

# Barnevernets stemmer

En diskurs og profesjonsteoretisk orientert analyse av  
fenomenet barnevernfaglig kompetanse

av

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## Akademisk avhandling

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# Abstract

Title: The voices of child welfare - A discourse and professional theoretical oriented analysis of the phenomenon of competence in child welfare  
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The superior aim of the thesis is to study which professional arguments various participants in the child welfare area have employed in order to explain, influence and legitimize their understanding of the phenomenon competence in child welfare. The general theoretical perspective of the thesis is social constructivistic, more exactly theories about discourses and professions. I have been inspired mainly by Michel Foucault (1972), Norman Fairclough (1995) and Andrew Abbott (1988), and central concepts in this thesis are jurisdiction, claimsmaking, power and discourse. Through the perspective of constructivism, this thesis will not focus on what professional competence in child welfare is. The aim of the thesis is instead to present how the conception of the professional work is created through the language idiom. In order to attain the aim of the thesis, I have analysed texts that, in the period 1992-2012, primarily have been found in the periodical *Norges Barnevern* (Child Welfare in Norway). However, I have also analysed central policy documents, such as for example Reports to the Storting and Norwegian official reports. The thesis has a qualitative design.

The research issues focus on the following aspects: Which participants' voices are heard? How do various participants make their voices heard? Which professional conceptions are behind what is said? The results show that there are various professions that claim to have a right to point out the direction as to how competence relative to child welfare may be understood. In other words, it is not reserved for professions with a professional background in social work. With the aid of legal claimsmaking, lawyers are constructed as guarantors of legal protection, and as useful to society. The competence that is referred to is the one that may be governed through rules of law. In addition, the findings show that psychologists make several attempts at creating a role as carriers of knowledge within child welfare. With an emphasis on evidence based knowledge and affiliated research, we see tendencies towards psychologicalization of the work related to child welfare. We also see tendencies to professional antagonism between child welfare officers and social workers, where both professions are made into spokesmen for their own professional territory. The competence which is claimed to strengthen the child welfare's professional legitimacy is mainly connected to evidence based explanatory models. The evidence discourse claims the requirement to reduce the use of professional discretion, and implicitly in these discussions, there are thoughts to the effect that the work related to child welfare is not as complex that it may not, to a certain extent, be standardized. The competence which is attributed value is also linked to requirements for cost efficiency. In this context, the findings indicate that lawyers and psychologists, to a greater extent than social workers and child welfare officers, fit in, or have adapted to the new administrative models, and to the requirement that complicated assessments within the professional practice, should be replaced by efficiency and evidence based package deals.