Master's thesis

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Young Refugee Children in Norway

A Critical Study on how the Right of Expression is addressed in ECEC

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"No one wants to become a refugee. No one should have to endure this humiliating and arduous ordeal. Yet, millions do. Even one refugee forced to return to danger is one too many. On this year's World Refugee Day, I ask people everywhere to spare a thought for the millions of children, woman and men who have been forced from their homes, who are at risk of their lives, and who, in most cases, want nothing more than to return home or to start afresh. Let us never lose sight of our shared humanity" (UN, 2011)

Ban Ki-moon

Acknowledgements

Refugees live under extremely difficult circumstances, circumstances that need to be recognised and acknowledged by the public. I hope that this study will contribute to place the children and their families in a more visible way on the agendas of ECEC providers and policy makers. But, this struggle is not yet over. I plan to proceed and help in areas where possible. Hopefully refugee children and their families will someday profit from this struggle for social justice.

During the journey of working with this study I have met many people who I have great respect for. All those working with the children and their families have jobs which are extremely demanding. These people all work towards making the circumstances for refugees better.

I wish to thank all of the respondents that offered their time and patience. I also want to thank my study supervisor Sonja Kibsgaard: thank you for your smile and positive attitude. The cover photography is taken by the photographer Linda Bournane Engelberth, thank you for letting me use it.

Marikken, without you it wouldn't have been possible, I would sail the sea with you in a rowing boat. Espen, at last we can play again, thank you for your patience. Emil, now you can sit on my shoulders again when we walk to the kindergarten.

Thank you!

Kris Kalkman Trondheim, 14.05.2012

Abstract

The current study is a master thesis in Early Childhood Education and Care at NTNU's Department of Education in Norway. This thesis has been written during the spring of 2012. In this master thesis I investigated how early childhood education and care provision (ECEC) practitioners and other related professionals interpret and work with children's fundamental right of expression with regard to newly arrived young refugee children between the ages two to six years. Children's right for expression is incorporated, as one of the four core principles, in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). An empirical investigation was carried out in order to uncover challenging aspects in the collaboration between ECEC provision and newly arrived refugee families with regard to safeguarding and promoting children's right for expression. In all, 12 respondents were interviewed. These were all professionals working directly or indirectly for or towards the fulfilment of the refugee family's needs and rights. According to the respondents, practitioners and other professionals can at times loose sight on the fact that young accompanied refugee children are not mere "attachments" to their parents but are people with their own rights and needs. There was recognised that also the young children have the right to ask questions and the right to give and receive information on matters concerning their own lives. However, how this is done in daily situations can be understood as being challenging. A number of challenges were identified in relation to how practitioners work with the right of expression for the youngest of refugee children. As a result of a weakened form of collaboration, children's right for expression is difficult to support in a sufficient manner with respect to young newly arrived refugee children. Results from this study showed that especially communication, both verbal and non-verbal, between ECEC provision and newly arrived refugee families is complicated. Challenges in communication were found to exist between the following groups: ECEC practitioners - newly arrived refugee children/families and ECEC practitioners - sub-systems (professional actors and instances surrounding the families).

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2009 there were approximately 16 million refugees worldwide and 26 million internally displaced persons uprooted within their countries (UNHCR, 2009). By the end of 2010 the number of internally displaced persons and refugees had risen to approximately 43.7 million, *31* % of these were children (UNHCR, 2010). Only a small percentage of the refugees find their way to Norway. From those arriving in Norway many are children. Statistics reveal that children between the ages 0-5 are the largest group of refugee children living in Norwegian reception centres for asylum seekers. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI)[1] reports that in November 2011 there were 15906 people living in Norwegian reception centres. Of these, 24,5 % are children. And 50 % of these children are between the ages of 0-5 years (UDI, 2011). Even though we know that 50 % of all refugee children living in Norwegian reception centres are below the age of five, little research has focused on this group.

A reception centre for asylum seeking refugees is generally described as being a negative environment for children as the daily on goings are determined and arranged on adults' premises. For refugees living in reception centres the following risk factors have been identified: insufficient economy, temporariness, low housing standards, a lack of structure in daily life and surroundings with a high level of linguistic diversity (Justisdepartementet, 2011; Seeberg, 2009). On the contrary, an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) surrounding such as a kindergarten, is generally described as being a positive environment for refugee children as activities and routines should be arranged on the children's premises. ECEC provision is regarded as a social arena that contributes to strengthening of children's sense of belonging through socially interacting with other peers and friends. More research on ECEC provision and their pedagogical programs has been requested, both nationally and internationally (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010; Hurley, Medici, Stewart, & Cohen, 2011; Lidén, Seeberg, & Engebrigtsen, 2011). Within research regarding ECEC provision and services for young refugee children there are still many areas left untouched and many questions raised. The current study will examine how challenges between ECEC practitioners and refugee children affect the upholding of children's fundamental rights. Special attention will be given to challenges in relation to Article 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

[1] Utlendingsdirektoratet (UDI)

All children in Norway are protected under CRC. The Convention was established on the notion that children, all over the world, should be protected by international law (OUNHCHR, 2012). Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC deal with children's rights to express themselves. Children's right to freedom of expression is one of the four core principles on which the convention is build. CRC's other three core principles are: non-discrimination; commitment to the best interest of the child; and the right to life, survival and development (UNICEF, 2012).

In accordance to Article 12 of CRC, State Parties shall assure to children who are capable of forming their own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. The views of the children must be given due weight in accordance with the their age and maturity. Children shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any legal and administrative proceedings concerning them. Norwegian law states that children who have reached the age of seven, or those who are capable of forming opinions of their own, must be informed and given the opportunity to express themselves before decisions are made in their legal cases (Justisdepartementet, 2003)[2]. Article 13 of CRC states that the child shall have the right to freedom of expression. This right includes the freedom to seek, receive and pass on information and ideas, regardless of barriers. This can be done either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice (OUNHCHR, 2012).

The Norwegian Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens from 2011 (R11)[3] states that children shall have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities. Meaning that, children in kindergartens shall have the right, not possibility, to express their personal views on the daily activities and routines of the kindergarten. Children shall regularly be given the opportunity to participate in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten, children's assessments shall be given due weight according to their age and maturity (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2005)[4].

The CRC emphasises that all children are entitled to express their personal views on all matters affecting them. There is made no discrimination between legal and personal matters. Children's views and opinions should therefore always be taken into consideration. Children in Norway are in accordance to CRC, the Children Act, the Kindergarten Act and R11 entitled to express personal views and have the possibility to be heard and listened to in order to

[2] LOV-2003-08-01-86
[3] Rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver, 2011 (R11)
[4] Kunnskapsdepartementet (Ministry of Education and Research)

influence aspects relating to their lives. However, the degree of participation will be "judged" after certain standards. These standards depend on the child's age and level of maturity (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011). R11 states that it is important that children experience a sense of belonging and are included within a community. For this children need to feel that they can "exert self-determination and express their own intentions" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011, p.15). Furthermore, it is acknowledged in R11, that children express themselves in a multitude of ways.

> "The youngest children express their views through body positions, mimicry and other forms of emotional expression. Children's emotional expressions shall be taken seriously. Children must be helped to wonder about things and to ask questions. They must be actively encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions, and must receive acknowledgement for doing so" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011, p.15)

Kindergartens must therefore develop pedagogical projects designed on the premises of the individual child that promote and support the children's unique form of expression.
Practitioners are encouraged to listen and make attempt towards interpreting children's body language. They are expected to be observant in relation to children's *actions*, *aesthetic expressions* and eventually their *verbal communications* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011). Practitioners should therefore be susceptive to alternative perspectives, and through their actions show respect for the subjective intentions and realms of experience that the children introduce to the kindergarten.

> "Children's right to freedom of expression shall be ensured, and their participation must be integrated in work on the content of kindergartens. Taking children's participation seriously requires good communication between children and staff, and between staff and parents"(Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011, p.15)

Working with children's right of expression and participation can be time consuming. Active listening and dialogue require time and space. Pedagogical activities must therefore be designed and carried out in such manners that there is space for *exploring* needs and thoughts together with the children. "This can encourage children to influence their own lives at their kindergarten" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011, p.15). Norwegian legislation states that a child who has reached the lawful age of seven, or children who are capable of forming opinions of their own, must be informed and given the opportunity to express themselves before decisions are made. However, in R11 children below the age of six are acknowledged as competent and able to make decisions. They are as such recognised as experts with subjective views regarding their personal environments and lives. Within the context of R11 there is accepted that children can express themselves through a multitude of expressive

means, as also stated in CRC. To sum up, children's social and legal statuses are not coherent. On the one hand children are viewed as mature enough to participate and give opinions regarding their life in the kindergarten. On the other hand however, children below the age of seven are considered too immature to have an opinion about their own lives.

Within contemporary childhood research young children below the age of six are recognised and confirmed as experts on their own lives and thus should be included within research projects as active participators or co-researchers (Clark & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). Childhood research gives great emphasis to empowering children in such ways they have a genuine possibility of influencing certain parts of their lives. Young children possess the ability to reflect critically on their direct surroundings and have opinions on what is supposedly considered to be good or bad for them. Flyvbjerg (2006) states that:

> "[…] people are experts in a number of everyday social, technical, and intellectual skills […]. Common to all experts, however, is that they operate on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases in their areas of expertise. Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity […]" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.222)

However, bringing forth the expertise of children requires that they are recognised and heard as competent subjects. One of the central thoughts within CRC is to bring forth the voices of the children themselves. The thought originates from two perspectives. The first is related to the need to protect children with regard to their *vulnerability*, and the other is related to the perspective of *empowering* children and give them possibilities to influence matters of personal interest regarding their own lives (Sandberg, 2008). Empowering children can be done by critically examining how certain aspects or praxis *strengthen* or *reduce* children's vulnerability. The term Sense of Coherence was developed by Aaron Antonovsky. Sense of Coherence is a social-psychological state "which is partly determined of the individual's position within the social structure and partly from experiences with health and illness" (Helmen-Borge, 2003, p.17). Per Borgå extended the theory by adding two additional aspects (Berg, 2012) that are considered to be important for an elevated or strengthened sense of coherence. The five aspects of "a sense of coherence" are: manageability, meaningfulness, comprehensibility, social network and employment. These aspects are briefly outlined below.

- *Manageability* is related to finding solutions considered to be challenging
- *Meaningfulness* is related to how one feels that his or her daily life is meaningful and a source for personal content

- *Comprehensibility* is related to how someone understands his or her own feelings in relation to everyday events
- *A social network* and *employment* are within the context of the current study understood as having social interactions and activities in which children can use personal attributes and resources which enhance a child's self-worth and social capital and contribute to forming personal identity. These five aspects combined are significant if young refugee children are to be understood and supported within an ECEC setting.

1.2 A Short Presentation of Asylum Seeking Refugee Children's Situation in Norway

Norway's supplementing report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child from 2009 describes the situation for refugee children in reception centres as being in many ways unbearable (FFB, 2009). In the report there is described that many reception centres lack competence amongst the staff to work with children who are and have been in traumatic situations. In addition it is stated that the Child Welfare Services should follow up refugee children in Norway closely and on a regular base. However, the quality and regularity varies to a high degree. Furthermore the Children's and Young People's Psychiatric Out-Patient Clinic (BUP)[5] announced that they have long waiting lists and do not have the capacity to offer sufficient counselling to those in need of special treatment (ibid.). The committee in charge of writing the report underlines the need for drastic improvements regarding the situation for refugee children in Norway.

In December 2011 the UN General Assembly approved a third optional protocol for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This protocol allows for children to submit a direct complaint to the UN regarding specific violations of their rights protected under the Convention and its first two optional protocols (OHCHR, 2012). Save the Children Norway described this as being the most important event since the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Magnussen, 2012). Norway has not signed the protocol even though Save the Children Norway and UNICEF have written a letter pleading the Norwegian government to sign the new protocol. The Norwegian government has replied that the protocol has not been signed because of concern that it will narrow down the national democratic latitude (Sommerseth, 2012). With regard to this, the Commissioner for Children in Norway Reidar Hjermann responded that "Children in Norway have many rights on paper, but when we receive critical responses from the UN regarding matters which should be

[5] Barne- og Ungdomspsykiatrisk Poliklinikk (BUP)

improved it is the obligation of the politicians to follow them up" (Barneombudet, 2012). This year, 2012, Norway signed a treaty with Ethiopia which opens up for forced return for Ethiopians residing illegally in Norway. The Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) fears that illegal refugees who will be sent back will end up in prison or in the worst case end up dead. Amongst the refugees in danger of forced return are children who have lived in Norway more than six years. NOAS therefore demands that cases concerning children who have lived in Norway for more than three years without legal grounds should not be handled or acted upon before the release of the next white paper "Barn på flukt" about asylum seeking children (NRK, 2012).

In an interview the Norwegian Minister of Justice and Public Security, Grete Faremo, was asked to comment on the fact that parents are abandoning their children because they fear what will happen to them when they are forcefully returned to their home country. The minister responded by stating that there rests a great responsibility on both parents and the Norwegian government but that it is important that asylum seekers who come to Norway know what is being expected of them and what they can expect in return. Faremo further states that parents should not think that children can be pushed ahead as a means to safeguard their own and their family's situation (Brandvold, 2012). Aina Basilier Vaage has written a PhD on the mental health situation of Vietnamese refugees. When Vaage's opinion was asked regarding the abandoning of children by parents, she replied that parents who are faced with deportation and risk being persecuted have no premise for taking care of their children. The stress and fear is too much of a burden for the parents. Parents contemplating the thought of abandoning their children, she says, are insightful (Brandvold, 2012).

In Norway lives a young boy named Nathan. He will turn seven in May this year. His parents fled from Ethiopia ten years ago and they have lived in Norway ever since. Nathan was born in Norway. He likes to play football, and is a fan of the football club Brann in Bergen. He goes to school, and I presume, has many friends there. His parents work, pay tax and are no threat for society. On March 14th 2012 the treaty with Ethiopia will go in affect. The current asylum politics in Norway concludes that the family will be deported. This has raised much public debate about the deportation of refugee children who have lived in Norway for several years and have strong ties to the country. In an interview the Minister of Justice and Public Security stated that: "I wish to hold the parents responsible for putting the child's life on hold" (Omdal, 2012). A critical question to be asked is then: what does it mean to put a life on hold? Nathan lives and plays, has friends and hopefully is enjoying his childhood. Is this a life

on hold? It is crucial to underpin the fact that as long as Norway does not sign the additional third protocol for the CRC, there will exist no proper means for refugee children such as Nathan to make a direct complaint on violation of their fundamental rights to the UN. As long as the third protocol is not ratified, it could be interpreted as being a direct violation with regards to Article 12 of the CRC.

1.3 ECEC Provision for Refugee Children in Norway

The youngest of refugee children seeking asylum in Norway do not have the right to ECEC provision (Justisdepartementet, 2011; Lidén, et al., 2011). It is however regarded as being important that young refugee children participate in a social environment that can help them to receive a more normalised daily routine. This is considered to be important for both the children and their parents (Lidén, et al., 2011). An ECEC centre such as a kindergarten can provide access to pedagogical programmes which in return can give support to refugee children where needed (Justisdepartementet, 2011). ECEC is considered to be important in relation to enhancing children's personal self-worth and resilience. Even though this view is widely accepted and supported by politicians, researchers and early childhood practitioners, the notion for the right to ECEC provision for asylum seeking refugee children is still not ratified by the government of Norway (Justisdepartmentet, 2012). Parents can privately seek for ECEC provision, however for the majority of refugee parents this is impossible because the economical support that they receive is minimal and mostly already insufficient. This possibility is therefore regarded as being an unrealistic option (Lauritsen, 2012).

However the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) states in their guidelines regarding children in reception centres, that all children from the age of two to six are entitled to receive *adapted* services for at least three hours a day. Services will be offered from Monday to Friday. These services can be organised in different manners depending on the child's age, existing access to ECEC services and the *children's base* located on the premises of the reception centre (UDI, 2012). The services provided should:

- contribute to a varied and meaningful weekday for children in a reception centre
- ensure that children in a reception centre can make use of an offered service during the time that the parents/caregivers participate in mandatory programs such as language courses, information program's and/or qualifying measurements

When the children reach the age of four, the municipal will receive a contribution from the state allowing children to obtain a fulltime place in a local ECEC centre/kindergarten. For

children between the ages of two and four, this offer can be given at the children's base at the reception centres. For those under the age of two, the reception centre must ensure that there are planned activities while the parents/caregivers are engaged with mandatory measurements (UDI, 2012).

However, children's bases have received several critiques on whether or not they provide adequate pedagogical programs for the children. As many children and their parents are traumatised there should be sufficient and well-trained staff. Staff should be present during the time the bases are open. This however is proven to be difficult. Seeberg et al. (2009) examined the overall situation for young children who are living in reception centres and are making use of the provided services. The report describes how life for young refugee children is chaotic and filled with tension. There was no indication of formal structure and children seemed to have difficulties concentrating due to chaos surrounding them. Few activities were undertaken with the children and the children spend most of their time inside (Seeberg, 2009). In both reception centres the children's base was the only room that was designated for them in particular. Here the children had access to toys and forming materials. This room was however most of the time inaccessible to the children (Bagge, Enger, & Seeberg, 2009). Within conditions such as these it is hard to imagine that there can be offered a pedagogical program to children. This seemingly has also been noticed by UDI and increasingly more allocated resources are used to give children a place within a kindergarten instead of offering the families a place in a children's base (Lidén, et al., 2011).

Most ECEC providers/kindergartens that have experience with refugee children have fixed routines and, a predictable structure and qualified staff. Within such kindergartens practitioners have extensive experience and competence when it concerns the needs of refugee families and their children. Lauritsen (2012) describes a well functioning pedagogical program for refugee children as a program that has practitioners with the necessary competence, both on early childhood matters as well as on more specific issues related to refugees, so that they can support a group consisting of linguistic and cultural diversity. This could be by employing staff with different competencies such as "cultural variation, language and communication, first language, children with more than one language and the use of an interpreter" (Lauritsen, 2012, p. 176). In addition to this, Lauritsen highlights the importance of practitioners having an understanding of the refugee families' situation while they are living in a reception centre.

The white paper *In the Waiting room of the Welfare State* [6] regarding the state of asylum seeking refugees in Norway, clearly stated that the majority of the committee in charge of writing the paper supports the notion that young refugee children must receive the right to ECEC just like any other child in Norway (Justisdepartementet, 2011). Even though this notion has been supported in public statements by a long list of organisations, political parties, institutes and researchers the proposal is still not ratified until present date (Justisdepartmentet, 2012).

1.4 Purpose and Objectives

In Norway all children are protected under the CRC. For refugee children however, maintaining certain rights can be challenging. Challenges can especially be noticeable during the first phase in which the children and their families do not speak Norwegian. The purpose of the current study is therefore to investigate how ECEC practitioners and other related professionals interpret and work with children's fundamental right of expression with regard to newly arrived young refugee children between the ages two to six years.

Given the limited research in this area, the current study aims to contribute to filling an existing knowledge gap about how children's fundamental right of expression is promoted and supported in relation to young refugee children. The study should be relevant for ECEC practitioners, the childhood research community, policy-makers and NGO's. Hopefully, refugee children and their families will eventually profit from investigations like this.

[6] NOU 2011:10 I velferdsstatens venterom. Mottakstilbudet for asylsøkere.

2. Related Research

2.1 Supporting Children's Expressions

One of the more central challenges for migrants, refugees and practitioners in ECEC provision is that of linguistic diversity. Children use numerous communicative styles for expressing themselves. This can be through talking, drawing, singing, play, theatre and so forth. The use of aesthetics has been widely adopted within kindergartens in Norway and has been highly influenced by the philosophy used in Reggio Emilia and the theory of the hundred languages (Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, 2010). Aesthetics has received a dominant place within the Framework plan for Kindergartens in Norway and is a part of the obligatory areas to be used by ECEC providers and practitioners. The use of aesthetics is also widely used as a form for *therapy* for specific groups of children considered to be vulnerable and traumatised; such as refugee children and children living in foster care (Berg, 2009; Coholic, Lougheed, & Cadell, 2009). Here, aesthetics has been studied as a form for therapy to help the children cope with trauma by giving them access to memories of traumatic events in a safe and controlled environment. In this way children can re-examine these experiences and learn to transform them into a manageable memory which can be controlled (Coholic, et al., 2009).

McArdle (2007) sees the potential of aesthetics not only as a useful form for therapy, but also as a powerful *language.* A language which enables young refugee children to have "the means to engage, build identity, and tell their stories […] which can include language, culture, and social capital" (McArdle, Spina, & Nerida, 2007, p. 51). Aesthetics in this context is seen to be a highly useful means for communication, which can help to empower children into overcoming existing language barriers. Participants and observers within the research project of McArdle et al., stated that the children who participated:

> "[…] did not depict traumatic scenes of war, killing and anxiety. Instead, they welcomed the opportunity to engage with the processes of art-making, and, through our observations of both their processes and final products, we saw them communicating with each other and us" (McArdle, et al., 2007, p.51)

Within Scandinavian ECEC *play* is seen as an aesthetic expression and is an important part of the curriculum. Within the field of ECEC there has until present been a culture free approach towards recognising the significance of play and how it can help us to better understand both the child's culture, and the child itself (Kirova, 2010). Re-examining existing understandings of refugee children through aesthetic expressions such as play could help contest rigor understandings of the child and its home culture. Through play refugee children might exhibit

specific cultural differences. Such as how they might eat, prepare food and play different games. When practitioners are trying to expand or reassess their understandings of the children represented within their group they should be sensitive towards these differences. Reassessing rigor knowledge and perceived understandings is necessary because it is still common within some branches of developmental psychology that *differences* are viewed as being "malfunctions" in need of correction (Lassen, 2008). Within a social constructivist approach however, these differences are seen as the cultivating ground in which new possible understandings and knowledge are constructed by entering a dialectic and dialogical relationship. Play in this context should therefore be understood as a means for cultural and aesthetic expression with its own language, symbols and culture. Constructing a complete or holistic understanding of a child should therefore be done through examining a child's expression through different perspectives in order to gain a broadened understanding on the child and its surroundings. This can however only be achieved if we identify and recognise children's unique cultural milieu in which their play is embedded and derived from (Kirova, 2010).

Exploring cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity through aesthetic approaches is still found somewhat challenging. Grieshaber & Miller refer to a study done by Nieto & Bode (2008) that draws attention to exploring differences and similarities between children and practitioners. Nieto & Bode propose to examine and discuss personal characteristics with the children attending the group. Exploring characteristics like skin colour, language, accent, hair texture and other physical and social distinctions between the children should become part of the daily curriculum. Exploring differences creates improved possibilities for understanding and helps eliminating existing *myths* and *biases.* This can however only be done through critically examining the program within ECEC provision and use pedagogies to help engage children through inclusive strategies (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010). Even though the next citation is directly referring to the primary schooling system it is not hard to draw clear lines towards required ECEC developments as mentioned above.

> Inclusion should not be viewed as an add-on to a conventional school. It must be viewed as intrinsic to the mission, philosophy, values, practices and activities of the school […] Full inclusion must be embedded deeply in the very foundation of the school, in its missions, its belief system and its daily activities, rather than an appendage that is added on to a conventional school (Levin cited in Peters, 2004, p.9)

2.2 Cooperation

A large body of research within ECEC has been committed to the importance of a healthy relationship between parents and providers of ECEC. The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2011) states that the kindergarten shall plan and develop its pedagogical program and activities in *collaboration* and *understanding* with the children and their families. Within the framework, understanding and collaboration are defined as:

> "Understanding means mutual respect and recognition of each other's responsibilities and tasks in relation to the child. Collaboration means regular contact during which information and reasoning is exchanged. Questions relating to the wellbeing and development of children shall be discussed, along with the pedagogical activities of the kindergarten" (*Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*, 2011, p.16)

In 2012 the white paper *In the Best Interest of the Child*[7] was published which, is a detailed report surrounding the state of ECEC provision in Norway. The significance of participation of both the children and their parents is stressed and *cooperation* with the child and its parents is emphasised as one of the most important aspects within ECEC provision in Norway. Daily contact and dialogue between parents and the kindergartens staff is considered to be the most important form of cooperation (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012, p.194). It is therefore noteworthy that, within such a detailed report, ECEC provision for refugee children is not addressed.

This concern is confirmed by Grieshaber & Miller (2010) who argue that in ECEC theory and practice there is an emphasis on "parents as partners" highlighting the importance of *relation*, *understanding* and *dialogue*, but that many early childhood programs that are specifically aimed towards and for refugees rarely incorporate the values, beliefs, expectations and concerns of the parents regarding what they feel is important for their children's upbringing. Consequently it might appear as if immigrant or refugee families are less concerned with their children's ECEC provision (ibid.). It is however quite possible that this sometimes is the case for instance if they have no prior experiences with ECEC provision for their children or if they are unfamiliar with the *style* of interaction between child, pedagogue and parent. Another reason could be that many parents lack prior experiences with formal education. This could possibly lead to the fact that the "*teachers"* are seen as an authority and experts on educating their children. This could in turn could leave the parents with a sense of that they are not wanted or their views not appreciated (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010). So it is important to reflect on the fact that even though illiteracy rates are high amongst refugee families this does

[7] NOU 2012:1 Til barnas beste – Ny lovgivning for barnehagene

not mean that parents lack an inherent notion of what they perceive as being good for their children. Parents should therefore be seen as resources capable of contributing with valuable aspects and views that could be highly valuable if ECEC provision for refugee families is reassessed. Such bias as described here can lead to the point that parents can experience, not only in mainstream society, but also within ECEC settings, forms for racism and discrimination. In order to identify, confront and discard racist and discriminatory ideas and attitudes it is important to work consciously against existing personal and culturally biases within ECEC provision. This "[…] means understanding how identity, difference, power and privilege are all interconnected within the socio-political context of society and that decisions about education are never neutral" (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010, p.178).

2.3 Identified Suggestions for Future Research

Grieshaber & Miller (2010) provide suggestions for researchers exploring the field of ECEC for immigrant or refugee families. They state that there is a need for more active participation from refugee children and their parents within research. They also suggest that there should be more focus on the youngest of refugees within ECEC provision and that additional focus should be on professional development that supports early childhood practitioners in exploring cultural diversity. Pedagogical projects should be analysed and revised in accordance to local standards, needs and factors that have proven to be lacking or that have proven to be positive. Both areas should be discussed and researched within local ECEC settings. For policy makers Grieshaber & Miller suggest that they:

> "involve, advocate and endorse the involvement of migrant and refugee parents in decision-making at all levels about the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, as well as in decisions that involve their children" (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010, p.183)

Further suggestions are that policy makers should acknowledge real life experiences of the users of ECEC and make efforts into uncovering cultural biases within local ECEC provision. Involvement of refugee families in local and political contexts is therefore not only desired but also needed. Moreover, it should be recognised that immigrant and refugee families are not a homogeneous group and that identification of "examples of individual and institutional racism could provide suggestions for non-racist practices" (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010, p.184).

Practitioners should have special focus on "the strengths and abilities that children and families bring so that culture is viewed as a resource rather than a deficit" (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010, p. 184). Differences and similarities can be explored as a daily practice. A

priority within ECEC should be to recognise, together with the children, that there is no "wrong" or "right", "good" or "bad" but that all people are different. Working with this requires a variety of resources and approaches that can help to serve practitioners and children at all ages and all levels of understanding. Professional progress is needed within the sector and can only be reached through collaboration and by creating forums for professional and public debate.

2.4 Critique of Reviewed Literature

There is limited research specifically related to the field of interest. Grieshaber & Miller (2010) have reviewed existing literature and their work is considered a valuable resource within the current study. A critique is however that the reviewed literature predominantly comes from North America and Australia. Even though a growing body of literature is being written in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia it was found difficult to find literature directly related to ECEC provision and refugee children. This does not mean however that it does not exist, but it was difficult to find. Furthermore in the found literature young refugee children's voices are rarely included. This is rather surprising as many studies have been written from a social justice or critical perspective. A further critique is related to the fact that the majority of ECEC studies related to young refugee children have had focus on families who are in their resettlement period within their new respective countries and municipals. Within the current study however, focus is on children and families who still await approval for resettlement and have not yet or not received asylum.

3. Methodology

This chapter gives an account of the methods and approaches that were applied in order to explore the research question of the current study.

3.1 Qualitative Research and Critical theory

Qualitative research consists of various methods and approaches such as case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods and interpretative analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.2). The common basis for qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach. The qualitative researcher looks at how people perceive their surroundings and tries to understand phenomena through the perspective of people's assigned meaning and values. In qualitative research, the reflexivity of the researcher is accepted as an explicit part of knowledge (Flick, 2006). This means that the subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process (Flick, 2006).

The current study belongs to the philosophical paradigm of critical theory. Critical research can be understood best in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name "critical" must not be understood as being "negative" but rather be connected to making an attempt towards confronting the injustice existing within a society. Whereas traditional researchers believe in neutrality and objectivity, critical researchers frequently announce their fellowship to those suppressed. There are many critical traditions. Inspiration for these traditions has come from scholars such as: Marx, Kant, Hegel, Weber, the Frankfurt school theorists, continental theorists such as Foucault, Habermas, and Derrida, Latin American thinkers such as Freire, French feminists such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous, or Russian sociolinguists such as Bakhtin and Vygotsky. The current study has found inspiration from the works of Paulo Freire and Emmanuel Lévinas.

A critical theory approach is appropriate for the current study because the aim of this research is not to test a hypothesis and generalise findings, but to uncover and map how Early Childhood Education and Care services in Norway promote and support young refugee's fundamental right of expression. Within critical pedagogies the aim is to move from "what is" to "what could be" (Jaramillo & McLaren, 2008). Through critically examining existing practices and relationships between practitioners and children it is possible to explore questions relating to what it means to be human, how to create a moral environment, and investigate what role ECEC provision and early childhood research can play in the pursuit of

a more humane world for young refugee children.

3.2 Assumptions in Critical Theory Paradigms

A paradigm can be understood as being a worldview concerning research practice, based on ethics, ontology, epistemology and methodology. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), critical theory paradigms are based on the paradigmatic assumptions presented in table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of paradigm terms and assumptions in critical theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005)

Paradigm term	Question asked in paradigm term	Critical theory assumptions
Ethics	How will I be as a moral person in the world?	Intrinsic – moral tilt toward revelation
Ontology	What is reality? What is being human?	Historical realism - virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallised over time
Epistemology	How do I know the world?	Transactional/subjectivist: value-mediated findings
Methodology	What is the best means for acquiring knowledge?	Both dialogic and dialectical

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) describe a criticalist as: "a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions" (ibid. p.304). The following assumptions serve as guidance towards uncovering how injustices are established and maintained in a specific society:

- All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted
- Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription
- The relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption
- Language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness)
- Certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable
- Oppression has many faces and focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g. class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them
- Main stream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of class, race, and gender oppression

3.3 Sampling

The original intention of the current study was to include young refugee children who live in reception centres as respondents. This was planned to do by involving the children as active participants and treating them as *experts* of their own lives. Refugee families are considered to be a vulnerable group. This means that comprehensive ethical considerations need to be evaluated by a number of authorities such as the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). A draft of the project proposal was sent to NESH for ethical evaluation. Their respond was that young refugee children seeking asylum are an extremely vulnerable group, however "even though this group is extremely vulnerable, research is needed. In order to justify risks that could come with this type of research it is necessary to contemplate whether or not data can be obtained through other channels". In January 2012 the project had still not received confirmation from UDI. Therefore, the decision was made to follow up the advice given by NESH and limit the scope of the study to concentrate on young refugee children's possibility for expression by including respondents who work with them.

The main criterion for selecting respondents was that they are professionally involved with the lives of accompanied young refugee children who live in reception centres. Respondents were strategically selected based on their professional contact with the children. This contact, between children and professionals, ranged from being direct to more indirect. According to Bronfenbrenner's original version of the Ecological systems theory, the following four types of inter-linked layers of systems surrounding a person can be distinguished: micro, meso, exo and macro (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner later developed the theory to include a fifth system called the chrono system (Kloep & Hendry, 2003). Figure 1 is adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory and indicates how the respondents of the current study relate to the young refugee child in relational distance. Bronfenbrenner's argument was that if a weakened form of collaboration developed either between or within the inter-linked layers, then this would have an effect on the child.

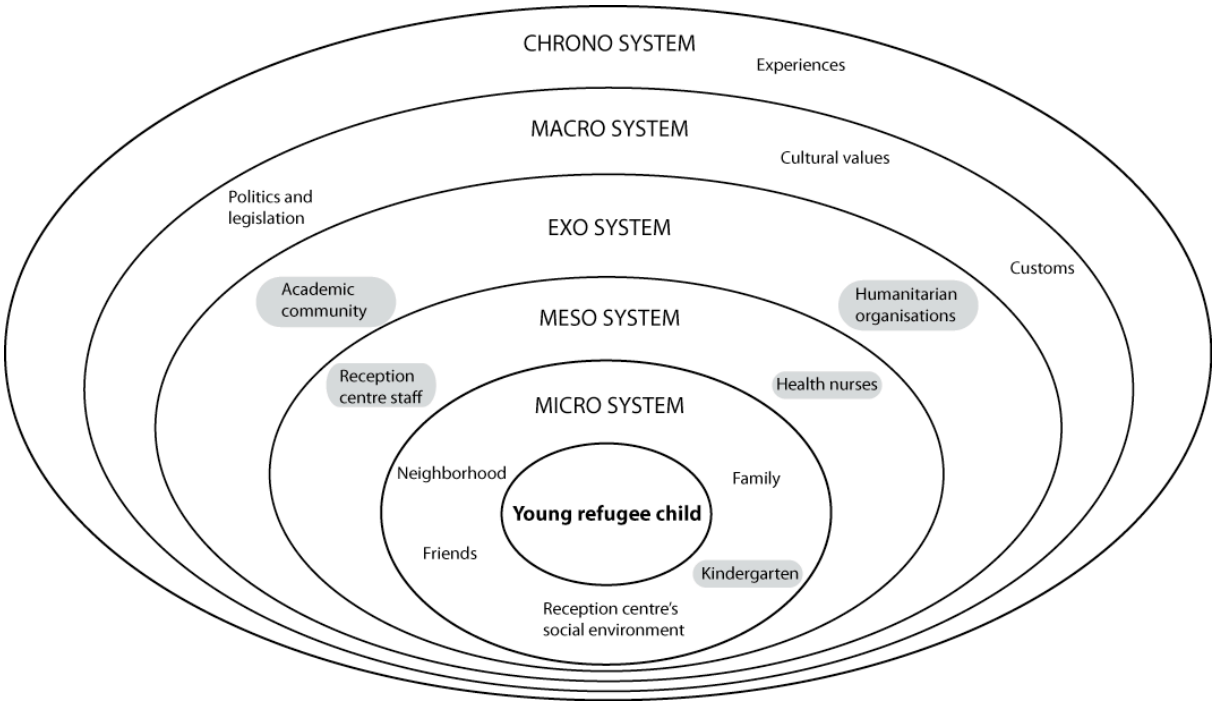

Figure 1. Refugee child's Ecological Systems adapted from Bronfenbrenner's model (1979). The respondents represent three different levels as shown by the grey markings.

A total of 12 respondents were included in the study. An overview of the respondents' affiliation and work profile is presented in table 2. A list of the respondents' demographics is also presented below.

Table 2. The respondents of the study

Affiliation of respondents	Number of respondents	Interview form	Work profile of the respondents
Reception centre for asylum seeking refugees	3	1 group interview	The respondents were the leading supervisor of the reception centre and two social consultants of whom one is directly responsible for children.
Kindergartens	3	3 individual interviews	All respondents work in kindergartens with different structures. All have extensive experience in working with young refugee children and their families.
Humanitarian organisation: Save the Children Norway	3	1 group interview, 1 individual interview	Two of the respondents work with safeguarding the rights of children. The third respondent previously worked as a volunteer with refugee children.
Academic community	1	1 individual interview	The respondent is an established researcher in the field of refugees and refugee politics in Norway.
Public health centre for refugees	2	1 group interview	The two respondents are both public health nurses with specialisation in health matters in relation to young refugee children.

Demographics of the respondents:
- Gender: 11 female, 1 male
- Age: between 25-60 years old
- Formal education: high school or university degrees ranging from bachelor to PhD
- Nationality: 10 Norwegians, 2 immigrants

3.4 Semi Structured Interview

In critical research, knowledge is constructed through dialogic and dialectical interactions. The current study follows a dialogical approach. As data collection method, both questionnaires and interviews are appropriate to use when the overall interest lies in understanding why people behave as they do and what meaning people assert to their behaviours. The advantage of interviews over questionnaires however, is their adaptability in terms of allowing researchers to follow up a respondent's answer (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Semi-structured interviews have the potential to let respondents and the interviewer explore personal accounts and feelings. Here, the researcher asks a series of structured open questions and probes more deeply into respondents' beliefs, attitudes and inner experiences by following up their answers (Gall, et al., 2003). The semi-structured interview is made up of different types of questions and is "complemented by ideas about how to structure its contents during data collection" (Flick, 2006, p.164). As within all interviews it is the role of the interviewer to let the interviewee come forth and present their experiences and knowledge.

Eight qualitative interviews were conducted on eight separate occasions. Five interviews were done individually with one respondent at a time. The remaining three interviews were conducted with two or more respondents present. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate how professionals from different fields understand and experience the circumstances of young newly arrived refugees. Through the use of a dialogical approach the intention was to learn more about the experiences of the respondents and listen to their opinions. By doing this it was possible to develop a broadened understanding of the social surroundings and lives of the children they work with.

3.5 Interview Guide

The interview guide included the following eight themes:
- Reception centre as a micro community
- The social environment in reception centres
- The role of the families of the children living at reception centres
- Children's personal interests
- Friendship between children and adults who live at reception centres

- Loneliness
- The importance of practitioners for children who live at reception centres
- The role of the volunteer visitors
- The importance of school/kindergarten for children who live at reception centres

The themes were inspired by the work of Lidén et al. (2011) where a list of suggestions for future research includes 1) newly arrived refugee children and the pedagogical programs offered in current ECEC provision and 2) refugee children's management of challenging family and childhood conditions. The underlying thought of the current study is that in order to create *best practice* a proper flow of information is required. Best practice within the current study is related to *expression* and *cooperation*, both regarded as decisive factors within ECEC provision. Linguistic barriers can however cause problems when information is being exchanged between practitioners and children/parents. In order to explore how best practice relates to a proper flow of information, I chose to use themes connected to every-day aspects within refugee children's lives. By focusing on every-day aspects, it was possible to investigate if and how ECEC practitioners are making sufficient efforts towards creating opportunities for expression and cooperation.

3.6 The Actual Interviews

All the interviews conducted within the current study took place at the respondent's place of work. The interviews ranged from 25 to 50 minutes each and were conducted by me personally. The interviews were all conducted in Norwegian. Firstly, I presented myself and the studies aim. Next, introductory questions dealing with the respondent's background and work were asked. This introductory part of the interview gave the respondents time to get used to the interview situation as well as to being recorded. As the interview headed from the introductory part towards the main part, a good atmosphere was established and a sense of trust was developed between the respondents and me. Probing was used through silence and making confirming sounds and body language. In the final part of the interview, the respondents were asked to reflect over the entire interview. This gave them a chance to mention moments of importance that possibly had not been taken up or that they wished to emphasise more. After completion of the interviews, gratitude was expressed by thanking them for participating.

3.7 Transcribing and Analysing Data

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, meaning that all sound made by participants was captured in text including moments of silence, coughing and laughing. I transcribed all the interviews in Norwegian. Later, significant data was translated to English. The data analysis was done through qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis uses categories derived from theoretical models. In other words, categories are brought to the empirical material and not necessarily developed from it (Flick, 2006). Qualitative content analysis consists of a number of steps such as defining analytical units that are interpreted with respect to the research question. The procedure for analysing involves reducing the data in three stages. These stages are known as 1) summarising content analysis; 2) explicative content analysis and 3) structuring content analysis (Flick, 2006).

Table 3. Stages of analysis

Stages of analysis	**Analytical actions**
Stage 1 *Summarising content analysis*	Respondents were divided into three groups in relation to their professional contact with the children (see Figure 1) Moments of importance were highlighted. Similar statements were then bundled.
Stage 2 *Explicative content analysis*	Single outstanding features in the data were sought after in order to describe them more in-depth. In addition, relevant literature was reviewed.
Stage 3 *Structuring content analysis*	Three categories for coding were formulated: 1) The Reception Centre as a Home; 2) ECEC Provision and 3) Possibility for Expression

3.8 Triangulation

Triangulation is a concept that is used to represent the combination of different methods and theoretical perspectives in relation to exploration of a phenomenon (Flick, 2006). Denzin (1989) distinguishes the following four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. In this section, these types of triangulation are discussed in relation to the current study.

Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources and a distinction is made between time, space and persons. Following the approach of Denzin (1989), the current study leans on investigation through various data sources. The studies aim is to find out how ECEC provision promotes children's right for expression with respect to newly arrived refugee children. This was done through interviewing 12 professional actors who work on a daily base either with or in relation to asylum seeking refugees (see figure 1). The current study is thus based on the thoughts of a group of respondents with extensive experience working with

refugee children. The study would however have benefitted greatly by including young refugee children as active participators.

Investigator triangulation is used through employing different interviewers or observers in order to achieve a broadened understanding of interpretation and understanding of a phenomenon. In the current study the interviews were conducted by myself.

Theory triangulation concerns approaching data from multiple theoretical perspectives. The current study has included multiple perspectives in terms of the various professional positions of the respondents. In addition, a broad theoretical base was used by employing research from several disciplines.

Within methodological triangulation there is differentiated between within-method and between-method triangulation. Within-method triangulation refers to adjustments of the actual method employed, such as using different interview guides. Between-method triangulation refers to employment of different types of methods. In the current study semi-structured interviews were used, and this method allows for the respondent to come with personal experiences and knowledge. As the current study is based on semi-structured interviews for collecting empirical data there is recognised that an observational study, as a supplement, would have been beneficial in terms of between-method triangulation.

3.9 Ethics

Information surrounding the studies intention and nature was sent in advance to parties of interest. The respondents were contacted after approval from their leading supervisors. Before every interview the respondents were asked for permission on whether or not the interview could be recorded. Every respondent was ensured that he or she would be referred to anonymously and that the data recorded on sound-file would be destroyed after completion of this thesis. All interviews were conducted on a voluntarily base. The project has been approved by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD)[8].

[8] Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (NSD). The project is represented by the reference number: 29497/3/KH

4. Theoretical Framework

Critical pedagogues explore questions relating to what it means to be human, how to create a moral world, and investigate what part education and research plays in the pursuit of a more humane world for our children and ourselves (Kress, 2011). Critical pedagogy has been born from criticising mainstream oriented pedagogies which "seeks accommodation with the interest group political system […]" (Jaramillo & McLaren, 2008, p.193). Critical pedagogies aim to move from "what is" to "what could be" (ibid.). Critical pedagogy can therefore be considered as a social pedagogy and draws highly on the socialist tradition influenced by prominent scholars such as Paulo Freire, Che Guevara, and Karl Marx. *Socialism* is describe by Jaramillo & McLaren (2008) to be a process which is never finished and therefore in need for criticism. They describe critical pedagogy as perpetual pedagogy, or continual pedagogy exploring "the intersections between human agency and social, cultural, and institutional relations" (ibid. p.193). Many educators and pedagogues these days can agree that children are not empty vessels who are in need to be filled with information. It is however unclear for many in what kind of society we wish our children to grow up in (ibid.).

One of the fundaments within critical pedagogy is to intervene with classification of subjects. Through classification myths and biases are easily constructed. Critical pedagogy attempts to give *voice* to people who are considered suppressed so that they themselves can explain and show who they are, what they think and what they believe. This is attempted through creating pedagogical conditions that allow room for expression. These efforts thus seek to empower people by overthrowing existing forms for stigmatisation and prejudice. By creating these types of conditions it is possible to make an analysis of existing class consciousness which can lead to transformative action into gaining understanding of the present, how we should study it and what we can do to change it (Jaramillo & McLaren, 2008). Finding answers requires a high degree of self-reflexivity. In the case of practitioners, it is required that they grasp their subjective understandings of the local environment they live in and are a part of. In order to undergo such systematic and profound processes it is needed that they uproot existing subjective bias and create space for "true judgment" (Critchley, 2002). A person with true judgment recognises the sensible individual or the unique thing in front of her or him self. It does not seek the "application of the universal". True judgment seeks rather that what really matters; *internal coherence* (Gadamer, 2006). A link can be placed here between Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995). For Lévinas, a "relation" with the other is not a relation of objective perception or vision. A "true relation" or "original

relation" is a linguistic relation (Critchley, 2002). As I have come to understand the "true relation", one can choose to perceive the person standing in front through *objective perception:* what you see is what you get. Or one can choose to make attempts towards a "true relation" or linguistic relation. For example, within this type of relationship practitioner and child/family would make a joint effort towards establishing relationships with room for subjective exploration by questioning former understandings and letting questions lead the way forward. A key term used within Lévinas work is the word *Autrui,* meaning the human other, or the other person (Critchley, 2002). Lévinas' concept is that the other is not reducible to comprehension. If the other is to be reduced to a mere *intellectual* understanding, or seen through objective perception, then the relation itself and with the other would become a relation of knowledge or "an epistemological feature" (Critchley, 2002). Attempting to assimilate the other into our own existing patterns of thought is considered by Lévinas an act of violence. Trying to understand the other would mean to make the other into the same, something we can completely understand, or already understand. This for Lévinas is not a true relation because for Lévinas the *face*, or other, is not something you see, it is something you speak to.

> "[…] in speaking or calling or listening to the other, I am not reflecting upon the other, but I am actively and existentially engaged in a non-subsumptive relation, where I focus on the particular individual in front of me. I am not contemplating, I am conversing. It is this event of being in relation with the other as an act or a practice […] (Critchley, 2002, p.12)

Within a *face-to-face relation* Lévinas says "it is best if we do not even register the colour of someone's eyes" (Steinsholt, 2008, p.4). This means that a true encounter between Self and Other is not established through objective perception by registering the physiological characteristics, but rather through dialogue in which the other can show her or his true *self.*

For Lévinas and as in critical pedagogy, *encountering* relates to a concept of difference. But difference here, means encountering the "marvellous", "out of the ordinary" or the "unexpected", rather than the often dichotomised meanings of such adjectives in the good/bad binary (MacNaughton, 2005). In order to closely examine challenges in difference, languages of critique and resistance are needed. Languages are needed that empower those without voice to tell their stories and histories such as young refugee children. For me this means to find the person behind the stereotypes and categories. Stereotypes and bias are mostly founded on second hand experiences or copied thoughts not based within personal experiences. The American journalist Walter Lippmann (1922) first introduced the term stereotype. He used it to describe the "images within our heads" (Dahl, 2008). His main thesis behind the term

"stereotype" was that in many cases we receive our own personal understandings and interpretations of others through secondary sources as opposed to personal experiences. "Stereotypes are by those means presumptions about a social group or those being a part of it. They are often simple generalisations about people who have certain characteristics" (ibid. p.25). Stereotypes can easily be transferred, from one person to another, as being absolute "truths". Nevertheless, we are in need of having certain stereotypes within our heads. If not, we would stumble from one incident into another. My stereotype or prejudgment of a bear is that it is dangerous and I should not come near it. Some may agree, but on TV there was a scientist who lived among bears for many years, he might disagree with me. The fact is however if I do not have the knowledge and experience to go round bears I probably would get killed. I have no interest in finding this out so I won't. But if my stereotype or prejudgment of a person with refugee status is that he or she cannot expand my personal and professional horizon by sharing with me subjective understandings in relation to his or her own life, is this considered being ok? The answer depends on one's personal view. But keeping this in mind it should be recognised that there is a genuine need for giving voice to those being racialised, indigenous, gendered, and alienated in order to help understand how the self and other is historically and contingently being suppressed by stereotypes and prejudgments (Jaramillo & McLaren, 2008). Through closely examining the relation to our self and to others it is possible to investigate how constructed identities prescribe us how we should act and behave in situations and with people. If we want to understand how we can achieve a true face-to-face relation we need to start by closely examining the self through internal dialogue. Through such dialogue it is possible to make an attempt towards trying to understand how the self is constructed within certain social paradigms.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), a pedagogue and contemporary, succeeded to set in motion a movement which embraced 'true dialogue' as a form for liberating pedagogies. Freire regarded dialogue as having the potential to empower those formerly thought to be powerless. As a pedagogue he regarded the student as an active and contributing subjective agent with resources of its own. He heavily discarded the view that students were nothing more than mere objects, incomplete and meant to be obedient and expected to be passive (Freire, 1970). Even though Freire does not mention children as being "the Oppressed", his thoughts are nevertheless easily transferable in relation to young refugee children and their rights in ECEC provision. Freire has frequently been cited and used in the struggle to promote young children's fundamental needs and rights within the field of ECEC (Clark & Moss, 2005;

Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). The current study adopts the view that "every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or submerged in the "culture of silence" he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others" (Freire, 1970, p.14). Freire believed that in order to be fully human one should be able "to say his or her own word, to name the world" (Freire, 1970, p.15). Adopting a pedagogy, which is truly liberating should in accordance to Freire therefore be based on a humanist and libertarian pedagogy.

In order to create room for critical reflection social spaces are needed that promote subjective agency and are based on what Freire calls "true generosity". "True generosity lies in striving so that […] hands […] need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world (Freire, 1970, p.27). True generosity in the current study is perceived as creating conditions in which opportunities are provided for the oppressed so that they themselves can have voice in matters of concern.

5. Analysis

5.1 The Reception Centre as a Home Environment

The respondents generally viewed reception centres as negative environments for both children and their parents. Furthermore, the respondents agreed that within the present framework of the reception centres it is impossible to have a "normal" childhood. Many refugees experience a loss of control over their own lives. This can affect their psychological and physical health. Children can therefore experience that their parents struggle to be proper caregivers during their stay in a reception centre. Varvin (2003) explains this through comparing life before and life after by stating: "There was a life before this, then came trauma, and everything changed" (Varvin, 2003, p.77).

Many parents carry heavy burdens related to their traumatised past, present situation and uncertain future. Their lives have been placed on hold and their everyday life is characterised by waiting and uncertainty. One respondent explained that while some of the refugees are waiting for an answer on whether or not they can settle in Norway, others are not even sure about what they are actually waiting for, they are just waiting for something to happen. Refugees are living in a state of "limbo". One of the respondents shared a story about how it feels for a child when living with parents in such a state:

> "They noticed that daddy was sad all the time, they understood that everybody walks around with and carries on them a great deal of suffering, that burden … eh … that takes its toll … when I spoke with the children about this, they told me that they really felt it … it is a feeling like everything collapses … that those nearest to you, those who should put their arms around you so that you can feel safe and fall asleep, read you a bedtime story. If they don't cope, … there is a great deal of loneliness just there" (spokesperson for Safe the Children Norway)

People who have experienced severe disruption within their lives are bound to go into a state of limbo before they can restore a sense of meaning and coherence within their lives. There are identified three stages that characterise a life crisis: the first is *separation,* the second is *merger* or *transition,* and the third is *reincorporation* (Becker, 1999). Experiencing loss of family, country, culture history and identity are all factors that can lead to a state of limbo, or liminalness. "Liminal people are at a threshold outside the boundaries of society: they have "been declassified but are not yet reclassified: they have died in their old status and are not yet reborn in their new one" (Becker, 1999, p.119). Living within an environment such as the reception centre, amplifies feelings of despair, loss of control and uncertainty. This was captured in a statement by one of the respondents as:

> "[…] a reception center is often a place with a lot of corridors; […] people go around without meaning. It is confined and many things help to break a person down" (Social Scientist).

Common for all refugees is that they are homeless and uprooted by being forced to leave their homes and countries. For many refugees it is therefore a primary desire to return to their home, to return to their home as it was "before": a place of positive experiences. For most people, home is a place where one feels safe and a place of predictability. But as Varin (2003) says: a home is much more. A home is also the place in which relationships are nourished, where life develops over time and memories are born as time passes on (Varvin, 2003). But what kinds of memories are born as time passes on when life is placed on hold?

The housing conditions in reception centres are generally described as being small and depressive with no positive stimulation for either children or adults. The physical surroundings of the reception centre often leave no means for privacy. In these surroundings children are exposed to conversations and situations that are described by the respondents as not fitting for children. It is often impossible for children not to overhear their parents talk and argue about their worries and fears.

> "The thing we often see is that there is little means for the parents to separate what kind of information children overhear … [pause] … eh …they talk in-between themselves, when children actually should be protected from this … [pause] … children hear everything and they get, like drawn into the adults world … [pause] … because there is no place for them to talk. Children live within the world of the adults: the adults concerns" (public health nurse)

Under these types of conditions children can develop a genuine concern for both their parents and their entire family's wellbeing. Several respondents underlined that the youngest of refugee children carry burdens that children so young really should not be carrying with them at all. This can lead to severe psychological strains. Family relations become more intense as the family structure has been altered. Many refugees come from countries where it is normal to be a part of an extended family. In the reception centre it is in many cases only the nuclear family.

> "Family is important for all children, but in certain areas even more so for these children because they have lost so much, like their extended family, home, everything continuant like; friends, network, school, preschool and so on. This means one becomes even more dependent on this little family you have around you" (Social Scientist)

Within such settings it is not hard to imagine that children receive more responsibility than the average Norwegian child. But it should be remembered that not all forms of responsibility necessarily are considered to be negative. Having partial responsibilities is seen as something that could be beneficial for children, and something most enjoy as well. Giving

responsibilities to children who are in vulnerable situations creates opportunities in which they can experience and learn how to cope with particular challenges. Giving vulnerable children the opportunity to feel and achieve mastery through helping out with simple tasks is seen as being positive and contributes into making a vulnerable child more resilient (Helmen-Borge, 2003). But a situation changes drastically when simple tasks viewed as being positive develop into more serious tasks, tasks like being placed in the position where you as a young child are in need to take care of your own parents.

> "We had a family here and one of the children's parents had severe a psychological disorder, and it was well, … [pause] …the children, they didn't leave their house because in a way they had to take care of their dad, they needed to take care of him and therefore the children couldn't be part of any of the activities we had arranged for the other children living here because they needed to be at home … [pause]… so we were very concerned that it would have a significant effect on their childhood and quality of life" (staff member at the reception centre)

Respondents highlighted the need for young refugee children to experience a most "normalised" daily routine. One of the most important aspects for creating a normalised routine would then to establish a social network and the possibility to develop friendship with other children. "To have a friend gives a sense of belonging towards «someone», and with that indirectly a distance to «some others»" (Ytterhus, 2002, p.28). But a reception centre is not a place where children can create distance from their worries and escape their personal tensions and anxieties through newfound friendships.

> "You get scared of loosing someone, even though the youngest of children are so aware of it I think that the somewhat older children talk about this, they get afraid of attaching themselves to someone because they have experienced it so often that people disappear or they got disappointed because they themselves were in need of moving away, all those, all children living their lives in a reception center have experienced a major disruption which was that they needed to move and leave their country and come to Norway through several countries or crossing the Atlantic. Under this journey they have lost many, even if your parents tell you that you will meet Aisha again the child knows intuitively that this relation, this friendship is over" (Social Scientist)

Seeberg (2009) points out that networks and relationships in reception centres for children in early childhood are primarily centred and established within the social arenas of the centre itself because it is here that the families spend most of their time (Lidén, et al., 2011; Seeberg, 2009). One of the respondents however, described the reception centre as being a socially desolated island. Friendships that are established within a reception centre are per definition temporarily of nature. The schools and kindergartens that these children attend are generally not located near the reception centre thus leading to difficulties in establishing and building relationships with other peers.

> "It becomes like an island, it becomes an island on which one becomes socially isolated from … well that we know from conversations with the somewhat older children is that … eh … they

> actually long to have Norwegian friends … mmm … They really wished they had more Norwegian friends." (Spokesperson for Save the Children Norway)

One of the more important markers for friendship is that there is established a "We" which is a clear indicator of friendship. "Without a collectively experienced "We", which manifests itself into a lived experience for the children, it is difficult to say something about a friendship" (Greve, 2009, p.94). Friends are predictable. Friends construct meaning together through a collective "We". Friends create and support a sense of belonging, both for the individuals within a group and for the group itself. They become a part of each other's lived life through humour and shared experiences (ibid.). But in order to achieve a collective "We" it is important to establish premises that are consistent and allow for relationship building. This could be found difficult as the conditions of a reception centres are unpredictable.

> "At a reception centre there is a great deal of anxiety, if I think children, then a reception centre is a place of coming and going without notice. This creates anxiety around these children: who is living in the room beside us now? Oh no, it wasn't Aisha, she was there yesterday now it's an older man who I don't understand" (Social Scientist)

Learning how to get close to others when friendships are broken without notice is for every person difficult. Losing a friend is like losing a part of one self. Friends have "mutual lived experiences with being-in-the-world-together, and this means there is no need for planning and explanation on how they are" (Greve, 2009, p.133). A lost friend is someone who knew you in ways that others don't. Such losing carves deep wounds and often leaves thick scares, no matter what age. If this happens often enough it could result in severe complications related to trust and relationship building.

> "If I think about the youngest children there is a particular incident I remember. We had an external house where one family lived close on top of the other, and of course children, even though they were very small, played together. While one of the families had received permit for settlement, the other family's application for settlement was declined. The father who was denied settlement came several times into my office with his daughter. He explained to me that his daughter did not understand what would happen to her friend living upstairs. Will he disappear? Won't they move together with us? Even though they were very young they are… [pause] … they register that something is going on […]" (employee at reception centre)

Children living in these conditions are in need of professional caregivers who have a clear understanding and intuitive feeling on what is happening within the lives of these children. One of the staff members at the reception centre highlighted how often people misunderstand the function of the staff at the centre. She said that many who are not familiar with what a reception centre is, think that we are the personal caregivers for the inhabitants. However, the people living at reception centres are responsible for themselves and their families. Staff

members at the reception centre are only meant for assistance and guidance, but they are not assigned to have control and insight on every aspect in the families' personal on-goings. The staff members were very clear and underlined that if someone wants to know something specific concerning the families or children they should ask the families themselves, not them. The reception centre staff do however have a responsibility to ensure that children experience a normalised daily routine. Employees should be accessible for the children and they should have time to talk with them. A challenge is however that their working hours coincide with the hours that the children attend school or kindergarten. After half past four, during the nights and in the weekends, staff are not present. The reception centre is obliged to arrange activities for its inhabitants. Volunteers from different organisations arrange such activities during the weekends.

5.2 ECEC Provision for Young Refugee Children

Within pedagogical projects a holistic view on the needs of refugee children should be incorporated. Focus should be on the children's personal competences and abilities. ECEC projects should therefore be constructed on a holistic pedagogical philosophy. This philosophy should allow children to explore and develop their selves on the base of subjective agency. R11 emphasises the importance of adults' attitudes, knowledge and ability to relate to and understand children, "so that they can bring up children to participate actively in a democratic society" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011, p.3).

All respondents agreed that all refugee children living in Norway should have the right to ECEC provision. This standpoint was based on the understanding that ECEC was in the best interest of the child. A pedagogical surrounding was argued to be beneficial for these children because it has the potential to help uncover and prevent social and psychological dysfunctions and assist with regard to special needs. Moreover, ECEC provision will contribute to create space, in terms of private life, for both parents and children for a short period every day. ECEC provision can contribute to develop children's self-esteem and perception. ECEC is regarded as a social arena where children can meet and interact. ECEC helps to create routines in the lives for both parents and children and furthermore helps to integrate the family into mainstream society.

> "Well if there is one thing we could do for these children whilst living in a reception centre then it would be to ensure that they receive a pedagogical offer which is good and have the chance to *get out*" (staff member of reception centre)

> "An ECEC surrounding can function as a place for comfort and which is considered as being pleasant surroundings for children. Within a kindergarten people are primarily concerned with creating something positive around children, and based on the children's own premises" (Social Scientist)

> "The state pushes hard on the parents to go to Norwegian language courses, children are therefore obliged to attend the kindergarten. Eh … then it is important that they have an offer that is considered good. The most important for these children is that they are in a social arena together with other children. The kindergarten is therefore in a unique position, I don't want to portrait the parents in a negative way, but in a kindergarten children are in contact with other children and this is better than being at home with mum and dad … I think" (ECEC practitioner)

In accordance to these responses ECEC provision for young refugee children is related to and regarded as: positive experiences, being meaningful, a safe place, based on the children's personal premises, a pedagogical surrounding and a social arena for the children.

R11 states that ECEC programs should incorporate possibilities for experiencing positive challenges. These challenges should be fitting the maturity of the children and safeguard them from physical and psychological harm. ECEC providers therefore have a special responsibility to ensure that an environment is created where children feel *comfortable* and *included* and *promotes social equality*. In R11 this is written as:

> "[…] cultural diversity shall be reflected in kindergartens. Social, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and economic differences in the population mean that children come to kindergartens with different experiences. Kindergartens shall support children on the basis of their own cultural and individual circumstances" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2011)

However, there are challenges with regard to incorporating theory into praxis. Respondents highlighted that there were several areas in need for improvement within ECEC provision. These range from staff competence to linguistic challenges. A considerable challenge was identified as verbal and nonverbal communication between the practitioners and the children/parents. In terms of communication, linguistic diversity was regarded as the main obstacle. Sharing and receiving information was therefore seen as being difficult and a highly challenging problem.

> "The mother and father did not speak Norwegian or English so we used a great deal of time on establishing close relationships with the parents. Communication was … well, very bad because it was difficult to pass on information. After three months, we in the kindergarten … well … had thrown ourselves out there by making ourselves ridiculous the parents began to make efforts themselves. The mother managed to explain to us that her daughter would be vaccinated the following day and that her daughter would remain at home with her parents. This she did without using a single word of English or Norwegian. The joy of the mother when she understood that we had understood her, this … well … this makes a person's day, or week, maybe even a whole month" (ECEC practitioner)

At first glance this example can be interpreted as being an example with a happy end. But by critically reflecting I noticed several aspects. If there was a close relationship with the parents, why did it take three months before a simple message was understood? Is "throwing yourself out there" conceived as being ridiculous? How do parents then feel in everyday situations when they are expected to make themselves "ridiculous" by throwing themselves out there? The ECEC practitioner in this example takes a first person perspective. The practitioner reflects on how it personally felt attempting to pass on information. Here the feelings of the practitioner stand in the foreground. Another practitioner shared a relating view, which is also based on personal feelings, but then as a foreigner and mother in such a situation. Here she reflects on how it feels when communicative barriers prohibit parents from being understood:

> "As a foreigner myself I know what it means to be in a country without knowing the language. One feels powerless, right. Try to think this in relation to your own child, you want to say something about your child, but you cannot because you do not speak the language (ECEC practitioner)

Here the practitioner can relate to how it feels when being powerless in such situations. She clearly reflects on the significance of language and how this relates to feelings of parenthood and being a parent who is able to take care of her child. Even though the former example describes the joy of the mother as something positive it can also be related to feeling powerless in situations where simple messages are not understood.

> "at official meetings [...] we order interpreters. But in everyday situations, when they come to pick up their children and we are in need to give information about how their day was […] in such situations it is often that older siblings are used as interpreters. Then it is natural, we do not say: *no, this is not the way we do this*" (ECEC practitioner)

In this example there is a division made between formal and informal situations. This can also be understood as: adult (formal), and children (informal). In formal meetings adults have something important to talk about. In these meetings an interpreter is ordered and used with the purpose to safeguard that information is being transferred and received in a correct manner by all parties attending the meeting. In informal meetings (daily routines and interactions between practitioners and the children) there is rarely used an interpreter. Here the correctness of information passed and received can seemingly be understood as being less important. However, how is it then possible to receive vital information from the children themselves? Is this not in breach with both article 12 and 13? Should children not be able to give and receive information regardless of existing barriers? Should this not be done through use of any communicative means of the child's choice?

One respondent shared an example regarding a child who came to the kindergarten. The child had experienced situations of war and was traumatised. She had been exposed to bombings and shootings and as a result of this every time she heard an aeroplane she hid herself under the table. If there is not a chance for such a young child to explain why she is scared, how will her behaviour be understood? A child living with such thoughts and feelings is in need to be heard and feelings are in need to be recognised.

> "We had a five year old who told us that the police was at the reception centre to incarcerate people living there. She was very afraid and did not want to leave her parents because she had experienced this, she most definitely also knew that her parents did not receive permission for settlement" (public health nurse for refugee children)

The child in this example could explain the situation and feelings she had. But how is this for children who do not speak Norwegian? They can experience similar situations, carry the same feelings with them and are certainly also in need to be listened to. Explaining these types of fears and frustrations requires that a child is given the possibility to do this. It is possible to ask then: Why are there no interpreters for children? Is this because children are being viewed as "informal" or just as an "everyday situation"? Is it not just as, or even more important, to ensure that children can express what they think, feel, need and want in those "informal" moments? Aren't the everyday situations in a kindergarten those situations that give insight into a child's life, here and now? As long as interpreters remain the exclusive "right" to "formal" meetings, then young newly arrived refugee children have a long battle in front of them before they are being recognised and understood.

In formal meetings when interpreters are being used the quality of interpreting can vary. According to the respondents the interpreters usually have little or no pedagogical background or experience working with children. When one of the public health nurses was asked a question regarding interpreters with pedagogical backgrounds she said:

> "We use interpreters assigned by the municipal and wait to see who comes … no, they do not have specific training and competences in childhood matters, but there are some who have experience working with children and we can express a wish for them … and we do this. We look at who can manage the children best" (Public Health Nurse for newly arrived refugees)

Respondents agreed that professional interpreters who work with children in the kindergarten should have an understanding of the pedagogical terms used within ECEC context as well as be familiar with R11. One of the ECEC respondents spoke several languages herself and had personally heard on several occasions that professional interpreters had misinterpreted or did not understood what was said in formal meetings. This she thought was unacceptable:

> "There were specific demands on the use of interpreter. But I remember quite vividly situations in which we used an interpreter for interpreting Dari or Swahili that I wished for an interpreter with a more developed and specific knowledge surrounding children, kindergartens context, activity and terminology, but you just needed to take those who came … […] things could have been interpreted in a different way, or the message was unclear, … this is a big problem" (ECEC practitioner)

Interpreters then are not used on a daily base and the children are expected to learn the language fast. Efforts are being made to teach the children Norwegian so that they can be socially integrated. This is one of the primary goals described in many Norwegian white papers concerned with ECEC provision for minorities and refugee children (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009, 2010, 2012). A practitioner reflected on how children learn and are taught Norwegian in the kindergarten:

> "Norwegian is the language used in the kindergarten and the children learn it quickly, very quickly. Children are very good to repeat. They are often very good on imitating. We often use children's songs and this is a very useful form for memorising and learning a new language" (ECEC practitioner)

Within this example the practitioner seems satisfied with that the children learn the language fast. There is highlighted that children "are good" at mimicking. However, critical questions could be asked; are the children considered to be empty vessels in need to be filled? Norwegian songs are used to teach the children a new language. Here, responsibility for learning is given to the children. Even though this can be experienced and viewed as something positive, questions can also be raised regarding if this leads to exploring who the children are, what they want and how they feel.

One of the practitioners underlined the necessity of creating a *We* before they started to explain to the parents what a kindergarten is, what is expected from the parents and what the parents could expect in return from the kindergarten. Within this view there is however not incorporated room for parents and children to come with personal values and needs that are considered important by the families themselves. Possibly, there has been developed an understanding that the parents and the children have no explicit values or needs. This could be related to stereotypification of refugee families. If this is so then practitioners are in need to find the person behind the established stereotypes and categories. Achieving understanding in these types of working conditions requires time, competence and experience from the practitioners. In order to design and maintain a good ECEC program it is required that ECEC practitioners have the necessary competences and experiences. A good ECEC program must recognise specific cultural and linguistic diversities as well as incorporate and safeguard the

individual needs of the children (Lauritsen, 2012). To do this not only critical reflection is needed but also a stronger form of cooperation between the sub-systems surrounding the families. Some of the respondents agreed that there should be made improvements in relation to collaboration. When ECEC respondents was asked how the cooperation between the kindergarten and other instances within the sub-systems was experienced, there was answered:

> "Yes, we want to strengthen the cooperation between most instances who work with refugees because we want to offer a holistic program, the best program, this we can not do as a single instance without communication" (ECEC practitioner)

> "We could have a better dialogue with INN[9] [Qualification Centre for Immigrants] and EVO[10] [Unit for Adult Education] so that we can explain in a way what a kindergarten is, and what the other instances represent, what they have on their agendas, what they can do for the families at the health centre, that we have a network and that we can take the request that come as good as we can. That is ... there are some who have heavy burdens with them that we are in need of working with, then I believe in a joint network, and not one instance here and one there (ECEC practitioner)

A stronger collaboration is seen to be beneficial for the children and their families. Through an improved collaboration between the practitioners and the other sub-systems the respondents anticipated that they would have a forum for debate and professional sharing of experiences. Here, experiences related to work could be discussed in a holistic manner from several professional perspectives. Although respondents confirmed that there were established certain work-groups, the feeling was that the information received from these meetings was rarely accessible or useable for the ECEC practitioners. The practitioners expressed that they felt a lack of information surrounding the families, insight on what a reception centre is and how the families' lives are whilst living here and proper methods for co-working with the families. The practitioners also expressed a need for experienced and well-trained staff.

5.3 Possibility for Expression

For professionals working with young refugee children reflecting critically on what *dialogue* and *expression* means should be the starting point towards changing daily practices and understandings of what communication is and what it can be. Exploring relations between *power* and *privilege* are then crucial factors. The following critical questions asked by MacNaughton (2005, p.11) can serve as starting points for exploring these relations: Who benefits from what I do and know? How and why do they benefit? Do I want this to continue? Why do I take this particular action or use this particular knowledge? Whose interests does

[9] Kvalifiseringssenter for innvandrere (INN)
[10] Enhet for voksenopplæring (EVO)

this knowledge or action support? Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged? And questions specifically related to working with children are then: Who is the child? What types of child do you want? Do you want a child that just goes with the flow, or do you want a thinker and a doer and a changer? (MacNaughton, 2005, p.12).

Many of the respondents agreed on the notion that it was difficult for refugees in general to express their views and opinions surrounding their lives, especially for the youngest of children. *Expression* was interpreted by the participants as having the means to engage in activities that are based in and on the premises of the children themselves.

> "My opinion is that more could be done than what is currently being done. Sometimes not much is needed if only staff see the needs and get help to see that here are certain challenges. And they also need some time and frames around them, but above all it is about that much is in the head, it is not only about the resource situation. I know there are some reception centres where specific attention has been paid to this, and here they have been able to construct children's groups and been able to capture skills and interests that the young have…[…] We must start where the interests of the child lie. Concerning activities on reception centres, many are very limited and often follow the same track; sort of like parodies on activities is a billiard table. That can surely be nice to some people, but how many children, women and men living on a reception centre play billiard?" (Social Scientist)

All respondents further agreed on the notion that more could be done with specific regard to the youngest. Many efforts are being made in relation to promoting the thoughts and opinions of the older children and their parents, but less effort is made in the case of the youngest refugee children. Children were included mostly in relation to legal matters concerning their or their family's legal case and far less attention was given to including them when it comes to daily practices. Many practitioners and other professionals loose sight on that young accompanied refugee children are not "attachments" to their parents but instead people with their own rights and needs. Young accompanied refugee children often live with parents who are in need of help and care themselves. The respondents agreed that under such conditions it is even more important to reflect on the aspect that also the youngest of children are in need to be heard.

> "[…] they should be able to receive information in such ways that the situation and reality they are in is understandable for them … that they can in a way understand what kind of situation it is they are in … and that they have the possibility to express their own views to the situation they are in […]" (spokesperson for Save the Children)

> "For example we have a child whom is very attached to his mother, whom has only been with his mother. It doesn't help than that someone will take care of you, especially not if they do not even speak your own language. So the initial period is a difficult time. We are fortunate that we have someone who can speak the child's first language and that is of good help […] " (ECEC practitioner)

Young children have the right to ask questions and the right to give and receive information on matters concerning their own lives. Following the thought of Freire (1970) who believed that in order to feel and be fully human a person should be able, or be made able, to speak his or her own word, to name the world. This I understand as having a genuine possibility to be heard and listened to in order to influence one's own situation.

> "[…] in that age that they can talk for themselves, I had many come in here that were very explicit on their situation and how they had it in life, what they needed, right, and then I transferred the message through to their kindergarten or school so that they could attend to these needs […]" (public health nurse for newly arrived refugee children)

One practitioner explained how they in the kindergarten were developing 'language suitcases'. These suitcases contained different objects relating to known fairytales or stories, which the children in the kindergarten had gotten familiarised with. These objects helped to develop the children's language skills by letting them name the figures or objects in the suitcases. Another practitioner used a similar activity where she gave children the opportunity to choose animal figures out of a bag. The children were asked if they knew the name of the animal. If the child did not want to name the animal the practitioner would ask the group if they knew which animal it was. Then the group would sing a song about the animal. Both practitioners saw these types of activities as confidence builders because the children could use their own voice and speak out. Practitioners were asked whether or not they had encountered that children were not allowed, for some reason, to participate in aesthetic activities. One respondent said:

> "Yes well mostly they are all right with it. Yes, well … I am pretty tough. We dance and sing. Yes, I can … we had a family from Afghanistan and the mother she told us that the two years she had been in this kindergarten with her daughter were the best years in her life. Here in the kindergarten we sing and dance. When we did this the mother would sit there and cry. I asked her what was wrong, why she cried. She said that it was so good to see her daughter have permission to dance and sing. In her culture this was not allowed. It was not allowed to sing and dance" (ECEC practitioner)

Other practitioners did however feel that it could be difficult at times for some refugee children to participate in drama activities, as illustrated by the following reflection:

> "Yes, … games like drama activities, like fairytales or role plays which these children often are not used to at all, here we are often in need to take it really slow. Many are traumatised and these types of games are quite scary. Hmm … like the fairytale *Bukkene Bruse* for example. That fairytale is scary for many, whilst in Norway we know it and it isn't considered to be a problem for children. But many who come here have experienced bombings, shootings and dark threatening voices … we were therefore in need to adjust the program and take out those kinds of things" (ECEC practitioner)

But expression should not merely be considered in terms of learning or playing. In the philosophy of Reggio Emilia aesthetics revolves around collaboration and joined exploration together with children and adults to open up topics for speculation and discussion. Projects are regarded as "open-ended spirals that revolve around the core socio-cultural and ethical question of what it means to be together in the changing physical and social environment of the preschool" (ref). Exploration is done through combining long-term inquiry projects with short-term activities. Children have access to a wide range of materials and together with pedagogues they explore ideas and express themselves through means such as words, movements, drawing painting, building sculptures, collage and music (ref). The aim of these processes is to empower the "hundred languages of children". To empower young refugee children to explore and use their hundred languages, they are in need to be in pedagogical environments that give them these possibilities.

> "In radical dialogue, based on listening, as a teacher you have to participate together with the child, entering a space together where both teacher and child are actively listening and trying to construct meaning out of the situation" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.101)

6. Findings

The purpose of the current study was to investigate how ECEC practitioners and other related professionals interpret and work with children's fundamental right of expression with regard to newly arrived young refugee children between the ages two to six years. A total of 12 respondents were interviewed in the empirical part of the study. Referring to Bronfenbrenner's theory as adapted and illustrated in figure 1, the respondents represented several professional groups working with young newly arrived refugee children. Their contact with the children ranged from daily contact (micro system) to frequent contact (meso system) to occasional contact (exo system).

Expression was interpreted by the respondents as having the means to engage in activities that are based in and on the premises of the children themselves. According to the respondents the somewhat older refugee children were sometimes included in relation to legal matters concerning their own or their family's legal case and far less attention was given to including them when it comes to daily practices. But rarely there was thought of how the right for expression could be incorporated with regard to the youngest refugee children. There was said that many practitioners and other professionals loose sight on that young accompanied refugee children are not "attachments" to their parents but instead people with their own rights and needs. There was recognised that also the young children have the right to ask questions and the right to give and receive information on matters concerning their own lives. However, how this is done in daily situations can be understood as being challenging.

Many of the respondents agreed on the notion that it was difficult for refugees in general to express their views and opinions surrounding their lives. In general there are efforts being made in relation to promoting the thoughts and opinions of the older children and their parents, but within ECEC additional support is needed for developing improved pedagogical approaches to support and safeguard the rights for refugee children in early childhood. Even though ECEC practitioners agreed that more could be done with specific regard to the youngest, few concrete ideas or alternatives for strengthening the rights of these children were suggested. A number of challenges were identified in relation to how practitioners work with the right of expression for the youngest of refugee children.

Young accompanied refugee children often live with parents who are in need of help and care. The respondents agreed that under such conditions it is especially important to reflect on the aspect that also the youngest of children have needs that must be recognised and listened to.

According to several respondents, one of the main challenges in direct relation to supporting the right for expression with regard to newly arrived refugee children is that the interpreters who are hired by the municipal often have no special competence in childhood matters.

Challenges in communication furthermore prohibit a well functioning form of collaboration between ECEC practitioners and newly arrived refugee children/families as well as between ECEC practitioners and sub-systems consisting of professional actors and instances surrounding the families. Language barriers between children/families and the ECEC practitioners cause ambiguous situations, as information shared is being misinterpreted or not understood. Between the practitioners and the sub-systems, communication is challenging because of client confidentially and professional secrecy. These factors combined, cause a lack of information that is seen as important for providing a 'tailored' pedagogical program fitting the individual needs of newly arrived refugee children. As a result of a weakened form of collaboration, children's right for expression is difficult to support in a sufficient manner with respect to young newly arrived refugee children.

Additional information about young refugee children could help and support practitioners to design a pedagogical program in which the needs of the children are reflected and incorporated more visible.

ECEC provision for newly arrived refugee children in Norway will always address new children and families with no or little formal knowledge of the Norwegian language, culture and ECEC setting. The problem of communicative barriers will therefore always be present. Existing modes of communication should be examined as they are proven to be insufficient within relations with young refugees and their families. The existing modes of communication within ECEC settings leave much room for speculation and uncertainties. As professional interpreters are only used in formal meetings and not on a daily base, children and practitioners often have little or no means for being understood.

7. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

MacNaughton (2005) reflects on how poststructuralism is considered to be useless if ECEC practitioners' critique does not tell them how to act. Her reply to this is that it should be quite the opposite. A 'recipe free' approach aims towards seeing complex, contextual, unpredictable, contradictory, messy and intensely personal circumstances as opportunities for alternatives to rigid understandings (MacNaughton, 2005).

One of the fundaments for an early childhood practitioner is the need to form together with the child and its family an alliance based on trust through recognising and confirming the child and its family in a holistic manner. This could be done by critically examining how certain aspects *promote* or *prohibit* a well functioning professional relationship. The five aspects of "a sense of coherence" are: manageability, meaningfulness, comprehensibility, social network and employment. These can be applied in a critical way for examining existing practices within ECEC provision for young refugee children. By creating room for critical reflection towards the social spaces within an ECEC setting it is possible to construct alternative ways for promoting young children their subjective agency and their inherent human rights.

Through the use of alternative pedagogical projects it is possible to examining the discourse "refugee child" to make attempts to overthrow existing bias. Questioning what it is we know, and what it is we think we know, would then be a good departure point. By analysing traditional perceived *knowledge* of refugee children and their families it is possible to uncover these biases. It is within such contexts that we construct opportunities for *new understandings* regarding our perceived knowledge of the children we work with.

Approximately 18% of all the children in the world live in North America and Europe, and most "scientific evidence" within Anglo-Saxon and North-American ECEC provision is based on middle class white children and written for a predominantly middle class white reader (Penn, 2005). Within such discourses refugee families are predominantly labelled as being "at-risk", "traumatized" and "helpless". Even though it is true that many children and their families have experienced traumatic situations and live in conditions which are considered to be high risk factors it should still be remembered that these people had a life before trauma occurred and before they became refugees. A friend of mine, a refugee himself, shared with me a story from his childhood. There is one part I remember vividly. He said: *when I was a child I used to catch butterflies and climb in trees, I was a child then … not a refugee*. This

small reflection shows that the state of being a refugee is for many something momentarily and that it belongs within a specific time and period within their lives. The experience of being a refugee will probably never be forgotten, and for some it will infect their whole being, but it could well be that many would like to share more about how they lived, who they were and perhaps how they experienced their childhood. Through dialogical relationships with refugee families it could become possible for practitioners and the parents to confront their existing personal and cultural biased understandings in an attempt to unveil that which is positive (Grieshaber & Miller, 2010). Dialogic interactions should become more dominant within ECEC for refugee children and their families by using autobiographical explorations that allow ECEC practitioners to explore their disposition towards refugee families and their children attending their program.

Newly arrived refugee children do not have the right for ECEC provision in Norway. Much debate has been related to the fact that they must receive such provision for reasons mentioned in this study. However, two questions have not yet been raised. If these children would receive the right for ECEC provision, what kind of program will be offered to them and who will offer this to them? Many kindergartens do not have the experience working with refugee families. At the present state there are only a small number of kindergartens who have extensive experience and competence relating to the field. These kindergartens, some of them represented in this study, are regarded as competent and qualified in working with refugee children. Their knowledge and experiences should therefore become more visible for other practitioners and ECEC providers. Their victories and failures could provide a fertile ground for further developing this complex area of ECEC provision. In addition to getting out the voices of the practitioners and other related professionals working with these children, I call out for more participatory research which includes young refugee children. These children are then to be recognised as active participators and co-constructers of expert knowledge surrounding that what they know best: *their own life*.

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