

Anne Sine van Marion

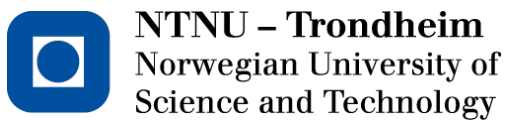
“BEND THE FISH WHILE IT IS STILL FRESH”

Minority parents’ experiences with the Norwegian nature and outdoors discourses in barnehager

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Department of Norwegian Centre for Child Research, NOSEB
Faculty of Social Science and Technology Management
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU
Trondheim, Norway



ABSTRACT

This study aims at providing an analysis of the experiences of non-Scandinavian minority parents with children in Norwegian barnehager (early childhood settings) where spending time in nature and the outdoors represents an important part of the programme. The fieldwork and data collection took place in a city in Norway in March to June 2012 and is collected through semi-structured interviews. In the analysis of the data theoretical perspectives of ideas, values and cultural practices within the dominant Norwegian nature and outdoor life discourses and the discourses dominating the view on children and childhood in Norway are utilized. In the analyzing process concepts such as culture, adaptation, reciprocity and resistance have been useful tools to understand the processes of meaning making that take place when people from more cultures meet and have to negotiate and re-negotiate their patterns for life. Theoretical perspectives and ideas of the dominant discourses of the North influencing the views on children and childhood have also been drawn on. Due to former colonialization, and to globalization, these ideas have spread to large parts of the world. Structures in society, e.g. school systems and curricula are often legacies of the same.

The minority parents experience that nature and outdoor life represent both challenges and pleasures. The cold climate and unpredictable weather and cultural practice of being and playing outdoors in the barnehage, represent challenges in terms of clothing for all kinds of weather during all four seasons of the year. Even though they are reluctant to go out themselves, the parents believe that it is important for their children to adjust to the climate and learn to love nature from an early age to be able to thrive in this country. The parents are challenged by their children to take part in outdoor activities. Once they do activities outdoors, these represent pleasures, and the parents tell about the happiness this gives the children. The parents are amazed that the children enjoy being outdoors. The children learn to take part in outdoor play and activities that require special clothes and equipment like skis, sledges, tricycles and the like. This can be experienced as economic as well as practical challenges. Some parents have worries about their children's health because they are outdoors in all sorts of weather. Their children are encouraged to take part in activities and play that can be risky.

From the analysis it appears that some minority parents are worried about their children's academic learning, and they find there is little academic instruction in the Norwegian barnehage. Some of the parents know they will return to their countries of origin and fear that their children are not prepared for the educational systems in their countries of origin. Despite little emphasis on formal teaching of literacy and numeracy, the parents experience that their children have got other kinds of knowledge. Their children seem to be environmentally conscious children, who zealously separate garbage, are careful with soap and toilet paper and pick up rubbish in the streets. The child-parent roles are at times changed, and the children teach their parents about nature, about observing and listening to birds, about the flora and the fauna.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FPCTK	-	the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens
EC settings	-	Early Childhood settings
UNCRC	-	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a Norwegian who has grown up in Norway and raised two children here, I feel very strongly that I am part of the Norwegian practice of using nature and the outdoors as the natural environment to grow up and to raise children in. My memories from own childhood are mainly from outdoor play without adults around and during all seasons in the small place I grew up in. As parents, my husband and I used to take our children outdoor regularly after work, or send them out to play, and in the Early Childhood (EC) setting, in Norway called 'barnehagen'¹ they would spend quite a few hours outdoors. Weekends and holidays would often be spent on trips in nature.

How to dress to keep warm, dry and comfortable in all seasons is an important part of growing up in Norway with its cold and wet climate (Nilsen, 2008). Being outdoors and dressing for it was never questioned, not until we went on visits with our children to my husband's country, the Netherlands. The kind of clothes my children were wearing, especially during winter (padded one-piece coverall, woollen underwear, gloves or mittens, scarf, warm, insulated boots), but also during rainy days (rain trousers with straps over shoulders, rain jacket and wellingtons) was often commented on.

Being out in "fresh air" is highly valued. From children are babies, parents are encouraged to let the child sleep outdoors in daytime all year round with temperatures above minus 10 degrees Celsius. In school we were not allowed to stay indoors during breaks. Teachers would check if there was anyone trying to sneak in during the breaks, and all windows were opened to air the classrooms. Children roaming the woods or other outdoor areas on their own, sledging and skiing at high speed, climbing trees and bicycling, all mostly without adult supervision, were, and still are, activities that are considered "natural" and a part of a "good childhood" among Norwegians, even today, and is vital in the social construction of childhood in Norway (Telhaug, 1992; Gullestad, 1997 in Nilsen, 2008:38). Many of these outdoor physical activities may today be categorised as *risky play* (Sandseter (2007), but the

¹ I choose to use the Norwegian term *barnehage* (*indefinite form, singular*; *barnehagen*: *definite form, singular*; *barnehager*: *indefinite form, plural*; *barnehagene*: *definite form, plural*) for any Early Childhood Setting. Every country has its own systems and terms for child care institutions which might not be compatible with the Norwegian system and term. The term *Kindergarten* was introduced by the German pedagogue George Fröbel, a term directly adopted and used in the English language. Translated into Norwegian, Kindergarten literally means *barnehage* and as such it is adopted from Fröbel. However, neither the German, nor the English Speaking World's use of the term corresponds with the Norwegian *barnehage*. In Norway *barnehage* is the term used for any day-care/ Early Childhood Setting for children from 8 months to 6 years, at which age children start in primary school.

lack of all-time adult supervision of children's play found in Norway is in accordance with what Guldberg (2009:60) describes as the cultural influence on how adults and caregivers carry out their supervision of children. In the other Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Denmark there is a similar reluctance to restrict the children's freedom to pursuit similar activities in their play.

In my work as an international coordinator and practical training tutor for international exchange students at a university college of early childhood education, I meet students and visiting practitioners and university lecturers from countries outside Scandinavia. They come from various continents, from Southern and Eastern Africa, Eastern and Western Europe and Northern and Central America. I am regularly questioned by them about the Norwegian practice of spending a relatively large part of the day in the *barnehage* in nature and the outdoors. Similarly, they question how we can allow children in *barnehager* to take part in risky play activities in the same surroundings.

The fact that children in Scandinavian countries are outdoors regardless of the weather conditions is a factor that amazes students and colleagues from countries outside Scandinavia. The practice is so different from their own experiences. According to what some of them say, there seems to be a golden rule in their countries that you do not take the children out if it is raining. From my visits abroad and talks with practitioners, students and lecturers, I have learnt that in some of these countries, i.e. Greece, South Africa and France, children would commonly be kept indoors in early childhood settings with temperatures under 18-20 degrees Celsius. These are temperatures we would experience on a lovely summer's day in the part of Norway I live in. If that should keep us indoors, we would have little chance of enjoying the outdoors.

1.1 Objective of the research project

What I want to explore in my study is how parents from cultural backgrounds other than the Scandinavian experience having their children in Norwegian *barnehager* where they are spending a substantial part of the day outdoors regardless of the weather conditions and with play and activities that regularly can cross the line of what might be seen as risky for the children. Does the Norwegian practice evoke the same astonishment and amazement among minority parents as was the case with exchange students and colleagues in partner institutions abroad? These parents will meet a majority culture which is broadly supported by tradition, native parents and by governmental legislation and documents regulating the work in

barnehager, like the *Framework Plan for the Contents and Task in Kindergarten (FPCTK)* (Ministry of Education, 2011). This framework plan is underpinned by the Outdoor Recreation Act and states that it is good for children to play and spend time in nature and the outdoors. Clearly there is political support from the Norwegian national assembly called *Stortinget* (Nilsen, 2008). With a majority culture being so outspoken and confident about the practice, how do the minority parents from outside Scandinavia experience the encounter with a practice in the Norwegian kindergarten where being in nature and in the outdoors encompasses such an important part of the activities? How do they manage to meet the majority culture's traditions that are so implicit in the culture and taken for granted? When the parents see their children take part in other activities than they would have done in their own culture, does that worry them, and what parts do they find especially challenging?

There is limited knowledge about the problem issues presented above, and in the next paragraph I will account for previous research of minority parents with children in Norwegian barnehager with a specific focus on the questions raised above.

1.2 Previous research

A report based on research among barnehage parents from five ethnic groups in Oslo about their perception of the barnehage their children were attending was conducted by Djuve & Pettersen (1998) and based on a large number of interviews with parents using a structured questionnaire. The title given to the report "*Do they have to be outdoors in the winter*" is taken from a question by one of the parents with a minority background and illustrates one of the areas many minority parents were dissatisfied with concerning the quality of the services in the barnehage (Ibid.). There has been research into the socio-economic background and motivation of parents who choose to send their children to barnehage with special focus on nature and the outdoors, but there is no mentioning of minority parents (Emilsen, 2005). A master thesis on a similar topic also deals with the background of the parents of nature and outdoor barnehager in a particular province in Norway and their reasons for choosing this kind of barnehage (Grette, 2009). There is no mentioning of minority parents. Another master thesis discusses whether there is room in the Norwegian barnehage for negotiation of the majority's cultural codes to meet the changing demography in the Norwegian society today where there is cultural diversity in most barnehager (Angell-Jakobsen, 2008). Clothing for all kinds of weather is an issue and can be a challenge, both in terms of knowledge and economy. Sometimes, parents might experience little flexibility and reciprocity among barnehage staff,

and lack of adequate communication create frustration for all parties involved and can have unpleasant consequences for the children, according to Becher-Andreassen (2006) who tells about staff that want to teach parents a lesson by taking the children outdoors in inadequate clothes provided by the parents. I will go more into these issues in chapter 3.

From investigation into research within the topic, I do not find information that goes in depth into the topic of minority parents and their response to the Norwegian practice in *barnehage* on spending a lot of time in nature and the outdoors, a practice which at times implies being exposed to and taking part in risky play.

1.3 Norwegian culture and national identity

The 19th century, and until Norway's independence from Sweden in 1905, was a time of nation building, and in the process there was a search for what was genuinely Norwegian. This was looked for in Norwegian nature and peasant life on the countryside (Gullestad 1992:39). For people in the rural areas nature has always been utilized as a place for taking out resources through hunting, fishing, gathering and grazing for livestock. Refined ideas of the urban elite who embraced nature and outdoor life after the fashion of British upper class tourists eventually defined what was true Norwegian (Gullestad 1990:202, Tordson 2010:162-263). The Norwegian Tourist Association (Norges Turistforening - DNT) was established and started building cabins and places to stay overnight in the mountains and thereby gave even more people easier access to these areas. DNT and its annual books have contributed in the nation building (Ibid:162). There was also a search for heroes. Great explorers who fought their ways through harsh and unfriendly environments in the Arctic and Antarctic areas, like Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen, became national heroes. They became great inspirers for others, and challenging yourself through physical hardships conquering the natural forces became "typically Norwegian". Nature and outdoor life has evolved to become a national movement and an identity marker for Norwegians. The theoretical concepts concerning *culture* and *national identity* will be dealt with in chapter 3.

1.4 Clarification of concepts

In my research question the concepts *nature and the outdoors* and *minority* are used. These concepts need to be explained to create the necessary clarification of how they are commonly understood in the Norwegian context and how I am using them here. The concept *risky play* has become an own field of research the past few years. In my research question this concept

is intertwined in one of the sub-questions of my thesis. How I understand this concept will be clarified.

1.4.1 Nature and the outdoors

I use the term *nature and the outdoors*, a collective concept by which I mean any outdoor area in or outside the barnehave, including the playground in the setting, outdoor areas on the outside, and green areas like lawns, parks, farmland or spaces open for the public. In addition the term includes any natural environment which you find in and/or around any Norwegian village or town. The access to woods, lakes, streams, rivers, and the seashore along our long coastline is free for everyone to enjoy regardless of ownership of the areas. In Norway the word 'natur' (English: nature) is used to refer to the rural and the countryside, but also the wilder, the uncultivated areas like the mountain areas and forests where you can find wild animals and pick mushrooms and berries. It is possible to access all these areas throughout the country in Norway due to a legal common access right called "*Allemannsretten*", "All Man's Right (to land access)" which is codified in the "*Friluftsloven*" (the Outdoor Recreation Act) and part of our cultural heritage. In the next chapter I will clarify what is implied in this act.

1.4.2 Minority children and parents in the Norwegian barnehave

The parents from outside the Scandinavian and Nordic geographical area are regarded as immigrants by Statistics Norway (SSB), and people from Nordic countries can settle down without any particular permission in Norway and therefore are not registered as immigrants (SSB 2012a). From 1990 to 2012 more than 525 000 persons with a nationality other than the Nordic immigrated to Norway, and 395 718 of these have got a residence permit in Norway (SSB 2012b). Among them are many children, and immigrants have become a common part of our society. When using the concept *minority* I refer to the group of immigrant people coming from non-Nordic countries as opposed to the *majority*, the peoples and national minorities defined by the Norwegian national authorities.

1.4.3 Risky play as part of the nature and outdoor experience and practice

Playing in nature and the outdoors gives the children other physical challenges than ordinary indoor play does. In accordance with the Norwegian cultural practice children are given the opportunity to explore features and elements outdoors like climbing trees, roaming the woods and other activities mentioned above. During my life I have never encountered the concept *risky play* until the past few years. These activities are all part of the common activities Norwegian children engage in during their childhood.

1.5 Research question

To find out how the minority parents experience the cultural practice in the Norwegian barnehage, I have worked out this research question:

“How do parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background experience having their children in a Norwegian barnehage where spending time in nature and the outdoors represents an important part of the barnehage programme?”

I will conduct interviews with minority parents who come from outside the Scandinavian and Nordic countries. As the research question indicates, my focus will be on the described group of minority parents in any kind of Norwegian barnehage, not only the barnehager with a special focus on nature and the outdoors, a category of barnehage we find in all three Scandinavian countries. When referring to Scandinavian practice I mean the similarities in ideas and structures without assuming that there are equal practices in the three countries. Also within Norwegian barnehager there is a variety of practices, so I have to operate on a more general level of ideas, ideals and practices.

In 2011, children with a minority background constituted 11 per cent of the children in barnehage (SSB 2011), an increase of 2,5 per cent since 2008 (Korsvold, 2011:14). From being a relatively mono-cultural, homogeneous Lutheran Christian country Norway now comprises of people of various nationalities, ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures. We have become a more heterogeneous, culturally diverse country.

The people coming to Norway from other countries might have a variety of reasons for wanting to settle down for a shorter or longer time, some permanently. Most parents would need day care for their children. With the right to a place in barnehage for all children between one and six years of age, most of these parents will choose a barnehage for their child(ren) and will meet the practice of nature and outdoor exposure for their children. I approach this phenomenon with a number of questions. Do the parents find the practice positive for their child(ren) and do they support it? What benefits do they see for their child(ren)? Similarly, do they find it challenging, difficult and more negative than positive? If that is the case, how do they experience this in the meeting with barnehage staff and perhaps other parents? If you are having other perspectives being a minority parent, it might be difficult in a context where the majority is so certain about the benefits of the practice. Are their perspectives static in the sense that they will maintain the practices in child rearing with regard to indoor or outdoor play and activities they are used to from their own cultural background, or are they somehow adapting to a new environment?

The interview guide will consist of questions related to the parents' meeting with the phenomenon of spending time in nature and the outdoors in practice in the Norwegian barnehage, the possible challenges they meet, the knowledge, skills or understanding they might need and how and/or where they get all this. Based on the expectations described above, there are claims that nature is the right and best place for children to play and develop. Is this aspect valued by the parents?

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 will give background information on access to nature and the outdoors in Norway and on the emergence of the Norwegian and Nordic barnehage model. I will discuss the relevance of referring to minority and majority culture and account for governing documents in the early childhood sector in Norway. Chapter 3 will contain the theoretical perspectives and concepts that are relevant to analyse and discuss my findings. In chapter 4 the methodology applied in the research project, the ethical considerations and the collection and analytical process of the data will be described. In the chapters 5 and 6 my findings will be analysed, and finally, I will give my conclusions in chapter 7.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

This chapter aims at giving a contextual backdrop for the research project related to the cultural practice in Norway of exposing children to nature and the outdoors as a part of raising them, both in the homes and in institutions like barnehager. To gain access to nature and the outdoors is therefore vital, and the laws and regulations governing this access will be outlined. Also, the cultural importance for Norwegians to have this access will be accounted for. I will point to relevant historic facts concerning the emergence of a Norwegian and Nordic barnehage model and Norwegian childhood in urban and rural areas where play in nature and the outdoors is emphasised.

As the research project targets the experiences of minority parents with children in Norwegian barnehage, it is useful to clarify the concepts *majority* and *minority* both in this study and in the Norwegian society in general. Who belongs to the majority and the minority vary according to the social settings. I will elaborate on the Norwegian *discourse* for what it means to be “a Norwegian” and thus a representative of the majority in order to understand what space and influence the majority culture has in this society in relation to the minority parents with their children in a barnehage. Relevant governing documents and framework plans in the early childhood sector in Norway will be dealt with, especially those pointing at the use of nature and the outdoors in barnehage, and those with reference to minority children. I will first account for the use of *discourse* in this thesis.

2.1. Use of the term discourse

The theory of *discursive positioning* comes from Michael Foucault (1977) who describes it as positioning power in a seemingly invisible network or web where we are both affected by and using power in all directions. The influence of the power structures can be hard to detect, but it permeates our relationships with others at all levels in society, both personal and institutional (Stainton Rogers, 2003a:201). A deconstruction of the discourses will make the power structures more visible and enables us to better understand how we are influenced by them. In this thesis I will use the term *discourse* as it is defined by Stainton Rogers (2003b:21):

“The term “discourse” is used to mean a self-contained set of interconnected ideas held together by a particular ideology or view of the world”.

2.2 Common access to land in Norway

In many countries access to land areas might be prohibited as much land is privately owned

and there is no common access. In the next paragraph I will account for the legislation which provides access to land in Norway for everyone.

These rights were codified by the Outdoor Recreation Act (*'Friluftsloven'*) in 1957 and have been through revisions, the latest one in 2001-2002. "*Allemannsretten*" distinguishes between cultivated land (*'innmark'*) and uncultivated land (*'utmark'*), a distinction citizens need to be aware of. Anyone can access uncultivated land on foot or on skis, in some instances also on horseback (some restrictions) or on a bike. You can have picnics and put up a tent for a couple of days. Cultivated land has no common access and is defined as tilled fields, pastures and meadows. In addition there is no common access to private plots around houses, farmyards and plantations, and you should not come too close to holiday cabins where public access could cause damage or invade people's privacy. However, when farmland is covered in snow or the ground is frozen, there is common access on foot or on skis. Implied in the Act is that access goes hand in hand with responsibility for showing consideration and respect for other people visiting, living or working in the area. In addition, the Act is designed to reduce conflicts and make sure no damage is done to the environment. Norwegians are taught to leave a place looking as if you were never there, and take all your trash with you. The Act gives rich opportunities to enjoy 'natur' (nature) and outdoor life, and as such has as intention to provide benefits for people's health and well-being (St.meld.no.39, 2000-2001; DN 2011; Nilsen 2008).

2.2.1 The importance of access to nature in the Norwegian cultural context

Norway is a Constitutional kingdom with a main land of 323787km² and 4 985 870 inhabitants (SSB 2012c). Most of the area in Norway is mountains. In the scarcely populated country only 3-4 per cent of the land area is inhabited. People have settled and make a living in the valleys and along the long coastline.

One of the Norwegian authors contributing to the building of a national identity, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), has written that "*Norway is a country of houses and cottages, but no castles*" (sic., cited in Aase, 2008:14). Historically there has been no nobility to define cultural ideals and preferences. If it is legitimate to talk of a defining class today, it would be the middle class. Assuming that your spare time activities would mirror your cultural values, Ove Skarpenes (2007) researched into the well-educated Norwegian middle class how they spent their free time and what their preferences would be if they could have had more time. The majority of the informants put being in nature first, and not city life with its rich offer of

other cultural activities as was found in another European study. Love of nature is deeply rooted in the Norwegian culture, and the Polish-Norwegian social-anthropologist Nina Witoszek says that in a country without big cities, castles, and ruins, nature would replace this culture. She claims that the Norwegians find their pride in the majestic mountain ranges, fjords and forests (cited in Skarpenes, 2007:538).

There still is no firmly rooted city-life culture in Norway, and despite industrialization and urbanization “getting out of the city” is a strong driving force, and the evidence is the building and use of a holiday cabin, a *hytte*, in the mountains, the inland valleys and along the coast. There has been a steady increase of the building of *hytte*, from 190 000 holiday cabin in the 1970s to 417 891 in August 2008, including farms and other buildings used for the purpose (Aase, 2008:21-23; Farstad, Rye & Almås, 2008:8). Many parents want their children to experience the same connectedness to nature and the outdoors as they themselves were socialized into and continued to appreciate as adults. Nature is a place “to charge your batteries”, a place where you are close to the original and natural environment for man and also an environment which challenges your physical and mental strength. Going for long or short walks in the country or the mountains is a favoured weekend activity, especially on Sundays (Gullestad, 1989). Whether you are in your *hytte* or you go into nature where you live, you put on comfortable “weather proved” clothes, good shoes and pack your backpack with packed sandwiches, coffee, a bar of chocolate, something to sit on and start walking. “Spoiling” a Sunday by sitting indoors the whole day makes you feel guilty, and you know you need the fresh air, the exercise and the refreshment of having been “ute på tur” (out on a hike) (Aase, 2008,:20). Not taking your children on these walks almost classifies you as bad parents.

2.3 Historic backdrop for the emergence of child care institutions in Norway

In 1837 the first asylum for small children in Norway was opened in Trondheim. In an announcement in the local newspaper the purpose was accounted for: “To protect the enrolled children from danger and damage, physical and spiritual, partly to awaken and support their development with respect to the areas previously mentioned, and to try to open their hearts for piety” (Sletvold , 1977:16, my translation). As for the content and tasks of the asylum they should stimulate “corporal movement”, ensure stimulating play combined with work and spiritual occupation. The asylum was for children under 6-7 years whose parents had to work outside the home with opening hours adjusted to working life. There was a set programme every day with practical handicraft, play and physical exercise, rest and teaching of subjects.

In the winters the number of children was often low due to storms and cold weather, seasonal epidemics and lack of proper shoes (Sletvold, 1977:63). Physical exercise was scheduled every day after breakfast and was more of a military character with marching while counting and exercises on gymnastics apparatuses (Ibid:21). These were activities far from the cultural ideals today of free outdoor play, and it is perhaps understandable that the summer time had a low attendance of children, especially when the weather was good and the children probably preferred to play outdoors instead (Ibid:63). However, the physical exercise teacher would be a military officer and the “corporal movement” was taken care of duly.

2.3.1 From asylum to barnehage

Early childhood settings were only scarcely found in the cities and larger towns apart from the asylums, but in Trondheim, for instance, there were small private barnehager referred to as “Frøbelske barnehager”, the first already from 1870. Better off women got a pedagogical training as barnehagelærerinner (barnehage teachers) in the Friedrich W.A. Frøbel pedagogy in seminars in Denmark, Sweden or Germany. The service was mainly for children of the better off among the bourgeoisie, it cost money and the opening hours were short (Sletvold, 1977:70-71). The women working in the asylums had no formal pedagogical training, but they carried out their work in love for children and with “*the maternal instinct which any healthy, normal woman has been given as a gift from birth*” (Korsvold, 1988:27, my transl.).

In 1920 the first barnehage owned by the municipality was established in Kristiania (Oslo), and there was a steady growth in the 1930s of privately and municipality owned barnehager. Norway got its first training college for barnehage teachers, Barnevernsakademiet, in Oslo in 1935, Barnevernsinstituttet Dronning Mauds Minde in Trondheim was established I 1947 (Sletvold, 1977:71). In 1924 asylums in Oslo changed name to ‘daghjem’, (coarsely translated into *day homes*). The 1930s is called the epoch of the barnehage. The pedagogy of Frøbel, the emergence of child psychology and the influence of professionalism among the trained barnehage teacher executed the pressure necessary to modernise the asylums. There was an interest in the child’s inner life and a more humane approach to raising children (Korsvold, 2005:71).

2.4 Nordic and Norwegian childhood

Frøbel’s pedagogy got a solid grip within the Nordic countries and an own Nordic barnehage model was developed in close collaboration among the Nordic countries (Korsvold, 1988:30). Throughout the first decades of the 1900s and in accordance with modern view on children,

the emphasis on learning handicraft, teaching Biblical stories and school subjects was gradually replaced by facilitating opportunities for play and the child's imagination, storytelling and the learning of skills "for fun" (Ibid). A part of the daily schedule in the barnehage was playing outdoors, the number of hours would vary from barnehage to barnehage, but about two hours a day would be the average, with longer hours when the weather was good.

The barnehage movement in Norway aimed at giving all children a good start in life with staff with a pedagogical education to ensure good quality. In the barnehage, play and the cultivation of children's joy had a central position, a combination where corporal punishment had no place. The barnehager grew out of communities of women who operated relatively independently of the school system. In many countries in the West there has been more emphasis on schooling, perhaps a logic development as most of the early childhood (EC) settings were attached to schools, or grew out from schools. They were meant to prepare children for entering society at large and constitute the future citizens of the nation, and the structure, organization and contents were more in accordance with that of school (Korsvold, 2005).

2.4.1 The social democratic Nordic barnehage model

There are many similarities in the Nordic countries, which are simultaneously distinct from other Western countries. From the 1950s the Nordic barnehage model has had four characteristics which are all based on the development of the welfare state (Korsvold, 2005:191). First, the model is based on equality between all children in line with the social democratic notion of similarities and equality. Implicit in this is the recognition that some children and their families have the right to be unequal and different and in need of special care or treatment, but still be a part of the community. Equalization was a long-term social democratic project which would eventually give all children the same good conditions and an equal starting point. The logic here is that variation, diversity and individuality are common values, rather than uniformity. Social integration is an aim, and the barnehage will meet the individual child with challenges appropriate to the child's needs and condition. Play is given a prominent position, and activities are adjusted to the individual needs with opportunities to choose between various activities. In many Western countries, different institutions were established which distinguished between pedagogical and social functions and parents' socio-economic standing. The Nordic welfare countries took the opposite direction by closing down special childcare institutions and establishing one barnehage model for all, regardless of socio-economic position, special needs in education or ethnicity. A common barnehage

including all children, and which provides care and learning as interconnected unities has got a prominent position in the Nordic countries.

The second characteristic has been the close connection to the social sector, like child and family care. The municipalities were responsible for building and running this sector along with most other social measures (Korsvold, 2005:191-192). The third characteristic has been the independence from the educational and school sector. The development was all the time closely connected to the family and the social sector. Children's play as their major means of expression has been given priority over academic or other school preparing activities that emphasised precise achievements and testing of knowledge.

The fourth characteristic of the Nordic model has been the emphasis of the home as a model for the practical design emphasising the fundamental anchoring of the child in the home and the community. The home-like atmosphere reflected that the home environment should be recreated outside the home (see also chapter 3 on *home* in the Norwegian cultural context, Gullestad, 1989). The settings were under the leadership of educated personnel who emphasised the needs of the individual child and the importance of play and the value of childhood and its importance for adult life. Simultaneously, it was a community of children who shared meals, and who, in their play learnt from each other and had to adjust to others.

In Norway today the municipalities are still responsible, but the barnehage is now under the department of education on both local and national level (Korsvold, 2005). The FPCTK (2011) emphasises the same values and aims, but has got a clearer emphasis on specific learning areas without being a curriculum.

2.4.2 Playgrounds in towns and cities

The dominant ideas from the Romantic period in Europe place childhood as a phase in life different from adulthood. Childhood was a time of innocence, purity and closeness to God and the good, nature and the natural. Children were vulnerable and needed protection from the corrupted world of the grown-ups (Cunningham, 1995:69-70). To give the city children an orderly and decent place, an alternative provision of child care was set up in cities in Scandinavia between the late 1800s and early 1900s, starting in Copenhagen in 1881. Playgrounds were established in green areas of the cities and, like the asylums, would keep the children out of the street with all their disorderly and doubtful activities, into an environment of fresh air and freedom to move and develop properly with caring adults

looking after them (Korsvold, 1997). In accordance with the similar ideas behind the asylum, the development of a sound physic would also stimulate the psychological development (Ibid), “a healthy mind in a healthy body”. In Norway the playgrounds were called *barnepark*, and they represented an additional child care institution along with barnehager and asylums.

In Norway, the first organised children’s parks, *barneparker*, were established in many parks in Oslo in 1923. The areas were given by the municipality and the barneparker run by women called ‘park aunties’, *parktanter*. From the middle of the 1950s, private playgrounds were established in many towns by housewives who took turns minding the children to ensure that they had playmates and could play in a safe place outdoors. Most of these playgrounds had a little shed where the children could have their lunch and go to the toilet, but they would spend most of the time outdoors during the whole year, 4 hours per day, reduced to 3 hours during the winter. By the 1960s half of the children with a play facility in the cities and larger towns were in *barnepark*, the other half in *daghem* or barnehager (Korsvold,1997).

A public expert committee consisting of, among others, trained barnehage teachers, delivered a paper in 1961 which was critical to spending too much time indoors in the small sheds or houses in the barnepark due to health risks. They wanted to limit the time spent indoors in the sheds to 20-30 minutes a day. Clearly, children should spend as much time outdoors as possible (Ibid.). But these child minding services were not services for the majority of children in Norway.

2.4.3 Norwegian barnehage and the outdoors

Although it is fair to talk about a Nordic barnehage model, each country has its own characteristics dependent on national cultural practices (Korsvold, 2005). The Norwegian children in barnehage spend more time playing outdoors than the other Nordic countries. All public documents concerning the barnehage from 1947 till today firmly emphasise the importance for children to have sufficiently long time playing outdoors. Indoor play was limited rather than the time spent outdoors. There is a clear link between the Norwegian view of what represents a good childhood and good life for children, and the Romantic view of childhood as a time of innocence and goodness and of nature as the best place to be for children, nature being their “natural” element . These notions are also found in the rest of the Western world in the 19th century (Korsvold, 2005:193). However, in most countries, this view did not materialise to the same extent as in Norway. To come as closely as possible to

the concept of what a “good childhood” encompassed, life in the rural area was the ideal. The barnehage in the urban areas would compensate for this “loss” by ensuring good outdoor play areas for children. Children’s outdoor play has been seen as a learning area for outdoor skills like staying outdoors in all kinds of weather, learning to dress appropriately for shifting weather conditions in various climates in the country, and preparing and enjoying outdoor meals. Outdoor play has also been an education into love for the Norwegian nature, which is an important part of the Norwegian cultural and national identity (Ibid:194; see chapter 3).

There have been many political debates about what the best place for children to spend their days was, at home or in an institution. Far into the 1960s there was a policy of supporting traditional family values and the housewives (Korsvold, 2007:12). From the late 1960s and onwards, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of mothers working outside the home, but there was little done to build barnehager for the children affected by their mothers’ joining the workforce (Ibid). From the middle of the 2000s however, there has been a political objective to meet this demand and substantial governmental funding of the building of new barnehager. Today the objective of the current government of guaranteeing all children between one and six years a place in a barnehage is reached (Ministry of Education, 2009).

2.4.4 Outdoor play during the seasons of the year in rural areas

Historically, the majority of the population in Norway lived in rural areas and made their livelihoods within the primary industries like agriculture, fishing, and forestry depending on where in the country they lived. Up to the late 1940s the children took part in the work from an early age alongside the grown-ups around them, indoors and outdoors. There was not a clear boundary between making yourself useful and playing (Korsvold, 1997), and when there were no particular chores, the children were free to do what they wanted without thinking of it as “free time”. When there was time, they would often play outdoors, in and around the farm yard, the fields, the woods, the mountains, wherever they were, depending on the season (Eike, 1991:170).

There were no institutions like asylums or barnehage of any kinds on the countryside. The smaller children were looked after by parents, grandparents, nannies, servants or neighbours, whoever was around the children. There was little adult supervision, and due to the number of children, smaller living areas indoors, and tradition, the children would be playing outdoors a lot, and doing various activities according to the seasons (Korsvold, 1997:56)

My childhood was set in the 1950s, and most children all over the country growing up in this period would have accounts of a multitude of activities and play in nature and the outdoors (Mjaavatn, 2005). From my own childhood, the outdoor activities with my parents were skiing and picking berries. All other activities were without adult supervision or monitoring. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the decades after World War 2, when everybody's joint efforts would contribute to building up the modern Norwegian society and the welfare state, is a period of time referred to as Classical Modernity in Norway. In this period, childhood was a part of the national identity and had some particular traits that we tend to think of as "natural" and "common" still today (Gullestad, 2001:23-23).

2.4.5 Nature and the outdoors and a sense of belonging

My own childhood story is in accordance with most auto biographies in Norway where childhood is described as parts of a landscape and are often referred to as "barndomslandet" (*childhood land*, my translation) or "min barndoms dal" (*valley of my childhood*, my translation). Childhood memories are so closely connected to the place you grew up, that this place becomes the key metaphor for the entire childhood (Gullestad, 2001:35). Childhood became a time where the environments indoors and outdoors were explored and gave you a sense of belonging to the place you grew up. Gullestad (Ibid.) claims that this connection to a local environment simultaneously connects you to the nation and its territory. Since most Norwegian children grew up within a family context and in an environment close to nature (see previous definition), their explorations were closely connected to nature. Childhood is the foundation we build our lives on, and a time when we have the time and opportunity to actively explore our surroundings using our bodies actively and with our senses wide open (Bagøien, 1999:19). Throughout the history of mankind we have been connected to nature. Industrialization and urbanisation disconnected us from the daily contact with nature, but our human nature is not changed, it is argued, and we can only develop fully as human beings when interacting with nature (Tordsson, 2010:24).

When looking for your roots and identity the place you grew up in and "come from" is of great importance. It is the freedom of exploring, being in and a part of, and playing in these areas that allow children to develop this sense of belonging to the place and ultimately to the nation (Gullestad 2001:25). The close connection to nature is thus something children are socialised into from an early age and has become a typical trait of the national cultural identity.

2.5. View on outdoor play outside the Scandinavian countries

In her article “Outdoors: An Important Context for Young Children” the Australian researcher Maragareth Davis (1996) found that there is some reluctance among Australian staff members to take the children to outdoor areas for play, mainly because they do not see the educational benefit of this. Due to the academic pressure also in EC settings, parents and staff tend to see play in itself as a waste of time because they assume children do not learn much of importance for their academic achievements (Ibid.).

In many African countries children have to pass tests or exams before entering primary school, especially private schools. A major part of the activities in EC settings is spent on teaching the children what they need to learn to pass the tests to be let into more prestigious schools, often skills that meet expectations of primary schools and parents, rather than the children. The preschool children are seated at desks indoors in a formal school setting from three years of age, waiting for the teacher to teach what they should learn, repeating after the teacher using rote methods (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008; Johannesen, 2007:58; own observations). The parents in most cases have to pay for their children in preschool. A good education is seen as the entrance ticket to a better life, and parents want to have evidence of the investment by good academic results. If a child “fails” the entrance test for primary school, the preschool has failed their responsibility of teaching the children what “they need”.

In many countries there is little tradition for schools to emphasis nature and outdoor activities. The focus is that of teaching (Dyer, 2002). In this context playing outdoors is a waste of time, is for a short break during the day, or is something the children can do when they come home. Moreover, the number of staff is not enough to cover the required number of adults for excursions to areas outside the setting or to look after the remaining children in the setting. According to practitioners and students from many countries I have spoken with, many parents are said to be against having their child getting dirty during the day, something which is harder to control outdoors.

2.5.1 View on play involving risk outside Scandinavia

In a Norwegian television programme² a comparison was made between the Scandinavian practices of emphasising play outdoors, including what activities can be permitted, for instance risky play. Clothing of children was another issue. Where “Safety First” was the overarching principle in England and Australia, free play in natural environments in all kinds

² Schrødingers katt. NRK 1, 2012

of weather was the Norwegian tradition and practice. The Australian researcher Helen Little (2009) found the same emphasis on safety rules and regulations in Australian EC settings.

In many European countries, health and safety rules and regulations, or interpretations of these by governmental bodies locally, and by practitioners (Reeves, NRK 2012), are major obstacles for any activities where there is a slight risk of getting injured. The staff fear that parents will sue the EC setting if anything unexpected happens to the children while in their care. This prevents them from allowing the children the kinds of activities that can be categorized as risky play. This is a tendency that started in the Anglo-American world, but has spread to many other countries (Sandseter, 2010:36). James & James (2008) discuss the discourses of risk and protection in the UK and argue that “law and policy are key elements” in the discursive politico-cultural parameters of the on-going social construction (Ibid:106). The UK Children’s Act of 1989, they say, have many intended and unintended consequences for children which has promoted policies that: “*[are] less about the welfare of children and more about the protection of adult communities*”. *Childhood is constructed as a time of risk and the children are in need of protection*”. (Ibid:111).

2.6 Majorities and minorities in the Norwegian society

Majority and minority groups of people (majorities and minorities) are not stable categories, but are made and developed in specific social settings. The majority in the Norwegian society has the power to define what is “Norwegian”, and how to name the various groups of immigrants coming into the country. Language and the words that are used are powerful elements in demonstrating and categorising who belong to “we” and “us” and who are “they” and “them”. The majority can define what groups come into the group of “society”, and, who are not “natural” members in that society. This is part of identity building, and the power lies in the hands of the majority (Gullestad, 2002:31). Gullestad uses the term “national order” for a discourse formation in Norwegian society (see my clarification of the concept *discourse* in 2.1).

From the 18th century the world has been divided into geographical unities with demographic groups of people carrying their own history and culture. Many new stories were made about who belonged to the nation, and who did not. In this way many minorities were made invisible and simultaneously created in the national stories about the dominant ethnic group referred to as “the people”. The idea about a national state means that the state, the people and the territory coincide. Norway was at that time first under Denmark’s reign and later given

away to Sweden. During the time of the building of the nation, there was a national movement against the elite representing the “aliens” in power. National identity was built on place of origin and culture (Ibid :20). Norwegian nature, music, art and literature were intertwined to create the stories about the Norwegian people as opposed to the Danish people represented by the authorities.

The concept “the people” is ambiguous, because it refers to both an abstract group having the same civil and political rights as well, as to concrete people with their particular language and culture. Due to this ambiguity, there is a constant conflict between the national membership you can achieve by settling down in the country, and the membership you are born into (Ibid:20).

In Norway today, the predominant discourse for being a Norwegian is that of decent, or bloodline, and it permeates the policy making and collection of demographic and social data. Even if you are born in the country you are still registered as “different” and not “proper” Norwegian. Until 2001 people without Norwegian bloodline were categorised as “the immigrant population”. The group consisted of “*first generation immigrants*”, i.e. those immigrating to Norway, and their children born in Norway, who were referred to as “*second generation immigrants born in Norway by two parents born in another country*” (Dzamarija, 2008). The last category was heavily criticised for excluding a group of people who were born in the country by referring to them as immigrants. Høydal (2008) in Statistics Norway acknowledges that the categories that were meant to be descriptive started getting normative and emotional connotations (Ibid. 2008). Gullestad (2002) argues that words like “immigrant” is not just a label, but becomes performative, i.e. a performing lingual action. Our actions are based in the categories through which we interpret the world. Thereby the categories have a direct effect on people’s actions and thinking. It is therefore important what kinds of categories are used, because these categories become powerful in the sense that they are taken for granted. Thereby, the political character of these categories is made invisible. Politics is about creating an active society, a “we”, which implies the naming of “us” and “we” as part of the national identity building. The power of the majority in the nation therefore lies in defining and giving names to social groups. Implicit in this is the definition of what groups are included in our understanding of “the society” (Ibid:43).

In 2001 the category “*second generation immigrant*” was changed to “*persons born in Norway by two foreign-born parents*”, a very little user-friendly term. To find a better concept Statistics Norway changed it to “*norskfødte med innvandrereforeldre*”(Norwegian-

born of immigrant parents, my translation). This new wording emphasises that these persons have Norway as their country of birth (Dzamarija, 2008). Still, the categories demonstrate that even if you have Norwegian citizenship you are different because you do not have the required decent, or bloodline, to be a “true” Norwegian. This kind of hegemonic thinking makes the word “immigrant” conceptually a dichotomy to “Norwegian”. It is not possible to understand the meaning of the word without understanding what “Norwegian” stands for. The words have different connotations. Where “immigrant” often stands for something negative, causing problems, for violence and crime, someone that cannot be trusted and that of a guest, “Norwegian” refers to images like “home”, “safe”, “familiar” and “host” (Gullestad, 2002). According to a survey by Hernes & Knutsen (1990), nine out of ten Norwegians equal “immigrant” with “dark skin” (cited in Gullestad, 2002:91). “Norwegianness” (and “whiteness”) becomes an undefined and unthematized normative centre, because Norwegians see themselves as “equal and alike” as opposed to immigrants that are seen as different, but simultaneously alike in their difference. (Gullestad, 2002:91).

The same traits are found in the other Nordic countries. The Swedish ethnographer Daun (1998) asked the question “Who is Swedish” in his book *Swedish Mentality* (my translation). The common opinion was that formal citizenship is of little value if you do not have the Swedish bloodline, i.e. born by Swedish parents, have a Swedish sounding name, except for foreign names that are already accepted in the language, and speak Swedish without an accent (cited in NOU-2000-32).

The power structures giving the right to define who are “we” and who are “they” will have consequences for minority parents in Norwegian barnehager. The majority is not represented only by the parents of Norwegian decent, and the staff, but also all governmental legislation, rules and regulations, such as the FPCTK. Together they have the power to define and interpret what kind of practices and discourses should be prevalent.

2.7 Governing documents in the early childhood sector in Norway

Barnehageloven 2005 (the Barnehage Act, my translation [see comment in Chapter 1 Introduction], officially translated to *the Kindergarten Act*) gives the national guidelines for the intention and content of the Norwegian barnehage and its services at any given time. Among the general intentions outlined in §1 it says that:

“Children are to develop creative enthusiasm, curiosity and desire to explore. They will learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. Children will develop basic knowledge and skills.” (Barnehage Act, Section 1, Content of barnehage).

It moves on to recognizing the value of childhood and stresses that the barnehage is supposed to contribute to enjoyment and pleasure in playing and learning. It also says that the barnehage's intention is to be a challenging and a safe place for fellowship and friendship, promote democracy and equality and oppose any forms of discrimination.. In §2 the content of the barnehage is outlined, and for my project I will emphasize that the barnehage is obliged to take into account the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the children, and also communicate values and culture and creating space for the children's own cultural creation. The barnehage should also help all children experience joy and mastery in a social and cultural community. The act goes on to emphasize that the barnehage should have a health promoting and preventive function and contribute to even out social differences. *Enjoyment* and *joy* are words used in both paragraphs and give a clear indication of the view of children and childhood in the Norwegian context.

The Barnehage Act also states that the Ministry of Education will work out a framework plan for the tasks and content of the barnehage. The first FPTCK came into force in 2006, and has been amended in 2011. The FPTCK interprets the Barnehage Act and deepens the understanding of the wordings. In accordance with the emphasis on nature and outdoor activities in "all kinds of weather" in children's natural surroundings as part of the Norwegian culture, the FPTCK says that:

[..]Outdoor play and activities are an important part of child culture that must be retained, regardless of the geographic and climatic conditions. Children should be influenced and inspired in their play by local experiences."(sic.Ibid:28).

The FPTCK acknowledges that the modern Norwegian society is no longer homogeneous, but a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and a diverse society. It sees this as enriching and strengthening the barnehage communities, and emphasizes the need to facilitate communication and interaction between the various groups "on an equal footing" (sic.Ibid:32). Also passing on culture to help the children create a sense of belonging is one of the tasks of the barnehage (ibid). Seven learning areas are listed in the framework plan, and many of these suggest activities and experiences in nature and the outdoors. It is specifically stated, that including outdoor activities and play as part of the daily routine in the barnehage is a way of meeting the objectives for the learning areas, as well as actively using the local community.

In addition to the above mentioned act and FPCTK there are other acts and regulation, or other parts of the Barnehage Act and FPCTK that are relevant for this project. Some of these will be dealt with in the next paragraphs.

2.7.1 Minority children in Norway with “barnehage for all” policy

The FPCTK (2011) clearly sets the premises for the needs of each individual child, minority children included (Ministry of Education, 2011). Because of the influx of children of other ethnicities in kindergarten and schools, there has been an increasing political interest for ethnic and lingual minorities in Norway, and the issue has been raised in several White Papers (Stortingsmeldinger). The government’s goal of having barnehage places for all children in Norway aged one to five, means that the majority of children will be in barnehage (Ministry of Education, 2009). To ensure the quality and meet the requirements of adapting and adjusting to the new reality, the government published their White Paper (WP) no.41 in 2008 on Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (St.meld. no.41, 2008-9). One of the goals of the Norwegian government sited in WP no.41 is inclusion of all children regardless of cultural background. A fact sheet based on the WP no 41 in English summarizes the main points concerning inclusion in barnehagen. It says that minority children “*must be supported to be part of both majority and minority cultures*” (sic. Ministry of Education and Research, 2009:4). Inclusion comprises four categories of minority children. In my research I will only focus on the parents of children with a minority cultural background, not particularly parents of children of the other three categories like *Physically and Mentally Challenged Children*, *Children at Risk* or *Children helped by the Social Security*.

In the following chapter I will account for the theoretical perspectives that have guided me in my study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will outline the theoretical framework and concepts that will be utilized in the thesis. The research project aims at producing knowledge about minority parents' experiences of the Norwegian cultural practice of letting children spend lots of time in nature and the outdoors in barnehaven regardless of the weather. The chapter will therefore be divided in two parts.

In the first part, I will account for the cultural practices, some dominating discourses and theoretical concepts concerning children and childhood in Norway. This is what the minority parents are met by in their encounter with the Norwegian barnehage. The minority parents in Norway meet cultural practices related to nature and the outdoors that might be different from their own. The concept 'culture' is a vague and little tangible concept as such. Within this concept are a lot of discourses. Some ideas, values and concepts are used to describe what is specific, or "natural", "normal" and "common" for a whole nation. If asked to explain what we mean by that, we find it difficult, because we take it for granted in our daily lives and have "essentialized" practices, values and ideas as a part of our culture. By deconstructing, or as Gullestad (2001:22-23) says, deneutralizing these, we will find out what lies behind. I will base my understanding of what "culture" means on the works of social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (1946-2008) and account for her theory on what are the most powerful Norwegian cultural symbols. This will give a foundation for understanding processes at work in the cultural meeting between the Norwegian, represented by majority staff, parents and children, and minority parents with their cultural practices and backgrounds. Even if minority parents cannot be seen as a uniform group, I expect that they will have many similar experiences in the socio-cultural context of the Norwegian barnehage (Gjervan, Andersen & Bleka, 2012:90).

Gullestad's theory on the meaning of *home* and *nature* in the Norwegian culture gives a good foundation for the discourses within Norwegian culture of what constitutes a "good Norwegian childhood". Here I will draw on the work by Kjørholt (2004, 2008) and Nilsen (2008). Kjørholt has elaborated on discourses around *social and symbolic space for children as participants* in society, *children's culture* and of what constitutes a *happy Norwegian childhood*. Nilsen has developed the concept of *the Norwegian robust child subject*. Implied in this concept is the exposure and encouragement for children to participate in *risky play*, a concept elaborated on by Sandseter (2009).

The second part of the chapter will deal with the theories and discourses on children and childhood that are prevalent in many countries in the world. The European and Western (from now on referred to as the North) discourses on children and childhood are very much influenced by two theories that in turn are built on philosophical ideas from the time of the Enlightenment, of modernity. The *socialization theory*, refined by Talcot Parsons (1902-1979) and the *theory of cognitive development* by Jean Jacque Piaget (1896-1980) have had an immense impact on child rearing and education in most parts of the world. Because they are still influencing our views and practices today, I will give a brief outline of the two theories. Due to colonialism and the economic and academic dominance in what often is referred to as the North³ (Montgomery, 2003:68), these theories and ideas have spread all over the world to many countries and are still dominating the educational institutions in most countries. In order to make sense of the parents' reactions and responses to the Norwegian practices, we need to know the theories and some of the discourses that have influenced on cultural practices and thereby the expectations many minority parents bring with them for their children's upbringing and education.

To understand the dominant theories and be able to deconstruct the modern discourses influencing views on children and childhood I will account for discourses from pre-sociological times that are still influential today in many parts of the world. Post-colonial critique has been helpful in deconstructing discourses that represent a legacy of attitudes and practices from colonial times. With minority parents coming from many former European colonies, it will be useful to be open for these perspectives.

3.1 Deconstruction of discourses

The theoretical approach of this thesis is that childhood is seen as constructed. Minority parents in my study come from various parts of the world, and the various constructions of childhood are influenced by the dominant discourses in their cultures. In order to understand the discourses that colour our view on children and childhood, a deconstruction of the discourses is necessary to understand the notions and practices that influence our ideas, concepts and values. By deconstructing our notions and practices we can find out what ideas, concepts and values govern these practices, the constructions of children and childhood that are dominating the discourses.

In the next section I will look closer at the concept of culture.

³ "The North" is often used to denote rich, more industrialized countries, "the South" is used to denote poorer, less industrialized countries (Montgomery & Woodhead, 2003:xi).

3.2 Culture as an analyzing concept

Our everyday activities, such as raising children, organization of family life, household chores etc. are often seen as trivial and have not been given much academic attention, at least not in the North. Social anthropologists have traditionally studied “exotic” societies that are not modern. In these societies there is little difference between everyday life and the society as such. Such differences make more sense in modern societies in the North (Gullestad 1989:17). Gullestad has studied everyday life in Norway (1989). Her point of departure was that everyday life in homes and the local communities would provide a starting point for discussions on theoretical and analytical questions in society and civilization at large. Words we use become performatives (see 2.6) and influence our experiences, emotions and thoughts. The social construction of our reality, a concept used by Berger and Luckman (1967, cited in Gullestad 1989:14) is built up by concepts and symbols. Together with our patterns of thought, the concepts and symbols influence on our interpretations of what is real, of what is important and the right thing to do in our lives. Gullestad claims that culture is more than values and preferences. She argues that culture is “*all social action*”(Ibid:14), and this is also my understanding of culture in this thesis.

Social action has an aspect of meaning which often becomes invisible, because we take many of our social actions for self-evident and not necessary to discuss. The only method to reveal these aspects of meaning is through analysis. In her research, Gullestad collected her empiric material in Norwegian families’ *everyday life*. Through her analysis, she has found phenomena that can be described as Norwegian without claiming that these phenomena cannot be found in other parts of the world, first and foremost in Scandinavian and Nordic countries, but also in many countries in the North. I will account for these phenomena. They form the theoretical foundation for my understanding of what can be described as Norwegian cultural phenomena (Ibid:14-15).

3.2.1 Everyday life and the home

Of the many dimensions of *everyday life*, there are two that stand out as most important. The first dimension is the daily organizing of tasks and activities, the second is everyday life as experience and life world. Most analyses of society are from a top-down perspective of the conventional social sciences and governmental institutions. They seem not to embrace the grey zone around the family, its activities, family relations and social networks, its informal organization of everyday challenges, the local communities and neighbourhoods. To be able to empirically describe how people organize their everyday life, it is necessary to have a bottom-up approach, be there, listen to what people tell about it, and experience and see it the

way it unfolds in the social and cultural context of people (ibid.:20). As human beings we relate to other people and places in our everyday life. Some of these we perceive as close and individual, other are more remote, unfamiliar and general. Gullestad says that “[*The relationship between the near and the remote can be linked to the relationship between order (cosmos) and confusion (chaos).*”(Ibid:23, my translation).

In the modern world, where roles, activities and forums we participate in are separated, man tries to create integration by linking their various participations to one identity, creating and relating to a life world. According to Gullestad, everyday life is not related to a particular institution or localities such as household, local community, neighbourhood, etc. These institutions and localities all describe social communities which are defined by their physical and spatial components. Instead of being related, the integrating efforts, and the desire to create a wholeness and meaning in life cross all sectors of society, and as such, the concept of everyday life is different from the other concepts (Gullestad, 1989:24). Simultaneously, there is one indirect central cultural element in everyday life, and that is the *home*, Gullestad argues. She maintains that this solution for man is not necessarily central in the everyday life of each individual in the Norwegian and Scandinavia culture, but it is central in the culture as such. The focus on *home* in everyday life is also a general trait of societies in the North. The private and the public spheres are more and more polarised, and in this process the importance of the home and the intimate and private sphere is intensified. Wherever you go, or whatever happens, you can always return to the pivotal point of your life, the home (Ibid:24). The home is the gravity of meaning making and integration for man in modern society (ibid.:24, Gullestad, 1992:203).

3.2.2 Our life world

The home and everyday life form our life world. The concept *life world*, which originates from a phenomenological philosophic tradition, is transcendental in the sense that it contains the sum of all things we take for granted, and as such it forms the background for cultural analysis. “*The life world can be regarded as doxa, the knowledge we have not thematised and which has just seeped in.*” (Gullestad, 1989:25, my translation). Life world is simply meaning stripped of knowledge. Life world can also be seen as an empiric fact, as the sum of our experiences (Schultz, 1975, cited in Gullestad, 1989:25). Life world is difficult to get hold of for e.g. minority parents. Life world seen as un-thematised knowledge, experience and communication links the study of everyday life to various forms of cultural analysis. These forms include dimensions like communication, where we use symbols, signs and rhetoric; values, both profound and the shifting nature of preferences; aesthetics, like beauty and

creativity; and moral, including both the written and unwritten rules for behaviour (ibid.:25). In Norwegian we say “I got it in through the mother’s milk”(gjennom morsmelka), which illustrates well how the life world seeps in and is something you feel and know, but have never “learnt it” in the educational understanding of the word. Minority parents with a different life world than the majority culture will probably find this the hardest part to come to grips with.

3.2.3 Three different ways of using the concept *culture*

The concept *culture* is ambiguous and is used with different meaning by people depending on the context it is used in. Culture in a social perspective can be divided into three areas:

1. As a sector in society; 2.As patterns of behaviour; and 3. As patterns for behaviour

(Gullestad, 1989:32). Culture as a *sector in society* is used to describe cultural life in the aesthetical sense encompassing what in Norwegian is referred to as “*høykulturen*” (high culture) or “*finkulturen*” (fine/posh culture) like literature, music, arts, ballet etc. Others are more inclusive and find that culture comprises of all areas within sports, amateur activities within theatre and music; pop music and other kinds of entertainment, a sector referred to as the “*den utvidede kultursektoren*” (the extended cultural sector) (ibid.:32, Martinussen 2004:8).

Culture as *patterns of behaviour* has reference to forms of life like the coastal culture; farming culture; Norwegian culture etc. This is a way of characterizing the way of living for whole groups of people, the socio-cultural system including cultural life and other life with customs, traditions, norms and values, and religions (Gullestad, 1989:33). It is frequently used as an everyday concept with reference to place of origin and tradition that is transmitted from generation to generation. This way of understanding culture implies homogeneity in a society, meaning that people of the same culture will think and act the same way. It disregards differences within nations and regions, and takes no account of what it means to have e.g. different religious backgrounds. Even if you have grown up in the same village, there might be differences due to religion, socio-economic positions, gender, family background etc. (Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008:29).

The third use of culture, *patterns for behaviour*, is of a cognitive-symbolic nature and refers to our ideas, values, symbols and patterns of thinking. All these influence our social life without determining them. Our patterns for behaviour are continuously being created and recreated between people in interaction (Gullestad, 1989:37). Regardless of ethnicity or country of

origin, everyone takes part in these meaning making processes. It is not always known how nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, generation or class give a joint cultural understanding. These meanings are negotiated in social contexts based on different experiences, and as such it is not a predictable concept (Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008:29-33). Culture is not a “thing” people have, but is an analytic aspect of their patterns for behaviour (Gullestad, 1989:40). She says that “[A] culture can be described as a cluster of themes (core) with a variety of effects around it. [...]. Motives and themes are stronger in the cultural core of regions, and decrease gradually, or are reproduced with new variations in remote areas” (ibid.:40, my translation). Cultural principles are thus difficult to limit as they more readily overlap and “work as reflections and resonance for each other” (ibid:40, my translation).

3.2.4 Home and nature as powerful cultural symbols in Norway

The cultural symbols and categories, values and ideas in everyday life can become parts of a nation’s identity when they are in accordance with the inhabitants’ own understanding of themselves. In this way, they can be the bricks in the historical processes of building a nation (Gullestad 1989:40). As mentioned in chapter one, nature and arts were used as symbols in the nation building of Norway. A symbol has a multitude of connotations, and it is a manifestation of our experiences that are not plainly conceptual. There are always parts of a symbol that cannot be expressed in a non-symbolic and clear-cut language. Symbols do not have strict structures, but they are collections of binary opposites, i.e. they are multi-vocal. Gullestad gives examples of such opposites in the Norwegian culture. *Home* is, as previously mentioned, a strong symbol and cannot be understood properly without seeing it in relation to Norwegians’ view on nature and the city, which Norwegians see as exciting and dangerous places, but still with different connotations. Another symbol, *equality* cannot be understood without the opposites *individuality* and *hierarchy*. The symbolic polarities of *peace and quiet* (“fred og ro”) are the negatively loaded *rush and bother* (“jag og mas”) and the more positively loaded phrase *life and movement/hustle and bustle* (“liv og røre) which indicate more excitement. Even if these contradictions do not seem to have a logical interconnectedness, it is necessary to see these opposite values as part of the same. A Norwegian can wish to see both peace and quiet and life and movement at the same time. You need detailed contextual understanding to make meaning of this, because symbols operate on a backdrop of the implied and un-thematised knowledge between members in a cultural tradition (Ibid:43).

In a cultural tradition there can be consent as to the various symbols, but there can still be ambiguity when it comes to the translation of meaning of the symbols. Since the contents of

most symbols are not discussed, this does not represent a problem. Gullestad refers to Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a French cultural sociologist, who uses the concept *doxa* and *opinion* to explain this. *Doxa* is the implied part of the culture which we do not discuss, the things, previous described, that seep in. *Opinion*, on the other hand, is the part of culture that is openly discussed. Opinion consists of both orthodoxy (orthodox opinions) and heterodoxy (heterodox opinions). It is on the border line between doxa and opinion that the indisputable truths, doxa, is getting its authority through a process where the “cultural” is believed to be the “natural”. Culture is not something that is created by the whole society, but is created by the most dominant group in society whose interests are acknowledged as the right world order. The dominated groups in society, like minorities, classes and gender, accept and acquire this world order and contribute to maintaining it. However, this does not have to apply to everyone, and cultural principles vary in strength. Every person can resist depending on the strength of their own cultural practices (see 3.2.1 and 3.2.3). The process that makes the cultural world order accepted and implied is cultural symbolic activities. These activities take place in everyday life and in cultural life, and this way the right world order is seen as natural, self-evident and real life itself. The members of a society are constantly dealing with cultural patterns in strategies that are partly unconscious, and they create and maintain the inequalities concerning power and influence (Gullestad, 1989:45).

Minority parents in Norwegian barnehage are in continuous interaction with the patterns for behaviour and life world of the majority and will have to make choices how to respond in that very context. Similarly, majority staff and parents will have to relate and respond to the minority parents, but the pressure is less on them than that of the minority. There are some overarching cultural themes and patterns consisting of ideas and values that are abstract enough to concern most people in a society regardless of their position or way of life (ibid.:115). In the Norwegian society the relation to home and to nature are some of these overarching cultural traits that I will account for next.

3.2.5 Nature and Norwegian cultural traits

Nature is one of the central cultural categories in the Norwegian culture. Norwegians and Scandinavians have a special relationship to nature and what they see as nature. This can be seen in the way nature permeates many areas of life, for instance advertising, literature, politics (as seen in governing document referred to in chapter two), and e.g. in the planning of barnehager (see chapter two) and urban areas. Nature has been important in creating a national identity in Norway as well as in Sweden (Skirbekk, 1981; Löfgren, 1989, cited in

Gullestad, 1992:202). *“In the search for symbolic expressions of national solidarity, the love of a common peasant heritage and a common landscape could bind the nation together and appeal to interests and emotions above local class strife and against other nations”*(sic. Ibid:202). One example of this is the popularity and use of regional/national costumes called *bunad*, especially on the Norwegian national day.

As accounted for in section 3.2.4, Gullestad argues that cultural symbols are binary categories with opposite meaning that complement each other (1989:42; 1990:84). She claims that one of the binary oppositions of nature in Norway is culture, which indicates that nature as a symbol has a more prominent position than culture. Untouched nature has more value to Norwegians than i.e. artfully planned parks (Gullestad 1989:87). According to Gullestad, Norwegians have a desire to create wholeness, integration and connection in their everyday life (1990:85; 1992:203). The home has a central position in this effort (see 3.2 above), and represents both the trivial and the sacred simultaneously, because of its intimacy (Gullestad, 1990:86). In order to discuss nature as a Norwegian cultural symbol, Gullestad uses the binaries “home” and “out”. “Home” stands for the defined and well-known; the safe, the warm and cozy, whereas “out” implies the unsafe and simultaneously, excitement and adventures. Nature is a form of “out”, it is wild, mighty and dangerous (Gullestad 1989:87). To be out in nature has a multitude of connotations. When you are out in nature you experience the flora and fauna and all kinds of weather in all four seasons (Gullestad 1992:804). Nature gives you aesthetical experiences of beauty, of wholeness and harmony and provides balance in your life, peace of mind and takes you away from the hustle and bustle of society (Gullestad, 1990:86). Simultaneously, nature and outdoor life gives you challenges that roughen up your body and soul so you can endure hardships (Ibid:87). You get new strength and practice in becoming independent and mastering the various landscapes nature provides in this country. This makes sense since the body in Norwegian outdoor life is a part of nature (Ibid:87). Nature provides opportunities for activities that are considered meaningful, and by straining your body you get the joyful feeling of mastery and control. Norwegians’ ways of relating and thinking of nature influence on their way of raising their children, and on family activities like Sunday hikes, weekends and holidays at the cabin (see chapter two). You feel free from all demands of society in nature, and many of the activities you do in nature, you do with family or friends. This strengthens relations between those that are close to you (Gullestad 1990:86; 1992:204).

3.2.6 Nature and religious and spiritual experiences

Many Norwegians feel that nature gives them a religious and spiritual experience. Fewer and fewer people go to church on a Sunday, and there are people that would rather seek a spiritual experience in nature where some feel they meet God (Gullestad, 1990:87-88). She claims that the weekly Sunday hikes become a ritual they either feel they have to carry out, or actually do carry out (Ibid:88; see also chapter two). There is a gap of meaning between nature as representing chaos in relation to the sacred micro cosmos of home, and nature, representing cosmos in relation to the fragmentation and chaos the city represents. Gullestad's theory is that this gap of meaning is what gives nature such a great power as a cultural symbol (Ibid:88). As previously mentioned, powerful symbols have so many meanings and can be understood in so many ways, that many people can easily acknowledge them without having to agree on a particular content. Nature is such a powerful symbol and cultural category in which Norwegians can unite their differences of opinion, associations and sets of values (ibid.:88).

3.2.7 Oppositions of cultural symbols in Norwegian culture

Society and nature are experienced as two binary cultural symbols in the Norwegian culture. When you are "out" in nature you are also away from society and you are free to govern your own life, like in the home. When you participate in society you lose this, only nature can give you the distance to social relations and society. *"This means that social distance is translated into spatial distance, because social interaction is easily interpreted as a loss of autonomy"* (sic. Gullestad, 1992:206). You feel independent and self-reliant and have autonomy and control, qualities that are highly appreciated by Norwegians, and which influence on how they want to raise their children (Ibid:204). Getting a certain distance from society on a regular basis is a requirement to socialize in a culturally adequate or acceptable way (Ibid:206). Being out in nature is something you do either alone or in a small group with close family or friends. Gullestad compares this trait in Norwegian culture to the secluded life in a monastery where the spiritual experiences in nature is a secular version of the contemplative and secluded life in a monastery (Gullestad, 1990:89). From my experience, when Norwegians tell about their positive experiences in nature, they will often make references to how far away they were from everyone, or, how lovely it is that their cabin is situated where you cannot hear or see anyone else.

Nature's position as a powerful cultural symbol has a great influence on the way Norwegians want to raise their children. Many writers of biographies will emphasize how grateful they are that they learnt to love and be in contact with nature in their childhoods. You have to learn to

understand and to relate to nature in a culturally correct way in your childhood (Gullestad 1990:90; Nilsen, 2008:45). In the next paragraphs I will outline how Norwegians perceive a happy and good childhood. It should not be a surprise, then, that contact with, and being in nature plays an important role in the way an ideal Norwegian childhood is constructed.

3.3 Construction of a happy and good Norwegian childhood

The construction of a happy Norwegian childhood is a childhood situated in the home of the family, on the countryside, with free play outdoors, preferably in a natural environment in the neighbourhood (see also chapter two). Kjørholt (2008) says that both former and contemporary notions of a good Norwegian childhood imply great degrees of freedom from adult supervision.

3.3.1 The children's own culture and a good childhood

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), was adopted in Norway in 1999, and incorporated in the Human Rights Act in 2003 by the Norwegian Parliament. As a consequence the Kindergarten Act had to be redrafted to implement the principles of the UNCRC (Kjørholt 2008). This indicated that children's rights to be heard in matters concerning themselves, and rights to participate in making their own decisions were included as a principle. In barnehager, these notions were closely linked to what a good childhood is in Norway, and what it is like to be a child. The individual child's right to choose activities and decide herself who she would like to play with has been emphasized in barnehager both in Norway and in Denmark (Gulløv 2001, cited in Kjørholt 2008:22). The concept of "children's own culture" refers to play and cultural activities with peers and represents a discourse that has been used since the 1990s. Kjørholt says that it is "*representing a particular understanding of childhood*" (sic.2008:22). Children should have the right to move freely and play uninterrupted with their peers in nature or the immediate neighbourhood. Having the autonomy to structure their time according to their own "needs" is a part of this. As mentioned earlier, children's play in Norway is free of all-time adult supervision understood as continuous control, and it is a part of the cultural practice of how adults and caregivers raise children (Guldberg 2009:60, see chapter one).

As for Norwegians in general, nature has a central position for children as well as for adults, and Kjørholt says that "*childhood and nature are closely intertwined*"(sic. Ibid.:22). For children growing up in urban areas there have been efforts made to compensate for the "loss" of nature by ensuring enough outdoor space for play in the barnehage and the barnepark (see

chapter two). Some of the many new barnehager have chosen to have a special focus on spending most of the days outdoors, and thereby meeting the cultural ideas of a good place for children to be, i.e. in nature and the outdoors referred to as *naturbarnehage* or *friluftsbarnhage*, a trend that started in the late 1980s and has grown steadily since then.

Closely connected to the values of nature and the outdoors are the values of independence, physical strength and endurance and the mental strength of perseverance, of enduring and mastering challenges that ‘roughens you up’, described by Nilsen (2008:153) as “constructing a robust child subject in ‘nature’”. The *robust child subject* is also a competent and knowledgeable child, like the previous reference to childhood memories of free activities and explorations that gave you valuable experiences building up knowledge without this ever been referred to as education (Mjaavatn 2005).

3.3.2 The Norwegian robust child subject

In Norway, the Romantic discourse (see 3.5.3 this chapter) is deeply rooted commonly among people and structurally by documents from the government. The *Norwegian robust child* discourse is closely linked to the *nature and outdoor discourse* that has a strong position in Norway (see Introduction chapter one and 3.2.2 this chapter). As previously mentioned, to be in contact with nature is something Norwegians see as inherently good for the well-being of the child and for his/her future life as a lover of nature (Gullestad, 1990; Nilsen, 2008). Nilsen introduced the discourse of the *robust child subject* who has to be toughened and hardened in this harsh climate. All children should spend time outdoors, preferably in wild nature, and it will develop the children’s competences and their social, physical and emotional skills. In that sense, the Romantic thinking of nature’s good influence on children and the Norwegian’s relationship to nature seem to be very close. The same cultural and social practices are interconnected with the values of independence and autonomy (Gullestad 1997, 1992, cited in Nilsen 2008, Kjørholt 2008), and as such children are positioned as agents in the present and the future where they can continue enjoying nature and the outdoors in their leisure time. They should develop the necessary skills and the wish to wander off in the woods and fields. In a discussion on White Paper (St.meld.no.39(2000-1)) in Stortinget (the Norwegian Parliament), one Member of Parliament maintained that experiencing and spending time in nature and the outdoors is a value in itself and will give a greater value and quality to people’s lives (see 3.2.2). The same parliamentarian added that closeness to nature is a shared value, which is an important part of being Norwegian and a natural part of our children’s upbringing (Nilsen, 2008:44-45). According to research by Moser and Martinsen (2011, cited in

Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012), Norwegian barnehage children on average spend quite some time outdoors, about 70 per cent during the summer and 31 per cent of the time outdoors in the winter. The outdoor areas of the barnehage are spatially important for physical activities, play and learning. In the FPCTK, as well as generally in Norwegian Early Childhood Education, learning and developmental opportunities in a stimulating and rich outdoor environment are emphasised as being beneficial to the child (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012:103). The same importance of being outdoors is expressed by many Norwegian parents who seem to believe that “happy children are children playing outside most of the day irrespective of season and weather (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie 2003, cited in Nilsen 2008). Children in natur- og friluftsbarnhager spend relatively more time outdoors and the content has a clearer focus on nature and outdoor environment, knowledge about nature and sensory motor experiences (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012:75).

Nilsen’s description of the robust child subject is constructed between children and adults, but also among children.

“The robust child signifies competence in this context and expresses adult expectations and challenges, which the children both encounter and participate in. These reflect practices and values at work in everyday life in nature, including physical and mental aspects, as well as knowledge, which are interwoven and coloured by endurance, resilience and vigour. In addition, a rational child subject, acting independently with agency, feeds into constructions of a robust child subject” (sic. ibid. 2008).

The robust child subject can endure long walks or skiing trips and put up with getting tired, cold and wet without complaining. When falling, the child is encouraged to get up quickly and the adult will tell the child that everything is fine and move on: “det går bra, kom igjen!” (this goes well – come on!). Vigorous activities in the cold snow are accepted and even enjoyed as part of physically challenging rough play. The robust child subject learns from experience to use the extra shifts of gloves and an extra jersey in the backpack in order to keep warm while outdoors. In addition you have to keep active to keep warm, and rough-and-tumble play is encouraged by adults, and they will often participate. The robust child subject is not a child that whines. If whining, the child does not meet the expectations of the competent child who is independent and self-sufficient. The whining child has to learn to express her needs verbally and not just whine and victimize herself. The child is encouraged to find other strategies, be an active agent and find solutions. In her descriptions of the robust child subject, Nilsen refers to research in a nature and outdoor barnehage. However, most Norwegians will recognize the construction of the robust child from their own upbringing and from raising their own children.

The robust child subject still seems to be the dominating childhood discourse in the Norwegian culture, and the natural consequence is to allow and encourage what is referred to as *risky play*, which I will deal with next.

3.3.3 Play involving risks

In her research among children and staff in Norwegian barnehage, Sandseter (2007) has defined six categories of play that all have a real probability of causing injury or harm, enable children to test and explore boundaries, on the borderline of being out of control and also play to try out something new or to overcome fear (ibid.:241). The six categories are:

1) *Play with great heights*, implying a real danger of falling down, e.g. from trees, rocks, roofs etc.; 2) *Play with high speed*, i.e. uncontrolled speed and pace which might lead to collisions, e.g. when skiing, bicycling, or sliding on ice/snow.; 3) *Play with dangerous tools*, like whittling or carving with knives, using axes, saws or other sharp or pointed tools. 4) *Play near dangerous elements*, where children can fall into a fire or fall from a rock or similar into deep water, or play in a stream or lake. 5) *Rough-and-tumble play*, like wrestling or play-fighting where children can harm each other; and finally 6) *Play where children can get lost or disappear* into the woods or other areas where there are no fences (ibid.: 243-247).

Taking risks while playing seems to be a natural part of growing up for children. They seek the exhilaration of exploring and challenging their own boundaries and meeting with their own fear. Risky play then is an ambivalent activity, because the emotions it causes are that of exhilaration and of fear. The emotions experienced are thus both positive and negative. The arousal of excitement felt by experiencing and mastering the situation is mixed with the emotion of fear. Sandseter (2010) found that children would withdraw from situations where fear became the dominant emotion. Simultaneously, it was the added feeling of fear that kept the children in the activity and added more joy and pleasure into the play. The children keep searching for this balance, and “Scary-funny” is therefore an expression she uses to describe these sensations in the children (ibid.:98-100). Each child will have different perceptions of what is risky, based on individual competencies and skills and previous experiences of accidents, or how rewarding the risks are. In addition, each child’s personality and emotions will influence the child’s perception. The objective risk involved will consist of environmental characteristics and the individual child’s own risk perception, and this will vary from child to child and situation to situation (ibid.:99). The environmental characteristics prove to be most decisive in influencing on children’s play. It consists of the physical affordance of the playground or the place in nature the play takes place, like surface, heights, steepness and other features in the environment. Simultaneously, there are cultural

frameworks consisting of rules and regulations for playgrounds which vary from country to country (ibid.:101). In addition, the staff in the barnehage have their own individual risk perceptions which will influence on what situations they will intervene with. Parents have their own risk perceptions along with the staff. How the adults respond to the children's engagement in risk-taking while playing, will work as filter for what kind of activities the children will take part in or are allowed to take part in (ibid.:104).

3.3.4 Overprotection and monitoring versus outdoor play and challenging activities

There is growing concern in the North countries on the tendency of overprotecting children, of monitoring every step they take and eradicate any elements that theoretically could cause any harm (Sandseter, 2009:94). Children are given less and less freedom to roam outdoors, and they are only allowed to stay in areas monitored by adults or take part in organized activities. Fear of strangers, bullying, cars and physical harm are reasons given to explain this obsession with controlling the children's whereabouts (Guldborg, 2009:32-35). This concern hampers the children's needs to encounter risk and learn to manage it and to be in an on-going process of "becoming at home in the world" (Smith, 1998 cited in Sandseter, 2009:94). According to Apter (2007) it is a part of "children's nature" to explore the world around them through play, both themselves and their environment. They will try out risky activities and find out what is risky and what is safe, and by these activities they will improve their perception of risk and also help them to master risky situations. Children's physical activities, including risky play, will have a positive effect on their physical fitness and even influence on their health as adults (cited in Sandseter, 2009:94). The overprotected lifestyle of children may lead to a more sedate life as more children spend time on indoor activities which do not encourage physical activity (Guldborg, 2009:34). This might have a deteriorating health effect on the children, e.g. by an increase in obesity. Guldborg refers to figures in Britain and the USA which show that only a small percentage of primary school children walked or cycled on their own to school (ibid.:34). Clemets (2004) conducted a study in the USA which shows that children do not play outdoors as much as their mothers' generation. Eighty per cent of the mothers admitted their children played less often outdoors than they did themselves. Only thirty-one per cent of their own children played outdoors every day. When the mothers were young they would also spend more hours playing outdoors than their children did (cited in Guldborg, 2009:35). In addition to safety concerns, the structured life of children throughout the day from a very early age prevent them from getting access to outdoor and unmonitored play (ibid:36-39).

In Norway, the cultural frame of “the robust child subject” already accounted for, gives the children great opportunities for involving in risky play, and they are encouraged to move around on their own and find their own spaces to play in. Minority parents might conceive this as irresponsible, frightening or appropriate depending on their own perceptions of risk, but also based on expectations of what children should do during the day in a barnehave. This leads to the second part of this chapter where I will account for other constructions of childhoods, and how the discourses in the North from the time of the Enlightenment influence conceptions of children and childhood in many parts of the world.

3.4 Many perspectives of children and childhood

The new paradigm within sociology that gradually emerged at the end of the 1970s is often referred to as the New Sociology of Childhood. Among some sociologists and anthropologists there was a lurking uneasiness about the dominant and mainstream theories within research. These mainstream theories were that of socialization within sociology and developmental psychology. The child in these theories was, what Jenks (1982:21) says, “abandoned”. Within the categories, the child was looked upon as unfinished, immature, incompetent and in the process of becoming an adult, which was the ultimate yardstick to be measured against.

3.4.1 Socialization theory

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) took up the Durkheim tradition and developed it further into the socialization theory where a hierarchical, top down system of norms and values and social structure should be internalized through the work of adults. The system would secure balance and harmony in society, and each individual should find his place and his role in this stable society, like cogs in machinery that help it run smoothly. The theory was seen as a natural universal model with no room for cultural or time differences. The perspective was adult centric. The child’s perspective was not relevant. It was a matter of adjusting to norms and values set, especially, by men in power, but also by adults in general. The adult was the active agent in society that would teach and influence the child to internalize the norms, values and expected behaviour in society. The child became passive and incompetent in the process (Jenks, 1982).

3.4.2 Developmental psychology

Jean Jacques Piaget (1896-1980) built up a theory referred to as cognitive development within the field of developmental psychology (Stainton Rogers, 2003b:13). Piaget saw the child as having potential to develop through various stages, from the sensory-motor stage of infants through to the ultimate aim of becoming a rational, operational adult that could join the group

of rationally thinking and objective scientists. The development of the child would take place through the process of assimilation, where new experience would be compared and added to existing schemata in the child, and this would lead to accommodation where the schemata would change. When the processes successfully completed, the child had adopted new knowledge and experience that would take the child to another stage on the line of development (Jenks, 1982; 2004).

For both mainstream theories, the research methods were those of positivism. It was the individual child that was the focus, researched in a, for the child, unfamiliar and alien situation. For both theories the assumption was that of innate, natural and universal perspective. The child as a universal concept was focused on, and the naturalness could be explained biologically – it was all in the child. The results of this perspective could, and were/are used to set a norm, a standard that any child regardless of where he or she lives, or what historical time they find themselves, can be measured against (Jenks, 1982; 2004).

3.4.3 Social studies of children and childhood

It is from this backdrop the new social studies of children and childhood emerge. The historian Ariès (1962) launched his ‘mind blasting’ ideas that childhood is not universal, but a social construct that has not been permanent, but has changed through time. He said that childhood (the concept) did not exist in the Middle Ages in the sense that childhood was different from adulthood. Children took part in all adult life and were not separated from the adult world. Ariès says this is a modern phenomenon that started when childhood became a time for education outside the home (Cunningham, 1995:31). There has been a lot of critique of his theory afterwards. However, the importance of his theory is that of an eye opener and perhaps a confirmation of the uneasiness felt by many scholars about the position of the child regardless of time, space and culture.

The new social studies of children and childhood recognize that childhood is a social and cultural construct and not a “natural” and universal concept. They represent a critique of the mainstream theory in that they also say children are worthy of studying in their own right, as are children’s social relations and their life worlds. Children’s social life should not be studied out of their real life context, as in a laboratory. Children are active social actors, they have agency, and influence their own lives and that of those around them. They are competent and full human beings with the same value as other human beings, i.e. adults. Childhood as a social construct differs according to historical time and geography, and there are many

childhoods, even if childhood may be studied as a social category within a specific historical context, for instance (Qvortrup, 2002:46).

3.5 Pre-sociological discourses

As already stated, discourse is a set of ideas and images that during time develop to a way of thinking and conceptualising, in this case, children and childhood. To be able to understand clearly what a certain discourse in society consists of, it is necessary to identify it, to deconstruct, or put apart concepts to understand the underlying theories, conceptualizations and ideas that are put together to form the discourse. It is this process that enabled the researchers within the new paradigm to disclose the hidden meanings and theories that i.e. socialization theory and developmental psychology built on, and what ideas, images and concepts they had of “the child” as previously mentioned. The modern view on childhood derives from two philosophers from the time of the Enlightenment, John Locke and Jean-Jacque Rousseau. These are still influencing our conception of children and childhood today in post-modern time. Our ways of explaining children’s behaviour and attempts to control the uncontrollable, or tame the very ones that resist these efforts, represent the necessary conditions for understanding the children (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998:8-9). In the process of deconstructing concepts of childhood historically, Rogers (2003b) accounts for three prominent discourses in the Western contexts that have had an impact on our view of children and our practices today. As such it is quite clear that the time aspect is important when studying these discourses.

3.5.1 The evil and wild child

In the Protestant Church the individual has to work on his own salvation by living a righteous and God fearing life. This includes self-discipline and keeping on the “narrow” path, making personal sacrifices by withstanding from indulging life, and live a pious life forsaking bodily and worldly temptations. This view was especially emphasised by groups of more zealous Protestants called the Puritans. Children were seen as born ignorant and as sinners, or evil and wild. Adults, i.e. parents, had to make sure that they were led on the right and narrow path through to salvation, and to discipline and constrain their anarchistic traits. In order to secure the children knowledge of God’s will to secure their salvation, education was established for all. Children’s lives changed from relative freedom to strict regimes in the homes and at school. They spent more time away from the parents, but also had a closer connection since there were so many restrictions as to what they were allowed to do, with whom and where.

3.5.1.1 The Puritan legacy on children's space and education today

Today the constant monitoring of children out of "improper" places where they can be corrupted by the dangers of bad company, for instance shopping malls or the streets, is the modern version. Space becomes important in restricting children's movements and the "safe" places are at school and at home or other designated spaces for children. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) discuss how spatiality and position of children are used for controlling and managing them: "*Schools provide an ordered temporal passage from child to adult*" (ibid:41). The curricula become more than the contents of the days and are more like "*[spatial] theories of cognitive and bodily development, and, as such, they contain a world view*" (ibid., citing Young 1971). They represent the power that is exerted through political and social structures shown in the choices, rules and conventions, but also in issues of children's personal identities, potential and philosophy of human nature. Foucault (1977) claims that the timetable, a legacy from the monasteries, forces certain rhythms, specific occupations and regulations of certain repetitions into the temporal and spatial framework of children's lives, both at school and at home. The same system is imposed on adult working life, in factories and other workplaces and constitutes the social control, which he refers to as the "*autonomy of power in Western culture*" (ibid., cited in James, Jenks & Prout, 1998:41-43).

Spatiality is used as a means of power to control and restrict children in their daily life and their experience of space. By placing children in classrooms in ordered rows one teacher can exercise discipline and control, but also use teaching facilities and organise the class into specific groups doing designated activities at designated times. Schools are criticised for not taking account of the spatial and temporal conditions of the child's school and home environment and therefore shapes particular educational identities instead of meeting the child's needs as coming from a specific context (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998:45). Children's play is also constrained spatially and temporally, and children learn many rules as to where and how to play instead of unrestricted, self-controlled play and social interaction with other children without adult supervision. Being confined to the home, the child has no areas where autonomy can be exercised as the home is under adult control. Childhood has become a temporal period which is spatially controlled both at home and in school (Ibid).

The legacy of the European school system and the Puritan view on children and childhood is still influencing education in many former colonies. This will be dealt with under the Post-Colonial Approach, 3.6.

3.5.2 The imminent child

The ‘tabula rasa’ discourse (meaning ‘blank slate’) is a discourse we can trace back to the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). He saw children as totally empty at birth, and all they became had been imprinted in them by adults. All skills, knowledge and competences had to be “written” onto the blank slate and contributed to “the making of them”. Children were “*inadequate precursors to the real state of a human being, which was adulthood*” (sic. Rogers, 2003:64). The aim was to educate the child into a rational and responsible man of high morals (Cunningham, 1992). Also, the main concern was boys, not girls. An important side of Locke’s theory was that the education itself did not have to be unpleasant. Educators should use methods that suited the age of the child.

Locke’s work has had an enormous impact on later generation’s view of children. I have accounted for the socialization theory of Parsons. There are clear parallels here to Locke’s view of the child as being empty needing to be imprinted, educated and developed before she can become a true and complete human being. The child is incomplete, in a process of becoming.

3.5.3 The innocent child

The Romantic discourse of the innocent child comes from Jean Jacque Rousseau’s idea about children being close to nature and in need of being in nature, their natural element. Rousseau was very influenced by Locke’s thinking around focusing on children by e.g. applying methods in teaching that were “child friendly”. Childhood should be a time of play and pleasure, life should be enjoyed and play was the appropriate and childlike activity (Cunningham, 1995:62-63). Nature was the natural teacher and children were God-like, pure and innocent creatures, close to God. They should be protected from the corruption of the adult world and in this sense be kept in special, child friendly places.

Rousseau’s view of childhood has influenced the Romantic discourse that is still influential in the North. As a direct consequence of this view, the lives of children changed from that of work to that of schooling, separated from the adult world of work. This is a generalisation, but in all countries in the North, laws and regulations were implemented to protect children from the harsh environments of work where they could be corrupted by adults. The proper place was at school. Children were seen as vulnerable, fragile and in need of protection and provisions, ideas that we today find in the UNCRC, a document that in many ways combines the three discourses discussed here.

3.5.4 Influence of north discourses in the global world

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the social studies of children and childhood have enabled us to understand the way our society has, and still sees children and childhood. By deconstructing mainstream theories we can see what views have dominated the research and the ideas in society. These ideas have developed during a long time and have taken various forms. Knowledge is not neutral, it influences the ways we think and the concepts we build. Knowledge influences the language we use and gives us power (Gullestad, 1989). From thinking that childhood is one thing and is a natural and universal phenomenon, we now understand that there are many childhoods, and that they change in time and place. It is especially important to understand that the theories based on seeing children and childhood as something universal are socially and culturally constructed. Due to earlier colonization of the American, Asian and African continents (also known as ‘the South’), the Western world (here referred to as ‘the North’), has had, and still has a dominant and powerful position globally. Many former colonies adopted educational and governing systems of the colonizer. Along with these systems the view of child/children and childhood as natural and universal phenomena has spread to countries and continents all over the world.

3.6 Post-colonial critique approach

The legacy of colonialism in structures, systems, cultural practices, ideas, language and mind-sets are still there (see 3.5.4). English or French, Portuguese and Dutch are languages used as a first language in many former colonies, depending on who the colonizers were. Many children around the world have these languages as the language of instruction, instead of their own local language. Culture is tightly attached to language, and there is continuous cultural influence from the former colonizers. There are many obvious post-colonial legacies, like legal and political systems, and school systems, which are relevant for this thesis as many minority parents come from former European colonies where the colonial school systems are more or less intact (Ansell, 2002:92) and where the *“Preschool curricula are often based on models from the West or are downward extensions of primary education”* (sic. Prochner & Kabiru 2008:126).

Referring to Macedo (1999), Viruru (2005) defends using post-colonial theory because of the many similarities between colonial ideologies and the ways subordinated groups in the Western cultures, like travellers, Roma and indigenous peoples and other groups have been treated (Viruru, 2005:10). There are many signals that other ethnic minority groups are treated by the same ideologies. There are a lot of unconscious and unspoken practices and ideas

among us all. When this is also the case in a barnehage, this becomes an ethical question that should be revealed and addressed. The post-colonial approach will therefore be useful to deconstruct these mind-sets among the parents, the staff and the children (Gjervan et al. 2012:54). Viruru maintains that the Western discourses about children and childhood still dominate the world of early childhood education. Ideas of linear progress and development, objectivity, universality and totalization represent the core of this dominance, in for instance the ideas of Piaget that all children develop in a universal, linear sequence to reach social and intellectual maturity (Dahlberg et al., 1999 cited in Viruru, 2005:15). Also “..[the]doctrine of children learning by doing, is interpreted more and more as justifying the need for material things in the classroom”(sic. Ibid:15). I believe the Nordic and Norwegian approach in *friluftsbarnhager*, with exposure to nature and the outdoors, where children get the opportunity to find their own play material in nature and create meaningful and self-directed social relationships with little adult supervised and monitored play, represents a binary to this “doctrine”.

In this chapter, I have accounted for various concepts and perspectives on which to base the theoretical approach and critical reflections. Firstly, I accounted for theories and cultural practices and dominating discourses concerning children and childhood in Norway. Secondly, the dominant theoretical perspectives and discourses in the North and how they have influenced and are still influencing children’s lives were presented. Due to colonialism these notions are also influential in other parts of the world, and therefore the perspectives of the post-colonial critique approach were included. All the perspectives will be useful in my approach to methodology, interpretation and analysis.

In the next chapter the methodology utilized for this research project will be accounted for.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the method I have used for my research project, as well as an outline of the challenges and processes involved throughout the research period. In order to gather information about the chosen phenomenon of interest, qualitative interview is chosen as research method. Utilizing in-depth interviews allows me to explore and collect data about minority parents' experiences and perceptions of Norwegian cultural practices of spending much time in nature and the outdoors in the barnehage context. In this chapter, I will first present the main research question and the interview guide before I go on to positioning myself as a researcher within the research field of minority parents in the Norwegian barnehage context. Secondly, I will give an outline of my field entry and sampling procedures and give a description of the samples. Thirdly, the process and various challenges of planning and carrying out the in-depth interviews will be accounted for, as well as reflections on the communication aspect of the interviews and the validity of the knowledge produced in the one parent and two parents interviews. I will then move on to give my ethical considerations before accounting for the process of transcribing and translating, from interview to written verbatim. Finally, I will outline the frame of analysis used to process the data collected.

4.1 Pre-position of the researcher

As a researcher you bring your whole life experience into the field of research. You become the main instrument in collecting and analyzing the data, and the lenses you see through are the background you have, your own life experience and theoretical knowledge. Miles (1979) says that by drawing on your understanding of how you see yourself and experience the world as a researcher, you are able to supplement and interpret the data that is produced in the interview. A researcher cannot fulfill the objectives in qualitative research "[...]without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in ways that are various and unpredictable" (cited in McCracken, 1988:18). Patton (2002) stresses the importance for the researcher to develop self-awareness. He says it is an asset in both fieldwork and analysis and is a way of "sharpening the instrument", i.e. the researcher (ibid:64). To secure transparency in the research project, it is therefore imperative to situate myself and my experiences within the field of research that has captured my interest.

Having the major part of expected life span behind me, my preposition as a researcher is many faceted. I grew up in a small village in the decades after WW2. Barnehage was not a commodity on the countryside when I grew up, but I worked as a barnehage intern for a year

before starting on my preschool teacher training. I have practiced this profession for a year in an ordinary barnehage and five years as a music teacher for preschool children in a music school. My further experience with barnehage in Norway was as a mother of two children, and this has given me the perspective as a barnehage parent. With this background I believe my researcher lenses are coloured by the inside perspective of a typically Norwegian childhood both outside and inside the barnehage institution, where nature and the outdoors were natural ingredients.

My university studies in music, English, religions - life philosophies & ethics have given me valuable insight into other ways of thinking, of other life perspectives, of the diversity of expressions and of human spirituality and could have an influence on my encounter and interviews with the respondents and further analysis of the data. I have worked internationally with teacher and student exchange, and I have had the privilege of spending longer periods in other countries in Europe, Oceania and Africa, experiences where I have had time to live in various cultural contexts, experiences that are valuable in this research project, where a meeting with respondents is simultaneously a meeting with other cultural backgrounds. During one of these periods abroad, I have had the experience of being a minority parent myself with children in national primary and secondary schools.

Six years ago I came back to the field of early childhood education as international coordinator at a university college of early childhood education. Incoming and outgoing students brought their experiences about early childhood education within Norway and in European and African countries. I have learnt that larger parts of the Norwegian barnehage practice are immensely different from the practices in other countries. My visits to many partner institutions in Higher Education also took me to EC settings, and all this has given me a richer insight into different practices, views on children and childhood, and the transmission of values in child rearing. These lenses to see through are valuable for me in this research project and will help me in the process of understanding and identifying some of the various backgrounds the respondents come from, with the values and views that are prominent in these contexts. They have influenced the choices I have made in designing the main research question, interview guide and the methodology best suited to find answers to my research question.

My life from the age of seventeen has been lived in a cultural intersection of what is Norwegian and regarded as “normal” and “natural” and taken for granted, and what is not. My

non-Norwegian spouse and I have raised two children in what could at times be described as a cultural mine field, something that has continuously made me aware of how easily “we” take things for granted and expect “the others” to adjust to what is “normal”, “natural and “self-evident” (Gullestad, 2002). It has opened my eyes to the positions of the “foreigner” or the representatives of the minorities in Norway in their inevitable encounter with the “this is typically Norwegian” attitude from the majority (a phrase, I claim, for Norwegians in itself carries a strong meaning of something positive). All the years of these experiences have helped develop some other perspectives in me on what it means to be a minority in Norway, and they will be of help in understanding the experiences of minority parents at a deeper level.

4.2 Access to the field and sampling procedures

The sampling of data was carried out in a city in Norway in the period between March and June 2012. Due to my work within early childhood education, I have contacts in barnehager. The criteria for sampling were: 1) They were minority parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background with children in a *natur og friluftsbarnehage* (nature and outdoors barnehage); 2) The parents should not be in a mixed marriage, with a non-Scandinavian and a Norwegian. This was to avoid a possible power inequality from a parent of the majority culture in the rearing of children, which I know from my own experience is unavoidable. My initial intention was to interview non-Scandinavian parents or minority parents from *natur og friluftsbarnehage* which I considered having the most “extreme” approach to spending time outdoors in all kinds of weather. I had to reconsider this during the procedure of sampling, something I will come back to later.

I sent emails to three preschool teachers in barnehager with this particular focus. I was successful in one where they had three children, but in the two others they either had no children of a minority background this year, or the one(s) they had had moved to another part of the city and changed barnehage. I tried the snowball effect and asked one of the lecturers teaching on the bachelor programme with focus on nature and the outdoors if he knew any outdoor barnehage where there were children with a minority background. Through this approach, I got in contact with one more *natur og friluftsbarnehage* with minority children.

I attached the *Information Letter to Parents* (see Appendix 1) and *Consent Formula for Parents* (see Appendix 2) to emails to the directors of the two barnehager and asked them to give these to the parents. I visited both barnehager, spent some hours in the morning in one of them when the parents arrived, and this way had a first personal contact. I visited the other

barnehage as well and met with the director and two preschool teachers who all got the two letters to give to the potential parent respondents. Despite email reminders and agreements to recruit parents for interviews with translators for two of three possible parents of minority children, I ended up with parents of one child.

I started phoning several natur og friluftsbarnhager. Most of them had no children of minority background, one had three. I contacted the one with the three children, got the email address of the director and sent the information letter and consent formula for parents as attachments to the email. Despite several reminders to the barnehage I was not successful in recruiting these parents. Eventually, I had to accept that doing sampling in this kind of barnehage proved to be difficult. As a consequence I had to change the criteria for the sampling of respondents. The natur og friluftsbarnhager seem from my experience to attract very few children from a minority background. This is in accordance with the findings of Emilsen (2005). I drew the conclusion that, generally, all children in barnhager in Norway spend more time outdoors in “all kinds of weather” than I have learnt they do in most other countries. The only change in the criteria for selecting respondents was that the minority parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background could come from any barnehage in this country.

Very early in this process I had got access, both as oral commitment and in writing, from one of the pedagogical consultants of a barnehage with many children with the background I was after, and I knew I would have many potential respondents in there.

I visited this barnehage some hours in the morning, spoke to staff in two classes and got to meet some potential respondents who were also given the information and consent formulas. Parents of five children gave their consent to participating. During the interview process I had a meeting at another barnehage with many minority parents. When I told about my research project, they were willing to ask parents to take part as respondents, and I gave them the information and consent formulas. The parents of one child contacted me by email and volunteered to participate.

By now I had parents of 10 children who had their children in four barnhager in the same city. This group of parents represents the sample of my research. My intention of having a purposeful sample for the project was met, because the parents were all of a minority background with children in a barnehage in Norway. All parents were informed about my

project and the theme before they volunteered to participate, and they had all signed the consent form and given contact detail so I could easily contact them to agree on a suitable time for the interview.

4.2.1 The sample

The parents come from various countries in Africa, Asia, North America and Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Some parents represent a mixture of national backgrounds with parents from two countries, or they were born and raised in one country to a certain age and then moved to another country. The cultural backgrounds can be summed up as Canadian, Dutch, German, Polish, Italian, Pakistani, Tanzanian, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Rwandan and Congolese. Of the 10 children, 14 parents took part in the interviews, i.e. 4 couples participated. Of the 6 children whose parents were represented by one, there were 3 mother and 3 fathers. One child has a Norwegian parent, but the parents are not living together and even live in different parts of the country. I have therefore chosen to include this parent in the sample, since the daily influence by the Norwegian parents is not present.

The age range of the parents is from mid twenty to above fifty year with half of them in their forties. The time they have spent in Norway varies from 6 months to 21 years. The children are from two and a half to five years of age. Some of the parents have more children in the barnehave. Since many of the parents are students, there is an overweight of parents with an academic background. Some parents who “tagged along” with their spouse, were not in paid employment at the time, but have a professional background within education or the health services. Other parents worked within health services, the restaurant and hotel or building industry. The immigrant group representing the largest numbers coming into Norway the past few years, the Polish is represented in the study.

4.3 Research Interviews

The method utilized in data collection for my research project is individual semi-structured research interview. This method has proved to be useful to learn about a phenomenon where experiences of cultural practices in barnehave are in focus (Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008). The research interview is a professional interview different from ordinary social interaction in a conversation in that it is planned, it implies using special interview techniques in posing questions and a specific approach with focus on a phenomenon, and it requires some previous knowledge about the theme (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009:24). Patton (2002) says: *“The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as*

directly as possible for ourselves. This leads to the importance of [...] in-depths interviews" (ibid:106). The research interview is an active form of interviewing where both the interviewee, or respondent, and the interviewer are interacting in a give-and-take process. The two-way communication allows information to flow both ways, and in this interaction knowledge is produced that can shed light on the phenomenon that is being researched. According to Holstein & Gubrium (2004) the respondent goes through a transformation from being a subject into becoming part of the process, and both parties are constantly developing throughout the interview in a joint activity of constructing, interpreting and reinterpreting knowledge to produce meaning (ibid:121). The main research question implies that the knowledge the researcher is after can be found among minority parents in Norway with children in a barnehage. The purpose of the interview with minority parents in my project is to produce knowledge, and as such it reflects the emphasis of postmodern philosophy on knowledge being socially constructed. There is both informal and formal communication in the interview situation, and this is necessary to better understand and explain the knowledge that is produced. With two or three strangers meeting, informal talk was natural to use for all to feel at ease with the situation and to introduce the topic before starting on the more formal interview. The interview situation was a suitable setting for communication about the minority parents' experiences of having their children in a Norwegian barnehage with a cultural practice of spending a large part of the day in nature and the outdoors. The parents displayed great interest in the topic and willingly shared their experiences. The topic affected their children's and their own daily lives.

4.3.1 Main research question

After carefully considering what the scope of the research project would be, the main research question emerged: *'How do parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background experience having their children in a Norwegian "barnehage" where spending time in nature and the outdoors represents an important part of the barnehage programme?'*

4.3.2 Interview guide, structure and process of semi-structured interviews

To use qualitative research interview as a method takes a lot of planning. Knowledge about the area for the research is a prerequisite to identify the scope of the field. In order to cover the various aspect of the phenomenon of the parents' experiences to get in-depth knowledge, several sub-questions were needed and an interview guide was designed. The interview guide became a useful tool for several reasons: a) it ensured that the interviews were kept within the scope of interest; b) it created a path to follow for the questions without forcing a particular

order of questions to be asked; and c) it gave some security that no subthemes were forgotten or left out. When occasionally there was a ‘topic gliding or topic sliding’, the subthemes in the interview guide were useful, to get back to the focus topic of the interview. This way, it helped creating the needed distance for both parties (Mc Cracken, 1988:40). It was especially during the interviews where both parents were present, that the topics had a tendency to glide away into digressions, and for them, familiar discussions or disagreements.

The following subthemes in the interview guide cover the scope of themes which were needed to illuminate the parents’ experiences of the phenomenon in question: 1) Parents’ meeting with the phenomenon of spending time outdoors in the barnehage and their knowledge about it; 2) Challenges they assumed were connected to spending time outdoors in all kinds of weather in Norway; 3) What necessary knowledge, skills and/or understanding they had to meet the Norwegian cultural practice of spending time outdoors, how they considered the play activities more frequently seen outdoors referred to as ‘risky play’, and whether they would have chosen a different barnehage had they known more on beforehand; 4) If they share the notion that staying in nature gives the children a sense of belonging, and whether this is important to them; 5) If their minority background was met with acceptance by the majority Norwegian cultural practice; 6) Possible changes in family practices from the barnehage experience; and finally: 7) What, if given the opportunity, they would change in the practice of using the outdoors and nature in the barnehage context (see Appendix 3).

4.3.3 Structure and process of semi-structured interviews

To collect the data, a semi-structured interview was carried out. As informed in the information sheet to the parents, I recorded all the interviews on an MP3 player. This enabled me as a researcher to be fully present as a communication partner in the in-depth interviews. As the word “semi-structured” indicates, there was not a strict order in which all the sub-questions to my research question were asked or answered. I started the interview by introducing my main research question to help setting the stage with focus on the phenomenon. I would introduce the various topics (see 4.3.1 above) in open questions to allow the respondents to elaborate on their experiences and would pose follow-up questions. If the respondent gave answers that naturally led to one of my other questions, or touched themes within the scope of the interview guide, but did not come in “the right order”, I followed up on what the respondent commented on. During the interviews, I was very conscious of letting the interviewee get the time and space to tell his or her views and to encourage by nodding and coming with encouraging utterances and showing interest in what

was said without interrupting. All the same, I did not only let the respondent talk, but frequently asked for elaboration on opinions and experiences, or asked questions when something was unclear to me. This way the research interview allowed me to go in-depth into how minority parents experience the cultural phenomenon in focus so as to be able to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon of my research project and to be sure that the knowledge was valid in that it was correctly understood (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:3/14).

4.3.4 Factors affecting dynamics of communication

The major challenge in my research project is that of language. None of the participants were native Norwegians; most of them could communicate in English, but not all. One parent could not speak English but had learnt enough Norwegian to communicate on a basic level. In a joint effort we managed to understand each other throughout the interview by searching for the right words together. Some parents spoke neither Norwegian nor English, and I needed the help of a translator for the interviews to take place. Only one had English as the only mother tongue. Most people would have mother tongue interference when communicating in a second language, so all interviews in English required that the interviewees would make sense of my Norwegian–English, and I had to try to understand Tanzanian, Ghanaian, Rwandan, Pakistani, Nigerian, Dutch and Italian -English. In two interviews I used a translator. None of these interviewees could speak English. One of the interviewees could not speak any Norwegian due to this parent's short stay in the country; two other parents could not communicate well enough in Norwegian. There is always a danger that the presence of a translator makes the respondent(s) more self-conscious as they might be worried that a translator could reveal private matters to others from the same country (Burr, 1999, cited in Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008:18). By using a translator, I had less control of the formulation of the questions, but the translator was given the interview guide as a support and understood the necessity of only translating what was said. I could not understand anything of the response, something that made the dynamics of the communication very difficult. It was impossible to respond immediately to what was said. I would not understand the tone of voice and would have to rely on the translator that everything was translated. But the nuances would not easily be caught, and so follow up questions came a long time after what had been said. But I tried to interpret facial and body expressions. Also, in one family the parents talked a lot and started discussions among them without making space for the translator to translate what had been said. On two occasions, I had to stop the flow of speech and tell the translator that she had to translate what was said. Since I felt I only got the short version, more like a summary, of what was said, and it was not specified always who was responsible for saying what, I later asked

the translator to transcribe the whole interview and translate it into either English or Norwegian, whatever language she was most comfortable with.

Finding a suitable time for the interviews proved in some cases to be a problem because the parents were busy working and studying and I have a fulltime job. In e-mail communication before the interviews, I suggested various settings for the actual interview: at the barnehave, at their home, at their office, at the university or at my office. I indicated what times I could do the interviews and asked them to tell me where they preferred to have the interview, and at what time. One set of parents chose the barnehave of their child, one chose for my office, two took place at offices of the parents and the rest of the interviews took place in the parents' homes.

Using the barnehave for the interview was like being on equal grounds. Both parties were "guests" and simultaneously felt at home, because we for different reasons had a connection to the place, the parents through their child, I through visiting exchange students many times. Meeting at my office was a secure place for me, but for the parent it was a new environment. However, we met and had some informal conversation before we came to the office, as I fetched the parent from a certain place, and after the interview, drove this parent to the city centre. I felt I could compensate for the inconvenience for the parent of coming all the way to my work place. Parents of small children and many children have a lot to organize, and the interview was interrupted a couple of times by telephone calls where the fetching of the children at school or barnehave had to be rearranged. Coming to the offices of two parents during working hours felt like intruding in their busy work, but I was warmly welcomed and had been waited for. One of the parents had told me off on the phone some days before because of a misunderstanding. The parent thought I was having a telephone interview that would last about 45 minutes, and I was told that I could not require people to sit for such a long time in a phone call. We could laugh about this when we met for the interview. The rest of the interviews took place at the parents' homes, two during daytime, two in the afternoon and two in the evening after the children were in bed. Entering somebody's home is going into the private sphere of people. They opened up for a total stranger and generously shared their life experiences while trying to organize their everyday life simultaneously. In three of the homes there were other persons present. In one family the pregnant mother was bedridden in an adjacent bedroom and needed some attention from the father from time to time. The child had a terribly bad cold, and alternated between staying in the room where the interview took place and going to her mother's. She often needed attention from the father for blowing

her nose or having something hot or cold to drink. The communication between father/husband and wife and child was in their own language and was not translated as both the translator and I felt it was part of their private life that we had “intruded”. Another home had their teenage sibling present in addition to the barnehage child. As such, the interview at times could be seen as a focus group interview, because both the teenager and the child responded to what was being discussed, either by discussing what was said and adding information (teenager), or by screaming out loud (the child). The parents mostly laughed at her loudness and said that the child did not like that they talked about her and what she did in the barnehage. There were frequent interruptions where the parents had to attend to the youngest child, and the interview was the longest of all, also because the interview had to be translated. One parent was at home with a baby, and had to attend to and feed the baby during the interview.

All these situations gave me an insight into parts of their everyday life. As a guest in their homes, I was seated where they asked me to sit, and the parents were in control of the situation. I was served water or coffee and in two places biscuits or cake, and there was always some small talk before the interview started. There was always a clear beginning of the interview where I would give some background information on my reasons for researching this particular phenomenon and, as previously mentioned, I would read my research question as an introduction to the interview itself.

In the first interview I had, both parents came, although I had not expected that. This interview I first considered as a pilot project. I had initially planned to use another tool for the parents, a ranking list of their opinions on the cultural practice of spending a lot of time outdoors, from positive to negative sides of it. But already during the interview, I decided not to use it, as it would not add anything to the research and would rather interfere in the flow of the interview. After this first attempt I realized that I wanted to add more themes to the interview guide to fully cover all aspects of the cultural practice, that of risky play. I later found that I needed the parents as respondents and arranged a second interview to cover the full scope of questions in the complete interview guide. The second time only one parent could come. Interestingly, the parent now had more experience from being a parent with a child in a Norwegian barnehage and could tell more about own development into this role three months after the first interview, when the child had been only some weeks in the barnehage.

4.3.5 Process of transcribing: from spoken source to written text

The data of my research consists of 11 recordings on an MP3 player and own notes after some of the interviews and from informal conversations with two principals and three pedagogical leaders in the barnehager. The verbatim transcriptions are of all interviews, except one of the two interviews where the translator was present. I had her simultaneous translation into Norwegian during the interview on tape, which I transcribed. One other interview is a transcript of the translated interview plus verbatim transcription translated into Norwegian. Together with the translator's transcription of the full interview, the content of the interview and who said what has come through more clearly, and I got the full understanding of the dynamics of the interview. All together the verbatim transcriptions consist of 167 pages of text plus 29 pages of translations.

In the information letter to potential respondents, I had estimated the interview to take between 30-45 minutes. In reality, the interviews lasted between 42 minutes and 1 hour and 32 minutes, the two longest where both parents were present and where there were many digressions and discussions between the parents and/or translation of what was said.

In the analyzing chapters, I use direct citations of the parents that are extracted from the written transcriptions, but where necessary I have written the citations in grammatically more correct English. Where I use citations from the interviews conducted in Norwegian or translated into Norwegian I have translated them into English for the purpose of being consistent in the use of language in my thesis. Also, I do not see the need to expose incorrect language since most of my interviewees used a second language.

In oral conversations, there are lots of utterances used to show approval, astonishment, disapproval and the like in addition to small pauses. I have used a lot of "yah" and "oh" and other utterances, but have not always included these in the transcriptions since they made no difference in the message of the interviewees. However, where there is a lot of this it is included. Pauses are indicated by ".....". In many situations humour and irony were used in the sharing of the parents' experiences, and there is quite a bit of laughing in some of the interviews. In some cases it was difficult to know if the laughing was real, or if it was general insecurity or a personality trait. Where I have interpreted the laughing as real laughter, I have transcribed "hahahaha", and where there is a bit of smiling followed by "smaller" laughter "he he" is used, the number of "ha"s and "he"s depending on the length or heartiness of it. When

using quotes in the analysis chapter I write “(laughs)”, and where I have cut out words or sentences [...] is used.

4.4 Ethical considerations

During the entire research, ethical considerations have been prominent from the stage of narrowing down to the topic, to planning the project, gathering data and to analyzing, verifying and reporting, something that is also recommended by Kvale & Brinkmann (2009:68). Some ethical considerations have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the following I will deal with the formal ethical considerations such as authorization and the storing and processing of data, informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and various sides of power asymmetry.

4.4.1 Authorization

There are national ethical guidelines to adhere to, and since I would record the interviews, store transcriptions and collect information about nationality and age, I sent my project plan and interview guide to the ethical review board of The Norwegian Social Science Services (NSD) for approval, something I was granted (Appendix 4). All information stored is coded, and personal data given by the respondents are kept separated in accordance with the requirements. The personal data was collected at the beginning of the interview and worked as an ice-breaker. Since I am using a translator who will also write verbatim transcriptions, we have signed an own agreement for processing data according to NSD guidelines.

4.4.2 Informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity

From the very first contact with the parents, they were given the information about my project including my main research question (Appendix 1) and the consent formula (Appendix 2). This states that the participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw if they wanted. One father withdrew because of restricted time, but his wife took his place and signed the consent formula as well. The participants all signed the consent formula before I contacted them using contact details they gave on the consent formula. As also informed on the consent formula, all interviews are audio recorded, and all parents gave their consent to having the interview recorded. To make sure my role as a student should be clear, I opened a new email account outside my work-related email account. Contact by sms was also used, especially if there were sudden changes in the appointments. All my informants are adults, and I did not have to go through other gatekeepers for approval. My project is not a high-risk project where medical or sensitive personal issues would be revealed. Nevertheless, it is important for the

participants to know that their confidence is not in any way misused, and that their anonymity is granted. In reporting my findings, I will therefore not use names of the barnehager the parents have their children in or use any names of the parents, just refer to “father”, “mother” or “parent”. The children’s names are all anonymized. I sometimes refer to one type of barnehage the parents have their children, the nature and outdoor barnehage.

Parents with a European and North-American countries are referred to as parents from *the North* and *the East*, whereas parents from African countries and Pakistan are referred to as coming from *the South*.

4.4.3 Power asymmetry

Even though my informants are all adults, and you could assume that we are meeting in a conversation on relatively equal terms, this is not the case. There is a clear power asymmetry in the interview situation where I as a researcher have control over the direction of the interview, the kinds of questions that will be asked and the content of the questions. I am also the one that later interprets the meaning of what is said (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008:33). In addition, I am old enough to be the parent of most of my interviewees (not all, though), and I come from Norway and have so much experience related to the topic from growing up here. On the other hand, these issues might have contributed to making it easier to talk about the issues because I, in my questions, could take the genuine role of someone who could imagine that there were challenges in meeting the cultural demands in a new country, also based on my own family history. However, I do not lure myself into thinking that my interviewees and I are on equal terms.

Having the children present was an ethical challenge, because at least one of the children demonstrated loudly that she did not like her parents to talk about her and what she did in the barnehage. There was little I could do here, as the time and place for the interview were suggested by the parents. During parts of the interview the child was taken outdoors by the older sibling.

In one family I got the impression that they wanted to show me that they could live up to the Norwegian cultural demand of spending lots of time in nature and the outdoors. They wanted to show that they were committed and active parents. During the interview, family photos were shown on the TV screen, and there were many references to all the excursions and trips they had had. At the end of the interview, as I was leaving the house, I was asked “what do

you think of our family, is it good?’. There is always a danger that the interviewees tell you what they think you want to know and this has been experienced by other researchers (Abebe, 2009:458). Still, I do not think that the knowledge produced during the interview would have been much different if they did not feel they had to show their activity level, because they obviously were very active outdoor people.

4.5 Data processing and analysis

The process of analyzing qualitative data is continuously going on throughout the project period, from the research question is formulated and clarified till the process of writing the report of the findings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:158). Designing the interview guide has been developed through a back and forth process between theory, own experiences, former research and ideas, and through writing up. The way my interview guide with its topics is put together constitutes the framework for transcriptions and as a consequence, also the analyzing of the data. The researcher has to read and re-read the data until theories are emerging. Data become material to think with (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:158). I developed coding schemes as the first step in analyzing the contents of transcribed interviews (Patton, 2002:463). This became useful in finding categories and finally, concepts that emerged in the transcriptions. Some of the categories that appeared in the material were climate, clothing, equipment, expenses, discourses around children and childhood and children’s academic learning.

The concept of “culture” and its cultural practices within the discourses emerged as a good analytic tool (Gullestad 1989; 1990; 2001; 2002). Appearing from the interviews, two main categories of the patterns for behavior were identified. One was the climate and the cultural practices related to it. The second category was the expectations of the children’s learning and the approach to this in the Norwegian cultural context in the barnehage. There are three other analytic concepts or tools that have been useful in analyzing the interviews with the minority parents: adaption, reciprocity and resistance. In addition, other theoretical reflections I am drawing on are the theoretical perspectives from the field of sociology of childhood (James & James 2008; Jenks 1982; 2004); the theories of cultural practices and dominant discourses concerning Norwegian view on children and childhood (Ibid.; Kjørholt 2008; Nilsen 2008) and risky play (Sandseter 2007; 2010).

The experiences of the minority parents in my sample are in meeting with discourses of cultural practices. These discourses are expressed in communicative language and all

interviews are therefore discursive in nature (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:155). Discourse analysis focuses on action, on how things are done, e.g. on practice here and now. The analyzing method has been useful in identifying the discourses at work. Discourses in play of cultural practices can often lead to dynamics like confrontations between the different discourses (Ibid :158). The discourses influencing the various interviewees can both cross and touch each other, or they can either exclude or ignore each other (Ibid.:226). The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to explore how the minority parents in my sample experienced the cultural practice in Norwegian barnehage of spending a lot of time in nature and the outdoors. In my analyses, it is what is said that has the primary position, not what might be the hidden attitudes or cognitive processes beyond language and action (Ibid: 228).

In the next two chapters the data will be presented and discussed according to the two main categories, *climate* and *learning*. I will analyze the material by having the particular conceptual view of the analytical concepts *culture*, *adaption*, *reciprocity* and *resistance*.

CHAPTER FIVE: PLEASURES AND CHALLENGES IN NATURE AND THE OUTDOORS

This chapter is the first of two chapters where I will present and discuss how the minority parents experience that their children spend lots of time in nature and the outdoors in all kinds of weather in the Norwegian barnehage. The focus of the chapter will be the pleasures and challenges the minority parents meet with their children when encountering this Norwegian cultural expectation, and practice which might challenge their own practices. The climate is the first challenge the parents meet.

As discussed in chapter three, nature and the outdoors play an important role in Norwegian and Scandinavian culture, where nature is one of the central cultural values. In the dominant Norwegian cultural discourse of nature and outdoor life, spending time in nature is important for people's well-being (Gullestad, 1990, see 3.2.5). In most regions with a warmer climate than the Norwegian, people would spend a majority of the time outdoors and in nature⁴, because there is no "indoors" as a father from the South says:

"[I] was born in nature and I grew up in nature, because there isn't a place I could go and there was not nature. And there isn't activities I could do that isn't associating with nature. There is [not] any play I could play without associating with nature. And what you call it: indoor.. we don't have indoor back home. We don't have indoor."

However, the symbol and value nature is given, and the relation to the outdoors might be different from the Norwegian cultural discourse. Gullestad (1989) says that the translation of meaning of symbols can be different among people. Meeting unfamiliar weather conditions, the consequences for their children's clothing and worries about their health and well-being are issues that were brought up among the parents in the sample and will be discussed here. Simultaneously, the parents keep referring to how happy and comfortable their children are under the same conditions, and the pleasures they take in sharing some of their children's experiences, once they try to do that. The minority parents are influenced by dominating discourses in their own cultures and meet with dominating discourses influencing the cultural practices of the staff and other parents representing the majority. The minority and majority all bring their expectations for the practices into the barnehage (see chapter two and three).

This chapter will be organized into six parts: 1) The analytic concepts that are used. 2) The Norwegian climate and the challenges it brings with it in terms of spending time outdoors at

⁴ The way I understand the use of 'nature' here has references to the outdoors in general as opposed to the indoors.

all, as well as the necessity of accustoming the children to the climate at an early age. 3) The challenges of providing appropriate clothes for their children, and the expenses involved in buying clothes and equipment. 4) The influence the exposure (a concept used by some parents) to nature and the outdoors has on the children's and the families' activities during the family time they spend at home in the weekends and the holidays. 5) How the parents experience the climate, on the one hand, as a health risk, or, on the other hand, as a potential for children to develop a healthy body, and finally, 6) The parents' experience with risky play.

5.1 Analytical concepts

In this part I will clarify the analytical concepts I will make use of in my analysis and discussion.

5.1.1 Culture

Chapter three contains the theories and dominant cultural practices and the dominant discourses concerning Norwegian children and childhood. According to Marianne Gullestad, *culture* is all cultural action. Implied in this understanding is that the home and everyday life form our life world which is the un-thematized knowledge, experience and communication that link the study of everyday life to various forms of cultural analysis (Gullestad, 1989:25, see 3.2). I concentrate on one aspect of this concept, *patterns for behavior* which refers to our ideas, values, symbols and patterns of thinking, and are continuously being created and recreated between people in interaction (Ibid:37, see 3.2). From the interviews with the parents, it appears that they are trying to make sense of the new culture in a for them, alien environment. They have to make choices how to respond to the expectations of the dominant culture, to what is communicated as requirements from the Norwegian culture. This leads to the second analytical concept, which I will account for in the next paragraph.

5.1.2 Adaptation

Adaptation, and maybe also "the struggle to adapt" to the Norwegian cultural practice is a concept that goes as a red thread through-out the interviews. Some of the parents are new in the role as parents. This is a challenge in itself, but for the minority parents it represents an extra challenge, because they cannot necessarily trust the references they have from their own childhood and culture, because the context has changed (see 3.2, Gullestad, 1989). They find themselves in a different culture than their own, without the comfort and support of family and friends. Even if they should seek advice from family and friends, these people would probably not be able to give appropriate advice on how to understand and adapt to the Norwegian cultural practices. In this new environment they will try to create an integrated

wholeness and meaning into one identity (Gullestad, 1990). They are in a continuous process of making meaning in their new environment, a process that is more demanding because they do not share the repertoire that is needed, and which most of the majority parents have and do not question. They have different life worlds (see 3.2.2; Gullestad, 1989:25). Every little thing may potentially cause worries and/or uncertainty and is not “natural” or “self-evident” as it might be for the Norwegian parents. The construction of their own identities as parents and adults are in interaction with the assessment and responses of the people they meet and to some extent are dependent of (Becher, 2006:82). People’s identities are many faceted, and they may be influenced by many discourses. When expressing something about themselves, various and, at times, conflicting emotions might occur (Ibid:83). The ambiguity implies that what the parents might express in one situation might oppose something they say in another. Cultural principles are difficult to limit. In the process of meaning making, meanings are negotiated in the social contexts based on different experiences. They are therefore not always predictable concepts (Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008). Whether parents will adapt to a cultural practice depends on how meaningful this seems in the context.

5.1.3 Reciprocity

There should be some level of dynamics in the meeting between cultures in a barnehave. The political intention of the FPCTK is as follows: “*Dealing with parents from different cultures, both within Norwegian society and from other countries, requires respect, sensitivity and understanding*” (sic. Ministry of Education and Research 2011:17). This mutual respect, sensitivity and understanding indicate the kind of dynamics that need some level of *reciprocity*, a concept that will be useful in the analysis of the experiences of the parents in my sample. Reciprocity implies that both parties have to give and take in negotiating patterns for behaviour. I am looking in the empirical material to try to identify if reciprocity takes place in the barnehave. Are both parties working at contributing to the flow of communication that in turn will lead to a better understanding of each other’s cultures and cultural practices in the everyday life of the barnehave?

5.1.4 Resistance

The nature of discourses is that truth effects are created within them and these truths cannot be defined as true or false (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:226). Discourse analysis looks at the power relations and how knowledge and truth are created (Ibid:155). The stronger the position of a discourse is, the more resistance it might evoke in persons. The concept *resistance* is therefore a useful analytic tool in the analysis of the minority parents’ experiences.

Resistance can come from both the majority and the minority cultures and will influence how all parts respond to cultural practices within other discourses.

5.2 Climate challenges and cultural practices

This section will deal with my informants' experiences with adapting to the Norwegian climate. The sample of minority parents that participate represent four continents and ten countries, so in that respect they are a very heterogeneous sample (see 4.2.1). However, this representation is not uncommon in many Norwegian barnehager. Two of the four barnehager in my sample have more than twenty nationalities represented among the children. Parents from *the North* and *the East*, have all experienced winter and more or less harsh weather. For many of the parents from *the South* (see 4.4.2), coming to Norway was their first meeting with a cold climate with snow and ice and lots of rain and wind, and how unfamiliar it feels is illustrated in the next paragraph.

5.2.1 "I feel so cold, my feet numb"

Some parents from the South admit that going outdoors in the winter is kept to a minimum, and only to carry out necessary activities like shopping, bringing and fetching their child to and from the barnehage and go to work (university studies are defined as work here).

However, they observe through the window and via television how nature and the outdoors seem to have a special place in the life of Norwegians. A mother observed how Norwegians go out and do all kinds of activities and how happy they are for the prospect of going out:

" But I see a lot of Norwegians..they are going...Thursday, Friday is their happy, happy days. They are going out. They are... I see them.. they are skiing, you know, materials(referring to skis), and then I see them on TV, and then they are skiing, competition and the rest".

There is a clear distance between what she observes and the activities in her own life. The mother expresses no desire to adapt to the cultural practices, rather resist them, as they do not make any meaning to her. There is a contrast with the nature and outdoor life discourses accounted for. For Norwegians "going out" represents the binary to home and gives experiences of wholeness and harmony. The contrast nature and the outdoors give to the hustle and bustle during the week creates a balance and helps creating the distance that is necessary to endure everyday life's demands. Physical challenging activities are deliberately sought after and are considered meaningful (Gullestad, 1992). Parents have noticed that Norwegians think it is important for their children to spend a lot of time outside, as another mother (the South) has experienced. It is not important for her, but she does not resist it. She adapts to the cultural demand, but not with great enthusiasm :

“..[because] when I get there they (the staff) tell me about, ... that they have been staying out for this long. They tell other parents that “Oh, we have been outside today”, yah, as if it is very important for the Norwegians”.

None of the parents would use the weather as an excuse for not sending their children to the barnehage, even if they saw that the weather was bad and knew their children would be outdoors a great deal. This is opposed to what some staff members said they suspected took place, and is different from experiences by others (Fajersson, 2009:28). The common ground for some of these families is also that their financial situation is fragile and is based on completing studies and holding on to a job. Some expressed bad conscience that they went to the cozy and warm office while their child “had to be” outdoors in the rain, as a mother (the North) said. She expressed her surprise at discovering that the children seemed to like it:

“[And] then I always said ”oh poor children, they have to be out, they have to be outside in this weather!” [...] I am actually surprised that children really like it”.

She also said that it had crossed her mind to stay at home, but she noticed that on the really bad days “[...] with horizontal rain..” they did not go out in her child’s barnehage. But she never held her child at home for this reason anyway, because the “group thinking”, or cultural practice influenced her decision, and everyone else brought their children to the barnehage, so she humorously said she assumed the children would survive:

“I’m influenced by the group thinking, like, okay, everyone brings their child, so they probably will survive,(laughing) so.. “.

The cultural practice in Norway is that children go to the barnehage and adults go to work regardless of the weather conditions, and the minority parents in my sample follow suit. A South parent tries to make sense of this practice and sees the necessity to adapt to the weather. Nothing seems to stop the wheels from turning, working life goes on as usual, and to have a future in this country you need to get used to it from you are a child:

“[...] otherwise you don’t have a future where you are young boys and girls[...] look here outside.. This is the winter period, but everything goes on like summer! People are building houses, people are repairing everything and they are outside there..he,he, but I don’t think, if you ask me to go there outside and I will accept to go outside, he, he”.

This father would like his child to adapt, but was reluctant to adapt himself. For him it was also not necessary. Even if they try to avoid going out, some parents, like another father from the South has observed, see that Norwegians enjoy spending time in the snow and ice, even sleeping in the snow, which is in accordance with the dominating nature and outdoor discourse. This father said his feet were numb from the cold, and believed it was necessary to introduce children to the climate at an early age in this country for them to accept it:

“So sometimes I see teachers and their pupils, you know, sleeping in the snow, you know, and sometimes...ah, wow, what is happening? And they take delight in doing that. And I feel so cold, my feet numbed, and I say, wow, maybe, so I see that now that it is good to introduce it to them that way for them to accept the climate”.

To the parents the climate is something you cannot avoid. You adapt to the requirement to go to work, and resist spending time outdoors if not necessary. You need to be introduced to the climate at an early age to accept it and enjoy it. The title of this thesis “Bend the fish while it is fresh” is translated from Kiswahili by a parent who used the proverb to explain why he saw it as necessary and beneficial for his child to spend time outdoors to get accustomed to the harsh climate and learn to love it from he was still small and “bendable”. If you waited till you were old and “dry” you would “crack”, like many parents felt themselves at times. This is in accordance with Norwegian discourses where the ideas are that you have to learn to love, to understand, to be in contact with nature and endure the challenges from you are a child (Gullestad, 1990; Nilsen, 2008). Most of the parents responded the same way, something that is different from the findings of Djuve and Pettersen (1998:45-46) who found that a great number of the minority parents they interviewed were dissatisfied with the fact that the children had to be outdoors during e.g. the winter. However, there are different aspects of the reluctance to having their children spend so much time outdoors, and this is not nuanced to a great degree by Djuve and Pettersen (Ibid.) One aspect mentioned by my informants as well as by Djuve and Pettersen was the health issue for their children, which will be elaborated on in this chapter (see 5.5). The strongest argument for restricting the time spent outdoors was however the worry for their children’s academic education and preparation for school. This is also mentioned by Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2012:87) and will be dealt with further in chapter six (see 6.1.2).

In the next section I will deal with clothing and what I interpret as the parents’ brave attempts to come to terms with a new and totally different demand to clothing than they are used to from their countries of origin. They have to adapt to new routines in their daily lives where their children’s clothes represent a financial, aesthetic, qualitative and practical challenge.

5.3 Dressing for the outdoors

In this section I will discuss the challenges of dressing for the outdoors in the Norwegian barnehave. Being a parent in Norway means buying clothes for staying outdoor in all four seasons of the year: in the cold of winter, in the wind, rain and mud of the autumn, the slush, mud and the floods of water during snow melting in the spring, and lovely semi-warm summer days, with promises of lots of rain and/or lots of sun. The style and the quality of the

clothes have changed, but the requirements to keep the child warm, dry and comfortable are the same (Nilsen 2008).

5.3.1 “Rain mittens – what is that?”

The discourse of dressing for the outdoors for children implies knowledge of what materials or fabrics insulate best, e.g. that wool is better than synthetic fabrics, what shoes, boots and wellingtons to buy, good quality rain gear, winter cover-all of good quality, various kinds of mittens, etc. In addition the parents need to know that they must provide, and check regularly, that there are extra sets of clothes, and if they need to take clothes home for cleaning and drying. Many struggle to make ends meet (see 5.3.4). In general, staff members I have talked with say that dressing for the outdoors is one of the great challenges throughout the year for the minority parents. Even if you have lived in the country for some years, good clothing represents a problem. One mother from the South, who had lived in Norway since she was a teenager, got a lot of helpful information from the staff in the barnehage her child started in as a baby:

“I was very lucky when she started in the barnehagen where a grown up woman like, I think about 45-50 years old, and they were very kind and caring those women who worked at (says name) Barnehage, so they would give you information about what type of clothes you should ..buy”.

Having the responsibility for a child is different from thinking of your own. She knew little about what was the best way to dress small children for the outdoors. This is understandable since she had not “got it through the mother’s milk” as a child, as her childhood was in a different country (see 3.2). The same mother noticed the difficulties other minority parents had with dressing their children. Among other things they did not know about the necessity of e.g. buying woolen clothes. Another challenge is to understand what the various items are like, if you have never used or seen them before. For a Norwegian parent words like “gamasjer”, “polvotter”, “regnvotter”, “cherrox støvler”, “parkdress” etc do not cause any difficulties. This is a part of the cultural knowledge you have. Despite a wish to adjust to the requirements, a mother from the South explained how difficult she found this part of the Norwegian culture of dressing for the outdoors, especially in the cold and/or wet weather. She was informed that her child had to put on mittens, but implied in this is that you need to know which ones of the many variations you need. This depends on the weather conditions. Also, it is the custom in Norway to take off your shoes when entering a home or a barnehage etc. Since the floor is often cold during the winter, you would need slippers. If you come from a warm climate, this does not necessarily make any sense and causes confusion:

“[Because] when he started in the barnehage we didn’t know almost anything about it, because we didn’t know what was meant by, yes, “å ha på seg votter” (to put on mittens).

Because there are different kinds of mittens. There are some with wool in them, and there are some without wool in them. There is a difference between “sko” (shoes) and “tøfler”(slippers) and the like”.

Another parent from the North had a similar experience about the various kinds of mittens she did not even know existed:

“[someone] told me, like, you should buy these mittens. And what are “dette”(Norwegian for ‘this’)? These are rain.. “regnvotter” Rain mittens? What’s that? Yah, that’s for the rain! Look! And how do they look? These are... So I had to go to the shop and buy rain mittens that I didn’t know that they existed. So it was like, oh, okay! (laughs)”.

It could be argued that this is a language problem as well as a cultural challenge, but I believe that even if you have lived in Norway for many years, you do not know these things before you are confronted with it once you have a child in a barnehage where the cultural practice requires you to relate to this. The knowledge is related to children’s activities and play in nature and the outdoors. The parents do their best to adapt to the culture.

5.3.2 “We put her in her normal clothes when she goes to and from school”

On visits to EC settings in other parts of the world, I have noticed that the children are dressed in their best clothes when they come in the morning. As a fashion conscious mother from the North told me, she did not find the warm, sensible and practical clothes children use in the barnehage in Norway very fashionable. She made a clear difference between “barnehage clothes” and “normal clothes”. She adapted to the requirements in the barnehage in accordance with the cultural practice, but had her own practice at home:

“[we] have to buy a lot of clothes that we otherwise would not use like the parkdress, the whole dress. We leave it even at the barnehage also in the weekends, because we don’t go outside in the weekends when it’s cold (laughs). So then she has her normal coat. But she’s not rolling in the snow. That’s not allowed (laughs)”.

According to the minority parents, the staff members play a vital role in guiding the parents. A mother (the South) told how helpful it was that staff members wrote down a shopping list with the items they needed for their child, and the names of the brands of good quality. This is a good example of reciprocity. A father (the South) said that he needed the advice from the barnehage staff. He had experienced that what he thought was okay, was not. The father had noticed that Norwegians do not necessarily put on thick clothes, but that they buy the right quality and material:

“ We have to ask them, because what we think is quite okay, but they will tell us, no it’s not. And sometimes we wonder that maybe Norwegians they don’t put more clothes, but we don’t know that. The type or the quality of the materials matters, more than the amount of [clothes]”

A mother (the South) who said she found this very difficult, solved the problem by buying, for instance, mittens of different brands and brought them all to the barnehage with the price tags still on so she could bring back the ones that were not good. To accommodate the gap of information many barnehager have worked out information sheets that they give to the parents or hang up posters in the wardrobes of the barnehage where everyone can see them (Appendix 5). This information is appreciated and often a prerequisite for the parents to have an idea of what kind of clothes their children should be wearing. Shop assistants also represent a useful help for minority parents who need to buy clothes for their children and are uncertain of what is right. A father was pleasantly surprised at this assistance, and believed the shops were genuinely trying to help them, not for the money, but because they had the cultural knowledge of what was needed. These examples illustrate how much easier it is for the minority parents to adapt when there is reciprocity and understanding from the majority. The parents did not resist a practice that was beneficial for their children's well-being.

5.3.3 “He’s good quality rain gear – he doesn’t even notice that it’s raining!”

A list of clothes is helpful, but not always enough, because the parents do not necessarily know what to put on when. They also need information about the principles of dressing warm and comfortable. A mother from the North said that the list of clothes to buy from the barnehage was useful, but in addition she would always check the weather forecast in the morning. She told about the learning process she has been through the first year, with the various layers and qualities of materials to make sure her child kept dry and comfortable. She did not want to complain, but she admitted it was hard work:

“You get a list, but since I’m the one that is bringing him every morning I just learn that basically every morning before I get him dressed I look at the weather report (laughs) [...] It’s not just because of the rain, it’s more the temperature. And so I know.. that was a learning process for me to get him dressed right. Because you sort of have to have the first layer right before ... yah, drop him off, and have the right clothes and make sure that they are dry, and.. it is.. that is ...not negative, it is work!”

Another mother (the South) said, that even though they had moved to another part of the city they continued having their children in the same barnehage, because there she felt the staff understood their difficulties to adjust to the dressing requirements:

“I would be more concerned if my child has to go to a normal Norwegian barnehage[...]. That’s not for foreigners[...]. [At her child’s barnehage] They always tell us to bring extra gloves and extra socks and extra shoes, and we try to put extra clothes, so that at least, if they need to change clothes, that’s more important to me. If they take them outside, that’s okay, but at least they should be wear.. they should not be cold and wet – they should be dry and happy!”

The reciprocity of the staff at the barnehage implied understanding for her as a foreigner who has not yet got the full overview of the clothing requirements following the Norwegian cultural practice. If she did not remember to check if her child had the necessary clothes, they would remind her about it so her child would be comfortable outdoors. This reciprocity meant so much that she was willing to have the inconvenience of travelling across the city to and from the barnehage every day. The mother was willing to adapt, and the situation made the staff adapt as well. The power structure is obvious, with one party having the necessary overview and the other party needing to be reminded, but I find this a respectful way of exercising power. Eventually, this practice empowers the mother to handle the clothing requirements adequately.

5.3.4 “It requires a substantial investment”

The financial side of having to provide clothes for all kinds of weather was raised by many of the parents. In addition to buying the clothes the children need when they get dressed for the outdoors, they also need extra sets of clothes to keep in the wardrobe of the barnehage (Appendix 6). As previously mentioned, this can be difficult for many of the minority parents who do not have the means to provide this. Luckily for the children, many barnehager acknowledge this, and make sure they have some extra sets of clothes for the children in the barnehage. One of the barnehager in my sample arrange for days of exchanging children’s clothes and equipment among the parents. This helps keeping the costs down for the parents.

Still, the main financial burden is on the parents to provide enough clothes of good quality that are suitable for all kinds of weather during the whole year. A parent from the East said that it was a challenge for the family to buy all the clothes his child needed at the start of the first year in the barnehage. The list of items seemed to be a never-ending. Since they had newly moved to Norway, there were so many other things they needed as well, to settle in:

“It was a challenge in the beginning to get hold of almost everything at the same time, with two cover-alls and woolen underwear and woolen socks, and there were more things coming little by little, so every time we got hold of something we needed to buy even more things. When we came to Norway we were badly off financially, and there were a lot of things we had to buy, so it was pretty difficult to get it all in place. But now it goes quite well with what we have”.

The barnehage demonstrated reciprocity in providing extra clothes for the child when needed. Children who are in nature and outdoors barnehager have even higher requirements when it comes to the children’s clothes as they spend a lot more time outdoors. Despite the high costs of investing in their children’s clothes, the minority parents make all efforts to adapt to the requirements of proper clothing for their children. There is no difference between the

financial burden for minority and Norwegian parents, but it is a part of the Norwegian discourse of nature and outdoor life to provide clothes for your children and yourself that enable everyone to enjoy nature and outdoor life. Some minority parents might lack the experience of being outdoors to understand how much more comfortable their children will be with the right clothes. Some might resist spending money on clothes they would not wear themselves.

5.3.5 “Ut på tur” – what do you need when you go on hikes?

All barnehager visited in my sample regularly go on hikes or on outreach programmes in the neighbourhood. This practice is also mentioned specifically in the FPCTK as being desired activities, and is written into the annual plans of the barnehager in Norway. “Ut på tur” is a slogan or a concept in Norway, and the cultural practice has a strong position, meaning out on a hike, either skiing or walking. Depending on where you are going, what time of the year it is, and what you are going to do, most Norwegians will probably know what it implies when it comes to equipment and food. This is a part of your childhood’s activities with your parents, with friends or with school (see chapters two and three). For minority parents, it is impossible to know that this activity triggers a set of new requirements if they are not informed before-hand. Mjelve (1996) tells about “parents’ meeting in the snow” where minority parents borrowed warm coveralls and went for a little hike outdoors with sledges and hot cocoa on a thermos. This way they got a better understanding of what their children experienced and how to choose clothes that fit the activities (Ibid:48).

To help parents adjust to this dominant discourse in Norwegian barnehage, they need a lot of information. A father (the South) explains how vital the information the barnehage gives is for them. The information would be adjusted to the kinds of activities and the season:

“When the children go to barnehage they provide some kind of details, okay you have to provide these kind of things. So whenever they have any kind of tour, like skiing tour, then they ask the parents that they, they should require these kind of things”.

The first year of having a child in a Norwegian barnehage, the minority parents will go through a continuous learning process. The father is satisfied that they are given necessary information for every hike their children are going on during all the seasons.

The tradition of enjoying the content of your backpack is a motivation and a treat for the children on the hikes. A mother (the North) told how her child had absorbed this part of the cultural practice and insisted on enjoying it, even though her parents did not take her out

much in the winter. The parents adapted to the Norwegian cultural practice in their own way. Sitting in their living room with their child, they enjoyed the traditional food and drink you would put in a backpack as if they were on a hike. They would not go “ut på tur” for real:

Mother: “[because] Betty knows about the Kvikklunsj and the thermos with “sjokolademelk” (chocolate milk/cocoa).. [Father interrupts: Oh, yah, yah..] and sometimes she wants sjokolademelk and we have to put it in a thermos here at our home.”

Interviewer: “Okay, indoors?”

Mother: “Oh, yeh, and she knows about these things, but I don’t think we’ll be a family that goes out and sit on the sitteunderlag⁵.. (all laugh)”.

Gullestad (1990, see 3.2.2) refers to the Norwegian relation to nature and the Sunday hikes as also having a religious aspect to it. I claim that a part of the religious and spiritual experience in nature is to sit down and enjoy the food and drink in your backpack that was packed in a ceremonial way at home. It is interesting that minority children have picked up this and show agency in making their parents adapt to the cultural practice, albeit in their own fashion.

5.4 Children’s influence on parents’ participation

In the following paragraphs I will discuss how the children’s outdoor activities can have an impact on family life and the parent – child dynamics. That the children learn to play and appreciate activities outdoors have to some extent influenced on the family activities in the weekends. The Norwegian cultural discourse of nature and outdoor life, going on hikes in the weekends during all seasons, or skiing trips in the winter, would be the kinds of family activities you feel you should do and also take pleasure in doing with your children (see 2.2.1). According to the Norwegian hegemonic cultural discourse nature is the provider of meaningful activities, which simultaneously give the joyful feeling of mastery and control (Gullestad 1990, see 3.2.5). The minority parents in my sample could to some degree share the joy of being outdoors, and to some extent take part in some of the activities.

5.4.1 Observe nature and outdoor activities from indoors or participate outdoors?

As accounted for in chapter three, the relationship to nature and to home represents central categories in the Norwegian culture (Gullestad 1990, see 3.2.2). Some parents in my sample expressed a strong relationship to their home, but more as a refuge from ” nature”, represented by the climate. They did not see the necessity of leaving their home if the weather was wet, windy or cold. The way I interpret this is that the home becomes a place to observe what goes on, on the outside. There is no strong connection to nature or participation in the activities nature and the outdoors invite to, especially not winter activities. A mother (the South) described how she observed the Norwegian cultural practices through television and through

⁵ “Sitteunderlag” is some kind of material to sit on outdoors that insulates from the cold.

the window. She had lived in Norway for a year without going out if not necessary, or trying any of these activities. Partly, this might be explained by her lack of knowledge of dressing for the outdoors or the skills and equipment for taking part in outdoor activities. When her child came to join her and started in the barnehage, she was challenged to go out, even in the snow, something she had avoided since she arrived:

“I watch the TV, I see people in the woods, I see people skiing, but I haven’t tried it myself, yeh. Not until my daughter came around, especially with the snow. When it is snowing I prefer to stay indoors, but when it is snowing, she wants to go out. So you don’t have a choice than to experience nature with her, yeh.”

A father (the South) was asked by his child if he would go sledging in the snow. He did go sledging, but only because he felt he had to:

“Yah, and I, ehehe, I’ve been doing that, especially when my son was not going to the barnehage for one month, I had to do it. And he was so happy, so happy.”

His son brought expectations from the Norwegian culture in the barnehage of going out and play even if it was winter. The father adapted to the culture, although reluctantly. The happiness he saw his son expressed, made the activity a pleasuring experience after all. However, the father had no intention of repeating this and let it become a part of his everyday life.

The climate seems to be decisive for whether most of the parents would go out and take part in the activities that are dominant cultural practices in Norway. The cultural practice of enjoying nature and outdoor life in all sorts of weather had little resonance with this group of parents. They were willing to have their children adapt and take part in the activities following the Norwegian cultural practices in the barnehage. At home, however, they would only consider going out, or letting their children play outdoors after pressure from their children. Their resistance made them not take any initiatives of their own, and they did not go outdoors because they shared the culture of love for nature and outdoor activities.

5.4.2 Family activities with warmer weather

With warmer weather, most parents in my sample said they would sometimes take part in outdoor activities. Bicycling stands out as the activity. Especially the fathers enjoyed bicycling with their children, and this would make their children very happy. A father from the South, reluctantly, however, gave way for the pressure of his child to go out and bicycle together:

“[...] sometimes our kid is tired of staying inside, and would wish to go outside. And especially riding a bicycle. He will just ask me, we have to go outside, especially during

summer. I have to go outside, even if I don't like...[...] the way he is so happy to go with me outside, me with my bicycle and him with his bicycle, and we go riding around. Very happy! Then after that, he is comfortable back home, (laughing)..”

After giving in to the child's pressure of wanting to go out, the father and the child both experienced that they were having a good time together. There is reciprocity in this and some adaption and acceptance of the child's agency. The father meets the child's desire to go outdoors and they both know that the activity will not be repeated soon after, as the father expressed that his child will now be satisfied to stay indoors for a while again. The dominant discourses in child rearing which restrict children's play spatially and temporally seem to influence the father (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, see 3.5.1.1). There is no cultural tradition and little priority given to play with children, and the parents perhaps have a very small repertoire of activities they could do together with the children outdoors.

An example of a small repertoire is that of a mother from the South in my sample, who told that in her country, as in many other countries, women do not bicycle due to patterns of behavior, to traditions, and they have not learnt it. Even if the mother would not and could not bicycle due to her cultural background, the mother said she would allow her daughter to bicycle in Norway, where the conditions are considered safe with own paths for bicycles. However, the daughter of five had no bicycle or tricycle yet. In Norway, bicycling is practiced by both genders, and even if the mother sees that the cultural practice in Norway is different, the dominating discourse in her culture makes her resist changing the practice. Could it be that she did not think a girl should bicycle after all? The mother told that now the traffic in general in her country of origin is considered dangerous and does not facilitate bicycling, for instance in big cities. However, I believe this would not stop the men from bicycling.

The cultural and safety issues for riding a bicycle are mentioned by another parent from the South. She said it would never even have crossed her mind to buy a tricycle for her child in her home country, but she has done that for her daughter here, and expressed how happy this made her daughter. She felt compelled to go out with her to allow her to use the tricycle:

“[She] has a bicycle[tricycle], I have to go out with her, yaah.. [...] I don't know if that would even cross my mind, because our roads are dangerous. [...] There are certain things I wouldn't do if I were in Africa. Yah, yah.[...] You know, when you even tell her “let's go” she would tell you “I still want to sit on the bicycle””

This mother uses her cultural background and the traffic to explain why she would not have thought of buying a tricycle for her child. However, she has adapted to the cultural practice after her child had tried tricycles in the barnehage and the mother saw how she loved the

activity. Her child did not want to leave her bike and insisted on bicycling home. The child showed agency and her mother accepted it and was proud of her child's determination.

Pride in their children's physical achievements and mastery is commonly expressed by all parents. The parents in my sample see that their children are adapting very well to the environment, the climate and the cultural activities, but they feel more ambivalent themselves.

The examples from my study show that the children are more likely to want, and even demand, to go outdoors themselves when there are fun activities to take part in. Since the children are so small, most of the parents feel they have to go with them. The children's agency has led to their participation in deciding how to, and where, to spend their time. This way, the parents become part of a process of adapting to their children's interests in the dynamics of reciprocity and thereby adapt to some of the new cultural practices.

5.4.3 "I walked, she skied!"

Some of the barnehager arrange own skiing courses for the children, and these are highly valued by the parents. One parent from the North said he was so grateful that the staff taught his child to go skiing as they are skillful and have the knowledge needed to teach children the best way. The majority of the parents would leave skiing activities to their children, though, but some parents adapted to the cultural practice and planned to buy skis next year, both for their child and for themselves.

"We will try to find something suitable for her next year, right, because we would like to go skiing ourselves. [...] because she has learnt to go skiing. I am not very good at it, but she manages quite well." (Parents from the East).

The eagerness to buy skis was not necessarily present for all parents, even if the economic situation would allow them to do this. In the long run, the pressure from the children can be strong, because the children want to do what they see the other children in the barnehage are doing, and the parents want to meet this in a positive way and adapt to the patterns for behaviour. Both parents and children are in continuous interaction with other parents, children and the staff from the majority culture. This interaction means they all have to make choices as to how to respond to the pressure (Gullestad 1989:115, see 3.2.1). The cultural pressure is from the majority culture, but in addition, I have also shown how the cultural pressure on the minority parents comes from their own children. Because most of the minority parents did not grow up with skis, they do not have the knowledge about where and what to buy of equipment. One mother from the North resisted getting involved in typical winter activities and tried to avoid the skiing all together. She was not interested, she was cold in the winter,

and she solved it by ignoring that her child asked for skies. However, the following year the pressure from the child was too strong, and she started the challenging process of buying skiing equipment. In the process, she asked around for some help, and she discovered that there were many kinds of skies, wax free and skis that need wax; that the skis and skiing poles had to have a special length depending on a child's height, etc. The father added that this knowledge is something that is normally passed on from generation to generation:

Mother: " ..[I] never went on skies, and also not really interested, because it's too cold, and I really suffer from the cold. And now I had to go and buy skies for Betty, and then people were.. I sort of asked here and there, and I wanted to buy second hand skis, because she is growing, and every year you need new ones. And in the process I sort of discovered that you have to wax skis, and then I discovered there are wax free skis, that's why, wow, I'm good at this! I discovered all things, like how long the sticks have to be and how long the skis have to be, and the longer than the child is shorter, and..(Interrupted by father)

Father: " ..but. That is typical information that is transferred from parents to child, and that goes from generation to the next and the next".

Once the skis were bought the daughter of course wanted to use them, and the mother continued her account of the skiing by telling, that she actually went outside skiing with her child, albeit she walked alongside her skiing daughter:

Mother: "[...]. And also when I went skiing with Betty outside.. (Interrupted by interviewer)

Interviewer: "Oh, so you have been skiing with her?"

Mother: "I walked, she skied![...]. I had to go out here every Sunday out here and ski, well I walked and she skied. And I was like, oh my God, this is punishment (laughing). Okay, we'll go outside! She was all happy, you know".

Even if she had no intention of sharing the skiing experience she adapted to her child's wish and supported her in her eagerness to go skiing. On being asked if the whole family would now go skiing on a Sunday according to the cultural tradition their answer was a prompt "no" with the explanation that : "[...], we are not that Norwegianfied (laughing)". Taking actively part in skiing is seen as being Norwegian, something they definitely did not define themselves as being, despite having lived in the country for 10 and 15 years respectively. In Norway there is a saying that goes "Norwegians are born with skis on their feet", and there is nothing considered more Norwegian in the culture than cross-country skiing.

5.4.3.1 Documentation of activities

The parents tell about various sorts of activities their children learn to do in the barnehave, like sledging, skating and skiing . The children want to do these activities at home as well. None of the parents from the South had ever done any of the winter activities before they came to Norway, and only two of the parents from the North could ski. It is with great pride

these parents from the North tell about their child's competence and achievements in these activities. They are amazed at the skills their child has learnt so quickly:

"He's learnt to ski! He's turned three years old and he probably can ski better than what we can, you know."

The father from the East, whose daughter had learnt to ride a bicycle without using support-wheels, told about how quickly his child learnt to go skiing. After going downhill two times, falling, and getting up, and falling, she mastered it the third time:

"Yes, I was very proud of it. First she managed to bicycle and later they told me she managed to go skiing. I told them, "it's impossible!". But then they showed me a film they had taken, so that way I got the proof!"

Documenting the children's activities is a very good way of communicating the contents of the days of the children for the parents. This opens for reciprocity between staff, parents and children. The children can more easily share the experiences with their parents, and the parents get a better understanding of their children's activities, their fun, skills and mastery. A father (the North) said he had to rely on what the staff told had happened during the day:

"We can't really go to the kindergarten with him, so we can't really comment so much on it other than what the teacher, the people there tell us has happened during the day"

There are parents who also have taken part in activities with their children at the barnehage. The way I see it, the reciprocity can open up for doing more activities together. It provides the parent with a greater repertoire of activities to do with the child, especially outdoor activities. The documentation of joint experiences makes it easier to talk about, and remember them.

5.4.4 Sports equipment and toys for outdoor activities

Most of the parents had bought sledges ("akebrett") for their children, few had skates and even fewer had skies. The economic situation for many of the parents in my sample was difficult, something they also communicated to the barnehage. A father (the East) told about his difficult financial situation to the barnehage staff and was happy with the fact that the barnehage had skis the children could borrow. For many children of minority parents, this might be the only way they are introduced to the activities, and get the opportunity to learn to go skiing or bicycling:

"The barnehage has a lot of equipment. When our daughter started in the barnehage I told the staff that we could not afford to buy all the equipment, like skis and the like. But they had skis in the barnehage that she could borrow. The same is the case with bicycles"

For children in Scandinavian countries, skis and sledges (akebrett) are commonly purchased by their parents and/or grandparents and are seen as the basic equipment you need in the winter. Owning a tricycle or bicycle is also common, and possibly also outside Scandinavia,

in the North and East, whereas this is not necessarily the case in the South. The reason here could be gender related (see 5.4.2 above). There is a great difference between the average family economies in the South, Eastern Europe as compared to the North. There is little tradition for spending money on children's toys or sports gear in the South. Many parents in the South and the East cannot afford spending a lot of money on toys or sports gear for children, whereas the average Norwegian child has about five hundred toys at home (Moen 2012). Parents in my sample were grateful for the acts of reciprocity of the barnehager by lending out equipment and thereby providing equal opportunities for outdoor activities for their children.

5.4.5 Proper parenting and happy children playing outdoors

What the parents in my sample all had in common was that they saw the happiness the various outdoor activities gave their children, even if they did not appreciate it themselves. One mother (the South) told about the joy and happiness expressed by her child when she can be outdoors:

"It's good for her. I see she's, she's happy. She's always beaming with smiles and very happy. And I am sure it's because she has been exposed, yah, to nature."

According to the mother, there was a great leap between the life her child had in her home country to the outdoor experiences in the Norwegian barnehage, which the mother refers to as "being exposed to nature". From regularly being locked up indoors all day in her home country, the child plays outdoors every day and is taken on hikes and excursions in nature and the outdoors with other children. Her child's happiness of being allowed to play outdoors is in accordance with the finding of Titman (1994), who found that children have clear preferences for outdoor play environments (sited in Fjørtoft, 2002:4). The minority parents' positive experiences of their children's happiness, and the pleasure they take in playing in nature and the outdoors are the same as expressed by Norwegian parents (Emilsen, 2005), and are in accordance with the intentions expressed in the FPCTK (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie 2003 cited in Nilsen 2008; Kunnskapsdepartementet 2012:13, see 3.3.2). Childhood is the time when the body grows fast. According to Pelligrini and Smith (1998), physically active play improves the child's motor control, his strength and endurance. It also shapes a healthy concept of the child's self (cited in Fjørtoft, 2000:3). These qualities are in accordance with the discourse of the robust child subject. From the experiences of the parents in my sample it seems that the opportunities for outdoors physical activities in the barnehage are considered as being positive. They contribute to their children's happiness and are important for a healthy development both physically and mentally.

The parents adapt to the majority culture for their children by letting them play and do activities in nature and the outdoors. Simultaneously, they are reluctant to go out with them and do not necessarily see that as important or desired. But they want to be responsible parents, and want to make sure their children are all right, and that the children's environment is safe. A mother (the South) told that they had bought a house, and that she had certain requirements for this house with regards to her children:

"[...] So now we have a house that can, you know, they can go out and I can just sit by the window and see, and speak (both interviewer and mother laugh), so that's... that was the most important that I put down, that it has to be a place where the children can play alone outside where they can play under my supervision from inside!"

Now the children can play outdoors as much as they want, and she can keep an eye on them without having to be outside with them. Another mother from the South explains that there are lots of household chores to do in the weekends, but that the children are sent out to play:

"But in the weekend, because we are not that good at being outdoors, and in the weekend we like to clean up a bit, so sometimes we send them out and look through the window and say "you'll stay there and play a bit" (laughs)".

The parents have adapted to the cultural practice and are familiar with the nature and outdoors discourse. They have come to acknowledge that their children are well off outdoors on their own, and have no problem adapting to the practice. However, there is resistance to join in.

The Norwegian discourses on nature and the outdoors has other sides to it in the views of many parents in my sample. In the next section the parents' concern for their children's health will be accounted for and discussed.

5.5 Worries about the children's health

Spending time in nature and the outdoors in all kinds of weather in the barnehage is frequently mentioned as a source of worry for my sample of minority parents, concerning the children's health. Most parents in Norwegian barnehager experience that their children go through a period of various illnesses, especially respiratory infections, like colds, leading to coughing and runny noses, and infections in the intestines, like diarrhea. During the first year of their life, most children have their immune system boosted through breastfeeding. At six months, 80 per cent of children in Norway are breast fed, although it is not the only food they get (Häggkvist et.al 2010:4). At the end of their first year they become more vulnerable to bacterial and viral infections (Ibid:1). This is a natural process and helps building up the children's immune system along with various vaccines. The likelihood of being contaminated increases when more than 5-6 people are together. Children with chronicle diseases will have a weaker immunity towards these contaminations.

5.5.1 Does being outdoors improve the children's immune system?

There are more parents in my sample that mention how their children's immune system has improved through being outdoors in all kinds of weather throughout the year. A father (the South) said that his child has benefitted from spending a lot of time outdoors "in this peculiar weather", because he believed he had developed his immune system and did not get colds any more:

"But what we came to understand, maybe this is part of the benefits of him developing immune with weather. He can go outside, play there, come back home and they.. he don't get cold, or what. So this basically what I associate ...it is very good within this peculiar weather."

Another father (the East) maintained that even though it was a shock for him to see children sitting outdoors playing for hours on end and getting dirty, he thought that it helped making the children more resistant to diseases. He assumed this had to do with the way they are dressed, as well, wearing wool and the like. In his country of origin his daughter very often had a bad cold, but she has been healthy since they moved to this place.

The cultural practice in the educational system of both parents is to keep the children indoors during school (barnehage) time with only short breaks where the children could go outdoors. This would depend on the weather, because it was assumed that if it was raining or it was considered too cold, the children would get ill. However, for ordinary healthy children, it is normal to go through various infections during the early years of childhood, and most children will be more ill for a period of time during the first years in barnehagen (Gjørven 2008). This coincides also with findings by Bakke & Moen (2004) who found that there was a tendency that younger children were more often ill than older children. The parents have to adapt, but are also provided with the tools needed for their children to enjoy it, like proper clothing. Most minority parents resist at first, but eventually adapt. That they also seem to recognize that there are benefits even for their children's health, represents a radical change for them.

Reluctance to bring their ill children to barnehage was an issue that was brought up by the parents in my sample. In quite a few barnehager in Norway, local regulations may say that you should not bring in an ill child or a child that, due to poor health conditions, cannot be outdoors. The arguments that are used are two folded: In the first place, a sick child needs care at home to recover; secondly, the child can easily contaminate other children. As previously mentioned, this represents a problem especially for students due to their limited time to finish their studies. For parents having ordinary jobs it is less problematic, as they have the right to stay at home with full payment from 10-30 days (depending on your civil status and number of children) with ill children under the age of 12 (NAV 2013).

Even though some barnehager are more willing to accept children who are ill due to the stressful situation of the parents, they know that there is not enough staff to stay indoors with their child when the rest of the group goes out, but also out of consideration for the other children, as a mother (the South) told:

*“When she is sick I don’t.. I keep her home no matter what. Especially when it’s like minus ten or above minus five I don’t feel comfortable sending her to the barnehage when she is sick [..] because I know they will take them out and she will be more sick or, so she stays home [..].
Interviewer: I thought there is even a rule that if your child is sick you had to keep her at home? Maybe they are not so strict at the [name of] barnehage?
Mother: No, they are not so strict. Or the kids are sick there all the time. But me, I keep her home, because I don’t want her to spread the disease among the other kids..”*

A father (the South) told about their plea to the barnehage staff of not sending their ill children out in case they got wet and cold. The barnehage could not accommodate the request, and the parents’ solution was to alternate staying at home when their child was ill. Managing ill children is a hard part for any working or studying parents and can hardly be said to be culturally different. However, some parents think that the Norwegian cultural practice influences their children’s health and make them more ill than what could have been necessary. What the right time is for a child to come back to barnehage is another discussion, but the point is, that the parents say the practice of taking their children out on their return after illness makes that it takes longer time before the children get well. The first example shows that some parents make the decision to keep their child at home because they are aware of the cultural practice, but also in consideration for other children’s health. As seen above some parents believe their children have improved their immunity system by spending time outdoors. The issue is how the barnehage can adapt the practice and show reciprocity by having some staff members stay indoors with children that are on the mend, but not fully recovered. I believe that the number of staff available is a financial question. How the staffs are managed is a complex issue that has to do with more than cultural practice. Rules and regulations, general working conditions and other practicalities like staff and parents meetings, mentoring of students and short term sick leaves add to a resistance of changing practice.

5.5.2 Toddlers sleeping in their prams outdoors

In Norway it is very common to let the youngest children sleep outdoors in their prams during the day. From a practical point of view in barnehager, it reduces the need for extra sleeping space indoors. The cultural practice is based on the firm belief that sleeping outdoors gives health benefits, and that the sleep is sounder, and the child sleeps longer than if a child sleeps indoors during the day. Some minority parents in my sample disagree with this practice and

believe the opposite is true, that sleeping outdoors throughout the year in all kinds of weather will deteriorate their child's health, like a father from the South (see below) pointed out. Another mother (the South) refused to have her child sleep outdoors at all with the explanation that this is not part of her culture. The staff listened to her and let her child sleep indoors:

“But I was sceptical to letting her sleep outside in the winter. I didn't like that. [...] They had to keep her inside, because I find it very uncomfortable to me. It's not in my culture to let children sleep out when it's cold, so..”.

This scepticism is understandable when you come from a country where the lowest average temperature during the coldest month is 14 degrees Celsius, which is the average summer temperature in this region of Norway. Another parent (the South) told how the fact that their child got ill affected them psychologically, so they could not perform well in their studies. Along with some other parents from the South, these parents pleaded the staff not to take their child outdoors, because they were afraid of him getting ill:

“We were not happy at all – kids being outside.. at the beginning. [...] My wife was studying and I was studying [...] So what happened, they would take him outside to sleep. And in the evening our son could start coughing and develop fever, and the what, and whenever we would tell them, they won't change. They would just take him outside to sleep outside. [...]. .. [this] was harder to us, because if we cannot sleep at night and every time we have to keep an eye on our son because he is not feeling well. Then we are psychologically affected, that we won't do well in our classes. The next day we won't attend the class.”.

The first example illustrates that the cultural practice is not maintained like a dogma. The staffs are willing to listen to the mother and take her worries seriously. There is reciprocity in the sense that during the winter the child could sleep indoors. With milder weather the child would probably be taken outdoors to sleep. In the second example there seems to be a lack of communication, and there is resistance from the staffs' side to be flexible when it comes to having the youngest children sleep outdoors in the winter. The cultural practice within the discourse seems to override the well-being of the parents and the children, and there is no reciprocity from the majority culture. The parents felt compelled to accept the practice, even though they were convinced that the consequences were bad for their child and their study. The lack of reciprocity forces the parents to accept a cultural practice that is experienced as extreme. The practice does not make sense to them when their child gets more ill, and you as parents cannot make progress in studies which have to be finished within a certain time. In situations where there is a clear difference in cultural practices, the staffs may consider ways to communicate with the parents to build up necessary trust and a feeling of safety for the well-being of their child. On the other hand, if minority parents lose the chance to experience that it is not necessarily “the bad weather” that causes illness, this may also be a problem.

Norwegian governing documents like the FKCTK and the Kindergarten Act state the intentions for collaboration with the home:

“The Kindergarten shall, in collaboration and close understanding with the home, safeguard the children’s need for care and play,[...]”.

(Kindergarten Act, Section 1, Purpose).

The Norwegian discourse of the robust child might cause great distance and uneasiness for minority parents if it cannot be subject to discussion and reciprocity.

The issue of whether toddler/small children should sleep outdoors during all seasons almost regardless of the weather is currently being discussed by Norwegian parents on the Internet. The discussion comes after an article from barnehage.no (Antonsen 2013), on whether children should sleep outdoors in the winter or not. Not all Norwegians agree to the practice. There is no clear cut conclusion here, but it is maintained that research on this issue is needed (Ibid). The discussion can also indicate that the hegemonic position of this cultural practice in Norway is declining.

5.5.3 Information to parents of injuries from outdoor play.

Another issue concerning the children’s health has to do with accidents during play. A mother (the South) explained that her child often came home with bruises, but that one time it was more serious, and the bruise stayed for many weeks:

“But I think they should watch them more, I think. They should have more people who work there, because there had been sometimes when she had bruises and they didn’t know. They cannot explain what happened, or.. and they don’t know when it happened [...]”.

The worst was not the bruise in itself, but the fact that the staff did not know what had happened, and did not even tell about the bruise when she picked up her child at the end of the day. This upset the mother a lot. Another mother (the East) told about a similar incident where she found out herself that her child was bruised. She got upset because no one among the staff informed her. She would have liked to be notified so they could find out if the child needed observation, had got a concussion or other injuries that needed medical care. After the incident she experienced that the staff avoided her instead of talking to her about what had happened. She eventually brought the issue up herself and told a staff member how she felt about this. After this, she is always notified, even by sms, if something happens to her child during the day. The way I see it, there are strong discourses and cultural practices colliding here, and there was little reciprocity. In the first place, within the nature and outdoor life, the robust child subject and risky play discourses minor bruises are seen as acceptable and natural

and something you should endure without complaining too much (Nilsen, 2008). This is in contradiction to the discourses of the innocent and vulnerable child, combined with health and safety discourses where protection is strong. I believe the threshold for accepting minor injuries is lower within the Norwegian discourses than other dominant discourses, as the mother from the South noted:

“[for] example, yah, sometimes if the kids fall down, for us it is, oh, it’s a very big thing. But here in Norway it is something they take easy, like “no, it’s okay”, you know [...] it’s something they say will pass away, while for me it’s the end of the world [...] It’s really important to cuddle them and to show them that you are sorry and you are sad, you understand their pain. But here they say, “no, it’s gonna be okay”. [...] I think it is bad, because they should let them feel...[.]”

There seems to be a kind of resistance from both parties to adapt to the other. The dominance of the discourses are too strong. Secondly, a central cultural value for Norwegians is to avoid conflicts and rather withdraw from relations to avoid confrontations, like the staff did (Gullestad, 1989:117). The cultural practices cause confusion, fear and anger for the parent. Instead of accounting for what happened to put the parents at ease, the staff chose silence and avoidance. In the report by Djuve & Pettersen (1998) some minority parents also complained about the lack of information from the staff. If parents feel they are outside their comfort zone concerning their children’s activities, one would expect that the staff had an even greater responsibility to make sure all information is given to the parents. I believe this is a prerequisite for good cooperation with parents and in line with the FPCTK and the Kindergarten Act.

In the next section the activities and play that can be risky will be dealt with. Most of the parents in my sample associated the various categories of risky play (see 3.3.3) with possible dangers for getting injured, but the learning aspect was very much mentioned.

5.6 Play and activities in nature and the outdoors involving risks.

The dominant discourses within child rearing in the North, which have had a strong influence in the South, are restricting children’s space and time for unrestricted, unsupervised play (James, Jenks & Prout 1998). Without being too categorical, many minority parents will meet a totally different cultural practice in Norwegian barnehager. The dominant Norwegian discourses in child rearing give children more autonomy in which they can spend more time without constant supervision and have more time for free play (Kjørholt 2008). Playing in nature and the outdoors involves lots of physical activities and play that are fun and scary at the same time. Norwegian parents and barnehage staff allow and stimulate children to take part in these activities, and they are important ingredients of what is regarded as a good and

happy Norwegian childhood and in shaping the robust child subject (see 3.3.1; Kjørholt, 2008, Nilsen, 2008).

Sandseter (2007) has categorized the kinds of play that involve risks of injury for the children (see 3.3.3). The minority parents in my sample were asked about their experiences with their children's involvement in risky play and activities that gave the children a great deal of freedom and autonomy outdoors. There was a difference between the attitudes of mothers and fathers in my sample, with more mothers expressing anxiety. They would more quickly define activities as dangerous or unacceptable. This is in accordance with research cited in Sandseter (2010). As Sandseter says, each person will have different perceptions of what is risky based on a variety of factors (see 3.3.3 for details). One factor is the cultural frameworks of rules, regulations and traditions that will influence on the assessment of the risk involved. In the following paragraphs I will account for and discuss how the minority parents in my sample experience the discursive Norwegian cultural practice of allowing children the autonomy of seeking and participating in play and activities that imply risks.

5.6.1 Play with great heights and play with high speed

Play with great heights involve a real danger of falling down from trees, rocks or other high objects like roofs, platforms etc. Play with high speed means uncontrolled speed and pace where the children risk colliding when e.g. skiing, bicycling or sliding. It is mostly when parents come and pick up their children in the barnehage at the end of the day that they are confronted with their children taking part in these kinds of play. They might find their children in a tree or on top of a roof of a shed or playhouse in the playground, or they are sliding downhill on sledges in the winter, or from sliding equipment. Many barnehager also have tricycles for the children, and some of them have seats where at least two children can sit simultaneously. The topography of many barnehager is hilly – if not naturally hilly, they would deposit heaps of soil to create artificial hills

Some of the mothers in my sample were ambivalent about having their children play in trees or climb on top of sliding equipment and set off at high speed. On the one side they were proud at the achievements of their children and thought it was important that they learnt to control their bodies. As such they were in line with the Norwegian cultural practice, and they did not prohibit the activity. On the other side, there were mixed feelings and they tried not to show their fear or reluctance. A mother (the South) mentioned especially how scary she finds climbing trees during the winter, when the children are wearing thick mittens and thick clothes that prevent the children from having close enough contact with the climbing object,

e.g. the trunk of a tree. Another mother (the East) said she sent a silent prayer of “*Dear Mother, I hope they don’t fall down*”, and yet another (the South) found her daughter of five too young to climb and was against encouraging children to climb in general. However, it shines through that she also accepts it, even though she cannot understand what her child finds of interest at the top of a tree, as the example tells:

“I don’t really think it’s safe also. They give them support, but I don’t think it’s wise for them to try on their own. Asha had an injury, just a minor injury while climbing a tree. But I think, you know, they are too young just be able to just explore [...] the environment just like that, like the tree, I think it’s. I’m worried about it. [...] Sometimes I get to the barnehage and I find her up in a tree! [...]”

Interviewer: “But that must mean that she manages to get up? [...], so what do you tell her[..]?”

Mother: “Ooh.. I just tell her that she should be careful[..] so that’s what I tell her

Interviewer: So you don’t tell her that she is not allowed to climb the tree?”

Mother: “Oh, no, I would say that “climb the short tree. Don’t go too far [..]. What is she looking for in a tree! (laughs)[...] But I’m “målløs”(speechless)(both laugh).

The mother tries to control her own worries by encouraging her child to find another, smaller tree to climb in. She did not say if she was successful in this attempt, but she might not have been. According to Sandseter (2009) children will seek challenges that give them the exhilaration of managing greater risks. This is the reason why they would climb in the first place. They are actively seeking the excitement expressed as a combination of both fun and scary at the same time (Ibid:99). Children have their individual sense of risk and will seek challenges that are adjusted to their own limitations and urge for exhilaration (Ibid:104).

On picking up her child from the barnehage, a mother from the South usually found her child on a slide, and even though she was proud that she was so fearless, she found it hard to get used to seeing her child sliding from what she perceived as a high slide in the barnehage. But she was happy that her child was so independent and was convinced the barnehage, “the system”, groomed her that way. The parent sees her child taking actively part in, and managing the risks involved and accepts it and recognizes that it is good for the child. Even if there are minor injuries, it is not the end of the world. “The system” in the Norwegian barnehage, which opens up for these activities also opens up the minds of the parents who admit they would have prohibited the same activities if they had been in their country of origin. Their own fear and cultural practice would be the filter for what the children would be allowed to do, and put a full stop to activities they now, in another cultural setting, see their children learn to handle and to master (Gullestad 1989; Sandseter 2010). The activities are examples of children’s agency in actively daring their own fears and developing their skills. When they master this they are rewarded with a feeling of exhilaration that made it

worthwhile. The Norwegian nature and robust child discourses open up for children to engage in these kinds of play activities. According to the mother above, there is little support from the staff to prohibit these kinds of play. The traditional cultural practice of experiencing and exploring the elements in nature and outdoor life has a strong standing in Norwegian barnehager. However, there is a growing discourse of worry also in the Norwegian culture (Nilsen 2008:46). There are few serious injuries in barnehager in Norway, but nevertheless, there is an increasing pressure of making the barnehager safer, especially by making climbing in trees prohibited. This could jeopardize the children's opportunities of playing in a challenging environment where they can learn to manage risks which in itself can prevent future injuries (Sandseter et al.,2013).

Another perspective is the rights discourse where children should have a right according to the UNCRC to participate in making decisions that concern them. One manifestation of children's rights is the possibility of deciding what activities to participate in (Gulløv, cited in Kjørholt, 2008; see 3.3.1). Despite inner resistance the minority mothers give their children this opportunity, albeit trying to convince them to make a different decision. It is indicated that the staff would grant the opportunity for the children to make the decision and rely on the children's individual sense of risk assessment. In both cases the children are granted autonomy, although with a different process to reach it.

The fathers in my sample are unanimously supporting their children in participating in risky play. When asked if he would mind finding his child in a tall tree when he came to pick her up in the barnehage, a father (the South) said that he would think it is good training, although he would warn the child to be careful. He thinks it is a 'normal' activity for children and would rather be worried if his child did not engage in it, and wonder whether his child was then 'normal' or not. I understand the use of the concept "normal" as a general term about "what children are like" which is commonly used among most people. Another father (the South) agreed with this view and was critical to the dominant discourse in child rearing in his culture. He was not very happy with how parents in his country of origin respond to the children when they want to try out risky activities, like climbing a tree. There are no explanations given of why they cannot do certain activities, just a general prohibition:

"Basically, I should say they are not risky play [...] this is maybe the mistakes we do back home. Back home we have this approach "don't do it, don't, don't, don't!" And this is not good. [...] We grew up with our parents telling us "don't" [so] everything is "don't" and not "why". [...] there isn't and additional "why I shouldn't do it". So we ended up telling them to our friends.[...] I needed an explanation[...] Why shouldn't I climb the tree? Why? Cause

when I grew up I had to climb that tree. Why, when I was small I wasn't allowed? I could have learnt".

This example tells that the discourses of worry leading to general prohibition make children hide their agency by going behind their parents' backs. The urge of challenging his fear and skills "obliged" him to go against what his parents told him when he said "*I had to climb that tree*". This experience has made the father willing to go against the dominant discourse in his country to make sure his child gets the necessary opportunity to play and do what children "have to do". Another father (the East) said it was important that children did not grow up in an environment without challenges. If they do not learn to cope with obstacles and challenges in childhood, they will get difficulties later in life. He believed that you would more easily cope with difficulties later in life if you learn to cope with small challenges as a child:

"Listen, if the children get sterile condition and everything right under their nose, they will not cope later in life, because even a small problem will seem like a big problem, right? But in this way the child learns to adjust to various life situations. That's what they learn now, at this age. When she later is 20 or 30 years old and loses her job, ah, that is not a problem. "I will find a new job rather than hang myself." This is my view on this. They have to learn to handle various difficulties"

His view is that you should not protect your children from all dangers, but let them try it out. It will benefit them in the long run and is a preparation for life, which is in accordance with research on benefits of risky play (Marano, 2005, cited in Guldberg, 2009:69). There seems to be a gender difference in adopting, adapting or resisting the cultural practice among the parents in my sample as the discourse of worry is dominant among the mothers, even if my sample is too limited to make generalizations.

5.6.2 Play with dangerous tools

Traditionally, in Norway, whittling with knives has been a part of the rural culture and the nature and outdoors discourses. Most male national costumes have a knife as a part of the attire. In the Sami tradition (national minority) the knife is a tool used for all purposes, from slaughtering reindeer, whittling and carving in bark and wood and even frozen meat preparing what is called "reinsdyrskav". The tradition is maintained in many barnehager. A father from the North, after saying that he had no objections to having his child use a knife, humorously told about a documentary he had seen on TV year ago about a Sami barnehage in the north of Norway where 3-year-olds played with the traditional Sami knives, the size of their legs, with great skills and no mothers screaming of fear:

"I have no objections to that. I remember to have seen, long time ago[...]from also documentary on the Norwegian television about children in barnehage in the far North [...] 3-year-olds playing with a "samekniv" (Sami knife). And just like normal, and no mother

coming like “ooohhh”, just, you know..And the way they handle that knife which is as tall as their leg, you know, just skillful and controlled”

Although tools like knives, hammers, saws and the like are basic tools in most cultures, the discourses of worries and overprotection of children prevent children from learning to use them, even from using an ordinary table knife during meals. I had expected that the minority parents in my sample would be terrified at the thought of having their children use a knife for whittling. To my surprise, most of them were not negative at the prospect of their children using knives in the barnehage at all, even if they would not give them ordinary table knives, or even scissors to use at home. Many parents said they trusted the staff, and if the staff teach the children and think it is okay to use a knife to whittle, the parents trust that it is fine.

The Norwegian discourse of the robust child subject is not colliding with the view that children should be taught to handle risks. It is prohibiting the experiences that would be contradicting this. As Nilsen (2008) says, the robust child subject learns from experience. Overprotection by prohibiting children from having these experiences will leave the children with a feeling of fear of what might be dangerous. This way, it is the parents' worries that in the end will lead to anxious children that are frightened of trying out anything that they have been told is dangerous (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). As mentioned above, the discourse of worry and overprotection of children is also a mindset that is seeping into the Norwegian culture. With the majority of the children in barnehage, this is the place where they spend most of their time. Getting the experiences of e.g. handling dangerous tools in the barnehage help children face challenges that will benefit them in the long run (see 3.3.4; Adams, 2001 cited in Sandseter 2009). By using dangerous tools, children take actively part in cultural reproduction in all cultures, the Norwegian culture included. The nature and outdoor life discourse implies knowing how to handle tools that make you autonomous and independent on hikes. There is reciprocity in the fact that the staffs do not expose the children to dangerous tools without teaching them, something that makes the parents trust that their children are safe.

5.6.3 Play near dangerous elements

Play near dangerous elements implies play near fire, fall from a steep rock or similar, into deep water, or play in a stream or lake. The minority parents in my sample did not dwell much around this. A mother (the South) said she would not be afraid as long as there were adults nearby. The staffs are educated and have learnt what to do and how to do it. She thought they probably know more than her. Most important for her was that her child was

safe. If the staffs think some activities are alright, she was okay with that. Cooking over fire has been the common way of cooking all over the world, and barbeques are the modern version of the same. However, from own talks with practitioners in the North, building fires in EC settings would be out of the question in many countries, and the cultural practice is not reproduced in these settings. Some parents in my sample told how the barnehage staffs teach the children to make a fire when they are five years old, not earlier. The staffs are sensible, according to the parents, and they teach the children so the children understand that it is not a toy, that it is dangerous, and make them understand what it is used for:

“[when] they teach them how to make a fire, it’s not the young kids, it’s not John’s age, it’s the older ones [...] they do it in a way that they explain it to them. That this is dangerous, that it’s not a toy and they explain them how to make a fire, and, it’s done in a way that I think the kids understand, why you make a fire and what it is.[...]”

Most parents would not be worried about any of the dangers involved in playing near dangerous elements. They trust in the staff’s ability to look after their children, and some of the parents say that injuries can happen anywhere, even if the child is playing outside their own home. There seems to be no colliding of discourses when it comes to playing near fire. Other dangerous elements were not responded to other than it was not a problem as long as staffs were present.

5.6.4 Rough-and-tumble play

Rough-and-tumble play means play-fighting or play wrestling where children can harm each other. It can also involve using sticks or other objects for fencing against each other. The mothers react more strongly against this kind of play than the father in my sample. This is not surprising, as this kind of play is said to appeal more to boys and men than to girls and women (Sandseter 2007:246; Storli 2012:13). One of the reasons might be that women have less experience from this kind of play and do not see clearly the difference between real fight and play-fight (Storli 2012:13). One mother (the South) had told the staff in the barnehage that her child (a boy) was not allowed to engage in this kind of play, at least not if there were no adults. The staffs replied that the children were playing, and that they wanted the children to learn, and she trusted the staff to make the right decision for her child. Nevertheless, she felt torn between this and her moral position as a mother to teach her child to be the big brother and a role model for the younger siblings, and to maintain the rule that you shall not hit. Another mother from the South admitted that she did not like it, but understood that her boys liked it. She would allow it if they went to the basement room. If it got too rough she

would stop it though, especially because there was an age gap between the eldest and youngest son:

Mother: "Yah. I don't like it, but I know all, mostly boys like it. Soo, I don't think that is good. I think we should tell each other that's getting too rough. I think so. I do that.

Interviewer: "But you are a woman. And you say that boys like this."

Mother: "Boys like this.[...] Maybe it's important for boys. So, lately my first child has been trying out all the karate moves and all that and playing rough. And we told him, that if you want to do this, just go into the basement, in the "kjellerstue" and do it. Because I think it will be too rough for Akin (4- year-old). If Akin gets to his age, eh, range, he can try that out as well, if he wants [...] but if it's getting too rough or too noisy, then we caution them. "Now the play is getting too rough!" There must be a limit".

Play-fight is stimulated as part of the Norwegian cultural discourse of nature and outdoor play and the robust child subject in which children show agency in co-constructing their childhood. Nilsen (2008) gives an example from rough-and-tumble play in the snow where adults also took actively part. Even when there is some pain involved, or the children get wet or cold, the fun of it overrides the disadvantages and the children choose actively to get involved (Ibid). The minority parents accept that this takes place in the barnehage and rely on the staff to keep it in safe forms. These activities do not seem to be culturally specific, and the only difference in response is the reaction by mothers as opposed to fathers, as is a phenomenon seen in many countries in the world.

5.6.5 Play where children can get lost or disappear

The last category of risky play is when children play in areas where there are e.g. no fences, and the children can move freely without constant adult supervision. In the Norwegian discourse of a good childhood, children should be allowed to move freely in nature and find places to play. The natural environment gives many opportunities for children to involve in all kinds of play. Children seem to prefer bushes and naturally formed corners to open spaces, where they will more exposed. The more complex the natural environment is, the more complex the play activities will be (Frost & Stickland, 1985, Wilkinson, 1980 cited in Fjørtoft, 2000:4). In the woods the children can take part in play activities where they can be on their own without adults monitoring and supervising every move (Ibid.). Such spatial freedom is what has been most restricted in many part of the world in recent years (see 3.3.4).

The parents in my sample, except one, were not worried that their children would get lost in the woods or on hikes. They trusted the staff to look after them and were positive to know that the children were taken out on excursions and hikes. A father from the East had been on one of the hikes. He told that he at first thought the staff had no idea of the whereabouts of the

children, but then realized that they had hill tops where they had the full overview without hovering over the children. If he had not seen it for himself, he would have thought that this was not “normal”. He was very positive to the care of the staff, and saw the advantage for the children, that they got a larger area to play in:

“I think they give good care, because I have seen situations where a child wanders alone in the forest. And I thought, no one sees the child, but after a while it appeared that a staff member was standing on the top of a hill, and she was standing in such a way that she had an overview of all the children in the barnehage.[...] If I had heard about it without seeing it myself, I would think it was strange, a problem and not normal. But after I have been there and seen what is going on in practice, I think it is very good, because the children have a larger area to play in.”

The one parent that was negative had a more protective attitude, a trait which is more and more predominant in the North. By restricting children spatially, there is no area where children can exercise autonomy, an idea that is contrary to the Norwegian discourse of a happy childhood with autonomous children (see 3.5.1.1, James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The adult’s fear of what can happen to the child, hampers the needs of children to encounter risks and learn to manage the risks and become at home in the world (see 3.3.4). A mother (the North) had overheard staff members asking each other if the other had seen a particular child, whether the child was indoors or outdoors. She got a panicking feeling that the same staff perhaps did not know where her child was at all times. She admitted that she liked to be in control of what her child was doing. Even though she tried to reassure herself that other parents brought their children to the barnehage, she was worried:

“[all] the parents of the classmates of Betty, they bring their child there All the other parents are trusting so, okay, I reassure myself that, okay, it’s okay to bring Betty there and don’t be alarmed or panicky about it. But, I am more concerned, because I like to be more in control of what she is doing. I am not sure how much they are watching her. Because one day I was just walking there and I hear two of the assistants “oh, where is that and that child. Oh, didn’t you see her? Oh, I thought he went inside. Oh, is he not inside?” And I was, oh my God, do they also don’t know where my child is sometimes?”

The Norwegian cultural discourse of giving the children the opportunities to move around freely in large areas in nature and the outdoors is for most parents in my sample not a problem at all. They have great faith in the staff and their ability to look after their children. From my experience and talks with practitioners, university lecturers and students teachers, Betty’s parent in my sample is influenced by discourses that are predominant in early EC settings in many countries in the North, e.g. Ireland and England. These are discourses of anxiety for what might happen and lead to close control and all-time monitoring of children. The parent resists the Norwegian cultural practice, and I will presume that the staffs are just as resistant

to change a cultural practice that is deeply rooted in Norway. This way the parent is forced to accept, but there is no adaptation.

The greatest worry for many of the minority parents in my sample was their children's academic learning. Would the time spent outdoors make them so wild and unruly that they would be unable to concentrate on "real learning" of academic subjects? They were worried whether their children would be able to learn enough in the barnehage to be prepared for school or not. Simultaneously, there were many references to other areas where their children learnt, and which their parents admitted they were impressed by, and proud of.

The next chapter will deal with how the minority parents experience their children's learning when spending a lot of time in nature and the outdoors during barnehage hours.

CHAPTER SIX: CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

This chapter is the second of two empirical chapters. I will present the experiences of the minority parents in my sample from the perspective of their children's learning in the Norwegian barnehage, where the children spend a lot of time in nature and the outdoors.

The minority parents have expectations for their children which to a large extent depend on their own experiences from preschool and/or school. Unlike in Norway, in most countries preschools have grown out of schools, and the teaching methods and curricula are often copies of those in school (Korsvold, 2005; Prochner & Kabiru, 2008). Learning academic skills like reading, writing and numeracy is emphasized. Most of the parents in my sample refer to the barnehage as school, something that is therefore understandable, since preschools around the world to a great extent are organized as schools. And in school you are supposed to learn, especially literacy and numeracy, but also learn to sit still, exercise more self-control and behave according to specific norms. From my own experience, I know that teachers and parents are concerned that discipline is maintained, and virtues like obedience and respect are held high. In preschool, children would spend most of the day indoors sitting at desks doing adult led activities. In many countries in the South good education is expensive, and parents want value for their money, and they want to see that their children succeed.

Traditionally, the Norwegian and Nordic barnehage has a so-called holistic approach to the development of the child. This means that care, play and learning have been emphasized, and children could interact and socialize with other children in an atmosphere of joy (see 2.4). There is a strong Nordic tradition that nature and the outdoors represent the ideal place for children to develop into competent, autonomous human beings, and that children and nature are closely linked together in this discourse (Kjørholt, 2008, see 3.2.1). Children learn to make sense of the world around them and acquire various skills through play and playful activities in accordance with the FKCTK where it says: *"Learning takes place in everyday interaction with other people and with the community, and is closely related to play, care and formation. Children can learn from everything they experience in all areas of life"* (sic. *Ibid:29*). The discourse of children's right to play and engage in cultural activities with their peers is referred to as "children's own culture". Implied in this is that the children should have the right to move freely in the neighbourhood or in nature and the outdoors. Children should have the opportunity to freely and autonomously structure parts of the day according to their own need without being monitored by adults all the time (Guldborg 2009, see 3.3.1). The

child's social, emotional and physical development has been more emphasized than reading and writing skills. It is the child's "natural development" that should be the centre of attention, not formalized, organized and adult led education. There was a lot of opposition when the Government introduced compulsory education for children in 1997, from age 6 instead of age 7, because formal education at such an early age would take away precious play time for the children and "take away their childhood" (Skevik & Hatland, 2008).

In this chapter, I will present and discuss what the minority parents in my sample tell about the experiences they have had of the learning environment their children meet in the Norwegian barnehage, and how this corresponds with the expectations they have for their children's education. The chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section deals with the worries some of the minority parents in my sample have for their children's academic achievements, the disciplining of them, and whether they think the children are ready to start school after spending so much time in nature and the outdoors during the hours they daily spend in the barnehage. The second section deals with what the minority parents experience that their children learn from spending a lot of time in nature and the outdoors in the Norwegian barnehage.

6.1 "Outside they are just playing and being wild and doing all kind of things"

As previously accounted for, culture, traditions, governmental documents and the majority staff and parents' expectations of a good Norwegian childhood imply for children to spend a lot of time in nature and the outdoors. This view might be shared by some minority parents, and it might just as well be very contradictory to how they see the aim and the purpose for the time their children spend in the barnehage.

6.1.1 Spaces for disciplining and learning

The *socialization theory* that has formed dominant ideas of learning and teaching (Jenks, 1982; see 3.4.1) is centred around the adult's perspective and the adult's influence on the passive and incompetent child. Through teaching the child norms, values and expected behavior in society, the child would in turn internalize these and eventually, as an adult, become a useful member of society. A mother from the North believes that teaching children indoors, where they are organized neatly seated around tables, will turn children into valuable members of society:

"[And] it's better for society if they learn to do things neatly and nicely[indoors]".

Another theory of great influence that is accounted for in chapter three is *developmental psychology* which also sees the child as someone to become something in the future, but has

to go through a series of developmental stages to reach the ultimate bench mark, that of a rational and reasoning adult. Both theories saw children and childhood in a universal perspective regardless of time and place and as a benchmark to measure “normal” development against (Jenks, 1992; see 3.4.2). The Puritan discourse was decisive for introducing compulsory education. Simultaneously, children’s space was restricted and became an effective control in children’s daily life and how they experienced space. Education would take place indoors where one teacher could control a whole group of children, who in turn were organized in ordered rows or smaller groups at tables in a classroom. The control of the children implies, that activities are organized and led by the teacher in an adult controlled environment. A mother from the North was disappointed that they in “schools” (barnehage) in Norway always concentrated on physical activities outdoors and not on quiet activities around a table indoors. She says there should be more balance between the two.

“She has a problem just sitting quietly and doing nothing! The only time she does it, is when she is watching TV or she is watching something on the computer[...]But I find it so disappointing that here the schools they always concentrate on playing, being outside, doing everything you can, climbing trees, running, and there is no balance. I think they should be taught a little bit more “okay, now it’s time to be quiet. We are going to do things together in a group”.

The concept “balance” is a subjective term, and from the context, I interpret it to mean little time outdoors and a lot of time indoors where children take part in adult led, structured learning activities. Restricting children spatially is a way of controlling them, in addition to introducing rules as to where and how to play, instead of giving the children freedom to play and interact socially without the supervision of adults. By keeping the child indoors at home as well, there are no areas for children where they can exercise autonomy (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; see 3.5.1.1). Most of the parents in my sample have children in ordinary barnehager where they would also spend time indoors. Even most of the nature and outdoor barnehager would spend time indoors, but the amount of time spent outdoors in barnehage still exceeds what you will find in most parts of the world. The Norwegian understanding of the concept “balance” in this context is not in accordance with the understanding of some of the minority parents in my sample (Djuve & Pettersen, 1998; see 1.2). One parent from the North explains that he thinks a child learns more indoors and should spend time on preparing for school by learning skills like reading and writing:

“[and also], I would say, I have the impression that, I don’t know, in a classroom they learn more. I would like her to learn more, like a little bit of reading or writing already, and prepare for school. And learn more like rules. These kind of things. Like, how to eat correctly, and how to behave correctly”.

It is not only the academic skills a child will learn this way, but also rules of behavior, e.g. how to eat correctly and be well behaved. The father is worried his daughter will not learn this if she stays outdoors in the barnehave. He sees learning these skills as equivalent with being “normal”.

“And I don’t know, I have the impression that when they are outside they are just playing and being wild and doing all kind of things, but not being normal, like [says a word in his own language], what’s that? “Disciplined”, or.. that they have.. ?”

These parents are very negative and reject the cultural practice in Norway which is based on the assumption that children learn from play, observation, wondering and practice. In addition, it is also assumed that learning can take place anywhere. There are more parents who reject this philosophy of learning than adapt to it.

The idea that children are wild and untamed, and in need of being disciplined and kept in line, is a discourse very close to the Puritan discourse, and these parents seem to be influenced by it (see 3.5.1 *The evil and wild child*). Normality comes with the taming of the children, and the school is an institution where this can take place. Education is a way of filling the children with the knowledge and skills they need to become rational and responsible men and women of high morals. Anything the child learns comes from the adult organized environment. Another dominant discourse (see 3.5.2 *The imminent child*) sees the child’s mind as blank. Everything has to be “written on the child’s blank slate”. A mother from the South tells about her worries for her daughter’s grooming. She illustrates her points by telling about the difference between her two eldest children. Her oldest child spent his first years in their country of origin and later in a school in Britain. The other one has only attended Norwegian barnehave. She says that children have no knowledge and skills, but have a personality. Children’s minds are blank, and they have to be groomed in an environment where her child can learn these things, and this learning can only take place indoors. In addition, you have to be sure the child has the right playmates and friends, and that they will add to the child’s good environment:

Mother: “She should be learning skills that can eeh.. make her better at school, think, at five years old. That’s what I think. It doesn’t mean it’s right, but that’s what I think. Skills, concentration skills, you know. So I think that’s what I think”.

Interviewer: “Uhum. And you feel she is not learning these skills when she is playing outdoors.. to concentrate, or..?”

Mother: “No. [...]. My oldest child can sit more to learn, but Asha is all over the place!”

Interviewer: “(Laughs) Yeh, so her whole body is moving at all times?”

Mother: “Aahhh! So, aah, moving at all times. So I think that.. I have learnt that a child’s mind is blank. A child has a personality, but not [...] knowledge. “Ikke kunnskap” (no knowledge). But they have a personality, and now they have.. We have to groom the child so

that they can grow up, so many factors affect them, environmental factors and playmates and friends and any things and their instinct and their personality and what good these things for them, I think. [...]”.

The mother resists the cultural practice so much that she had already planned to take one of her children out of the barnehage and into an international school, because there is more structured learning both indoors and outdoors. This is a system she recognizes from her own country of origin:

“They have more structured indoor teaching and outdoor learning and all that. But in (says name her country of origin) it’s almost the same.”

In this way, her child will be under adult control and will be kept more “in line”. Instead of risking that her child should continue the “wild and untamed” behaviour in a Norwegian barnehage, where children can roam about and have more control of their own time when they are outdoors, it probably felt safer to change to an environment where the mother was more comfortable with the way children were learning. After all, preparing for school meant sitting down (or “settle”) indoors to learn.

6.1.2 Age for learning “school skills” and start formal education

At what age a child should leave a playful existence behind and start formal education is an issue of concern for some parents. One mother from the South is of the opinion that until age five children could play, but when they turn five, they should prepare for school by learning what she refers to as “school skills” so they do not come unprepared and “untamed” to school:

“So I think at age six children should be learning. So it will not be more difficult for them when they go to school. They should be that transitions period...Age five, then age six [...] they start school, and you don’t want to be fiddling with a, ..eh.. you don’t want to be walking with a child that is not even settled. So.. eh!![...]They can be outside if they want. They just.. they should just be happy and by the time they get to like age five they should be learning skills, school skills, I think”.

A survey of the barnehager’s pedagogical work with the five-year-olds referred to in Norwegian Parliamentary White Paper no.24 (St.meld.no24, 2012-13), says that almost 70 per cent of all barnehager say their work methods are directed towards learning, towards supporting the initiative of children in the learning process and securing the children’s independent choices of activities. Social competence is the area which is given highest priority (Lekhal et a. 2013, cited in St.meld.no.24, 2012-13:72). Almost all barnehager organize activities that aim at preparing the children for school. They also engage in cooperation with institution like primary school, child welfare, educational psychological services (“PP-tjenesten”) and health services so the children have a smooth transition from barnehage to school (Ibid:20). Even if the barnehager organize these school preparing

activities, these are either not communicated well enough to the parents, or they are still not as frequent, formal and “school like” as some minority parents in my sample expect. Reciprocity would mean that the barnehage listened to the parents’ worries and gave adequate information on the assumed learning of the activities the children took part in, either in formal or informal situations. Only one parent (the North) mentions this preparation, and sees them as positive:

“[when] they get into the age when they are five years old they have this “førskole”(pre-school) programme. So they have that as well, so they are not really losing out compared to other kids, I think[...]”

There is ambiguity among the references parents in my sample make to their happy children playing and being active in nature and the outdoors, and their worries about the children’s academic education. Even if they see their children are happy, they resist the unstructured practice and want to make sure their children get into “the system” as soon as possible. The fear that their children will not be ready for school because they are “wild and untamed” makes some parents insecure of the benefits of all the positive sides they mention when it comes to playing, learning and being active outdoors. They simply cannot trust this. I will deal with the positive learning effects in 6.2.

According to some parents, school seems to be the end of a child’s happiness. Mother from the North says of her 3-year-old child that he should be allowed to be a child and be happy before he starts school. After he starts school the happy time will be over. And for her, the child is most happy when he is outdoors:

“I think it’s important that he’s allowed to be a child. When he starts school at six years old, a lot of that is over, and it’s not going to come back. Because school is, is.. that’s pretty serious when that starts, and, so, I think it is great that he can be now as happy, and, so whatever he wants, and he’s happy outside, so. And I just .. every day I pick up a kid with a big smile on his face. And for me, I don’t think there’s anything better[...]”

The experiences and attitudes of the minority parents above are examples of the kind of ambivalences you will find in barnehager and schools that have parents and children from many cultures. Culture, or the patterns for life, are not static, but are continuously negotiated and renegotiated among parents, children and staff (Gullestad 1989). *Critical multiculturalism* is a concept which can be seen as a further development of Gullestad’s understanding of culture where e.g. parents’ culture is confirmed and recognized, but is simultaneously an object for critical approach. In a barnehage, where there are parents from various cultures, there will also be a disagreements about whose life experiences, and what views on issues should count. This could be about what knowledge is important to learn; and how and where it is learnt (Angell, 2010:112). In line with this, other diverging views can be on, e.g. how we define what environment is best for children, for instance if that is indoors or outdoors.

The FPCTK (2011) suggests both formal and informal learning settings for children in indoor and outdoor areas. The seven learning areas are stated, but the learning methods used in the Norwegian barnehage are different from the parents' expectations. The FPCTK has many references to the use of outdoor arenas for learning. Play and social interaction are seen as important prerequisites for learning. It also says that the curiosity of the children, their wondering and observations in “*rich, joint experiences*” are crucial (Ministry of Education, 2011:33). As mentioned above, a problem for some of the parents in my sample is that they feel there is a lack of *balance*, a word that was frequently used, especially by parents from the South, from former British colonies. It does not mean they only want formal teaching situations, but they want more of it. However, the concept of ‘balance’ is not easily measured, so the only way I could understand it, was that there should be more focus on academic work and less on play. A father from the South acknowledges that play is important for children, is part of their nature and something they like doing. You cannot take play away from the children, but there should be more “balance” so children should be introduced to academic work:

“[Yaah], because the children like playing, so we can’t take that away from them. The moment we are doing that we are going against even nature. Yah. So there should be some balance where the children are introduced to some academic work”.

Age seems to play a role when you should introduce more academic work. The first mother mentioned five years as the limit when children should stop playing and start learning to concentrate, and other “school skills”. The child of the father above had not turned three at the time. Another father (the North) believed that for his 4-year-old child, there should be more formal introduction to academic work in line with what age school starts for children in his country of origin. A mother (the South) shares the worries for her child’s academic development. She would rather that her child could prepare for school, “for necessary things”, by being forced to sit quietly and write and count and not roam about all day. She also notices that her view has little resonance in the barnehage where her child is:

“[...]I think it’s very important they spend time indoors on necessary things, like.. Because I think it will be a challenge for most of them when they start primary school when they got so used to always run and scream the whole day and now they have to sit! Inside and .. write. I think it will be important that they start teaching them very early on how to write and count.. all that.. But they don’t put so much focus on it in the barnehagen, actually”.

This issue is one of those that will be in the battlefield, because it is so far from the Norwegian understanding of what is important for children in the barnehage, something that is illustrated by the response the same mother got from the staff when the issue of teaching

reading and writing skills was raised. The staff resisted this practice strongly. As a two-year-old child, her daughter had learnt the alphabet, and she asked the staff to support her by continuing working on her learning. The staff did not give any support to the mother and her strategy of teaching her child at this age, and I assume they were a bit shocked, because they told her she was too hard on her child. They felt she was stressing her child by insisting on this at such an early age:

“[Yes], because when she was two I taught her the alphabet and I asked them.. She was very interested in it, and I asked them if they can help me, because, yah, it was after summer and in the summer she had learnt the whole alphabet, and I remember the staff, one of the staff she told me that “it is very hard, you are stressing your kid”, and I said that no, I don’t think she will have any harm of learning things early, because the kids have the capacity of taking [...] a lot of information in when they are small, than when they grow up, so I think it should start earlier than five years ,because I think it is important for them that, in that critical period, than waiting when they are six or seven,(laughs), so..”

The mother, on the other hand believed that it was better to utilize the child’s capacity of taking in information as early as possible. There was no reciprocity from the staff’s side. There was a clear clash of discourses at work. Another mother from the South was critical to the staff’s way of listening to the children and putting children first by following their initiatives. They should instead teach them more and provide more guidance:

“Maybe the teachers in the barnehage always put “children first, children first, children first (knocks on the table)!” And they follow their initiative, and maybe they don’t really get to learn some things [...] So, it’s children first. Of course children should be first, but we should know also that children need that kind of grooming, “veiledning”(guidance), [...]. They have their personality but they don’t know so much”.

What the mother is critical to, is emphasized as being positive in the FKCTK and the rights discourse (Kjørholt 2008). Children’s initiative to explore the world is seen as a good starting point for wondering and learning. It is not surprising that there will be resistance from staff to change this approach which is in line with the cultural practice. Not all the parents were concerned about the fact that the children spent more time outdoors than what they were used to from their home country. One father (the North), was not worried about his three year old child’s learning of academic skills like numbers theory yet. His child could focus on that later and have fun and enjoy the outdoors at his age:

“I don’t want to sit down and teach him numbers theory now. It’s important to try a little now and then, but it’s not something to focus on yet. He’s too young! He has to have fun and learn to enjoy outdoors. We think that’s more important at this age”.

On a question from the interviewer whether he would rather that his child should be seated on a chair indoors and learn letters and numbers, a father from the East answered that he would

rather have her play more in the barnehage now that he had seen the advantage of this for his daughter. He saw that she had made a lot of progress :

“She has made so much progress.[...]I am not saying that it was bad in the barnehage in V (says name of country), they did other things there [...]. My daughter has already learnt the letters and numbers, and I see the advantages of having more play in the barnehage.”

It is difficult to say if the father adapted so easily because his child had already learnt letters and numbers before she moved to Norway. However, he had spent some time in the barnehage with his child and had observed what activities the children took part in, and the free play they engaged in. He was very pleased with what he had observed. This can indicate that reciprocity would rely on communication and knowledge of what goes on in the barnehage.

6.1.3 “One day I will have to go back with my children”

The educational structure in many countries outside the Nordic countries divide early childhood education into Child Care for children from 0-3years and Pre-school for children from 3-5 or 6 (OECD, 2006 & OECD, 2012b, cited in St.meld.no.24, 2012-13). From age three the learning environment is more formal and adult centered than the Nordic model (see 2.4). Some of the minority parents in my sample might have good reasons to be worried about their children’s little exposure to formal education in literacy and numeracy. Some of them know for sure that their children will have to break up from the Norwegian society they have grown up in and try to adapt to a new reality in the country of origin. What kind of preparations you feel you have to do to help your child will have consequences for how willing you are to adapt to the cultural practice in the host country. A mother (the South) tells about a friend who sent back two of his four children to their home country. The other children in the classes were far ahead in class and could read anything in English. The mother knows that she will also have to go back with her child and worries about how this will be for the child who is accustomed to the Norwegian system and does not speak, read or write English :

“We have a friend. He has four children now. But two of them are back home in X (name of country).In X-country their age mates were already reading in English, any material they took them. They had gone ahead in class. It took them a longer time to catch up with people of their class.. Yah. So, I think that, because I was not born in Norway, one day I will have to go back home. I have to go back with my children and we have to adjust to the X-ian system. That system is different”.

The other options would be for the parents to send their children back to their country while they were still here. That was not a desired option for them. Their country of origin has English as the language of instruction in school, as have many countries that are former British colonies. The legacy of colonialism is still influencing, among others, the education

systems, the language of instruction in schools and the governments' official language (see 3.5.4 and 3.6). Post-colonialism is also influencing minority parents with children in Norwegian barnehager. The educational systems have curricula that are more or less based on that of the former colony's educational structure and contents. The preschool curricula are often extensions of primary education (see 3.6). The emphasis on the school age being five is that kind of legacy. The insecurity of the minority parents of what benefits their children in the long run, influences their attitude to the Norwegian barnehage system with its emphasis on nature and outdoor play and activities. In Norway free play and activities in nature and the outdoors can be perceived as an obstacle to a future reintegration to the country of origin, and is resisted. The worries also concern their children's understanding of what school is, that it is a system requiring "serious studies" and little play, as the same mother from the South explains:

"[I] don't know when the system prepares them to start serious studies. So, it might be difficult for them to be reintrodu.. or for them to be moved from this stage of spending so much time outside, into the classroom. So, the reintroduction could be a bit of a problem [if] it is not well handled. The children could think that they will not be very serious students.. think that education is all about play. So that is a challenge".

One father tells about the decision of a friend to move back to his country of origin because he claimed his child did not learn enough in the Norwegian school system, i.e. barnhage. Here there was a never ending emphasis on playing outdoors whereas his child's friends abroad had learnt arithmetic and could recite poetry:

"The eldest when they left was [...] six, and they specifically moved back to the Y-(country), because their oldest son, every time when he met with his friends in Y-country, with his age peers, they could do things that he couldn't, like simple arithmetic, some rhymes etcetera. And he got frustrated for that. And here, all it was "playing outside playing outside", endlessly. But, to the liking of these parents, too little focus on education".

There is too little focus on education in Norway, one parent says. The father telling this is resisting the cultural practice and shows great sympathy with the friend who resisted so much that he moved the whole family back to his country of origin.

6.2 "They explore and observe at close range, they learn to separate garbage"

Despite worries whether their children would learn enough academic skills and learn to concentrate to be prepared for school, the minority parents in my sample gave many examples of what their children learnt from spending time in nature and the outdoors. In this section I will account for the areas the parents mention as very valuable for the development of their children and for their whole life. One parent believed that through exposing the children to nature and the outdoors, the barnehage staff could see how they responded to it, like testing in

a laboratory. This way they could find out what kind of skills, hobbies or knowledge the children would try to develop. Although put in a different form, this is in accordance with the approach to learning that is framed in the FPCTK. As a teacher, you should build on the “rich, joint” experiences of the children. In this sense, “nature” is valuable as a tool for other purposes than the immediate experience here and now.

6.2.1 Learning about flora and fauna

The minority parents show no resistance to activities that are somehow organized. “Gå på tur i skogen” (go for a walk/hike in the woods) is one of the activities the children do, according to a father from the South. Here the children get the opportunity to discover nature and observe the flora and fauna at close range:

“They pick flowers, they observe at close range on various insects and things basically, .. back home in W(name of country) we tend to prohibit kids not to touch some insects or what, because we know others are dangerous. But here the kids are given the opportunity to observe at close range, and .. I understand of course, that there are kids that will develop interests on biological observations, and in future these are doctors and the surgeons, and the what.”

The father recognizes that this way of observing can influence on the further interests and even choice of profession later in life. The influence of spending time outdoors, and the interest and the knowledge the children get from going out in nature is also shared with the parents. A father from the South tells how his child takes on a leading role in showing his father birds and tells his father to listen to the voices of birds when they are out in the forest:

“Whenever I go with my son outside, he will start showing me whatever they use to see when they go for a trip. He will show me birds, he will tell me to listen to the, to the voice of birds, [...] You see? So he’ll keep on showing me various, eh, what, in nature, various activities which are associated with nature, whenever we are outside”.

Given the freedom to be in nature and the outdoors without too many restrictions and be stimulated to discover and observe at close range, give the children rich opportunities to feed their curiosity and stimulate them to be innovative. The father believes this practice could explain why there were so many discoverers in this part of the world compared to his own, as the same father had contemplated on after coming to Norway:

“Discover this, and that’s how maybe this part of the world you have many discoverers than the other part of the world. It’s because trying. Becoming a discoverer, becoming innovative, it is the trying to do it once more [...] every time you try to do it. And that is how you reach the point to discover something”.

A mother (the) North told about the flora and fauna her child learnt. She is amazed that the children learn so much in the barnehage:

“[and] they learn, you know, all the birds and all the trees and it’s great, because it’s a lot they learn in school [barnehagen]”.

Another mother from the South tells that her daughter is very explorative, and that she learns a lot from exploring nature using her senses and wondering about phenomena in nature asking lots of questions, like why the seasons change, why it is snowing. A mother from the East tells about all the gardening activities they do, like sowing various seeds to grow plants, and how the children learn about birds by observing via a camera how a titmouse is brooding over her eggs, and how they even grew grass to provide food for birds. This parent says they do not lose out on anything because they learn so much. A father (the East) told about his child learning about what berries can be picked and eaten, and which ones are not good for eating. The children learn to become autonomous.

The parents are very happy and proud of the kind of knowledge the children gain concerning nature. The staffs are praised for being creative and for organizing activities outdoors that appeal to the children. These activities are seen as useful and something the children learn from. There is reciprocity in the parent - child relationship when parents proudly tell about the children sharing their knowledge with their parents. Many of the activities seem to be adult led, and I believe they are therefore easier to accept and adapt to. That they also have a future perspective for their children's choice of a career and learning to become explorative are seen as positive. However, most of the parents I have referred to above were those that were least critical to the lack of academic learning. These parents recognized that the culture of taking children on hikes and various outdoor activities stimulated to their children's learning, even if it did not take place indoors and at a table working at learning letters and writing words etc.

6.2.2 Environmentally conscious children

One of the things that many of the minority parents in my sample were especially proud of and found very important, was that the children learnt about taking care of the environment. A mother from the South says her daughter has become very environmentally conscious and learns to take care of the environment both when they are out in the forest, in the barnehage and at home. She has learnt to sort garbage and practices this in the home as well:

“[she] cares about the environment. I think that's something she has learnt much, because they have this “Miljøagenter”⁶ (environment agents) in the barnehage [...]where they take part in walking around Z-place (referring to a place) or in some forest and they learn how to [separate] different things, like paper, they have to be there; the plastic ones, and there is something she even do when she is home because she don't want to cheat with that (laughs)”.

Mother from the North has the same experience with what her child learns and tells how her child has learnt to take care of nature by never leaving any garbage there, because we are all

⁶ Children's own organization for the protection of the environment.

part of nature. Her child is very conscious about not using too much toilet paper and soap and has learnt how to separate garbage for recycling:

“[they] learn how to take care of nature, you don’t leave your garage where you.. it’s..[...] and that you are part of nature and they learn that. What I think is really, really important. [...] and they learn that they shouldn’t use too much toilet paper, that they, you know, be careful on soap, and that you recycle your garbage. They really know what is plastic, what is paper..”

As one of the minority parents mentioned, the children do not want to cheat once they have learnt something. The parents are sure that this kind of knowledge is something they will remember later. A father (the North) tells about an incident from a visit in their country of origin where his child took action and picked up garbage when they were out on a hike in the woods. She picked up an empty can and put it in her father’s pocket so it could be recycled.

Knowledge about nature and consciousness of man’s responsibility for the environment are learning areas that are emphasized in the FPCTK (2011). In addition to becoming: *“familiar with and gain an understanding of plants and animals, landscape, seasons and weather”* (sic.Ibid.:38) the children should also: *“begin to understand the significance of sustainable development. This includes love of nature and an understanding of the interactions within nature and between humans and nature”* (sic. Ibid). To be environmentally conscious means to help preserve nature. Nature is, as previously mentioned, a cultural category and powerful symbol in Norway and a provider of aesthetical experiences of beauty, feeling of wholeness and harmony and of giving man peace of mind, as Gullestad outlined (see 3.2.2; Gullestad, 1992). Many of the minority parents expressed that they appreciate nature; they are amazed at the environmentally friendly attitudes and actions their children have learnt in the barnehave. They are also proud of the zeal with which their children practice what they have learnt, and, after strict corrections from their children, they cooperate with them in these activities. A mother from the South tells how her child teaches her what flowers cannot be picked, how to treat trees and plants, and corrects his mother if she throws something, telling her it is not allowed. The mother listens to her child and follows his instructions:

Mother: “[he]knows there are flowers here, and we must not pick them, we must not hit the trees or the flowers, no. Or throw things in nature. He is very focused on that, because if we happen to go for a walk [...] and if you throw the things “no, mamma, you mustn’t do that. It’s not allowed”. Interviewer: “What do you think about that?”
Mother: “I think it’s okay”.

In the examples I have used from my sample, it is the children that have taken charge and teach their parents about flora, fauna and how to be environmentally friendly. The parenting roles could be seen as being reversed when the children to some degree become the

autonomous knowledgeable agents in the relationship. This is contrary to the theories of socialization and developmental psychology, where only the adult could take this position and guide the immature, passive and dependent child into adulthood (see 3.4.1 and 3.4.2). In the examples above, it is the children that lead the adults and teach them what to do and how to do it. By doing this, they become the active agents. The child as an autonomous active agent is more in line with the Norwegian cultural ideal of children. They have learnt to love and feel at home in nature. They are familiar with the flora and the fauna and spend time in nature in all seasons and weather conditions when they are in the barnehage. Simultaneously, the children's experiences take their parents into nature. This might strengthen the relationship to them and the parents' relationship to nature. The parents are all very proud of what their children teach them and want to share with them. It would be fair to claim that the parents "listen to their children's voices" to use the term of the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. The "*children are co-constructors of their own childhoods and active participants in the constructions of their identities in everyday lives and in establishing relationships with adults and other children*" (Dahlberg et al. 1999, cited in Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005:184). These constructions have elements of the Norwegian construction of childhood, and represent a different culture than that of their parents. However, the parents have no problems adapting to the cultural practice. Some of them would say "if there is a balance", indicating that there should still not be too much of it at the cost of academic learning.

6.2.3 "They learn to cooperate with other children and are very independent"

Through play and activities in nature and the outdoors the children have rich opportunities to interact. One father (the East) thinks that it must be a challenge to be outdoors so much and still have activities for the children. He sees how the activities and the interaction between children and adults benefit his child and have made the children good at cooperating, caring and being independent:

"There is no one who is just sitting there on his own, getting bored. They learn to cooperate with other children in a very good way, and they become very independent. And in the barnehage they have some soil and plants which the children have to take care of and the children have to cooperate to take care of the plants."

The learning of social skills is important for some of the other parents, but some parents from the North, who I will quote from, did not agree between them whether the child would learn it better indoors or outdoors. In the end they agreed that their child has got friends, even if he is so much outdoors. Even if a parent would want more focus on learning e.g. the alphabet, there are other learning experiences that are appreciated, like social skills, know what is allowed and not allowed and to look after each other, play together and take care of others. In this way

they are caring subjects and contribute emotionally to their own quality of life, as well as those of peers and adults (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005:184). The mother from the South, recently referred to, is pleased with this, because she has only one child, and she sees that her child learns not to become selfish. She learns values in positive interaction with the people around her. This is a good example of a parents' willingness to adapt to the cultural practice where play and social interaction among the children are emphasized:

"[because] she (the child) is always saying: "I did this in the barnehagen, they say this.. You are not allowed to do this..(laughs) or that.." So I think it is good. And I think they learn very much, because they learn to look after each other as well, so.. And I think it is good quality, because when she is a one kid, so she has learnt to take care of others, to play with others, and not just be a selfish one kid (laughs)".

Another aspect of the children's learning is that they learn to play without having too many toys. In one of the barnehager a staff member told that they are very conscious of not having many toys that are defined. They would rather use recycled material where the children themselves can define what they make and what they play with. In the nature and outdoors barnehager they usually do not bring toys with them into the woods. Some parents in my sample are enthusiastic about the creativity of their children that is stimulated by the barnehager. A parent (the North) highly appreciated that, apart from the skies and sledges they bring with them in the winter, the children learn to play with whatever is around them outdoors. Her child is also happy to just have a bucket and a shovel when they are outside:

"[at] least, I personally appreciate.. he learns.. because when they go out they don't take toys with them, I mean, in the winter they take skies or "rumpeakebrett" (small sledges for under your bum), but otherwise they don't take toys, not even a shovel, nothing. So they learn to play with what's there. And that sort of fits to the way we think, that, .. I mean, John has toys, of course he has toys for inside, but outside it's usually a shovel and a bucket and sometimes we don't even take anything with, and, .. he's happy!"

Another parent (the East) tells that the staffs do not organize everything for the children, but they are present and make sure the children do not do anything dangerous or wrong. He notices that his child has developed her creativity and compares the activities with what he knows from his country of origin:

1) " She has become so creative They spend a lot of time outdoors and they go to the forest or the playground. The staff are very good at being creative with nature. In V-country they decide more what to do and what not to do, so the children have less opportunity to do what they want to do in their play [...]. It's not that it is not organized here, because when they go skiing down the hill, then all children have to be at the same place. They cannot just wander off. But there is more spontaneity in the play, so it's not so organized that way"(Father, the East).

A mother (the North) is impressed by the fact that the children are given many opportunities to be creative, as painting and other creative activities are done outdoors. Another mother (the

East) tells about her child that she is singing Norwegian songs, which shows that she has learned something, and that is good. Most importantly, her child is happy. The staffs are praised for their creativity. The fact that the play is freer and less organized is something the father experiences as positive and stimulating for the children's creativity and spontaneity, opposed to the cultural practice he comes from. Both mothers are reassured that their children do not lose out on what other children might learn. They adapt to the cultural practice because they think it makes meaning for their children and themselves.

6.2.4 "The practical way is the best way to learning"

All the barnehager from where the minority parents in my sample have their children, take the children on excursions or hikes in nature, the outdoors and the community on a regular basis. They believe this is a good way for children to learn, to socialize, to play and to interact with each other and people they meet in the community. As mentioned earlier, there has always been emphasis on play in Norwegian barnehager, however, the FPCTK (2011) has clearer focus on "education" with seven learning areas. The starting point for learning is the interest of the child and everyday activities. Under each learning area, play, joint activities and observations, experiences and encounters with nature and the physical world are mentioned. In the Norwegian cultural context this means that learning takes place wherever the child is, be it indoors or outdoors. A theoretical approach that comes very close to this is a model of learning first proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), which they refer to as "Situated Learning", and also "Legitimate Peripheral Participation". Learning here is not viewed as a transmission of abstract and decontextualized knowledge, but as a social process in which knowledge is co-constructed and taking place within a particular social and physical environment.

The minority parents in my sample mention many learning situations the children are exposed to through excursion and hikes. A father from the South is very surprised at what his child has learnt from trips in the local environment with the barnehage. On their way to taking the bus, he experienced that his child knew why the bus stopped, that there must be a traffic light on red, or someone had pushed the "stop" button or strap in the bus. Because the child has had the practical experience of this together with the barnehage, and observed how it really happens, she has learnt it. The father claims that if a teacher had just told that: "this is what happens on a bus", the information was not connected to a practical and real situation and the child would probably not have learnt it and understood it:

"I came to know that they learn many kinds of activities. They have good knowledge. Once we were going to the bus, the bus stops and, in the middle of the road, then my daughter says to

me: "Okay, there must be a red light signal. That's why the bus stop[s] here". So I got really surprised, okay [---] you know these kind of things as well![...]. Children learn from observing, not with a teacher, you could say. Whatever you teach they don't bother these kind of things. But they do care [about] those things which they have observed, okay? Why [does the] bus stop? Because of the street signal, or, because of the strap signal[...]

His child surprised him, and he reflected some more on why children learn and where. He said that limiting children to indoor activities they will learn to cooperate and to play with e.g, lego. But for other things they need to go out and interact with nature or the outdoors. That way, they would learn what is going on in real life, in the community. He maintained that the best way to learn is to be engaged in a practice of learning. The father had experienced that his child had learnt from practical and social interaction with peers and adults, from observing and taking actively part. This is the kind of social process where knowledge is co-constructed in a particular social (the barnehage group) and physical environment (the bus). As such it comes close to Lave and Wenger's concept (Ibid.).

There are more examples of what parents experience their children learn from observing on excursions into other physical environments. Some of them are already mentioned in section 6.2. A father from the South was particularly intrigued by what his child learnt about various professions. He said that there was a point when the children were taught to understand the outside environment. He was not referring to nature, but to working life. The children are taken to various work places and learn about many professions. He noticed particularly that the children were not only learning about "white collar" jobs, but also "blue collar" jobs:

"[Outside] working professionals.[...]Because there was a time when there was so many trips. Today they could go to the library[...]to the airport [...]to the train station. And then suddenly I saw many pictures showing different professionals.[And]the professions were not only white collar jobs. Not only sitting in an office It was garbage collection, for judging [...]I came to understand that kids are going outside in order to familiarize with different kind of professionals".

The father seems to be amazed that all kinds of skills and professions are dealt with in the barnehage, and not only the jobs where academic achievements would lead you, like doctors, lawyers, engineers and other kinds of traditional white collar jobs. Despite the unfamiliar practice and learning arena there was no resistance to this part of the "curriculum".

6.2.5 "His motor skills are just amazing"

The minority parents give many examples of how their children have developed their gross motor skills from playing outside. Even though some parents were concerned that the children's ability to concentrate, which is needed for indoor academic work, should be trained from an early age, this mother from the North says that these things, like watching television

and using computers, will come by themselves anyway. She was amazed at her child's physical competence, which she was sure come from being outdoors so much:

“He’s learning a lot what is also very, very essential, also for adults and for later. So he’s learning a lot [...] a part of being in a U-barnehage (kind of barnehage) is just that.. what for me is very important is that.. to use your body. Because watching television using computers ,that will come all by itself [...] and he’s so.. his motor skills are just amazing. They are really, really good, and that’s because he’s out like that all the time [...]”.

On the question whether she thought her child learnt anything from playing outdoors, a parent from the South mentioned particularly the physical abilities that her child develops, and how important this is at this age, especially because they live in a small flat:

“[I] think maybe to control her body, like motoric.. the motoric aspect [...] she learns maybe to control her body, and the movement and all that, which is important. And I think that’s why it’s important, because, we live in a small house, not enough space, so..”

Research into the impact of playing outdoors confirms that children's motor skills are immensely improved among children who play in outdoor playgrounds, including natural environments like the woods, rocky shores and the like. These children scored better on motor fitness test in addition to concentration abilities. They were also less absent due to illness than children in less challenging physical environments (Grahn, 1997 cited in Fjørtoft, 2000:1). The last two factors, concentration abilities and less absence due to illness should be of great interest to the parents who fear that the opposite is the case (see 5.5.1).

From the analysis of the experiences the parents in my sample have, it seems that parents are very satisfied with the learning that takes place on the excursions and hikes that barnehager arrange with the children. However, there seems to be a divide between the parents that see the advantages and learning opportunities in nature and the outdoors and parents that are worried that their children will not learn what they think is most important, i.e. academic learning. These parents do not think that children can learn these things in nature and the outdoors. There is no clear divide here between parents from the North and the South in my sample. The minority parents from the East are very satisfied with the learning that takes place in nature and the outdoors. However, it is not possible to draw clear conclusions on the basis of the number of parents in my sample of minority parents.

In the next chapter I will give my concluding remarks on the findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I wanted to explore how minority parents with children in Norwegian barnehager experienced the focus on spending lots of time in nature and the outdoors. In the introduction chapter I asked questions related to this particular cultural practice which stands strongly in discourses concerning nature and outdoor life and the Norwegian perspectives on children and childhood. With the great variation in the climate, I imagined this would be a new and at times, challenging experience for the parents, as the children would spend time outdoors in all kinds of weather. The cultural practice allows for children to organize and participate in play and activities that involve risk for injuries. The majority cultural practice is supported by governing documents, like the FPCTK. Throughout the analysis and discussions in the two previous chapters, I have examined various aspects of the parents' experiences. In this chapter, I will sum up and discuss some of the issues that emerged from the data.

There are many cultures meeting in barnehager in Norway today. Governing documents like the FPCTK indicate that the staffs have a particular responsibility to be prepared to meet every parent with an open mind and accommodate cooperation and the flow of information. To identify the discourses and analyze the semi-structured interviews that were carried out, I have drawn on theoretical perspectives by Gullestad (1989, 1990, 1992, 2002) on dominant Norwegian cultural concepts, values and ideas along with those of Kjørholt (2004, 2008) and Nilsen (2008). On the phenomenon risky play, the works of Sandseter (2007, 2009, 2010) have been invaluable. Other theoretical perspectives have been the social studies of children and childhood, post-colonial critique and the dominant discourses in the North on children and childhood.

Two clear categories emerged from the analysis of data collected. One refers to the challenges of the *climate* and the cultural practices related to spending time in nature and the outdoors regardless of the weather conditions in all seasons of the year. The second category is the view on *learning* and where and how learning can take place. An important issue was also what kind of knowledge is regarded as important to acquire. The analytical concepts that emerged from the data as useful in order to examine the experiences of the parents were *culture, adaptation, reciprocity* and *resistance*.

In the following I will account for some of the findings, reflecting further on potential implications of these findings, and finally I will give some recommendations and suggestions to further research.

7.1 Empowering the parents

In their daily encounter with the majority in the barnehage, and the challenges the climate represents, there is great willingness among the minority parents to adapt to the cultural requirements of letting their children play outdoors in the barnehage, to go on hikes, skiing trips etc. They sometimes let the children play outdoors at home. The parents believe it is important for the children to get used to the climate from an early age to be able to enjoy living in this country. A lot of effort is put into understanding and learning how to dress their children and provide equipment for the outdoors, and the parents are creative in finding information and solutions. Due to a difficult economic situation for some of the parents in this phase of their lives, they appreciated that some barnehager have invested in extra equipment like skies, tricycles/bicycles, and even clothes.

The staffs stand out as the ones that play a vital role in accommodating the parents' needs for extra support, and in bridging the gap of lack of knowledge, equipment and information on what they need for their children. This position represents an inequality in the power relations between staff and parents. In helping the parents fill their roles as adequate and proper parents in a new cultural context when it comes to clothing and equipment, the staffs usually show reciprocity by respecting the fact that it takes time to 'grow into' a new culture. In addition to securing that the children have a good time in nature and the outdoors, I will argue that the empowerment of the parents by supporting them to crack the codes of dressing for the outdoors is just as important. When they get a better grip on the cultural codes of e.g. dressing for the outdoors, packing the backpack for hikes, buying equipment etc., they are more empowered in their position as parents in this particular cultural context. The staffs are often praised by the minority parents in my sample for being competent, skillful, helpful, caring, creative and inspirational. However, there are areas where there is more resistance than reciprocity from both sides, something I will deal with in 7.3.

7.2 Children in a reverse position to parents

The children's position in the relation with their parents as the ones that often know and are good ambassadors for sustaining the cultural practices, is one of the interesting findings in the data. All the parents told about happy children who enjoyed playing and doing activities in nature and the outdoors. I found that the children's agency in many ways was the driving force in the parents' attempts to adapt, but of course, an agency that was pushed and cherished through a discourse that is dominant in the majority culture. The children got used to being outdoors in the barnehage and put pressure on their parents to let them play outdoors when they were at home. In many cases, and often very reluctantly, the parents showed reciprocity

towards their children and took them outdoors to play. It was through their children they were introduced to sledging, skiing and bicycling as activities you can do with your children. This way the children helped building up the parents' repertoire of activities. However, many parents adapted to a certain degree and only after massive pressure. It seems like there was reciprocal, but silent agreement between the children and the parents, that once they have been outdoors together, it could take a long time before it happened again. Parents adapted to the cultural pressures in their own ways by carrying out 'ritual' outdoor meals in their living room pretending they were on a hike, or walk on foot along a skiing child. This reciprocity was rewarding, because it made their children happy.

Another side of the children-parent relations was the position the children took as teachers and instructors towards their parents, not only about being outdoors in general, but also about factual knowledge. The parents told about their knowledgeable children who taught them about the Norwegian flora and the fauna, asked them to listen to the birds singing and were zealously separating garbage, and teaching their parents what they should do and not do in nature in terms of how to treat the vegetation and how to protect the environment.

7.3 Cultures for learning

The findings above refer to knowledge the children have acquired mainly during play and activities outdoors. The parents were very enthusiastic and willingly and proudly took the roles of apprentices under the expert guidance of their children in the roles as masters in a *situated learning* context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through exploring nature and the outdoors, through sensing, exploring and wondering together with peers and adults in the barnehave, the children had learnt a lot - sometimes referred to as tacit knowledge (Hogsnes, 2010:74), which they willingly shared with their parents. This is the kind of learning culture that is aimed at in the Norwegian barnehave, and the parents testified that the children learnt. The parents appreciated that creative activities were offered outdoors, especially adult lead activities, as well as hikes and other outreach programmes to the community.

However, the cultures for learning are very different between the Norwegian cultural practice and the practices of educational discourses in most countries in the North, the East and the South. Even if most of the parents appreciated the cultural practices described above, they believed there was something missing. There were certain areas within the learning cultures where the parents or the staff showed no reciprocity or willingness to adapt to each other's cultural practices. In these cases the schooling discourses of the North influencing the parents and the Norwegian discourses of learning influencing the staff neither opened up for negotiations. Many of the minority parents were sceptical, and even negative to the fact that

the children spent so much time outdoors playing. The scepticism was not against the activities as such, but the amount of time that they took compared to the more 'serious' activities. Even if they appreciated the things that they experienced, they still wanted the children to sit indoors at desks learning academic skills, as is the main activity during the day in EC setting in many countries. This also ensured adult control of the children's activities and their spatiality, which is a powerful discourse in many countries. This is to some degree in contrast to the Norwegian cultural practices where children have more autonomy to choose activities and have more spatial freedom. For parents with a background of higher education, their children's academic achievements had high priority. The parents wanted more discipline and activities indoors that required concentration skills, or "school skills". This was met with resistance from the staff. There has not been a culture in the Norwegian barnehage for formal academic instruction. There is a firm belief among preschool teachers and in formal regulations that children learn through play, and that the children's natural interest and curiosity are the right motivations for, and will lead to, understanding and, eventually, to learning. In other words, there is a belief in inductive learning building on experiences, exploration and discovery instead of deductive learning where the child receives what the teacher has decided the child should learn.

7.4 Experiences with play involving risks and parents' gender

Studies on adults show that there are gender related differences in the seeking of excitement and risk, where women are less risk taking than men (Zuckermann, 1979, 1994, cited in Sandseter, 2010:27). The gender difference in responding to their children's risky play was clear in this study as well, and mothers were generally more negative. The Norwegian discourse of roughening up the child and letting the children participate in risky play was embraced by most fathers, whereas the mothers were ambivalent without resisting, but not actively adapting. Some of them would rather negotiate with the children to avoid them taking what the mothers considered as risks. The staff resisted preventing the children from participating, and they even encouraged these activities.

There is also a cultural and gendered difference in the expected responses to children who hurt themselves and get bruises or injuries. Some mothers found the Norwegian practice of paying little attention, and even ignoring minor bruises, was little considerate. One mother argued that this cold response could even teach the children to withhold their emotions. The lack of information to the parents by the staff when the children got bruises was criticized.

7.5 Recommendations

“Bend the fish while it is still fresh” is a proverb used by a minority father to explain the necessity of having the children adapt to the climate and cultural practice of spending time in nature and the outdoors in all kinds of weather in Norway. Even if some of the parents are not ready to adapt to this themselves, they find it important for their children to adapt. For staffs being the cultural experts is easy, but also problematic. They are the ones that have the power to decide, and therefore must be conscious about how they approach these issues in a respectful way.

The converted role of the minority children and parents, which I found in this study, with respect to who teaches whom, is an interesting issue for further studies. It challenges cultural practices where knowledge is seen as something that is transferred from the knowledgeable adults to the less knowledgeable younger generation who is expected to show respect, obedience and receive instructions.

Communication and information are key tools to open up for dialogues and joint reflections around various cultural practices and images of children and childhood from various parts of the world.

The children are precious to their parents. Handing them over for many hours every day to people that have totally different practices from their own cannot be easy. In my view, it demands great care and sensitivity from those who are given this responsibility. In many respects this study shows that the barnehager succeed in this, but not in all matters. The meeting between the cultural patterns for life should be of a dynamic character to be successful for all parties involved. The question representatives of the majority culture in the barnehager could ask is, whether there is sufficient reciprocity, or whether there is a one-sided expectation from the majority that the minority parents adapt.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information to parents

Appendix 2: Informed consent form

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview guide

Appendix 4: Letter from Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD)

Appendix 5: Winter clothes for children, list. (Example 1 of information to parents)

**Appendix 6: Extra set of clothes for barnehage; Swimming gear for the swimming pool
(Example 2 of information to parents)**

Information for parents

My name is Anne Sine van Marion, and I am a Master's student at the Norwegian Centre for Childhood Studies (NOSEB) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (NTNU). I would like to use this kindergarten to collect data for my thesis. Here is the written account for the aim of the project.

What is the aim of the research project?

In my thesis I would like to find out how parents from a different cultural background than the Norwegian experience the emphasis on spending substantial time in nature and the outdoors in the kindergarten programme.

My research question is therefore: ***How do parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background experience having their children in a Norwegian kindergarten where spending time in nature and the outdoors represents an important part of the kindergarten programme?***

In the research project where I use qualitative research methods, I hope to be using parents as my informants, and I hope you will agree to set aside some time for an interview. If you find it difficult to communicate in English or Norwegian, I will try to find an interpreter to help out, or you might have a good suggestion yourself. I hope you will share your experiences, expectations, challenges and other relevant information to shed light on your meeting with practices in the kindergarten that are either similar or different from the practices you know from the country you grew up in. Each interview will take 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be taped and transcribed by me afterwards. I will possibly ask you to make a ranking list of issues, and the list will be photographed to help me remember how you ranked them.

Who is participating?

I hope to have 12-15 parents involved in my field work. They will come from 3-5 different kindergartens. About half of the parents have their children in "ordinary" kindergartens; the others will be from kindergartens which define themselves as nature and outdoors kindergartens. I will also observe general activities all children are engaged in during the day as part of the ordinary kindergarten programme. In addition I will have informal conversations with staff members.

What kind of information or data will be collected and how will it be used?

As mentioned before the purpose of collecting information in the research project is to use it for my Master's Thesis. The result of the research project will be used and discussed in this thesis. You will be secured anonymity in the paper, and names will not be used. Collected data will be stored in such a way that others do not have access to it, and it will be destroyed and deleted after 2 years. All person information will be deleted.

If you have questions concerning the research project you can contact me at any time.

Kind regards

Anne Sine van Marion
Gudruns gate 8B
7030 Trondheim
Mobile: 41 22 62 04
e-mail: annesinevanmarion@gmail.com

Consent Formula for the Parents

I have read the information sheet about the research project and understand what it is about. Any questions I have had are answered, and I understand that I can ask questions at any time later.

1. I know that my participation is voluntarily.
2. I know that the recordings and other data will be stored in a secure place after the research project so no-one else gets access to it, and will be deleted and destroyed after 2 years. All personal data like name and consent formula will be destroyed after the research project is finished and the Master thesis is written.
3. I know that my child might participate in informal conversations with Anne Sine on issues concerning being and playing outdoors and in nature.
4. I understand that only Anne Sine has access to any personal information about me given by me and that she will be allowed to make further use of this when the transcription is written down.
5. I know that during the writing process Anne Sine's drafts will be read and discussed with her supervisor and that the finished Master's Thesis will be assessed by an examination board. The anonymity of myself is secured.
6. I understand that I can ask Anne Sine questions, or discuss whatever issues that might occur related to the research project or myself.

I give my consent to participate in the research project/interview. I can be contacted via telephone or e-mail to make an appointment for the time and place for the interview.

Parent's name (BLOCK LETTERS)

Tel.no: _____

e-mail address:.....

Place, date

Parent's signature

Semi-structured interview guide

Main Research Question:

How do parents of a non-Scandinavian cultural background experience having their children in a Norwegian kindergarten where spending time in nature and the outdoors represents an important part of the kindergarten programme?

Introduction:

- Name, from which country, time period in Norway, age child;
- How long your child been in a Norwegian kindergarten
- Are you planning to settle down in Norway or return to your home country

Meeting with the phenomenon of spending time outdoors; knowledge;

- What did you know about the part of everyday life in the kindergarten which means that the children spend quite some time outdoors every day? How much of the day do you think your child is outdoors?
- What do you think about this practice? Meaningful/positive? Negative/of little meaning? Initially/After some time: Have you changed your opinion during the time your child has been in the kindergarten?

Challenges from spending time outdoors in all kinds of weather in Norway:

- What are the challenges of spending time outdoors in all kinds of weather for the various parties in the kindergarten:
 - experienced by the parents
 - what parents expect for the child
 - what parents believe the kindergarten staff meet
- “All kinds of weather” is quite powerful in this part of the country. Would you say that the weather could influence on your decision whether or not to bring your child to the kindergarten?

Necessary knowledge, skills and understanding about the Norwegian outdoor focus; children’s activities outdoors; choice of kindergarten:

- What knowledge, skills and understanding do you as a parent need in order to meet the Norwegian cultural demands for children to spend much time in nature and the outdoors throughout the whole year? (seasonal clothing, equipment like skis).How could you get the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding?
- When the children are outdoors or on trips in nature they are physically active and engage in various activities that might be categorized as Risky Play. What do you think about your child taking part in these various activities outdoors:
 - rough-and-tumble play (like wrestling)
 - exploring heights/ climbing heights (trees, rocks etc)
 - experiencing high speed (sliding on the snow)
 - handling dangerous tools (whittle/chopping or carving wood with a knife)
 - being near dangerous elements (like water or fire)
 - wandering alone away from adult supervision. (no fences in the woods)
- Do you think that your knowledge about nature and outdoor activities in Norwegian kindergartens was sufficient before you applied for a place for their child? In retrospective, would more knowledge have influenced their choice of kindergarten?

A sense of belonging to a place:

- Some people believe that being in nature gives the child a sense of belonging to the environment (place in nature/kindergarten/the community). What do you think about this? If there is something in this, would this be important for you and how you want to raise your child?

Cultural acceptance of minority culture in meeting with the Norwegian cultural practice:

- In your encounter with the Norwegian and Nordic cultural practice and expectance of embracing outdoor life from an early age, do you, coming from a non-Nordic family feel that your own cultural background is met with understanding and respect?

Possible changes in family practises from kindergarten experience:

- To what extent does the exposure to Norwegian culture of outdoor activities influence on the child's home activities with or without the parents?

If you could change anything concerning the practice of using the outdoors and nature in the kindergarten context, what would that be?

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Vebjørng Tingstad
Norsk senter for barneforskning
NTNU
Loholt Allé 87, Pavillion C
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 08.10.2012

Vår ref: 31493 SSA/RF

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

PROSJEKTVURDERING

Vi viser til meldeskjema mottatt den 14.09.2012 for prosjektet:

31493 *Non-Scandinavian Parents' Experiences with the Norwegian Kindergarten and its focus on nature and the outdoors*

Det fremgår av prosjektmeldingen at prosjektet allerede er påbegynt. Personvernombudet finner dette beklagelig og minner om at prosjekter som omfattes av meldeplikten skal meldes senest 30 dager før oppstart.

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 7-27.

Ifølge prosjektmeldingen har det blitt innhentet skriftlig samtykke basert på skriftlig informasjon om prosjektet og behandling av personopplysninger. Personvernombudet finner informasjonsskrivet tilfredsstillende utformet i henhold til personopplysningslovens vilkår.

Det har blitt registrert sensitive personopplysninger om rasemessig eller etnisk bakgrunn, eller politisk, filosofisk eller religiøs oppfatning jf. personopplysningsloven § 2 nr. 8 a).

Personvernombudet forutsetter at det foreligger en databehandleravtale mellom leverandør av tolketjenester og NTNU for den behandling av data som finner sted, jf. personopplysningsloven § 15. For råd om hva databehandleravtalen bør inneholde, se Datatilsynets veileder på denne siden:
<http://datatilsynet.no/verktoy-skjema/Skjema-maler/Databehandleravtale--mal/>

Datamaterialet anonymiseres ved prosjektslutt, 13.05.14 ved at verken direkte eller indirekte personidentifiserbare opplysninger fremgår, verken hos leverandør av tolketjenester eller veileder/student.

Innsamlede opplysninger registreres på privat pc. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at veileder og student setter seg inn i og etterfølger NTNU sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet, spesielt med tanke på bruk av privat pc til oppbevaring av personidentifiserende data.

Prosjektet skal avsluttes 13.05.14 og innsamlede opplysninger skal da anonymiseres og lydopptak slettes. Anonymisering innebærer at direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger som navn/koblingsnøkkel slettes, og at indirekte personidentifiserende opplysninger (sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no

TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no

TROMSØ: NSD, HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no

f.eks. yrke, alder, kjønn) fjernes eller grovkategoriseres slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes i materialet.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med personvernombudet, samt personopplysningsloven med forskrifter.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html.

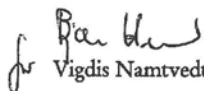
Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 13.05.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Ta gjerne kontakt dersom noe er uklart.

Vennlig hilsen


Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim


Sondre S. Arnesen

Kontaktperson: Sondre S. Arnesen tlf: 55 58 25 83

✓ Kopi: Anne Sine van Marion, Gudruns gate 8B, 7030 TRONDHEIM

DETTE TRENGER BARNA
AV KLÆR OM VINTEREN



ULLBODY



ULLSOKKER



ELLER
FLEECEKLÆR



ULLUNDERTØY



ULLKLÆR

Bikuben barnehage



GODE VINTERSKO



VOTTER/HANSKER



BUFF/HALS



VINTERDRESS



LUE



REGNKLÆR

Bikuben barnehage

Extra set of clothes for barnehage; Swimming gear for swimming pool.

Appendix 6

(Example 2 of information to parents)

**I DEN BLÅ KURVEN SKAL
DET ALLTID VÆRE:**



Sokker



Truser



Strømpebukse



Stillongs



Body

Bikuben barnehage



Tskjorte



Genser



Bukse

TA MED I SVØMMEHALLEN



Bikuben barnehage

