KAPITTEL 6

Ethical discretion in kindergarten

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Abstract: This chapter investigates the concept of *ethical discretion* in kindergarten practice. Drawing on the ethical theories of Knud Løgstrup (1997) and Martha Nussbaum (1995), it aims to contribute to the corpus of literature by emphasizing six elements in this discretion: *knowledge, experience, imagination, emotions, attitudes, and values*. I ask how elements of ethical discretion are active in kindergarten teachers' stories and reflections. Discretion is a concept mentioned as necessary in several political documents. Nevertheless, few empirical studies show how discretion is active in kindergarten teacher practice. The current chapter aims to provide new practical and theoretical knowledge in this field, emphasizing that ethical discretion is about applying ethical demands in practice (cf. Løgstrup, 1997).

The present study consists of theoretical reflections in which four narratives from kindergarten teachers are used as examples taken from the practice field. The empirical material expands on a recent qualitative hermeneutical study of kindergarten teachers' discretion in value conflicts between parents and staff in two kindergartens with religious diversity (Moen, 2021). The analysis of the narratives shows variations regarding how integrated and deliberate ethical discretion is in different situations. The chapter argues that kindergarten teachers need to raise their awareness of how they use ethical discretion in practice.

Keywords: ethical discretion, ethical judgment, kindergarten teachers, kindergarten practice, narratives

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Introduction

> There are choices all the time! I think you have to make around 4-500 ethical choices during a single meal in kindergarten. More importantly, you have to know each and every child. Who can handle a direct message? How much can you demand from this or that child? Who can you require only to eat his sandwich? So, at all times, it's about seeing each and every one of them. This is in my opinion what recognition is. At the same time, we have to work together as a community, too. (Kindergarten teacher Rasmus in an interview)

The term *discretion* is regarded as the core of professional work that involves humans (Christoffersen, 2011a; Grimen & Molander, 2008; McGuirk, 2021a). The origin of discretion is found in the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, which means *practical wisdom*: The ability to act right in the right way and at the right time (McGuirk, 2021a, p. 52). Discretion is described as the cognitive activity of separating things from another to make a justified decision about a choice of action (Grimen & Molander, 2008).[1] It is needed in both ambiguous situations and ones where standard rules are either non-existent or must be interpreted into a specific context in light of general knowledge and norms (Molander & Terum, 2008, p. 20). The current chapter focuses on elements in the process of practicing ethical discretion.

To begin, Norwegian kindergartens are part of the larger Nordic kindergarten tradition which emphasizes learning through play. Many kindergartens in Norway practice a holistic approach to children's development through *Bildung*, care, socialization, and free play rather than promoting structured learning activities (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008). Kindergarten practice consists of situations that often lack clear rules; therefore, these situations need to be handled individually as they arise, a necessity that forms the kindergarten's justification for needing discretion (cf. Molander, 2016, pp. 10–12). In fact, the framework plan for kindergartens in Norway requires that kindergarten teachers use their discretion at all times, especially in situations of value conflicts (Norwegian Directorate

1 Grimen and Molander (2008) divide discretion into two main categories where *structural discretion* is the space for decisions surrounded by rules and regulations that narrow the space. *Epistemic discretion* is the cognitive activity of separating things from one another in order to become able to make a justified decision about a choice of action. This chapter focuses on the latter category.

for Education and Training, 2017, pp. 16, 55).[2] However, the plan does not indicate how this should be done.

Personally speaking, I understand discretion as practical wisdom, an ability to discern the best possible action. It is needed to deal with both minor situations and more challenging ones involving value conflicts. Discretion in educational settings always contains ethical aspects. For instance, at the kindergarten level, *care* is a primary component; hence, as Knud Løgstrup (1997) underlines, an ethical demand in educational practice is highly relevant. My own perspective has been formed by my occupation as a religion and ethics educator in the kindergarten teacher education program, where I often focus on ethical reflection. I therefore wish to explore the values and reflections connected with how kindergarten teachers respond to the ethical demand. In this search, I study different elements of discretion as a tool for analyzing ethical discretion in kindergarten practice, thereby choosing to use both "ethical discretion" and "discretion" in my writing.[3]

In the current chapter, I focus on discretion in a kindergarten setting. Drawing on Løgstrup (1997) and Nussbaum (1995), I emphasize six elements of ethical discretion, focusing on the question of *how elements of ethical discretion are active in kindergarten teachers' stories and reflections*. Four narratives from interviews with three kindergarten teachers are analyzed and discussed in light of this question. This chapter aims to contribute a theoretical perspective and reflections upon empirical material gathered from kindergarten practices. The chapter points to the need for training and raising awareness of ethical discretion in practice, starting with a selection of previous studies on discretion in pedagogical professions.

Discretion in professions

Discretion is a new and relatively undefined field of research in pedagogical professions, not least in kindergarten research. Grimen and Molander point to personal knowledge and experiences as being essential elements of epistemic discretion, and people rank rules and values. Nevertheless, Grimen and Molander (2008, p. 193) also state that personal experiences

2 To avoid several different practices within the same institution, more rules and standardization programs may restrict the space for discretion. While this interesting topic has been discussed by several researchers (Pettersvold & Østrem, 2018; Seland, 2020; Solbrekke & Østrem, 2011), I have chosen not to focus on this particular aspect of discretion.

3 I understand the concepts of ethical discretion and ethical judgment as similar, and in Norwegian, I call them *dømmekraft* or *etisk skjønn*.

and values challenge discretion. Cognition research shows that when exercising discretion, individuals "rapidly select a few salient features of the situation and decide on the basis of this," according to Molander (2016, p. 15). One challenge is that situations where discretion is most needed are the ones where it is most difficult to practice. This is why it is necessary to be aware of the challenges connected to practicing discretion in professional situations (Grimen & Molander, 2008, p. 195).

Discretion is also an area where it is difficult for practitioners to verbalize what is happening (McGuirk, 2021b). For instance, according to a study by Olsvik and Saus (2019), heads of child welfare agencies in Norway find it challenging to describe the concept of discretion, having never reflected upon its meaning. There is reason to believe that this lack of knowledge is found in the kindergarten field as well.

Several recent academic articles and theses on pedagogical practices in kindergarten declare that discretion is essential (Eggum, 2019; Førde, 2017; Gotvassli & Moe, 2020; Isaksen, 2018; Wirsching, 2014). The most relevant study is by Gotvassli and Moe (2020), who asked pedagogical leaders specifically about discretion and found that leaders see it as a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. At the same time, many leaders have claimed that too much discretion is unfortunate because it could cause too much variation in practices, in turn leading to a rising sense of insecurity among children. While Gotvassli and Moe's study investigated practitioners' verbal reflections on their use of discretion, there are in general few empirical studies of how discretion is active in kindergarten teachers' practice, according to a government report (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018) and Gotvassli and Moe's own findings (2020).

Due to this situation, my study aims to contribute more empirical knowledge of how kindergarten teachers practice ethical discretion. It is, however, difficult to grasp a diffuse concept like discretion merely from observations. So, in order to get closer to how discretion is used in practice, I listened to practitioners' stories, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

Narratives as empirical material

The overall approach of this study is hermeneutical: I aim to understand more about how ethical discretion works and how kindergarten teachers

use ethical discretion in demanding situations. The present study consists of theoretical reflections where narratives from kindergarten are used as empirical examples. This material first appeared in my doctoral study of kindergarten teachers' choices and actions in value conflicts between parents and staff (Moen, 2021). The fieldwork consisted of making observations of children and staff interactions for nine days in Rowen and 16 days in two departments in Oak. I conducted separate, semi-structured interviews with eight kindergarten teachers and twelve parents with different religious/cultural affiliations. These parents had only recently moved to Norway; similarly, both kindergartens had children from immigrant families enrolled for only a few years. The kindergarten teachers had majority Norwegian backgrounds and between three to twenty years of professional experience. The Rowen was strategically selected because a previous pilot study uncovered several intriguing situations showing conflicting values (Moen, 2017). The Oak was subsequently selected as it was assumed to be a more "average" kindergarten with respect to its size as well as the composition of its children and staff.

The empirical material in the current chapter is based on interviews with three kindergarten teachers: "Rasmus" and "Rigmor" from Rowen Kindergarten, and "Ellen" from Oak Kindergarten. The study did not specifically ask these participants about discretion; however, they were asked about examples of situational value conflict where they had to respond verbally and/or choose a course of action. By way of answering, these teachers told me about different situations of this nature and how they solved them.

I have transcribed their stories into short narratives, adding context and direct citations where needed. A narrative is a condensed presentation of an experience that makes a foundation for new knowledge based on the experience (Mehti, 2021). This narrative approach to using ethical discretion in practice may allow access to the practitioner's own store of practical wisdom. From this perspective, the narrative is a mode of cognition (Bruner, 2004; Mehti, 2015).

The narratives are interpreted thematically; thus, the person's general appearance, body language, emotive expressions, and impression from the more extensive material play a part in the interpretation. These four narratives have been chosen strategically because they, more clearly than any others, show different aspects of ethical discretion in practice.

In a hermeneutical study like this, while interpretation is unavoidably influenced by the researcher's previous understanding, during my

observations and interviews, I attempted to stay open to other people's point of view. Yet according to Ricoeur (cf. Lindseth & Norberg, 2004), a researcher also needs to have a critical point of view when conducting research. Due to my attitudes and previous professional work experience, I was more critical of kindergartens that appeared to be less open to immigrant parents, which in turn impacted the analytical process. The participants gave their informed consent, and their names were anonymized to protect their identity; doing so is especially important in a study that includes critical viewpoints.

During the interviews and subsequent analysis, I realized that emotions and attitudes played a more important part in the practitioners' experiences and reflections than I had expected beforehand. This made me curious about the complexity of the situations where kindergarten teachers had to make choices and how much these situations demanded of them. I started searching for a theory to help analyze ethical discretion in practice. In the next section, I will point to a selection of ethicists' perceptions of ethical discretion's elements.

Elements of ethical discretion

The search for a more concrete practical theory for analyzing ethical discretion started with the root of discretion: *phronesis*. Phronesis requires integrating different elements in a complex landscape to answer the demands of a particular situation. It is a necessary virtue for practitioners and can be developed by practicing it (McGuirk, 2021a, pp. 50–52). The Aristotelian tradition is renewed by Canadian philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who underlines that if one is to practice phronesis, it is not enough to 1) look at what is useful – as teleological ethics do or 2) obey rules – as deontological ethics require. Rather, Nussbaum emphasizes a holistic perspective of ethical choices; these include rationality, passion, lust, and the whole complexity of human life (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 29). She compares ethical discretion with improvisation in music or theatre, stating: "What counts is flexibility, sensibility, and openness towards the world" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 73, my translation).

Phronesis is required in every encounter in a professional setting where people interact with one another; consequently, I interpret it as a parallel to ethical discretion. Svein Aage Christoffersen (2011b) describes ethical discretion as the essence of professional ethics in professions that deal with human beings. Christoffersen points to the Danish ethicist Knud Løgstrup's concept of "the ethical demand," which describes a universal

and fundamental challenge that arises whenever a person meets another person (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 17–18). Human life is one of interdependence, and trust is a sovereign expression of life, as Løgstrup calls it. Hence, we are delivered to the other people we meet. Løgstrup says that when we meet an individual, we carry some parts of the other's life in our hands. The challenge is to consider what is in the other person's best interest, and not one's own. Responding to an ethical demand is challenging because it is "silent" or unspoken, there are no specific instructions. In other words, it takes ethical discretion to answer an ethical demand. Indeed, "insight, imagination, and understanding" (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 22) are essential elements to figuring out what a silent demand requires, according to Løgstrup.

Perspectives gained from both Løgstrup and Nussbaum reveal their emphasis on the belief that *knowledge or insight, experience, imagination, emotions,* and *attitudes toward others* are all essential to ethical discretion. Some of these concepts need clarification: Knowledge is both theoretical, ethical and contextual knowledge. Nussbaum also points at passion and lust as well as emotions. Although all of these could have been mentioned as separate elements, I choose to regard them collectively as *emotions*, even as I am aware that this element consists of a complexity of bodily knowledge. Further, Løgstrup and Nussbaum mention sensibility, openness, understanding, listening skills, flexibility, sympathy, and relations. I choose to combine these aspects in the concept of *attitudes*. Ethical discretion thus requires that one maintains an openness toward the other person and situation. Anders Lindseth uses the concept of "not-knowing" to describe this openness (2001, p. 134), emphasizing an attitude of listening: To meet the other person with an openness toward what is unknown, what one does not know beforehand.

The underlying *values* may be defined as conceptions and attitudes that are essential, reasonably stable, and containing a guiding function in life (Moen, 2021, p. 57). Neither Løgstrup nor Nussbaum mentions values in this context; nevertheless, values are essential sources of ethical discretion in professions that deal with humans. This is why, in concurrence with Christoffersen (2011a) and McGuirk (2021a), I argue that values are necessary for ethical discretion.

The search for a practical theory for analyzing ethical discretion in practice led me to six elements: *knowledge, experience, imagination, emotions, attitudes*, and *values*. These elements all emphasize the necessity of maintaining a holistic perspective when the issue is as complex as ethical discretion. Moreover, while all elements in the list are important, the list

is not comprehensive. When analyzing the kindergarten narratives, I will investigate how these elements work in the kindergarten teachers' use of ethical discretion in practice.

Narratives from kindergarten teachers' practice

In everyday situations, an individual's previous experiences are important sources for their making choices. Yet in situations where new challenges arise, as seen in the following narratives, practitioners do not have any previous experience to lean upon. Therefore, practicing ethical discretion may be even more challenging, and the other elements of discretion may become even more critical. The following narrative analysis focuses on which elements of ethical discretion have dominated practitioners' thoughts and actions. The first two narratives concern kindergarten teacher Rasmus:

1. *At the Rowen kindergarten, several of the 4–6-year-olds wanted to paint their fingernails, and the staff was ready to help them do so. Ahmed also wanted to paint his own fingernails, so he asked Rasmus for permission. Ahmed's family had moved to Norway a few years before, and Rasmus knew that Ahmed's father did not want his son to wear nail polish. However, the kindergarten teacher did not want the boy to feel like an outsider in the community of playing and laughing children, either. So, he granted Ahmed's wish and painted his nails, and the little boy was happy with the result. However, before Ahmed's father came to pick up his son that afternoon, Rasmus removed the polish from Ahmed's nails.*

   In a later interview, Rasmus confirmed his choice of action and reflected on having disrespected the father in front of his son. Yet despite this situation, Rasmus confirmed that his choice had been both reasonable and necessary:

   > *I still think that what I did was right in that specific situation with that child. I think so (…). The most important thing for me was that this boy wouldn't feel excluded, and that was the most important point here. And he did get to wear nail polish, after all.*

Focusing on the elements of ethical discretion, I see that Rasmus used his **open attitude and empathy toward the child** as the main element in his

decision-making process. He seemed to be listening to the child more than the parent. And although Rasmus had some knowledge about the father's cultural traditions, this was not his primary concern. He also showed imagination by removing the nail polish, even if this was the tricky part of the story. While Rasmus knew that he was judging and dismissing values held by other people, he pointed out his main concern: "The boy should not feel excluded." When reflecting on the experience, Rasmus emphasized that ethical discretion is contextual. Similar to the Aristotelian understanding of phronesis as the ability to act right in the right way and at the right time (McGuirk, 2021a, p. 52), Rasmus pointed to a specific child at a specific time and in a specific context to justify his choice of action. And even if others might consider his choice controversial, Rasmus validated what he had done, given the particular context he was in. There is an implication that in another situation with another child, he might choose to act differently. This use of discretion is the professional's privilege, and Rasmus utilized the opportunity to practice ethical discretion as he thought best. It is easy to criticize his choice of acting against the father's will and withholding information; indeed, some people would probably call it a poor use of discretion.[4] Nevertheless, Rasmus was able to discern for himself what was most essential for him to act professionally in that situation, and he argued out of his core professional values: He thought that how he acted was in the child's overall best interest. This principle is also a "guiding star" for all activities in Norwegian kindergartens (see Article 3, No. 1, of the UNCRC; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 8).

2. *Rasmus said that cultural diversity was the new normal at Rowen, and preschool girls enrolled there both wore and played with their hijabs as if they were toys. He used the example of Noor, a three-year- old girl recently arrived from the Middle East who had started at Rowen only the week before. One day, Rasmus met her as she was entering the kindergarten with her mother, and on this day, she was wearing a hijab like her mother. When she saw him, Noor smiled at Rasmus. He told her that she looked nice. At the interview the next day, Rasmus told me:*

> *It had a leopard pattern. She was so proud. And I think she wanted to be wearing it because she said: "Like mum!" Do you have one like your mum's?" "Yes, like mum,"*

4 Further discussions regarding Rasmus' choice can be found in Moen (2021) and Moen (2022).

> *that is what she had today. She wanted to wear her hijab. So, I didn't make it into something negative. But my personal opinion about wearing a hijab is something else.*

Rasmus' reflections during the interview show that he was aware of several components that influenced his decision: He knew about Muslim rules and practices but had a negative opinion about the hijab. On the other hand, he had an affection for this little smiling girl who wanted her teacher's recognition. He was aware of his obligations as a professional regarding inclusion in kindergarten and had some previous experience with hijabs being used as toys in kindergarten. Ultimately, he chose his professional value of having a positive attitude and recognizing Noor over his negative opinion about the hijab. These reflections regarding choices and situations are necessary for strengthening and making ethical discretion more conscious and deliberate. Rasmus responded to the ethical demand in Noor's face and chose to follow his principal value: the importance of recognizing the child. Like in the first narrative, having a positive attitude and showing empathy to a child are the decisive elements in this second narrative.

The third narrative comes from Ellen, a kindergarten teacher at the Oak:

3. *Several years ago, when the kindergarten first started receiving refugee children, Ellen was suddenly faced a new situation: A father, who, according to Ellen, was a Muslim and "a very religious man" told the kindergarten staff that he wanted them to clean his daughter using water and their bare hands after they had changed her diaper or she had gone to the toilet, and to stop using dry toilet paper, which is common in Norway. Ellen said:*

> *While he was telling us this, I was thinking: No, this is too difficult, this is going to be very difficult for me. I'm going to keep using toilet paper on her; I can't … I felt that this was really difficult; we all felt this.*

So, Ellen rejected the father's wish and continued to use dry toilet paper in bathroom situations.

Ellen's use of "difficult" three times in two sentences indicates that she both had a distance to the situation while feeling that it was impossible. She wanted to avoid this father's request and values because he was a man who had entered her kindergarten with his "strange" traditions. Repeating

the word "felt," she makes it clear that **emotions** are a dominant element of this narrative, in this case a negative one. Ellen neither seemed to know what was expected in other cultural traditions nor have an open mind to a new request from the father. Further, she did not use her imagination to find other solutions, such as using wet wipes or wearing gloves. I interpret all of this as an incomplete use of ethical discretion in this situation.

Nevertheless, this situation had taken place a couple of years before the interview, and the reason for Ellen's immature discretion in the situation may have been that she was unprepared because she lacked both experience and knowledge. She had also pointed to other staff members who agreed with her, an action which made her decision less private and more "normal." After telling me her story, Ellen wanted to soften her implied criticism, assuring me that this father was a "good man." She also talked about immigrant parents' food requests, which made her seem more open to new values and practices than she had been in this narrative. This indicates that practitioners need time to accommodate to new situations, and both individuals and workplace cultures differ in their ability to adapt quickly. Hence, I do not interpret Ellen's attitude in the third narrative as being her attitude toward immigrants in general.

Rigmor, head of Rowen, is the source of the last narrative:

4. *In Norway, children usually start kindergarten when they're around one year old. Last autumn, they had accepted a five-month-old infant because the infant's parents, who had come from an African country, wanted to return to school as fast as possible, so they needed a safe place during the daytime for their baby. The parents also made a few requests in accordance with their own traditions, for instance, that babies weren't supposed to stay outdoors for any length of time during the first twelve months. But in Norwegian kindergartens, kids spend several hours outdoors every single day. So, this particular request would impact the kindergarten's daily operations, and it caused a lot of debate among staff members. So Rigmor ended up making changes to her own work situation to avoid causing problems for the other staff members.*

   The following year, they had two more requests regarding infants who were younger siblings of older children at Rowen. At this point Rigmor said that she did not want to accept any more babies:

   > *We think you need your mother when you are six months old. However, it seems to be going okay with the baby we accepted when she was just five months old. But*

> *what kind of effect will this have on her later in life? (…) We don't know if this is good for the kids, if it might hurt them later in life?*
>
> *Nevertheless, she felt obliged to accept these babies because the parents needed it to get on with their Norwegian language course, so they'd be allowed to study and work in Norway. The fact that they were siblings gave the parents certain rights according to the kindergarten's statutes, so Rigmor ended up saying yes to this request.*

This narrative contains a real ethical dilemma with possibly harmful consequences arising from both actions. Like Rasmus in the previous narratives, Rigmor showed an **open attitude**. However, her main focus was on **the parents**, not the children. She used several elements of discretion here: For instance, knowledge about the debate concerning one-year-olds in kindergarten[5] was considered. However, this knowledge did not give her a clear answer because accepting babies in kindergarten was a controversial topic with no conclusion. This dilemma created a more expansive space for ethical discretion; simultaneously, it also made it harder to reach a decision. Rigmor listened to her emotions, which told her that it was best for infants to be at home with their parents. She was also fearful of making the wrong decision. Rigmor's communication style during the interview reflected her ambiguous relationship with the choice she had made. She was hesitant about what was best for these infants, yet she had also had several positive experiences with the first baby and strongly wished to help the parents. On top of these factors, and not explicitly mentioned in the interview, comes the fact that a leader must consider the financial aspects of all requests, and, at this point in time, Rowen needed more children. Ultimately, Rigmor's values and attitude of understanding and wanting to help *the parents* were the most decisive elements in her ethical discretion. This narrative shows how difficult ethical discretion may be in complex professional practice situations.

The analyses of the narratives show that kindergarten teachers use and emphasize different elements of ethical discretion in various situations. In addition, there are variations in how deliberate ethical discretion is in

5 This topic has been debated in newspapers and research literature in Norway (see Bredeveien, 2019; Holte, 2019; Skard, 2017; Undheim & Drugli, 2012)

practice. Based on this analysis, I will discuss ethical discretion in kindergarten teachers' practice.

Ethical discretion in kindergarten teachers' practice

Discretion is a practice where the situation demands making a choice; as a result, many elements play together in making this choice. Discretion has been called a blurry or obscure process and ability. This makes it difficult for practitioners to verbalize what is happening (McGuirk, 2021b). More significantly, discretion will hardly be deliberate if everything is diffuse and blended. It may feel like maneuvering in an unknown foggy landscape, which may be one of the reasons why the pedagogical leaders in Gotvassli & Moe's study (2020) stated that one should not have a too extensive use of discretion in practice. I argue that ethical discretion is essential to pedagogical practices because we deal with individual human beings in diverse situations. The challenge is to help the practitioner discern and see more clearly what is most important in the situation – not to minimize the use of discretion.

The deliberate exercise of discretion is connected to the integration of several elements. One may ask if it is helpful to divide and analyze diverse elements of discretion in kindergarten practice. My experience is that having knowledge of different ethical concepts and models is helpful and may increase an individual's reflection and insight into the situation. In hermeneutical processes, a process of analysis (to separate into small parts) is necessary to expand understanding and synthesize (put the elements together) (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). A similar hermeneutical process is needed to see more clearly and understand ethical discretion in practice more deeply. The previous analysis attempts to understand more of how kindergarten teachers' discretion works in practice and its decisive elements. This analysis is a part of the hermeneutical process of a more holistic or comprehensive understanding of ethical discretion.

In Grimen and Molander's category of *epistemic discretion*, they claim that "the person who is exercising discretion reasons about specific cases to come to a justified conclusion of what should be done" (Grimen & Molander, 2008, p. 182). They seem to emphasize cognitive reasoning in the process of discretion. In the tradition of Nussbaum and Løgstrup,

I have found a more comprehensive and expanded understanding of ethical discretion:

First: Nussbaum and Løgstrup mention a more complex repertoire of elements that influence and form discretion. Cognitive knowledge is but one of the essential elements. A person's emotions, imagination, attitudes, and values are important influencers with respect to discretion, in addition to knowledge and former experiences. I would argue that epistemic discretion – the process - part of the discretion – needs to be expanded because "the whole complexity of human life" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 29) plays together in the exercise of sound discretion.

Secondly: With *the ethical demand*, Løgstrup underlines that devotion to others is the primary concern for a professional who works with people; consequently, cognitive knowledge and reasoning about a situation are secondary. First and foremost, a kindergarten teacher has to be dedicated to children and what is in children's best interest. Rasmus' reflections in the introduction of this chapter illustrate this point: In every situation where people meet, an ethical demand arises where ethical discretion is needed. I observed Rasmus in these situations where he met each child, which required his presence, sensitivity, and devotion toward the other. These qualities are integrated in a good practitioner, and the elements of discretion work together in the best interest of the other. In Norwegian kindergarten practice, providing children with care and a sense of security is more important than teaching them. This means that professionals have children's welfare as their primary concern, while educational matters are secondary. In the exercise of discretion, one has to consider every child's best. Hence, in kindergarten, individualization justifies discretion (cf. Molander, 2016, pp. 11–12). Nevertheless, a challenge remains in everyday life in kindergarten: Balancing both this recognition of each child's individual needs *and* the kindergarten as a holistic community for all children, which Rasmus points out.

In the presented narratives, different elements of ethical discretion were dominant. A professional needs knowledge to deal with situations, and knowledge is an essential backdrop. However, one also needs to be open toward the other person, as Lindseth (2001, p. 134) says. Molander mentions that discretion is sometimes exercised by rapidly selected situation

features (Molander, 2016, p. 15), a point which could describe my third narrative. The challenge of ethical discretion in practice is that if disgust dominates the discretion, other discretion elements will not be considered, and it will be incomplete. The reason for this feeling of disgust could be an individual's lack of knowledge, experience, openness, reflection, etc. To counter this negativity, both a higher level of awareness and integration of different elements are needed.

The kindergarten teachers in my study ranked values to deal with situations where diverse values or diverse demands met. It is possible to discern personal and professional values as Rasmus did in the hijab story. During situations of ethical discretion in practice, however, these values are often blended, and a combination of values guides individual actions. Grimen and Molander (2008, p. 193) pointed at personal experiences and values as *challenges* in exercising discretion. I argue that personal experiences and values are natural and essential to ethical discretion. In complex situations with many aspects that pull in different directions, the lasting values of a professional may be a decisive element. This can be seen in the narratives from Rigmor and Rasmus, where their openness toward the child or parents was dominant. The goal is, as Christoffersen (2011a, p. 82) puts it: "not to keep the general and professional from each other, but to connect them well". Ethical discretion is value-based, implying that being aware of kindergarten teachers' values is essential to understanding their ethical discretion.

In each narrative, it seems like the kindergarten teachers exercised discretion independently. For instance, in the "cleaning" narrative, Ellen said she had discussed the situation with colleagues. However, this discussion took place afterwards and functioned merely as a confirmation of Ellen's actions. At Oak, the kindergarten culture was more harmonizing than discursive, and they had few meetings and discussions during my fieldwork there. At Rowen, the staff members had several intense discussions, daring disagree with one another regarding values and challenges in the kindergarten's practices due to constant changes. Nonetheless, in Rasmus' narrative, it seems he did not discuss his challenging situation with colleagues before making his decision. As head of the kindergarten, Rigmor discussed a certain number of issues with her colleagues with regard to the first infant, but when facing the following year's dilemma, the decision was hers alone to make. One challenge to exercising discretion in kindergarten is that the practitioner must often make a choice quickly and does not always have a chance to discuss the matter with others before (s)he has to act.

How can we avoid bad decisions made in a hurry? Løgstrup answers: It is possible to avoid immature decisions "if there has been time for maturing so that one is prepared for one's decision" (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 149). Well-founded ethical discretion requires that several elements of discretion are *integrated* into the moral subject, which in turn requires practice and training (McGuirk, 2021a, p. 50). By telling their experiences and discussing them with colleagues, kindergarten teachers may see themselves and the situation more clearly. Christoffersen claims that having conversations with colleagues to strengthen ethical discretion is «a quality check of professional ethics» (2011a, p. 67). In other words, working deliberately to increase staff members' ability to discern situations while raising their level of awareness with regard to practicing discretion in kindergartens is crucial for maintaining their overall quality.

Conclusion

As the lunchtime reflections of Rasmus illustrate, answering the ethical demand that arises whenever individuals meet in kindergarten practice, ethical discretion is constantly needed. The chapter has discussed certain aspects of ethical discretion in kindergarten practice. In search of a practical theory for analyzing kindergarten teachers' ethical discretion, the chapter points to six elements: *knowledge, experience, imagination, emotions, attitudes*, and *values*. The question has been: How are elements of ethical discretion active in kindergarten teachers' stories and reflections? Narratives from three kindergarten teachers have been analyzed while considering the elements mentioned. These examples show that several elements are included in the discretion in narratives one, two, and four. Ultimately, the kindergarten teachers chose action based on their primary values. In the third narrative, negative emotions and a lack of openness seemed to dominate the kindergarten teacher's discretion. Therefore, in order to respond to the ethical demand in kindergarten, several elements of discretion must be integrated into the decision. The chapter concludes that to ensure the quality of a kindergarten's ethical practice, its staff must be given time to practice, discuss, and reflect together upon ethical situations and challenges. In this process, knowledge of the different elements of ethical discretion may raise kindergarten staff members' awareness of ethical discretion in practice.

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