

Policy Production Through the Media: The Case of More Mathematics in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract This chapter explores how politicians' use of the media can disrupt educational traditions. Analysis of the discursive resources that a Norwegian Minister of Education used in a single authored debate article in a Norwegian newspaper shows that he drew on a well-known argument for why schools should teach mathematics, that of the need for socio-economic development of society. The use of this argument, rather than other arguments such as those about civic development, which would be more in alignment with the social pedagogy approach traditionally characterising early childhood education in Norway, seems to indicate that the Minister was promoting a shift in approach to one of preparing children for school. This example of the use of the media to determine how policy shifts are made is explored in relationship to promoting a new kind of "common sense" which does not require public discussion or input from mathematics education researchers.

Keywords Media rhetoric · Early childhood mathematics · Policy shifts
Economic development · Politicians

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, we explore a newspaper debate article, in which the Minister of Education in Norway attempts to present the shift in policy about the role of mathematics in *barnehage*¹ as “common sense”, and in so doing limits public discussion of it. The study is part of a larger project about how policy documents and public discourse frame staff and parents’ perceptions of mathematics education in *barnehage*. Our analysis considers how the structure of the debate article and the use of rhetorical devices, contribute to situating the Minister’s argument as common sense. Although only one example, we see it as illustrating a trend in how politicians redefine mathematics education policy through determining how policy discussions are framed so that research outcomes become irrelevant, a practice connected to politicians’ use of the media since at least the 1990s. Therefore, the case that we present in this chapter is part of a wider story of how politicians seek to change the ways that educational policy is introduced and discussed (Lingard and Rawolle 2004).

In the last two decades, there has been a growing realization that the media have a significant role in profoundly changing “social institutions and cultural processes” (Hjarvard 2008, p. 106). This includes using the media to affect education policy (Franklin 2004; Hattam et al. 2009; Lange and Meaney 2014; Stack 2006). For example, Hattam et al. (2009) showed how an Australian Minister for Education used the media, through a specific contact, to present school education as being in crisis and to blame teachers and their innovative pedagogies for this crisis. In this way, common sense understandings about educational issues are redefined to suit politicians’ own interests. As Franklin (2004) noted about the Labour government in the UK:

Politicians’ preference for soundbites above sustained policy debate reflects the extent to which their determination to set the news agenda and to use media to inform, shape, and manage public discourse about policy and politics have become crucial components in a modern statecraft and system of governance. (p. 256)

Lingard and Rawolle (2004) discuss how politicians, in a variety of ways, use soundbites of short pieces of information about such things as new policy that is catchy and likely to stay in the memory of those who hear it without requiring an explanation. Soundbites are also used to ensure that the politicians have the final word in any discussion. The soundbite becomes the important point, reiterated in different media presentations. The release of these well-crafted pieces of information also replaces the need for the media and the public to engage in thorough

¹The word *barnehage* (*barnehager* in plural) is the Norwegian term for institutions providing early childhood education and care for 1–5 year old children. *Barnehage* literally means a children garden. It is commonly translated to the German kindergarten (although not capitalised as in German). The organisation and naming of institutions for early childhood education and care varies significantly across countries. Hence, in order to maintain the situatedness of the study we have chosen to use the Norwegian term throughout the paper.

analysis of policy. Consequently, the media, rather than querying new policy, including educational policy, and providing opportunities to discuss it, can be manipulated by politicians to represent policy changes as an adjustment to match the general public's common sense understanding of the world.

The use of common sense to justify positions lies not just in the realm of politicians. Aspects of mathematics education are also often described in terms of common sense. For example, common sense has been defined by Radford (2008) as the things so taken-for-granted that they are not even noticed. Consequently, assumptions on which the common sense is based are also taken as pre-existing and given in any discussion. Keitel and Kilpatrick (2005) defined common sense as "a concept referring to local, situated or everyday knowledge" (p. 105). Therefore, common sense has come to be seen as knowledge based on everyday experience rather than knowledge based on rationality and logic. In mathematics education research, common sense has been used to describe attitudes towards mathematics (Gellert et al. 2001); the relationship between rankings in international comparative tests and a country's economic potential (Sjøberg 2015); and the learning of mathematics (Gravemeijer and Doorman 1999). Although common sense is recognised as affecting various aspects of mathematics education, little research has been conducted on how that common sense is produced or changed. In previous research (Lange and Meaney 2014), we showed how discussions in the media about national testing affected what mathematics in schools was considered to be, calculations and multiplication tables. This common sense acceptance about mathematics, which was not reflected in curricula documents, generally went unchallenged. LeBlanc (2012) investigated how Canadian media created a discussion of a report advocating the need for traditional methods of teaching mathematics through a series of rhetorical devices to present this view as being common sense.

Thus, there is recognition that the media among other institutions, including schools, contributes to the construction of common sense, by determining what can be challenged in discussions, for example, through investigating the rationality behind assumptions (see for example, LeBlanc 2012). What is accepted without being challenged, that is the unrecognised assumptions, which premise the discussion, can be considered the basis for this common sense. However, unpacking how choices are made in the media about what can and what cannot be discussed involves considering who has power and who does not. McLaren (1989) summarised this perspective by stating:

The dominant culture tries to 'fix' the meaning of signs, symbols, and representations to provide a 'common' worldview, disguising relations of power and privilege through organs of mass media, state apparatus such as schools, government institutions, and state bureaucracies. (p. 174)

Research on mediatisation of educational policy can provide insights into how policy about mathematics is being shaped by politicians as common sense through ensuring only certain topics get discussed (Stack 2006), while others are rendered as being beyond dispute. For example, using Radford's definition of common sense, it

is possible to see Sjøberg's (2015) discussion, of the acceptance by the media of PISA results as evidence of a country's economic well-being, as an example of the media constructing a new common sense. Similarly, in Sweden, media discussion, which extended school results into discussions about what should occur in early childhood institutions can also be considered as constructing a new common sense. "The role of the media is important for understanding the focus on school readiness as a result of their interest in the development of Swedish pupils' school results as measured by the OECD's international assessments (PISA)" (Jönsson et al. 2012, p. 5). By focussing on school results, what already occurs in early childhood institutions, the old common sense, can be ignored as irrelevant as what has become important is how to prepare children for school and international test taking. Thus, the media becomes complicit in politicians' need to present policy decisions as common sense.

In this chapter, we focus on how a Norwegian Minister of Education constructed his argument so that it appears as common sense. To do the analysis, we use the ideas from Edelman's (1988) political spectacle which have been used in previous research on the use of media to transform educational policy (Anderson 2005, 2007; Hattam et al. 2009; Smyth 2006). Before describing the methodology, we present the case.

2 The Case

The reason for pursuing this particular example is that the Norwegian barnehage, alongside its equivalent institutions in the other Nordic and northern European countries, traditionally has been firmly rooted in the "social policy pedagogical tradition" (Bennett 2005).

Staff are trained to work in open framework contexts, and structural conditions support an active learning approach. The guiding national curriculum is flexible enough to allow staff to experiment with different pedagogical approaches, and adapt programmes to local conditions and demand. Again, Nordic guidelines are formulated on a consultative basis, and receive the critical analysis and consent of the major stakeholders before becoming statutory. (Bennett 2005, p. 11)

However, there are indications that this approach to early childhood education is under pressure to change to the "readiness for school tradition" (Bennett 2005), which emphasises learning specific content, such as mathematics. This approach is teacher-directed with a focus on child outputs, often assessed during the programme to ensure easy transition to school. Bennett (2005) made the distinction between these two approaches as a consequence of analysing the curriculum documents for early childhood institutions in 20 countries. From this analysis, he identified these two broad traditions, although most curricula combined features from both. Drawing on the OECD (2001) document *Starting Strong*, Norway, along with other Nordic countries, was considered to have a strong commitment to the social

pedagogy tradition. However, even at that time, Bennett (2005) noted that these countries were instituting requirements for children to participate in more academically-focused activities.

Increasingly, OECD countries regard early childhood as a period in which children should be introduced to literacy and numeracy. Economic and labour market reasons drive this focus to some extent, as literacy, numeracy and technology proficiency are fast becoming indispensable in modern economies, with many service sector jobs now requiring high standards of reading comprehension and analysis. (Bennett 2005, pp. 15–16)

In Norway, the last year of barnehage, for 6 years old, was shifted to become the first year of school in 1997 (Hansen and Simonsen 2001). This did alleviate, to some degree, anxieties about young children's transitions to school, as this first year of school was designed to ease them into school routines. It also meant that the barnehage curriculum, known as the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2011), could retain its strong connection to the social policy pedagogy approach, as it continues to be based on "holistic pedagogical philosophy, with care, play and learning being at the core of activities" (Jensen 2009, p. 12).

Since then, the tendency to pay greater attention in barnehage to educationally significant goals has increased. This has resulted in a substantial amount of research into how mathematics learning opportunities could be incorporated into the social pedagogy tradition (see for example the work of Scandinavian mathematics education researchers documented in Meaney et al. 2016). However, the traditional consultative approach to forming barnehage policy, described by Bennett (2005), seems to have been replaced by politicians using the media to change public opinion before policy is proposed. The lack of consultation means that the voices of researchers as well as other key stakeholders are left without possibilities for providing input into the policy.

Since coming into government in 2013 and accepting the position of Minister for Education, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen has focused on strengthening the teaching of mathematics and science, known as "realfag" in Norwegian. This focus may have been connected to the Prime Minister, Erna Solberg's claim when in opposition that if she gained power, she would improve Norway's position in the testing program of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Sjøberg 2015). Regarding mathematics in barnehage, from October 2013, when the government was elected, till April 2016, his Ministry has released 64 press releases and the Minister has written about 200 debate articles on this topic. The debate article that we analyse here was written about 22 months after he came into government. As is the case with this one, debate articles were sometimes written after one of his policy proposals was criticised. This suggests that he was conforming to a recognised media strategy of politicians of providing quick rebuttal to any criticism (Franklin 2004).

In August 2014, the Norwegian Minister for Education gave a short interview in a regional newspaper, *Bergens Tidende* ("Norske elever gir opp for lett" 2014), in which he first agreed with a lower secondary school teacher's description of

students giving up too quickly when they perceived mathematics problems as being hard. He then went on to promote a forthcoming strategy for improving students' interest and achievement in realfag. The strategy addresses, among other issues, how mathematics teaching could start earlier. The Minister added, "perhaps we should introduce realfag already in barnehage".

A local barnehage teacher, Tone Digranes, picked up on this last remark and—on the grounds that science and mathematics constitute two out of seven knowledge areas in the framework plan for barnehage (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2011)—attacked the Minister for lack of knowledge of the barnehage curriculum (Digranes 2014).² In his answer two days later, the Minister defended himself by referring to Fröbel's³ geometrical toys, his "gifts", and his experiences from visiting several barnehager, and then argued for a stronger focus on mathematics in barnehage (Isaksen 2014). He has reiterated this same argument many times since he became Minister and it has become a central platform in his Ministry's attempts at being seen to improve education in Norway. The Minister's argument was:

I believe that an even stronger emphasis on maths [in barnehage] can be a good measure to reverse the trend of poor maths performance in school. / Mathematics is the school subject that causes the students the biggest problem. Not only are many Norwegian students at a low level in mathematics, but there are also few who score high. ... Bad results in mathematics can have serious consequences for the individual student – it is actually so that the grades one get in maths and science have the greatest impact on whether one manages to complete *videregående*⁴ [upper secondary school]. At the same time, the number of doctorates in mathematics and science decreases. For society, this is serious. Norway needs scientific expertise to develop new technologies and to secure its well-being in the future. Innovation, research and the use of high technology require that we have a certain number of people with top competence in mathematics and other sciences. / Therefore, realfag is one of the government's main priorities. We need a new culture of realfag, and nothing is better than awakening interest in realfag already in barnehage. (Isaksen 2014; our translation)

Building on a model of economic progress based on scientific development, the minister's argument for a stronger focus on mathematics in barnehage is composed as a chain of six cause-and-effect claims:

- Norway's well-being in the future will come from innovation, research and use of high technology
- Innovation, research and use of high technology will come from an increase in the number of doctorates in mathematics and science

²The rubric of Digranes' reply "Kunnskapsløst av kunnskapsministeren" is a pun in Norwegian apposing "knowledge-lessness" (i.e. ignorance) with the Norwegian title for the Minister for education which translates to "Minister for knowledge".

³Friedrich Fröbel is known as the father of kindergartens, having set up the first ones in Germany in the nineteenth century. His "gifts" were a set of toys that support children's learning, including the learning of mathematical ideas.

⁴We have consistently provided the names of the Norwegian school system in Norwegian to indicate, like barnehage, that English terms do not provide the nuances of the Norwegian system.

- The number of doctorates in mathematics and science will increase with less dropouts in videregående (upper secondary)
- Less dropouts in videregående (upper secondary) will occur if there are fewer students with low exam grades at the end of *grunnskole* (lower secondary school) and more high-achievers
- Fewer students with low exam grades at the end of *grunnskole* (lower secondary school) and more high-achievers will be the result of awakened interest in mathematics in barnehave
- Awakened interest in mathematics in barnehave will occur as a result of a stronger focus on mathematics in barnehave.

The short version of the argument is that more mathematics in barnehave results in the society's future well-being, specifically the economic well-being. Suffice to say, the whole argument is not stronger than the weakest of the links in the chain. For example, Drori's (2000) extensive research showed that more emphasis on science education in curricula did not automatically lead to economic progress. If there was a relationship, it was that the more curriculum emphasis was linked to the least amount of economic progress. There is therefore no evidence to show that emphasis on mathematics curricula in barnehave will yield the economic benefits that the Minister suggested.

However, rather than focusing on the validity of the argument, we analyse it as an instance of mediatisation of education policy and consider how the Minister used particular discursive resources to present his argument as common sense. We then use this analysis to discuss how the Minister subtly shifts the focus on mathematics in barnehave to the readiness for school approach and away from the social pedagogy tradition, so that opportunities for consultation seem unnecessary.

3 Analysing Media Production of Policy

Rodney et al. (2016) described different methodologies used by researchers in Canada to investigate media discussions, including about mathematics education. These approaches include framing (Barwell and Abtahi 2015), critical discourse analysis (LeBlanc 2012) and positioning theory which Rodney et al. (2016) used. Chorney et al. (2016) who had an article in the same journal as Rodney et al. (2016) and drew on the same set of media reports also used positioning theory. Of these earlier research studies, LeBlanc's (2012) has the most similarities with our research, as it was also concerned with the mediatisation of policy discussions. However, we have chosen to use the ideas of Murray Edelman, a political scientist, to analyse what strategies the Minister used to construct his argument rather than critical discourse analysis, because Edelman's work focused specifically on how politicians utilised the media.

Murray Edelman wrote several books (e.g. 1964/1985, 1977, 1985, 1988) in which he explored the social psychology of politics and the consequences for

democracy of the “political spectacle”, his term for the pervasive reporting of news in readily available media. The discussions in the books are extensive and long ranging, making it difficult to identify specific points. However, Anderson (2005, 2007) extracted from Edelman’s work six strategies that could be seen in the use of media by politicians to both present, but also to construct educational policy. Although Anderson (2005) noted that the media were just one contributor to political elites’ construction of “political consensus around ‘ruling ideas’” (Edelman 1988, p. 199) in the political spectacle, Anderson was able to exemplify their overt use by politicians in different circumstances to ensure that the general public came to take specific perspectives for granted, that is as common sense. It was this connection to common sense and the use by other researchers (see Miller-Kahn and Smith 2001; Smyth 2006) of Edelman’s ideas in understanding the role of media in education policy debates that made it clear that his ideas would be valuable for our research.

Anderson (2007) listed the six strategies as:

- Importance of language and discourse
- The definition of events as crises
- A tendency to cover political interests with a discourse of rational policy
- The linguistic evocation of enemies and the displacement of targets
- The public as political spectators
- The media as mediator of the political spectacle. (pp. 108–109)

In the next sections, we introduce each of these strategies and analyse the Minister’s argument to determine whether and how the Minister utilised these strategies to construct his argument for why barnehager should include more mathematics. In this short, one-quarter page debate piece, not all six strategies were equally evident. Nonetheless, we found it surprising that so many of them were present, particularly as Edelman’s work had been situated in another field, political science, and in another country, USA.

3.1 Importance of Language and Discourse

From Edelman’s perspective language and discourse were particularly important in setting the problem (Smyth 2006). As Anderson (2007) summarised, the importance of language and discourse is concerned with what Edelman (1977) aptly phrased as “the linguistic structuring of social problems” (p. 26) and “how the problem is named involves alternative scenarios, each with its own facts, value judgments, and emotions” (p. 29). Consequently, the choice of words and images channel the public into seeing a situation in a specific way through connecting to a particular sets of values (Anderson 2007).

In the debate article, we argue that the Minister used specific terms, about Fröbel and his gifts, to situate himself as knowledgeable about barnehage to a specific

audience, barnehage teachers. This provided the opportunity to quickly rebut Digranes' (2014) critique about his lack of awareness of the barnehage framework plan. Franklin (2004) indicated that the British Labour government at the end of the 1990s deliberately provided quick rebuttals in the media to the voicing of any opposition to their policies. Isaksen's response two days after Digranes' (2014) criticism can be considered to be such a rebuttal, in that it tried to silence any dissent to his view and ministerial authority. The use of references to Fröbel indicates that the rebuttal was directed at the barnehage teacher, Digranes, and other educators, as these references might not be understood by the general public. Although he also mentioned that he had visited barnehager and seen children engaging in mathematics and science, this is unlikely to invoke the same reassurance to barnehage teachers as the name of the founder of barnehage and his well-known geometrical toys, his gifts. As Edelman (1977) wrote, "the authoritative status of the source makes his or her definition of the issue more readily acceptable for an ambivalent public called upon to react to an ambiguous situation" (p. 25).

The careful choice of terms suggests that the Minister wanted to connect to a set of values from the traditions of barnehage, while also showing himself to be knowledgeable about barnehage. In this way, he indicated that his suggestion for more mathematics and science in barnehage was not to be viewed as something new or as moving barnehage in a new direction, away from the social pedagogy tradition. His article was designed to convince this audience that the common sense that he used was not so different to the common sense that they drew on in their work in barnehage. He was merely suggesting that for the economic well-being of Norway, there should be more attention given to something that already had a long historical association with barnehage.

3.2 The Definition of Events as Crises

Anderson's (2007) second strategy that was used by politicians was for them to define events as crises. For Edelman (1988) a crisis is not an inherent feature of a situation but rather something that has been manufactured between politicians and the media. "A crisis, like all new developments, is a creation of the language used to depict it; the appearance of a crisis is political act, not a recognition of a fact or of a rare situation" (p. 31). The choice of language ensures that the general public recognises a situation as a crisis, and that it is in their interests for politicians to solve, often by extraordinary means which the public, by default of not having any options, is likely to acquiesce to.

In the debate piece, the Minister described school students' mathematics results in terms of a crisis, a crisis for the individual students, but more so for society. Norway's economic well-being is dependent on more people having PhDs in realfag who could use and develop new technologies. Without this, it is implied, the Norwegian society would be in difficulties, particularly economically. This suggests that unless this crisis is dealt with immediately, there will be a larger crisis just

waiting to happen with much wider consequences for society. Although resolving the crises maybe at the expense of shifting the social pedagogy tradition towards the readiness for school tradition, this shift is hidden in the presentation of the solution as being more of what is already occurring, although maybe at the expense of children's other activities in barnehage.

In tying this argument to the discourse of crisis, the Minister was using global ideas that have been circulating for some time. Working in Australia, Smyth (2006) identified a myth about education being in a crisis and which blamed schools, teachers and teacher educators. This was despite the fact that evaluations of the Australian education system could find no actual evidence of this crisis, resulting in it being labelling a crisis in confidence rather than a crisis in reality (Thomas 2002). Although not explicitly discussed in relationship to the education system, the Minister's article has an implicit link to the idea that the present system is in crisis and the failure of many young people to achieve in mathematics is one symptom of it.

Similarly, framing the crisis in terms of the economic well-being, which is difficult to argue against, also has both a historical and global spread. For example, Thomson et al. (2012) in an introductory article to a special issue of a journal on educational policy and school change stated:

Governments around the world are committed to changing education. These changes are framed by national economic imperatives and driven by the need to be globally competitive in today's globalised economy. This is not change driven by an imaginary of a better and more socially just future for all, but of a more competitive economy, powered by improved human capital and better skills. (p. 1)

Thus, the state of affairs that the Norwegian Minister of Education implicitly referred to as a crisis was neither new nor specific to the situation in Norway. However, he was able to situate the crisis, of poor student results in mathematics, within the specific circumstances of Norway. Although the link between teenagers' test scores and the need for more mathematics in barnehage seems somewhat tenuous, it is presented as common sense, something that should be taken-for-granted, and not needing to be questioned.

In presenting the link as common sense, the Minister also indicates that school requirements of children are important considerations for barnehage. By not paying enough attention to them, barnehage risks the children's individual as well as society's well-being. In this way, priority in barnehage is implicitly shifted away from children's holistic development (Jensen 2009) as part of the social pedagogy tradition and towards their need to do well at school, the readiness for school approach (Bennett 2005).

3.3 *A Tendency to Cover Political Interests with a Discourse of Rational Policy*

The third strategy that Anderson (2007) identified in Edelman's writing was the tendency to cover political interests with a discourse of rational policy. The production of a crisis results in the logical conclusion that something must be done, thereby providing the government with an opportunity to interfere with aspects of education that may have previously been out of their control. "When the ideological agenda of government needs to be concealed, for example, in the desire of government to more closely and tightly control the work of teachers and schools, it is convenient to disguise the real intent" (Smyth 2006, p. 310). In order to persuade the public of the necessity and naturalness of this interference, then what is being promoted must be presented as rational.

It is possible to see the push for more mathematics as a way of more closely controlling the work done in barnehave, where traditional definitions of curriculum with planned lessons based on predetermined content have previously been rejected as inappropriate for young children (Bennett 2005). Situating barnehave as a kind of school, or pre-school, allows for the same type of government control as experienced by schools to be seen as natural (Schaanning 2015). To align the learning in barnehave with the more formal school curriculum, the Minister invoked discursive resources, which have been suggested for decades for why mathematics should be taught in schools. In this way, he situated barnehave and school as being the same kind of institution with the same kinds of purposes. These reasons situated the policies as being rational as they have long been accepted in the school circumstance. Niss (1996) summarised the typical reasons for why mathematics should be taught in schools:

Analyses of mathematics education from historical and contemporary perspectives show that in essence there are just a few types of fundamental reasons for mathematics education. They include the following:

- contributing to the *technological and socio-economic development* of society at large, either as such or in competition with other societies/countries;
- contributing to society's *political, ideological and cultural maintenance and development*, again either as such or in competition with other societies/countries;
- providing *individuals with prerequisites which may help them to cope with life* in the various spheres in which they live: education or occupation; private life; social life; life as a citizen. (Niss 1996, p. 13; original italics)

The future "technological and socio-economic development of society", as highlighted by Niss (1996), of Norway was the primary reason provided in the Minister's argument for why there should be more mathematics education in barnehave. The main purpose of proposing more mathematics in barnehave was to contribute to the development of the Norwegian society by facilitating an increase in labour force qualifications involving science and mathematics.

It is interesting to identify what the Minister chose not to use in his justification. Historically in Norway, emphasis is placed on holistic education (Sjøberg 2014) rather than the perceived societal needs for labour force qualifications. This is particularly the case in barnehage, where the barnehage goals as stated in the law relate to society's political, ideological and cultural maintenance and development as well as the children's individual life coping skills ("Barnehageloven" 2005), i.e. Niss' second and third reason. The Minister only superficially invoked Niss' third reason by referring to school students' need for mathematics qualifications. These qualifications are not connected to becoming democratic citizens, but rather are only to do with completing senior secondary school. Therefore, by highlighting economic rather than democratic needs, it seems that the Minister was attempting to shift perceptions of the purpose of Norwegian education, specifically in regards to barnehage, thus affecting what comes to be considered as common sense. The common sense, he promulgated, was that labour force qualifications formed the main reason for providing state education and that barnehage should have this as their main focus. Barnehage teachers' traditional understandings about the need to support children to become democratic citizens (Alvestad 2004) was no longer the common sense that could remain unquestioned.

3.4 The Linguistic Evocation of Enemies and the Displacement of Targets

The fourth strategy, used by politicians in their interactions with the media identified by Anderson (2007), is the identification of an enemy, or enemies, which act as a smoke-screen that shifts attention away from new policy initiatives. In the debate article, the Minister did not situate any one or institution as an enemy. Although it could be imagined that he could have situated the barnehage teacher, Tone Digranes, in this way, his language was guarded in how he responded to her criticism. Instead, he seemed to present himself as being in alignment with her perspective by providing his reasons for his earlier views. This lack of evoking enemies could be that unlike US politics, Norway's cultural values would not accept this way of addressing issues as appropriate, at least not in the context in question. It is, thus, interesting to see that other strategies were used to make the policy initiative, more mathematics in barnehage, become the accepted common sense.

3.5 The Public as Political Spectators

Those who control the media discourse are able to situate the public as political spectators, as they decide what should be discussed, how it should be discussed and by whom (Anderson 2007). In this way, the public is sidelined from participating in democratic discussions about how to resolve the issue, let alone from deciding

whether there is an issue. The issue becomes a political spectacle to be watched, but not engaged in, by the public at large.

By situating himself as the determiner that there—in effect—is a crisis for Norwegian society, the Minister also situated himself as being the person who could provide the solution to the crisis. In this way, the public is restricted from engaging in the discussion about more realfag in barnehage, as who can argue against the need to be concerned with the future well-being of Norway? Researchers and other stakeholders in barnehage policy are also sidelined as the solution to the crisis has already been found.

Although online news resources can provide opportunities for comments from the general public (see for example Lange and Meaney 2014), these possibilities are often constrained by the structure of the news item. With this debate article, there were no options for public discussion, except by writing a new debate piece and hope the newspaper would publish it. In the article, the Minister situates the government as the ones in control who know what is good for the public—“Therefore, realfag is one of the government’s main priorities. We need a new culture of realfag, and nothing is better than awakening interest in realfag already in barnehage” (Isaksen 2014; our translation). The public is situated, not as those who can influence, but instead as those needing to be influenced by media on the government’s rational education policy. There is no need for them to become engaged because they are being cared for by the government and by him, as the Minister, in particular.

Even though this article was aimed at barnehage teachers, the latter are grouped with the general public as not having valuable contributions to make to the discussion. Digranes’ criticisms are not dismissed out of hand, but merely adapted to show that they were in alignment with the Minister’s own points. He knew and understood their situation. Barnehage teachers did not have to worry as the Minister was well informed about barnehage as well as the needs of the Norwegian economy. Consequently, the common sense that is being produced is that the public, including barnehage teachers, should remain outside of the difficult decision-making as political spectators and be confident that the government could determine what was best for society. As the discussion was not explicitly about shifting to a readiness for school tradition, but was rather situated as a need to do more of the same in barnehage, barnehage teachers did not need to participate in the discussion but could take on the role of spectators instead. Mathematics education researchers were similarly excluded from the discussion because the solution to the crisis had already been identified and thus there was nothing for them to contribute to.

3.6 The Media as Mediator of the Political Spectacle

As Anderson (2007) stated “the political spectacle is produced with media as its central conduit” (p. 109). Politicians use the media to present a particular version of a situation in carefully crafted language so that values and beliefs are brought to the

fore and the public are channelled into accepting the common sense value of this viewpoint. The media's role is not one of examining or critiquing different perspectives. As Edelman (1988) claimed, "widening of the frame (in time, space, logic, and empirical links) within which an event is viewed would change its meaning but would also create an account typically categorized as research rather than as news and often as dull rather than dramatic" (p. 102).

Consequently, the genre of a short newspaper article may lead readers not to expect the Minister to use evidence to support his argument that more mathematics in barnehave will lead to economic well-being for Norway. The implicit message is that such evidence is not actually needed because it is assumed to be well-known or unequivocal, or because the claims are common sense. Little discussion by the public is needed about the value of the policy when its benefits are self-evident or a necessary response to a crisis.

The Minister has used the media consistently over the time he has been in office to present a particular version of the world. This debate article is merely one example of this strategy. Debate articles in the Norwegian press are important ways of communicating and raising disagreements. However, in this debate article, the Minister chose not to situate himself as being in disagreement with Digranes. Instead, he turned the genre of the debate article around to indicate that rather than being in disagreement (she was just ill-informed), they were on the same side, he merely wanted more of the same, that is more mathematics in barnehave.

The common sense that is promoted is that the media does provide opportunities for discussion and disagreement. However, as this debate article shows this role is an illusion, which the Minister can manipulate to his own advantage in order to present a shift towards the readiness for school tradition as nothing new and, thus, not requiring extensive discussion by others.

4 Conclusion

Earlier research on mediatisation of educational policy showed that politicians actively used the media to present new policy so that it appeared as common sense (Franklin 2004; Stack 2006). In doing so, they reduce the possibilities for public engagement in debates to discussions of technical issues, whereby ideological differences became hidden from view (Clarke 2012). Our contention is that the use of media by politicians sideline the role of researchers, as well as other stakeholders, as contributors to policy development. Unless researchers also learn how to become media managers, their research will have little impact, unless it is in alignment with the common sense being promoted by politicians. Providing reactive critiques are likely to achieve little response if they go against the established common sense understandings about mathematics education.

In the example provided in this article, it can be seen that discussions about the ideologies behind the social pedagogical approach and the readiness for school tradition become impossible in media discussions that emphasise only the economic

well-being of Norway because of a lurking crisis caused by an insufficient supply of scientifically-skilled labour force. There is a displacement of the target of the discussion, so the shift in traditions is hidden from view. The discussion of what is needed for the well-being of Norway is in reality a Trojan horse bringing in changes that Norwegian barnehage teachers are not likely to regard as being in the best interest of children's holistic development (Alvestad 2004).

Our analysis, using the six strategies of political spectacle (Anderson 2005; Edelman 1988) showed how new "common sense" was used to position the public as spectators, whose role was to accept the benevolence of the government in providing the only appropriate solution to the crisis currently facing Norway. The findings from previous studies (Franklin 2004; Stack 2006) suggest that by using a set of typical politician media strategies, this may have been a deliberate strategy by the Minister to shift understandings about the role of barnehage. Using debate articles in the media enabled the Minister to set up his argument as sensible and in so doing create a new "common sense" for the general public. Situating arguments as common sense is a global approach used by governments (see for example, LeBlanc 2012), in which democracy becomes reframed as a spectator sport and other ideologies ignored as unimportant. In such a way, education can be situated as being primarily about labour-force requirements without public outcries. In this case, it may lead to barnehage replacing the current social pedagogy tradition with that of a readiness for school tradition without the need for stakeholder, including mathematics education researchers, to be involved in discussions about such a change. Democracy requires discussion and this includes hearing the voices of those with professional expertise, as well as those of parents and even the children whose experiences in barnehage will be altered. The mediatisation of policy could open up for wider discussions with the general public, but that is only likely to occur if politicians see their job as including listening to experts, not just presenting themselves as the ones who have the most knowledge and the best interests of society at heart.

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