**“I don’t think there is anything wrong with her pedagogical expertise” – an analysis of when and why parents challenge pedagogues’ professional authority**

Rikke Overvad Kolding, Department of Political Science, Aarhus University  
Mathilde Cecchini, Department of Political Science, University of Southern Denmark

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**Introduction**

On a daily basis, professionals in public service organizations[[1]](#footnote-1) make decisions which may significantly influence the lives of the citizens they serve. Traditionally, these decisions are accepted and trusted, as street-level professionals’ expertise within their field provides them with professional authority (Greenwood, 1957; Hirst, 1982). Yet, broader societal changes, e.g. economic, technological and socio-cultural developments, have led to debates about the future of professions (Adams et al., 2020; Noordegraaf, 2020). One broad narrative in the sociological literature on professions is the “fall of professionalism”. Several researchers discuss how the expertise of the professionals are no longer trusted at face value. Citizens have become more unwilling to accept street-level professionals’ judgements without questioning them. Researchers argue that professional authority is being challenged by citizens due to for example easier access to information and rising educational levels, which makes citizens better able to critically assess the knowledge claims of street-level professionals (e.g. Haug, 1976; Pfadenhauer, 2006; Rothman, 1984). Studies have shown how challenge might take the form of active resistance, questioning or rejecting judgements (Haw et al., 2018; Stivers, 2005; Stivers & Timmermans, 2020), but it may also take place in a more discreet way, where citizens respect professional knowledge and does not openly challenge authority (Stevenson et al., 2021).

However, these studies do not shed light on *when* and w*hy* citizens challenge professional authority. In this paper, we argue that citizens may challenge professional authority in different situations and for various reasons, and some reasons represent a greater threat to the profession than others. Based on an interpretive ethnographic study in two Danish daycare centers, we identify four main reasons for challenging professional authority. In some situations, parents challenge authority based on skepticism towards the pedagogues’ expertise within their field. In other situations, they challenge authority because they believe that the judgement pertains to a knowledge area outside of pedagogy. Further, parents may also challenge authority, because they have different perceptions and observations of the child at home. Finally, parents also challenge authority due to criticism of the procedure, e.g the level and form of information, leading to the judgement.

We argue that it is important to study when and why citizens challenge, because not all challenges of authority may not represent a great threat to the profession, indicating that the “fall of professionalism” narrative may be overestimated. This is supported by the pedagogues’ experiences of the different situations, as they only experience a challenge of their professional authority in the first of these situations, namely when the challenge is based on a skepticism towards their pedagogical expertise. Some of the situations may even constitute desirable challenges, such as when parents challenge based upon their experiences of the child at home. In such situations, they often provide important input and knowledge. Challenge of professional authority is thus neither necessarily a good nor bad thing; it depends upon what takes place in the specific situation. In this paper, we therefore study when and why parents challenge professional authority and how pedagogues experience it.

**Relational professional authority**

Taking the definition of professional authority provided by Harrits and Larsen (2021) as our point of departure, we understand professional authority as “the willingness to support and follow discretionary judgements based on professional expertise”. In order for citizens to support and follow discretionary judgements, three components must be fulfilled. First, built on Starr’s (2017, p. 59) concept of legitimate complexity, citizens must perceive certain problems as requiring expertise due to their complexity. Second, they must believe that the street-level professional(s) in the field possess the necessary expertise. Finally, they must believe that the street-level professional(s) will use this expertise to help them. In such a situation, citizens will grant the street-level professional(s) professional authority by supporting and following the discretionary judgement.

**Discretionary judgements: diagnosis, inference and treatment**

Discretionary judgements consist of three tasks: diagnosis, inference and treatment. That is, street-level professionals make claims to classify a problem, reason about it and act upon it (Abbott, 1988, p. 40). These tasks raise validity claims that are defeasible (Molander et al., 2012), meaning that they are open to negotiation. We argue that it is when street-level professionals and citizens discuss a diagnosis and/or treatment that professional authority in particular may get challenged. Diagnosis and treatment should be understood in broad terms, meaning that diagnosis covers concerns or problems, while treatment covers what street-level professionals advice citizens to do as well as their decisions about the actions they implement in order to solve the problem.

**How do citizens challenge professional authority?**

Studies of doctor-patient interactions have investigated how patients may challenge the professional authority of doctors. Several studies have focused on how easier access to alternative health information, for instance through the internet, may be used to challenge doctor’s authority (e.g. Dedding et al., 2011; McKinlay & Marceau, 2002; Murray et al., 2003; Tian & Zhang, 2022). By drawing on several other studies, Cline and Haynes (2001, p. 675) writes: “Conflicts between provider and client may be likely as consumers locate information that leads them to challenge, question or ‘second-guess’ providers, indicating diminished trust in their physicians”. When patients hold alternative information, they may present themselves as experts, who are able to critically reflect and question doctors (Ziebland, 2004). While challenge might take the form of active resistance, questioning or rejecting a doctor’s judgement for instance by asking for alternative treatments or arguing with doctors (Haw et al., 2018; Stivers, 2005; Stivers & Timmermans, 2020), challenge of authority does not have to be that explicit. Patients may carefully mention information from the internet in a way that respects medical knowledge and does not openly challenge their authority (Stevenson et al., 2021).

While these studies shed light on how citizens may challenge doctor’s professional authority for instance by questioning their judgements, they do not investigate when and why citizens challenge. They tend to assume that their challenge is based on skepticism or criticism of the doctor’s expertise within their field. In this paper, we want to nuance this by focusing on when and why citizens challenge and how street-level professionals experience these situations.

**When and why do citizens challenge?**

In the literature, citizens’ challenge of professional authority is taken to imply that citizens challenge the street-level professionals’ core expertise within their field. Yet, we argue that besides expertise, other reasons exist as well. In some situations, parents challenge authority because they believe that the judgement pertains to a knowledge area outside of pedagogy. In other situations, parents challenge authority, because they experience the child differently at home. Finally, parents may also challenge based on a criticism of the procedure leading to the judgement. These situations may be experienced differently for pedagogues and do not necessarily represent a great threat to the profession.

**Data and Methods**

The article is based on an interpretive ethnographic study conducted in two Danish daycare centers. It consists of 58 semi-structured interviews with pedagogues and parents as well as 42 days of participant observations of interactions between pedagogues and parents.[[2]](#footnote-2) Ethnography is a well-suited approach to study when and why parents challenge and how pedagogues experience it, because it allows us to observe interactions in context and to get access to the participants’ sense-making (Ybema et al., 2009).

The case of pedagogue-parent interactions is selected based upon the characteristics deemed necessary to be able to answer the theoretically driven research question. For several reasons, the case of pedagogue-parent interactions can be argued to represent an extreme case regarding the challenge of professional authority (Flyvbjerg, 2006). First, pedagogues are semi-professionals, and compared to classical professions they possess shorter educations with less specialized knowledge, something which makes it easier for laymen to question them (Brante, 2010). Second, pedagogues constitute a particular “soft” type of profession, as they often work in grey areas in which there is not necessarily one correct answer. Related, the type of knowledge they possess, i.e. pedagogical knowledge, might be perceived as general knowledge rather than specialized knowledge by a lot of citizens, and parents often believe that they are highly competent when it comes to their own child (Ahrenkiel et al., 2013, p. 42; Lyhr, 2009, p. 20; Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006, pp. 70, 135). Finally, pedagogues work in a context of coproduction, i.e. in a context where collaboration and horizontal relations are stipulated in the law. Together, this leads us to expect that professional authority will be negotiated and challenged to a great extent in this case, something which enables us to study the situations of theoretical interest.

Within this case, we chose to conduct multi-sited ethnography (Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995). By triangulating data in the sense of generating data in more than one center, we enhance the trustworthiness of the results. The two daycare centers have been selected with the aim of studying a lot of different interactions within the chosen context. Therefore, we selected two daycare centers with a lot of different types of parents regarding their socioeconomic background to encounter a wide variety of interactions and perceptions (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, pp. 84-85). The daycare centers are located in the same municipality, meaning that they need to implement the same policy and have the same administrative structure. Daycare center A is a kindergarten with around 80 children situated in a smaller city in a rural area. The parents’ socioeconomic background is below average compared to the municipality as well as the rest of Denmark. Opposite, daycare center B is an age integrated center with around 130 children (almost divided equally in a nursery team and a kindergarten team) located in a medium-big city close to the city center. The parents’ socioeconomic background is above average compared to the municipality and just above average compared to the rest of Denmark. We do not treat the centers as cases to be compared, but rather as research sites constituting the context of the interactions. We will return to the implications of the case selection and selection of research sites in the discussion.

By triangulating data generation methods, we are able to grasp the complexity of the interactions and gain a holistic understanding of when and why parents challenge and how pedagogues experience it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, pp. 195-196; Welch & Piekkari, 2017). The observations focused on what pedagogues and parents say and do in different types of interactions including formal collective meetings such as meetings with the parental board and formal individual meetings such as parent consultations. Fieldnotes were written in full, including reflections and initial analytical thoughts, after every meeting (Burgess, 1984; Emerson et al., 2011; van der Waal, 2009). Every meeting was audio recorded and listened through, when writing full fieldnotes, something that enhances the dependability of the account. During more informal interactions, the author who conducted the fieldwork asked informal questions for instance about their experience of particular situations or actions. Through the formal interviews, we grasped these perspectives more systematically. The formal interviews centered around the participants’ perceptions and behavior in theoretically interesting situations. In total 17 pedagogues, 3 pedagogical assistants and 38 parents were interviewed. As all the pedagogical staff were interviewed in both centers, they weren’t selected based on any criteria. Yet, while the centers did not have any male pedagogues or assistants, their pedagogical staff was quite diverse in relation to age and experience. In relation to the parents, the aim was to maximize variation (Weiss, 1995, pp. 22-23) in relation to gender, education, job, age and number of children in order to grasp multiple perspectives. All interviews have been recorded and transcribed.

Afsnit om analysestrategi mangler

**Analysis**

In the following we examine parents’ challenges to pedagogues’ professional authority. As mentioned, we understand challenge of professional authority as citizens being critical or skeptical towards the street-level professionals’ discretionary judgements by e.g. resisting or questioning them (e.g. Haw et al., 2018; Tian & Zhang, 2022; Ziebland, 2004). Despite the analysis of the empirical material showing that parents generally listen to pedagogues and follow their instructions, there are still situations where parents question what pedagogues say and do. Looking closer at these situations, we see that there is a difference in when and why the parents challenge the pedagogues. In some cases, it is the pedagogues’ professional expertise, i.e., their pedagogical knowledge and competence, that is doubted. In other cases, parents challenge the pedagogues’ assessments, decisions, and actions because they believe that the problem pertains to an area outside the realm of pedagogy, and pedagogues therefore lack the knowledge and competence to judge and make decisions in that case. There are also situations where parents challenge pedagogues’ observations and assessments because parents have a different impression of and different experiences with their child. Finally, parents also challenge pedagogues in situations where they believe pedagogues and the daycare institution's procedures for handling cases are not appropriate. In the following, we delve into the four forms of challenges. Afterwards, we examine how pedagogues experience these situations.

Sidste del af analysen mangler

**Challenging pedagogical expertise**

Data is filled with examples of parents seeking and following the professional advice and guidance of pedagogues, but there are also examples of parents questioning the professional knowledge and competencies of pedagogues. For instance, parents explicitly express in some cases that pedagogues are mistaken in their professional assessment and decision, as the following excerpt from an interview with a mother illustrates:

Vi var ude for i den gamle børnehave, at de satte Emilie ned, så hun blev sat ned sammen med en børnegruppe, der var et år yngre end hende selv. Vi var dybt uenige og jeg var så vred som mor over, at de satte hende ned uden vores samtykke eller noget dialog. […] Men de holdt på, at ud fra den pædagogiske-et-eller-andet-indgangsvinkel. Så er det godt at give hende nogle succeser i hverdagen og hvor jeg tænkte: ”Det er jo ikke at give hinanden succes og sætte hende ned sammen med treårige, når hun egentlig er fire år gammel. Og hvor jeg simpelthen endte med at komme op på dagtilbud-lederniveau, fordi jeg simpelthen var så vred over det, og hvor de så til sidst bed tænderne sammen og satte hende op igen. Så ja, jeg ville gå rigtig langt for mine børn. Og for hvad jeg mener er rigtigt og forkert […] Men lige på det punkt der var jeg ikke i tvivl om, at jeg bare vidste bedre

(Hanne)

Hanne states that she is very much disagreeing with the pedagogues' decision that her daughter should be in a children's group with younger kids, despite the pedagogues presenting her with a professional argument namely that her daughter Emilie would benefit from 'everyday successes.' By rejecting this argument, Hanne questions the pedagogues' professional expertise. Her expression that the pedagogues argue from 'the pedagogical-something-something perspective' can be interpreted as if she doesn't attribute much weight to the pedagogical perspective. She concludes by saying that she 'had no doubt that she simply knew better.' This, again, can be interpreted as a challenge to the pedagogues' professional knowledge and competence. She does not believe that the pedagogues - at least in this situation - have a particular expertise that enables them to assess what is best for Emilie. Thus, one could argue that Hanne doesn’t perceive the issue as legitimately complex (component 1) and hence doesn’t accept the professional authority of the pedagogues.

It is not always whether the issue is legitimately complex that parents challenge when they question the professional knowledge or competences of pedagogues. The following quote is from an interview with a mother who didn’t trust the expertise of a particular pedagogue in the daycare:

Jeg synes, at personen var meget hård, så jeg var faktisk også lidt utryg ved, at hvis jeg konfronterer, hvad er så konsekvensen? Fordi jeg kunne se, at var måden, man *var* på. Altså en, der er gammel i gårde… Det kan være svært at lære en gammel hund nye tricks. Så jeg var egentlig sådan prøvede at italesætte det uden at sige det direkte… ”Hey, hvorfor skælder du det barn så meget ud?”. Fordi jeg synes jo heller ikke, at det rette tid og sted er foran børnene. Omvendt kunne jeg også godt få det sådan lidt… Jo, jeg skal faktisk… Børnene må godt mærke, ”hov, det *er* da forkert, at der er en voksen, der lige tager mig hårdt i armen eller taler grimt til mig eller ignorerer mig, når jeg græder”. Det var faktisk det, der gjorde størst indtryk på mig. Det der med, at jeg kunne se, at der var nogle børn, der blev ignoreret, når de græd. Fordi det er bare sådan et ”no-go” for mig. […] Og det var lidt dér utrygheden var i. Det var, at jeg følte, at de blev gjorde lidt forkert, at de blev ignoreret. Men så kom jeg til Karin (lederen), og min oplevelse var, at hun tog det meget alvorligt, og kort tid efter stoppede medarbejderen jo.”

(Johanne)

What the mother is questioning in this situation is not whether it requires complex knowledge and competences to carry out the job as pedagogue, but whether the street-level professional possess the professional expertise to carry out the task (component 2). She clearly disagrees with how this specific pedagogue fulfills the task, and questions whether she has the competences to be a pedagogue (“det er svært at lære en gammel hund nye tricks”) and ends up going to the manager of the daycare.

Another example is the father in the quote below. He expresses that he disagrees with the pedagogues’ way of handling “numselege”. “Numselege” (bum games) refers to play activities where children explore their own and playmates' bodies, for example, by looking at and touching each other's bottoms, genitals, and private parts. The father acknowledges the pedagogical point of view that children should be allowed to play “numselege” and that they shouldn’t be made to feel wrong. However, he also makes it clear that he thinks the pedagogues are wrong in letting the children put sticks into each other’s genitals and he explicitly demands that the pedagogues surveil the children, so it won’t happen:

Der har været noget med nogen pindelege, man [børnene] havde kigget hinanden i numserne, og det er okay at man…… vi er enige i at børn må godt se hvad der er i underbukserne, og man må gerne kigge på hinanden. Men vi synes grænsen er nået, hvis man gemmer sig steder, hvor man begynder at stikke pinde op i numsen eller tissekonerne. Der var vi meget… Ja det slog vi meget hårdt ned på, fordi det skete flere gange. Så det slog vi meget hårdt ned på og sagde, at det skulle simpelthen ikke finde sted. Fair nok at de kigger på hinanden, men nu er det nået dertil, så nu skal de børn det handler om, I skal simpelthen overvåge dem hårdt. Og der fik vi at vide af børnehaven, at vi kan ikke forkertgøre børn og altså de børn som så havde gjort det, og det var vi også enig om at selvfølgelig skal de ikke forkertgøres, men det skal overvåges.”

(Anders)

The father seems to acknowledge that the situation is delicate and complicated, however one could argue that the father is questioning whether the pedagogues have the necessary expertise to handle the situation.

**Challenging the domain of pedagogical expertise**

The episodes in the previous section have in common that parents challenge the frontline workers' pedagogical knowledge and competencies. This can either be because parents doubt that the specific pedagogues have the required knowledge or competencies to handle the situation, or because parents do not see the situation as requiring a special professional expertise, but rather believe that parents can just as well assess what is best. However, the analysis of the empirical material also shows that parents in some situations challenge the pedagogues’ assessments and decisions because they believe that pedagogues are commenting on something outside their pedagogical expertise. The following quote from an interview with a mother who is a trained psychologist illustrates this:

Jamen, de havde skrevet en beskrivelse af barnet. Og så kom jeg med mine ”psykologer-briller” og sagde, ” når du skriver dét her, så beskriver du ligesom et barn, der ikke er *i stand* til at give øjenkontakt. Og det er jo ikke det, vi oplever”. Og så sagde pædagogen, ”jamen, ord er jo ikke vigtige” eller et eller andet. Og så snakkede vi også lidt om det, fordi det synes psykologer jo er meget vigtigt [griner]. Men der kom der så en sådan en specialpædagog ud og observerede, som sagde, at der ikke var noget problem med øjenkontakt, og at der ikke var noget problem med koncentration […] hendes faglighed, tænker jeg, er rigtig fin. Jeg tænker måske, at hendes viden sådan mere psykopatologiske tendenser, og hvad ingen øjenkontakt… Og jeg tænker, at mange almindelige mennesker måske ville læse det og tænke, ”nå ja, det er fint nok”. Og så tænker jeg, at når man er en, der plejer at udrede for autisme og ADHD, så tænker man, at ingen øjenkontakt betyder noget andet end dét, du beskriver. Så jeg tænker ikke, at hendes pædagogfaglighed fejler noget. Jeg tænker måske mere, at man kommer til at skulle vurdere noget, som man ikke har udgangspunkt for *kunne* vurdere. Ligesom jeg ikke skal ind og vurdere, om de lever op til deres faglige mål og pædagogiske læreplaner. Det har *jeg* ikke faglighed til. Så jeg tænker, at det var en situation, hvor det måske var nogle pædagoger, der *ville* rigtigt godt, og så kom de lidt ud på dybt vand.”

(Elin)

The mother disagrees with the pedagogue’s assessment that her daughter is unable to maintain eye contact. From the quote, it is evident that she does not believe the pedagogue has the expertise to assess whether the child can maintain eye contact, whereas she, as a trained psychologist, possesses the specialized knowledge required for such an evaluation. Therefore, one could argue that the mother believes it is a legitimate complex issue (component 1), but she does not think the pedagogue has the necessary expertise (component 2). At the same time, the mother emphasizes that she does not believe the pedagogue's pedagogical expertise is lacking overall, meaning that the pedagogue has professional expertise (component 2), but not specifically in assessing and making decisions regarding the particular situation at hand.

I lighed med dette siger moderen i det følgende interviewuddrag, at hun har ”stor respekt” for pædagogernes faglige kompetencer og viden, men at der er vidensområder, hvor hun ved mere end pædagogen:

Lige præcis i den konkrete situation ville hun ikke kunne [overbevise]. Jeg tror egentlig, at hun vil kunne det med meget andet. Hvis det for eksempel vedrører… Det kunne være sprogudvikling eller mere om trivsel. Altså noget hvor jeg ved, at jeg har stor respekt for hendes pædagog-kompetencer og den viden, hun har qua hendes uddannelse, og der ved jeg også, at hun har mere viden om noget, end jeg ville have. Men lige præcis på det felt ved jeg, at der er det faktisk mig, der ved mest [søvn]. Så der ville jeg faktisk ikke. Men ved mange andre områder, så vil jeg lytte til, hvad hun siger. Og jeg tænker, at nu er vi til at skulle i gang med pottetræning og sådan noget, og der vil jeg også gå i dialog med hende, fordi der ved jeg, at hun har meget mere viden og erfaring omkring det, som jeg vil trække på. Så det var faktisk, fordi det var lige præcis den konkrete situation, hvor jeg ved, at lige præcis dér, er jeg opdateret [griner]. Så den ville jeg ikke have bøjet mig på.”

(Julie)

This mother, much like the mother in the case above, is also a trained psychologist. In the excerpt, she describes a specific situation where she challenged the pedagogues' practices regarding the children's naps. She mentions several areas where she believes the pedagogues have more knowledge, both formal and practical, such as potty training. In these cases, she would "engage in a dialogue" with the pedagogue and "draw on her knowledge." However, when it comes to topics where she is convinced she possesses more specialized knowledge, she is certain that she "would not yield" in the discussion with the pedagogue.

A common characteristic of these two examples is that the parents in the interview emphasize that they acknowledge the expertise of the pedagogues. However, they also note that pedagogues sometimes say and do things with professional justifications, where the parents do not believe that they have the necessary professional expertise because it falls outside the realm of pedagogy. Parents providing these explanations are often professionals themselves, such as psychologists, and therefore rely on their own professional expertise when challenging pedagogues.

**Challenging observations**

The previous sections show that parents challenge professional authority of pedagogues by questioning the professional expertise of pedagogues or by challenging whether the pedagogues are expressing an opinion on something outside their field of expertise. However, in many of the cases where parents challenge the judgements and decisions of pedagogues, they do so by drawing on their own personal experiences or insights. In other words, they refer to their knowledge about their child. The following extract from a field note illustrates this. The field note is from a meeting between the parents of the girl Line, who attends kindergarten, the kindergarten's manager, a pedagogue, and a psychologist. This case is an example of a situation where parents and educators disagree on the diagnosis of the problem. The parents are convinced that Line has ADHD, while the staff does not believe that to be the case. Instead, they think that Line simply needs to practice maintaining her concentration. The parents do not accept the staff's assessment and have therefore requested a meeting:

Mor: ”Vi har jo ønsket det her møde, fordi vi jo ser nogle ting ved Line, men måske også, fordi vi ser nogle ting, som er genkendelige fra vores andre børn. Altså vi har jo mange børn. Det ved du jo godt [griner].” (Mor kigger på psykolog)

Far: ”Ja, du kender jo min datter, Freja [griner].”

Mor: ”Og Mark har jo 3 børn, og jeg har 2 børn.”

Far: ”Altså ud over de 2, vi har.”

Mor: ”Ja, Line og Markus, ja ja. Men jeg har 2 fra et tidligere ægteskab. Ja, vi har jo Freja, Marks, som er autist. Og så har jeg en pige, der er autist og ADHD. Og så har jeg en dreng, der har ADHD. Så jeg har 2 børn med ADHD

The mother starts out by stressing that they observe certain things in Line’s behavior, which they recognize from their older children who have either an ADHD or autism diagnosis. By referencing their older children, she attempts to position herself in the interaction as someone who is knowledgeable about the subject matter due to her previous experiences with Line’s older siblings. She might not have the professional knowledge and expertise, but she has personal experience with ADHD. She then continues to talk non-stop for almost five minutes about Line providing very detailed description of Line’s behavior. This can also be interpreted as the mother seeking to give the impression that she is knowledgeable about her child and thereby being able to evaluate the situation and question the assessment of the pedagogues. Providing detailed descriptions of what they observe and experience at home is common in situations where parents challenge the interpretation or judgments of the pedagogues.

Other parents provide less detailed descriptions but dismiss the observations and interpretations of pedagogues by saying that the child behaves in a different way at home. The following field note from a meeting between the pedagogue Nadja, the parents of the boy Oskar, the daycare manager, and a psychologist. The meeting has been initiated by the pedagogue and the daycare manager, because they are worried about Oskar’s ability to participate in play activities:

Nadja siger: ”Men der er noget, vi er nysgerrige på. Der er nogle ting, hvor vi er lidt usikre på, om han egentlig forstår, hvad der foregår. Vi tror ikke helt, at han forstår de lege, vi leger, og han er ikke så god til at deltage i legene med alderssvarende børn.” Nadja giver et eksempel, hvor de leger en leg med billeder, hvor børnene skal pege på billedet af dem selv, når det bliver deres tur. Men når det bliver Oskars tur, så virker han forvirret, og han forstår ikke helt, hvad han skal. Nadja kigger skiftevis på forældrene og spørger: ”Ser I det samme?” Mor ryster kort på hovedet og far svarer, at de ikke ser det samme. Han læner sig længere ind over bordet og siger: ”Vi ser ikke det samme derhjemme. Derhjemme leger Oskar tit med sine søskende, og derfor undrer det mig, at du siger, som du gør.” Mor nikker og tilføjer, at Oskar er en klog dreng, der f.eks. har bygget en trappe den anden dag for at komme hen til et skab. Far tilføjer, at der måske også har været nogle udfordringer med ham, fordi han har fået dræn og haft meget ondt. Nadja nikker, mens forældrene taler og siger så: ”Det kan selvfølgelig også være rammerne. Men vi har lidt svært ved, om han forstår legene”. Far læner sig igen tilbage i stolen og siger: ”Vi ser det bare ikke derhjemme”. Far taler med tydelig stemme, mens han kigger på Nadja.

In the case of Line, it is the parents who have requested the meeting, and perhaps that is why the mother is the one initiating the conversation with her observations in that situation. In the case of Oskar, it is the kindergarten that is concerned, and the pedagogue, Nadja, is the one starting off by informing the parents about their diagnosis, namely, that Oskar struggles to participate in age-appropriate games. Nadja describes various observations that form the basis of the staff's concern. The parents challenge the staff's assessment by repeatedly stating that "they don't see the same thing at home." It is challenging for the pedagogues to contradict the parents' assessments since they cannot observe how the child behaves at home. In the example with Oskar, the parents appear resistant to the pedagogues' perspective: they cannot recognize the pedagogues' descriptions, shake their heads, lean back in their chairs, etc. However, there are also situations in the empirical material where parents express understanding of the pedagogues' assessments but believe that the pedagogues overlook elements by exclusively adopting a "pedagogical perspective" or an "institutional perspective" on an issue. The following episode provides an example. It is a fieldnote exceprt from a forældremøde, where the kindergarten wants to stop offering breakfast in the morning. Many parents oppose this decision:

Faderen har også talt med en pædagog, og han anerkender pædagogens synspunkter. Han siger, at han godt forstår det, og at det giver god mening, at det er nemmere at få pædagogik igennem uden morgenmad. Han fremfører dog, at han synes, at der mangler aspekter i disse argumenter. Her ser man ikke på hele dagen som samlet enhed – at dagen bliver lang for børnene uden morgenmad. Han foreslår derfor et kompromis, hvor børnene kan have deres egen morgenmad med, som de så kan spise, når de kommer. Det er der mange, der ønsker – afslutter han. Faderen kigger på pædagogerne, mens han taler.

The parent starts out by acknowledging the perspective of the frontline professionals and agrees that it may also make sense from a pedagogical point of view. However, he stresses that the pedagogues fail to consider the whole day. The pedagogues may know what happens during the day, but they don’t see the children at home. The parents do. Hence, he is positioning himself and the other parents as knowledgeable even though they don’t have pedagogical knowledge, they have insights that the pedagogues don’t.

Although the situations presented above are very different both in regards to the topic of discussion, who has initiated the interaction etc. they all represent situations where parents challenge the judgements of pedagogues by drawing on their own knowledge about their children.

**Challenging procedures**

The types of challenges to the authority of pedagogues examined above all relate to the content of the pedagogues' observations, assessments, and decisions. However, the analysis of the empirical material reveals that several situations where parents challenge the practices of pedagogues involve the procedure or process surrounding decisions. The following excerpt from an interview with a mother illustrates this. Her son, Harald, has been assessed by pedagogues as being in the yellow category, indicating that the educators have some concerns about his development. In the interview excerpt, she describes how it unfolded:

Vi havde jo gået i et år næsten i børnehave, eller i hvert fald otte måneder i børnehaven, og da havde vi ikke hørt noget. Det skal også siges, at vi også har skiftet gruppe og har haft nogle rigtig gode samtaler, fået at vide, at der ikke var noget, og det næste der så skete var, at der kom en pædagog til mig ud i garderoben. Og så afleverede [pædagogen] den her seddel, hvor der stod, at vi var indkaldt til sådan et møde, og der kom så og så mange fagfolk. Det blev vi så lidt blæst bag over, og har også fået at vide, at det var forkert rækkefølge, fordi der ikke er en eneste pædagog, der har fat i os inden mødet og sagt: ”vi har lige undret os lidt over det her. Det kan godt være, at vi skal have et møde dér.” Vi fik faktisk bare den der seddel.  Jeg læste den ikke ordentligt, for jeg var egentlig rolig i maven. Jeg tænkte: ”ja ja, den tager jeg lige med hjem”.  Og så kom jeg hjem til Peter, Haralds far, og så stod der simpelthen, at vi skulle til møde med alle de her mennesker. Og så nåede vi at få ondt i maven, for det var vi bare overhovedet ikke forberedt på. Vi har så også fået at vide, at det var en ups’er, fordi at vi er hernede meget og har meget daglig dialog. Jeg snakker rigtig tæt med pædagogerne, så jeg tror ligesom, at der er der …  Jeg tror måske, at der er nogen, der har forventet, at der var en anden, der havde snakket med os eller forberedt os på det - fordi vi snakker med mange. Det er også den ærgerlig oplevelse. […] Det, der ville have været rigtigt godt, eller det, der er afgørende for mig er, at man at man har tid til at tale med mig om det. At man ikke står i en garderobe, hvor der tilfældigvis også er andre forældre. Den dag var der endda to andre. Og så afleverer man en seddel og siger: ”Ja, vi har vurderet Harald, og han ligger faktisk i den her gule position, og det skal vi jo have gjort noget ved” og smiler til mig, og jeg står totalt chokeret, og der er der andre forældre i rummet.

(Nynne)

What the mother, Nynne, ended up challenging the pedagogue on in this situation was not the professional assessment itself (that Harald was "in yellow"), but the way she received the message, namely, quickly in the cloakroom where other parents were present. One can debate whether questioning the pedagogues’ procedure for handling problems, making decisions, etc., constitutes a challenge to professional authority, as the criticism of the educator is not directly related to the professional assessment of Harald. However, one could argue that in this situation, the mother demonstrates skepticism toward the pedagogue’s relational competence, specifically the pedagogue's ability to read the situation, empathize with the parents, and deliver the message in a professional manner. In this regard, the mother is questioning whether the pedagogue has the necessary (relational) competencies to carry out her job (component 2).

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1. We refer to these as street-level professionals to recognize their dual roles as professionals and bureaucrats. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The data has been gathered by one of the authors. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)