# Systemic Leadership in Nordic Kindergartens: A Scoping Review

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This is a scoping review of peer-reviewed journal articles within Nordic Early Childhood Education and Care research from 2014 to 2020. We aim to explore if and how the concept of systemic leadership is employed within Nordic research on kindergartens. Forty-two studies were included. The results show the study types, methods and informants used. Based on a qualitative content analysis, six dominating leadership perspectives were identified in the studies. These can be briefly described as: 1) leadership mirroring the outside world, 2) leadership as a collaborative process among humans, 3) hybrid leadership between solo and distributed, 4) shared formal leadership, 5) leadership as organizational learning and development, and 6) leading in the professional context. These approaches consider the ways in which systemic leadership is employed and they highlight the collective and relational dynamics of leadership beyond the individual leader. Despite a growing body of research, there remains a need for further theoretical and quantitative investigations, and studies that focus on staff without pedagogue education as informants.

Keywords: Collaboration, ECEC, Kindergarten, Scoping Review, Systemic Leadership.

# 1. Introduction

## *1.1 Main question and approach*

The concept of systemic leadership focuses on the collective and relational dynamics of leadership beyond the individual leader (Bolden, Gulati & Edwards, 2020). The aim of this study is to illuminate whether and how the concept of systemic leadership is employed within Nordic research on the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector (kindergartens), and what implications it may have for leadership theory and practice in this context. We argue that a coherent conceptualization of kindergarten leadership seems to be lacking, and practical leadership at the kindergarten level remains in need of abstract guidance through the maze of theories and concepts that exist. In this scoping review, we postulate systemic leadership as a concept, and we also argue that it might function as such a guide.

## *1.2 Point of departure*

There are several reasons for this approach. Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the need for more research on leadership within the ECEC context (Ang, 2012; Cheyney-Collante & Cheyney, 2018; McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012; Nicholson et al., 2020; Nuttall, Thomas & Wood, 2014; Rodd, 2013). Leadership in early years settings and services has also become a key concern for policymakers and practitioners (Whalley et al., 2018) and a recurrent theme as formal competence levels in kindergartens are increasingly elaborated upon (Aasen, 2018; Børhaug et al. 2018; Gotvassli et al. 2012; Sheridan & Williams, 2018). In kindergartens, teachers work together with other staff members to realize the national mandate (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

Compared with the school sector, leadership research within the kindergarten sector is greatly underrepresented, and little of what is published is made available through reputable channels (Mordal, 2014, p. 49). One implication seems to be a tendency to lean on general theories of leadership and management, amid a dearth of context-specific leadership literature (Stamopoulos, 2012; Ødegård, 2011). General theories are historically drawn from research within business and educational leadership, contexts which are markedly different from early childhood environments

(Nicholson et al., 2020). Leadership theories are also classified into several ontological and epistemological categories. Dons and Mørreaunet (2019) point to a tension between an actor perspective with a focus on individuals and on individual traits and a system perspective, building on system dynamic theories and social psychology, highlighting communication, interaction and group level dynamics. Competing perspectives such as these may not always contribute to clarification as much of the corpus on educational leadership theory lacks contextual relevance and fails to recognize the complexities and realities of leadership within early years contexts (Kivunja, 2015; Klevering & McNae, 2018; Rodd, 2013).

A review carried out by Mordal in 2014 concluded that several sets of leadership theories might "explain" why leadership "worked" in schools and kindergartens. Mordal (2014), however, concurred with Mulford and Silins that "successful school principalship is an interactive, reciprocal and evolving process involving many players which is influenced by – and in turn influences – the context in which it occurs" (Mulford & Silins, 2011, pp. 61-62, cited in Mordal, 2014, p. 49). As far as leadership within the kindergarten context is concerned, Mordal's conclusion was that *there exists an almost complete lack of insight from research* (op cit. p. 50). This is our point of departure, whereby we borrow a working hypothesis from Sillins and Mulford (2010, p. 73) and reformulate it for the kindergarten context: "Kindergarten leadership is an interactive, reciprocal and evolving process involving many players, which is influenced by – and in turn influences – the context in which it occurs". This broad formulation invites a discourse on how to classify the theoretical and empirical perspectives employed within leadership research in the kindergarten context. Our contribution is to explore whether different studies might be labeled as "systemic", even if this concept is not explicitly mentioned in the published research document itself.

### 1.3 Previous reviews on leadership within kindergartens

An international review by Nicholson et al. (2020) on the literature on leadership in early childhood educational contexts between 1995 and 2015 reports a shift towards more a distributed and relational understanding of leadership. They found three main themes represented. Firsty, many studies still lean on traditional hierarchical and trait-based discourses of leadership. Secondly, another group conceived leadership as untethered from formal position and/or level of institutional authority. Thirdly, yet another group of texts described leadership as a situated,

culturally influenced, interpretive phenomenon. The authors point out a noteworthy shift away from a focus on traditional hierarchies and assumptions about the association of leadership with singular minds and bodies or specific professional roles and levels of authority. An increasing emphasis on postmodern discourse emerged, whereby leadership is conceptualized as a complex, situated process that is highly influenced by its context. The authors seem to conclude that theories on ECEC leadership must emphasize ideas more aligned with the praxis of the field of early childhood, including the value placed on relationships and collaboration, teaching and direct service, family engagement and multi-disciplinarity.

Mordal (2014) had primarily focused on Nordic literature and cited 206 articles and 37 other sources (i.e., books, book chapters, reports) in the review of leadership within ECEC and schools. The most prominent trends 2004-2014 include a focus on leadership as contextual, and the dominating discourses are distributed leadership, pedagogical leadership (instructional leadership), transformational leadership, collaborative leadership and leadership of learning. Both similarities and differences between schools and ECEC are reported, but a common focus is the notion of distributed leadership. The report is written within a frame where "good leadership" is asked for. The answer seems to be that leadership must be contextual, and this implies both professional knowledge of the ECEC sector in general and the concrete school or kindergarten in question. "Good leadership" implies some sort of distribution of responsibility among staff. However, this must be balanced with instructional or pedagogical leadership that is focused on quality. Strategic leadership is also mentioned as an answer to a changing institutional landscape in the Nordic countries.

A report on the professional ECEC teacher (Børhaug et al. 2018) was commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The main perspective employed is theories on professions, not on leadership per se. The report views kindergartens as expert organizations with a hierarchy within their staff. The report discusses the three different formal positions and mandates established for kindergarten teachers by the Kindergarten Act (2005) and the Framework Plan (2017): head teacher, pedagogical leader, and kindergarten teacher. The latter has no leadership responsibilities except for leading the children groups they are responsible for. Thus, leadership is

practiced on several levels. Quality work, competences, learning and supervising are central leadership concepts within the kindergarten. The report points to quality improvements and developmental work as two of the most important responsibilities of the head teacher and the pedagogical leaders as a team. The head teacher's role is to initiate staff to become active organizational learners. Despite the value added to local development/organizational learning capacity, there is little empirical research on what this is or what factors promote or inhibit it. Leadership can, according to the report, be regarded as a function, or as distributed due to its strong concept of direction and the way in which it applies pressure to facilitate staff resources for successful collaboration. Distributed leadership is seen in the report as pedagogical development, which involves capacity across the whole system and at all levels. The report points to pedagogical leaders as professionals who distribute their professional knowledge when participating in teaching tasks in close relation to the staff.

The three reviews have all pointed at the direction we are trying out in this text. Nicholson et al. (2020) was most specific. Leadership is conceptualized as a complex, situated process that is highly influenced by its context, and kindergarten leadership should focus on relationships and collaboration, teaching and direct service, family engagement and multi-disciplinarity.

### 1.4 The concept of 'systemic leadership'

The term "systemic" stems from systems theory and a family of related ideas (Castellani, 2018). A system is a group of parts or sub-systems working together as something more than the sum of parts. A person is a system, but so is a family. A department in the kindergarten is a part of the kindergarten as a larger organisation. In this sense, a kindergarten is a whole, but also a part of a larger whole in our society and our communities; the children and staff members are parts, but also more than that. "Systemic" is a term used to focus on the relatedness and connections between parts and sub-systems, while "leadership" refers to human interaction that creates and manages new connections between parts and sub-systems and is an activity that goes beyond the management of parts. When ECEC leadership focuses on relationships and collaboration, teaching and family engagement, and multi-disciplinarity, the notion of "systemic" is close at hand.

A focus on "connectedness" implies the same as a holistic approach, which is a pedagogical idea shared across the Nordic countries (Puroila et al., 2016, Einarsdottir, 2013). Play and a holistic

approach to learning have been in the forefront in the Nordic kindergarten model (Roth, 2014), built on the Fröbelian tradition (Karila & Kinos, 2012). The value of child-centeredness is thus normative in relation to a holistic approach to learning within this model (Kristjánsson, 2006, Einarsdottir, 2013; Roth, 2014). The aim of early childhood education in the Nordic countries has also been the integration of care and learning and supporting children in their current developmental tasks and interests. For example, the Norwegian Framework Plan's (2017) first paragraph directly states that "kindergartens shall take a holistic approach to child development" (the Norwegian word *helhetlig* 'wholeness' is used). In the same paragraph, the notion of connections (*sammenheng*) between play, care, learning and bildung is also put forward.

Hence it is probably natural for research on kindergarten leadership to raise ideas that might address the epistemological challenges posed by a holistic approach (Birkeland & Ødegaard, 2019). We therefore ask whether a concept as "systemic leadership" reflects one of the core values in the Framework Plan and similar thinking in other Nordic countries. Leadership in a holistic and child-centered practice is dependent on the staff's collective understanding of "good childhood" and integration of care, learning and support of children. Thus leadership might be a question of knowledge exchange among staff at all levels. It may also reflect a need to understand leadership in the light of characteristics of working life traditions and leadership models within the Nordic countries, i.e. equality, participation, cooperation and trust (Byrkjeflot, 2015; Grennes, 2012; Vie, 2012).

The need to understand "wholeness" in combination with an equality-oriented working life tradition goes a long way to explain a quest for leadership ideas which reflects a complex and confusing world not captured by traditional organisational concepts. One approach might be "leadership as connections". The term "connectivism" has been offered as a new concept for our age (Kop & Hill, 2008; Bell, 2011). In Tschofen & Mackness (2012), "connectivism reflects the many shifts in contemporary cultural narrative including increased recognition of systems, complexity, and interrelatedness" (p. 124-125). Individual and social learning within this concept is regarded as the ability to construct and traverse connections (Downes, 2008).

### *1.5 The concept operationalised*

The search terms employed in this scoping review derived from an intuitive, dialogical process arising from the authors' generic knowledge of the literature on leadership in general and of the leadership discourse within the kindergarten context. From this discussion, a series of themes and concepts emerged as possible "systemic" angles of leadership. However, we did not regard these concepts as "holistic" if we could not link it to a reductionistic antonym. From this dialogical process, 10 key terms derived with their antonyms, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. The concept of systemic leadership between reductionist and holistic orientation*

| Leadership as | |
|---|---|
| A reductionistic, hierarchical and fragmented orientation | A holistic, non-hierarchical and integrated orientation |
| Solo | Collaborative |
| Individual | Collective |
| Linear | Complex |
| Delegated | Distributed |
| Fragmented | Integrative |
| Need to know | Shared |
| Part | System |
| Reductionistic | Systemic |
| Formal procedures | Organisational culture |
| Member | Team |

The question is if the notion of systemic leadership could synthesise these two orientations by highlighting the opposite positions embedded in the alternative concepts and ideas we defined in our search.

## 2. Methodology

This study is a scoping review based on the framework and the five key phases outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), starting with the research question, then identifying studies through systematic search, a study selection process, charting the data, and collating, summarizing and reporting the results. Scoping reviews provide a useful alternative to traditional literature reviews when clarification around a concept or theory is required (Munn et al., 2018, p. 5). A scoping review aims to provide an overview of a limited research field, provide a descriptive presentation and identify existing research gaps (Peters et al., 2016).

### *2.1 Data collection*

We began by undertaking an exploration of the field, namely by reading literature on leadership. Further, a more specific reading focused on systemic leadership was undertaken, followed by a discussion of our prior understanding and delimitation of "systemic leadership". From this, as shown in Table 1, keywords which were relevant were derived: collaborative, collective, complexity, distributed, integrative, shared, system, systemic, organizational culture and team. In collaboration with a librarian at our university, our search strategy was tested, further developed and executed.
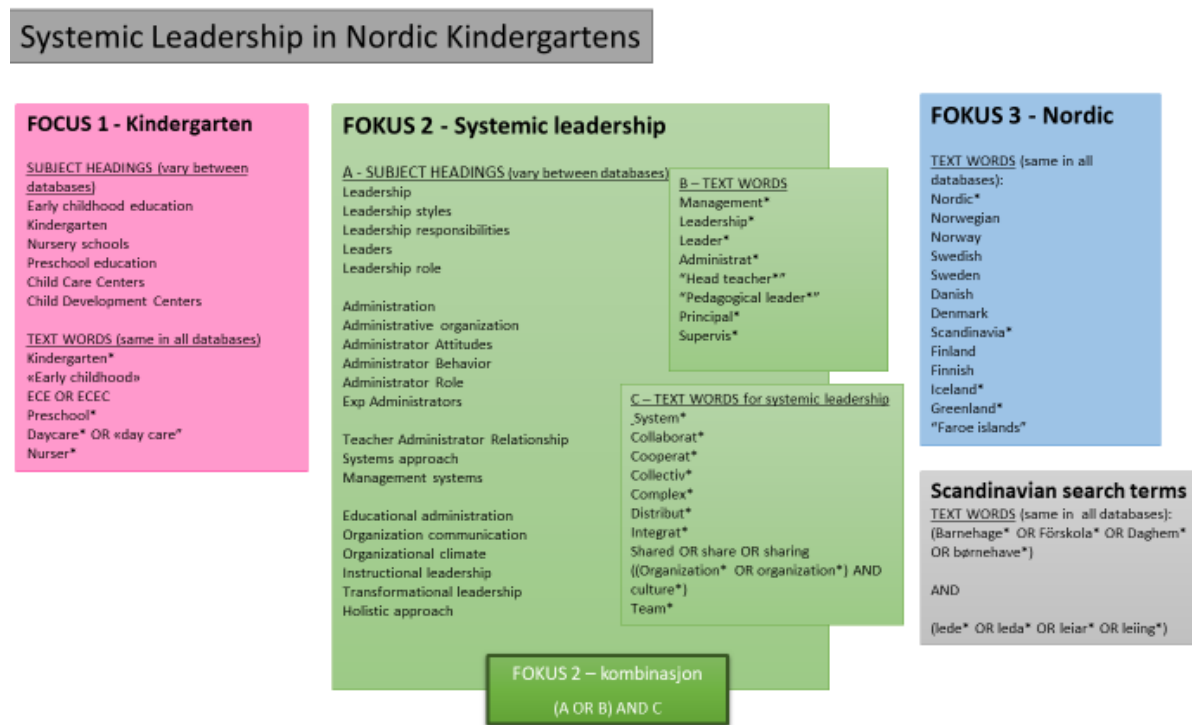
## Systemic Leadership in Nordic Kindergartens

**FOCUS 1 - Kindergarten**

SUBJECT HEADINGS (vary between databases)
Early childhood education
Kindergarten
Nursery schools
Preschool education
Child Care Centers
Child Development Centers

TEXT WORDS (same in all databases)
Kindergarten*
«Early childhood»
ECE OR ECEC
Preschool*
Daycare* OR «day care"
Nurser*

**FOKUS 2 - Systemic leadership**

A - SUBJECT HEADINGS (vary between databases)
Leadership
Leadership styles
Leadership responsibilities
Leaders
Leadership role

Administration
Administrative organization
Administrator Attitudes
Administrator Behavior
Administrator Role
Exp Administrators

Teacher Administrator Relationship
Systems approach
Management systems

Educational administration
Organization communication
Organizational climate
Instructional leadership
Transformational leadership
Holistic approach

B – TEXT WORDS
Management*
Leadership*
Leader*
Administrat*
"Head teacher*"
"Pedagogical leader*"
Principal*
Supervis*

C – TEXT WORDS for systemic leadership
System*
Collaborat*
Cooperat*
Collectiv*
Complex*
Distribut*
Integrat*
Shared OR share OR sharing
((Organization* OR organization*) AND culture*)
Team*

FOKUS 2 – kombinasjon
(A OR B) AND C

**FOKUS 3 - Nordic**

TEXT WORDS (same in all databases):
Nordic*
Norwegian
Norway
Swedish
Sweden
Danish
Denmark
Scandinavia*
Finland
Finnish
Iceland*
Greenland*
"Faroe islands"

**Scandinavian search terms**
TEXT WORDS (same in all databases):
(Barnehage* OR Förskola* OR Daghem* OR børnehave*)

AND

(lede* OR leda* OR leiar* OR leiing*)

*Figure 1. Search strategy*

A systematic search was carried out in May 2020 in seven databases: ERIC, Business Source Ultimate, Academic Search Ultimate, SocIndex, Scopus, Web of Science, and Teacher Reference Center. For a detailed description, see https://hdl.handle.net/11250/2725027. In addition, searches using the text words were also executed in Norart, Nordic Base of Early Childhood Education and Care, Science Direct, Google Scholar, The Danish Research Database, Idunn, and SwePub.

Only peer-reviewed journal articles were included, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2). Due to limited translation resources, only articles written in English, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish were included for full-text reading.

*Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

|  | *Included* | *Excluded* |
|---|---|---|
| Time frame | 2014–2020 | Articles published before 2014 |
| Publication type | Peer-reviewed journal articles | Books and book chapters, conference proceedings, reports, theses, editorials |
| Language | English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish | Other languages |
| Focus | Studies focused on leadership within kindergartens/preschools in one or more of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Greenland, Faroe Island; Finland, Åland; Iceland; Norway; Sweden). E.g. leadership within kindergartens as an organization, leadership at different levels (head teacher (manager), pedagogical leader (middle leader, leading the staff, and leadership in collaboration with other professions/institutions and parents). | Context: countries outside the Nordic countries. Leading the children. Governmental and municipal management of the ECEC sector. Transition to school. Kindergarten/preschool teacher education. |
| Target population | Head teachers (manager) Pedagogical leaders (teachers) Assistants (other staff members) | Students |
| Field | Kindergarten/preschool | Other fields |

The total flow of the selection process is shown in Figure 2 in the Result section. Throughout the selection process, discrepancies were resolved by group consensus, thus reducing the risk of researcher bias. Following the final inclusion/exclusion process, searches were done on all the included articles for additional literature in their reference sections, and we also searched for articles which cited the included articles.

## *2.2 Data analysis*

An analytic review template was developed and used to categorise the texts in terms of author, year, and title; unit, level and focus – what is studied (ontology); research question; view of leadership; method, data, and informants; type of study (empirical study, literature review, theoretical/position paper, other); theory; results; discussion, conclusion, and contribution of relevance to systemic leadership. We then proceeded to write a summary relating to our research question. The schemata completed for each article gave us a description and an overview of the areas which we determined were relevant for comparison: type of study, methods, focus, informants, the theory used and view of leadership. Further, content was classified, based on the guidelines of deductive Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2000), categorising the different leadership perspectives. The analyses were guided by our theoretical outline of the concept of systemic leadership (Table 1) and is summarised in Table 3.
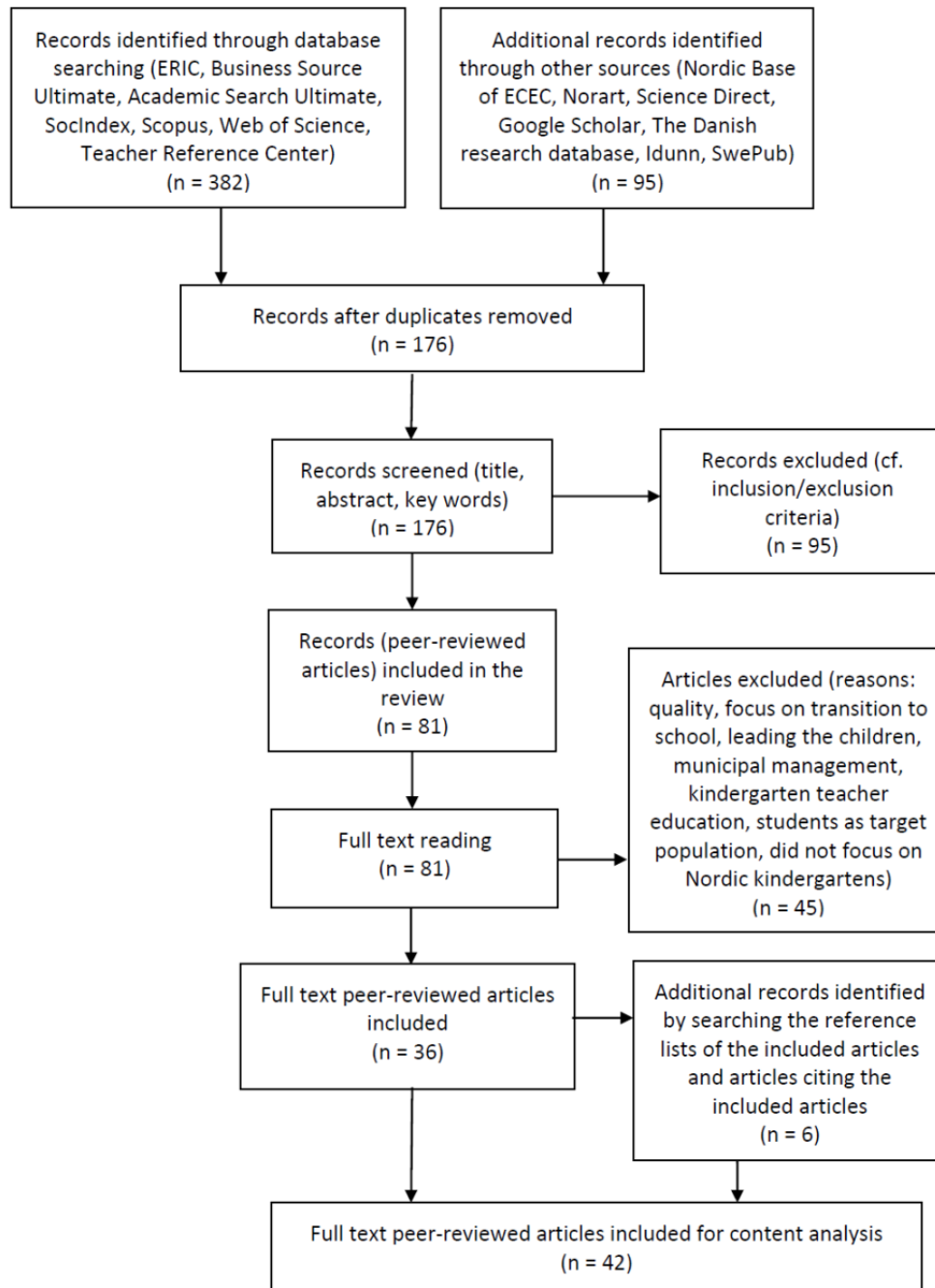
# 3. Results

## 3.1 Flow of the selection process

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Records identified through database searching (ERIC, Business Source Ultimate, Academic Search Ultimate, SocIndex, Scopus, Web of Science, Teacher Reference Center) (n = 382) | | Additional records identified through other sources (Nordic Base of ECEC, Norart, Science Direct, Google Scholar, The Danish research database, Idunn, SwePub) (n = 95) |

Records after duplicates removed
(n = 176)

Records screened (title, abstract, key words)
(n = 176)

Records excluded (cf. inclusion/exclusion criteria)
(n = 95)

Records (peer-reviewed articles) included in the review
(n = 81)

Full text reading
(n = 81)

Articles excluded (reasons: quality, focus on transition to school, leading the children, municipal management, kindergarten teacher education, students as target population, did not focus on Nordic kindergartens)
(n = 45)

Full text peer-reviewed articles included
(n = 36)

Additional records identified by searching the reference lists of the included articles and articles citing the included articles
(n = 6)

Full text peer-reviewed articles included for content analysis
(n = 42)

*Figure 2. Flow of the selection process.*

The search resulted in 56 studies in ERIC, 24 in Business Source Ultimate, 100 in Academic Search Ultimate, three in SocIndex, 93 in Scopus, 101 in Web of Science, and five in Teacher Reference Center. The search in the other sources resulted in 95 articles. All the references found were exported to Endnote X9, from where we removed the duplicates (301), and applied the first selection procedures, i.e. screening the title, abstract and keywords. We were able to access the full text of all the 81 remaining records for full text reading. Figure 2, inspired by the PRISMA model (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009), shows the total flow of the selection process. The result comprised of 42 articles, listed in Appendix Table 1.

### *3.2 Number of published articles and main types by period*

Our search covers the period of 2014-May 2020. Only one study had been published in 2020 thus far, so we omitted 2020 in Figure 2. With regards to research type, we categorised this as empirical or theoretical study.

*Figure 2. Number of published articles and main types by period*
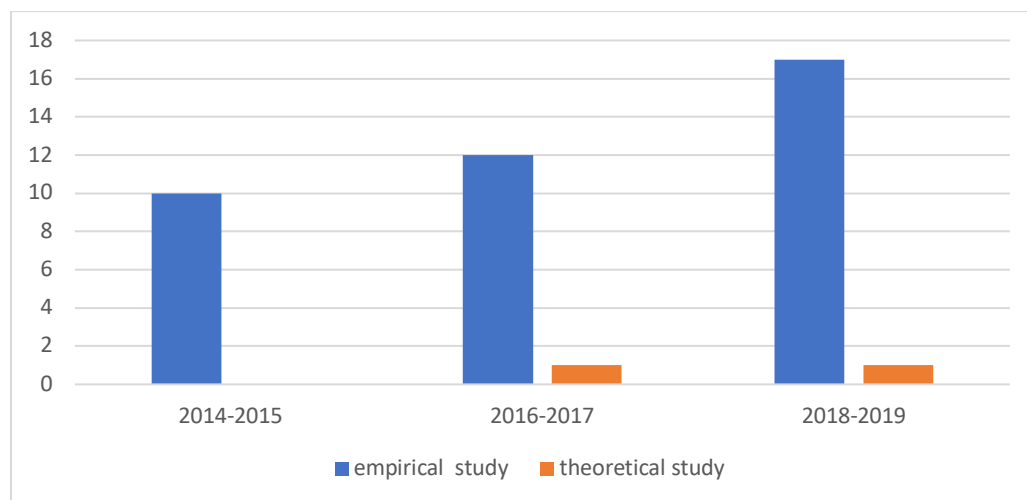


Of the 42 studies in the sample, 40 are empirical, and two (Bøe, 2016; Hansen, 2018) are theoretical works. Figure 2 shows the proportion of research types by time-period. Only one (Løkken & Gradovski, 2014) of the empirical studies was quantitative, three used mixed methods (Gradovski & Løkken, 2015; Hujala et al., 2016; Skjæveland et al., 2017), and the rest were qualitative studies.

*3.3 Employed methods*

The methods used in the empirical studies were mainly interviews and observations, as shown in Table 3. Of the 40 empirical studies, 11 included assistants[1] as informants, 25 included the manger, and 25 included middle leaders (teachers) as informants.

*Table 3. Overview of methods used in the empirical studies*

| Methods | Authors |
|---|---|
| **Interviews** (semi- structured interviews, in-depth interviews, group interviews, focus group interviews) | Bjarnadóttir & Guðmundsdóttir, 2016; Brodin & Renblad, 2014; Bøe & Hognestad, 2015, 2016; Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2014; Döös, 2015; Döös & Wilhelmson, 2019; Eik & Steinnes, 2019; Eriksson, Svensson & Beach, 2019; Fimreite & Fossøy, 2018; Halttunen, 217; Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2018; Hognestad & Bøe, 2014; Håkansson, 2019; Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2016; Klages, Lundestad & Sundar, 2019; Larsen & Slåtten, 2014; Larsen & Slåtten, 2017; Liljenberg & Nordholm, 2018; Lunneblad & Garvis, 2019; Moen, 2016; Nisser & Olsson, 2018; Nygård, 2017; Omdal, 2018; Trandem, 2018; Vannebo & Gotvassli, 2017; Varpanen, 2020; Wiedemann, 2018. |
| **Observations** (shadowing, video observations, field notes, participant observation) | Bøe & Hognestad, 2015, 2016; Eriksson, Svensson & Beach, 2019; Fimreite & Fossøy, 2018; Halttunen, 217; Halttunen, Waniganayake & Heikka, 2019; Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake & 2016; Hognestad & Bøe, 2014; Melasalmi & Husu, 2019; Nisser & Olsson, 2018; Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Trandem, 2018. |
| **Questionnaire** | Gradovski & Løkken, 2015; Halttunen, 2017; Hujala et al., 2016; Larsen & Slåtten, 2014; Larsen & Slåtten, 2017; Løkken & Gradovski, 2014; Skjæveland et al., 2017. |
| **Narratives** (written stories, reflection notes, | Havnes, 2018; Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2016; Nilsen, 2015; Thomas & Reinertsen, 2016; Aasen & Birkeland, 2018. |

[1] Staff without kindergarten teacher/preschool teacher education.

| learning diaries, summaries) | |
|---|---|
| **Audio recordings** (recordings of meetings) | Döös & Wilhelmson, 2019; Fimreite & Fossøy, 2018; Halttunen, Waniganayake & Heikka, 2019; Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015. |

### 3.4 Classification by content

As shown in tables 2 through 7 in the appendix, the studies might be classified in six different categories.

### 3.4.1 Kindergarten leadership mirrors the outside world

In the first group of articles, leadership is understood in a contextual, functional, or strategic oriented perspective (Bjarnadóttir & Guðmundsdóttir, 2016; Hujala et al., 2016; Bøe & Hognestad, 2015; Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2014; Vannebo & Gotvassli, 2017; Nisser & Olsson, 2018; Nygård, 2017) (Appendix Table 2). Questions asked are typical of how the context shapes leadership discourse and leadership culture and distribute it in the kindergarten organisation. Another topic is leadership reflected in action, management and leadership behaviour, reflective practice, and judgement. Leadership as a function is classified here. In this category we have also classified studies that focus on strategy development implementation and framing, another word for governing kindergartens through policy development.

Viewed as systemic, leadership is thus an activity coupled to the outside world beyond the kindergarten. One could argue that a kindergarten is a sub-system, a cog among other cogs in a larger system of frames, policies and formal roles. Local leadership mirrors the outside world.

### 3.4.2 Kindergarten leadership as a question of collaborative practices

While the first group of articles focuses on the complexity created by the outside world, the second highlights human interaction, relations and dialogues on daily life and local practice (Nilsen, 2015; Melasalmi & Husu, 2019; Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Bøe & Hognestad, 2016) (Appendix Table 3). This is a broad category including focus on agency and dialogical/performance analysis, shared agency, teamwork, collaborative learning and communicative space. However, a common denominator are care, everyday leadership and leadership care connected to different types of practice perspectives. The studies classified in this category seem to be rooted in a human relations perspective on leadership. One could argue that the collaborative side of this literature mirrors the democratic expectations on a modern leadership role. Systemic leadership in this sense mirrors the complexities of human interaction around common practice.

### 3.4.3 Hybrid leadership as both solo projects and distributed among organizational members

A small but distinct group of articles focuses on what is termed as hybrid leadership, where individual leaders shift between solo and distributed forms of leadership (Håkansson, 2019; Hognestad & Bøe, 2014) (Appendix Table 4). The first group of our classification may be understood as a version of solo leadership but in a larger system, while the second may lead us towards the notion of leadership as something distributed among the individuals in an organisation. The hybrid concept is different from both, however, and thus a third kind of systemic leadership as it is defined as neither one nor the other, but rather as the ability to shift between them.

### 3.4.4 Shared leadership and collective leadership development

The fourth group (Table 5 in the appendix) contains articles in which leadership is seen as shared or distributed within the organisation (Döös & Wilhelmson, 2019; Döös, 2015; Wiedemann, 2018; Halttunen, 2017; Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2018; Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2016; Aasen & Birkeland, 2018; Varpanen, 2020; Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2016; Lunneblad & Garvis, 2019; Halttunena, Waniganayake & Heikka, 2019). The term "distribution" is used here in a more formal sense and as distinct to the organic sharing of leadership tasks among the individuals who happen to be working at a kindergarten at any given time. This is a large category containing code words as shared leadership, distributed leadership, organisational culture,

organisational development, leadership development, task distribution and pedagogical leadership. This is systemic in the sense that an organisation is seen as more than merely the sum of its members.

### 3.4.5 Leadership as organisational learning and development

The fifth group (Table 6 in the appendix), lists articles in which the dominating leadership perspective seems to be on organisational learning and development, coaching, mentoring, dialogues and learning (Liljenberg & Nordholm, 2018; Skjæveland, Granrusten, Moen & Lillemyr, 2017; Bøe, 2016; Eik & Steinnes, 2019; Fimreite & Fossøy, 2018; Brodin & Renblad, 2014; Klages, Lundestad & Sundar, 2019; Løkken & Gradovski, 2014; Thomas & Reinertsen, 2016; Omdal, 2018; Gradovski & Løkken, 2015; Moen, 2016; Larsen & Slåtten , 2017; Trandem, 2018). What makes this a systemic perspective is the way in which organisational change is highlighted through the role of leadership while existing, collective knowledge is questioned. This is a category of studies where focus is on a collective dimension as well as individual acquisition of knowledge. Mentoring, coaching, dialogues, learning organisations and leadership of learning are among the key words in the category.

### 3.4.6 Leading in the professional context

In the last group of texts (Table 7 in the appendix), the dominating leadership perspective seems to be heavily influenced by the notion of professionalism and processes of professionalisation (Eriksson, Svensson & Beach, 2019; Havnes, 2018; Larsen & Slåtten, 2014; Hansen, 2018). It is the explicit interrelatedness between the execution of leadership and professional communities that makes this a type of systemic approach. The notion of a professional community demands conceptual bridges between the formal and informal sides of the organisation and between solo and distributed leadership strategies.

### 3.4.7 Summary of results

Of the 42 studies of the sample 40 were empirical. Only two (Bøe, 2016; Hansen, 2018) were of a theoretical nature. Qualitative studies dominate. We found only one quantitative study (Løkken & Gradowski, 2014) and three mixed methods studies (Hujala et al., 2016; Gradovski & Løkken,

2015; Skjæveland et al., 2017). None of the 42 articles were meta-studies. The methods used in the empirical studies were mainly interviews and observations. Most of the studies focused on the manager or the middle leaders within the kindergarten, not the staff they lead.

The six groups or classifications are not mutually exclusive. They represent overlapping approaches to the concept of systemic leadership. The results are further discussed below, but a general impression is that all analysed studies adopt a perspective on leadership which goes beyond the individual leader (Bolden, Gulati, and Edwards, 2020). The literature in this sample depicts leadership in kindergartens as contextual and as a complex responsibility, which is characterised by extensive and diverse tasks distributed within the organisation, as described by Børhaug et al. (2018), Kivunja (2015) and Mordal (2014).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 The sample – did we hit the mark?

We do not claim this to be an exhaustive review of the existing literature on leadership within the Nordic kindergarten context. It includes only peer-reviewed articles published in journals between 2014 and May 2020. We know that some relevant have been published in books, which are not included. The concept of team leadership is an example. This is scarcely visible in our hits, despite the word team* used in our search strategy. This raises the question whether our findings indicate that literatures on this subject are mainly published in books or anthologies. Moreover, the search strategy, as guided by our definition of systemic leadership, limited the search results that we got from the databases, and in the hindsight, our decision to focus on the Nordic context may have been unnecessarily narrowing, even with the holistic approach to learning within the Nordic kindergarten model in mind.

We should have included the governmental and municipal levels, parents and other institutions with whom kindergartens collaborate. Our search did not exclude these topics. However, our selection process flow ultimately omitted this level as the articles did not address kindergarten leadership directly. However, governmental management of the ECEC sector is an integral part of understanding kindergartens as located in ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al., 2014), in

which frames and guidelines influence leadership in kindergartens (Nygård, 2017). Our focus on leadership in kindergartens addressed to some extent the cooperation between kindergartens, and it seems that talking, sharing experience and reflecting together in groups with other kindergartens promote the development of one's own kindergarten (Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015).

Despite these limitations, this study may nonetheless contribute to the corpus of kindergarten leadership knowledge.

### 4.2 The content analysis in a broader perspective

As indicated in the introduction, an increased recognition of systems, complexity and interrelatedness is one of the narratives of our time. But parallel to this, there also exists an older and more traditional narrative on leadership which highlights individual members, the linear and decoupled side of organisational life in kindergartens. Our sample of studies seems to illustrate how the two theoretical streams interact and overlap.

"Systemic leadership" refers to human interaction that creates and manages new connections between parts and sub-systems. We are not the first to point at this approach to kindergarten leadership. The contextual leadership model set out by Hujala (2004) has a foundation in Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1989) ecological theory and within systems thinking. Granhof Juhl and Molly-Søholm's (2013) conducted a study of 15 Danish managers' understanding of systemic leadership as a communicative, contextual phenomenon, but this is outside of our defined time range. Heikka (2013, p. 270) claims that "distributed pedagogical leadership could be understood as pedagogical development which involves capacity building of the whole system...". Clearly, this is a systemic approach, but this study also falls outside of the defined time range.

As mentioned in the summary, it seems like all included studies adopt a perspective on leadership that transgress simple ideas of a difference between "management" and "leadership", between "solo" and "distributed" leadership or other concepts and ideas used to capture the complexities

of modern organisations. In this discussion, we propose to use the metaphor "balancing act" as a broad and general umbrella covering several discourses on kindergarten leadership.

### 4.2.1 Leadership in kindergarten as a balancing act

Minzberg has in general advocated for a balance between intuition and analysis as tools for leaders in organisational planning (Campbell, 1991). This reminds us that a phenomenon can only be recognised in relation to its opposite (Fang, 2011). Jung has discussed the concepts of Logos (i.e., masculine, active, objective) and of Eros (i.e., feminine, receptive, emotional). Similarly, Taoist philosophy points to yin and yang as the two great forces of the universe that need "to be held in balance and equality" (Cooper, 1990, p. 30). In defining a holistic approach among the core values, it is necessary to establish an opposite position. This is usually understood as "reductionism", often in a derogatory sense.

This general idea of leadership as a balance between opposites might be illustrated by borrowing a notion of a reductionistic, hierarchical and fragmented orientation versus a connectivism, non-hierarchical and integrated orientation from Allen and Cherrey (2000), as cited in Carson (2001). We then raise the question whether the notion of systemic leadership could synthesise these two orientations by highlighting the opposite positions embedded in the alternative concepts and ideas we defined in our search. These antonyms and alternative approaches were presented in Table 1 in the Introduction.

This approach implies that systemic leadership within the kindergarten context might be defined as a balancing act as it, for example, is described in an educational context by Kemmis et al. (2014), as they understand "leading as located in ecologies of practices that have a common commitment to the overall project of *education development"* (p. 176). We contrast this with the "command-and-control" view of leading, which according to Kemmis et al. (2014) may often take a technical and managerialist view of the process of educational change.

The opposite to "command-and-control" is also called "shared leadership" (op cit.). Bøe (2016), with reference to Gronn (2008, 2011), named this balance "hybrid leadership". Hybrid leadership

is combinations of concentrated individual leadership which co-exist alongside patterns of distributed leadership and emergent leadership (Gronn, 2008, cited in Hognestad & Bøe, 2014, p. 3). We have classified this approach as one of the six categories of systemic leadership found among the 42 studies. Hybrid leadership demonstrates the complexity of leadership roles, in which both hierarchical and heterarchical leadership styles are intertwined (op cit).

As this approach was applied in our search, not all the concepts and ideas listed in Table 1 were central, but some of them seemed to be relevant as label on the texts we have classified. In Table 3, we suggest those main characteristics and their antonyms we found among the six sets of studies. However, it also seems necessary to edit the original list as tensions between knowing and learning, and between non-educated and professional seem like possible labels on reductionist and connectivist positions.

*Table 3: The concept of systemic leadership in Nordic literature on kindergarten leadership*

| Groups of articles with focus on leadership as: | Systemic leadership in the 42 sample studies shows a balance between: | |
|---|---|---|
| | A reductionist position | A connectivism position |
| Mirroring the outside world | Inside | Outside |
| A question of collaborative practices | Command and control | Shared |
| Hybrid practices with shifts | Distributed | Hybrid |
| Shared and collective development | Solo | Distributed |
| Organisational learning and development | Knowing | Learning |
| Professional development | Non-educated | Professional |

### 4.2.2 A question of complexity and balance as an answer

Nicholson et al.'s (2020) international review reported a shift towards a more distributed and relational understanding of leadership. This was also the case in Mordal (2014), which mostly focused on the Nordic literatures. Børhaug et al. (2018) described the Norwegian kindergarten context, and distributed leadership was understood as capacity building across the whole system and at all levels. We have found that distributed and shared are still central and important notions

in the Nordic literature, but leadership in kindergartens is also pictured as contextual, and a complex responsibility characterised by extensive and diverse tasks distributed in the organisation. The central themes in this sample of literature on leadership are "external shaped contexts", "distribution and sharing", "professional knowledge", "learning", but also "hybrid practices". We may ask if "complexity" is a common denominator, as the sum of connectivism themes makes a hefty image of demanding leadership roles and tasks. In our discussion, the notion of leadership as a balancing act has been used as a metaphor, expressing the diverging and contrasting tasks embedded in the expectations placed on kindergarten leaders We find that this metaphor carries weight as leadership on the kindergarten level seems to be a question of managing apparently complex realities created by at least two different driving forces. The first force might be identified through the hierarchical structures made up by formal, government policy demands, local, administrative levels, and professional, educational pressure. This forces kindergartens to emphasise the formal roles of managers, pedagogical leaders, department heads, the level of pedagogical education and professional competence in a formal sense. It may drive kindergarten leadership thinking into a "reductionist mode". The second driving force is a demand for integration on the vertical level. In the daily work with children, each kindergarten is supposed to function in an integrated, "holistic mode". Distribution seems to be a code word used in the quest to understand this integration. These two driving forces may, however, be counterproductive, serving ultimately to create more complexity.

## 5. Concluding remarks and further research

### *5.1 A growing corpus, but biased approaches*

Even if limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, Figure 2 shows that empirical knowledge on leadership in kindergartens is growing fast in the Nordic context. There is, however, a striking lack of articles which are quantitative and theoretical in their orientation.

We recognise the limitations of this study as we have been working with a limited sample of articles. Studies beyond the Nordic context could yield new perspectives of relevance to leadership in kindergartens. Further research should broaden the scope and investigate how the concept of systemic leadership is employed in practice-oriented literature.

### *5.2 To study concepts in context*

One critique of the educational leadership theory corpus has been the lack of contextual relevance, recognising the complexities and realities of leading in early years contexts (Kivunja, 2015). As discussed in this text, there has been no shortage of attempts to catch these complexities. However, as much as qualitative case studies and theory-informed analyses are recommendable, the dearth of theoretically and conceptually oriented meta-articles points to a need for articles which develop abstract concepts on leadership, but also systematically relate them to the kindergarten context. Børhaug et al. (2018) do this, and by using the notion of profession, they apply theories of leadership in a manner that is sensitive to the kindergarten context. Concepts such as "institutions", "roles" and "policies" could – through conceptual texts – be rendered contextually relevant and thus be translated into local realities. Words such as "systemic", "context" and "complexity" are in themselves examples of a need to develop contextual knowledge around concepts.

### *5.3 Whom to include*

In kindergartens, in most of the Nordic countries, educated and non-educated staff members work closely together. The execution of the kindergarten mandate is a managerial responsibility, including leadership at different levels and involving the entire staff. However, one

could ask whether this is truly reflected in the literature, even if the concept of "distributed" has been established. If we believe that leadership in kindergartens is supposed to exert an effect on learning, play and becoming at the level of the child, then it would surely be a mistake to exclude or, to a degree, omit the level of the assistant.

### 5.4 Implications for theory and practice

Several implications might be derived from this scoping review. We will point to three of them. Firstly, the concept of systemic leadership ought to be further developed as a conceptual bridge between activities such as the daily, informal work undertaken with children and staff and the formal planning and administrative tasks which are embedded in the roles of kindergarten manager and pedagogical leader as parts of larger systems. Secondly, systemic thinking implies connections and relationships. Systemic leadership must therefore necessitate considerations of connections and legitimises discourses on connections and perspectives on relationships. This could be a way of understanding complexity as a characteristic of modern organisations. Thirdly, relevant knowledge on kindergarten leadership should still be developed through empirical studies, but more meta-studies and theoretical/conceptual studies should also be encouraged.

### 5.5 Conclusion

This article aimed to explore if and how the concept of systemic leadership is employed within Nordic research on kindergartens, and what implications this might have on leadership theory and practice in this context. Our findings are framed by our interest in the concept itself. With this in mind, we conclude that systemic leadership in the Nordic kindergarten context is more than one thing: the content analysis showed six major ways of understanding systemic leadership. The first might be labelled "Kindergarten leadership mirrors the outside world", while a second reflects the inside of the organisations as "Kindergarten leadership as a question of collaborative practices". A small, but distinct group is termed "Hybrid leadership as both solo projects and distributed among organisational members". A closely related group of texts are classified as "Shared leadership and collective leadership development", a fifth group is "Leadership as organisational learning and development" and the last "Leading in the professional context". The sum of themes makes a hefty

image of demanding leadership roles and tasks, which deserve the label "complex". We have discussed the notion of leadership as a balancing act. This metaphor might label the diverging, and contrasting, tasks embedded in the expectations placed on kindergarten leaders.

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**Appendix**

*Appendix Table 1: The sample studies, in alphabetic order by author*

| Nº | AUTHOR | YEAR | TITLE | JOURNAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bjarnadóttir, A. & Guðmundsdóttir, S. | 2016 | Managerial qualities preferred by long-tenured employees at a Sme in Iceland. | Journal of International Business and Economics |
| 2 | Brodin, J. & Renblad, K. | 2014 | Reflections on the Revised National Curriculum for Preschool in Sweden – interviews with the heads. | Early Child Development and Care |
| 3 | Bøe, M. | 2016 | Pedagogisk ledelse og barnehagen som lærende organisasjon. | The Nordic journal *Barn* |
| 4 | Bøe, M. & Hognestad, K. | 2016 | Care as Everyday Staff Leadership. | Journal of Early Childhood Education Research |
| 5 | Bøe, M. & Hognestad, K. | 2015 | "Det krever mye tankevirksomhet for du skal finne det rette øyeblikket". Refleksjon i praksis i personalledelse. | Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift |
| 6 | Børhaug, K. & Lotsberg, D. | 2014 | Fra kollegafellesskap til ledelseshierarki? De pedagogiske lederne i barnehagens ledelsesprosess. | Journal of Nordic Early Childhood Education Research |
| 7 | Döös, M. | 2015 | Together as One: Shared Leadership Between Mangers. | International Journal of Business and Management |
| 8 | Döös, M. & Wilhelmson. L. | 2019 | Att förändra organisatoriska förutsättningar: Erfarenheter av att | Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv |

| 9 | Eik, L. T. & Steinnes, G. S. | 2019 | Systematikk eller tilfeldighet? | Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | införa funktionellt delat ledarskap i skola och förskola. | |
| 10 | Eriksson, A., Svensson, A.-K., & Beach, D. | 2019 | Förskolepersonals tal om ansvar i relation till den förtydligade ansvarsstrukturen i svensk förskolepolicy. | Educare |
| 11 | Fimreite, H. & Fossøy, I. | 2018 | Kunnskap i endring. Kollegaveiledning som innfallsvinkel til utvikling av lærande barnehagar. | Nordic Studies in Education |
| 12 | Gradovski, M. & Løkken, I. | 2015 | Chronotopic Thresholds, Reflection, and Transformation of Supervision Experiences for Preschool Assistants in Norwegian Preschools. | International Journal of Early Childhood |
| 13 | Halttunen, L. | 2017 | Whose culture? Monolithic cultures and subcultures in early childhood settings. | Journal of Early Childhood Research |
| 14 | Halttunena, L., Waniganayake, M. & Heikka, J. | 2019 | Teacher Leadership Repertoires in the Context of Early Childhood Education Team Meetings in Finland. | Journal of Early Childhood Education Research |
| 15 | Hansen, L.S. | 2018 | Data- and research-informed improvement work in ECEC. | Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice |

| 16 | Havnes, A. | 2018 | ECEC Professionalization – challenges of developing professional standards. | European Early Childhood Education Research Journal |
|----|------------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 17 | Heikka, J., Halttunen, L. & Waniganayake, M. | 2016 | Investigating Teacher Leadership in ECE Centres in Finland. | Journal of Early Childhood Education Research |
| 18 | Heikka, J., Halttunen, L. & Waniganayake, M. | 2018 | Perceptions of early childhood education professionals on teacher leadership in Finland. | Early Child Development and Care |
| 19 | Hognestad, K. & Bøe, M. | 2014 | Knowledge Development through Hybrid Leadership Practices. | Journal of Nordic Early Childhood Education Research |
| 20 | Hujala, E., Eskelinen, M., Keskinen, S., Chen, C., Inoue, C., Matsumoto, M. & Kawase, M. | 2016 | Leadership Tasks in Early Childhood Education in Finland, Japan, and Singapore. | Journal of Research in Childhood Education |
| 21 | Håkansson, J. | 2019 | Leadership for learning in the preschool: Preschool managers' perspectives on strategies and actions in the systematic quality work. | Educational Management Administration & Leadership |
| 22 | Kangas, J., Venninen, T. & Ojala, M. | 2016 | Distributed leadership as administrative practice in Finnish early childhood education and care. | Educational Management Administration & Leadership |

| 23 | Klages, W., Lundestad, M. & Sundar, P. R. | 2019 | Mentoring of newly qualified teachers in early childhood education and care centres: Individual or organizational orientation? | International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education |
|----|------|------|------|------|
| 24 | Larsen, A. K. & Slåtten, M. V. | 2017 | Jeg er en sånn verdagspedagog! Barnehagestyreres profesjonelle handlingsrom for å styrke barnehagelærerens anvendelse av fagspråk. | Journal of Nordic Early Childhood Education Research |
| 25 | Larsen, A. K. & Slåtten, M. V. | 2014 | Mot en ny pedagogisk lederrolle og lederidentitet. | Journal of Nordic Early Childhood Education Research |
| 26 | Liljenberg, M. & Nordholm, D. | 2018 | Organisational routines for school improvement: Exploring the link between ostensive and performative aspects. | International Journal of Leadership in Education |
| 27 | Lunneblad, J. & Garvis, S. | 2019 | A study of Swedish preschool directors' perspectives on leadership and organization, | Early Child Development and Care |
| 28 | Løkken, I. M & Gradovski, M. | 2014 | Barnehagen som lærende organisasjon: bruk av nære læringsformer som veiledning og simulatortrening i forhold til kompetanseutvikling for assistentene. | FoU i praksis |
| 29 | Melasalmi, A. & Husu, J. | 2019 | Shared professional agency in Early Childhood Education: An in-depth study of three teams. | Teaching and Teacher Education |

| 30 | Moen, K. | 2016 | Leadership for Developing Consensus of Perspectives on Children's Learning in Early Childhood Centers. | Journal of Early Childhood Education Research |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31 | Nilsen, H. K. | 2015 | Konstruksjoner av lederskap i barnehagen. | Journal of Nordic Early Childhood Education Research |
| 32 | Nisser, A D. & Olsson, M. | 2018 | Förändringsproceser i förskola och skola beslyst gjenom ett implementeringsperspektiv. | Utbildning & Lärande |
| 33 | Nygård, M. | 2017 | The Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care institution as a learning arena: autonomy and positioning of the pedagogic recontextualising field with the increase in state control of ECEC content. | Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy |
| 34 | Omdal, H. | 2018 | Creating teacher capacity in Early Childhood Education and Care institutions implementing an authoritative adult style. | Journal of Educational Change |
| 35 | Rönnerman, K., Edwards-Groves, C. & Grootenboer, P. | 2015 | Opening up communicative spaces for discussion 'quality practices' in early childhood education through middle leadership. | Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy |
| 36 | Skjæveland, Y., Granrusten, P. T., Moen, K. H. & Lillemyr, O. F. | 2017 | Ledelse og læring i barnehagen. | Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift |
| 37 | Thomas, L. M. & Reinertsen A. B. | 2016 | Writing matters in leadership practice. | Reconceptualizing Educational |

| | | | | Research Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 38 | Trandem, A.S. | 2018 | Utforskende arbeidsmåter i barnehagen: Barnehagepersonalets rolle. | Nordisk tidsskrift for utdanning og praksis |
| 39 | Vannebo, B. I. & Gotvassli, K-Å. | 2017 | The concept of strategy in the early childhood education and care sector. | European Early Childhood Education Research Journal |
| 40 | Varpanen, J. | 2020 | Early childhood education leadership in Finland through the lens of structure and agency. | Educational Management Administration & Leadership |
| 41 | Wiedemann, F. | 2018 | Kollektiv ledelse – er det ikke noget med hønsestrik? | Forsking i Pædagogers Profession og Uddannelse |
| 42 | Aasen, W. & Birkeland, J. | 2018 | Lengselen etter barnehagekunnskap: Når erfarne assistenter ønsker å bli barnehagelærere. | Nordic Journal of Pedagogy & Critique |

*Appendix Table 2: Articles in which the dominating leadership perspective is contextual, functional, or strategic in orientation*

| Leadership perspective | Key words | Theoretical foundation | Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual leadership | Management, middle managers, educators, | Leadership (Mintzberg, 2011), leadership communication (Barret, 2010), trust (Herold & Fedor, 2008) | Bjarnadóttir & Guðmundsdóttir (2016) |

| | organizational culture | and traditional, general leadership theories. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual leadership | Cross-cultural study, early childhood education, leadership | How the context shapes leadership discourse and leadership culture (Akselin, 2013; Hujala, 2002, 2004; Nivala, 1999). Distributed leadership (Heikka, 2014; Heikka & Waniganayke, 2011) | Hujala, Eskelinen, Keskinen, Chen, Inoue, Matsumoto & Kawase (2016) |
| Contextual leadership | No key words listed | Leadership as reflection in action (Schön 1983, 1987), Management and leadership behavior (Klev & Vie 2014, Mintzberg 2009). Reflective practice and judgement (Kinsella 2012). | Bøe & Hognestad (2015) |
| Functional leadership | ECEC management, ECEC leadership, pedagogical leadership, management functions | Inclusion and leadership as function (Gotvassli, 1996; PAIE (Strand, 2007) (Quinn, 1988; Lotsberg, 2005; Strand, 2007). | Børhaug & Lotsberg (2014) |
| Functional leadership | Strategic management, leadership, managers' role, learning organization, organizational change | Generic or resource-based strategies (Porter 1998). They also use Mintzberg et al.'s (1998) perspectives: strategy as a plan, a pattern, a position, a perspective, a ploy. | Vannebo & Gotvassli (2017) |
| Functional leadership | Implementation, accessible education, qualitative analysis | Implementation (Van de Ven 2017, Ekholm et. al. 1990), Inclusion and leadership (Ainscow et al. 2003). | Nisser & Olsson (2018) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | process, meaning creating dialogue | | |
| Functional leadership System and policy as frames | Bernstein, learning, framing, profession, autonomy, positioning | Pedagogic discourse is defined as 'a rule which embeds a discourse of skills of various kinds and a discourse of social order' (Bernstein, 2000/1995, pp. 32–33). Framing may be described as a way of realizing a discourse (Bernstein, 2000/1995, p. 80). The Framework Plan is literally "framing". | Nygård (2017) |

*Appendix Table 3: Articles in which the dominating leadership perspective is on human interaction, relations, daily life, dialogues and/or practice*

| Leadership perspective | Key words | Theoretical foundation | Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relational leadership | Agency position, dialogical / performance analysis, leadership | The study takes a narrative perspective using a dialogical and performance analysis strategy in analyzing short texts about situations and events in kindergartens, Elliot (2005) and Riessman (2008; 2013). | Nilsen (2015) |
| Relational leadership | Teacher agency, shared agency, teamwork, professional development, teacher education | Socio-cultural theory, viewing agency as a relational phenomenon that is temporally and locally situated with the enhancement of learning enabled through dialogue (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004; Wenger, Trayner, & De Laat, 2011). Agency, in a broader | Melasalmi & Husu (2019) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | sense, encompasses individuals' capacity to exercise control over their lives (Bandura, 2001). | |
| Relational leadership | Collaborative learning, communicative space, middle leadership practices, practice architectures, systematic quality work, practice-based research | Theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). | Rönnerman, Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer (2015) |
| Relational leadership | Care, everyday leadership, leadership care, practice perspectives | Combining the concepts of care and intentional leadership (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2012), knowledge management and an approach to leadership as social practice (Tengblad, 2012). | Bøe & Hognestad (2016) |

*Appendix Table 4: Articles in which the dominating perspective is on leadership as hybrid or both solo and distributed*

| Leadership perspective | Key words | Theoretical foundation | Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hybrid leadership | Preschool manager, leadership, systematic quality work, strategies, expectations | A frame factor theoretical thinking (cf. Gustafsson, 1999; Lundgren, 1972). Three components appear as significant for the understanding of | Håkansson (2019) |

| | | different pedagogical sequences: frames – processes – result. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hybrid leadership | Knowledge development, communities of practice, formal teacher leader, practical knowledge | Hybrid leadership theory (Gronn 2011), Solo and distributed leadership styles. Leading communities of practice (Wenger 1998, Lave and Wenger 1991). | Hognestad & Bøe (2014) |

*Appendix Table 5: Articles in which the dominating leadership perspective is organisational learning and development, coaching, mentoring, dialogues and learning*

| *Leadership perspective* | *Key words* | *Theoretical foundation* | *Studies* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strategic leadership/ Organizational development | No key words listed | Organization development (OD) (Weick, 1976, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) and the coupling mechanisms of decoupling, assimilation and accommodation as described by Coburn (2004) and others (cf. Oliver, 1991; Spillane & Callahan, 2000). | Liljenberg & Nordholm (2018) |
| Leadership and learning | No key words listed | Learning organizations (Senge, 1990) (Leadership as translation (Rørvik 2007). | Skjæveland, Granrusten, Moen & Lillemyr (2017) |
| Leadership and learning | No key words listed | Pedagogical leadership (Gotvassli, 2013), Organizational learning, Senge (1990), Filstad (2010), Irgens (2011). | Bøe (2016) |

| Leadership and learning | Vurdering, barnehage, trivsel, allsidig utvikling | Socio-cultural theory (Säljö, 2001, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). | Eik & Steinnes (2019) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership and learning | Systematic peer counselling, learning communities | Group counselling (Lauvås, Lycke & Handal, 2004). Learning in organizations (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Ertsås & Irgens, 2014; Gotvassli, 2014; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 2006). Knowledge development (Roald 2012). | Fimreite & Fossøy (2018) |
| Leadership and learning | Preschool curriculum, preschool heads, focus group methodology, early childhood education, quality work | Three theoretical approaches: Postmodern Curriculum research. Quality in terms of structure, process and outcome, collaboration, and togetherness. Leadership as both visionary and management. | Brodin & Renblad (2014) |
| Leadership and learning | Mentoring and coaching, individual orientation, leadership and mentoring, mentorship, organizational orientation, reflection-based mentoring | Counselling (Handal & Lauvås), learning organizations (Hargraves 1994: Lieberman et al 2016; Senge 2006; Wenger 1998). Eik (2014) knowledge in action and how to comment on practice. | Klages, Lundestad & Sundar (2019). |
| Leadership and learning | Veiledning, simulatortrening, barnehageassistenter | Kindergartens as learning organizations (Filstad 2010) | Løkken & Gradovski (2014) |

| | | councelling (Dahlin 1999) (Handal & Lauvås 1993) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership and learning | Beyond leadership, materiality of language, leadership as collaborative (wr)iting processes | Becomingness of language through writing: inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 2013). | Thomas & Reinertsen (2016) |
| Leadership and learning | Authoritative adult style, capacity building, collective orientation, implementation, social interactions | Implementation of a leadership style. Elaborates on collective orientation, leadership and on individual and organizational conditions. | Omdal (2018) |
| Leadership and learning | Preschool assistants, supervision practices, Bakhtinian theory, chronotopic thresholds | The Bakhtinian theory of dialogue and understanding (Bakhtin 1986). Chronotopic thresholds as pedagogical experiences/events (White 2013). | Gradovski & Løkken (2015) |
| Leadership and learning | Perspectives on learning, direct and indirect leadership, early childhood leadership, pedagogical leadership | Senge (1990), Klev & Levin (2009, pp. 149-154) four central leadership tasks when leading a "learning organization": creating frames and facilitating dialogue that challenges and develops action theories. Dialogue with employees, challenging their action theories. Argyris & Schön (1978) and their notions of action theories. | Moen (2016) |

| Leadership and learning | ECEC-director, professional language, pedagogical leadership, freedom of professional action | Sociology of profession, knowledge discourses, inference (Abbot 1988), Classification and framing (Bernstein 2001), Division of labor (Mintzberg (1997) | Larsen & Slåtten (2017) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Learning and exploration | Læring, danning, utforskende arbeidsmåter | Socio-cultural learning theory. Ellis & Kleinberg (2000), Harlen & Allende (2009), Sageidet (2012), «Inquiry» (Wells, 1999, 2001). | Trandem (2018) |

*Appendix Table 6: Articles in which the dominating leadership perspective is heavily influenced by professionalism and processes of professionalisation*

| **Leadership perspective** | **Key words** | **Theoretical foundation** | **Studies** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Discourse analysis on leadership | Critical discourse analysis, policy revision, preschool teacher, professionalization, responsibility | Responsibility as a concept and analytical tool. (Svensson & Karlsson, 2008). Responsibility as a double dimension (Johanssons, 1998). Theory of professions (Brante 2013; Freidson 2001; Svensson 2011). | Eriksson, Svensson & Beach (2019) |
| Catalytic leadership/ profession  Leadership in a profession perspective | ECEC professionalism, early childhood teacher role, professionalization, professionalism, professional | Building excplisit on theory of professions. Many general and classic references made relevant for kindergartens. | Havnes (2018) |

| | knowledge, early childhood education | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership in a profession perspective | Ledelse, barnehage, profesjonalisering | Identity, profession and inference: Mead (1972) Sociology of professions (Abbot 1988), Heggen (2008) | Larsen & Slåtten (2014) |
| Leadership in a profession perspective | Data- and research-informed, improvement work, learning environment, professional learning and development, leadership, whole system approach | Professional learning community (Cherrington & Thornton, 2015). "The model for pedagogical analysis" (Nordahl, 2013), Distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004). | Hansen (2018) |

*Appendix Table 7: Articles in which leadership is a phenomenon understood as shared, collective, or distributed in the organisation*

| *Leadership perspective* | *Key words* | *Theoretical foundation* | *Studies* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shared Leadership | Delat ledarskap, ledningsform, lärande, organisations-förändring, organisationsideal, skolledning | Shared leadership as a solution to the work situation (Eckman, 2017; Wilhelmson & Döös, 2018). Equal collaboration (Rubinstein Reich et al., 2017). | Döös & Wilhelmson (2019) |
| Shared leadership | Shared leadership, managerial position, | Shared leadership (Erlingsdottir 2010, Wilhelmsom & Döös 2009), | Döös (2015) |

| | experience, organization, work task | distributes leadership, joint leadership, shared leadership (Pearce & Conger 2003), Co- leadership (Heenan & Bennis 1999). | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Collective leadership | Kollektiv ledelse, erfaringer, pædagogik, børn og forældre | Culture-historical approach. Pedagogical history and intellectual history. Theories of collective leadership. | Wiedemann (2018) |
| Distributed leadership | Organizational culture, subcultures, integration, differentiation, distributed organizations, leadership | Organizational culture as integrated cultures (Morgan & Ogbonna, 2008; Schein, 2004; Smircich, 1983). Different subcultures in one organization (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Martin, 1992; 2002). | Halttunen (2017) |
| Distributed leadership | Early childhood education, leadership, teacher leadership, leadership perceptions, team | Distributed pedagogical leadership. Heikka (2014) five interdependent ways of enacting leadership tasks, functions and responsibilities which could be applied in implementing teacher leadership in ECE settings. | Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake (2018) |
| Distributed leadership | Distributed leadership, early childhood education, teacher development, mentoring | Distributed leadership (Spillane et al. (2004), Shared expertise (Brown & Campione, 1994). | Kangas, Venninen & Ojala (2016) |
| Distributed leadership | Assistent, barnehagelærer-utdanning, distribuert ledelse, | Theory of professions (Molander and Terum 2008), Team theory, (Aasen 2018), Experiential learning: Dewey (1938), Birkeland (2004) | Aasen & Birkeland (2018) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | posisjoner, profesjons-kompetanse | | |
| Distributed leadership | Distributed leadership, structure and agency, frame analysis, poststructuralism | Post-structuralist social theory on practices (Doty 1997, Howarth 2000, Laclau & Mouffe 2001). The analytic concept of "frame" is used to identify different subject positions occupied by the leaders with respect to institutional structure (Goffman 1974). | Varpanen (2020) |
| Distributed leadership | Teacher leadership, distributed pedagogical leadership, early childhood education, Finland | The emerging scholarship of early childhood distributed pedagogical leadership and school-based research on teacher leadership as well as classical theorizing of ECE leadership. | Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake (2016) |
| Distributed leadership | Leadership, public management, directors, preschool | Leadership roles (Sims et al. 2015) and neo-liberal policies (Imsen et al. 2016). | Lunneblad & Garvis (2019) |
| Distributed leadership | Early childhood education, leadership, pedagogical leadership, teacher leadership | Teacher leadership and distributed leadership (Spillane et al. 2004). | Halttunena, Waniganayake & Heikka (2019) |