogic assistant, she is busy setting the table before lunch—sit on the floor in a circle where they will learn about today's name, date, time of year, weather type, etc. A boy is asked to look at different illustrations (drawings of weather types, numbers, words, etc.) that Helene has made. Based on those he must say which day it is,

what the weather is like, what month we're in and so on. The boy is allowed to answer the question first if he can, and if not other children who have raised their hands must answer the question.

As mentioned in the excerpt, the assembly occurs at eleven o'clock as in opposition to free play among the children. Procedurally it is in opposition to free play in terms of how the kindergarten teacher structures the two activities: free play is structured very little by the kindergarten teacher, and the assembly is highly structured by the kindergarten teacher. The above observation shows that Helene combines her knowledge of children and knowledge of names, numbers and weather types to structure the activity. Like a school teacher she structures the activities and subjects purposively according to a curriculum she is the master of.

To Helene, these types of structured pedagogic activities seemed very important. By distinguishing these activities from the less structured activities, she reproduced the aforementioned distinction between herself and the uneducated pedagogic assistants. Among male kindergarten teachers we did not find a similar set of distinctions. Here, the activities were based on the life experiences and competences of male manual workers—e.g., fixing cars, doing metal work, playing football, billiards, boxing or the like. One of the men employed in an after-school institution, Jan, said the following about this: "I have my own specialty here. I have always been good at mixing music so that is mostly what I do with the kids". Martin, who was previously quoted, said the following:

I've always been good at playing football. I still play at a pretty high level. For me this is a natural way to get into contact with the kids in our club. We play football, and then we talk some, make jokes, make food together, etc. In that way I get to know them, and they get to know me. I never use theories, methods or something like that from my education. Not deliberately at least. It only happens if for example we have a theme going on, and I need to know something specific on that. It could be healthy food in which case I might browse some of the books we used in healthcare.

It is evident that formal education and abstract knowledge do not serve as the basis of these men's pedagogic practice. The basis is instead their personal experiences as DJs, semi-professional football players, and the like. If formal education and abstract knowledge plays a role for these men it is merely as a reflective tool. For these reasons, male kindergarten teachers did not, as a rule, employ education in a professional project. Instead they used education as part of what I will call a qualification project, applying knowledge and insights to reflect on and, if reasonable, qualify some parts of their work.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In the following section, I will conclude on and discuss the research questions raised at the beginning of the article.

How do newly educated kindergarten teachers realise the occupation's professionalisation strategy?

The professionalisation strategy, on the one hand, is realised as a female professional project. On the other hand it is rejected in favour of a male qualification project. The female professional project is based on an approving position towards formal education and abstract knowledge—a position that in

many cases seems to originate from a negative or disapproving attitude towards informal and historically female competences towards care. Furthermore, the female professional project is based on institutional recognition of formal education. Such recognition can be found in traditionally female pedagogic institutions—that is, institutions for “normal” children in the age of one to six years. It even seems to be rising in step with the construction of new job categories such as the room-responsible pedagogue. Lastly, the female professional project is based on a classic professional practice: the kindergarten teacher’s actions and goals are expected to be based on abstract, scientific knowledge—not life experience, ethics or the interests of children or other users.

The male qualification project is opposed to the female professional project in the three mentioned respects. It is based on a disapproving attitude towards formal education; it arises via institutions that give low priority to formal education; and it draws on practices that are closer to craft than science.

The female professional project, as studied among these newly educated kindergarten teachers, resembles the female professional projects studied by Witz in the medical field. Both professional projects occur in situations where proxy male power, in the shape of e.g. formal education and abstract knowledge, must be imported in order to raise the status of what is not highly valued by the surrounding society: care work. Thus, this process among kindergarten teachers does not entail a downward exercise of power as was the case for the classic and historically male professional projects; rather, it involves the same kind of upward, countervailing exercise of power that Witz found among nurses, midwives, and radiographs. The men’s qualification project can be characterised neither as a classic male professional project nor as a female professional project. It rejects formal education and abstract knowledge; it even seems to escape the question of power, perhaps due to the fact that the men feel, not powerless or unable to attain recognition and status, but rather that they are in power as scarce resources in a field over represented by women (Nielsen, 2005; Pedersen, 2005).

What are the consequences of the efforts towards professionalisation in the current context?

Both the women and men studied here act in ways that show the ongoing production and reproduction of gender. What is interesting in this case is the way both female and male kindergarten teachers tend to negotiate their genders in order to obtain a higher status or maintain the one historically ascribed to them. In some ways, the female kindergarten teachers adopt more traditionally masculine practices when importing and relying on proxy male power in their professional project. Likewise the male kindergarten teachers can be seen as adopting more traditionally feminine practices by insisting on using spontaneous and “natural” competences in their work with children and young people. As also pointed out by educational studies professor Olesen (2005), it seems that new work creates new genders as new genders create new work.

What does *not* seem to be produced or reproduced in this case is the historically female care work that is the foundation of the occupation. This part of kindergarten teachers’ professionalism seems to be increasingly unnoticed, marginalised, and left to uneducated pedagogic assistants to perform, as also pointed out by Plum (2011, 2013), and Ahrenkiel et al. (2012). On basis of this article’s analysis I see

this partly as a consequence of the female professional project among kindergarten teachers in which a new type of work and status is envisaged. However, the marginalisation of care work cannot be explained solely by (some) kindergarten teachers' quest of professionalism; I also see it as a consequence of academisation and processes related to the ongoing transformation of the welfare state. These processes share a rationale that is productive and goal-oriented as seen in, for example, the new focus on purposive learning in kindergartens. Alongside this focus there appears to be little room for the reproductive client-orientation that has historically informed kindergarten teachers' care work, and which to some extent has been inscribed in the welfare state as a universalistic principle.

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Notes

Note 1. The research project on which this article is based was funded by BUPL. In addition to the author of this article, the following researchers participated in that project: Steen Baagøe Nielsen, Randi Andersen, Vibe Larsen and Jimmy Krab.

Note 2. At the moment, the “promilleprogram” is only a vision formulated by the parties at the labour market for the Swedish school. However, it contains specific goals for the expansion of research on teachers’ work towards 2020, and it provides examples of research already carried out or underway.

Note 3. http://www.bupl.dk/presse/statistik_om_boern_og_paedagoger/medlemmerfordelt_paa_koen_og_type_arbejdsplads_2013 OpenDocument

Note 4. The attributes are high technical competence, universalistic, functionally specific and affectively neutral (Parsons, 1951, pp. 434-435).

Note 5. She does not focus on gender in her analysis, but rather on the historic circumstances that paved the way for the model and, today, for the ideology of profession.

Note 6. I would like to point out that I do not see education and abstract knowledge as masculine per se. But in this particular field, with a majority of women and a minority of men, it *becomes* masculine through complex social relations. In other fields, with a more equal distribution of men and women, education and abstract knowledge can enter into relations of class and be understood more fruitfully as such (see e.g., Bernstein, 2001; Bourdieuog Wacquant, 1996; Sirnes, 1998). This way of understanding gender and class can generally be referred to as social constructionist (Gergen, 1999). It involves seeing not only men and women as social constructions, but also entities such as work values, tasks and corporations (see e.g., Kanter, 1977; Hofstede, 1984). Through historical and social work, these entities *become* gendered entities; they are not gendered in an original or transcendent sense.

Note 7. On average, Danish kindergarten teachers are about 30 years old when they begin professional education (Jensen et al., 2008, p. 52). That is a quite high average age compared to, e.g., nurses, social workers or teachers in the primary school, who are closer to 25 years old when they begin professional education. This finding suggests that many kindergarten teachers begin their careers as uneducated pedagogic assistants. In fact, about 40% of the pedagogic work force still lacks a professional degree (BUPL, 2006b; Nielsen, 2005).

Note 8. In Denmark, the rivalry between BUPL and SL goes way back. Historically it can be related to

a discussion of whether or not “socialpædagogik” (social educator work) is and should be a profession (“fag”) in itself (Tuft 2003). SL and its members believe it is, while BUPL and its members are more likely to see socialpædagogik as part of a more general pedagogy that includes many types of work with children. SL and its members have constructed a professional identity based on the so-called “ildsjæl”—the dedicated social worker focusing on the weak members of society. BUPL and its members have constructed a professional identity that is more focused on “normal” children and on qualifications.