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**“A MEAL IS MORE THAN WHAT IS ON YOUR PLATE”
- The symbolic value of meals**

A study of children’s mealtimes in the nursery and at home

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore children's experiences of dinnertime in the home and lunchtime in the nursery and to explore the meaning children, parents and early-years practitioners give to meals, by using qualitative methodology. The data collection took place in three nurseries in a city in Norway in the autumn of 2012 and spring of 2013, as well as in the home of eight families with at least two children, of which at least one was 6 or 7 years old, in the period from autumn 2011 to spring 2013. The methods used included the use of puppet show, role-play, drawing, lego, walk and talk, semi- and un-structured interviews, and both fly-on-the-wall and participant observation. The study is based upon social constructionist thinking, drawing particularly on the studies of children and childhood. The ideas of childhood as socially constructed with an intrinsic value of its own, and of children as social actors in their own right rather than mere becomings, like adults in waiting, underpin this study. Key concepts used are childhood, food, community, generation, childhood dependency, structure and agency.

The study has found that children's experiences of meals depend on how these are prioritised and facilitated by adults. There were great variations in the way food and mealtimes were prioritised and facilitated. Within the individual nurseries and homes, however, the mealtime experiences stayed more or less consistent. The differences within the settings related to actual food served and other activities or obligations contributing to time constraints. The similarities within settings related to reasoning, aims, attitudes and wishes for the meals, and thus how the meals were prioritised. The study found that the understanding and meanings related to food and the role of mealtimes were diverse. Where mealtimes were highly prioritised, children were encouraged, if possible, to take part in all stages of the meal, from growing and cutting vegetables, preparing warm meals and baking bread, to serving and tasting the finished meal. Such facilitation of mealtimes in the home and nursery created a friendly and welcoming atmosphere where food (and eating) was seen as important not only due to its nutritional value, but also for its social, cultural and symbolic meanings. Where mealtimes were not prioritised in the same way, children were rarely encouraged to be involved. Adults did rarely, although present, eat with the children, the mealtimes were stressful and noisy, and the overall experience was coloured by a feeling of duty, obligation and obedience.

Norwegian nurseries have a mandate in the national framework that outlines the role food and mealtimes should have in the nursery. The findings in this study, however, imply that the understanding and implementation of the regulations and curriculum in relation to mealtimes in nurseries are variable.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCTC –	Closed Circuit Television
NRK –	Norsk rikskringkasting
NSD –	Norwegian Social Science Data Service

1 INTRODUCTION

Food is important for all living beings, for without it we would die. ‘It doesn’t matter what you eat as long as the jaw is moving’, my great-grandmother would say, and this may, for many people, have hit the nail on the head, at least for the generation she belonged to, which experienced Norway as a poor country. However, food can in addition be seen as an intrinsic ingredient necessary for *mealtimes*, which are shared, social events. In some families, as this thesis will argue, food and eating are secondary to children and parents talking about their adventures and experiences of the day. A meal might therefore be more than what is on your plate.

The issue of children and food has been on the political agenda and a focus for the media for years, and parents as well as early years practitioners have an interest and a concern in regards to children’s eating. There are several ongoing public debates about children, food and eating. Parents fret about their children being fussy eaters and often share their concerns and experiences on the various Internet groups and social media forums, like Facebook (see also mammanet.no, netmums.com, mumsnet.com, parenting.com). The debate is not confined to food issues in the home, however, but can also be found in relation to schools and nurseries, where children’s food and eating habits have received much attention, particularly by the well known British chef, Jamie Oliver. The menu at restaurants is also a topic of conversation, with parents and journalists often referring to the children’s menus as insufficient both when it comes to nutritional value and taste (see Adresseavisa, 2013 for article with public comments).

But in the academic world, children’s food and eating have until recently barely been mentioned as sociological phenomena and have historically received little attention within the sociological classics. If mentioned, it was in the broader context of other topics of interests, such as social inequality and class, religious function and mass consumption, to mention a few. Anthropologists have often recorded events including children and food, but their focus has more often than not been on something else, and children and food just happened to be observed (Mennel et al. 1992). Nonetheless by the early 1990s, a sociology of food, within the British Sociological Association, emerged, with Anne Murcott as a driving force (Murcott, 2011). Having a branch of sociology devoted to food is now encouraging

researchers to see the topic of food and eating as worth studying in its own right rather than a reoccurring theme within other sociological phenomena (see chapter 3)

However, despite this, there is still little research into children's food and children's own experiences of mealtimes. This thesis will therefore focus on children's meals, both in the home and nursery¹ settings and argue that by observing and listening to children's own understandings and experiences of their mealtimes we can better understand the paramount role that food and eating has in their lives. I will argue that the socio-cultural significance of food and eating is important not only to children and parents, but also to nurseries, as these provide children with meals during the day. This thesis, therefore, makes a key contribution to the body of knowledge on children's mealtimes.

Initial interest

When I moved to England in 2001, I noticed the striking differences in the way families and early years institutions "do"² mealtimes there compared to my native Norway, and this made me think about food and eating in a different way. It awakened a dormant interest in exploring the issue of children and food further. Why is it that we relate to food in so different ways, not just what we eat, but how we eat? I started to question whether my perception and experience of mealtimes are very different from other people in my home city, or whether we have a similar way of thinking about children and food based on our shared national culture.

The idea that mealtimes are important for children and families, both in terms of bonding, sharing daily experiences and the (re) production of cultural values, is my starting point for exploring this topic. I have through years of working with children and families observed many ways of "doing" family dinners as well as nursery mealtimes. I have also observed that many parents complain about or make excuses for their own or their children's eating habits. This can be seen as an indication that there are some 'proper' and accepted social rules or norms in relation to food and eating and that these often contradict the reality of family mealtime practices (see Charles and Kerr for more on proper eating). The term 'fussy/picky' eater (labels often given to children who are reluctant to eat or try novel food given to them) is familiar to most parents and early-years practitioners, and has intrigued researchers as well

¹ Nursery, kindergarten, day care centre, preschool and early-years settings are terms used more or

² The term "doing" mealtime refers to the many ways in which people organise, prioritise, facilitate and relate to their mealtimes, and implies that mealtimes are "done" in different ways depending on the social and cultural settings.

(See Adessi et al 2005, Dovey et al 2007 and Moore et al 2007). There are several explanations for fussy eating, some focusing on the mother's diet during pregnancy, some claiming that children have too much choice when it comes to food, and others seeing the way children and adults share meals as being the key to understanding children's eating. Adessi et al (2005) found, for example, that children were more likely to eat new food if others were eating the same new type of food than when others were merely present or eating another kind of food. Children's mealtimes often include adults in one way or another, as providers of food, helpers or fellow diners for example. This thesis will explore how the adults communicate and relate to one another in a mealtime setting and how this may impact on both the children's and the adults' experiences of the meals as well as the level of conflict caused.

Aim of study

This study aims to explore the understandings and experiences children, parents and early years' practitioners have in relation to children's mealtimes, emphasising the social aspects rather than the physiological aspects of food and eating. Much of the focus when it comes to children, food and eating has concentrated on obesity, nutrition, allergies and achieving a balanced diet, but this thesis will not concentrate on the health-related aspects of food and eating. Rather, in this thesis I aim to challenge the common-sense understandings about children's food and eating. Seeing children's food and eating as common practice and 'of-courseness' (Geertz, 1983) can result in mealtime practices remaining unquestioned and being deemed insignificant. However, by focusing on eating as part of a shared mealtime, as a social event, and exploring how mealtimes are carried out in families and early-years settings, the thesis aims to place children's meals on the agenda and legitimize it as a topic of interest that should be valued for its importance in children's everyday lives. Findings concerned with health issues like nutrition and obesity will not be ignored, however, and will be discussed alongside other data. Indeed, conflicts about children and food often relate to health issues and may therefore be expressed by the participants in those terms. However, this is not the main focus for this thesis. Rather it is food as a social event.

Research objectives

This thesis provides a qualitative analysis of the experiences expressed by children, parents and nursery staff in Norway. It aims to develop a greater understanding of children's mealtime practices and experiences, and to develop knowledge that may encourage parents and early-years practitioners to examine their practice in this important area.

The thesis aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To explore children's experiences of dinnertime in their home;;
- To explore children's experiences of lunchtime in their nursery;;
- To explore the meaning children, parents and early-years practitioners give to meals
- To discuss the perspectives on food in the context of children's mealtimes.

The key questions it aims to explore in relation to the specific objectives listed above are as follows:

- What is a meal?
- How do children, parents and early-years practitioners relate to food and mealtimes?
- How do children, parents and early-years practitioners understand children's mealtimes and the role these have in children's everyday lives?

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter acts as an introduction and positions the study within the broader context of food and childhood studies. It further outlines the key questions and objectives that this thesis aims to explore. The second chapter provides the background and social context in which this study was conducted. Chapter three aims to articulate the theoretical perspectives and key concepts guiding this thesis, with the intention of positioning the study within a social constructivist perspective on childhood and food. Chapter four is devoted to the methodological perspectives, aiming to describe and justify the use of the methods in the study. The presentation of the data is divided into two chapters, the first giving attention to children's lunchtime in nursery whilst the second analysis chapter focuses on the family dinner in the home. In chapter seven the key findings will be discussed in relation to the research objectives and questions presented in the introduction, reflecting on some implications of the findings and concluding remarks.

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The media addresses issues related to food and eating on a daily basis, illustrating the relevance and widespread interest in food and eating both in Norway and internationally. The media distributes information and in many ways forms the basis for discussions on the topic. Children's food and eating is a hot topic amongst parents as well; parental chat groups and Internet forums overflow with advice and concerns in regarding children's eating, nutrition and health. In this chapter I will describe the relationship between children's food and eating and several features in the historical and current political, ideological and cultural landscape of Norway. I will outline the recent focus and attention given to children's food and eating, both in the public and the private sphere. First I will briefly look at change and continuity in the traditions of food and eating, before moving on to current debates shaping the cultural landscape.

Traditional food – change and continuity

As with many other western countries, there has been a change in the provision and availability of food in Norwegian households correlating to the more general structural changes in society, such as those relating economic factors, working patterns, childcare facilities and so forth. Food has become an arena for global political cooperation as well as conflict, illustrated by ongoing debates concerning the production, transportation and risk management of food worldwide (Lien and Nerlich, 2008). This is not a focus for this thesis, but useful to bear in mind when looking at the context in which the study was conducted. Bell and Valentine (1997) argue that there are increasingly complex food and eating patterns, reflecting a change in the diversity of foods available. Other important issues that have had great significance for peoples' diet and eating habits were the emergence of the Norwegian welfare state in the years after the Second World War, with economic growth and security, public nutrition programs and particularly the Oslo breakfast programme³ in the 1930s, which provided all children in school with breakfast. One should also bear in mind the historical settlement pattern in Norway, much of the population being spread out in the countryside in close proximity to commodities and with few elements of processed foods. Before the emergence of the welfare state and then the modern oil economy Norway was a poor country, and sobriety and frugality were considered to be virtues (Hatland et. al., 2011).

³ The Oslo breakfast was designed by school physician Carl Schiøtz in 1929 and consisted of milk, bread, butter, cheese, fruit and cod liver oil.

In a global context, north European dinners may seem very similar: meat, potatoes and two vegetables. The Norwegians may, compared with many other European cultures, expand the diet a little by including several fish dishes, but lack far behind when it comes to the use of spices, which traditionally has been confined to the well-known palate enticers named salt and pepper. The ‘meat and potatoes’ dinners that the current generation of grandparents was making in their youth are still prevalent and popular today, and are not out of fashion, as illustrated by the availability of such products in the supermarkets as well as their prevalence in cookery shows and magazines. However, the culinary extravagance of boiled fish has developed and the Norwegian diet is now increasingly influenced by the holiday destinations Norwegians have visited over the last few decades, in particular southern Europe, Asia and America. The younger generations may be the ones inclined to absorb these new food cultures, but many of us still look forward to coming home to parents or grandparents to eat traditional Norwegian food. When it comes to lunches, nothing is more common and widespread than the packed lunch, usually consisting of sliced bread with a topping of either cheese or meat, and traditionally wrapped in paper. Runar Døving, a social anthropologist working in the field of consumer behaviour argues the *matpakke* (packed lunch) should be abolished in the Norwegian nursery- and school environment due to the differences it creates between the wealthy and poorer children, seeing the packed lunch as a symbol of class division (nrk.no, 30 September 2013). This implies that food is closely linked to social class, but this is not a focus in my thesis.

One of the reasons traditional Norwegian food cultures are still going strong today may be the long tradition of cookery programs, beginning with the chef Ingrid Espelid Hovig at the start of NRK⁴ and television history in Norway in the early 1960s. Her program *Fjernsynskjøkkenet* (‘the television kitchen’) was particularly popular and may have been one of the longest-running television series in Norway, from 1965 to 1998. The essence of this program was to convey Norwegian food and food culture to the Norwegian people, television being an effective tool for this task. Today, there is a food culture award in Espelid Hovig’s name presented to people who have contributed to the conveyance of Norwegian traditional food and food culture, in many ways illustrating how influential these cookery programs have been in the Norwegian cultural context. Even though this particular cookery program is no

⁴ NRK stands for ‘Norsk rikskringkasting’ and is the Norwegian public broadcaster, the equivalent to the BBC in the UK.

longer running, there are a myriad of new TV programs showing great variation of interest and focus within the field of food and eating.

NRK broadcasts today fifteen cookery programmes, varying in theme from traditional Norwegian food to cookery competitions and programmes by the international chefs Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver. This illustrates the great interest in food and cooking in Norway, but does not necessarily indicate or illustrate the food eaten in private homes. The mediation of food, through the means of cookbooks, cookery programmes as well as news media does, however, ‘play a key role in defining nutritional beliefs and standards, and in shaping consumption practices’ (Buckingham, 2011:115).

Current debates

Current debates in relation to food and eating, as well as advice and guidelines in regards to children’s eating, usually concentrate on nutrition and a balanced diet (see Helsenorge.no, 2013; Departementene, 2007; Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007 and Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011) Worries have been voiced in relation to unhealthy food adverts aimed at children. A survey of unhealthy food and beverage advertising aimed at children concluded that such advertising only account for four per cent of the total advertising aimed at children (Bugge and Rysst, 2013). The review showed that the most prominent message within current food and beverage advertising aimed at children is about ‘health, healthiness and naturalness’ (my translation of ‘helse, sunnhet og naturlighet’ in Bugge and Rysst, 2013). The relationship between food consumption and health, therefore, emerges as an important ingredient in the public discussion about food, and lays the ground, so to speak, for the general expectations to the public, efficiently promoted, often by celebrities.

In policy documents and frameworks for nurseries, however, little is said about the design or purpose of children’s food and mealtimes. In the national curriculum food is mentioned only briefly, in passing: ‘A good healthy diet, and proper alternation between activity and rest, play important roles in the development of a healthy body’ (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011:35). In the report *Mealtimes, physical activity and environmental health in nurseries* carried out by the Norwegian Directorate of Health, focus is given to what types of food is offered and how often (Report, Helsedirektoratet 2012). An instruction booklet by the Directorate of Health and the Ministry of Education, *Good food at nursery*, encourages staff to eat with the children and to create a friendly and appetising mealtime (Helsedirektoratet and Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009).

In addition to the national curriculum there are the *Guidelines for food and mealtimes in nurseries* published by the Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs, which argues that nursery meals constitute a significant part of children's overall diet (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007). Work in relation to children's food and eating in nurseries should be carried out in close collaboration with the children's families and lead to mutual understanding between the two settings, according to these guidelines (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007).

In relation to the adults' role in, and the educational and social importance of, mealtimes the guidelines argue that:

Adults should take an active part in the meal and eat with the children for several reasons. Through the meal, the children are provided with energy and nutrients. But meals are also of great importance as a social and cultural arena in the nursery's everyday life. As the social arena, the mealtimes are of importance due to the meeting between children and between children and adults, and they provide a structured framework for interaction and dialogue. Adults are important role models, and children learn from what adults do and how to socialize around a table. One can also talk about food and diet in a natural context. This can help to develop children's knowledge about food in a broad perspective, for example in relation to name, origin and use, local food traditions and cultures, the importance of nutrients for the body, feelings of hunger, thirst and of fullness etc. The meal is also a venue to stimulate the senses by focusing on taste, smell, colour, texture and shape. (My translation from the Norwegian, Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007:8).

Despite the existence of such guidelines, critique has been voiced in regards to the variation of meals served in nurseries, with many repeating the classic and well-known dishes week after week (see Foreldre & Barn, 2012; Helsedirektoratet, 2009). These meals do not necessarily expand the taste buds nor encourage a particularly extravagant culinary experience and love for food (Adresseavisa, 2013). Neither do they correspond to the guidelines for food in nurseries, where variation of dishes is emphasised (Sosial- og Helsedirektoratet, 2007).

Thus, it is clear from the national framework and guidelines for mealtimes in nurseries that nurseries have an obligation to promote healthy food in a positive and friendly environment.

In conjunction with other measures, like outdoor activities and exercise, the aim is therefore for the nurseries to provide children with a healthy and good start in life.

It may seem a paradox that, in Norway, as with many western countries, there are national challenges with obesity, the prevalence of both adult and child obesity having increased over the last few decades (Folkehelseinstituttet, 2013) while at the same time there is probably now, more than ever before, a sharpened focus on the body, both in terms of its ideal shape and function. With such a focus on children's food and healthy eating, it may be difficult to understand therefore why there are increasing obesity rates and many children (and adults) are having an unhealthy relationship with food and eating. This thesis contributes to this discussion by looking at the social context of food – mealtimes – to see what children learn about food and eating. It will not take a nutritional perspective on food, but it rather aims to look at how children and adults communicate about food in everyday lives, how they structure mealtimes, and explore their understandings of food and eating through their everyday dinnertime in the family and lunch at nursery.

In the next chapter I will outline the theoretical approach I have taken to this study of children's mealtimes.

3 THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

In this chapter I will position my study in a theoretical context and as part of the broader paradigm of childhood studies. I will look at three of the main discourses of childhood – the romantic, the puritan and the tabula rasa – and briefly illustrate how these have influenced the way children are seen today. The scientific approach to children and childhood will also briefly be covered, as it has played an important role in the study of children and childhood. The research project aims to explore experiences, understandings and meanings given to *children's* mealtimes. The theoretical focus of this chapter will therefore be devoted to childhood studies. I will then identify the key concepts used in this thesis and justify these from a theoretical perspective.

The theoretical starting point, or paradigm, is important due to its implications for the research project. Fraser and Robinson (2004:59) describe a paradigm as ‘a set of beliefs about the way in which particular problems exist and a set of agreements on how such problems can be investigated’. The paradigms are therefore the basis for the choices we make as researchers from the start of a project and are the foundations for what we choose to do, how it is carried out and why we find it interesting.

Childhood as a social construction

How children and childhood are seen and conceptualised has changed through time and place and will continue to do so in the future. The social institution of childhood, as James and Prout (2005) argue, is:

...an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted. The immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture. (James and Prout, 2005:7)

In this section I intend to show how the concept of childhood is a social construction and how dominant discourses of childhood have influenced the construction of childhood in the past. I will not enter an in-depth discussion on discourses of childhood, but there are some points worth mentioning due to their historical dominance.

Historical legacy

There are three particular discourses of childhood that have left their legacy for the future lives of children and how we understand childhood. Firstly, the puritan discourses, seeing

children as innately evil and sinful, in need of salvation, strict adult control and physical punishment (Cunningham, 2005; Stainton Rogers, 2003). This was a prevalent image of children within the European Christian cultures, in particular within the strict protestant church. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) proposed the need for an authoritarian rule to control and tame sinful and wild children (Montgomery, 2003). Secondly, the romantic discourse saw childhood as a time of innocence. The romantic philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was particularly influential, seeing children as special beings born pure, but corrupted by society due to its decline resulting from its move away from nature. Whilst the puritan methods of childrearing encouraged excessive and strict physical punishments, from a ‘spare the rod and you’ll spoil the child’ mindset, the romantic idea contrasted greatly and argued adults should filter out any negative social influences on the child and in that way keep the child pure and natural (Brockliss & Montgomery, 2013). However, most working-class families at the time were dependent on the income children could bring to the household and were therefore reluctant to accept this new image of childhood as something pure and precious. In the UK, for example, the middle-class on the other hand internalised this romantic childhood image, which in turn influenced government legislation: The 1842 Mines Act, the 1844 Factory Act and the introduction of compulsory education in 1880. These changes in thought and social structures emphasise the important influence both politics, psychology and sociology have on images of childhood, and society as a whole. Thirdly, the empiricist John Locke (1632-1704) rejected the idea of children as innately good or evil and argued instead that children were born as blank slates (Tabula rasa in Latin). Within this discourse the society’s role was to fill children with appropriate knowledge and guidance, and thus shape children’s development in the right direction (Stainton Rogers, 2003; Brockliss & Montgomery, 2013; Montgomery, 2003).

Today one can see how these discourses, three different ways to construct children and childhood, have influenced the different way in which children and childhood. Are understood This influence is evident in the home, in schools and nurseries, in the media, in public spaces, and in relation to everyday activities such as mealtimes. What is considered a good childhood will therefore vary depending on time and place. In Norway, for instance, there is a strong belief that being outside in nature is good for children.

In a Norwegian cultural context, outdoor environments in the fresh air, preferably ‘in nature’ where children engage in self-governed play, are central in traditional and contemporary constructions of ‘a good childhood’. (Nilsen, 2008: 38)

This shows how the romantic discourse has influenced the contemporary construction of ‘a good childhood’ in Norway. However, one may also find parallels in Norway with the puritan discourse identified in respect of the UK. The constant managing and monitoring of children, restriction of children’s movements and use of spaces can be seen as ways to control children and prevent unruly or chaotic conditions. The use of spaces in nurseries and schools, in particular the classrooms are, as James, Jenks and Prout (1998) put it ‘a disciplined system of control’ (ibid: 45). One can also argue there are correlations to the puritan discourse in relation to children’s mealtimes, both in the home and in nurseries⁵.

Dominant discourses

While these three discourses of childhood are seemingly very different, they are similar in one major way. They all construct children as future adults, as ‘becomings’, and childhood as important only due to its impact on the future generation of adults (Qvortrup, 1994). In this respect they mirror the focus on ‘futuraity’ which permeates much of the research done within the fields of psychology, education and sociology (ibid.), and is particularly prevalent within developmental psychology. This scientific approach to the study of children has been dominant, traditionally, and focuses on how and when children develop certain cognitive skills. The developmental theorist Jean Jacque Piaget (1896-1980) argued that children’s cognitive abilities develop through four stages, all of which need to be completed before moving to the next stage, a theory that corresponds to Rousseau’s idea of children’s cognition progressing through natural phases (Woodhead, 2013). By studying children’s cognitive abilities through the use of tests or tasks, Piaget argued one could see the ‘normal’ progression through which children develop and determine a universal competence scale relevant for all children’s cognitive development (Stainton Rogers, 2003).

Critics of Piaget’s work have, amongst other things, pointed to the unreliability of the methods used, drawing attention to the need for tasks making sense to the children (Donaldson, 1978). One may, for example, look at the way children were tested on concepts of volume and quantity. Pouring liquid from one wide container over to a tall container, before asking the children whether the amount of liquid has changed, can be seen as a pointless exercise and does not make sense to many children (Woodhead, 2003). Another

⁵ This will be further highlighted in the discussion chapter, where I will illustrate how constructions of childhood may, whether deliberate or not, influence the way children’s mealtimes are conducted both in the home and in nurseries.

example of a seemingly pointless exercise was the way Piaget tested children's understanding of another person's point of view. This would include a papier-mâché sculpture of three mountains and a doll sitting on the opposite side to the child. The child would then be asked what the doll could see. Piaget concluded that children under the age of seven were egocentric and unable to de-centre themselves enough to successfully see other peoples' point of view (Stainton Rogers 2003). Both these tests can be modified to make sense to children. If there is a reason for a content to be poured from one container to another, (e.g. two children are in the modified test playing a game and for the game to be fair it is important each child has equal amounts of liquid, but one container is broken so it needs changing), children are able to see the 'human sense' and thus pass the test at an earlier age than Piaget found. Similarly, children may be able to see something from another person's point of view if the task makes sense. This was illustrated by a modified version of the doll test, in which the child had to place the doll on a board with two walls forming a cross in such a way that a 'policeman' was not able to see it (Hughes cited in Donaldson, 1978). Children down to the age of three-and-a-half were able to do this, with a pass rate of 90 per cent, showing they had an understanding of other people's point of view (Donaldson, 1978).

Whether or not the methods or tasks used are designed to make sense or not, the aim of these methods is still the same: to find out at what age children acquire certain cognitive abilities. What the scientific approaches and the discourses of childhood outlined above have in common, therefore, is the idea of universalism. Science aims to find universal truths that are tested, verified and valid without prejudice. Children are observed and tested outside their social context, similarly to a laboratory rat, and a conclusion is drawn with the assumed universal validity. The discourses of childhood mentioned above also promote the idea of children and childhood as universal regardless of time and place and as such they stand in opposition to the social constructionist approaches now common to the field of childhood studies.

Childhood as a social construction

In *Century of Childhood*, a landmark work published in 1962, Philippe Ariés claims that childhood did not exist until the end of the fifteenth century (Montgomery, 2003). That is, society in the Middle Ages did not differentiate between children and adults, saw children merely as 'adults in waiting', and therefore childhood as a distinct generational category was not conceptualised (Kellett et al 2004). If this was to be the case, childhood could not simultaneously be a universal phenomenon. Archard was not convinced by Ariés' evidence

for the emergence of childhood and argued ‘the evidence fails to show that previous societies lacked a concept of childhood. At most it shows that they lacked our concept’ (Archard, 1993, cited in James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:5).

However, whether or not the concept of childhood was new can be debated, what Ariés did, with his publication, was to contribute to many scholars recognising childhood as a socially constructed rather than a natural phenomenon (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Thus, as a reaction to the idea of universal childhoods and the way children were valued on the basis of their future as adults, a new paradigm emerged. The New Sociology of Childhood⁶, as it became known, saw childhood as a social construction and children as beings in their own right. As a consequence of seeing childhood as a social construction, one of the core elements within this new paradigm has been the deconstruction of the taken-for-granted assumptions about children and childhood. It is within this social constructionist paradigm my research is located.

The social studies of children and childhood

The new paradigm within childhood studies emerged as a reaction to the way children and childhood were constructed and conceptualised within the dominant discourses and approaches to childhood. As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) put it, they were concerned with providing an analytical framework to consolidate the new social studies of children and childhood and to indicate pointers for further development. Thus, the paradigm did not emerge in a completed form, but has developed over the last few decades. One may therefore refer to it as an emerging and developing paradigm. James and Prout (1997) identify six key features of the paradigm. The first is an understanding of childhood as a social construction. The second key feature addresses the importance of seeing childhood as a social variable in relation to other social variables such as gender, class and ethnicity. The third relates to the value given to children and childhood in research, and argues children’s social worlds are worthy of study in their own right, not just in relation to adults. The fourth key feature is recognising children as active participants in the construction of their own lives and not as passive recipients. Ethnography is identified in the fifth key feature, as a particularly useful

⁶ The terms ‘the new sociology of childhood’ or ‘the social studies of children and childhood’ or similar descriptions are used interchangeably about the new paradigm within the field of childhood studies. I have chosen to use the social studies of children and childhood in this thesis, illustrating that the paradigm includes more than sociology.

methodology. Finally, the sixth key feature of the paradigm concerns the double hermeneutics of the social sciences, illustrating that researchers, as well as the research participants, contribute to the reconstruction of childhood (James and Prout, 1997).

These are all relevant and important features that underpin my research project throughout. However, there are variations in the way childhood is theorized within the new paradigm, giving room for four sociological dichotomies and four sub-discourses of childhood identified by James, Jenks and Prout (1998), as illustrated in figure 1.

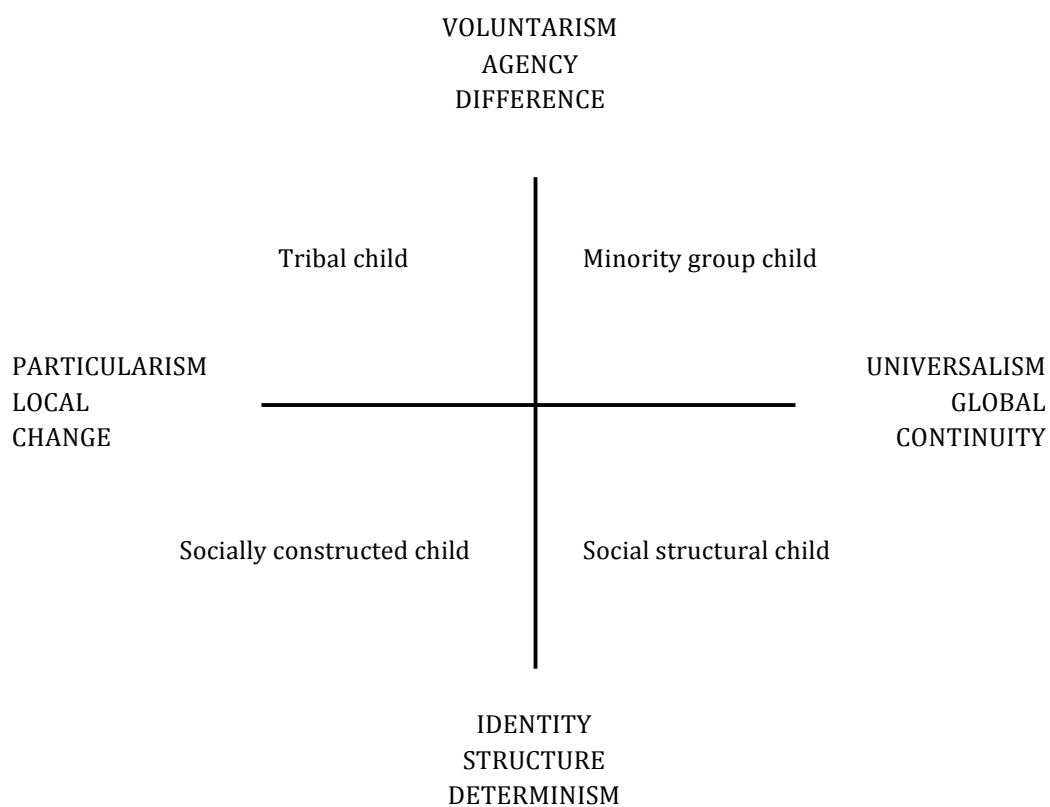


FIGURE 1 Theoretical field for the social study of childhood – (James et al., 1998:206)

This theoretical framework for the study of childhood is useful as an analytical tool. The dichotomies and discourses shown are neither mutually compatible nor conflicting, some overlapping, whilst others diverge. For the purpose of this thesis I will include a discussion on the dichotomy between structure and agency in relation to children’s mealtimes (see i.e. section 3.3 Key concepts). As this research project is rooted within the social constructionist

thinking I found the socially constructed child to be the most appropriate of the discourses or approaches to childhood studies within the new paradigm. However, I will not immerse myself in this approach, but rather keep it in mind as a guiding tool in line with the social constructionist thinking underpinning this thesis. The idea that knowledge is not a neutral phenomenon, but something that is fundamentally positioned within certain paradigms, is an underlying assumption when looking at food studies.

Food studies

Previous studies and academic publications on the topic of children's food and eating have, as already mentioned, to a large extent focused nutrition, both in terms of promoting healthy eating behaviours (see e.g. Birch and Fisher, 1998, 2000 and Cook, 2009) and the development of the social meaning of nutrition (Coveney, 2006). Much attention has also been given to food consumption (see e.g. Kjørholt et al. 2005; Carrigan, 2006; and Buckingham, 2011) and the politics of food (Lien and Nerlich, 2004), as well as food cultures (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Ashley, 2004; Counihan and van Esterik, 2008; Lysaght, 2008), family meals (DeVault, 1994; Jackson, 2009; Lupton, 1996), children's identity in relation to food and eating practices (James et al. 2009) and eating habits (Murcott, 1997). In the last few decades food has manifested itself as a worthy topic of interest within the fields of both sociology and anthropology, as shown by Murcott (1983), Lupton (1996) and Counihan (1999). My approach to the study of children's mealtimes takes a different approach, both in terms of focus and use of methods. Rather than focusing on food as nutrition, as fuel for the body, or in terms of its political or commercial significance, the study explores the everyday experiences children, parents and early-years practitioners have in regards to children's mealtimes, including communication, expectations and children's agency.

As mentioned, the field of food studies has expanded rapidly in the last decade or so. Food is often linked to culture in a broad sense and cultural aspects such as gender, consumption, identity, class, economy and politics. One of the main reasons for this expansion and growing interest is, according to Counihan and van Esterik (2008), feminism and women's studies that have contributed to legitimising food as a topic of interest, and not solely as a woman's domain. Another reason they mention is the politicization of food and the expansion of social movements linked to food. A third reason points to the fact that when food studies were first legitimized it opened the door for academics to link food with other topics; it was no longer local and known, but global and unknown with a novelty that encouraged exploration

(Counihan and van Esterik, 2008). Food is often linked to identity (Kjørholt et al. 2005) and taste is, by some authors, identified as socially and culturally constructed (Caplan, 1997; Buckingham, 2013). The importance of commensality in relation to food and eating has also been pointed out in relation to children's mealtimes (e.g. Mennell et al, 1992; Giovanni, 2006). Giovanni (2006) referred to the mealtime routines as particularly important for the commensality, or fellowship at the table; e.g. lighting and blowing out candles to denote the beginning and end of the mealtime and to have set places at the table.

The sharing of food is a vital part of family life, kinship and friendships. The type of food shared depends on the closeness of the relationships, with drinks and snacks scoring lower than a dinner, which represents the highest level of closeness (Lupton, 1996). Many understandings in regards to food and eating are culturally reproduced from generation to generation (ibid:25) A shared meal can therefore, as Lupton argues, be directly linked to the construction and reproduction of emotional relationships. When looking at family mealtimes, at least within the private sphere, this makes perfect sense as 'the social dimensions of eating and those of emotions are particularly tied together' (ibid:37). However, within an institutional setting, such as a nursery, the sharing of food is not directly linked to close relationships, but may rather be seen in terms of its structural form and nutritional value. One may nevertheless argue that these shared mealtimes in the nursery are important social barometers, which provide children with a cultural foundation for social norms and practices. Within the structural boundaries which constitute mealtimes it could be argued that children do, to varying degrees, exercise some agency, for example in negotiating types and amounts of food, spaces, as well as the dominant and pre-existing rules, routines and norms.

Key concepts

In this section I would like to specify five key theoretical concepts that signify the approach, direction and interest of this thesis, and which have helped narrow the focus both during the preparatory stages and during the analysis. These key concepts are childhood, food, community, generation, and structure and agency, and act as pillars, with established theoretical weight, for the foundation on which the thesis is built. In this section, however I will only briefly outline and clarify the concepts of childhood, food and community, as these are clarified in more detail in other parts of the thesis. The focus in this chapter will rather be on generation, and structure and agency as the overall theoretical concepts for this thesis.

Childhood

The first key concept, childhood, has already received a fair amount of attention in this chapter. The most important theoretical perspective for this thesis in relation to childhood as a concept is that childhood is seen as socially constructed. Therefore, this thesis is not pretending to establish universal truths about children's mealtime experiences, but is rather interested in exploring experiences and questioning common-sense practices in a particular culture at a particular time.

Food

Food has also previously been introduced as part of the theoretical landscape within sociology and anthropology, albeit a small part. Food is a key concept in this study of obvious reasons, although the meanings attached to food may differ greatly. Food can be seen primarily as fuel for the body, for its nutritional benefits, or as part of a meal, as a social event, and in this way conceptualised as possessing a variety of symbolic meanings, which I will come back to. Children often figure in studies on food as a part of the family and the private sphere. It is therefore interesting to include both the private (the home) and the public (the nurseries) to explore children's own experiences and thoughts on their mealtimes.

Community

The concept of community emerged from the empirical data as a relevant theoretical concept. Community, as Cohen (1985) theorises, can be seen as a set of shared symbols, values and ideologies, both within the home and within the nurseries. How these are conceptualised, understood and maintained is an interest of this thesis, and will be discussed further in chapter seven.

Generation and childhood dependency

Generation is often linked to family, as in second-generation immigrant, but also structural and culturally specific, as in my generation, or the war generation. The concept of generation is also used analytically, particularly when studying childhood (see e.g. Mayall, 2000; Alanen, 2001). Alanen (2001) sees generation as the structural context that distinguishes children from other social groups. The concept of generation highlights or reveals the imbalanced power relations between children and adults since the category of which one is a member impacts greatly on the opportunities available as well as how one is treated (James et al., 1998). As Qvortrup argues, one needs therefore to account for the structural generational relations when studying children.

It is impossible to make assessments of any social groups or form without comparing it to other groups or forms, and as far as children are concerned there is a superior (but not exclusive) logic in making comparisons along the generational dimension. (Qvortrup, 2002:49)

Generational structures are particularly important when exploring children's agency in their everyday lives, as Alanen (2001) points out. Positioned within the generational category of childhood, children are confined by the culturally and socially defined generalised norms and children's capacity to exercise their agency has to be seen in relation to power, or the lack of it due to the limitations, restrictions and scope of influence allowed within the structural boundaries given to children in any situation. The power to influence or control their everyday lives is restricted due to their position as children in a generational structure. When looking at children's agency it may therefore be useful to think of it rather as 'possibilities and limitations of action', which to varying degrees are controlled by generational structures (Alanen, 2001:21). In relation to children's mealtimes, as this thesis will show, one may look at how generational structures at home and in the nursery shape the experience and understanding of the concept and children's experiences. Generation is also crucial when it comes to transmission of values. In the article *From obedience to negotiation: Dilemmas in the transmission of values between the generations in Norway*, Marianne Gullestad argues that the preeminent model in family life has changed from one based on obedience and 'being of use' to one based on negotiation and 'being oneself' (Gullestad, 1995:25). Family life, she argues, can be considered a site for the transmission of certain kinds of moral values, alternative social visions, new ideas, and resistance to the values of capitalist production, market liberalism, and state bureaucracy. Changes in the transmission of values in families call for careful ethnographic study, she further argues, as well as more discussion of the location of family life in social theories more broadly.

The level of agency possessed by children is determined by the structural boundaries and the symbolic power at work in any given situation (Bourdieu, 1996). The interpretation or understanding of own agency may not be equal for all children, some choosing to negotiate the terms of conditions on a regular basis whilst others are more accepting to the social and generational structures surrounding them. Despite recognising children as active social beings, we must also admit that there are few instances in children's lives where they are not constrained by adults' structures (James and Prout, 1997). This is particularly prominent in the nurseries where there are fixed and usually permanent structures such as rules and routines

that determine the way meals are organised. However, as will be shown in the analysis there are some scope for individual agency within these structures. Routines, rules, rituals and norms can all be seen as symbols of social mechanisms that allow for the continued reproduction of the given social structural systems (Bourdieu, 1996). As Leavitt and Power (1997) argue, the extent to which children experience predictability and security in daily routines as well as their interpersonal relationships in for example the nursery, contribute to their sense of self and feeling of agency (Leavitt and Power, 1997)

The story of childhood dependency is complex, as Nick Lee (2001) argues. The idea of children as dependent reflects the states' view of children as an investment for the future. Intervention in childhood became synonymous with protecting the future and developmental state, identifying childhood with dependency (Lee, 2001). Adults' dependency is often seen as accidental or circumstantial. That is, when an adult requires assistance is it generally understood in terms of their circumstances rather than who they are as a person (ibid.). For a child, on the other hand, dependency is often seen as the default, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves.

Structure and Agency

In accounting for social life, Emile Durkheim emphasised the importance of social facts and structures for shaping peoples' behaviour while Max Weber, on the other hand, argued that individuals possess abilities to plan, define and organise actions and that society is a result of human creativity, rationality and autonomy. This agency-centric perspective was thus a reaction to the emphasis on structure in previous approaches to the study of human behaviour, and led to a shift in focus from looking at the structural constraints and social functions, that Durkheim promoted, to the analysis of intimate, everyday interactions as well as the social meanings attached to human action which is the perspective to be adopted in this thesis. Durkheim and Weber can in some ways represent the poles in this dichotomy (Hughes et al.1995). Antony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu attempted to reconcile the two poles and find a balance somewhere in the middle ground, like a dual didactical relationship. Max Weber's sociological theory emphasise the individual's ability to rationalise and act intentionally, suggesting that individuals decide on actions through micro-level processes of interaction and meaning making (Sztompka, 1994). Weber therefore argues that agency is a stronger motivator for behaviour than the social structures in society.

However, structural issues cannot be ignored and in his work Giddens constructs a coherent framework that accounts for both structure and agency. Structure and agency, as he saw it,

represent a duality, working as an iterative process and rather than being opposed to each other they in fact presuppose each other (Giddens, 1984).

An exploratory theoretically approach to studying children's mealtimes

As outlined in this chapter my research is located within the social constructionist thinking. There are several reasons for this, five of which I will specify here. Firstly, it takes a critical stance towards the taken for granted truths (see Geertz, 1983 and Burr, 2003). This allows me to explore routine activities and see these with a critical and open eye. Questioning the common sense and taken-for-granted practises may gain valuable insight into children's everyday lives and explore understandings, symbolic meanings and experiences of their mealtimes. Secondly, the specificity of knowledge is recognized from both a historical and a cultural viewpoint. Thus, the culture I describe in the particular nurseries or families I visited has also to be seen as a product of the particular time, culture and economic conditions of the time when the data was gathered. Thirdly, within the social constructionist thinking knowledge is seen as being produced constantly through the daily interactions of people in every day life situations, the use of language is therefore given an important role. In my study, as I will show, language and communication are important in relation to food and mealtimes and the way adults facilitate children's agency. Fourthly, the role of power is prominent in social constructionist thinking. The issue of power also relates to the dichotomy of structure and agency, and is particularly relevant when considering the power imbalance in adult/child relations in regards to food and eating, both in the home and in the nursery. I found that power is multifaceted and can be negotiated and held by different people or groups in different contexts. At last, but not least, I wanted to explore children's own understandings and experiences of their mealtimes as well as the adults', and therefore positioned the study within a perspective that values childhood as part of the general social order and not as a preparation for it. Children are thus seen as a particular social group, as social actors with own understandings and experiences of childhood. Children are thus seen as 'beings' in their own right and not as 'becomings', as future adults (Qvortrup, 1991; Prout and James, 1997, and James, 2007). Children's perspectives may vary both within the group of children and compared to adults, but this study nevertheless sees children as parts of society with rights to participate and be provided for, and rights to be oneself (Ennew et al., 2009; Kjørholt, 2005)

The story of adult/child relations and childhood dependency is complex, as Nick Lee (2001) argues. Referring to the British context, he argues that the idea of children as dependent

reflects the state's view of children as an investment for the future. Intervention in childhood became synonymous with protecting the future state, identifying childhood with dependency (Lee, 2001). Adults' dependency is often seen as accidental or circumstantial. That is, when an adult requires assistance is it generally understood in terms of their circumstances rather than who they are as a person (ibid.). For a child, on the other hand, dependency is often seen as the default, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves.

4 METHODOLOGY

So far, I have addressed my initial interest in the field, placed it in a wider context and outlined the theoretical positions taken and key concepts used in this study. In this chapter I will discuss why I found a qualitative methodological approach to be the most appropriate for this study, and justify the research tools used. I will establish coherence between the methods used and the methodological perspectives underpinning the research project. I will also touch upon ethical issues, in particular the importance of being reflective, the interaction between researcher and participant, how to approach a sensitive research topic, and consent. The way in which nurseries and families were found, and the rationale for choosing these, will also be discussed in this chapter.

Methodological perspectives

Traditionally researchers saw children as passive and emphasised their potential as adults rather than their experiences here and now, as children (James and Prout, 1997). In the previous chapter I outlined the ways in which children have been conceptualized over time and how the idea of children as *beings* in their own right rather than *becomings*, as future adults, is at the core of the New Sociology of Childhood. Within this new paradigm childhood is, as already mentioned, seen as a social construction. That is, the biological fact of age is seen as universal, but the frame within which childhood is constituted is culturally dependent.

For the researcher to be able to see childhood as socially constructed and children as active participants in their social worlds they must question common-sense practices and taken-for-granted assumptions. By looking at everyday events with an open and critical mind one may unravel the many layers that make up the taken for granted practice. As one parent in the study said: 'It's a Monday so you know, we'll have something simple'. This reflects the differences in eating patterns that separate, for example, the working days with the weekend, but also the taken for granted understanding of this pattern. It is as if everyone knows and agrees that a Monday does not require anything special when it comes to catering. As this thesis aims to highlight the social and cultural aspects of children's mealtimes both within the home and in nurseries, it was particularly important not to expect certain patterns, similarities or differences between the settings prior to the study, but rather to critically reflect on the data gathered.

In general, the importance of exploring children's experiences and perspectives in relation to food and mealtimes in a non-intrusive manner is paramount. There are two main reasons for

this: ethics and reliability. For the data to be reliable it is important for researcher–participant relations to be built on mutual trust. A non-intrusive manner is more likely to make the participants feel at ease and they may in turn be more likely to share an accurate account of their understandings and experiences with the researcher. This is an important aspect for a researcher to reflect on prior to collecting the data, as there may be differences in what the participants and the researcher find intrusive. Being non-intrusive, friendly and accommodating is also an important ethical issue, as it is a way to show the participants respect, both as individuals and for their time and efforts.

There is a long tradition and history in research of taking adults' word for how children experience their lives, but this can never be understood as providing the whole picture. Adults' accounts of children's lives can be seen as important pointers, but merely as an indicator of children's environments and not as evidence of children's own thoughts and experiences. By including adults in the research and getting these pointers, I was able to narrow the lens and focus on what I found most interesting and important. The intention was therefore to do research *with* children rather than *on* children through adults (Fraser, 2004).

Knowledge as socially constructed

Having taken a social constructivist approach to childhood, knowledge is seen as constructed and reconstructed.. The participants' experiences of their lives were accepted as a valid way of deriving new knowledge. Even though people experience the world differently, empirical research is nevertheless systematic in its investigation of experiences and sceptical to taken for granted truths. As Stainton Rogers (2003) argues:

Whereas scientific approaches seek to discover universal laws of cause and effect that underpin the process of growing up, social constructionism emphasizes the diversity of ways that childhood is constituted and experienced in different situations and circumstances.
(Stainton Rogers, 2003, p 24)

Due to an interest in how children, families and nurseries construct the idea of the meal and what the meal has come to mean in practice, a qualitative approach was adopted.

Qualitative research

It is perfectly possible to conduct a study on the topic of children and food using quantitative methods of enquiry. One may for example, do a survey/questionnaire on how many times during a set period of, for example, one week families eat dinner together. With a large

enough sample of *parents* one can get a good indication of the frequency of family dinners, and may be able to answer, for example, whether or not the family dinner as a phenomenon is in decline or not. However, if one would like to understand how children construct the idea of the mealtime, meanings *children* place on mealtimes, their experiences of mealtimes or ways mealtimes are used for other purposes than eating in everyday lives, one would need to approach the subject matter from a different angle. A qualitative approach allows for a systematic enquiry into lived experiences using ‘participant friendly’ methods. This term requires some clarification. As with all participant-based research, it is important to plan the research with the participants in mind, including research techniques and tools that enable the participants to express themselves in the best possible way. When doing research *with* children it is therefore important to adjust standard methods to this setting or incorporate other methods that the children are familiar with and feel comfortable using. These adaptations do not undermine the recognition of children as competent, but rather act as negotiated compromises that allow communication between the children on the one hand and the researcher on the other (Fraser et al, 2004). The term ‘participant-friendly methods’ is a unifying term that illustrates the importance of bearing in mind one’s participants (whether they are children or adults) when choosing researching tools and does not question the participants’ abilities or competencies.

One of the strength of qualitative research is that one is able to compare data gathered using a variety of research tools. This may serve as a means of assessing the reliability of the data obtained. One of the important reasons for using other methods in addition to interviews is that it can be difficult for participants to accurately recall routine behaviour and activities. As Hammersley (2013) argues, routine behaviour is below the level of consciousness; participants’ accounts may therefore be unintentionally misleading (Hammersley, 2013). Participants may ‘forget’ to mention certain aspects of the daily routine, as this is not something they normally think about or find particularly interesting. Children’s and adults’ accounts of routine activities, like mealtimes, are nevertheless valuable and interesting as they reflect the meaning participants place on these events and the understandings they have. Whether or not their response reflects an accurate account of, for example, the number of mealtimes eaten together or not, is not necessarily that important when one is interested in their experiences and understandings of those mealtimes. Consciousness is deceptive in the way that one may believe an event to happen more frequently, or less frequently, than it does. However, the meanings and understandings given to the event are not shaped by universal

truths. These are personal and subjective. To explore these one must therefore use a research approach that get the participants to express themselves in the ways most suitable to them. An open, personal and reflective researcher with a flexible toolbox may therefore be more successful than for example an impersonal questionnaire.

Research Design

The theoretical and methodological approaches taken influence the research outcome. Reflecting upon and considering the impact of these influences is therefore of great importance when deciding upon the research design and tools to be used. I have framed my research within the social studies of children and childhood. Seeing childhood as a social construction, and not as a universal state children need to go through, influenced the choice of focus for this thesis and therefore also the research tools used. My intentions were to explore children's current life experiences, their understandings and experiences of mealtimes, rather than their potential as adults, whether in regards to future health or as chefs in the making. The choice of methods as well as the decision to use multiple methods were greatly influenced by Ennew et. al. (2009) and Clark (2005), who both emphasise the benefits of including multiple tools, involving the children in the research, and adjusting the methods to suit the participants' abilities. Another important influence, Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Approach to childhood education, argues that children have a hundred languages. Children use their symbolic languages, such as drawing and dramatizing, to represent their theories of the world, and, as they work their way through problems and ideas, they are encouraged in Malaguzzi's research to explore their understandings using different representations (Malaguzzi, 1993). With this in mind, I settled on a research design that enabled me to incorporate multiple methods that were able to capture the children's different representations. These are described in further detail later.

I chose to include families with two or more children, of which at least one was between six and seven years old. There were several reasons for this, one being that I wanted the children to be relatively young, but to have experienced and reflected upon different types of family mealtimes. I needed participants that were able to tell me about their experiences and thoughts as well as participate using the researching tools, and in this way provide much valuable data. I carried out most of the research with the families in the autumn and was aware that many children had just started school. I chose not to include children in the first year of school as they would already be experiencing many changes in their everyday lives and I felt it would not be wise to include this age group. To include siblings was a deliberate choice due to the

changes families might go through when moving from three family members to four. I was particularly conscious of the way many parents may relax a little when it comes to routines and rules in regards to food and eating when they have a second child. This assumption was built on my own experience both as a parent and having worked with families for many years. By including only families with more than one child there was also a better balance between adults and children, and the social aspects to mealtimes could perhaps become more apparent.

The rationale for choosing the nurseries was to include a different setting from the family context, looking for variation mainly. I chose three different types of nurseries to obtain this. Another reason was to look for the relationship between home and nursery. As mentioned in the background chapter there has been a change in how nurseries are built and run in recent years and I wanted to include both a traditional and a 'base' nursery⁷. In addition to these two types of municipality-run nurseries, I also wanted to include a private nursery. This was not to compare the three directly, but rather to explore the different ways in which mealtime practices are carried out and the frameworks that construct and constrain mealtime practises.

Several of the participating families had children at one of the nurseries also participating in the study. This was deliberate and desirable as it opened the possibility to reflect on or compare parents' relation to food in the home and their expectations for mealtimes in the nursery, with the nurseries' actual implementation of mealtimes. No generalisations are made on these grounds due to the small sample size. I did, however, find it interesting to get an insight into the expectation, negotiation, satisfaction and disappointment many parents felt in relation to the way nurseries dealt with mealtimes.

How, what, where and when?

Observations, activities and interviews were conducted within eight families with two or more children, of whom at least one was six or seven years old. In all the families at least one of the observations were video and audio recorded. Observations were also carried out in three nurseries: one private nursery (with a particular educational objective) and two municipal nurseries. One of the municipal nurseries (Nursery 3) and the private nursery (Nursery 2) were both small, traditional nurseries with two groups for the one- to three-year-olds and two

⁷ The 'base' nurseries are based on an economic model on how to run nurseries, with more children and fewer adults. It was developed in order to accommodate new legislation giving 100% nursery coverage for all children between one to five years-old. This is therefore the preferred model for governing politicians. See Seland (2009) and Buvik et al. (2003) for further reading on this topic.

groups for the three- to five-year-olds. The other nursery (Nursery 1) was a large ‘modern style’ base nursery with only children from three to five years old. Whereas the two traditionally run nurseries have group sizes of about eighteen children and three to four adults for the older age groups, the large nursery had groups of around thirty-five to forty children and four to five adults. Each group has one preschool teacher⁸. Notes were taken during these observations. The study was conducted within the three-to-five age groups in all three nurseries. Informal chats and semi-structured interviews were carried out before and after the observations. The main bulk of these interviews were with the staff, but a few children were also keen to tell about their experiences.

Research tools

The research tools were, as mentioned earlier, very much influenced by the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) in which several ‘participant friendly’ methods are used to enable children to express themselves in ways they feel comfortable with. All the tools were presented to the children, but not all the children made use of every tool. No justification was needed for the choices they made, but most of the children still gave their reasons for their choice. One boy said he did not like to draw, but would rather play with Lego and puppets. A girl gave the impression she was too old for puppets or Lego, but said she would rather do a drawing. Some of these choices were probably influenced by what their siblings wanted to do, but I found no indication that this impacted the data in a negative way, rather the opposite⁹. By being flexible and attentive to the children’s wishes and needs, bearing in mind the focus of the research at all times, I was, at least most of the time, able to adjust the methods, keep focus and prevent chaos.

Puppets and role-play

By dramatizing food-related events in their family my aim with using this method was to enable the children to express themselves in a way that may be more suitable, fun and entertaining than, for example, an interview, and in this way get good and reliable data. These events had to be food related, and were usually dinnertime, food preparation and food purchase. Whether to use role-play or puppet shows was up to the children and what they

⁸ To become a preschool teacher requires a bachelor degree. The preschool teacher is the pedagogical leader in the group and there should be at least one preschool teacher per group of children. With only one preschool teacher per group it means that the teacher density decreases with more children per group.

⁹ See the analysis, chapter six, for further illustrations.

were most comfortable with. I felt that these two methods were somewhat equal in terms of what I, as a researcher, obtained in the form of interesting data as both methods consisted of the dramatization of food-related family events. However, I found that each group of children had a strong preference for one or the other and it was therefore a good decision to allow them to choose. I was particularly attentive to any feelings or suggestions given by the children. As family and food can be sensitive topics for some of the children, such methods may help them to distance themselves from it by either playing a fictional character in a role-play or talking through a puppet. I found that these methods often resulted in performances. It was up to the children if they wanted to present this performance to their parents. Several of the participants did this, to much amusement from parents and siblings. It also seemed to act as an eye opener for some parents who, for the first time, saw how the children understood and experienced mealtimes in the home. One mother questioned her husband in the following interview whether she really was that strict around the dinner table, whereupon he took his arm around her, smiled and said ‘yes, honey...’. A father laughed loudly at his children’s account of the grocery shopping, clearly impressed by the intricate details the children were able to portray, particularly of the parents’ comments in regards to price, ingredients and other customers.

Drawing

Some children felt uncomfortable with acting out in a role-play or puppet show. All the children were therefore also offered the chance to do some drawing in addition or as a substitute to the other methods. The children were asked to draw something that meant a lot to them and that was related to dinnertime. Many children were very good at drawing and found this both a fun and easy method to take part in. The comments they made about their drawing, which I wrote down in my log book, were useful to gain insight into the everyday lives and experiences of the children. I was therefore not disappointed if the children chose drawing as the preferred method. By having a variety of methods available I could be flexible and adapt the methods according to the needs and wants of the children. Many of the children finished the session with a drawing whilst the parents and I talked in another room.

Lego

Lego is the most fantastic toy and research tool as it can be used to almost anything. In combination with dramatizing and drawing, lego bricks provided a platform for exploring the children’s understandings of food and mealtimes in the home in a way many of the children seemed to enjoy. The children had free rein in regards to how to use the Lego, only the frame of dinnertime was given from my side. Lego was a particularly useful tool when the children

seemed a little shy or nervous. As soon as the bricks came out they started playing and the wall or boundary between us vanished. Lego was used both as a tool in it self, as an icebreaker and as a way to make the participants feel at ease.

Walk and talk - show and tell

The aim of this method was to enable the children to physically show me their mealtime environments and talk me through their experiences and understandings of these as well as how and by whom they were normally used. Such a method is ideal when the aim is to better understand the children's own perceptions and experiences of their environments, and similar to the neighbourhood walks, promoted by Ennew et al (2009) as a good tool when doing research with children.

Observation

Observation is a widespread tool used both in academic research and in everyday life. We observe all the time, what other people do, and the reactions and consequences that follow. Children, as well as adults, use observation actively when learning new things: through observing others, processing what they have observed and trying it out themselves. When observing in the nurseries my intention was to become a fly on the wall, metaphorically. I sat in a corner taking notes and tried not to be noticed too much. This succeeded to some extent as one member of staff said 'Oh, I forgot you were there', when I stood up after the meal was finished. However, another adult said 'this was not normal, you know, they were so well behaved when you were here, you should come back another day', implying that my presence changed the children's behaviour. When I told her I would be observing the rest of the week she said 'oh, good, then you'll see how it really is'.

As I was only there to observe the mealtimes it would have been very difficult for me to become one of them, as a participant observer. It would also be difficult to observe the whole group if I was seated at one of several tables used. Both staff and children are used to having students observe their everyday activities. I therefore felt this was the best way to blend in and collect data during the mealtimes in the nurseries.

Within ethnography participant observation has a long history as a very good method to use if the aim is to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. In the home the most obvious role was as a participant, as a dinner guest. I would sit at the table (or wherever they were) and eat with the families. This way I was in the middle of it and was able to see, hear and sense as much as possible. However, I did not feel comfortable taking notes during the

meal as this is not common practice and the participants may have felt reluctant to converse normally. As taking notes is so visible I also felt that this could increase the feeling amongst the parents, in particular, that they were being evaluated and that they needed to excuse any behaviour or comment, which again would, seemingly, result in me taking more notes. I therefore chose to video record these observations when possible. This involved much added work for myself in terms of e.g. transcription, but I felt it was the best way to capture the sound, atmosphere and body language. After each observation I wrote a logbook or diary in which I recorded the situations or conversations I found particularly interesting or important as well as my own reflections. This helped me choose what to focus on and transcribe. A few times I used a sign, like a cough, during the observation to mark the place in the recording that I would need to look at more specifically. Another issue I was aware of when using video recording was the risk of the participants 'playing up' to the camera and not showing their 'normal' behaviour. Bowman (1994) discusses these issues suggesting there can be a possible 'researcher effect' when using video recording as an observational tool. However, he also points to the reduction in observation error and concludes the benefits of using video recording outweigh the disadvantages. I did not find the researcher effect to have any great impact and therefore did not see using video as a big problem. This may be due to all the parents being very calm and seemingly disinterested in the camera, something that may have rubbed off on the children. Another reason may be that I visited the families several times and usually became 'known/familiar' to the children prior to the video recordings. In this way I was not a total stranger. There were only two episodes I thought not representative for the families, but these were none the less interesting as they showed aspects of the family dynamics, structures, discipline and children's agency in negotiating their roles around the dinner table. One girl, Linea (3) refused to eat, screamed and threw her plate and glass on the floor. As this only happened during the first observation, I might assume that her behaviour could be a result of me, and the camera, being present. However, the parents felt a need to reassure me that this had nothing to do with me and that Linea had these tantrums now and then, particularly on the days she had tiring field trips at nursery. At the end of the observations, four families wished to see the recording taken and were able to reflect on what they saw. This also enabled them to comment on whether this was a typical dinnertime or not. I found their comments and reaction particularly interesting and a good indicator on whether the observation was an accurate reflection of their 'normal' mealtime and typical of their everyday lives. Some pointed out how they felt aware of being watched, whilst the majority said they forgot the camera was there. Some, particularly adults and older siblings, explained

how a particular observation would have been different depending on what they ate, if they had a busy day and so forth.

Unstructured and semi-structured interview

As the first sentence in the book about interviews in research, written by Kvale and Brinkmann clearly states, you need to talk to people if you want to know how they understand their world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:xvii). A good way to explore children's everyday experiences and understandings of mealtimes is therefore to talk with them directly and observe their daily environments.

I chose to include child interview as a method as a way to discover how the children understand and experience meal times in their home and how they relate to these in general. The child interviews were carried out as informal chats during other activities and play. In this way it did not become boring or tiring for the children and many of them were relaxed and happy to talk. Some children were almost ready to burst and seemed very proud that someone was interested in their point of view in relation to a topic they may not always have a say in. My intention was to complete the research with the children before the observations with the whole family, as I would then be more familiar to them, it would feel more appropriate for me to dine with them, and it could reduce the risk of anyone acting atypically or playing up. In reality, when I arrived at the homes the food was often ready to be served and I had little time to do much else prior to the observation. In most instances I therefore carried out the activities and chats after the observations. As with the other activities I conducted the interviews either with each child individually or in sibling groups, being flexible and pragmatic according to the circumstances.

Most of the parental interviews were carried out after the children had gone to bed. Both parents were present during the interviews in the six families where both parents lived with the children. In the other two families the interviews were carried out with the mother.

No formal interviews were planned or carried out with the nursery staff due to, amongst other things, time constraints. Several staff approached me, however, before or after observations with issues they wanted to talk about or illustrations of common practice. Sometimes I found it appropriate to ask further questions and the staff would usually be more than happy to tell their side of the story. I found these informal chats or unstructured interviews extremely valuable as data in their own right, to illustrate or explain episodes observed earlier, and also as help in finding a focus for further exploration.

Recruitment and access

Finding families was both harder and easier than expected. Some were friends of friends and others responded to invitations sent out through local schools and nurseries. It was slow going and some families pulled out at the last minute. The remaining four families were recruited through the participating nurseries, as many of the children there also had older siblings. Maybe the study appealed more to those parents or maybe I had increased credibility due to already having carried out research at the nursery, but in any case the last group of families came to me voluntarily offering their participation.

Many nurseries were contacted via email and telephone. Most of these did not respond at all, some replied that they were not interested and a few offered to mention the study at their staff meetings. The first nursery to agree did so immediately after being contacted and was very positive to the study from the start. After a period of long waits, I happened to speak to a nursery teacher who was very happy for her group to share their mealtimes with me. The third nursery was contacted several times without responding to me directly. They had however, without me knowing, discussed their participation at their staff meetings and agreed to take part.

For the sake of clarity I will systematize the methods and focus in the settings in a frame.

The families

Focus in families: Dinnertime, and food more generally

Methods: Participant observations, video/audio recording, semi-structured interviews with the parents, activities like drawing, Lego, role-play, puppets, show & tell and interviews/informal chats with the children.

The nurseries

Focus in nurseries: Lunchtime; before, during and after.

Methods: Observations, some unstructured interviews with staff and children.

Choosing the same methods in both settings would definitely have given even richer data. However, the child-friendly methods are time consuming, and not realistic to do in the nurseries within the limit for this thesis.

Methodological challenges

There were potential challenges to reflect upon in advance, and of course, challenges that emerged throughout the process. One of the first things to consider was whether the topic chosen represents a sensitive topic.

Sensitive research?

Sieber and Stanley's definition of sensitive research is very broad, and encompasses any research that can have 'potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research' (in Lee, 1993:3). I understand 'sensitive research' to be research on topics that participants may find difficult to talk about: maybe due to embarrassment, shame, blame or taboo. An interview on such a topic may even be seen as intrusive or cause offence. Such a situation may be prevented or be easier to deal with if one is conscious from the start of the sensitivity of the topic and the possibility for reactions. Compared to other topics one might not at first glance consider mealtimes to be of a sensitive character. However, I felt that research into these topics, especially the family dinners, somehow blurred the boundary between the public and the private sphere, and that it therefore had the potential to create a feeling amongst some parents of being judged or evaluated on their parenting skills. This feeling may for some have already existed due to underlying expectations and pressures from society to conform to what is considered proper parenting. There has been much debate over the last few years, in the UK at least, regarding the control of the state. This relates to everything from CCTV¹⁰ cameras recording people's movement; health labels on food, cigarettes and alcohol; as well as how to be a good parent¹¹. A question is whether and how this is relevant in the Norwegian context. Attitudes from some parents show that they do not want to be told how to raise their children by the state; they are the parents and therefore know what is best for their children. Jamie Oliver illustrated this very well in the TV series 'Jamie's school dinners' (2005), in which many parents were shown to be angry over being told what to feed their children. During the research I was therefore conscious not to suggest in any way that one way of carrying out family mealtimes were better or worse than any other. I did, however, sense a common understanding and a wish to give the children the best food possible. Many parents regretted not always being able to do so, but justified this by explaining their busy lives and afterschool

¹⁰ CCTV is an abbreviation for Closed Circuit Television, which does not broadcast TV signals publicly but transmits them over to limited monitor(s).

¹¹ For a discussion on proper parenting see James et al (2009).

schedule. Comparing with some British parents, being portrayed on TV, I did not recognise a similar resistance towards public guidelines. However, many parents distanced themselves from much of, what they saw as hysteria or commercial interests, and had clear ideas of how they intended to “do” and convey food and mealtimes in their home.

Another point to reflect on is the way we often are on our best behaviour when we have dinner guests. Having a visitor (or a stranger) at the table may influence the situation and therefore not give an accurate account of how meals are conducted in the family’s everyday life. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue, deviance from the normal can be ‘important in helping us to understand the limits of the normal’ (Ibid. 2007:169). Bearing this in mind, an important issue for me to consider was therefore how I could approach parents with such a topic, gain access into their home and take part in their family mealtimes without the risk of offending anyone or potentially distorting the data gathered.

The ‘proper’ family dinner

Kjørholt et al (2005) argue that meals where people eat together are often understood as important both due to their nutritional value and their cultural significance. It is also argued that proper family dinners are the ‘cement of family life’ and thus can be seen as the building blocks of a proper family (James et al, 2009:39). From my own experience dinner can mean a variety of things for different people. My own idea of dinner is a hot meal eaten between 4 and 8 pm. My husband, on the other hand, has broader understanding of dinner, which can include cold dishes like sandwiches and salads. I would argue these fit the category of lunch rather than dinner. He would argue that the Norwegian tradition of rice porridge or pancakes (with jam and bacon) for dinner is absurd and should either be classified as breakfast or as pudding. This example illustrates that ‘dinner’ is not a defined type of meal that everyone agrees on. I therefore found it interesting to explore how families understand the concept of dinner and the variations in the understanding of dinner within the same family. As a researcher I could not make the assumption that I knew the meaning given to a familiar object or situation, in this instance dinner or mealtime, as this could hide or distort the real meaning given to the phenomenon by the participants. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue, the emphasis should be placed on ‘ethnographers seeking to understand the meanings that are generated in, and that generate, social action; and avoid imposing their own meanings’ (Ibid:168). I have therefore been particularly conscious of my own understanding of mealtimes, and tried my best to be open minded in order to allow the participants to show me their own understanding and experience and not what they think I want to see.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were prominent throughout the research process, from the stage of narrowing the focus and finding a topic, planning the research and deciding on methods, gathering the data, and throughout the analysis, verifying and reporting (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Alderson, 2004). There are national ethical guidelines for research in Norway. Due to the video and audio recording of some of the observations, the project plan was sent to the ethical review board of the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) for approval, which was granted (Appendix F).

An explanation was given to the children of the reasons and aims for my presence as well as how they could contribute. It was important for me to let the children know that I was not there to judge them. I explained that I was very interested in food and how we carry out mealtimes in families and in nurseries, and that I was trying to understand enough about this topic to write a book about it. As children often ‘fit the observer’s behaviour into their own view of the world’ it was particularly important for me to let them know why I was there, in order to prevent uncertainty and misunderstandings (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988:30). I also explained that I would not use their real names in the book and that the video and audio recordings would be deleted when I had finished the book. Informed consent was gained from all the children in the families through an informed consent form (Appendix E) on which they could indicate through drawing or writing which of the activities they wanted to participate in. If it was unclear what they had chosen through their drawings, we looked at their picture together to make sure I had understood it correctly (see Picture 1). The parents and nurseries were given background information about the project (Appendix H) prior to agreeing to participate.

There were also some practical ethical issues during the research in the homes, such as non-participating siblings walking in and out of the room during the activities. This was discouraged when it became a problem for us to maintain focus and continuity in the activity or conversation, or if the participating children indicated that they disliked it. Occasionally, parents would pop in to get something or maybe retrieve a sibling. In terms of confidentiality and privacy of the children I did not feel that this posed a risk. In one of the families, one of the children participating expressed the need to have the door open at all times, and this was respected without question. In most of the other families, the doors were closed most of the time.

The tools themselves did not post any challenges during the research process. The challenge was rather to be aware enough to sense a dislike or preference for one or the other from the children. Some children were very clear about what they did and did not like, but others were more shy and seemed to either think I expected them to complete all the different activities, or would go with the suggested tool despite not preferring to. If I detected any dissatisfaction, I would ask whether we maybe should change tool or scenery, or invite a sibling to join us.

I found the various tools or activities helpful in communicating with many of the children. Play is a powerful tool and can be used to narrow the gap between adults and children, and enable children to express themselves on their own terms with a 'language' of their choice. For example, when sitting on the floor surrounded by Lego, we could switch the theme from home to a restaurant, nursery, a friend's house or the home of a grandparent. In this role-play the dinners would differ, sometimes only by where we were sitting or by how much we could eat, but often also by what we ate and how we were "expected" to behave. This insight into a child's experiences, thoughts and memories of dinners showed the importance of using so called 'child friendly methods' or 'participant friendly methods' when doing research with children (Ennew et al., 2009). Without such a flexible and multi-layered approach I would have had difficulty understanding the experiences of young children and they would not have been able to share them with me to the same extent.

One way to confront the generational issues, such as power imbalances between children and adults, as a researcher (Mayall, 2000), is to do research *with* children as opposed to *on* children by using researching tools or methods suitable for them as participants (Ennew, et al., 2009). According to Ennew, using several research tools often leads to better data than if using only one. Using a methodological framework that encompasses a variety of methods encourages children to share their experiences and understandings in ways they are familiar with and can thus enable them to express themselves more freely. Using a variety of methods also enabled me, as a researcher, to obtain a large quantity of data showing the topic from different angles. When the aim is to explore and better understand children's own experiences, understandings and perspectives about a topic that may, for the participants, seem "obvious", it may be counterproductive to use quantitative methods. By using a variety of methods, observing and talking to children directly I hope that participating in the research project was both fun and interesting for the children and that the data gathered can shine some light on what these children think about food and eating and how they experience their family dinners.

Reflections

It was difficult and very time consuming getting families and nurseries to participate. One can only speculate about the reasons for not responding to requests to participate. Perhaps they believed it to be too demanding and time consuming, or found the topic uninteresting. The response from the participating nurseries after the observations was that they almost did not notice I was there. Some nursery staff and children expressed a relief at finally being able to express their views on a topic to someone who actually cared. Another inference one might draw from the lack of enthusiasm from some of the nurseries contacted may be that they feared being judged for their common practice in regards to food and mealtimes. Such a reaction to or understanding of my study was not my intention and I therefore hope this guesswork to be incorrect. However, it can be useful to bear in mind in future, as a different approach may work better. When talking to prospective families I emphasised the wish to observe the mealtime, as it would normally be conducted, without any extra effort due to my presence. I also stressed that I was not there to judge or praise what I observed, but that my interest lay in understanding the variations in how mealtimes are conducted within families with young children.

Analysis

Researchers do not enter the research as a blank slate (Gudmundsdottir, 1996). We can, however, use our knowledge and previous experiences as an instrument with which to explore the data (McCracken, 1988). In the early, explorative phase of the analysis (Gudmundsdottir, 1990), I identified about fifteen key words or themes emerging from the data that I found particularly interesting and worthy of further investigation¹². It was not within the scope of this thesis to go into detailed analysis of all of these.

The process of categorisation was, however, the necessary first step in condensing the data to create meaning (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In the second phase, after repeatedly reading through and working consistently with the data, the data was divided and codified, and five broader patterns of behaviour or categories emerged that symbolised the children's mealtimes I observed. As Gudmundsdottir (1990) points out, the third phase of analysis consists of, after having codified the data, gathering the data into their respective categories. These categories are systematised under the umbrellas Prioritisation, Facilitation, Time, Food and Talk and are relevant both for the nurseries and the families, albeit in varying degrees. There was a need to

¹² For an overview of these themes and key words see Appendix G.

reflect upon the relationship between the categories found for these to have any analytical value (Gudmundsdottir, 1990). Phase four of the analysis was therefore used to understand the meanings of each of these categories and characterise the relationship between them. I found that the categories are connected in many ways; e.g. an adult *talking* about *food* can be both *prioritising* and *facilitating* the mealtime. They are, however, still separate in their focus and boundaries can be drawn. The two analysis chapters are therefore each structured in five sections. I chose to divide the analysis into two chapters: the first presenting the data from the nurseries and the second presenting the data from the families. The dichotomy of structure and agency, outlined in chapter 3, underpin the thesis and are relevant concepts to bear in mind and reflect upon in the analysis. The issues of structure and agency in relation to mealtimes will be reflected upon and discussed further in chapter 7, the discussion chapter. In this chapter a more in-depth discussion of the findings, as well as a comparison of and reflections on the relationship between the two institutions of nursery and home, will also be provided.

5 EXPLORING THE NURSERY LUNCH MEAL

In this chapter, the first of the two empirical chapters, I will present and analyse the data about children's mealtimes. This chapter will focus on children's and staff's understandings and experiences of the lunchtimes in the three nurseries visited. The nurseries are numbered in the order they were visited. The data is divided into five separate themes or categories, as outlined in the previous chapter.

The first three themes; Prioritisation, Facilitation and Time, are strongly linked and in many ways interdependent. The need to prioritise facilities and allow enough time, is one way of looking at it. At the same time one may argue that with similar structures and constraints different nurseries (or families) prioritise their facilities and time differently, or use their own competencies and interests to facilitate different use of time. It also appears that time in some cases are used as an excuse to make priorities that go against the curriculum and that are not strictly necessary.

Prioritisation

In this section I focus on how food and meals are prioritized in the nurseries. The national guidelines for mealtimes in nurseries argue that meals should be an important arena for children's social relations in addition to the nutritional value of the food eaten (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007). How the nurseries prioritise internally in relation to food and eating, both from the management's side, in their educational planning and the everyday choices the staff on the floor makes, is not insignificant as it greatly influences the mealtime experiences for all parties involved.

In nursery 2, food and mealtimes received much attention, the planning and preparation often going over several days involving the children along the way. They would, for example, prepare bread dough in the afternoon and bake the bread the next morning ready for lunch, or a pile of vegetables would accumulate as a picturesque display over a few days before it was made into a meal. This enabled and encouraged wonder and curiosity among the children, some discussing the usefulness of the various vegetables on display.

Below, I present a discussion between three children aged three and four who are standing by the vegetable display in the kitchen:

- What do you think we will make of this one?
- It looks like a ball

- Yeah, but we can't eat balls
- We need to cut it anyway
- Then it won't roll very well
- Maybe with cheese on
- My dad would just mash it
- We need a sharp knife though
- Yes, it is very big and strong
- What will this be? (*asking an adult*)
- All the vegetables can go in the soup (*the adult replies*)
- Can I cut it up?
- And me, I want to peel it with a sharp stick

The excitement then spread quickly amongst the nearby children and many came to the table and wanted to help make the soup. There seems to be a conscious effort amongst the staff to include the children in food preparation.

Here, (*in the nursery*) we like to look at it like... yes... from soil to mouth sort of, that the children take part throughout the process and are involved in everything. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

The focus given to the food illustrated the integral part food, eating and mealtimes have in everyday life. The staff valued food and eating as an arena for learning, sharing experiences and forming social relations. Nobody was stressed and time was not limited; everyone who wanted took part and the activity could take the whole morning. The pride and joy of having made the soup was obvious to see when these two boys ran into another room to tell their friends.

Felix (4): We made soup today
 William (3): Yes, me and them, we made it
 Felix: I did the cutting and the stirring
 William: I was peeling the very big potato and the carrot
 Emma (5): Is it any good?
 William: It is the best
 Felix: And it smells like... at home
 Marius (4): Can I have some?
 Felix: Yes, after the story
 William: And we mashed it with the buzzer

There was awareness amongst the staff about the role food and mealtimes were supposed to have in the nursery and a conscious effort was made to prioritise accordingly. The aim, or common thread, was not to rush or stress the food preparation and eating, but rather create a relaxed, friendly and calm atmosphere in which both children and staff felt at ease. I observed that, despite having about sixteen children around two tables, there was a low level of noise in the room. Children and staff were polite, calm and welcoming, and it seemed like everyone

took their time with the food. This may indicate that the staff's goal and aim for the mealtimes were successfully achieved. As one of the staff explained:

Children in Norway don't starve. If they are playing, are happy and grow, yes then it's not dangerous if they drop a meal. If they never ate in the nursery or at home, then it's a problem, but then it is not about the food, it's a bigger problem. If six out of twelve children didn't eat anything in the nursery we would need to look at what we could do differently. But most of them eat and are happy. Then there is no need for us to stress about it. We have a mantra here; they eat what they want, if they don't want anything then we do not get cross, just say ok. Ninety nine per cent of them eat a little after a while except that one boy who doesn't eat much. He just says 'I do not really like this food' when he doesn't like something. But then he eats at home, so... Food preparation and mealtimes should be relaxed and it should be a positive experience for everyone. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

This also illustrates how the communication between the nursery and the home in relation to food and eating is important. If the nursery knows what the children are eating at home it helps them see each child's individual needs and prioritise accordingly.

The educational role of mealtimes in the nurseries is mentioned in the guidelines (Sosial- og Helsedirektoratet, 2007) and children's active involvement is encouraged.

Meals in the nursery should be aimed at promoting healthy eating habits and health. In addition, a variety of educational activities and measures can relate to food and meals. Examples of such activities include children's participation in cooking, cultivation, harvesting and local food production, learning about different cultures' traditions, language development, development of smell and taste, fine motor development, independence and interaction with others, knowledge about the relationship between food, body and health. (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007: 8, my translation)

When asked whether children take part in food preparation and cooking, a member of staff in Nursery 1 replied:

No, not when it is hot food. Sometimes they will take part when we are baking or maybe cutting up fruit or something, but never the hot food. No, not at all. They are allowed to watch though. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

In the other two nurseries, however, children took an active part in cooking, illustrating how nurseries prioritise differently despite having the same guidelines and similar facilities and constraints. During my observations in Nursery 1, two girls were only involved once in preparing the mealtime, placing salami and cheese on sliced bread for cheese on toast. In nursery 3, by contrast, I observed a group of six children helping to make the warm meal from scratch, including cutting vegetables, stirring on the hob, and pouring the ingredients into a casserole dish. An adult was supervising, but children were encouraged to independently

reflect on what needed to be done, and help each other. A group of children gathered in front of the oven to watch the cheese melt and discussed the bubbling and changing colours, as well as the emerging smell. When one child came a little too close to the oven, the older children looked out for him saying ‘come here, it’s hot, Markus, don’t touch it’. The boy listened instantly and came to sit down with the others. The older children’s responsibility also became apparent when they were cutting up vegetables by showing the younger children how to hold the knife, passing items and giving encouraging remarks. Such activities do not only teach children how to appropriately handle hot and sharp objects, it also encourages an interest for food and cooking. When actively involved in the preparation of food the children showed a collective excitement, passion and love for food. The children’s conversations and comments during the food preparation in nursery 3 illustrated this:

One adult and six children are in the kitchen. All the children have one chopping board and a sharp knife. The children peel and/or cut carrots, leeks and cod, and grate cheese to make a fish gratin. The member of staff cooks macaroni, makes a white sauce and is available for supervision and guidance.

- Oh, this will be so nice
- Yes, I will cut small pieces
- Do you know what vegetable this is? *(Staff)*
- It’s an onion
- Hmm... well, yes, it has a oniony flavour *(Staff)*
- It’s a leek
- Yes, and we need to cut all these leeks in small bits *(Staff)*
- But this is very cold
- Why is it so cold?
- Oh, its been in the freezer, can you see what's inside *(Staff)*
- Its white meat
- Its fish, white fish
- That’s right, and we need to cut it in to chunks and put it in the sauce *(Staff)*
- I want to cut the fish, cause I love fish
- But I don’t like white fish, I only like pink fish
- You will like this one, look, just cut it up in small bits, ooh, its very cold
- It is too cold to eat
- We will cook it and then it will be too hot and then we need to just blow on it, you know
- Yes and the cheese will melt in the fish and it will be yummy
- What about the carrots?
- Carrots and the leeks will just hide in the sauce underneath the cheese like the worms in the flowerbed outside.
- We can dig them up with our fork
- Yes, then it will be carrot-worms and leek-worms
(Children laughing)

When the gratin was in the oven the children washed their hands and laid the table. As the smell of food filled the playroom next to the kitchen I could hear both children and adults

commenting on the lovely smell; some of the children who had made it explained to the other children how good it would be because they had done such a good job.

Yes, it smells nice, cause we cut it up and stirred it and now it is in the oven with the cheese, you have to try it, you might say 'oh, it's the best gratin I have ever tasted' and then thank me and Frida, because we did it together. (Emilie, aged 4, in nursery 3)

Prioritising food preparation and mealtimes in this way illustrates how nursery 3 values food as important for children's learning and everyday lives, and not only as nutrition or as part of a diet. Through their comments and excitement children showed that taking an active part in the making of food was a positive experience, both in terms of the mere exercise being fun, and the pleasure of sharing the food they had made with friends later.

In nursery 2 some of the staff said that mealtimes were the highlight of the day; it was like a respite from an otherwise busy day. In nursery 1, however, several staff expressed that they did not look forward to the meal unless it corresponded with their break time; one member of staff saying he rather dreaded lunchtimes. Reasons for not looking forward to mealtimes often related to the stress and level of conflict it seemed to bring with it, one member of staff saying:

Oh, it's just something we need to get through, you know. It's a lot of stress, they won't eat that much and I think sometimes, what's the point really, but you know, they need to eat something, but when they wont we can't force them either. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

Another staff saying:

There's a lot of noise. We try to tell them to use the indoor voice, you know, and be a little quiet, but some don't listen. We often have to be quite strict with them, you know, so there are lots of conflicts at mealtimes and that's so tiring. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

Not all the nurseries visited had what I regards as as a collective awareness or consciousness in regards to the children's mealtimes. To identify and get an impression of the level of reflection, I had to simply rely on what they said and what I was able to observe. As previously illustrated, nursery 2 valued the meal as a shared, positive social event where children's involvement and a low level of stress were sought after. This was also the case in nursery 3, albeit not to the same degree, as nursery 3 only prepared food from scratch once a week. In nursery 1, in contrast, food and eating was rather seen as a necessity, sometimes as an activity that prevented them from doing other things. The manner in which food and eating were talked about and featured in conversations with adults gave the impression that it was

used as a means to reason with the children, to justify why other activities could not be carried out, and as a form of discipline.

The meal seems here to be a subject for control, a disturbance of the play and an obligation where the adults have the power to decide:

- We need to go inside now
- No, I want to play outside
- Yes, but it is lunchtime soon
- I'm not hungry
- You can play more outside afterwards
- But I want to play now
- No, now it is time for eating
(nursery 3)

The meal does also here become an obstacle for what the child suggests:

- Can we go for a walk today?
- No, I don't think so
- But why? We want to.
- I don't think we'll have the time after lunch
- What about now?
- It'll soon be lunch
- We can eat outside...?
- No
(nursery 1)

An example of negotiation:

- You need to eat your food
- But I am not hungry any more
- You haven't touched it, just sit there until you're finished
- I want to play with Viktor
- Viktor has finished, he's already outside
- I want to go outside
- Just eat some more first, and then you can go.
(nursery 1)

The mealtime is used as an opportunity to learn good manners

- Can you sit down
- But I am finished
- You need to wait, it's rude not to wait until the rest of us are finished
- But I want to finish building
- Just eat a little more or wait on your seat
- The others will come and break it
(nursery 1)

These excerpts illustrate how the meal was used to justify why certain activities could not be done. The practical implications for children's play is obvious; the rules and norms of the nursery implies that food should be served around the table indoors if such a facility is available, at a set time, unless another option is previously agreed. Play must therefore give

way to eating, not out of desire, but rather as it was compulsory. This meant that the mealtime appeared to be not relaxed and was less associated with pleasure or joy. It was rather an activity that benefited from early completion. However, one might question the need to *blame* the food or mealtime for play not being possible as this may influence the perception of the meal in a derogatory way. It may also result in the mealtime experience being stressed; if the understanding amongst the children is that they just have to get it done before they can continue with the game, the mealtime is not valued in its own right or seen as something that can both be play and pleasure. None of the mealtimes observed in the nurseries involved games or play to any large extent, but there were great differences in the staffs' acceptance of children expressing their fantasy and imagination through talk. In nursery 2, in particular, children's play-talk¹³ had room to carry on in to the meal setting and faded naturally when they started eating rather than being interrupted and discouraged, as it often was in nursery 1.

Due to the taken-for-granted-ness often observed in relation to the meals in the nurseries I wanted to identify the practices observed, in order to look for similarities and differences. I have chosen to present these in form of a table. I defined five themes that I found particularly prominent and important for the experience of the mealtimes in the nurseries and which captured the different ways of prioritising food and eating. Each of the nurseries received a score representing the effort or attention given to five topics; *awareness, children's involvement, product quality, atmosphere and rules/discipline*. By *awareness*, I mean the way the nursery shows awareness in regards to the role of children's food and mealtimes; conscious attention and agreed coherent practises in relation to the food and mealtimes. *Children's involvement* would include how the nurseries prioritise children as active participants, in all stages of the preparation of meals. *Product quality* is directly linked to the food served, whether it was prepared and cooked from scratch, processed, organic and so forth. The *atmosphere* relates to the atmosphere in the room during mealtime: was it friendly and calm or stressed and full of conflicts? One point was given to nurseries where I observed little or low level of attention given to the topic, while in nurseries given two points there would be aspects of attention, for example some of the staff showing awareness and attention to the topic in a positive way a few days a week. Three points was given to nurseries where I observed high levels of attention given to the topics listed, with what I interpreted as a thorough and coherent understanding. In the scores for the last theme, rules/discipline, three

¹³ By play-talk during the meal I mean children's talk that continue from their previous play and games, as well as talk that to a large extent is made up of fantasy and pretend voices.

points were given to the nursery showing the least strict rules and discipline in relation to mealtimes. One point was given to the nurseries with the most focus on fixed and controlled rules and discipline. This change in the way to allocate scores is linked to the mealtime atmosphere reflecting the view that the more focus staff members have on following the expressed rules, with the inevitable repercussions to breaches of these, the less it seemed to be a focus on a positive and friendly mealtime experience. This does, however, not suggest that the nurseries scoring three points would lack rules or ways to deal with the breaches of these. It rather illustrates there were fewer negative rules (as in ‘children should not...children are not allowed to...’) and more positive rules (as in ‘we try to encourage children to...’).

These scores are only meant as a means of identifying patterns and validating the data, as an analytical tool and may help to see the similarities and differences between the nurseries more clearly. A similar table will also be provided at the end of the remaining sections in this chapter and may work as a summary of each section. I will start with the prioritisations.

Prioritisation	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
Awareness of role	1 -	3 -	2 -
Children’s involvement	1 -	3 -	2 -
Product quality	1 -	3 -	2 -
Atmosphere	1 -	3 -	2 -
Rules/discipline	1 -	3 -	3 -
TOTAL	5 points	15 points	11 points

Table 1 The level of prioritisation in the nurseries.

These scores illustrate the data gathered through interviews with staff in the respective nurseries as well as observations of their mealtime practices. The most interesting point to make a note of is that, with the exception of rules and discipline, each nursery ends up within the same bracket, receiving the same number of points for each of the topics listed. Even if this is not a systematic and significant measure according to some justified measuring instruments, it indicates a link between the various topics. For example in nursery 1 where

there was low level of attention given to the food served to children or the awareness of the role of children's food and mealtimes, children's involvement were also low and so was the atmosphere around the lunch table. Similarly, in nursery 2 where there was a high level of focus on the role of mealtimes and good quality food, children were more involved and there was a more welcoming and better atmosphere around the meal. When using the normative concept 'better', it refers to, as previously mentioned, the lack of stress and discipline.

It may seem obvious that the ways in which nurseries prioritise around mealtimes influence how they facilitate mealtimes in the nursery, both in terms of cooking facilities and children's involvement. However, the data suggests that this is an area that is still neglected or undermined in some nurseries. It may therefore seem naïve to rely on national guidelines and frameworks to promote mealtime experiences that are organised according to the intentions. It may be a considerable challenge if the government wants a greater focus on food and meals in nurseries that does not just concern nutrition, but also accounts for the social aspects, if the practices vary as much as this data suggests.

Facilitation

I have included an overview of the cooking facilities in the three nurseries in a frame below. This is to visualize the differences and similarities between the three, also enabling reflections on the different priorities observed in relation to mealtimes in the nurseries.

Kitchen and cooking facilities:

Nursery 1: Large kitchen; the cooker, fridge, sink and worktops were along the wall on either side of a wall of windows giving much light, the fourth wall being a retractable door to the play room often also used for eating. Tables were placed in the middle of the room.

Nursery 2: Medium sized kitchen with windows on three walls. The hob, sink and worktops were situated in the middle of the room. Two tables for eating were in a corner by the windows. Two ovens were placed on the opposite wall.

Nursery 3: Small kitchen with one window. The cooker, fridge and sink were placed in a corner whilst the table, rooming eight to twelve children on benches, took up most of the room. During the mealtime one group of six children ate in the kitchen whilst the other two groups ate in adjacent playroom.

I define facilitation to mean both the actual facilities available in the nursery, i.e. the kitchen equipment and so forth, and also the way staff facilitate or make possible children's

participation and agency in relation to mealtimes. In the national guidelines focus is given to the involvement of adults in the nursery mealtimes, stating that ‘nurseries should facilitate for adults to take an active part in the mealtime and eat with the children’ (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007, my translation). The following quote illustrates how these guidelines are not always followed:

I worked in another nursery before, and there it was eating just for eating, to fill up the stomach, and not for the meal’s sake. I didn’t like that. The adults didn’t eat with the children, they were not allowed. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

In nursery 2 and 3, I observed the adults were sitting down with the children, eating the same food as the children and thus taking an active part in the mealtimes, as stated in the national guidelines. In nursery 1 there was also a common understanding and objective, at least in the educational planning and verbalised through the interviews, that the adults should eat with the children, each table having its designated adult. However, the observations showed that this was not the case most of the time. Due to the large group of children in nursery 1 there were often five tables in use, and as lunchtime also was a time for staff breaks there were just two or three members of staff present throughout the mealtime most days during my observations. They were then busy serving food, pouring drinks, helping and supervising all the five tables, moving to and fro more or less constantly. In calmer periods, when all the children had received food and sat quietly eating, the adults would eventually find their seat and bring out their own packed lunch. Only when hot food was served on Friday did I observe the adults in nursery 1 having the same food as the children.

Every Friday we have a warm meal, we usually make something from scratch then. We don’t really have the facilities to make proper food. Just small hobs, but that’s just how it is. We just make the best of what we have. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

According to recent research on food in nurseries in Norway, from about the age of four years and upwards the most crucial influence on children’s eating is what their friends eat (Langholm and Herikstad Tuset, 2013). These authors further argue that younger children would more easily accept food given to them by a well-known adult. They also found that if the adults present eat the *same food* as the children, it does not seem to be essential whether it is their parents or other adults serving the food. This underlines the importance of the staff eating with the children in the nursery.

None of the nurseries had dedicated members of staff to do the cooking, like a chef. This was more common in the past, but is now rare. However, this did not mean that cooking and food

preparation were shared out equally between the members of staff. In all the nurseries there was one female¹⁴ member of staff in each group that had, some way or another, acquired the position or taken on the role as the chef. Some explained that this was due to the fact that they liked cooking more than the others, or were more experienced. In nursery 3, however, there seemed to be a schedule for the three groups preparing food, requiring all the staff to take part. However, one member of staff explained their system in this way: ‘We have the three groups, but since I like cooking more than the others I often end up taking their group, so ... yeah, I do most of the cooking really’. Another member of staff expressed how she understands the importance of hot meals in the nursery:

I worked in a nursery before where they served hot food every day and had a fulltime chef. We noticed it in the children; they were not so picky with the food and ate more, learnt new tastes. But here we have mainly sliced bread, yes... We have a warm meal on Fridays. (Member of staff, nursery 3)

In nursery 1 a staff member from each group would occasionally cooperate when cooking the hot meal on the Friday, for example one boiling the potatoes and vegetables whilst the other did the meat and sauce. In this way they were able to cook for nearly eighty children on two stoves and using only the staff already working with the children. I asked how the food was purchased, whether they or the children had any influence on that matter:

The food is ordered, yes, we do not buy anything ourselves. We just tell the office lady what we would like, and she sends off the order. Everything is through the council, you know. Oh, what’s the name of the wholesaler again? Well, a truck comes with all the food. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

This seemed to be the common way to acquire the food, at least in the municipality run nurseries. Nursery 2, which is private, was a little more flexible, having dairy products, organic fruit and vegetables delivered, whilst dry ingredients and tins etc. were bought by staff on a weekly basis or as and when needed, and stored in what was referred to as ‘the shop’¹⁵. Children were taken on little excursions to ‘the shop’ to ‘buy’ the food and ingredients needed. In this way the children learnt about ingredients and took an active role in the planning and facilitation of the meals. It also gave them an opportunity to negotiate in

¹⁴ In two of the groups observed there were several men working (2 of 5 and 2 of 3), in the third nursery there were only women working in the group observed.

¹⁵ ‘The shop’ was an old and small two-storey house in the garden, previously used as a woodshed and for general storage.

regards to the food served, as they might suggest ingredients not originally planned by the staff.

Fussy eaters

There were some debates among staff in nursery 1 in regards to the way they should relate to or facilitate children who did not want to eat and were particularly picky or fussy with their food. Nursery 2 seemed to have a clear position that all the staff agreed on, resulting in such incidents being dealt with consistently regardless of time or people involved, as illustrated by a member of staff: ‘they eat what they want, if they don’t want anything then we do not get cross, just say ok’¹⁶. Staff in the other two nurseries voiced the opinion that they would encourage all children to taste what was offered. In all three nurseries there seemed, therefore, to be a consensus that there would be no substitute if the children did not eat what was originally offered. However, in practice, the staff members in nursery 1 were not consistent in this matter, as illustrated by the two extracts below.

Adult 1: Can you eat some more of your food, Jacob?
Jacob: I don’t want it
Adult 1: Then you’ll be hungry, this is it, there’s nothing else, you know.

Adult 4: Shall I make some bread for Celia?
Adult 2: Doesn’t she eat anything either now? Well, there are a few different opinions about this.
Adult 4: Celia, do you want some bread instead?
Celia nods
Adult 4: What do you want on it?
Celia: White cheese
Adult 4: Then I’ll make that

A boy sitting next to Celia did not touch his food either. A member of staff brings him a slice of bread and asks whether he would like some. He grabs it. The member of staff asks two more children if they would like some bread with cheese and they do. The other children have already left to get dressed. In the first illustration it is emphasised that there will not be served any alternative food, whilst in the next illustration several children are offered something not originally served.

Whether or not the ‘policy’ of not giving a substitute was agreed on or openly discussed by the staff was hard to judge from the observations and interviews. However, one can read from the observation that there were different opinions regarding this. Some staff members were

¹⁶ See full quote on page 45.

more concerned that the children at least ate something, while others were more concerned about following the rules, teaching the children that they had to eat what they were given. In nursery 2 and 3, by contrast, incidents of pickiness or children not eating were not given much attention; it was not made in to a big scene, but rather deliberately ignored. I observed that the adults noticed that some children did not eat, or ate just a few things. They did not, however, intervene unless the children loudly expressed disgust, as this was not tolerated, a typical comment being:

Simon (4): Yuck, this tastes horrible

Adult: That's not a nice thing to say about the food, Simon

Simon: But I don't like it

Adult: Then you just put the things you don't like on the side of your plate and eat the rest, there's no need to shout about it.

Despite the similar cooking facilities available to the staff in the three nurseries, there were great differences in the ways they facilitated the mealtimes for children, both in terms of their own participation in the meal as well as the children's involvement in the preparation. In nursery 1 it was rare to see the staff eat the same food as the children. In nursery 3, I occasionally observed staff bringing their own packed lunch, whilst in nursery 2, the staff always shared the meal with the children. Bearing in mind the type and quality of the food served in the various settings, one can assume that the staff's decisions to bring their own food were influenced by the alternative food served. If the food served in a nursery is tempting, and eating with the children is encouraged, there is no apparent reason to bring your own food, if the staff do not have to pay for the food received at nursery. There were no indications that any of them had to, even if this has been a common practice in some nurseries. The homemade bread and bread rolls often served warm with a nice selection of toppings or homemade soup in nursery 2 were appealing for both small and tall. In addition, there was a clear and common understanding and agreement amongst the staff in regards to how they should behave in relation to the food and eating situations; it was seen as important that the adults ate with the children and in this way were good examples for the children. Such a coherent attitude towards children's food and eating were missing in the other two nurseries, although of the two nurseries showed more awareness and ability to implement routines, for example children took to a greater extent an active part in food preparation than in nursery 1. Table 2 shows the main differences in regards to how the nurseries facilitates for children's mealtimes.

Facilitation	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
Cooking facilities	3 -	3 -	2 -
Adults eating with the children	1 -	3 -	2 -
Home made food	1 -	3 -	2 -
Children's involvement	1 -	3 -	3 -
Coherent response to fussy eaters	1 -	3 -	3 -
TOTAL	7 points	15 points	12 points

Table 2 The level of facilitation in the nurseries.

What this illustrates is that the actual facilities for cooking in the nurseries, i.e.. the equipment and space, do not necessarily determine how food, eating and mealtimes are facilitated in the nurseries. Nursery 1, for example, had a large kitchen with all the necessary equipment, but did not prioritise food and eating to the same degree as the other two nurseries.

Time

The challenge of having enough time is a constant feature of food and eating in nursery settings, both in relation to prioritising and facilitating mealtimes as well as when talking about food. First, the nursery day is very much structured according to routine activities, allowing children as well as the adults, a predictable day or week. Second, there is a defined period of time for eating - lunchtime was about thirty to forty-five minutes in all three nurseries. Some children were able to sit by the table for a little longer while the rest of the children were getting dressed for outdoor play. In addition to the time spent around the table and the obligatory time spent laying the tables, nursery 2 also used the time prior to lunchtime, often from they arrived in the morning, to facilitate children's participation and active involvement in food preparation. Making dough for bread, bread rolls or pizza, cutting vegetables for soups, sauces or fillings were voluntary activities children were encouraged to take part in and these occurred parallel to other activities throughout the morning. In nursery

1, on the other hand, the meals were considered as something that competed with the other activities.

We need to allocate more time if the children shall make the food, and we really don't have time most of the days, there are many other things we also want to do, you know.
(Member of staff, nursery 1)

One may therefore argue that the use of time in relation to mealtimes is greatly influenced by all the other requirements listed in the guidelines and the ways in which the staff manage to manoeuvre between all the requirements. For some, the logic might be that meals should be an activity that runs itself in order for everyone to do other things that are in their educational plans and documents. The way meals are conceptualised in terms of their role in the daily routine will influence how staff prioritise in relation to food and cooking, not just in relation to nutrition, food as fuel, but also whether or not they value food and cooking to have other qualities, such as social, cultural and symbolic meanings. Similarly, time, is even more than facilities or lack of these, given as a justification for organising the mealtimes in certain ways.

We don't really have the time to cook proper food, you know, because we still have the other things to do and don't have any extra adults at lunchtime. It's the opposite really, because people need their break so we have fewer adults when we are meant to make lunch. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

Nursery 3, by contrast, had organised the children into three groups, each member of staff being responsible for their own group. The groups consisted of three, four and five year olds. While two thirds of the children were outside or doing other activities, the rest would help in the kitchen, especially if they were having hot food that needed preparing.

Staff: Well, the children are divided into three, the blue, yellow and red group, with six children in each. My group will make lunch today. It is much better to have a small group, you know, because then we have the time to show them and explain, you know.

Author: How do you decide what to make?

Staff: I just decide, normally, but it really depends on what is in the freezer though. Today we took up fish; I hope it will defrost in time. And we will make a fish gratin. It depends what we have time for as well, you know.

One member of staff in nursery 2 pointed out that the nature of the meal – how it was experienced, whether it was calm or filled with conflicts – depended on what food was served. Even if the staff's intention is to take their time, they have to be flexible with their expectations and meet the children's needs or wishes here and now.

The mealtime depends on what we eat; it depends on the moods, how much they eat. We like to sit for a long time and talk, but when it is something they like a lot, and is simple, they are finished so quickly. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

Time as a factor in children’s mealtimes in the nursery is, as shown above, related to how the nursery prioritises food and eating and is often used as a means to justify these priorities.

In the table below I would like to summarise the main differences and similarities, between the nurseries in relation to how they use time. With these themes I felt it was counterproductive to give the scores 1, 2 and 3 as in the previous tables. The differences and similarities are better described in minutes and other time descriptions.

Time as/used	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
Eating	30 – 40 min.	35 – 45 min.	30 – 40 min.
Preparation	10 – 30 min.	30 min. – 3 h.	15 – 45 min.
Justification	Often	Never	Occasionally
Routine	Predictable and fixed	Predictable and flexible	Predictable and fixed

Table 3 The amount of time used in the nurseries.

The main time related difference between the nurseries, as illustrated in table 3, is the length of time used for food preparation as well as the use of time as a reason, excuse or justification for why food and mealtimes are carried out in certain ways. ‘Blaming’ time (and using it as a disclaimer) may illustrate that the staff’s focus, interest and priorities lie somewhere else, or that time really is an issue to consider in large groups of children. One should not underestimate time as a crucial factor if children's right to participation should be taken seriously.

Food¹⁷

Several of the staff, in all three nurseries, mentioned how the nursery should be an extension of the home. This is an idea prevalent in the history of Norwegian nurseries (Korsvold, 1997), emphasising the importance of good communication and consistency between the two settings for the children's everyday wellbeing. One particular one aspect was mentioned by was the sharing of information about the amount children were eating and whether or not they were eating at nursery or at home. If such information were available for the staff, they argued they were better able to accommodate children's needs. There was no mention of sharing or valuing information, however, in regards to the *types* of food eaten at home. The nursery-home relationship will be discussed further in chapter seven.

During my visit in nursery 2 I noticed there were no meat served and I therefore posed the question 'do you always serve vegetarian food?', to which I got the answer:

Yes, always. If it's a carnival or summer party or something we might have sausages, but otherwise it is vegetarian. And we can have mackerel in tomato sauce sometimes, you know, on sliced bread, but not that often. It is much easier in relation to hygiene and the regulations as well when we don't have meat. It was decided a few years back that we should be vegetarian. We had a girl some years back who was very allergic and then we had liver pâté, because she could have that. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

Another member of staff explained this issue further.

It's ideological, really. We cook everything from scratch, make our own bread and use all organic ingredients. Many of the children are vegetarian and some of the staff too, so... We don't actually need meat so it's easier and it's better for us to eat more healthily, and the children get used to not having meat all the time too. (Member of staff, nursery 2)

Thus, hygiene, allergies and the staff's personal food habits may influence the food served in the nurseries. The other two nurseries served meat during my visits, such as salami and ham, or meat patties. Generally, the main difference between the three settings when it came to the food served was that nursery 2 made most of what they served from scratch. The other two nurseries would, they said, make cakes or buns occasionally, but there was no culture of making bread and bread rolls as part of the everyday routine despite all nurseries using such foods every day.

¹⁷ The actual food eaten in the various settings visited was not an initial interest of mine, but has popped up over the course of the research as an interesting aspect. This is mainly due to the focus, or lack of focus, it received by the participating adults.

Presentation of food

In the guidelines for food and mealtimes in nurseries there are eight short and specific points related to mealtimes, one of which relates to the atmosphere. Here it is argued that mealtimes should be calm and peaceful, stating that ‘nurseries should facilitate a well-functioning and pleasant eating environment’ (Sosial- og helsedirektoratet, 2007: 8). The elements mentioned as important for achieving a pleasant eating environment are, amongst others, aesthetics and communication. One of the girls in nursery 3, Helena (4) was particularly observant in relation to the way the food looked and was presented and took action if it was not to her satisfaction. She was happy to decorate both her own and other’s food, and told the staff each plate needed food of at least four different colours.

Helena: Everyone knows that peppers are for decoration

Adult: Oh, is it decoration?

Helena: Yes, mummy and daddy have said it

Adult: Where do you decorate with it then?

Helena: The food

(Her slice of bread with liver pâté then gets some cucumber slices as decorations)

Helena: See, it is pretty.

The presentation of the food and how it looked on the plate was also a concern for one of the staff members in nursery 2 who often commented on how nice the food looked, how the colours complemented each other and so forth. Typical comments were:

We need a drop of sour cream in this soup, then it would look really nice as well

You have decorated your sandwich with nice colours; red, yellow and green, I bet it taste nice too.

We always have sliced cucumber and peppers with the lunch, oh, and olives, the children like to decorate their food and some just eat it. No matter how much we cut up, there never seems to be anything left, you know.

Crunchy vegetables were also served with the bread-based meals in nursery 3, where one of the staff stated:

We do try to make the food appetising, you know, we know ourselves that it is much nicer to eat food that looks nice, isn’t it? But its not like *(laughing)* it is at restaurants exactly, some try a bit harder than others.

In the nurseries where children were most actively involved in food preparation (nursery 2 and 3), there were also greater awareness and focus on presenting the food in a decorative manner, the mealtimes were calmer and more relaxed, and the children sat for longer around the table and also seemed to eat more. One may therefore argue that this was a function of the

priority given in the nurseries to children helping out with the food preparation. More generally, this indicates that children’s relationship to food and eating is influenced by the priorities exercised by the facilitating adults. One may also suggest that how children relate to food and eating in the nurseries may contribute to their relationship with food at home as well as later in life. Some illustrations of the implications nursery mealtimes can have for family mealtimes are included in the next chapter where parental expectations and views on cooperation between families and nurseries are presented.

Table 4 provides a summary of the data found in relation to food served in the nurseries.

Food	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
Preparation	1 -	3 -	2 -
Quality	1 -	3 -	2 -
Presentation	1 -	3 -	2 -
Children’s eating	1 -	3 -	2 -
TOTAL	4 points	12 points	8 points

Table 4 The attention given to food in the nurseries.

I will briefly explain what is meant by the four categories in the table. The scores were given to the nurseries in relation to how much attention was given to the themes in the categories. Attention means in this context the staff’s focus and priorities. The *preparation* and *presentation* categories simply show the level of attention given to the preparation and presentation of food. The *quality* of the food served received the least attention in nursery 1. This does not mean that the food was of poor quality, rather that the food was not given much priority compared with the other nurseries. By *children’s eating*, the scores are an indication of how much food was eaten. This does not mean that all the children in nursery 2 ate all their food every day, but the scores show the general extent children were observed eating happily in the nurseries. Overall, this data can be interpreted as an indication that the level of attention given to food preparation, quality and presentation influence how much children eat. This, on its own, may seem quite obvious and is nothing new; restaurants have made good use of this knowledge for a long time. As pointed out in the previous sections, the topic of food and

mealtimes has not been prioritised in all nurseries. It is rather seen as something taken for granted, something that is not valued enough to prioritise. The data indicates that conscious effort and focus, both from an organisational level as well as by the individual members of staff, are needed for mealtimes in the nursery to achieve the goals set out in the frameworks and guidelines.

Talk¹⁸

I use both the terms talk and conversations when describing the verbal utterances recorded during the mealtimes in the nurseries. For the purpose of this thesis talk is understood as everything said by any of the participants, whilst conversations require two or more participants talking together with a shared understanding of what they are talking about. During the meals there was rarely a quiet moment, conversations going on between children sitting at the same table as well as between tables. I noticed great differences in the way children and adults were talking. In addition the nature of the conversations changed when the adults were seated at the table eating with the children and thus taking part in the talk. This section will present data of both children's and adults' talk, including topics of conversation.

As touched upon above there were differences in the ways the adults interacted with the children, how they took part in the conversations or just commented from the sideline. In nursery 2 and 3 the adults sat with the children unless they were serving or helping the children. The talk in these nurseries reflected the adults' presence, the adults often taking an active part and interest in the shared conversations, explaining and answering questions when needed. There were also room for the children to have parallel conversations; not all children took part in the same conversation at all times, but were rather talking to their immediate neighbour. Similarly, the adults would sit quietly for a while, just responding if the need arose. In nursery 1, however, the adults were much more fluid, often moving in between tables depending on where they were most needed. The data indicates that this influenced both the children's and the adults' talk during the meal. The children were generally talking more in nursery 1, more words were said and they were louder, but with less adult input. The circular effect of the more people talk, the louder people need to talk to be heard seemed, to a

¹⁸ Talk, or verbal conversation, was an interest of mine from the start as part of the focus for this thesis related to communication about food and eating. I have therefore chosen to include much illustrations of talk, both between children and between children and adults. Much of the talk observed was directly linked to food and thus somewhat blurring the boundaries between the two categories, food and talk.

certain extent, to explain the amount of talk and noise, but not why it was like this in the first place. The adults' reaction was often to shout that everyone had to be quiet, something that had a fairly short-lived effect. As mentioned in the facilitation section above, the experience of the meal differed greatly depending on whether the adults sat down and ate with the children or not. It was also paramount that the adults that were seated with the children had their attention there as well.

A social event for pleasure, learning, sharing experiences and negotiations

In nursery 3, a member of the staff explained 'Today, we only have water, because the milk is out of date' as they all sat down at the table. This set off a conversation about food going off and what this means. The milk may not have gone off yet, but it was passed its use by date and thus could not be used in the nursery, explained the member of staff. One girl (5) said 'its just to smell it, you know', showing she had some previous knowledge of this phenomenon. A boy (4) replied 'Yes, it will smell of poo and farts and then we can just drink it and say oh, nice farty milk'. And many of the children laughed. One of the adults said that one could get sick in the tummy and feel unwell if they ate food that had gone off, so it was best not to. Another boy (5) explained how a friend had to go to hospital due to food poisoning. A girl (5) then replied 'that's why we need to wash our hands, you know, before we eat, cause of the germs that make you sick'. Whereupon another girl (4) replied 'you know in the olden days they didn't have freezers and then the food was dry and salty or they had to eat it up right away'.

This conversation illustrates how sharing knowledge and experiences around the mealtime is a good way for the staff to prevent stressful situations, but also for children to learn about risk in relation to food and eating. Children were able to share their understandings of the topic and adults complemented these with their knowledge. This mealtime conversation was initiated by the children due to a statement by one of the adults and carried on throughout the meal in varying degrees. It seemed like many of the children thought about it, processed the information, and brought the topic back into the discussions later in the meal. Adult intervention only occurred when the talk moved on to include 'poo and farts', which does not conform to the norms of appropriate topics of conversation when eating. This illustrates how staff can steer the conversation in a different direction without dismissing or controlling the conversation or telling the children off.

In nursery 1, I overheard a group of children talking about what various foods were made of, not totally agreeing on the different terminology and type.

Brage (4): This is made of meat
 Ulrik (4): No, it is pork and fat
 Brage: That is meat, it is a salami sausage
 Ulrik: No, not like a sausage or a steak
 Brage: But it is still meat in it. What is salami made of? He says it's not meat.
 Adult: No, it is meat, yes
 Brage: But what sort of meat?
 Adult: Oh, I don't know, do you know? (*asks another adult*)
 Adult 2: No, not really, let see on the packet? Oh, where's the packet gone, well. It is meat anyway. Do you not want meat?

This shows two children's interest, curiosity and knowledge in regards to food. The adults' response seemed both reluctant and half hearted, the tone of voice being short and dismissive. There was no acknowledgement or encouragement of the children's discussion and questions, they were rather seen as a problem. It seemed like the adults felt they were somehow accused or humiliated; they did not know the answer to the question posed and they had given meat to a child that potentially should not have had meat. Their body language and tone of voice became friendlier when they realised that both boys were meat-eaters, showing that their reaction had been premature. In the next excerpt two girls discuss the taste of cheese, one of the girls finding it hard to understand that the other girl did not like both brown and white cheese.

Amalie (4): I want the white cheese and not the brown cheese 'cause I do not like that one so much.
 Ingrid (5): But it is still from the cow like the milk
 Amalie: I still don't like it
 Ingrid: If it was white?
 Amalie: Maybe if it tasted different
 Ingrid: Not if it was just white but taste of brown
 Amalie: No, I would not like it at bit, cause it sticks to my teeth
 Ingrid: But, you know it is made of the milk from the cow on the picture, like the white cheese
 Amalie: It's still different

In this conversation Amalie demonstrates that she is familiar with reasoning as a means of getting her argument across. Ingrid, however, is not convinced and is adamant that she would not like brown cheese even if it was white; it is not the colour, but the texture and taste that matters for her.

These last two examples show how the adults had several opportunities to interact with the children about the food, using the mealtimes and the food, which the children impulsively had shown an interest in, as a social event for learning. However, despite the adults being present

and listening to the children's conversations there was little attempt to follow up the children's discussions and curiosity. Children's talk and behaviour were often rather ignored, patronised, disciplined or ridiculed, as these comments from nursery 1 illustrate:

- He's always talking about the food; can he not just eat it? (*laughing, said in a loud whisper in the same room as the children to another member of staff,)*
- Stop talking about the animals now, you can do it later when we go outside, now we are eating, so can you just be a little quiet?
- If you don't like something you can just pinch your nose, then you won't taste anything (*laughing*)
- You don't need to play so much with the food, it doesn't taste any different you know, it doesn't matter if you have three or four pieces. (*Turning to another adult*) She's always moving her bread and toppings around.
- Sit down! If you need anything just ask someone to pass it to you, you'll just spill something when you are stretching over like this.

One may argue that such comments reflect a disinterest in the children's point of view, understanding and experience of the mealtime and that it shows little respect for their ways to express themselves. Murud-Riser (2012) highlights the importance of adults' awareness of their role in the process of interaction with children during mealtimes in nurseries seeing the mealtimes as an important arena for children's learning, formation and meaning making.

If we are too focused on the children sitting properly on their chair, we miss what occupies the child, we can therefore forget to listen to and watch children's expressions and thus be unable to understand. A child who reaches across the table can be told to sit properly and we'll never know anything about the child's attention, intention and emotion. If, however, we are aware and have the desire to understand, meaningful interactions can occur. (My translation, Murud-Riser, 2012:79)

This quote shows why it is important for adults working with children to reflect on their own role and interaction with children in everyday situations, like the mealtime, and in this way meet and accommodate the children's individual needs, curiosity and learning.

There were several rules and norms in relation to how mealtimes should be conducted in the nursery. In nursery 3 there was an understanding that the children should try to finish the food on their plate, and this was encouraged. It was, however, not expected or demanded that they did so, and the adults let the children know that they understood the children's perspectives.

Casper (4) gets down from the table. An adult says:

- Casper, you need to eat some more of your food before you get down
- But I am finished. I am not hungry.
- I understand that you want to play with Daniel, but he has finished eating.
- But why do I have to eat when I am not hungry?
- Your body needs it; remember what we said about the cars? They can't drive without fuel.
(Casper comes back to the table and eats a little more of his bread.)

This shows the adult's ability to see the situation from the child's perspective, which allows the child to experience that he is being understood, rather than being controlled or disciplined. Casper's wish to play with his friend was obvious for the adult to see; it was appreciated and acknowledged by the adult, though not immediately fulfilled. The explanation or justification given by the adult was accepted by Casper and one can assume that this was a better situation for Casper than if the adult had not explained the reasoning.

The three nurseries differed greatly in their meeting and interaction with the children during mealtimes. In nursery 2 and 3 the adults seemed to accept the children as valuable and respected conversational partners with important views and opinions of their own, whilst in nursery 1 there was a feeling of disinterest; children's comments and conversations were often laughed at and brushed off as childish, inadequate, unimportant and thus disregarded. I did not detect any feeling of contempt or bad intent behind these reactions. It rather seemed that awareness of the adults' own influence on the mealtime experience was lacking and that remarks and comments were meant as jokes and camaraderie among the employees, i.e. a way of being that included laughing a little at the children's expense.

Children's talk

The conversations around the table did not always adhere to the adult's sense of conversational norms, where the talk usually relates to the same topic and builds on each other's comments, i.e. linguistic turn-taking. Matias's (4) and Milla's verbal utterances (5) from nursery 3 will in the next excerpt illustrate how children change between topics, or share a sort of parallel conversation, seemingly without confusion.

- Matias (4): I have more than two hundred russekort¹⁹
 Milla (5): My father has more than me cause he collects them every year
(The mackerel in tomato sauce is passed around the table)
 Matias: Mackerel is very healthy
 Milla: But there are no yellow russ though, just red and blue and black, but not yellow
 Matias: Does it look tasty?
 Milla: You can be yellow russ if you walk naked around the city.

¹⁹ Identity cards given to children by college students in their last year celebrations in the run up to 17th May.

Adult: Do you become a yellow russ then?
Milla: Yes, you get like a belt to have all your cards in.
Matias: I like mackerel and I like it now
Milla: I like mackerel too
Matias: Mmm...

This kind of conversation was quite common, many children juggling several topics and conversational partners throughout the meal, often jumping back to a previous topic as if it had never stopped, which in their minds were true. This could at times be challenging for an observer and I noticed the ‘mobile’ adults struggled to keep up. I am not suggesting that this way of communicating is exclusive to children, as adults also may multitask and juggle several conversations at once. Rather, I would like to draw the attention to mealtimes as an arena where conversational skills develop, and that adults’ involvement in the conversations has a great influence on such a development. In nursery 2 and 3, where the adults normally were seated with the children, there seemed to be a much more coherent, friendly and rewarding form of communication where the threshold for participation was low. In nursery 1, on the other hand, the communication took a more direct and authoritarian tone, mainly giving orders or messages, asking someone to pass something, telling children off for seemingly misbehaving as well as telling on someone. The children talked about play and games as well, but there was a significantly higher proportion of competition and humiliation in their conversations. There were very few examples of conversations about the origins of the food they ate, food preparation, tastes and so forth. Thus, in short, food as a topic of conversation was rarely represented in nursery 1.

Topics of conversation

The children seem to be more involved and participating in shared conversations when the adults were seated and eating with the children, and when the topics of conversation related to shared experiences. The main topics of conversation amongst the children during the actual mealtime can be divided into three themes: food, activities and events, and friends and family. Food talk related to the food currently eaten, things they had had before, likes and dislikes, what they would like to eat in the future, how to make dishes or the proper way to prepare certain foods, whether things were hot, cold or spicy, as well as the texture. The way adults responded, became involved or encouraged such talk varied greatly both between and within the nurseries. However, positive feedback was particularly prominent in nursery 2 where the adults often became involved with small comments and thus added weight to the curiosity and explorative urge developing amongst the children, as the next excerpt illustrates.

Lukas (4): Oh, this was good soup
 Adult: Yes, it was
 Nora (4): It is macaroni
 Lukas: Do you think it was good?
 Nora: Yes, it was very good, but a little spicy
 Adult: Oh, do you think it was spicy? What could have made it spicy?
 Jonas (5): The pepper
 Emil (3): And chilli
 Adult: Mmm, but we didn't put any chilli in it...hmm
 Sofie(5): It could be garlic cause that is quite strong, but not the tomatoes
 Nora (4): And onions too and the salt with the yellow label
 Adult: Do you mean the bullion?
 Jonas: Maybe it is hot too?
 Sofie: Yes, it is maybe hot cause you haven't blown on it
 Sarah (4): But, who has got macaroni? Put your hand up! (*holding her hand up high*)
 Adult: Sarah, I think everyone has got macaroni.
 Sarah: But you don't know that, do you?
 Jonas: It can be both hot and spicy...and, yoghurt is good in soup.
 Adult: We may have some sour cream. Shall I check? Hmm...no, but you can have a little milk in the soup, that will do the trick.

Activities and events were also popular topics of conversations and could sometimes be linked to food, for example telling about what they had eaten at birthday parties and other celebrations. However, the children's talk about activities and events usually involved both family and friends, and this seemed to give the activities greater credential among the children. Such talk often included activities and events experienced outside the nursery, at home or on holiday for example. Shared experiences of activities and events at the nursery were also discussed, talk often starting with 'do you remember when...'. Much talk also related to specific films, toys and games they had played or wanted to buy or play with later. The children would often plan their afternoon activities during the meal, making detailed plans that involved several children that could span over decades.

Marcus (4): We can play pirates outside
 Aleksander (4): We use the boat and the sticks on the other side
 Marcus: But the flag is not there and we need one, we can use a blanket maybe. And we need to fasten it, though...
 Aleksander: Then it is only ours, and we can say 'go away' to the others or else we will take their treasure.
 Lisa (4): I can be the mum and Nora can be the baby
 Marcus: Pirates don't have mums and babies, they just scare them away, you know
 Lisa: Not when you're the daddy, then you'll steal treasure for us and steal food too, because the baby is hungry.
 Aleksander: That is when we have grown up and become daddy and grandpa pirates.
 (*nursery 2*)

The third common topic of conversation amongst the children related to their families and friends, often sharing stories and examples of things these had done and said. The children

would typically relate what other children and adults were saying to things that their close relatives or friends had said and done, and talked generally a lot about their families. There seemed to be a lot of pride, children usually sharing stories that were positive and illustrated what is commonly understood as good qualities and attributes amongst the nominated candidates. Some children would also occasionally point to funny and ironic incidents involving family members or friends, showing them in a not so perfect light.

- My dad never closes the door when he goes to the toilet and he farts like a trumpet.
(Boy aged 4, nursery 3)
- One time when we got home my mum didn't have the key and then my sister had to climb through the upstairs window and she fell down on a cactus cause it was dark.
(Girl aged 5, nursery 1)
- We always watch the films when we are going to grandma and grandpa, in the car you know, cause we have a screen in the back, and then we just say 'turn up the sound' all the time and my dad doesn't mind but when my mum is there we have to be quiet.
(Boy aged 5, nursery 3)

These descriptions of children's talk and conversations during mealtimes illustrates how the mealtime is an arena for sharing daily experiences, developing social skills and relations, as well as an arena for learning. In order to fulfil this function, mealtimes need therefore to account for this and be welcoming and open to conversations. In nursery 2 and 3 there were friendly and relaxed atmospheres, which allowed for much and varied children's talk and conversations, whilst in nursery 1, the atmosphere was very different. There was more noise, agitation and restlessness amongst both staff and children, and this did not seem to have a particularly positive impact on the children's talk, which very often resembled a busy public cafeteria where everyone is trying to drown each other out.

Adult's talk

I will use the next excerpt to illustrate what seemed to be a typical adult talk observed in nursery 1.

Lisa: I decide where everyone is sitting today. You sit over there, Oliver and Jacob, you cannot sit on the same table, you sit there and you...you can sit there. Emma, you go there.

Jane: Glasses on the table, hands on your lap.
Jane walks around and gets many of the children's hands away from the glasses and places them on their laps.

John: *(says to two boys)* If you tinkle any more with the glasses I will take them, and then there won't be any drinks for you.

Martin: Ok, I'll go on break then. Can the adults have a little taste as well?
Jane nods and Martin helps him self to the warm food.

Such adult talk was not so common in the other nurseries, where the adult's talk was more relaxed and friendly, and concerned with creating a pleasant eating environment. Langhom and Herikstad Tuset (2013) argue that due to 'the interactional and communal features of the meal it is important that the group of staff have discussed the meaning of mealtimes. Too many rules can lead to the meal being characterised by reprimands and scolding. One should rather use the energy to make the meal enjoyable' (ibid:22) In nursery 1 there seemed to be a tendency to 'talk down' to the children; the adults were a little patronising in their approach to children's eating and abilities both in terms of skills and understanding. On the other hand they would, when talking to me, often praise the children's abilities, referring to them as both competent and clever. However, the impression I gathered from the observations did not mirror this, the adults often doubting children's abilities and choices, criticising or reprimanding the children for what seemed to be nothing at all. This shows a discrepancy between what is said and what is done, a missing link between planning and practice. This may indicate that they have not understood what the fine words they use in the educational planning means or alternatively that there is not enough will and prioritization within the nursery to implement the plans and see the meal as an important activity in the everyday nursery life.

This next example shows how the adults often had preconceived ideas of what the children liked and disliked or how they were expected to behave.

- Cranberries, does anyone want some? (*Several children answered yes*)
- But do you like it? I doubt that you like it. You have to eat it though, because I do not want us to have to throw it.
(*The adult takes the pot of cranberries, walks around the table and gives it to five children*)

Towards the end of the meal, two of the adults were standing by the window, eating.

- I need cranberries with this, yes.
- Yes, I am addicted to cranberries
- Can I have some? (*a girl, aged 4, asks*)
- But do you like it?

I found 'the cranberries situation' particularly interesting, as it showed how, collectively, that there was little encouragement to taste them. This surprised me, both because of the cranberry's traditional role in the Norwegian food culture, but also because I assumed that the children would be encouraged to try the food present. The nursery staff pointed to their awareness and priorities in relation to new tastes, apparently encouraging children to explore new tastes by for example restricting the variety each day and varying the selection between days. Cranberries are often used as an accompaniment to certain meat dishes, and this was

also the case in nursery 1. It was, however, a little ambiguous whether it was actually for the children or not as the pot was not placed on the table with the rest of the food and seemed only to be offered half-heartedly.

This illustration shows the lack of encouragement to try new foods and seemingly a lack of trust in the children's own understanding of what they liked and disliked. This attitude towards the children's eating and food served were also illustrated by some of the comments members of staff made in relation to the process of choosing what to cook.

We cook normal dinner food really, food that the children like, or that normally goes down well, you know. We have tried things and settled on a few dishes, and then at least we know that the children will eat something. It makes the job much easier and we have fewer conflicts. (Member of staff, nursery 1)

This illustrates the understanding of food, and particularly children's likes and dislikes. It is taken for granted that particular dishes are popular and thus a conclusion is drawn, whether conscious or not, that there is no need to challenge this conception by introducing new or varied food.

Many of the children, in all three nurseries, were eager to cut up their food, spread toppings with their knife and pour drinks into their glasses, and the older children did this without being supervised. However, there seemed to be a sense of panic amongst the adults in nursery 1 when any of the younger children tried to help themselves. As the adults did not always sit with the children at the table the discovery of children's independent action often resulted in an adult shouting from the other side of the room, dropping what they had and running over to the child, as illustrated by this example from nursery 1 in which two girls (3) have a conversation about milk.

- Milk is good and white
- My glass is empty
- I can fill it up for you
- No, I can do it (*she takes the milk carton and starts pouring*)
- We don't need bottles, just babies.
- No, no, no, stop it (*an adult shouts from the other side of the room*)
- I want milk
- Yes, I can see that, but we don't want milk all over the table, do we?
- But I didn't spill it
- No, not yet, but I stopped it, didn't I?

Other examples from the same nursery illustrate the type of response often given to children spilling or misbehaving around the table. One day the children were eating tomato soup and drinking milk. At a table with no adults, two of the girls (4) poured a little milk from their glasses into their soup. Another girl (5) said ‘don’t pour too much in, cause then it will only taste of milk’. One of the girls replied ‘I know, but it is just so hot, so...’ The other four-year-old girl said ‘I poured too much so my soup will taste of milk, *(she tasted it)*.. it is yummy’. An adult realised what had just happened and came over to the table, saying loudly: ‘What are you doing? You cannot mess like this; the milk should be in your glass and not in the soup. There is always trouble when the two of you sit together, tomorrow we’ll have to separate you’. Another day, a boy (4) knocked over his glass of water when reaching for something on the table. The adult reaction was also this time of a critical manner emphasising the negative part of the episode.

- What happened here?
- He knocked the glass over and the water is on the floor.
- I just wanted some salami
- But you know you should ask someone to pass it, that’s just silly, you’re too big to spill your drink like this. Do you need a cup with a top like the babies have? No I don’t think so, you just need to be more careful, and look what you’re doing. *(The boy sat quietly the rest of the mealtime and looked rather sad)*.

Pouring episodes were frequent in all the nurseries, many children helping themselves to drinks and occasionally spilling did occur. The difference did not lie so much in what the children did or said, but rather the adult’s responses and reaction to this. In nursery 2, water was spilled twice. The first time an adult just went and got some kitchen towel and dried the water without mentioning it, almost as if it did not happen. A few days later an elbow knocked over a glass and spilled water over the seat. One of the children shouted ‘he spilled his water’. The adult response was ‘oh, that happens sometimes, just go and get some towel and clean it up’. When the boy (3) had dried his seat he was asked whether he wanted some more water and asked to pour himself some. These different ways of handling a spillage situation in the nursery illustrate that it is not a matter of course. There are several ways to approach it.

Below, I present a summary of the data found on talk in the nurseries.

Talk	Nursery 1	Nursery 2	Nursery 3
Positive arena for learning	1 –	3 –	3 –
Comfortable volume	1 –	3 –	2 –
Adult/child relation	1 –	3 –	2 –
The adults presence	1 –	3 –	2 –
Mutual respect	1 –	3 –	3 –
TOTAL	5 points	15 points	12 points

Table 5 The level of talk in the nurseries.

In this first analysis chapter I have presented my data gathered in the nurseries. As shown, there are clear differences between the nurseries in the time allocated to food, eating and mealtimes; the ways mealtimes are prioritised, facilitated and communicated; as well as the actual food eaten. This, in turn, influences the mealtime experience for both children and adults. The more they prioritise food and mealtimes in the nurseries, the better they facilitate children's involvement and the more the mealtime is a positive experience and arena for learning created for the children.

6 EXPLORING THE FAMILY DINNER

While the previous chapter dealt with the data gathered in the nurseries, this analysis chapter will focus on the data from the families. The analysis will be structured in the same manner, in five sections: prioritisation, facilitation, time, food and talk. The ways these concepts or categories are used to analyse the data from the observations of families differs a little from the nurseries. I will therefore briefly outline at the beginning of each section what is meant by these five categories in relation to their use in the families. Before turning to these five categories, I would like to return to the issue of sensitive topics mentioned in the methodology chapter.

It was a possibility that some parents would feel that food and mealtimes were sensitive topics: that their idea of the proper family mealtime would be questioned or challenged, or that they would be judged on their parenting skills if they agreed to be observed or interviewed about such a topic. However, I did not find anything suggesting that parents refrained from telling me about things or that they were holding back or hiding mealtime practices or attitudes towards food in fear of being questioned, challenged or exposed. Indeed, some parents were open about how they felt, some saying they felt pressured from every direction in regards to good parenting, and particularly in relation to food and mealtimes, as two parents explained:

There's always someone with an opinion, you know, someone who knows better. It doesn't really matter what you make for dinner or what the kids have in their lunchbox, it can always be criticised. Like the other day, we had no bread left and I gave my son some left over pasta to take to school... and he really likes it, but then someone said 'she can't be bothered to make him proper lunch', because it wasn't the standard bread. See? I don't know, there's like, everyone telling us (parents) how the food should and should not be. It's quite confusing really. (Mother of two)

Yes, there's a lot of focus on food in the media, you know, we see it all the time, about what you should eat, and not eat, and how to check for fat and sugar and also where it comes from, you know, whether it is local or fair trade, and... Yes there is a lot to think about. And with the children, there's like ... even more, because then, well we are responsible for them you know, we want what is best for them and if you don't know, yes, what do you do, there's a lot of googleing²⁰. And the mother in law, she's got a lot to get off her chest, but we don't always do what she says though. (Father of two)

These two examples show how parents may feel pressured in relation to the proper ways to do food and family meals in various settings in their everyday life, and illustrate how there are

²⁰ Googleing = using the internet search engine Google to research topics of interest.

different understandings and constructions of what good or proper food for children is. It is particularly interesting to bear this in mind when looking at how families prioritise and facilitate in relation to children's food and family mealtimes in the home, as their constructions of proper parenting in many ways influence their decisions in these matters.

Prioritisation

The ways parents prioritise in relation to children's food and mealtimes in the home are complex. In this section my aim is to present some of these complexities, by drawing on data that illustrate, amongst other things, the reasoning, justifications, rationalisations, ideologies, constraints and structures experienced in regards to food and mealtimes in the families. How parents prioritise will also be illustrated in the other sections in this chapter due to priorities having direct impact on for example the use of time, as well as how parents choose to facilitate, talk about, prepare and serve food. This section will focus on priorities connected to parents' expectations of food and mealtimes, both in terms of their own parenting and cooperation with the nurseries.

Constructions of proper parenting

As Lupton argues, many of our practices and understandings related to mealtimes are culturally reproduced from generation to generation (Lupton, 1996). The concept of proper parenting is thus both constructed and reconstructed through social interaction. Parents' definition of what constitutes a proper family dinner depends on their social and cultural background as well as their current level of awareness of food and eating. Some of the parents interviewed were conscious of and interested in the topic of food and mealtimes. Several couples showing a united and conscious attitude towards the way they related to food and meals in the home. One couple explained how they had discussed and reflected before having children upon how they should relate to food and meals when they did start a family, focusing on what they should pass on from their own childhood and what they would do differently. In several of the families one of the parents was more aware, engaged or dedicated to the topic of children's food and eating than the other. However, I sensed very few disagreements amongst the parents, only slight differences in priorities.

He'd like more meat in the diet than I do, but we never argue about it. It's like... whoever buys the food decides really. (Mother of three)

Well, at home we always had to eat everything on our plate and I was quite a fussy eater so I often sat picking at the food till late, so... I just decided early on that when I

have children they should never be forced to eat things they don't like, you know, and that is something that we luckily agree on (Mother of two)

I always try to have at least two vegetables and maybe some salad, but I know you don't really mind that so much (*talking to her husband*), so we are a little different, but you (*the husband*) have come a long way (*laughing*), because you know, he didn't eat any vegetables before he met me. (Mother of three)

As illustrated above, there are some differing priorities within the families and internal discussions on how best to “do” dinners. One mother of two explains how she and her husband have a fairly similar approach to food, except in relation to frozen vegetables. ‘He would never use frozen vegetables, he wouldn't even think of it, but I don't really see the problem’.

Most of the parents interviewed in this project emphasised the importance of the dinnertime as a shared time for the family to talk about the day, discuss things and socialize. Many saw these aspects as important, if not more important than how much was eaten. As one mother puts it:

No one is starving, as long as I know she is eating something and developing normally it's not that important whether she eats all her potatoes every day. It's more, like, that we are all together, you know, we talk and relax as a family. (Mother of two)

Not many parents gave the impression of being completely satisfied with their dinner routines, but everyone seemed to have a clear understanding of how it should be and what they would have liked to do differently. As one mother explained:

We never have time for a proper dinner on Tuesdays, like sitting down together and that, because we're not all home until it's time for bed really. We just bring a *matpakke*²¹ or pop into IKEA on the way. (Mother of three)

This illustrates how the proper family dinner is constructed as a shared event where, ideally, all members of the household are present. Just having a sandwich does not count, in her eyes, as a proper family dinner. This is consistent with the other families, all of whom had a clear intention and wish to create what is seen as a proper family dinner most days of the week. However, as many of the families expressed, this is not always possible. Other considerations must be prioritised. It seems like the parents felt a need to explain why they prioritise in such

²¹ Matpakke is the Norwegian equivalent to a packed lunch sandwich, with single slices of bread with toppings.

as way that they deviate from their ideal dinner routine and the socially and culturally accepted norms. They legitimize their behaviour by either justification or rationalisation (Bugge, 2006). A justification would typically be ‘we didn’t have time for dinner today because the boys have football practice’ or be ‘when my husband is away we just have something simple, cause its only me and the kids, you know’. A rationalisation of the choices made would be ‘no-one in the family likes broccoli so we never really have that’ or ‘they eat much more when we have pasta so I often make that’.

During an activity with puppets and Lego, three siblings, Oscar (3), Ella (5) and Sophie (6), dramatized several food related events illustrating their understanding of how food and mealtimes were prioritised in their family. Ella was the mother while the other two were her children. They had all just got back home after a long day at school, nursery and work and the children were asking, begging almost, for food, giving many explanations and reasons for why they should get food now.

- But mummy, we are so hungry
- My stomach is empty like a balloon without anything in it
- No, we have no time for dinner today
(The mother, Ella, walks around putting things in her bag and shaking her head)
- Oh... but what shall we eat then
- Just take a fruit, we can pop in to the shop on the way
- That’s not dinner
(The Lego car arrives and everyone jumps in)

In the same activity session, but in a different story, the children are helping the father (Ella) empty the shopping bags in the pretend kitchen.

- Did you buy any chocolate?
- No, just food
- Chocolate is food
- No, not chocolate, proper food for dinner and milk for the baby
- But, I want chocolate biscuits with crunchy bits on them
- That is not today, today it is fishball day
- With chocolate?
- No (*getting a little strict now*), no chocolate until the weekend!

These children show how discussions and negotiations around food and mealtimes in the family are understood and experienced. They illustrate how the parents may prioritise differently in weekdays and weekends, as well as when they have other time-constraining obligations. It shows that children experience and understand parental priorities in relation to

food and mealtimes, at least when the priorities have a reason and are justified as shown in the excerpts above.

The ways in which parents prioritise in relation to their children's food also includes the food eaten at school, where constructions of proper parenting also were on the agenda.

We need to bring packed lunches for the children and we've always just made sandwiches, it was quite basic, like the ones we had ourselves at school you know. Then Linnea (6) started complaining, she wouldn't eat her food and we realised after a while that there was ... well sort of a competition maybe at school, you know the children brought all sorts of food in their lunchboxes. So now we've had to expand the selection a little. She might have a sandwich and some carrot and crackers and maybe a small yoghurt. But for Linnea I think the most important thing is, well her concern is more that the box has several compartments, not what's in them. I don't want her to be bullied for her food, you know. (Mother of two)

This example illustrates that the expectations of a proper packed lunch are changing. The traditional Norwegian *matpakke* is in some schools no longer adequate. Many of the parents raised similar issues. There were, however, differences in the expectations felt, with some parents expressing that the packet lunch had to be quite standard and not stand out, and by no means be messy or smelly. Others felt differently. One mother joked about the packed lunch issue faced by many parents and said:

I don't know what they say about me at school, they might think I'm a real bitch, but I don't care (*laughing*). I've just always made, you might say... extravagant lunches for the children, they don't mind, they're used to it. Sometimes we get really good feedback and other times people just laugh or are shocked, you know, that a parent can expect their children to eat it. But at least it's healthy... and it is actually nice, too.

When asked what sort of foods she would make, she replied:

Well, there's a lot of vegetables and pulses, you know, sort of nice vegetarian salads, stir fries, maybe couscous. I think the scepticism is just because they (other parents) don't manage to get their children to eat it, cause its vegetables you know and maybe not the typical children's food, but it's all about what you get used to, isn't it?

This illustrates that parents may not relate in the same way to the pressures of proper parenting. This mother seemed to be aware that she broke with the norm, but she was sure about her position and adamant that her food was a good choice. As the children, according to her, also preferred the food and it was a healthy option, she didn't mind whether or not she was considered a strange parent.

It is clear from the data that both parents and children have a good idea of what they think constitutes a proper dinner and that this is sought after in everyday life, but that other aspects of family life sometimes get priority. The main difference between the families was where in the list of priorities food and mealtimes were placed, that is, how important they saw the family dinner compared to other activities. In some families it seemed to be easier for both children and adults to challenge or negotiate the proper dinner ideal; as soon as there was something that indicated that the proper family meal might be difficult to conduct they would justify doing something else. An example was when one of the parents had to work late, and rather than carrying on with the family dinner routine at home the other parent would take the children out to eat or order a take-away. Another family with a very hectic schedule of afterschool activities often gave the children sandwiches in the car to and from activities, rather than having a warm meal together at home. The mother reflected on this and seemed to regret this tendency, but justified the priority based on it being the easiest and least stressful option. If the children were to continue with all their activities while the parents worked fulltime, sandwiches in the car was the only option. Another family had similar challenges a few days a week, but prioritised differently. They were unable to provide a warm dinner for the whole family together, but divided the family into two or three groups. For this family it was most important that the children ate something warm and healthy together with at least one other family member. Another family with similar challenges resorted to giving the children a snack, for example carrot and cucumber sticks, cheese and crackers or dried fruit, in between activities and then having a full dinner for everyone in the evening, even if this sometimes was quite late. One mother explained how the proper family dinner, as she saw it, was disappearing from the schedule during the week due to busy lives, but that they more-or-less consciously over time had developed a new routine of having long shared breakfasts at the weekends, and in this way somehow were making up for the loss of shared meals during the week.

This shows how families prioritise their dinners differently in relation to their idea of proper parenting and the proper family dinner. Even if the families prioritise differently they have the same, or at least very similar, ideas of what a proper family dinner should be. According to both the parents and the children I spoke to dinner should be a warm meal shared by all the members of the family. The non-vegetarian families ate more traditional meals made up of meat or fish, potatoes and vegetables, whilst the vegetarian families or those that had one or more vegetarian members were more likely to experiment with untraditional dishes. The topic

of what constitutes a proper family dinner will be further illustrated in the section about food below.

Home / nursery relations and cooperation

Most of the adult participants, both parents and staff, mentioned good relations between the home and nurseries, as well as mutual trust, as important both for themselves and for the wellbeing of their children. Some parents did not seem to have any particular concern in relation to their children's nursery mealtimes, some expressing that they had not reflected much on this topic. One mother of two said:

I haven't thought so much about the nursery mealtimes other than that they get food, you know. If my daughter doesn't like something (*at the nursery*) she might complain at home and then we talk a little about it, but otherwise I just expect it to be good and healthy, you know. I am sure they know what they are doing. (Mother of two girls)

This shows a trust in the nurseries and the ability of the staff to provide good and healthy food for the children. Other parents expressed very different understandings of the nursery meal and took a conscious interest in the food served in the nurseries. Several of the parents said that they had previously been in dialog or conflict with the nursery in regards to food or mealtime practices. One father of three explained that they were unhappy with the way the nursery handled dislikes amongst the children and expressed a worry that the nursery stigmatized children for not eating all foods served. He added that many adults also have dislikes, and therefore one should not expect all children to eat everything. He reflected over the nursery's situation and said he understood that there had to be policies and rules in regards to such procedures, both for learning purposes and to reduce chaos. But he added that the staff should learn to know all the children well enough so as to be able to meet the individual children's needs in relations to both likes and dislikes. This, he argued, 'is more difficult when they have so many children', referring to their children's nursery being a 'base' nursery with groups of about forty children.

Two of the families interviewed had previously been dissatisfied with their children's nursery to such an extent that they had moved the children to other nurseries. Both of these families gave disagreements in relation to food and mealtimes as one of the main reasons for this move. The disagreements had related to understandings, expectations and ideologies around food and eating practices, and concerned the way in which individual staff members and the leadership prioritised and facilitated children's food and eating. One father explained:

We didn't react so much in the beginning, because we were new you know, but as it never got any better even when we talked to the staff and the manager, we decided that the only option was to move the children. (Father of a boy, 6, and a girl, 3)

When questioned about what they had been unhappy about he explained further:

Well, the food was a problem. It was only, you know like... children's food, what you see on the children's menu at restaurants, you know, quite unhealthy and never any variation. It's like fast food really, chicken nuggets and fish fingers and pre-processed food, you know and it is no good for them. It's not a problem if they get it once a while, but when it is all the time it's bad and we did not want them get used to it really. Another thing was the way the staff organized mealtimes and talked about food. It was so negative and stressful and we noticed that our daughter started playing around at dinnertime. She didn't want to eat anything and always argued. It was unlike her, it was like someone pressed a button. It was first when we talked to another parent at the nursery that we realised that she was just copying how it is at nursery, you know. Eating should not be like this; it should be a nice experience. (Father of a boy, 6 and a girl, 3)

The nursery is an authority and many parents may be reluctant to complain or suggest alternative practises in fear of being stigmatised or punished over time. By complaining they would merely create a problem for themselves and their children. One mother explained how she had reflected on her own role as a parent in the nursery: how some staff might see her as overprotective and get fed up or annoyed by her constant interference. She thought the staff might start resenting her, something that could result in her children being treated differently. She referred to a conversation she had previously had with a member of staff. She asked whether her daughter ate much and when in the day the food was served, as her daughter always seemed very hungry when she was collected in the afternoon. The response was, according to the mother, short and evasive, and made her feel like a nuisance for asking. Another mother expressed similar views:

By asking too many questions or requesting too much in relation to food and mealtimes one might risk being labelled as an overprotective mother, you know, or the staff might think we're just stupid or something. (Mother of two)

A father had a different experience with his nursery and expressed how he was happy for the staff to give them some input and guidance about children's food and mealtimes in the home, as he often felt unsure of what to do.

Oh, I am so happy with the preschool teacher; she is so open and doesn't hesitate to suggest variations in ways to serve or prepare the food, you know if we have had a bad time with our son. Because sometimes he won't eat and there is... like a lot of things he just would not touch, or he throws a tantrum during the dinner. I guess, because she

has been in the game for many years, she's just so much more experienced with kids you know and it never feels like... patronising, just very helpful. (Father of two)

These examples illustrate that it is possible to establish a good dynamic and a positive relationship between the staff and the parents. If such conditions are present, the communication between the two settings may serve as a stepping-stone for a positive nursery life. Food and mealtimes are in many ways seen as routine activities and may not be valued in their own right and for their own qualities. Staff may therefore see it seen as unnecessary for parents to stress about such taken-for-granted practices and parts of everyday life. A Foucauldian power perspective may imply that the significance of seemingly modest everyday practices manifests specific accepted norms of, in this instance, children's mealtimes, and contribute to regulate social relations. The of-courseness (Geertz, 1983) and taken-for granted-ness of mealtimes in nurseries may therefore result in parents being reluctant to confront ingrained practices unless the nursery staff are particularly open and encouraging to such parental input.

Some of the families and nurseries seemed to have diverging ideas of the meaning of mealtimes and thus prioritised differently; some parents expressed concern about the inconsistency this creates in their children's lives. A mother of two explains:

At home the children take part in planning the week's dinners. We sit down on a Sunday with a pen and paper and the oldest girl always have her preferences lined up. The little one, she just smiles or says 'no', but at least she takes part. I don't think the children are involved in the planning or preparation at all in the nursery and that worries me. It's like their opinion doesn't matter, you know.

This is an example from a family where the children often were involved in both planning and cooking. Not all the families prioritised children's involvement to such a degree, but many had a similar approach to their children's involvement. That is, children were often asked what they would like for dinner, many children referred to taking an active part in the grocery shopping, and several children showed good knowledge and experience of food preparation and cooking at home. A father expressed similar views in regards to the food served in the nurseries:

I think they prioritise very differently than we do at home, you know. Its more like food that is easy to make for lots of people and is quite cheap. They don't really think of the quality or taste, or take into account the sort of... local food discussion or even organic and stuff. It's an institution isn't it, so it's more like, basic. It's a shame, because we try to teach the children at home, you know, about where the food comes from and to be conscious about animal welfare and so on. It's a bit confusing for them

(the children) when they get mixed signals from the adults around them, and it makes our job even harder. (Father of two)

This father's comments illustrate an inconsistency experienced between the way the nursery and the family relate to food. The nurseries were also different in their focus on food, as shown in the previous chapter, nursery 2 having a similar focus as this father. Due to the importance many parents placed on their children's food and thus how the nurseries relate to food, one may think that parents chose nursery based on exactly its mealtime practices. However, nothing suggested this, with the exception of the two families mentioned above who swapped nursery due to not being satisfied with the food. Another family expressed how they were pleased when they realised how food was prioritised in the nursery.

My daughter didn't really like to try new foods, you know, she was a modest eater, but didn't make much fuss. I was a little worried when she started nursery, because you know, they'd have a heck of a time with her (*laughing*). But they (*the staff*) were so good, you know, they didn't force her or anything, but just offered her the food like with the others, and didn't stress about it, and then suddenly she just ate it. Now she eats almost everything, you know, and the staff always tell me how it's going. It's different in the nursery, with all the other children. At home its only us and... I think, you know, the love of food is contagious; it definitely helps when the staff are so laid back and relaxed about it, you know, then we don't need to stress either. (Mother of two)

A girl, Marie (4), explained how she found the food at home and at nursery to be very different. She pointed to how there was little variation at nursery saying 'we have the same every day, it is just sandwiches', adding:

Because the adults just do it, me and my friends we do not say anything and then we don't get what we want, but they don't ask. That day, when we helped, then we just took the food out from the fridge and to the table and we didn't cook and make anything, like anything hot with sauce and rice, like we do at home. Me and my friend said we wanted to cook food on the oven, but she said 'no, not today', so my friend and me are still waiting, because it's my turn. (Marie, aged 4)

In this excerpt Marie illustrates how preparing meals at home and at nursery are different, that it more often involves cooking hot food at home. She understood the turn-taking system at the nursery and argued she was still waiting her turn, as the previous turn did not meet her expectations.

These illustrations have shown how there are differences in the way families prioritise mealtimes and how they expect the nurseries to prioritise, as well as in how they experience the cooperation between the home and nursery in relation to mealtimes. There is a common

understanding that there need to be a close relationship and good communication between the nursery and the home, which in turn encourages favourable conditions for good cooperation around children's eating.

Facilitation

I understand facilities in the homes to include the actual cooking facilities available as well as the families' economy. All the families I interviewed can be grouped in the category of middle class, with no immediate economic difficulty, most owning their own home. I did not ask about their income, but I knew the parents' level of education and line of work. Within this section I will also look at facilitation in terms of the families facilitating for children's involvement in meals in the home.

Kitchen

All the families visited had a well-equipped kitchen, either as a separate room or as part of a dining or living room. The children showed great understanding and awareness in regards to their kitchen facilities, including where all the foods were kept and the appropriate use of utensils and other equipment. During the show-and-tell or walk-and-talk activities the children would help me understand their family's routines and facilities around mealtimes, in particular dinners. Not all the children chose to do this activity; out of eight families, children from six families used this method. A question posed to all of these children was: 'can you show me where your family keep and prepare the food for the dinners?' The children would then take me to their kitchen; some would start opening cupboards, fridges and ovens and talk me through the various ingredients they found. This method seemed to capture the children's attention and was fun both for the children and myself. During our visit to the kitchen I asked some follow up questions depending on what they had already told me, including 'how do you use this? What can you make of this? Can you show me or tell me about it? Are all these ingredients for the dinner? How come you are not allowed to use it? One girl, Ella (5) showed me the chopping board, the knives and peelers she would normally use when helping make the dinner. She pointed to a large knife hanging on the wall and said:

- I am not allowed to use that one
- How come you are not allowed to use it?
- Because it is too big and sharp and I can cut my finger 'and it is not finger soup, you know', my mum said.

This shows her awareness of risk and that she has understood the rules expressed by her mother. During my presence she was very precise, telling me exactly what she was and was

not allowed to do in the kitchen. Whether or not she followed these rules when no adults were present, I do not know.

Grocery shopping

There were great variations in the way the grocery shopping was carried out. Some families said they had one large shopping trip a week whilst others just picked up something on the way home from work. There seemed, however, to be a common idea amongst the parents that planning meals about a week or so in advance and then doing weekly grocery shopping was the ideal way to organise the household. Some parents said they would have wished to only go for a large grocery shop²² once a week and have everything planned in advance, but admitted that they hardly ever did. Three mothers explained their experiences:

We did that (large grocery shopping) before, but since the youngest was born, you know, we don't seem to do it anymore. I guess we don't really have time; it's only like... very occasionally. We only buy what we need for dinner on the way home really and we do usually have something in the freezer. I often plan to do a big shop for the weekend, you know, but then often something comes in the way and we end up just getting what we need here and now. (Ingeborg, mother of two boys)

We never plan the dinner that much anymore, there's just too much else going on. We do sometimes go (shopping) at the weekend, but only if it fits in with the other activities. That's like the way everyone does it, isn't it? It's always so busy, so I sometimes prefer to go at other times. (Anniken, mother of three)

Oh, we always do big shops, like once a week. I plan the dinners, and sometimes I... like... ask the rest what they would like to eat, and then maybe on the Friday or Saturday I will do the family's grocery shopping, you know. It works really well; cause then I know what we have and I don't need to go (to the shop) at weekdays when there's so much going on. (Ragnhild, mother of two)

These mothers illustrate that with a similar idea of the ideal way to buy the food for the family, the reality may still vary due to time constraints and other activities taking priority.

Jonas (5) explained how he preferred coming with his parents to do the large grocery shopping rather than just popping to the supermarket on the way home.

Because then we often get to buy something we want, you know. Like... we can decide some of the dinners and I say 'No, I don't want that one, I want that one instead' and then they buy it maybe for the Wednesday. (Jonas, aged 5)

²² 'Storhandel' in Norwegian, meaning a large grocery-shopping trip usually carried out once a week/two weeks.

The younger children, about three and four years old, did not seem too interested in the grocery shopping and focused more on routine activities like washing hands, laying the table, and helping cut up vegetables. The older children, from about five to ten years old, talked about how they enjoyed coming shopping with the parents. This was usually associated as a positive and pleasurable social event, often combined with a visit to a café, toyshop, library or bookstore as Elias (7) explains:

At the weekend we often go to town and shop for food, dinner and sweets. We go to the café first and then we might go to the library and then we get the food on the way home. That is nice, because... we get something we like, and dad is there and my mum too. My brother can't wait to get his Saturday sweets, but that's because he is so little, you know, but I can wait till we get home, after dinner. (Elias, aged 7)

This example shows that the grocery shopping was experienced as part of a day out, a social event that the family shared together. Many of the families described similar events, but this was not the most common practice. One mother explained her typical grocery shop as an activity carried out in between everything else she was meant to do, and as both rushed and stressed with little enjoyment.

I just drive to the shop, you know when the children are at football practice or something, and I only have half an hour to do everything and then I just grab what I can and rush out, I never have time to just walk around, you know and enjoy it or look at the offers. It's just in and out again. (Mother of three)

Several of the parents had similar experiences of their family's grocery shopping, most of them regretting that they did not seem to have time to either plan or take it easy during their shopping trips.

Children's involvement

The observations with both children and parents provide several examples and illustrations of how the families facilitate for children's involvement in mealtimes. First, I will describe how some families involve children in the preparation and cooking of food. Secondly, I will show how families to a varying degree facilitate for children's likes and dislikes.

I never get to cook much, only cakes and buns for birthdays, then I roll them. But my big sister, she cooks a lot in the kitchen, like... she can stir on the oven and use the sharp knives as well, because mum said she is much bigger, but I will do it when I am seven, too. (Alena, aged 4)

Elena describes in this excerpt how she, due to her young age, is not allowed to do as much in the kitchen as her big sister. There does not seem to be any resentment over this, just the

acknowledgement that her time is still to come. This comment reflects the data from most of the families, that children receive more and more responsibility in the kitchen as they get older. Several of the children also refer to the parents as having differing views on the children's involvement in the cooking, the fathers often preferring to be on their own, as Sigurd, Michael and Freya explain.

My dad says I only make a mess so I'm not really allowed to cook that often. (Sigurd, aged 5)

My dad cooks on Sundays and no one can come into the kitchen cause then he barks like a dog. Yes, he does, it's true. It is so that he scares everyone off. (Michael, aged 7)

It depends what we are having. My mum usually wants help in the kitchen, I ask her and then she usually says yes. I find the things we need and cut up with the sharp knife and measure how much and help stirring and lay the table. My dad only lets me lay the table. (Freya, aged 6)

These comments are consistent with several of the observations and parental interviews, which indicate that the mothers often have both the responsibility for the children and the dinner when they are cooking, while the fathers, when they are cooking dinner often delegate looking after the children over to the mother. This may in some instances be explained by the fact the fathers would cook at the weekend, when the mothers were available to 'babysit', whilst the mothers more often than not would be responsible for the dinner during the week. Some of the fathers were also more firm and determined in their approach to cooking, preferring not to mix the activities of childcare and cooking, one father stating:

Oh, I never like to have anyone in the kitchen, I can't concentrate and the food is ruined. No, it's best to close the door really. I'm happy for someone to wash up. (Father of two)

When asked who decides what the family has for dinner, this four-year-old girl, Eleah explained:

My mum says it is me and my sister that decides now, because she said we don't listen to her anymore, and we are her little monsters, only those cute small monsters that you snuggle with in bed, but they control what is happening and make it not your choice anymore. (Eleah, aged 4)

Some of the parents also indicated that their food habits and what they cook has changed after having children, to facilitate the children's likes and dislikes. This may to some parents feel like the children have taken over the control of the dinner.

I often place the salad stuff in separate bowls, because Emma won't eat it if she can't choose herself, like pick each thing herself. So, that's one way we have changed how

we do it, just to accommodate her really. And sometimes I mash the vegetables more, cause the other one, she doesn't like the bits. But she changes her mind all the time, so I don't always remember. (Mother of two)

We have changed the food we eat since we had children, most definitely. Like, we don't have that much spicy food or sushi, or like salads and things. And we hardly ever eat out. We have more traditional food really, like we had at home, fish balls, meatballs, pancakes, that sort of thing. (Mother of two)

In the unlikely event that we have something too spicy or that they don't like, they make a lot of fuss, and it's a battle that lasts until they're in bed. So, yes, they often get to decide, but maybe indirectly, you know, because I know what they like. (Mother of three)

These examples illustrate how parents, or mothers, facilitate for their children's likes and dislikes in the everyday planning of the dinner. Leon (8) outlines the family's weekly routine for cooking dinners, and this was also confirmed by his parents who gave the impression they were happy with the way they organised it.

From Monday to Thursday it is my mum making the dinner, Friday we all make it and sometimes also on Saturday, because that is taco and pizza and we all know how to make that, and on Sunday my dad makes the dinner. (Leon, aged 8)

Even though it was rarely said directly by the parents, I sensed a reluctance to involve the children, particularly the younger ones, in food preparation and cooking if this involved sharp or hot objects. The parents had differing views on the level of risk posed by the varying kitchen activities. Only the parents who encouraged the children to participate articulated this as a particular goal. The other parents gave an impression of being somehow indifferent to the children's involvement in food preparation and cooking; unless the children were particularly interested they were not encouraged to take part. Leon was keen to help in the kitchen and described his father's attitude to risk in this way:

I cut myself once when I was cooking with my dad and he just laughed and said I now only have nine more fingers to cut. (Leon, aged 8)

His father described how the perceived risk and the actual risk are two different things, and that parents should be realistic about the actual risks posed rather than overdramatize and create fear.

We are maybe a little more laid back than some parents, but we have ended up with two really good small chefs in the family. From day one, we were, like... they just have to learn the hard way you know, if they burn or cut themselves they soon figure out what it is not smart to do. Obviously, there are things they are not allowed to do, but we might be a little more tuned in to the real risks. You know when my son was

five he wanted to flambé some pudding, so then I had to step in and help him (laughing). (Father of two)

Not all the families had such a relaxed attitude to the children's involvement in food preparation and cooking, but many parents gave the impression of having similar views. A small burn or cut was to be expected once in a while, and such an incident should not discourage parents from letting the children take an active part in food preparation. However, many parents argued that they needed extra time to supervise the children in the kitchen and that they therefore usually tended to involve the children in food preparation at the weekends when they had more time and energy.

Time

The issue of time was repeated common theme in the interviews with parents. Justifications were made in terms of priorities of time: time constraints, how much time they had to food preparation and shopping, when in the day or at what time they ate, and for how long they were seated. Most of the time constraints mentioned related to parents working late or children's afterschool activities. The issue of time was also touched upon in the above sections on priorities and facilitation. Time is entwined in everything we do, particularly in relation to food and mealtimes, which are structured in such a regular and repetitive fashion.

Typical parental comments included: 'we just have something simple and easy today, because we don't really have time to make anything proper', or 'we try to take our time at the weekends, and make something really nice'. Such comments illustrate how the busy family life with time constraints during the week can be seen and justified in relation to the more social and elaborate meals at the weekends. Most of the families expressed similar views, showing that there were often great differences between the effort and time spent on meals at the weekends, including Fridays, and the weekdays. In many of the families I observed the dinner on two weekdays and on a Friday, and I noticed there was a change in both atmosphere and attitude. The weekdays were characterised by efficiency and determination, whilst it seemed on Fridays the families were in a more laid back and relaxed mode, often resulting in the dinners being served a little later and the families spending more time around the table. This also was also reflected in the time spent on preparation. The meals in the weekdays often tended to be served within half an hour of starting the preparations, whilst the weekends were characterised by dishes that had long preparation times, such as pizza dough that needs time to rise, steaks, pies and casserole dishes. The only exception found was taco, which usually is quick to make, but is seen as a weekend-dish.

Lack of time was the most common justification for doing the dinners in certain ways. All the parents seemed to have a clear idea of how they wanted the dinner to be: the proper family meal, both in terms of the social context and frame, and the actual food served. When such ideals were thwarted, for whatever the reason, the parents usually justified this using lack of time. In the most active families, where the traditional and proper family dinners occurred most infrequently, the parents used time, or lack of time, more than the other families to explain why the mealtimes had to be done in such and such way. In these families the children also used time to explain why things were done in certain ways, indicating that they had internalised the understandings and meanings expressed in their family and used these to reason in relation to mealtimes. Children in families where the parents did not openly justify and explain the meal in terms of time constraints did not mention time as an issue in relation to food and dinners, but rather focused on how the food was made, likes and dislikes and who was present.

Rules and Routines

Rules and routines relate to priorities and how the everyday family lives are organised. I have, however, chosen to include this under the *time* category as many of the rules and routine were explained and justified in terms of controlling time and creating a friendly, but predictable and repetitive experience for the children to relate to.

‘We wash our hands and take off our boots, because, you know, that’s (*points to the outdoor clothes*) not allowed around the table’ (Jonathan, aged 6)

All the families I visited had similar routines that signified the start of dinnertime, such as washing hands. Only the very young children had to be helped or reminded of these, the children from about four years old took it for granted and did it without question. The rules observed were also quite similar in the different families, or at least variations of the same rules. These included washing hands, sitting nicely on the chair, eating what was offered, and keeping the noise to a comfortable level. The variations between the families were mainly in relation to how they reacted to the breach of these rules or norms, some being stricter than others. Using dolls, Sofie (5) dramatized her understanding of some of the rules experienced in her family, and summed up the rules as follows:

‘No, don’t do that’, said the mother and then the little sister cried and pushed the drink on the floor with a bang and it all spilled. You are the mum and then you have to get the towel from the kitchen and this daddy came (*brings another doll into the scene*) and took the little sister down on the floor and said ‘look what you have done is not allowed’ and he was very angry with her, but she didn’t understand because she is just

little'. 'Sit there'. The daddy said that, and he gave her the food on a plate. 'I don't like all that noise you are making', said the dad. 'Now you have to eat it all up before you can play'. The mum can come here and you sit there and help her eat up. (Sofie, aged 5)

This dramatization was filmed and watched together with Sofie, her parents and her siblings, to much amusement. The parents commented on Sofie's accurate account and said it was educative to watch, as they recognised themselves in her story, and that it gave a good insight into how Sofie experienced mealtimes in the home.

Food

There were great variations in the food served in the homes. Some families served mainly traditional Norwegian meals, such as fish, steak, and fish- or meatballs, all served with potatoes, vegetables and sauce. Others were more influenced by other food cultures and served for example various pasta dishes, tortilla/omelette, curries, risotto and fish or meat kebabs. Salads, rice, lentils or sautéed vegetables were often used as accompaniments to the food.

As mentioned in the section on priorities above, the nursery-home relation is important when looking at children's eating and mealtimes. The parents have varying experiences in regards to food with their respective nurseries, but most parents mentioned issues of openness, trust and a friendly tone as important in order for the relationship with the early-years practitioners and the nursery to function.

It's a good tone, they always ask, you know, how the nights has been, whether they have eaten and things. It really helps. And they let us know at the end of the day as well, you know, was it a good day, did they eat much and what they've been doing. (Father of two)

This family were very happy with their nursery and satisfied with the way they communicated, mentioning the feedback at the end of the day as particularly useful for the positive relationship. The communication between the two settings is not necessarily always perfect, as this mother explains:

Well, one of the reasons we changed nursery was that we never knew anything, no one seemed to be able to tell us how the day had been and how much he'd eaten. Then we don't know if anything is wrong either. (Mother of two)

This mother touches upon an important issue; if the parents are not informed of how the children's day has been, it is more difficult for them to make wise decisions in regards to the children's food, eating as well as health more generally.

Our nursery does a brilliant job when it comes to food and mealtimes. When we get there in the morning the candles are lit for breakfast, the breads are baking in the oven ready for lunch and a group of children and adults are preparing vegetables for the soup. It's calm, friendly and welcoming. And at the end of the day we always get feedback on how much the children have eaten and what they like. (Mother of two)

A common feature in the children's drawings were the presence of their family members; even their pets would usually be included. The children were asked to talk me through their pictures. It was often difficult to understand the intended meaning at first glance, but with the children's descriptions it was made very clear. A three-year-old girl (Dina) drew many roundish objects on a large piece of paper, including many dots and lines (see Picture 3). It resembled something between a map of the planets and a treasure map. She explained in detail that the round objects were in fact plates of food and there was an intricate system of ranking these, her favourite being in the middle. Her mother helped articulate some of the ingredients, as Dina did not remember all the names. After about ten minutes she had successfully explained nine separate dinners, including how she preferred them to be served and ranked these in terms of her favourite taste.

As mentioned earlier, in the homes visited the families ate mostly home-cooked meals. All adults and children ate together unless a parent had to work late or the children had afterschool activities. The typical 'child friendly foods' like fish fingers, pancakes, pizza, spaghetti, hot dogs and so forth were eaten, but not very often. As mentioned above the parents seemed to need to justify serving such meals, time usually being the big scapegoat. That is, if they were in a hurry they might resort to such meals, but not more than once or twice a week.

Mother: What we eat varies a lot depending on the afterschool activities. Sometimes we only have time for a sandwich in the car between school and football practice. I try to give them all something which resembles a dinner whenever possible. Like, my son would get a pasta salad or some salmon or something to have in the break as he can't have what they serve there because he's a vegetarian, you know. When we have a lot of activities, I might take the children one at a time to IKEA for dinner in between their activities. Then at least they all get a warm meal even though we can't all eat together.

Author: So, you think it is important to have a warm meal every day?

Mother: Yes, as far as possible. It is only maybe two times a week we don't all eat at home and then I try to send some proper food with the children in the morning. But we try to eat dinner together as often as possible. We like to eat together, share the experience and talk to each other. The meal is a social event. And it should not be rushed. That's why I think the last few months we have started having long breakfasts at the weekends when we miss the shared dinners in the week. It just happened. But it may be that unconsciously there was a need for it, since we were missing the shared time with the rest of the family.

This mother illustrates how the proper family meal is constructed as commensality, as a shared family event. She was very clear about her intentions for both the children's food and their experience of sharing this meal with at least one other member of the family. Food is thus not seen as purely nutritional, as fuel, but rather an important ingredient for the family, both socially and structurally. The meal is a family's focal point, a regular and shared event that acts to secure and stabilize the coherent family.

Dinner needs to be practical and fit in with the various activities the different family members have each week. It also needs to conform to the accepted social and cultural norms and standards for what constitutes a 'proper' family dinner. This includes both the individual dinner's nutritional value as well as being varied and balanced over time, i.e. one should not have the same, or similar meal two days in a row or too often. 'I try to vary it a little, even though I know they will eat their food every day if they just got this, you know'. (Mother of three)

The children were asked explain their understanding of what constitutes a dinner. Many also showed me their kitchen and ingredients used for making dinner. Some had a very developed understanding and argued that some dinner ingredients could also be used for food in other categories, like cakes.

This is an onion and we cut it in small pieces and usually fry it. Sometimes we put it in the sauce with meat and this is a carrot, and that is a vegetable. We eat it sometimes hot and sometimes raw with our dinner. But we also make cakes with carrots, and it is not dinner then, it is not like dinner cakes, but desert cakes cause it is sweet.
(Ask, aged 7)

A common feature amongst the children's descriptions of dinner was that dinner is a hot meal served after school, work and nursery, and usually with all family members present. One girl (6) explained how the dinners always were served hot initially, but that she sometimes had a cold dinner if she came home late and was too hungry to wait for it to be reheated. Another girl (7) said her parents once argued whether or not it would be acceptable to have salad for

dinner. They had agreed that as long as the salad included pasta, chicken, bacon or tuna it could count as dinner. The girl added that they still never have pasta salad for dinner, but that she knew her mother sometimes used the left over pasta with some salad for lunch the next day, and said: ‘So then it becomes lunch and not dinner’.

Negotiations around food were also common amongst the children, as this excerpt illustrates.

I said I want pizza, but then my dad said we had pizza yesterday and I said I don’t mind cause I really like pizza, but then he said we can’t have the same every day, so then we made salmon and we can have pizza another day instead. (Daniel, aged 8)

Anna (8) shows, in the next excerpt, great knowledge and understanding in regards to how the dinners are planned and organised in her family for the meals to be varied over time.

You can get bored of the same, you know. Like at home we never have the same two days in a row, like we have seven different dinners in the week and then we don’t start over again, but then I think it is ok to have something again...if it has been over a week or maybe two. But in the nursery we had the same, you know, every day, except when we had the warm dinners and at the school we also have almost the same food because, you know, we just have packed lunch so it is often bread. (Anna, aged 8)

Two children, Leon (6) and Andrea (8) dramatized the family’s grocery shopping. They performed their interpretation in front of their older brother, the parents and me after having rehearsed in the bedroom for a few minutes. They dressed up a little, using hats, scarves and adult shoes, and used a doll’s buggy as a shopping trolley. They imitated adults with both intonation and choice of words, to their parents’ amusement, and received a standing ovation. The story was initially presented as a fairy tale but soon it changed to a more casual conversation between the two characters, the mother (Andrea) and the father (Leon):

Andrea: Once upon a time a mother and a father went out to buy some food for their hungry children.
Leon: Have you remembered the shopping list?
Andrea: It is somewhere in my purse
Leon: Oh, great, then we will never find it.
(the mother finds it and dangles it in front of the father’s face)
Andrea: Here is the shop
Leon: What does it say then?
Andrea: Toilet paper, milk, conditioner, nappies, coffee, cucumber and dinner.
Leon: Look at this (picks up a toy box), it’s on offer.
Andrea: How much on offer?
Leon: Fifty and sixty
Andrea: But we really do not need it, put it back
Leon: We can have it for dinner
Andrea: That is desert
Leon: We can use it as sauce
Andrea: It is unhealthy, look; it says a lot of sugar and fat *(pointing to the back of the box)*

Leon: Oh, but it is so nice
Andrea: No! We can't have burgers with custard for dinner.

This excerpt shows how children may understand adults' behaviour and reasoning and make use of this in their games. They illustrate knowledge and understandings of relationships and communication, the practical and common use of shopping lists, labelling of ingredients, healthy foods, value for money and appropriate food combinations.

Talk

In this section I would like to present some of the data relating to talk observed during the dinnertimes and the activities with the children. First, I will look at some of the children's talk during the activities before I move on to topics of conversation during the meals, including several excerpts and explanation of topics.

When there were several siblings involved with the same tools they talked more and seemed to complement each other, as this example shows. Three siblings, Jacob (4), Mira (7) and Emma (9), showed me their kitchen and explained where everything was kept and who did what. Mira took on the leading role and showed me the content of all the cupboards while all the time describing what the various ingredients were used for. Jacob opened all the drawers and cupboards while Mira did most of the talking. Emma followed in the background and did not say much until they opened the cupboard for dry ingredients. When Mira just closed it quickly and said 'no, this is for cakes' Emma jumped in with 'we can make pizza with that', Jacob continuing, 'at the weekend'.

One 5-year-old boy, Brage, showed me his picture (see Picture 4), beaming with pride. He had drawn his mother, sister and himself, sitting around a table. The father stood by the door with the older brother and they were holding something in their arms. I asked what they were holding, and he said, as a matter of course, that they had just come home from football practise. I therefore assumed they were holding something related to football practice like a bag of clothes. It was not until later, in the parental interview, that the revelation came. The father usually bought Chinese take-away after football practise. The parents seemed surprised at the boys drawing, saying they were unaware of how much this 'tradition' meant to him.

Many of the children were aware of the rules and routines around mealtimes in the home. Some also pointed out how these may differ from the way things were done in other families, at their friend's house or at the grandparents for example.

My mum knows what I like and dislike, so I don't need to eat it if we have something I don't like and usually we have things I like at home, because they know. But my friend's dad, he doesn't know and in his house they are quite strict so you have to eat up all the food and sometimes I don't like eating there because maybe I don't like it. (Ask, 6 years old)

We only eat in the living room when we have guests or it's my birthday or the weekend. The other times we eat in the kitchen or in the car. I like eating in the living room 'cause then we have desert (Brage, aged 5)

This illustrates the difference in meaning between the everyday and the weekends or special occasions.

Only one of the children mentioned eating in front of the television and that this only happened if his mother was not at home:

My mum would not like it if we ate in front of the TV, but when she's not here my dad doesn't care. One time my sister told my mum and then she got cross with my dad, but he still let us, but only if it is children's TV²³. We are never allowed to watch a DVD and eat the dinner at the same time, then we can have popcorn instead, but only on Saturdays. When my sister is out we have meat, because she is a vegetarian (Leona, aged 6)

This shows that Leona has reflected upon how the dinners in her household is conceptualised, how her parents have differing views in relation to what they see as important, and that the mother has the last word, at least as long as she is at home.

Topics of conversation

There were no immediate surprises in the observed topics of conversations during dinnertimes in the families. It was still interesting to see how the topics were very similar in all the families as well as their tendency to change depending on whether or not the parents were eating with the children. As this was also one of the key findings in the nurseries, particularly in nursery 1, I found it worthy of further investigation.

The typical topics of conversation related to the food served; how it was prepared, likes and dislikes, what could have been done differently in the preparation or presentation, as well as food in general. Planning was also a key topic of conversation, both in terms of the week's dinners, shopping, and other activities. However, the main topic of conversation around the dinner table, a topic that all the families took part in and which was mentioned in several of the parental interviews as one of the main reasons for having family dinners in the first place,

²³ Children's TV = Barne-tv at 18.00pm (NRK)

was to share experiences of the day. Parents were particularly conscious and active in asking the children about their day at school or nursery, as well as their partner's day at work. When asked about topics of conversations around the dinner table, several children also mentioned episodes where I interpreted sharing experiences to be of importance, and explained how they often told their parents about things that happened during their day.

First, my mum or dad will say 'dinnertime', and then we all sit down to eat. My little sister, she cannot really talk that much, but the rest of us we tell each other what we did, cause they did not see it; they don't go to my school. (Ask, aged 6)

My dad he talks about football, my mum talks about the car that broke down when she was in the shop and my sister talks about her girlfriend that says she has no boyfriend, but she does, and my little brother, he talks about his Lego tower that no one should touch. I just eat. (Frida, aged 7)

These excerpts show that the children are aware and reflective of the topics of conversation around the dinner table. The next excerpts illustrate how sharing experiences is at the core of the mealtimes in the families, and that this is seen as a time to relax.

I don't like to bring up anything stressful, you know, something that requires a lot of organising, but sometimes we just have to. We rather try to talk about the day, has everyone had a good day, just talk about what everyone has done really. This way we understand each other, like if someone is really tired one day it might be because of something that happened during the day and it's nice for the rest to know about it. It's nice to share your experiences with the family, you know, and then we can help each other. (Mother of two)

When I tell my mum and dad what happened at school we always eat, because my mum said it is better to talk then. Before I told them in the night, but they were too tired to listen. (Daniel, aged 6)

They (the parents) ask me how my day was and I say 'oh, it was ok', and then sometimes they ask who I played with or what we did, like if I learned anything new. I told them at dinner when I hurt my arm on the swing and then my mum almost got her food in her throat, and I had to give her some of my water. (Kasper, aged 7)

There are also unintentional conflicts during the dinnertime, as illustrated by these two excerpts.

Mum and dad always complain about the people at work. Maybe someone didn't put the toilet seat down, or they took all the pens, or drank all the coffee? (Heidi, aged 4)

I always say 'no, not that, I want something else', but then my mum gets cross, cause she don't want to throw it away, and I eat it anyway (laughs), but never those... what are they called, the small green cabbage things we have, ah... brussel sprouts, they're so disgusting. (Sara, aged 8)

In this chapter I have presented the empirical data from the families, showing that proper parenting and related issues were a concern to many parents. There were few disagreements between parents in relation to the 'proper' family meal. Aims and wishes of parents were not always fulfilled, resulting in some parents feeling dissatisfied or disappointed over their own achievements in relation to their construction of the 'proper' family meal, as a shared family event. However, several parents had found ways to negotiate their construction of the 'proper' family dinner by occasionally separating the family in groups, or sharing other meals, such as long breakfasts at the weekends. Afterschool and recreational activities were often given as reasons or justifications for the 'proper' family meal not to be possible on a particular day. Similarly, children's active involvement in the preparation and cooking of food were not prioritised when one or more members of the family have other time-consuming obligations. Children showed awareness, knowledge and understanding of various systems and processes related to all stages of the food and eating chain, from planning and shopping to cooking, eating and washing up. They also showed awareness in regards to topics of conversation during mealtimes, and seem to reflect on and relate these to current activities within the family and personal interests.

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this final chapter I will look back at my initial research question and objectives. I will summarise the main findings and discuss them by focusing on the concepts of community, structure and agency. I chose to present the data in two chapters, one for the nurseries and one for the families. I will discuss the relationship between these two institutions as well as their similarities and differences in relation to the five categories identified in the analysis: prioritisation, facilitation, time, food and talk. I will then move on to discuss the nature of the meal and how the meal is conceptualised in different ways. Finally, I will reflect upon what kinds of implications one may draw from the study before I suggest some recommendations for further research and policy.

In this thesis I wanted to explore children's mealtimes in the home and in the nursery, the focus being on dinnertime in the homes and lunchtime in the nurseries. The aim was to better understand children's experiences of mealtimes, both in terms of food preparation and eating. A further aim was to explore the meaning given to meals by children, parents and early-years practitioners, and how they relate to food in their everyday life. Theoretically, the study was approached from a social constructionist perspective; the ideas of children as active participants in their everyday lives and the mealtime as a shared social and cultural event, which has a value beyond simply feeding and nutrition, underpinning the research.

This study was carried out using a qualitative methodological approach, making use of a wide selection of methods, including role-play or puppet shows, drawings, Lego, and show-and-tell, as well as the more traditional methods of observations and interviews. I found the methods to be both challenging and liberating, but most of all fun and interesting. This approach allowed and encouraged the child informants to produce rich and valuable data, which in turn gave thick descriptions (Geertz, 1994).

As Chapters 5 and 6 showed, two key concepts have emerged as important in understanding children as participants in the meal. First, the concept of community, a group of members with shared symbols, values, norms, moral codes and ideologies (Cohen, 1985) has made itself apparent as a key concept worthy of attention. Second, the concepts of structure and agency: in particular children's involvement and dependency regarding food and mealtimes, but also the structures that make room for children's agency in relation to food and mealtimes both in the home and in the nurseries.

The majority of my informants were concerned about the social value of the meal in addition to the nutritional aspects. For parents, for example, food and mealtimes represent key elements of proper parenting. The social value was also an important aspect of the nursery meals in nursery 2. The meals in nursery 3 were valued for their social significance, albeit to a lesser degree. In nursery 3, however, the observations indicated that the meals seemed rather to represent an obligation; it was the early-years practitioners' duty to feed the children, and that is what they did. Food therefore had the function of fuel for the body, rather than as part of a social meal, as commensality. During unstructured interviews with some of the early-years practitioners in nursery 1, they gave the impression that the social aspects of the meals were in fact important; it was part of their planning and that they followed the national regulations and guidelines in regards to mealtimes in nurseries. When questioned about the reasons for their priorities, one of the early-years practitioners expressed regret at the fact that they were unable to include the children more in food preparation, that they did not have enough members of staff present during lunchtimes and that they had limited funds and facilities to prepare all the food from scratch. This indicates that there may be a discrepancy between what is expected (through national guidelines, by parents and so forth) and what is actually feasible, or realistic for early-years practitioners to achieve given the tight economic budget nurseries have. Whether parents or early-years practitioners, all live busy lives. Meals can easily become marginalized even if, at least for the nurseries, there are clear expectations about facilitating good experiences around mealtimes. The ideal of prioritizing and facilitating the shared meal as an occasion for pleasure, humour, and the transfer of knowledge and values between generations can, as mentioned, be restricted in practice by, amongst other things, economics, sick leave, educational principles, and so forth.

Community

Both the nurseries and the families have the characteristics needed to be a community, in Cohen's definition of the concept. As already mentioned, such communities provide a sense of identity within a set of boundaries that act to distinguish different communities from each other. They can also be seen as relational. That is, the members have something in common relating them to each other, thus implying both similarity (between its members) and difference (between communities).

In all of the eight homes, I interpreted both the family members' behaviour and what was said to indicate a strong feeling and idea of community and a shared understanding of the role, meaning and symbolic value of meals. Most parents and children gave similar descriptions of

dinnertime, both in terms of how they preferred it to be as well as how it often actually turned out to be in their everyday lives; these did not always depict the same type of meal. These descriptions and aims were consistent with the observations made in the homes during dinner, as well as with the data gathered through the various activities with the children. The traditional and dominant role of the dinnertime in Norwegian households (Bugge, 2006) may have contributed to this common understanding and aim for the family meals. The families' similar social class may also explain the shared focus on the importance of the family meal as expressed by the parents. This is, however, not an analytical focus of this thesis. The interesting point and contribution made by this thesis is the strong and consistent idea expressed by the families, which was also to a great extent illustrated by the practice observed, showing the dinnertime to be understood as predominantly a social event that creates a shared understanding and feeling of belonging to a community (in this instance, the family). And in which children have an important part to play.

In contrast, in the three nurseries the meal was not always seen as a shared and joint social event. How the nurseries acted and understood community and the role, meaning and symbolic value of meals, varied. During the observations in nursery 1, there were relatively little detectable community feeling and shared understanding in relation to the role, meaning and symbolic value of meals other than a focus on structures such as rules and regulations. The rules manifested themselves through verbal comments and restrictions, such as 'have you washed your hands', 'no jumping the queue', 'use the inside voice'. They started each meal with a song, something which could have functioned as a focal point and helped create a shared feeling of belonging for the children. However, the process of choosing songs and the attitudes shown by the adults to suggestions expressed by the children undermined any community feeling, or commensality, that might have been brewing. The adults rarely ate with the children, and if they did they usually ate something else. This meant that even if the adults were present and communicated with the children during the meals, they did not actually *share* the meal with the children, and this can be interpreted as an obstacle to creating commensality around mealtimes in the nursery.

Nursery 2 had a very different approach to the mealtimes and gave much attention and focus to what in this thesis is interpreted as a feeling of community, emphasising the friendly and calm atmosphere desirable for their shared mealtimes. Their attitude was similar to the views expressed in the homes, or at least to what parents aspired to when having the time. The children were encouraged, although it was not always possible, to take part in all stages of

food preparation, thus developing the meal as a shared community action. The dough for the bread was prepared in the morning. The children were encouraged to use their senses to experience the process from making the dough to when the slice of bread was on their plate. This meant they would not only receive food or watch an adult prepare food, but were encouraged to touch, question, and for example follow the development of the smell of baking bread. All the adults were encouraged to take an active part in the mealtimes, eating with the children. The adults' supportive comments that encouraged positive conversations about food seemed to enhance the feeling of commensality. The mealtime received much attention and was given a role in the everyday nursery life that was not confined to its nutritional value, thus emphasising the broader meaning and symbolic value of the mealtime as a social event.

Nursery 3 was positioned between the other two nurseries when it comes to the feeling of community. They had divided the group of children in three, each group eating together over time. Together with the adults' encouraging comments and friendly attitude around the lunch table, this created a relatively calm and predominantly positive mealtime atmosphere. What was lacking here, but present in nursery 2, was the understanding or willingness to incorporate the food and the preparation and planning of meals in their everyday activities, and in this way involve the children in all stages of the process.

Structure / Agency

Another key finding of the thesis was how the balance of structure and agency is divided differently in different settings, illustrating how there is both continuity and change between structure and agency in children's mealtimes. It is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that there is either no scope for individual agency or, conversely, that there are no social structures constraining individual autonomy. But, the balance between the two poles varies greatly between the different nurseries and families visited as well as within these institutions depending on other variables like members of staff present, day of the week, other activities taking place, moods and so forth. I would, however, argue that the level of agency children possessed varied to a lesser degree within their own family or nursery unit than between them. That is, each individual setting was more or less coherent and to some degree predictable and consistent. This resulted in children and adults having a common understanding of the level of children's agency possible in any given situation. I find it interesting to reflect further on the differences and similarities found in children's agency regarding food and mealtimes. Both in the nurseries and the homes, where children were able

to actively participate in the food preparation, the structures provided scope for children's agency to unfold. On the other hand, where the children's involvements were limited to eating, the structures were used as an explanation for not providing space for children's agency and participation. In other words, there are structures influencing children's mealtimes in all the families and nurseries visited; the differences relate to how these structures are formed and used by adults to limit or control children's agency or as boundaries, rules and routines necessary for a predictable and safe environment for children to explore their autonomy and exert their agency.

Within the structures set by national law, guidelines and regulations, it is a question therefore how much agency the professional adults working in nurseries have and how they use the agency they have. Some early-years practitioners I spoke to gave the impression that their agency was somewhat tied, and that they felt they had little autonomy in their job. Other early-years practitioners had the opposite experience, and expressed they had much agency and say in their everyday work life, and that it was up to them, in collaboration with the management, how to prioritise, facilitate and structure the children's mealtimes. A question then arises as to which structures affect the scope for children's agency?

The nursery-family relation

For all the parties involved to be satisfied, a good working relationship between the nursery and the home is paramount. In terms of this relationship, this study focused mainly on communication and expectations in relation to food and eating. This is an area of children's everyday life that both early-years practitioners and parents possess much information, knowledge and beliefs about. It was clear from the data that both parents and early-years practitioners valued a good working relationship between the home and the nursery as very important. There were, however, different ways to approach this issue, and several examples of such relationships having gone wrong. Such examples were mainly expressed by parents who felt that their views, suggestions and wishes regarding their children's food and eating were not taken seriously, and that they instead were humiliated or ridiculed. Such incidents led two families to move their children to other nurseries, indicating that the issue of children and food is important for many people, and thus worthy of both academic and political attention.

Expectations

Maybe due to the common sense and taken-for-granted-ness associated with children's food, particularly in the nurseries, many early-years practitioners and parents had difficulty expressing their concrete expectations to the other party. However, as the interviews and conversations expanded it became clear that the expectations were similar in many ways, communication and handover of information being the key words. The parents expected to get information, to be told what the children had eaten, what they liked, how they have behaved and so forth. Similarly, the early-years practitioners appreciated information in the morning in regards to how much breakfast the children had eaten, how the night had been, in addition to the more general information given in regards to allergies, intolerances or religious preferences. Several of the parents and nurseries stated that this regular handover of food related information was common practice, and gave examples of good practice praising parents or nurseries for being particularly good at maintaining this part of their relationship.

In addition to communication, several parents were concerned about the food served at their nursery, saying they expected the food to be both healthy and tasty. As mentioned, two families chose to change nursery due to being dissatisfied with the quality of the food and the manner in which the mealtimes were conducted. Parents' expectations of the food served in nurseries were generally higher than the quality of the food actually served. Several parents had reflected on this, but concluded that the issue was not worth the hassle. This may indicate that some parents find it difficult to discuss the issue of food with their nursery, something which may be due to the common-sense attitude to children's food or an occasionally constrained relationship between parents and early-years practitioners. The nursery-family relationship and the ability of the family and nursery to cooperate are therefore of great importance for children's mealtimes. Several parents also mentioned trust and understanding as important factors for their relationship with the nursery, as one father put it: 'I trust them to serve good food, they seem to know what they are doing'. A mother, who was not overly satisfied with the nursery's food said: 'They don't seem to understand what is good and bad food for children to eat. The children eat in the nursery every day, and I therefore expect the food to be of good quality, not just pre-cooked stuff'.

Similarities and differences

The families were more similar than the nurseries. This may just reflect the small sample size, but the data shows there are more similarities in the ways families conduct their mealtimes. This despite the nurseries having the same national guidelines guiding the way they should

organise mealtimes, something the families do not possess. The similarities in the homes relate mostly to beliefs, understandings and attitudes to food and mealtimes and not necessarily the actual food eaten. The similarities in the nurseries were more structural, as part of the logistics: the time at which the food was served, the routines and rules relating to washing hands, laying the table, tidying up afterwards and so forth. The main differences between the nurseries were therefore related to their understanding of the role of the mealtime and how the meal was conceptualised and mediated in the everyday nursery life, as well as the quality of the food served.

There are also, of course, similarities and differences between nurseries and the homes, as should be expected. The main differences observed were the number of people eating and thus also catered for, the type of food eaten, the structural routines and discipline, as well as the topics of conversation observed. Nursery 2 was in many ways more similar to the families, both in that they created an intimate and cosy atmosphere during the meals and they prepared the food from scratch and involved the children in this process. In this way, nursery 2 was more of an extension of the home than the other two nurseries.

The similarities in relation to how the meals were prioritised were in terms of the routines and structures for the meals. In all the nurseries there were predictable pre-meal routines, like story time, washing hands, saying a rhyme or singing a song. These routines were not as rigid in the families, but they were still present. In all the families there were established routines in regards to hygiene. In addition, some families lit a candle at the table and dimmed the lights, which nursery 2 also did, and some said a rhyme or sang a song. All of these routines contribute to the feeling of commensality, lowering the level of stress and encouraging everyone to be tuned in for the meal to come.

The differences between the nurseries' and the families' priorities were most noticeable when looking at nursery 1, where the strict or rigid structural features were prioritised. This is not to say that the staff did not appreciate and aim to create a positive and friendly atmosphere. Rather, their focus was on following the rules, routines and overall structures, which, one may argue, led to more control and discipline during the mealtimes. When all went well and all was quiet, the atmosphere was good. However, not everything always goes as planned, as is to be expected with large groups of people; something may get spilled; someone needs the toilet; there might be an argument between two children; or someone might not like the food and make a big scene about it. The list is endless. However, it is in the moments when not

everything is running smoothly; when everyone is tired and hungry or excited and noisy, that the adults' ability to plan ahead, keep calm, prioritise and facilitate will shine through. When the mealtimes are conceptualised as a chore, as an obligation, and the understanding is by some adults, maybe unconsciously, that children's role is to be seen and not heard, resulting in children being blamed for creating this mealtime havoc, the adults need to step back and evaluate the way they prioritise and facilitate for children's meals, as well as their own behaviour. This is particularly relevant for the nursery 1, although many families may also benefit from reflecting on how they prioritise and facilitate their family mealtimes.

When children are able to take part in the mealtime process the meal achieves a different practical and symbolic meaning; the children talk more about food and cooking and show an interest in ingredients, recipes and where the food comes from. The atmosphere at mealtimes is calmer and there's an increased sense of community, commensality. When children are not taking an active part in the mealtime process something else seem to happen.

Looking back at Nick Lee's (2001) argument about dependency, my empirical data seems to support the idea of both dependency and interdependency between children and adults. Such a relationship establishes and maintains a shared feeling of community among all involved, both in the homes and in the nurseries.

Despite entering the field with an open and explorative approach, I was surprised by how many of the children had a detailed understanding both of food and cooking. I was also surprised by the many of the children's intricate understanding of the social norms and interaction between children and adults in relation to all aspects of the mealtimes, from planning and preparation to serving and washing up. Many of the children gave detailed descriptions of how the family members behaved differently around mealtimes depending on, amongst other things, who was present, what was served, what day it was or how their day had been.

Recommendations

I would argue that enabling children to experience the joy of cooking in a friendly and supportive environment is important and significant for children's future relationship with food and cooking. Involving children in all aspects of mealtimes should therefore be valued and encouraged in nurseries as well as in the home on a regular basis.

It is naïve to think that nurseries will prioritise mealtimes above other activities without further guidance, policies and attention given to the importance of food and mealtimes in the early-years practitioner training. Mealtimes should not be conceptualised just in terms of its nutritional value, but should also be understood in terms of their social, cultural and symbolic values. It is a unfortunate that while there is much focus on healthy and balanced diets in the media and obesity rates are increasing nationwide, children are not encouraged and taught to cook at an early age, and in this way develop healthy relationships to food and eating. With many families living busy lives, with many afterschool activities, it is unrealistic to expect parents to be responsible for this learning alone. Nurseries should, in my view, provide children with the best possible environment for learning the skills needed to value the social aspects of the meal, as well as help to prepare and cook healthy meals. Learning about food and cooking in nurseries does not necessarily exclude other curricular activities. It may rather provide the children with practical and educational tasks, helping them to explore and develop knowledge and understandings in a myriad of topics, such as maths and science, language and communication, history and culture, to mention but a few. Creating an environment where children are encouraged to be actively involved in food preparation should therefore, in my view, be highly prioritised in nurseries.

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APPENDIX A – Standard observation/activity form

Date and time of observation/activity:

Place of observation/activity:

Tools used:

Number, age and sex of participants:

Possible factors that can influence data:

When/Day of the week:

Where/Place of dinner:

What is for dinner?

Who prepared the dinner?

Who/Guests/researcher:

What/Other activities:

Weather:

Interruptions/distractions:

Other:

Researcher's comments:

APPENDIX B – Interview guide - children

Purpose:

To learn more about how children and families relate to and experience dinnertime.

Role-play/puppet show

To begin with I would like you to choose some characters that can be the people in your family. If you would like we can start with colouring them so we can tell them apart. When this is done they can have their dinner? If you find that something is missing in the house we can make this from the materials I have brought.

Possible questions:

- Who have we got here?
- Is everything ready for the family to have their dinner?
- If not, what do they need to do?
- Where do you think they'd like to eat their dinner?
- Who is making/has made the dinner?
- How do they feel?
- Does everyone like/eat the food?
- Why/why not?
- What do you think they talk about?
- Do they tell anyone that they like/dislike the dinner?
- How does the parents react?
- What do they say?
- How do they feel?

Semi structured interview:

So now that this family has finished their dinner I would like you to tell me a bit about how the dinnertime is in your family.

Possible questions:

- Can you tell me a little about what happens at dinnertime?
- Where would you be when you eat dinner?
- If you talk, can you tell me what you may talk about?
- Are there any particular rules that you need to follow?
- Why do you think your family has these rules/routines? (if rules/routines)
- Who decides? (if rules/routines)
- Have your family any routines that you can think of?
- Is it the same or different eating dinner at your friend's house or at your grandparents?
- How is it different? (if different)
- What happens if someone does not like the food?
- How do you decide on what food to have for dinner?
- Who does the shopping/cooking?
- Can you decide?
- How do you feel about dinnertime?
- How do you think your parents feel?

- Can everyone say what they want at dinnertime?
- Is the dinnertime the same everyday, or does it vary?
- If it varies, why do you think it is not the same everyday?
- (*does this depend on who's there, what's for dinner, what day of the week it is?*)
- Who's the boss when it comes to dinners? (How/why?)

Themes:

- Preparations (including preparation of food, shopping, pre dinner routines etc)
- Communication (about dinner and dinnertime, including both before, during and after the actual dinner, both verbal and body language)
- Emotions (How do the members of the family feel? Stressed, happy, sad, angry etc)
- Similarities/differences (within the family, between own family and friends/grandparents, own family mealtime unique or just like any other family)

Walk and talk/Show and tell:

- Can you show me where you make you dinner in your family?
- What can we use to make dinner?
- Where do you keep food and kitchen equipment?
- Who can use it?
- Are there things you are not allowed to do in the kitchen, or that you can do when an adult is with you?

Drawings:

I have brought with me some paper, crayons and pencils for you to draw on. Would you like to make a drawing about dinner or dinnertime?

- Can you tell me about your picture?
- Would you like to keep your picture or can I have it in my book?
- Maybe I can take a photo of your picture for my book?

Lego:

If children choose to use lego, encourage them to include mealtimes and dinners in the play by prompting question, such as:

- Maybe they are hungry by now?
- Will they eat alone, or maybe together with someone?
- What do they like to eat?
- Where shall they sit?
- What food will make them happy?
- Who will be making the dinner for them?

Can be similar to the questions for the role-play or puppet shows.

APPENDIX C – Interview guide – parents

Parental interview:

I am here to learn a little more about how you in your family do dinners and dinnertime. If you are ready to start we can begin with any particular **routines and rules** you may or may not have regarding the dinner and dinnertime more in general.

Possible questions:

- Can you tell me about your understanding of dinnertime?
- Do you think both of you agree on this point or do you have different understandings?
- Can you describe a typical dinnertime in your family?
- How do you think your parents' behaviour and views have influenced the way you do dinners in your family now?
- Where do the children feature?
- Are the children involved at all? (How/when?)
- Who's the boss when it comes to dinners? (How/why?)
- What is most important with dinner?
- Why do you have dinners?
-

Themes:

Preparations (including preparation of food, shopping, pre dinner routines etc)

Communication (about dinner and dinnertime, including both before, during and after the actual dinner, both verbal and body language)

Emotions (How do the members of the family feel? Stressed, happy, sad, angry etc)

Similarities/differences (within the family, between own family and friends/grandparents, own family mealtime unique or just like any other family)

APPENDIX D – Bakgrunn informasjon - Foreldre

Kjønn:

Alder:

Utdanning:

Type arbeid/student/arbeidsledig:

Sivil status:

Antall søsken:

Antall barn:

Eget forhold og/eller holdninger til mat/måltider:

Ønsker for barnas matvaner:

Ammet/morsmelkerstatning:

Din og barnas rolle i matlaging:

APPENDIX E - Skriftlig samtykke – Barn

Mitt navn er: _____

Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen er i familien min.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen til dokkene er.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil fortelle Marit om middagen i familien min.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Skriftlig samtykke – Foreldre

Jeg har fått skriftlig og muntlig informasjon om prosjektet - FOOD, PARENTING AND CHILDREN'S AGENCY - Contemporary food practices in Norwegian households with young children, og vil delta i undersøkelsen. Jeg godtar at intervjuene og observasjonene blir tatt opp på lydbånd og at en eller flere av observasjonene blir tatt opp på video. Disse vil bli slettet ved prosjektets slutt. Jeg forstår at jeg kan trekke meg fra undersøkelsen når som helst uten å måtte begrunne dette.

NAVN:-

NAVN: _____

DATO: _____

APPENDIX F – NSD form

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

Allison James
Norsk senter for barneforskning
NTNU
Loholt Allé 87
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 13.09.2011

Vår ref: 27791 / 3 / SSA

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 24.08.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

27791	<i>Food, Parenting and Children's Agency. Contemporary Food Practices in Norwegian Households with young Children</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Allison James
Student	Marit Tingstad Husby Loveland

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

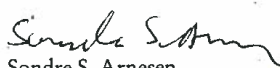
Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år 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, 01.06.2013, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandling av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim


Sondre S. Arnesen

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

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Marit Tingstad Husby Loveland, Heimstadveien 7, 7041 TRONDHEIM

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

APPENDIX G - Key words/themes

Mastering skills:	Pouring water/milk Spreading butter Cutting food on plate Helping others Laying the table
Agency	When to get off the table What to eat (choose between what's on offer) Negotiating time (when am I finished)
Communication	Sharing experiences Talking about the day Encouraged to eat/drink About food, growing food and preparation
Structure	Tables/seating Food
Food as Fuel	Feeding, nutrition
Food as a Meal	Sharing Make meaning Social Commensality
Involvement in food preparation	Cutting vegetables Placing toppings on bread
Social aspects	Helping others Talking Wanting to sit next to someone Adults eating with the children, or not?? Eating more or less if in company with others
Rules	Quiet at the table Only start with routine when your name is called Challenging/negotiating rules/authority
Punishments	Must wait until the end If silly, will not get milk
Routines	Wash hands Collect plate/glass Visit toilet Get dressed
Control	No singing at the table Adults deciding when you can get off the table, how much food or drink you can have When to sit down
Music/singing/rhymes	Ritual before and/or after meal Forbidden during the meal

APPENDIX H – Project information to parents



Marit Tingstad Husby Loveland
Heimstadveien 7
7041 TRONDHEIM
Telefon: 95414048
E –mail: marit.tingstad@gmail.com

Trondheim, 24 Juni 2011

Information letter

Request to participate in a study regarding family mealtimes

I am a master student at Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB), NTNU. I am writing my thesis on children's mealtimes and therefore seek participants for my study. The overall topic will be the main meal within families with children under the age of 7 years old, and lunchtime in nurseries. I am particularly interested in how the children and adults experience their mealtimes and how these are structured in everyday life. I will conduct individual and/or group interviews with both children and parents, do participant observations of family dinners, a short questionnaire for parents as well as activities like drawing, role play and/or puppet show with the children.

Suitable participants

I wish to come in contact with families that have at least two children of which one or more are between 6 and 7 years old. The families can be Norwegian or English speaking.

What would the questions and activities be about?

The questions will concentrate on your relationship, attitude and experience of family mealtimes, in particular the dinner. I am interested in division of responsibility and control and how mealtimes are negotiated. The various activities aim to encourage the children to share their experiences, attitudes and reflections regarding the family mealtimes through methods that they are more familiar and comfortable with. They can choose which of the methods they'd like to do.

When will the study commence and how long will it take to participate?

I will conduct two sets of three *observations* per family. We will agree upon a suitable time for you. The observations will be conducted in your home at dinnertime. I wish to film these, as written notes may be inaccurate and difficult to record whilst eating. I further wish that these meals should be as 'normal' as possible without any special consideration due to me

being there. Economical compensation over and above the normal expense of the meal will be offered. The *activities with the children* will take about one hour and will be audio recorded. These will be conducted after the observations, whenever it suits you. If the children choose to make a puppet show/role play, I would like to film this. The children can choose to give me *the drawings* or if they prefer to keep them, I will take a photo of these. *The interviews* will take about one hour. We can combine the children's interviews and their activities or do these separate. If we have filmed a show I would like to show this to the children to enable them to explain and reflect on this. I have prepared a *small questionnaire* (about 10 minutes) for the parents that can be used as a guide for the interview. The interview will take about one hour.

How will the information be used?

All the information gathered will be treated confidentially and will be anonymous. When the study is completed all data that can identify the participants will be deleted. Audio and video recordings will also be deleted. To participate in this study is absolutely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving an explanation for this. All of your data will then be deleted.

If you wish to participate...

If you wish to participate you can contact me by telephone, text messaging or e-mail. Don't hesitate to contact me with comments or questions if anything is unclear or if you are unsure if you would like to participate.

The supervisor for this study is Prof. Allison James.

Yours faithfully

Marit Tingstad Husby Loveland

PICTURE 1 – Informed consent form - children

Skriftlig samtykke – Barn

Mitt navn er: _____

Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen er i familien min.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen til dokkene er.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil fortelle Marit om middagen i familien min.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



PICTURE 2 – Informed consent form – children

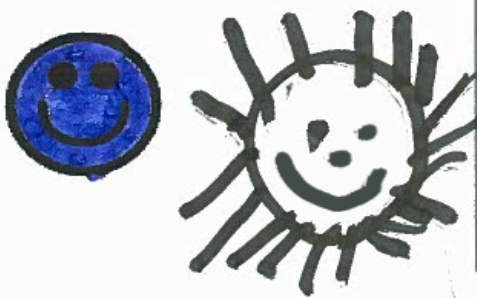
Skriftlig samtykke – Barn

Mitt navn er: _____

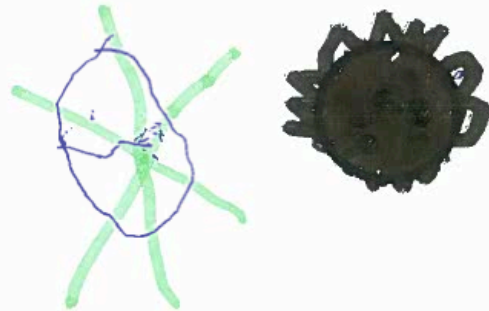


Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen er i familien min.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil vise Marit hvordan middagen til dokkene er.

JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke...



Jeg vil fortelle Marit om middagen i familien min.

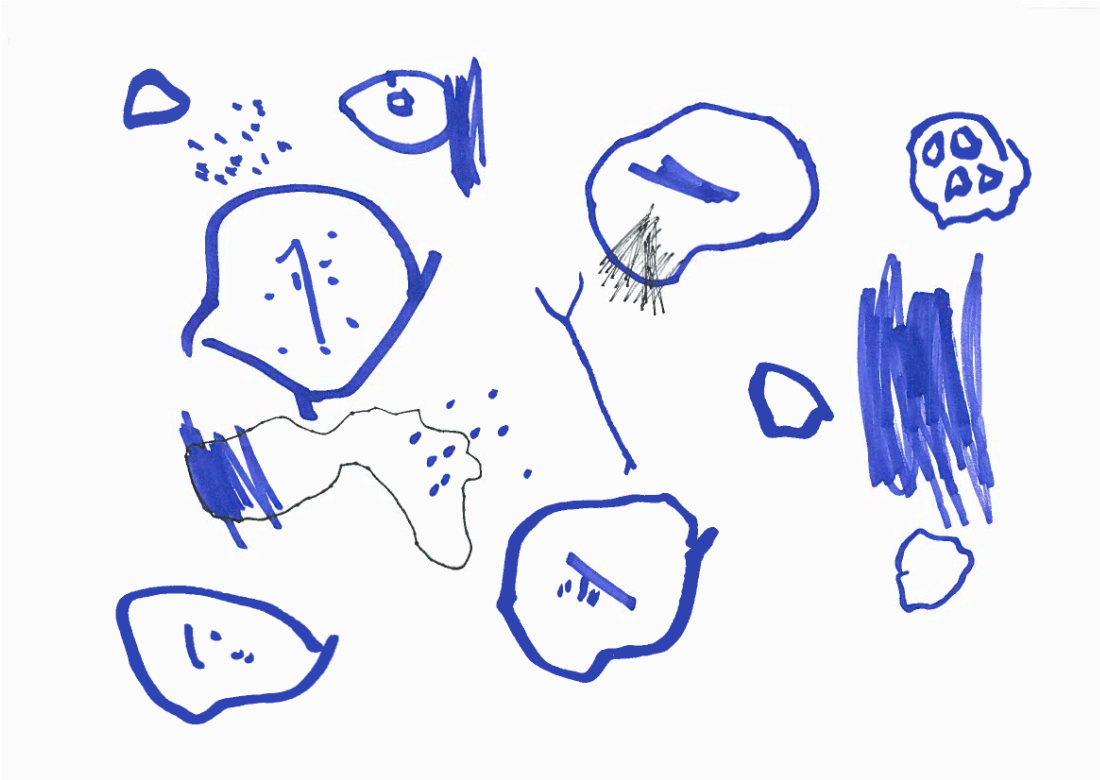
JA, jeg vil...



NEI, jeg vil ikke....



PICTURE 3 – Dinners – drawing, Dina (3)



PICTURE 4 – Family dinner – Drawing, Brage (5)

