

## Abstract

The focus of this study is to explore the outdoor experiences of children in the context of a kindergarten in Norway. It investigates the outdoor play, adaptation processes to diverse weather conditions and children's engagement in outdoor and indoor interaction with each other as well as interaction with staff members of the kindergarten. Taking into consideration the importance of nature and outdoor presence for people living in Norway, one of the aims is also to explore the learning process of children in the preschool age in relation to nature and environment.

A large part of this study was a collection of empirical data in form of a fieldwork in an international preschool setting in Norway. This study material was obtained during 20 days in an international kindergarten, using a qualitative approach, and the main resource of data was observations with informal dialogues and an interview. There are several theoretical concepts that influence the study; The new sociology of childhood, particularly the social and cultural construction of childhood, children and their agency as well as the theory of socialization. These theoretical concepts have an important role in the analytical part of this study.

The data from the fieldwork in an international setting show the significance of nature in both learning processes and outdoor play, the influence of weather on children's games, use of outdoor places and their relationships with both children and staff members. The first analytical chapter focuses on children's experiences outside and inside of the kindergarten, variety of places for playing children and choices of playmates. The proper clothing is strongly emphasized when it comes to weather and conditions, that might be uncomfortable for children. The second analytical chapter focuses on the variety of learning opportunities for children in the studied kindergarten when it comes to the use of outdoor areas.



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Andrea Benkeová

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## Prologue

I was a trainee in the kindergarten in Norway, being absolutely new to everything. One day, I was standing outside soaking wet, stepping from one foot to another when it finally stopped raining and the sun came out. The kids were building a huge castle in the sandbox, bringing the rainwater from underneath the drain from the roof. The smaller children were just sitting in the puddle<sup>1</sup>, pouring the rainwater from one cup to another, pretending it was tea followed by tasting it.

I have to admit I was slightly disgusted and had mixed feelings at that moment. Suddenly, the teacher came over to me and handed me a cup of warm coffee. She was smiling and noted, how the kids can make best out of the worst situations. I remember being a bit worried and wondered, whether they could get a cold from sitting in the wet sand or get sick because of drinking from the puddle.

I clearly remember what she answered, even though it happened more than three years ago. She seemed to be so proud about being Norwegian, having Viking ancestors and how everyone in Norway just had to go through this. This was the way how they learned about the world, built the immune system. She then pointed at the children and told me to see how happy the kids looked.

And they indeed were happy.

September 2015, Norway

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<sup>1</sup> The picture on the cover illustrates the common practice, that children in Norway like to engage in; jumping into puddles. The consent from the legal guardian to use this picture was obtained. © 2018, Andrea Benkeová



## Preface

I come from a Central European country where I used to be involved in preschool education through teacher and assistant practical training. I spent over 6 months in a kindergarten situated in an old mining city where the air pollution was persisting, and children could not go out for more than 30 minutes if the conditions did not allow more time spent outdoors. When the conditions were critical, children even had to stay indoors for the whole day. These children did not go out when the rain was pouring, when there was *too much* snow, or when it was windy etc.

In this Central European kindergarten, I even remember checking the air conditions every day before the groups decided to go out. One day, during strong wind, these conditions changed quite quickly. Our group decided to go out as the conditions allowed approximately half an hour outside. We spent probably 20 minutes getting ready and dressing 15 children around 3 years old. Suddenly, when we were almost ready to go to the playground, another teacher from a different group came and asked, if we did not check the conditions. Apparently, at the moment we were about to go out the warning was telling us to stay inside. Children started crying and complaining, adults in our group were also not very pleased. But eventually, we decided to take them at least for a walk in pairs around the preschool building, which took probably 5 minutes. They seemed satisfied to be outside for at least a few moments, but their parents were quite mad to know, that their children had been taken outside in such conditions.

When these children got outside, they were only allowed to run across a 50-metre-long pavement, where the teacher allowed them to, and use the buckets and spades only in the sandbox. Children also usually did not use many types of toys at the same time; when they had sandbox toys, the teachers removed balls and jump ropes and another way around. I cannot say this was a standard for all kindergartens in that country, but it was a standard for the kindergarten where I had my practice. And the children seemed to be accustomed to the rules.

April 2015, Central Europe





# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Prologue.....	v
Preface.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research motivation.....	2
1.2 Aim and objectives.....	3
1.3 Research questions.....	3
1.4 Outline of the Thesis.....	4
Chapter 2: Background.....	5
2.1 Philosophy of outdoor life: Nature as a value.....	5
2.2 Historical view on kindergartens in Norway.....	7
2.3 Kindergartens in contemporary Norway.....	7
2.4 Teaching and learning about outdoor life.....	9
2.5 Official state documents regarding preschools and outdoors.....	10
2.5.1 The Kindergarten Act.....	11
2.5.2 The White Paper on Quality of Kindergartens.....	11
2.5.3 The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens.....	12
2.5.4 Access right.....	13
2.6 Point of departure.....	13
Chapter 3: Theoretical framework.....	15
3.1 Discourses and the social construction of childhood.....	16
3.2 Children, agency and spatial expressions.....	17
3.3 Children and socialization.....	19
3.4 Relevant research.....	21
3.5 Summary.....	24
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	25
4.1 Process of accessing the field.....	25
4.2 Selection of participants.....	27
4.3 Kindergarten area.....	27
4.4 Entering the field.....	28
4.5 Research tools of this study.....	29
4.5.1 Observations and informal dialogues.....	30
4.5.2 Playground map.....	31
4.5.3 Semi-structured Interview.....	32
4.5.4 Research diary.....	34

4.6 Ethical considerations .....	35
4.6.1 Informed consent.....	35
4.6.2 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality .....	36
4.6.3 Negotiation of roles.....	37
4.6.4 Reciprocity.....	39
4.7 Analysis.....	40
4.7.1 Transcription.....	40
4.7.2 Coding.....	41
4.8 Limitations of the study .....	42
4.9 Summary .....	42
Chapter 5: Children experiencing nature and outdoors.....	43
5.1 Children outdoors versus indoors .....	44
5.1.1 Children and places.....	45
5.1.2 Children and territories .....	47
5.1.3 Children and play .....	53
5.1.4 Children eating lunch on trips.....	55
5.2 Experiencing the cold .....	57
5.2.1 ‘My hands are ouchie’.....	57
5.2.2 ‘I want to go inside’ .....	60
5.2.3 ‘The drying machine broke’ .....	64
5.2.4 ‘I will take a short walk now to keep myself warm’ .....	66
5.3 Summary .....	67
Chapter 6: Outdoors as an area for learning .....	69
6.1 Learning according to official documents .....	69
6.2 Children mastering their skills .....	70
6.2.1 Social skills .....	70
6.2.2 Motor skills .....	75
6.2.3 Academic skills.....	77
6.3 Children and nature.....	80
6.4 Summary .....	82
Concluding remarks .....	83
Reference list .....	87
Appendices.....	91

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Norwegian child is expected to live an active outdoor childhood. The relationship between young children and their wider environment is strongly emphasized, in particular [...] with nature. Apart from being fun and healthy, staying outside through the year teaches them to live with strongly demarcated seasons and extreme weather conditions. Without learning to enjoy this, life in Norway can be constrained and difficult. (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003, pp. 616).

I came to Norway in August 2015 as an exchange student during my third year of Bachelor's degree study related to pedagogics, education and psychology and I studied a program about Early childhood education and care. Throughout this program, I was able to get a brief insight into Norwegian preschool education theoretically as well as practically. I spent 4 months in a Norwegian preschool setting as a trainee during this program. Prior to my arrival, I got several emails from my hosting university about paperwork and practicalities, together with one specific email about weather, nature and *appropriate* clothing. They suggested woollen underwear as a bottom layer, some fleece and waterproof clothes in addition to regular winter clothes. I packed what I had or what I assumed would be enough.

The experience described in the prologue very much expresses my general thoughts for the first few weeks about Norwegian weather, clothing and the time Norwegians dedicate to spend outdoors regardless of the weather. I did not really understand it until I had learnt and experienced that. Children in Norway do spend a lot of time outside which has its roots in culture and history as well as in the Framework plan for kindergartens in Norway, as the love of nature is seen as one of the greatest values for Norwegians (Aase, 2008; Gelter, 2000; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). It presents quite contrasting ideas about outdoors from the experience presented in the preface, which happened on my preschool training through my home university during my Bachelor's degree.

Kindergartens in Norway put great emphasis on being outdoors, which, from my own experience as a trainee in the Norwegian preschool setting, children seem to enjoy. It appears to be stimulating and entertaining for them, and what I observed is that the children usually have a vivid imagination and they can create amazing plays and places in outdoor areas. When it is raining, they jump into puddles or drink from them, or if it is snowing, they build a

snowman, slide down the hill or just jump into piles of snow. Some children bring their skis from home and ski in the yard of the kindergarten. They seem to enjoy themselves outside no matter the weather and having proper clothing for each weather seems to help a lot. However, I have also met some disagreements and anger too. Some children may not be used to be outdoors these amounts of time and they may get uncomfortable because it is too cold, too windy or too wet for them. When they came to the teacher complaining that they were cold, they were not offered to go inside as a first choice. Most of the time teacher sent a child to find extra clothes, mittens, checked if the child is wet so they could change clothes or initiated a game with a higher amount of movement, so the child could warm up quickly<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.1 Research motivation

Learning about Norway and the practices in kindergartens while experiencing it, I still had a perspective of an *outsider* trying to understand everything inside. Coming from a Central European country, our ideas and perceptions regarding preschool age children and nature were different, as presented earlier in the Prologue and Preface. Going hiking into the woods, going cross-country skiing during winter with the whole family or spending weekends at cabins far away from the cities seems to be a usual practice in Norway. Also, in kindergartens, seeing Norwegian children enjoying their time outdoors by the side of teachers simply having fun with them lead me to think, how do they do it? And why? Therefore, I wanted to use my outsider perspective on the cultural practices in Norway regarding the preschool age children and outdoor presence, to get an insider understanding of it. I have had a lot of questions that lead me to this study project, as well as I was interested in finding out, how children coming from different countries experience being outdoors in the kindergarten in Norway.

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<sup>2</sup> Nilsen (2008) also experiences this during her research. Children in nature: Cultural ideas and social practices in Norway. In: A. James & A. James (eds.). *European Childhoods. Cultures, Politics and Childhoods in Europe* (pp. 38-60). London: Palgrave.

## 1.2 Aim and objectives

This study investigates how children living in Norway use outdoor areas in the context of a preschool setting, how they perceive to be outdoors and how they cope and adapt to ‘bad weather’. It is important to look at children’s actions in making decisions about outdoor presence and activities; this includes play, relationships, learning and body movement. Furthermore, the study pursues the ways in which children learn about nature and environment in the preschool and what teachers do to help them and provide them with this knowledge.

In order to obtain this information, it was necessary to carry out a research with a qualitative participatory approach in an international kindergarten in Norway. The main sources of the collected data were observations, informal dialogues, field mapping and an interview. All methodological choices are discussed further in chapter number four.

## 1.3 Research questions

The process of formulating the research questions for this project was quite long and I took into the consideration my interests and desires, previous experience in the field, available literature and methodological ideas about this study as well as practicalities for carrying out such a project. I was mainly interested in two topics; children’s outdoor experiences in a kindergarten in Norway and using nature and outdoors as a learning area. Therefore, I formulated two research questions, as follows:

### **Q1: How do the children experience to be outdoors?**

In answering this question, I would like to focus on outdoor natural areas as well as built playgrounds and parks for children, the role of the weather, clothing, the role of the staff members as well as children themselves, their play and so on.

### **Q2: How is nature and outdoors used as a learning area?**

For this question, I find it important to look at the areas where children get to practise, develop and master their skills, how the weather influences this, how does the staff approach this topic and how do children learn about nature and environment. Important to mention is

that I also search for learning *outdoors* which includes learning *outside* the kindergarten during the kindergarten hours which covers, for instance, public places.

#### 1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This Thesis consists of 7 chapters; the first one presents the introduction to the study and the whole Thesis. The second chapter focuses on the background topics and ideas which were important to create a solid foundation of this study, such as the Norwegian preschool system, state documents but also the relation to nature perceived as an important cultural value in Norway. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework and concepts that represent the fundamentals of the research. Chapter number four is focused on the methodological structure of the study, choice of approaches, methods and tools, as well as ethical considerations that were addressed throughout the whole study process; from the preparation phase, through the choice of informants, fieldwork until the completion of this document. It also shortly reflects upon the analytical approach, followed by two analytical chapters discussing the findings of an empirical data collection based on the research objectives and questions. Chapter number five focuses on children's experiences while they are outdoors opposed to when they are indoors, distinction between types of plays and places inside and outside, use of children's imagination and relationships between children and staff members and children between themselves. Here, the weather is a strong subject that influences these experiences. Chapter number six discusses the outdoors as an area for learning in the kindergarten and the significance of nature. The Thesis is finalized by the concluding remarks.

## Chapter 2: Background

‘You need a good excuse to sit inside on a Sunday when the sun is shining’ (Aase, 2000, pp. 20).

This chapter focuses on introducing the reader to the topic of outdoor experiences of children living in Norway. Its main aim is to set a basis for understanding upcoming elaborations on nature and its role in the preschool education of Norwegian children. First, I find it important to elaborate on the lifestyles of Norwegians connected to nature and outdoors, where nature is seen as one of their values. Later in the text, I will present a brief history of the Norwegian preschool model, leading to the modern Norwegian preschool system. I will elaborate in depth on outdoor kindergartens followed by selected official documents setting the base for preschool education in Norway.

### 2.1 Philosophy of outdoor life: Nature as a value

People living in Norway have grown up with an ideology and philosophy of life being tightly bonded with nature. This concept is called *friluftsliv*<sup>3</sup>. The theory behind this thinking and practice might be unclear to a non-Norwegian person, but as Gelter (2000, pp. 2) shows, the ‘concept [of *friluftsliv*] can be found among outdoor people all over the world’. He offers a translation of this term as ‘free air life’ and presents it as a tight bond between [Norwegian] people and nature. Through this, people experience a deep and emotional connection to nature, experience happiness, freedom and peace while being outdoors (Gelter, 2000). It is not only about being active outside, going skiing, jogging or practising any other kind of recreation in their leisure time but also about spiritual connection, protection of nature while being a guest there (Aase, 2008; Gelter, 2000; Kaarby, 2005; Nilsen, 2008, 2009a).

When one compares a common, modern notion of spending time outdoors with the Norwegian one, as Gelter (2000) for example, the two notions seem to be opposites. One could argue that the example of a modern way of spending time outdoors could be exemplified by a consumer-driven form of tourism, such as visiting places just to take pictures, sharing them

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<sup>3</sup> Free air life in Norwegian

with people on the internet and crossing an item off from the checklist. The concept of *pure friluftsliv*, however, is not only about being adventurous, but it is also about lifestyle. Going for walks in the woods or just in the neighbourhood is a very visible practice, it is simple and free (Aase, 2008). Norwegians also maintain their relation to nature in their way of living, building or buying a house close to the woods, or having a cabin in the middle of nowhere, far away from the city (Aase, 2008; Nilsen, 2008).

During hiking trips into the woods or mountains, there is usually not much talking, although people wear smiles on their faces and greet everyone along the way. Then, they might spend some time building a bonfire, sitting around it with their family and/or friends which presents a social notion of *friluftsliv* (Aase, 2000; Gelter, 2008). As this chapter begins with thoughts of Aase (2000, pp. 20), there has to be ‘a good excuse to sit inside on a Sunday when the sun is shining’. A lot of people, especially families with children tend to make this a tradition – going for trips, hiking, skiing or any kind of outdoor activities during weekends or holidays. Both Gelter (2000) and Aase (2008) present these practices as some kind of system of values in Norway. This appreciation and enjoyment of nature are usually transferred from generation to generation, mostly during family trips, where children learn from a very young age to appreciate nature. Through this, they also gain the aspiration to take care of it and become responsible for the environment (Kaarby, 2005).

Children are presented to outdoor practices in early ages of their lives (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003; Hansen, 2008; Nilsen, 2008). There are several notions of a ‘good, proper or happy’ childhood for children in Norway, such as children should play freely outdoors, in the neighbourhood or in the woods, regardless of weather, even if it is raining or snowing heavily (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003; Hansen, 2008; Nilsen, 2008). In addition to this, Kaarby (2005) says, that performing outdoor activities helps both to prevent illnesses and promote a healthy development of skills and independence among children.

In the next section, I will detail the history of kindergartens in Norway as it adds to the narrative of how the concept of *friluftsliv* and Norwegian kindergarten could have come to be so connected.



## 2.2 Historical view on kindergartens in Norway

The first Norwegian institution focusing on young children and their care and education was established in 1837 in Trondheim as an asylum for young children (Alvestad, 2009; Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003). This institution primarily took care of children coming from underprivileged backgrounds. From 1920, these institutions were known as *daghjem*, which meant day-nurseries. In 1975, the Ministry of Children and Family affairs had the responsibility for the management of kindergartens in Norway. The same year, the first Kindergarten act came into force (Alvestad, 2009). In 1996, the first National Framework plan for Kindergartens was established. It is a document summarizing goals and tasks for these institutions. Kindergartens were established in the form we know today. Since 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research has been managing the kindergartens in Norway.

## 2.3 Kindergartens in contemporary Norway

Kindergarten in Norway (*barnehage* in Norwegian) is a preschool institution for children aged 1-6 years old to spend their time while their parents or caregivers are occupied with work and/or studies. It represents a learning and playing arena for these children (Johansson; in Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006; Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2017; Utdanningspeilet, 2017). According to Statistisk Sentralbyrå (2017), 91% of all children aged 1-5 in Norway attend a kindergarten. There are 5,980 kindergartens in Norway today according to statistics from 2016/2017 (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2017; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017; Utdanningspeilet, 2017). Utdanningspeilet (2017) further states, that out of this total number of kindergartens, 46% is owned by a municipality and 54% is privately owned. In 2016, there were approximately 5,300 regular kindergartens, 578 family kindergartens<sup>4</sup> and 165 open kindergartens<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> A family kindergarten is a preschool unit that is held privately, in most cases in a private home, where each of the groups have up to 5 children. There is one assistant who is responsible for the children and their everyday routines and a preschool teacher who is mainly a manager and gives pedagogical supervision every week (Alvestad, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> An open kindergarten is a preschool setting, where there is no fixed group of children and is based on drop-in system (Alvestad, 2009).

Out of all 5,980 kindergartens in Norway, there are 1,615 kindergartens that present themselves under a profile which describes their ideologies, practicalities and everyday routines as being outdoors (Utdanningspeilet, 2017). These might be kindergartens following philosophers and their ideas or approaches such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner or Reggio Emilia, alongside kindergartens that have a greater focus on e.g. sports, music/culture and arts, language or environment. The kindergarten I based this research on is an international kindergarten which belongs to the language kindergartens group. These kindergartens focus on the development of language especially in those children who come from multilingual families (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017).

Although my fieldwork and research are not focused on outdoor kindergartens (*friluftsbarnhager* in Norwegian) in particular, I find it important to draw an example of very specific practice within preschool education which only emphasizes the importance of nature and outdoors in lives of Norwegians. There are 593 kindergartens in Norway that present themselves as outdoor kindergartens or have at least one department focusing on being outdoors (Utdanningspeilet, 2017).

*Friluftsbarnhager* put greater emphasis on spending a significant amount of time outdoors playing, exploring, learning or going on trips etc. Nature is used actively, irrespective of the weather, for children's physical and social development, entertainment and education. Usually, the educational processes that other kindergartens place inside, these kindergartens practise outdoors and nature is used as a learning area (Ekrehage Friluftsbarnhage SA, n.d.). There are also *Naturbarnhager*<sup>6</sup> (nature kindergartens) in Norway, where children spend most of their time in preschool outdoors, playing in woods with e.g. wooden sticks and branches, sitting by the bonfire or even using knives at a very young age (Aase, 2008; Kaarby, 2005; Nilsen, 2008).

However, even in the regular kindergartens, one can see strollers outside in the backyard or on the front terrace of a kindergarten where the smallest children sleep, regardless of the weather. During my teaching training in Norway, I experienced that in cold weather (usually maximum minus 10 degrees Celsius), children were properly dressed, and their strollers were equipped with wind and rain cover. Also, teachers had the responsibility of

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<sup>6</sup> These two types of preschool settings seem to be very similar and the boundaries between what exactly is a *Friluftsbarnhage* and *Naturbarnhage* seem to be a bit unclear. What I observed during my previous studies in Norway is that *Friluftsbarnhage* has a regular preschool building as any other kindergarten, with a wider focus on outdoor presence throughout a day whilst *Naturbarnhage* might have only a small hut or *lavvu*/tent and children spend their time outdoors playing, eating or sleeping practically the whole day.

deciding to let them sleep inside the kindergarten if it was too cold as well as checking on them regularly while they were sleeping outside in any kind of weather conditions.

In some kindergartens, children sleep outside even when they are on a trip in the woods. For instance, a local newspaper<sup>7</sup> published an article about 2-years-olds going on whole day trips, carrying their backpacks with some extra mittens or socks, water bottles and lunchboxes, while pedagogical staff carried backpacks with sleeping bags and mats. Kindergarten's staff explained that children enjoy sleeping under the bare sky when they are on the trip, and they can get some new energy to play longer. Some of them fall asleep and some of them only lay down and relax. It does require some level of preparedness, as someone has to bring the sleeping bags, and it also requires adults, who are eager to spend most of their time outdoors, to lie down in the sleeping bag in the forest with children to be a role model for them (Krognes, 2018).

An average space for each child in kindergarten was calculated to be approximately 5,6 square metres per child. According to the norms, a child above the age of 3 should have an indoor area as big as 4 square metres and for a child under this age, the indoor area should be slightly bigger than 5 square metres. When it comes to outdoor areas, these should be six times bigger than indoor playing areas (Utdanningspeilet, 2017). Moser and Martinsen (2010) present findings of their research in the article about the outdoor environment in Norwegian kindergartens stating, that the outdoor playing area is approximately 47 square metres per child. Another finding they present is the time children spend outdoors, which is approximately 70% of the time in summer and 31% in winter (Moser & Martinsen, 2010).

## 2.4 Teaching and learning about outdoor life

Norwegian education for future teachers and those who work with children and youth have something unique; studies to become *friluftsliv pedagog* (outdoor teacher), creating and managing outdoor activities and plans for children. There are several university colleges in Norway that offer such study program; either whole Bachelor's degree in *friluftsliv* (*friluftsliv* related studies) or one-year studies. Usually, this program is combined with sports or nature

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<sup>7</sup> Heimdalsbladet (February 7, 2018). Sover under åpen himmelen på skogstur. *Heimdalsbladet* #3 2018, pp. 21

studies. For instance, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences<sup>8</sup> offers a Bachelor program in *friluftsliv*, together with other sports and nature-related studies as well as a year-long study program or Master program in sports. Another one, The Norwegian School of Sport Sciences<sup>9</sup> offers various study programs related to sports, sports psychology, nature, *friluftsliv*, physiotherapy, health, even courses in yoga, dance and arts as well. Most of these are at the Bachelor and Master level, while some are one-year programs. Volda University College<sup>10</sup> offers *friluftsliv* studies as both Bachelor and one-year study program, together with other Bachelor and one-year programs in sports, Nature-guiding and Tindeveg<sup>11</sup> guiding. University of South-East Norway<sup>12</sup> has a one-year study program for *friluftsliv*, culture and nature guiding. A private high school for studies for preschool teachers, Queen Maud University College<sup>13</sup> has a specific Bachelor study program for preschool teachers with a focus on cultural differences, arts, music, handicrafts and nature and *friluftsliv*.

Most of these study programs require students to be physically fit with a deep interest in nature and outdoors. What they offer to students finishing these programs is mostly jobs as *friluftsliv* teachers/workers with children and youth in schools, preschools, afterschool clubs, nature and hiking guides on camps or tourist organisations, *friluftsliv* management in public sectors or workers in health and rehabilitation sectors<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.5 Official state documents regarding preschools and outdoors

There are several official state documents and government reports that should be mentioned in relation to preschool settings in Norway. Here I will present and elaborate on The Kindergarten act, The White Paper on Quality in Kindergartens, The Framework plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (further named Framework plan) and The Access Right (Allemannsretten) respectively.

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<sup>8</sup> Høgskulen på Vestlandet (February 8, 2018). <https://www.hvl.no/studier/studieprogram/idrett-folkehelse/>

<sup>9</sup> Norges Idrettshøgskole (February 8, 2018). <https://www.nih.no/studere-pa-nih/>

<sup>10</sup> Høgskulen i Volda (February 8, 2018). <https://www.hivolda.no/studietilbod>

<sup>11</sup> Tindevegen (February 8, 2018). <https://www.visitnorway.com/listings/tindevegen/6402/>

<sup>12</sup> Høgskolen i Sørøst-Norge (February 8, 2018). <https://www.usn.no/studier/finn-studier/idrett-kroppsoving-og-friluftsliv/arsstudium-i-friluftsliv-kultur-og-naturveiledning-1/>

<sup>13</sup> Dronning Mauds Minne Høgskole (February 8, 2018). <https://dmmh.no/bli-barnehagelarere>

<sup>14</sup> translated from Høgskolen i Sørøst-Norge

### 2.5.1 The Kindergarten Act

Act no. 64 of June 2005 relating to Kindergartens is an official document of Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. It is divided into 7 chapters (26 sections) presenting the fundamental base for Kindergartens in Norway, their purpose, objectives and content, the participation of parents and children and collaboration between preschools and homes as well as responsibilities of owners, municipalities and county governors. It also talks about the child's right to be enrolled in a kindergarten, fees connected to child's attendance in kindergarten, requirements for kindergarten staff and their responsibilities and duties.

### 2.5.2 The White Paper on Quality of Kindergartens

Similar to the Kindergarten Act, there are several elements within Early Childhood Education and Care that this White Paper focuses on, like responsibilities of kindergartens, their content and tasks or collaboration between preschools and homes. The White Paper no. 41 from 2008-2009 follow three main goals set by the Norwegian Government: 'Ensure the equity and high quality in all kindergartens. Strengthen the kindergarten as a learning area. All children should participate in an inclusive community' (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009, pp. 1).

This document focuses on the quality of preschool settings in Norway and their development according to recent research. Kindergarten staff, mostly with reference to kindergarten teachers, should have relevant competence for working with children in the preschool age such as a Bachelor's degree in preschool education from a University College. There is usually no specific requirement for teaching assistants and their educational background but many of them have some relevant education<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, it states that a kindergarten should be a social arena for children's inclusion, especially in terms of children coming from minority families (e.g. language, culture) as well as children with disabilities. It also highlights the importance of attending a kindergarten, as 'children who have attended

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<sup>15</sup> Barne- og ungdomsarbeider (Child and youth worker); Videregående skole (High school)

kindergarten, have better chances of succeeding in education and working life than children who have not' (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009, pp. 1).

### 2.5.3 The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017), in the following called Framework plan, sets the ground rules, the base for practicalities and educational ideas for Norwegian kindergartens in 9 separate sections. It talks about the key values and ideas that each and every kindergarten has to follow; what is a child and a childhood, how democracy is important in the preschool setting together with diversity and respect. Like the previous two documents, it also presents and discusses responsibilities of people working in kindergartens taking care of children as well as managers and kindergarten owners. It states how kindergartens should meet children's needs for care, play, development and learning, together with social competencies, friendship, communication and participation.

The last section of this document elaborates on specific areas that a kindergarten should focus on while working with children. These are Communication, language and text; Body, movement, food and health; Arts, culture and creativity; Nature, environment and technology; Numbers, spaces and shapes; Ethics, religion and philosophy and Community and society. Each of these subsections/areas presents the aim and what kindergartens and its staff should do in order to achieve that aim.

In relation to this Thesis, I want to emphasize the subsection focusing on Nature, environment and technology. Here, the aim is to give children in kindergartens enough opportunities to experience nature in all seasons during the year, regardless of weather conditions. Through this, children should gain a positive relationship with nature and use it freely for playing, exploring and learning. A kindergarten should provide children with opportunities for a variety of these experiences, knowledge about nature and environment and how to take care of it, and the arena to learn about sustainable development, flora and fauna. Moreover, it is important to make children experience *friluftsliv* throughout the whole year, irrespective of weather (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017).

There is also an information pamphlet on Nature and Environment for kindergartens (*Temahefte om natur og miljø*) presenting in detail what kindergartens could do when *doing nature* with children and why it is important (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). The regular Framework plan presents how a kindergarten should have an appropriate outdoor area for children, although these playgrounds are usually standardized equipment like swings, slides, sandbox and some obstacles for climbing. These give children opportunities to develop their motor skills, however, the more-less static design of equipment might not allow children to master their skills and overcome their own challenges once they get used to them. A kindergarten playground might not fulfil the needs and desires of all children. Here, nature plays an important role, as it is an always changing environment which gives children the opportunity to experience different challenges every day, even if they are walking the same route (Fjørtoft; in Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006).

#### 2.5.4 Access right

In Norway, there is a special right of free access for people into the woods and all uncultivated outdoor areas regardless of who owns the piece of land they are walking through. This access right (*Allemannsretten* in Norwegian) is both for protecting the nature and giving people opportunities to spend their leisure time outdoors. In winter, roughly from October to April it is allowed to walk on farming fields as long as they are covered with snow or frozen, one can walk, ski, cycle or ride a horse through these. If going into woods, one can use nature as long as they are not leaving any remains, such as trash and so on. Sleeping outside is also allowed, in the tent or just under the skies, but a rule of 150 metres applies; the tent or sleeping spot should not be closer than 150 metres from the closest living property or a cabin. Picking berries and mushrooms is allowed, and there are only a few species that are protected (Miljødirektoratet, 2018).

#### 2.6 Point of departure

I have now laid down the foundation for the understanding of Norwegian kindergartens, their contemporary philosophy and influencers as well as their historical set-up. For this

Master's Thesis I carried out an empirical study in an international kindergarten in Norway. This kindergarten was not an outdoor setting, they focused mostly on the language competencies of children. However, my aim was to focus on how the significance of nature was demonstrated in everyday life of children in this kindergarten. With regards to this, I will elaborate in detail on the empirical part in the Methodology chapter.



## Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

‘It is necessary to pay attention to local contextual understandings and practices in those places where constructions of children and childhood occur’ (Franck & Nilsen, 2015, p. 230).

Ideas about children and childhood were slowly transforming throughout history, but the common perception was that children were viewed as passive receivers of the adult world (James & James, 2008). During approximately 1980’, the change of thinking, also known as the paradigm shift, happened and laid the foundation for the Sociology of childhood. The ideas about children started to shift globally and the contemporary perception emphasized acknowledging children’s voices and their ability to act independently (James, 2009). This has influenced the research about children, and this chapter will introduce the key theoretical concepts and ideas arising from this thinking about children, related to this study.

As the main approach in this study is **the Sociology of childhood**, I consider it important to begin this chapter with a small section about it. This approach in studying children presents how childhood may be understood in relation to adults and children themselves, the society around them and how the children are perceived. As Prout and James (1990, pp. 7) point out ‘the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture’, we can clearly see the core of this thinking; the way how we view and understand children and childhood depends on the society and culture we live in. And not only is childhood constructed for children by adults who may have an influence on their lives but also children are actively taking part in constructing their own childhood (ibid).

There are six launching points for how to grasp this, at the time, new thinking in the sociology of childhood which can be found in Prout and James: ‘Childhood is understood as a social construction; Childhood is a variable of social analysis; Children’s relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right; Children should be seen as active social agents; Ethnography is a useful method for the study of childhood; and studying childhood involves an engagement with the process of reconstructing childhood in society’ (1990, pp. 8-9). I will elaborate on several of parts in the following.

### 3.1 Discourses and the social construction of childhood

Understanding of childhood cannot be universal as there are several factors influencing our perception of children and childhood. It is mostly us, adults, who limit the way children and childhood are defined. We have certain expectations and ideas on how children should behave, play or be educated and these ideas are changing depending on where these children grow up and which people and institutions are in charge of them (Montgomery, 2003; Rogers, 2003; Qvortrup, 1994). Rogers (2003, pp. 24) explains, that the aim of social constructionism 'is to describe the alternative ways in which we can answer the questions 'What is a child?' and 'What is childhood?' [...] and to examine the consequences of adopting the different answers'. It is important to acknowledge that childhood in different countries around the globe will be experienced and understood differently and that 'social constructivism is concerned with ideas about children, not facts about them' (Montgomery, 2003, pp. 46).

James and James (2008, pp. 122) define the social construction as 'a theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which 'reality' is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through sets of discourses'. This supports the idea mentioned above, that we, adults, are the ones who create the notions about the world we live in, including the perceptions of children. As there is no standardized perception of childhood, Montgomery (2003) presents several discourses as a guide to different groups of characteristics. 'Discourses are not simply statements but are sets of ideas which are rooted in a historical, social and political context' (ibid, pp. 47). As mentioned above, childhood experiences and understandings are different depending, for instance, on the country where the child lives as well as the discourses that create the reality for people worldwide. There are many discourses that reflect people's lives and realities depending on their e.g. culture, history, religion, political beliefs, social or financial situation, personal philosophy or just the way they think and speak about the world and themselves and this further influence the ideas about children and childhoods (James & James, 2008; Montgomery, 2003).

For instance, there are discourses rising from thinking of different philosophers, like John Locke and the Tabula rasa discourse, where the child is born as a blank piece of paper, learning about life by living and experiencing it. Here, childhood is a time of becoming. Another philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, had ideas about children and childhood as a period of innocence. Thomas Hobbes and his philosophy perceived children being born with

an inherited sin, which was rooted in the Christian religion (ibid). These are only a few of the discourses that might be visible in the Sociology of childhood and in the following part, I will talk about the discourses that connect to the study project I am focusing on.

As already mentioned, nature is closely tied to the lives of Norwegians. Whether in the education or spare time of people living in Norway, nature is very often pronounced. As found in Nilsen (2008, pp. 38), nature is connected to the “‘good’ or ‘proper’ childhood”, encompassing the historical context and contemporary practices in schools, preschools and family homes. However, due to changes with time on a global scale and influence of the Western world, Nilsen (2008) sees some things that could possibly endanger the original ideas of nature and the relationship children have towards it from very young age. She pronounces this as a discourse of worry and draws on particular examples that might be visible today in upbringing children. For instance, use of electronic devices for entertainment, video games or simply exchanging skis with snowboard instead of wandering and exploring nature (Nilsen, 2008).

For this project I will draw on a **discourse of nature**. Within this discourse, I aim to collect contemporary ideas about nature in an international kindergarten in Norway. Nature has a powerful position when it comes to legal documents that regulate preschool education in Norway. These documents were presented in section 2.5 of this Thesis. They encourage the preschools and staff members to actively use nature not only for pleasure but also for learning. The discourse of nature is then supposed to complement the discourse of worry and emphasize the relationship children have towards nature when in preschool as well as the weather that might influence this relationship. In the empirical part, I will search for this discourse through the emphasis that studied kindergarten has when it comes to being outside in nature and how does this discourse influence their everyday schedule.

### 3.2 Children, agency and spatial expressions

As presented by James (2009) children are no longer perceived as passive receivers but they are actively participating in society. They are seen as rational human beings with responsibilities, able to decide about matters of their lives. Agency is an ability to make these decisions independently as well as experience consequences that come after the decision-making. Children get the freedom to express their means as well as influence, which place they

take in the society, they are being taken seriously by adults who respect children as full citizens (James & James, 2008; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). Mayall (2002) also points out, that children are getting more and more freedom in terms of exercising their agency, their abilities to decide upon things that affect them. These usually happen in family homes, in school or preschool settings where children are free to express their opinions and desires. It might also be questionable, how much freedom should children get in order to practice their decision-making skills while still being able to respect adults around them (ibid).

Here, Nilsen (2008) presents constructs, which can be further used in the analytical part of this study. She pronounces a robust child subject and a rational child subject. She draws on particular examples of children using their agency in terms of whether keeping themselves comfortable in diverse weather conditions or trying to achieve their goals. A robust child subject is aware of his/her bodily expressions and is able to use them, for instance, to keep warm in colder days. A rational child subject then thinks through the situation and is able to express her/his needs and wishes clearly. Moreover, besides the agency, the ability to act independently and possess the knowledge of an *expert* is articulated, such as children do not need a help from adult person to achieve their desire (Nilsen, 2008).

In relation to agency, I find it important to look into how children use the space and areas around them as well. I do not mean to examine the geographical context of space, rather children's interpretation, creation and the use of space. Clark (2013) differentiates spaces from places in terms of how tangible the area is. A place can be a particular area whilst space is more abstract, but both might be used with the same meaning.

The understanding of place in relation to children might be twofold; places for children or children's places (Clark, 2013). The place for children can be understood as a place created by adults **for** children, according to the adults' perceptions, expectations and ideas of where a child should be in. On the other hand, children's places are created **by** children for themselves according to their own ideas and wishes. This place might be exactly the same for both an adult and a child, but the interpretation of the place is what is different and important. For instance, a child's bedroom can be both a place for a child and a child's place; a room created by parents for their child to sleep and make home works in and a place created by the child, because of the bedding, furniture distribution or wall paint colour. Furthermore, a child might have some secret places in the bedroom connected to particular memories or just favourite activity, which are not visible to parents and make this place even more personalized and special.

Children participating in creation of places use their fantasy, and sometimes, they can create very specific places there, which might not be visible for an adult at the first sight, e.g. a gap between the wall and a sofa can present a lava river where no one can step<sup>16</sup>. When defining and using these places, imaginary or real, children might gain the feeling of ownership and are eager to fight for them. This concept, called **territoriality**, was developed by Robert D. Sack (1986; in Nilsen, 2005). Children might hence use their agency, negotiate places with other children in attempt to take control over the specific area and make rules for others. I will be looking at how is agency visible in children's behaviour in the studied kindergarten, how are places and spaces created, negotiated and used, how does the agency come into this process and if children have any special or secret places or territories both inside and outside.

### 3.3 Children and socialization

Socialization is a concept very often pronounced in sociology. It is a long process of learning the rules of society, accepting the everyday challenges and learning ways of solving them, absorbing and fulfilling the expectations of the society and the surrounding world. Children's participation in this process is very much emphasized here as well (James & James, 2008). Looking at children, socialization has been criticised many times, mostly because of the active role of adults within socialization of passively receiving children. Nilsen (2009b) presents and criticises the mainstream thinking about how adults are the main actors within the process of socialization of children, having expectations and rules to which children should passively oblige. With the paradigm shift presented at the beginning of this chapter, this mainstream thinking has also been changing and revising in relation to children's agency. There are yet institutions for children where socialization occurs, like family or schooling settings, where adults are still the key individuals, however, children are being encouraged to be active themselves (James, 2009; Nilsen, 2009b).

Here, agency plays an important role in the process of socialization if children are to be seen as actively taking part in this process. As presented by Nilsen (2009b) and further also analysed by Åmot and Ytterhus (2014), there are concepts of adaptation and resistance in relation to the socialization of children and their agency. We can talk about adaptation as a long

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<sup>16</sup> Author's empirical experience from the teacher's training

process of getting used to the place, society and culture in which a child lives. By adapting, children learn the social systems and values, rules of the society they live in and build relationships. We might say, that ‘all adaptation is socialization, but not all socialization is adaptation’ (Hellesnes; in Nilsen, 2009b, pp. 3).

As socialisation is an ongoing process, children might try to constantly negotiate the rules, activities they want or do not want which can be interpreted as resistance. Nilsen (2009b) explores forms of resistance in a preschool setting in Norway as a part of the process of socialization. These forms might be more or less visible to adults working with children and being aimed directly or indirectly to the person or situation. For instance, children might argue and express verbally what they do not wish to do which is a form of **direct and open resistance**. In case they are doing something behind the teacher’s or someone else’s back, knowingly breaking some rules, this might be **hidden resistance**. Children using their body language or actions avoiding something on purpose, such as refusing to get dressed because they just do not want to go out, this may be called **indirect and open resistance** (Nilsen, 2009b; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014).

Another important aspect that should be taken into account when discussing socialization is power and power relations between children and adults. Children usually realize the imbalanced relationship towards adults and other authorities and therefore try to negotiate the boundaries when they wish to achieve something which is not primarily allowed (Nilsen, 2009b; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). It might be adults who use the powerful position over child’s attempts to act against the rules, however, it might be the child using his or her agency against the adult and pushing the boundaries towards what he or she wants to achieve. I will be searching for situations in which children might show resistance, how they deal with it and how they might eventually show signs of adaptation.

In relation to children’s socialization, I aim to search for the concept of **we-ness** (*vi-felleskap* in Norwegian), that was developed by Nilsen (2005). Here, children decide upon whom they are including in their games, in their group in general, they have their own games, share stories and secrets, share toys etc. To emphasize the inclusiveness of we-ness, she further explains the changing notion of this concept. The concept of we-ness might be related to friendship but is not stable. ‘We are together now’ does not necessarily include meaning ‘we will be together in the next moment’ (Nilsen, 2005, pp. 123) explains how dynamic this process is. Looking at the relationship between the children is beside socialization important for me. I

aim to search for grouping process and preferences in the studied kindergarten and how these are used then in the creation and use of spaces.

### 3.4 Relevant research

There are several scholars that have dedicated their time to studying topics related to children and nature, outdoor life, learning and development which are relevant for this study. Below are presented the main scholars I have used prior to and during the study as launching literature as well as during the analytical stage of this project.

**Ingunn Fjørtoft** (2001) focuses her study on the possible impact of outdoor play and presence in nature on children's development and stimulation of motor skills. Her study was carried out in three kindergartens in southern Norway with children aged five to seven. The first group was an experimental one, where 46 children from one kindergarten participated. This group used the woods close to the kindergarten most of the days as an area for playing. The next two kindergartens presented the reference group where 29 children took part in the study, they usually played in the preschool playground and only used the forest in the neighbourhood rarely. All children participated in 'Eurofit: European [*sic*] Test of Physical Fitness, the Motor Fitness Test' (Adam et al., 1988; in Fjørtoft, 2001, pp. 112), which consisted of 9 physical exercises such as balancing on one foot, distance jumping, sit-ups, speed of climbing etc. All data gathered were analysed with SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. She eventually found out that those children who had access to the forest more often mastered their physical skills (according to the Eurofit) better than those children, who had this access to the woods less often. This relationship was indicated mostly in terms of balancing and coordinating exercises towards the playing in the woods. Fjørtoft finishes with the statement that 'the forest [...] stimulates motor development' (2001, pp. 117).

**Kaarby and Tandberg** (2017) studied the two specific themes from the Norwegian Framework plan for kindergartens; Body, movement and health, and Nature, environment and technology (pp. 25). They focus on the time spent outdoors of kindergartens as a commonly known practice in Norway. This research was conducted in 2014 where a questionnaire with

163 questions was sent to approximately 1130 kindergartens in Norway and almost 2000 parents. Even though the method used is a quantitative one, followed by a quantitative analysis in SPSS, they argue that the data collected and especially the interpretation is also qualitative. Within the investigation on the time spent outdoors, it is obvious from their results, that it depends on the season; for instance, in winter around 50% of the responding kindergartens stated, that they spend their time outside approximately hour-hour and a half a day. Whereas in summer, more than 90% of kindergartens stated they spend their time outdoors for more than an hour and a half a day. Other results regard to the Framework plan and the use of the themes in relation to different circumstances, parental views and staff qualification.

**Moser and Martinsen** (2010) conducted a research in 2009 when teachers and leaders from 133 kindergartens in Norway filled in a questionnaire related to time spent out of doors of kindergarten as well as the outdoor area measurements. When investigating the preschool outdoor area, they focused on the playgrounds within the fences, which size could represent the level of quality of the preschool. According to their findings, preschools in Norway have approximately 50 square metres of outdoor area per each child. These children spend a lot of time outdoors where they can engage in free or risky play supervised by adults, they can get to choose the tools and toys they wish to play with. Moser and Martinsen also look at the outdoor equipment of kindergartens and what kind of outdoor activities children can engage in, where most of the kindergartens had sandboxes, toys to play with in the sandbox, some sitting arrangement, cars, bikes, balls, some climbing opportunities like trees or rocks and climbing walls. Around half of the responding kindergartens stated that they have access to the woods close to the kindergarten. Furthermore, Moser and Martinsen investigated on the creative thinking of children in terms of space use. Not only children had predetermined spaces or places for playing like slide, hut or a sandbox, but they were also looking for so-called *secret places*, where they could hide from other children or staff members and where they were searching for a rest. Together with attributing places different meanings than they are *built for* or perceived by adults, children tend to make toys from materials they find outside like sticks or stones, or just use the toys they have available differently (e.g. sand-bucket is used as a hat).

Research work of **Nilsen** (2009b, 2011) can be also considered relevant to this study. In her article from 2009, she explores and criticises the process of socialization. She sees the



relation between adaptation and resistance and further explores how children in kindergartens in Norway engage in this process. Nilsen uses her data for this analysis from her study in 2000 from Norwegian day-care centres. She presents the three concepts of resistance; children argue or negotiate the rules openly and directly; children can be hiding their resistance behind breaking the rules; or they can resist openly but not directly to the authority, for instance by their actions or body movements.

In her other article from 2011 about very Norwegian practice of going skiing, she expresses a commonly known saying, that children in Norway are *born with the skis on their feet* (*født med ski på beina* in Norwegian<sup>17</sup>). Here, she focuses on a day-care with a multicultural background and how children from other countries adapt to this practice. What she emphasises as well is the importance of adult roles in the kindergarten as these are seen as role-models together with the one supporting children in harder situations when they learn how to ski. Nilsen further explains how going skiing is such a deeply rooted cultural practice, that even if children cannot ski, or do not have skis in the preschool, all of them have to join for these kinds of trips. Here, she also looks at skiing trips as a social event for inclusion for children with different backgrounds. They get to learn to ski, they get used to the practice as well as other children and staff members might be very supportive, so it can be an easier process for them.

**Åmot and Ytterhus** (2014) explore three day-care centres in Norway and how children use their bodies as a tool of power while being outdoors, building on a study lasting for eight months (2008/2009), using the data from observing and interviewing children in preschool age. The whole study was related to their time spent outdoors and was aimed at children with difficulties in interaction and expressing themselves and how they use their bodies in order to attract the attention from staff members. One of the examples from their data that they present is the use of body language as a tool for resisting the rules of staff; children avoiding getting dressed in the dressing room in order to stay inside or dragging staff members to the door or peeing outside in their clothes in order to get inside. Åmot and Ytterhus also point out how helpless it might have been for staff encountering this kind of situation as they had to deal with it before other children also engaged in this behaviour in order to get inside too. Power and powerlessness were also examined in children in situations when they tried to negotiate the rules by the behaviour presented above. They further state that ‘children use body and staff use

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<sup>17</sup> Name of the article

rules' (Åmot and Ytterhus; 2014, pp. 265) as a dialectic explaining the same situation from both sides.

### 3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I focused on the theoretical framework of this Thesis rising from the Sociology of childhood. The main concepts that I ought to present and discuss were social construction of childhood and discourses related to these studies, children's agency and socialization. These concepts will be further used in the analytical part of this Thesis. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the methodology of this study.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

Me: *'Are you going out?'*

Teacher: *'Oh, not me. I am having my break, only kids are going out. But gosh how I wish I could go out with them!'* [laughs].

This chapter will present methodological choices within the research, chosen approaches and the research site. Furthermore, the whole process from accessing the field, choosing participants, negotiating relations and roles in research will be discussed. I will present the methodology of the study and ethical considerations together with challenges related to the study. Lastly, I will reflect on leaving the field, limitations of the study and analysis of data.

This study has a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach yields the advantage of being able to reflect on and understand the lives of its participants, in this case children (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Ennew et al., 2009; Kawulich, 2005). I did so by conducting fieldwork, participating in their everyday lives in a kindergarten in Norway for 20 days, mostly from 9 AM until 3 PM. As Ennew et al. (2009, pp. 1.13) presents, 'the basis of all research is systematic curiosity', I was curious about how children experience being outdoors in the context of a kindergarten in Norway.

### 4.1 Process of accessing the field

Upon making the decision to carry out a research in Norway, I had to consider my language skills to get the best possible data from my informants. I had some basic knowledge of Norwegian language, but it was not advanced enough, and since hiring a translator or interpreter would have been cost demanding, I decided to focus on bi-lingual or international preschool settings in Norway. I investigated these settings online first and by random choice chose a few of them, which I e-mailed afterwards. E-mails were directed to managers of these settings with a short unofficial introduction of my research idea, myself and an enclosed question as to whether they would be interested in participating in my study. As I only got one positive promising answer, and one stating that they might be interested but there also might

not be time for them to host me, I decided to cooperate with the preschool setting that responded positively. The manager of the preschool setting that answered *yes* to my invitation was interested in my idea and most importantly, in the data I could possibly obtain from their kindergarten.

My next step was to thoroughly prepare an official information letter for the manager, parents and staff of the kindergarten. I also obtained an official letter of introduction from my department at the university (see Appendix 1 Letter of introduction). Both letters were sent to the manager of the kindergarten to distribute the information about my study further to the staff and parents. Some weeks later, I initiated an information presentation about the study for the staff and parents, where I also hoped to obtain their consent. As I would be approaching children under the age of 18, the consent of their parents was essential. I decided for an opt-out method (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) with regards to consent for this research, so any parent who felt uncomfortable with their child participating in the research was supposed to send a note stating so. Otherwise, it would be understood as parents agreeing to the participation of their children in the research.

The whole presentation took place at a parents' meeting one afternoon where I was invited by the manager of kindergarten. Here, parents could ask questions and ensure that there would be no harm to their children. Most important for the parents was to know whether or not I intended to take pictures or any recording of their children. I ensured them, that it was not my intention to collect any audio or visual recording, but in case taking pictures was necessary, I emphasized that I would not take pictures of their faces or any details that might reveal the identity of either the child or the preschool/staff. After the presentation and provision of all information about the research, I asked the parents if they agreed to their children's participation in the study and if they did not agree, they should notify me. Everyone attending the meeting agreed to the participation of their children. However, as there were parents who did not attend the meeting, I spent my first week at the kindergarten introducing myself, explaining the study and asking for permission from those who did not attend the meeting. There was also a leaflet (the informational letter about the study) hanging on each door of the kindergarten rooms/groups (see Appendix 2 Information letter). I was aware of potential risk within ethics of this project, but throughout my stay in the kindergarten, I daily met the parents of all the children. I felt the necessity to ask each and every one of the parents whether they are okay with their child being a research participant and I kept a note about it, so I was sure that all children had permission from their parents. It took some days in my initial project period

but eventually all of them agreed and kept asking every now and then how am I progressing, how is the research going and so on, having a very positive tone about it. I did not receive any negative responses towards participation from parents and as such started approaching the children.

## 4.2 Selection of participants

The studied kindergarten is situated in a large Norwegian city, quite centrally located. There are approximately 40 children aged 3-6 years old, divided into three groups, coming from around 25 different countries. The first two groups are age-mixed groups of children aged 3-4 years old and the third group, Spiders<sup>18</sup>, is the oldest ones aged 5, turning 6 at the end of the academic year. Each group has approximately 13 children lead by 2-3 members of the pedagogical staff where these are also coming from different countries, not only Norway. I spent my first week in one of the groups of younger children. However, due to language difficulties (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) and the possibility of richer data, I moved to the group of the oldest children and remained there for approximately two weeks. Throughout this period, this group, including the staff leading this group, was predominantly my main study sample. However, during the time outdoors, when all the children went out at the same time, I observed and interacted with all of them through the play and dialogues, while their consent for participation was given by including me into their games. As children were my key informants, it was important for me to let them feel knowledgeable and appreciate them the way they are. This was also an important step when deciding upon the methods chosen for this study which will be discussed later in this chapter (Punch, 2002).

## 4.3 Kindergarten area

The indoor area of the kindergarten consists of three big rooms, one for each group, as well as wardrobes, a library, toilets and a kitchen. The kindergarten also has an outdoor area within the fence with a house with a slide, two roomy sandboxes, some wooden obstacles, kitchen corner, fireplace with a tribune for sitting, several garden tables with benches, a big

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<sup>18</sup> A made-up name, see section about Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

rock, a smaller storage cabinet for small toys and a big storage house for bigger toys like bikes, sliding mats etc. Children, when supervised by staff, also have access to the outside area behind the fence in the close neighbourhood; a playground, an asphalt field for playing as well as hills and flat areas, trees and bushes. They have a good access to both city and natural surroundings, however, to get to the forest or more remote nature areas they have to take public transportation.

#### 4.4 Entering the field

Entering the field and establishing my role as participatory researcher was an important part of my introduction. As Corsaro and Molinari (2008) present in their article, the researcher was presented to children by a teacher as someone from another country who will stay with them for some time. In my case, this happened during our first morning circle time<sup>19</sup>, the very first day I came to the kindergarten. I told the teacher in advance that I would like to present myself, so she was not stepping into my introduction as I wanted to avoid being introduced as a staff member. We sat on the carpet together in small circle with 12 children, whereby the two staff members and I sat close to each other. Head teacher then said good morning to everyone and asked, if the children noticed that they have a new person in their group. They nodded shyly, looked at me and some of them asked who I am. Then I said hi, my name and I asked a group of 3 and 4 years olds if they knew how a school works. They seemed a little bit confused, but they also seemed interested in what I wanted to say. I said, that a school is a place, where a group of children is in a class with one teacher, who teaches them about the world. Children are there, because they want to learn what the teacher offers, because the teacher is an expert, so the children ask a lot of questions to learn as much as possible. Then I said, that here, in this group, we have an opposite situation. I am the child, I am a student who wants to learn something from them. They are my teachers and therefore I would like to stay with them for some time, ask questions and be a part of their group. I gave them an explanation like Punch (2002) suggests, to involve children as informants and let them feel important, because they are the experts in what I am investigating.

As found in Kawulich (2005), it is ethically appropriate to explain a researcher role to research participants. Although, it might be different to explain the research and everything

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<sup>19</sup> A routine when children sit together with staff on the carpet and have a small get-together time

around it to children as compared to adults. As Solberg (1996) presents, approaching children and adults might not be same and it might depend on their age, as their understanding and competencies might differ. Here, I met some ethical challenges I will discuss later in this chapter.

After one week when I changed groups, I introduced myself to the children in the same way as I did with the other group. I also mentioned that they are the oldest children in the kindergarten and that they will soon be starting in school.

Me: *'Do you know how it works in school?'* I said and continued to explain that I want to learn from them how to play outside, learn about the weather, clothing and immediately, one of the children in the group named Erik said that it's raining outside!

Me: *'What should I wear?'*

Children: *'Rainclothes!'* several of them responded simultaneously.

Me: *'And what should I do when I am cold?'*

Children: *'You need to have winter clothes, wool, fleece, boots and warm socks, gloves and a hat!'*

Erik: *'You have to go inside!'* [laughs]

I introduced myself to all staff members, especially the substitutes, as some of them did not attend the parent meeting. I explained my researcher's role and emphasised that I am not a pedagogical staff. It was a little bit challenging as the substitutes changed almost daily, so I had to explain my position continuously, as they thought I was a substitute as well. Here I also met some ethical challenges which I will discuss later in this chapter.

#### 4.5 Research tools of this study

Here, I will present the tools and methods I used during my fieldwork with both children and adult informants, why I decided to use them and what kind of data I could get. The main source of information for this study were observations and informal dialogues, mapping of the playground and an interview. I also held a research diary which was quite rich in research material.

#### 4.5.1 Observations and informal dialogues

According to Ennew et al. (2009) and Kawulich (2005), observation gives a good base for any research, as observing (children's) actions and the ways of doing it might be a source of important information for researchers. I used observation during the entering period when I was finding a way how to reach to my (child) informants, but it was mostly a continuous process throughout my fieldwork. This was supported by Corsaro and Molinari (2008) who talk about observation as a helping procedure from the very beginning of the research. Oakley (2000, pp. 79) refers to observations as a possibility 'to see it as it is', and that was the main reason why I put a great emphasis on observations. As I stayed in the kindergarten for only 20 days, I cannot specify the observation as a *participant* observation, more as an *active* observation as I interacted and played with children while observing.

I was able to watch children play, to observe what kind of toys and tools they use, what kind of games they play, how they behave according to the weather and how they interact between each other. Through structured observations (Ennew et al., 2009) I was able to get a grasp of particular activities and repetitive patterns like games, relationships, interactions or moods, depending on what my focus was on during that particular observation. However, for most of the time spent in the field, I used unstructured observations (Ennew et al., 2009) as I wanted to have an overview of the whole situations as they happened. Only few days/few observations were dedicated to specific focuses as mentioned above.

In addition to observations I found it very easy to get information simply by talking to staff members and children. These dialogues were not prepared beforehand or tied to any topics like structured interviews (Ennew et al., 2009; Willis, 2011). They just came up during the outdoor stays or during the variety of indoor activities. Usually, I saw some situation and questions arose immediately. I saw the opportunity to get explanations and more information right at that moment. Most importantly, teachers did not feel pressured to answer and the atmosphere was relaxed, because we were just talking. The dialogues we had on daily basis were not only initiated from my side, but sometimes I was asked questions by the staff or children and we ended up having nice conversations both research-related and free talking. Here, I put a great emphasis on this free talking as it gave us the opportunity to get closer to each other as well as made it easier for me to get information.



#### 4.5.2 Playground map

It was my 13<sup>th</sup> day in the field when I planned to do a playground map with children. As suggested by Ennew et al. (2009) this method is beneficial to understand children's views of their own area, the playground in this case, and how they use it. Sometimes these maps are simply drawn as a sketch first and then revised. My initial idea was to make a small map on A4 paper format myself while walking outside, asking children about their playground. I started walking around with a paper and a pencil, and was drawing the fence when suddenly, Veronika and two younger girls from the other group came to me and asked what I was doing. I explained that I was attempting to make a map of their playground, but I would need their help. Veronika jumped with happiness, saying that she knows everything and asked for the pencil I was holding in my hand.

We walked around the playground together, while they pointed at particular objects out there and added them onto the paper map. Later, a few other children from the oldest group, Bruno, Sylvia and Klara joined in as well in discussing the map. They let me draw some objects too which I took as a sign of their trust. After this, the children went inside and the Spiders, the oldest group, stayed just a little longer outside when I explained to them the idea of the playground map. They said they noticed that I have been walking around with smaller children with a piece of paper and a pencil. I said that I would like them to make the playground map for me, so we could talk about it later and that it was important for my book to understand how they play outside. I then distributed plastic cups for them to collect some things from outside which they could place on the map later. I explained that it was not necessary for all of them to go around gathering things if they did not want to, but all of them did. Some of them came with full cups asking if they could get more, and some of them returned with only few stones in their cups, saying that it was enough. I saw a teacher trying to coordinate the children in gathering material, saying that some could go get more, or different things, but I emphasized that it was all right for children to pick material they wanted.

In the afternoon, we sat around the big table with a big blank paper when I explained the map idea again. All of them brought their cups filled with material from the outside and I started outlining the fences of the playground. There were two main objects on their playground which they all mentioned as the first things that should be on the map: the sandbox and a big climbing rock. I got permission to start drawing these two, but they immediately started

complaining that it did not look like the sandbox and the rock they have outside. I realized I am only an outsider who does not really know their playground, so I said that they should draw the big map themselves. They took their pencils and started drawing together, discussing who should draw what and where, and if someone was not precise enough, they corrected each other so the final map was perfect. Then I helped them to glue the leaves, wooden sticks, stones and sand to the map so that it was complete. During this process it was important for me to listen carefully to their conversations, because that was the most fruitful source of information about their perceptions of the playground. After they agreed that the map was finished, we sat down in a circle and discussed the map. I asked them questions such as which places were their favourite and what they like to do there. The whole activity probably took an hour and I will discuss the data I got in further depth in the analysis chapter.

Even though I was warned prior to using this tool that I might get stuck in a role conflict between researcher and an educator<sup>20</sup>, I decided to use it. After it was all done, and the data transcribed, I realized, it was not easy and that I really felt the role conflict. Reflecting back on what I had done, I would probably have changed the approach, and aimed for a smaller group of children instead of trying to involve all of them, like Ennew et al. (2009) suggest. Nevertheless, I obtained quite rich data and learned that when using this tool again, I have to be more careful about my choices.

#### 4.5.3 Semi-structured Interview

In the closing period of my fieldwork I conducted a semi-structured interview with a preschool teacher. I waited until we got to know each other a bit better, so that the teacher would be familiar with me and my research (Willis, 2011). Even though I conducted only one interview which might have seem too little, in connection to other research methods I assumed it should be enough as an additional method. I used the interview to get more details from a staff member and maybe clarify, probe more into topics I have observed. Throughout the whole period in the field there were some additional question which arose, and these were taken into consideration when making the interview guide (Ennew et al., 2009). The tool I used was an interview guide with 4 background questions, 7 main questions and one closing question. All

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<sup>20</sup> Lengthy discussions with the supervisor

questions were phrased as open, with some additional themes in brackets in case I wanted to widen the questions (see Appendix 3 Consent form and Interview guide).

Prior to the interview I sent the interview guide to the teacher to take a look and prepare, mainly with regards to the questions about the educational processes and official documentation. The interview took place in the school's office where I brought water for my informant and myself. I explained the aim of the interview, that it was anonymous and voluntary, there were no right or wrong questions, and I asked for permission to record the interview. I then obtained a signed informed consent for the interview and said that I would start the recorder on my phone.

As Ennew et al. (2009) point out, it is not easy to stay relaxed as an unskilled interviewer. The interview itself turned out to be rather semi-structured as I did not always follow the order of my questions as my informant was very talkative and sometimes covered more questions at the same time. So, I only asked probing or clarifying questions which Willis (2011) shows is advantageous for an interview. With my informant's permission, I was able to record the interview which allowed me to focus on my informant, see the facial and other nonverbal expressions while having the tone of voice and pauses recorded as well. This was beneficial especially as English is not my mother tongue and I did not have to focus on writing down everything my informant responded (ibid).

The whole interview took approximately half an hour and I tried not to ask any leading question that might disrupt the thoughts of my informant. I kept repeating parts of the answers to ensure I understood it correctly while balancing it with moving forward in the interview. I had to rephrase the question only once and there were few moments when we ended up with filling words like *well*, *so*, *uhm* or silence for a while. This was a challenge to me, as I was not a trained interviewer as well as English was not my mother tongue. At the end of the interview I asked my informant if there was anything to add, whether it was some more information to be shared which I did not ask specifically about or anything regarding the interview itself. After the interview was finished, I thanked my informant for the time and stopped the recorder.

#### 4.5.4 Research diary

Every day and at all times I kept a journal noting all the information that was available to me, whether it was observed or heard from among my informants. This was a suggestion found in Ennew et al. (2009), to keep track of observations and information from the field. This was my diary, a small notebook that fit right into my pocket, so it was easy to have with me at all times. For me, it was not only a way of storing the variety of information, but also a tool for visualising my role in the field to children and adult participants. I was usually writing down notes outside while I was observing by taking a step aside. When it rained, I just stepped under the roof by the main entrance to the playground. I tried to take notes immediately, but it was not always possible. Sometimes I only managed to write down a few symbols, which I described in detail later, either inside a room during the break or whenever it was possible.

After some days, children became quite interested in my small book and they questioned me about what I was doing.

Marcela: *'What are you doing?'*

Me: *'I am writing a book,'* I reply pointing at my diary.

Marcela: *'About what?'* she seemed very interested.

Me: *'About you kids. Remember the first day I came?'* Marcela nods. *'I said, I wanted to learn about you.'*

Marcela: [giggles] *'She's writing a book about us!'*

Kids are laughing and some of them come to take a look. As my diary is written in my mother tongue which none of them speak, I am not very concerned. Up until the point when two girls take it and start fighting over it. I have become worried that they might tear the pages and I might lose important material.

Me: *'You can take a look in the book but be careful. If you break it or lose it, I will be sad.'*

I knew I probably sounded too *adultlike* at that point, but it was important for me. I knew, it would have been my fault if something happened, but I was showing them that I trust them with my book. The same way of communication I observed from their conversations, when one of the kids showed them the Lego built airplane.

Oskar: *'Look, I made this airplane! You can play with it, but don't destroy it!'*

After that situation with my research diary, I kept a better eye on it, but the children also did not want to take it anymore. I am not sure whether it was because I sounded too serious about it or because they understood that it was important for me.

## 4.6 Ethical considerations

Here I will present and discuss the ethical issues and challenges that I dealt with throughout the whole process of my study, from the beginning and planning stage until the very end. Carrying out a study in the field of Childhood studies requires particular attention towards various ethical considerations, especially because children as a group are usually perceived as vulnerable (Ennew et al., 2009). Apart from children being vulnerable, I wanted to focus on their role in the study where I perceived them as active agents, being able to decide upon things themselves. I did not focus on the age gap between us, even though they did, but I only adjusted my language and expressions, so I could be as close to them as possible (Punch, 2002; Solberg, 1996).

### 4.6.1 Informed consent

In carrying out research it is a requirement to obtain informed consent from participants (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Ennew et al., 2009). Potential respondents should have the freedom to decide upon their participation in the study, receive substantial amount of information about the study, about what will happen with the data, how and who will access it, whether there will be any confidential information collected and how the research will treat informants below the age of 18 etc. (ibid).

As this study was focused mostly on children below the age of 18, the consent of their parents/care givers was necessary. As noted, I aimed for the opt-out method of this procedure (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) and all parents seemed to be compliant as I did not receive any opposition from anyone. Regarding the staff members who participated in the study, mostly for observations and informal conversation, I verbally asked for their consent and explained that they can in any case express their wish to not answer my questions without any

consequences for them (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Ennew et al., 2009). For the interview with the kindergarten teacher which was prepared, scheduled and recorded, I obtained signed informed consent.

Gaining consent from children participants was particularly important for me as they were my key informants and I wanted to emphasize their autonomy regardless of their age. Throughout the whole fieldwork, I avoided words like research, researcher or participants to adjust to their language and minds by simplifying why I was in their kindergarten in the first place, and what I did. I wanted to use a child-friendly approach (Punch, 2002) to get closer to children without complicating the process. Therefore, their consent to *teach me about them* (participate in my study) was constantly negotiated as well as me *joining their games* (actively observing). Before any planned activity I explained, that they could decide whether or not they wanted to join or could choose to leave the activity without saying why they want to leave. Sometimes, it was particularly difficult as children were used to listening to the teachers and teachers were used to making children participate in activities even if children might not have been in the mood for it. It happened a few times when some children got easily bored with some activities and stopped, others would follow them. In other cases, some children were just not in the mood to do anything. Here, I had to accept that, as well as explain to the teacher that it was completely fine, and they did not have to make children participate if they did not wish to join themselves.

#### 4.6.2 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

I respected the privacy of all my informants and I assured them (mostly adults) that all the information would be securely stored until the end of the study. I did not keep notes that contained names, precise ages or nationality throughout the study. I only used a made-up code for each informant which I then replaced with pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of my informants<sup>21</sup>. I was also particularly careful about taking pictures during the study. None of the pictures show faces or areas that might identify the kindergarten, and I showed every picture to the teacher for approval.

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<sup>21</sup> These names were chosen randomly from my country, therefore some of the names in the analytical part might sound strange, while other names might sound international

Prior to interviewing the teacher, I explained that it was important not to mention names or areas identifying the kindergarten as I was recording the interview. I also assured him/her, that after the interview and the transcription of it I would delete the record, which I later did.

Prior to the whole study I was advised by my supervisor to check with the Norwegian Centre for Research (NSD; n.d.) whether or not I have to notify them about my study. I started filling the online form the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 and as I did not intend to collect any confidential data or data that might have identified my informants (names, addresses, ID numbers etc.) my study was not subjected to notification. The screenshot of this NSD registration is located in appendices (see Appendix 4 NSD registration).

#### 4.6.3 Negotiation of roles

I did not find expressing and explaining my role of researcher very difficult, the only complicated part was to remain in this role. From the beginning, some of the staff members thought I was a substitute teacher so they kept assigning me pedagogical tasks, like helping them to keep an eye on the count of children or staying with them alone for a few moments. I had to explain politely several times, that I am not a pedagogical staff and I cannot take on these tasks. With counting children, it was a bit easier to explain, as they wear high visibility vests in green, yellow, orange or pink colour (very bright colours like a highlighter) and distinguishing yellow and green was quite difficult. I told the substitutes a few times that my colour vision is not very good, so I do not see the difference between green and yellow and they accepted it. I remember, however, agreeing twice to stay with a group of Spiders alone after spending some time in the field because one staff member was on break and the others were not available. I agreed to this because these requests from the staff members gave me the unspoken confirmation of trust, which I truly appreciated, even though it might have position me into a role conflict of researcher versus staff member.

To emphasize my role as a researcher, I visibly took field notes and informally interviewed staff members whenever possible (Corsaro and Molinari, 2008; Kawulich, 2005). Corsaro and Molinari (2008) further talk about persisting in a researcher role by not only dismissing tasks from pedagogical staff, but also reflecting on researcher's own initiated behaviour. During my observations of outdoor time in preschool, I realized a few times, that I was stepping into the pedagogical role by, for instance, telling children to be careful when we

were climbing up the rocks together, or comforting a child when they fell off because I was the only adult around at that moment. The latter was particularly difficult to stay back, but was I really supposed to stay back? I could not really freeze and ignore a crying child when they ran into my arms for comfort, which I might have interpreted as showing trust (Ennew et al., 2009; Punch 2002).

Another example of this role conflict might be situation, when children came to me saying they are cold and their hands hurt. As a pedagogue, I would check their hands and neck, and if I observed they were cold, I would take them into the wardrobe to find extra clothes. But any compassionate person would do a similar thing, except perhaps actively helping them. Therefore, the only thing I did to stay in my role and to show compassion was to take their hands, say *'Oh yes, your hands are cold!'* and sent them to the teacher for help. Yet again, it is a little bit difficult to evaluate the situation right in that moment as this action of children might be interpreted as showing affection and trust, which is very important during fieldwork and building the trustful relationship with informants, as this is constantly negotiated (Kawulich, 2005).

Understanding my role as a researcher was not that difficult for staff members. They were curious about what I was observing at the moment but took the whole period quite naturally. We held informal conversations, either in pairs or in smaller groups, where the topic was sometimes research related, sometimes very free in order to get to know them better, which was reciprocal.

Explaining my role to children and keeping it clear throughout the whole research period was a bit harder. Due to my schedule, it was not possible to perform my research on 20 consecutive days. Therefore, children might have been a bit confused as to whether I was a substitute. Who was I? They understood, that I was a different kind of adult (Corsaro and Molinari, 2008) in their kindergarten, but many times they approached me as a teacher. For example, one day (my seventh day in the field, first day with group of Spiders) we were going inside after a trip to the neighbourhood, where children were jumping into the puddles. One of the boys, Erik, was soaking wet so he ran straight into the bathroom to get changed to dry clothes and then he went to the Spiders' room. He saw the opportunity to compete, when I came into the room and claimed he was the first one inside. Right after me, Jakub came in happily jumping and claiming he was the second one in as he heard Erik.

Me: *'No, I was the second one inside.'*



Jakub: *'But teachers don't count in the competition!'*

Me: *'But I am not a teacher.'* I tried to explain, but boys only laughed and said, that I am a teacher and the conversation was over.

Only two days after, we were on a day trip to the city, when we stopped by a big playground with a very steep slide. Veronika and Klara were playing on that slide when suddenly Veronika grabbed my hand and invited me to slide with her. When I walked up the hill and sat down on the beginning of the slide, I felt nervous because it really was steep.

Veronika: *'Are you scared?'*

Me: *'Yes, I am a bit scared.'*

Veronika: *'Don't be, it's fun! I am here with you, we can slide together.'* At that moment I felt like I was the child and she was the older one, supervising me, which gave me the feeling of belonging.

Veronika to Klara: *'Hey! Look! I am playing with a teacher!'*

Many times, I got into a situation, where there was a notable imbalanced power relationship between me and children or staff members. Mostly in cases, when children did not want to join the activity and they perceived me as a teacher. It seemed like they felt the obligation to join because I am an adult. Or because the teacher usually says so and they probably linked my person better compared to the teacher. And sometimes I felt the obligation towards the staff as I was a guest in their environment, so I had to be quick to reflect upon that and stay in my role as a researcher.

#### 4.6.4 Reciprocity

As discussed above there was ever-present struggle to make all the stakeholders, both teachers and children, aware of my role. There were a few situations where I intentionally left the role as a researcher in order to contribute to a better relationship with my research environment. Here is one example: It was my fourteenth day in the field when we went on a whole day trip to the town's concert hall to watch some musical recital for children. After the show was finished, the plan was to go to the museum nearby, so the children did not put all of their winter clothes on as it was only few minutes' walk. When we arrived at the museum, it

was closed, even though it was supposed to be open. We turned around and went back to the concert hall, so children could get more clothes on and staff could talk about the situation. I heard them talking about going back to the kindergarten as they struggled with a substantial plan, because it would take time to find another playground and some of the children did not have enough clothes. I offered myself to try to call the museum after teacher called several times unsuccessfully, while the staff was helping children with their clothes and backpacks. And after a few calls I got an answer, and the museum was opened soon. Both children and staff members were grateful.

On my last day, when I was leaving the kindergarten, I brought a small gift packed in a wrapping paper which I gave them during the circle time. I showed them my diary I kept with me during the whole time in there and I told them, that I have to leave, go back to school and turn my small diary into a real book. I told them, that this book, as I was telling them the whole time, will be about them and one day they will be able to read it. But until then, I brought two books for children, wrapped in the paper, as my thanks for their time and for being my informants. They opened the gift and started looking into the books, saying thanks and hugging me. Then they draw some goodbye cards for me and asked, if I am really leaving and if I ever come back. It was emotional, but no one cried. I said all my thanks to the children and staff members and they wished me good luck.

## 4.7 Analysis

This part will deal with the analytical processes of the study from a methodological perspective, mostly the transcription process and the coding of collected data.

### 4.7.1 Transcription

As I mentioned, I kept writing down a diary throughout the whole study which I wrote in my mother tongue to ensure, that no one could read it. Every day after I came home from kindergarten I transcribed these notes into my computer in detail. As it was almost always demanding to focus on children and still write down the notes, I ended up with codes for different actions, emotional expressions, persons, places etc., so it was important for me to

transcribe it as soon as possible to work with it while it was still fresh. I made up different codes for all children and staff members and after the data collection was finished, I replaced the codes with made-up names to ensure the anonymity (Alderson & Morrow, 2012).

I conducted one semi-structured interview with the teacher which was recorded. As soon as it was finished, I transcribed it, and the recording was deleted. Again, it was important for me to finalize the transcription as soon as possible, to have the fresh feelings and emotions at hand, to be able to note these down. The interview took approximately 34 minutes and the transcription took a little over 3 hours. During the whole process of transcription, especially after the interview, I tried to go back and forth many times and note down even the pauses, laugh, remember the emotions we had at that point, so the transcription would represent the interview as authentically as possible.

To increase the anonymity and confidentiality of my informants, I stored the material data securely in a suitcase with a code in my office and the transcribed material on my PC with a passcode security.

#### 4.7.2 Coding

After the transcription was finished, I organized the documents the way that the text was on the left side of the paper filling two thirds, with double spacing between the lines for additional thoughts and comments. The right side, last third was left blank for the coding. I printed out the transcriptions prepared for coding and coded manually. As Saldana (2013) suggests, coding is a cycle as it usually never gets done to the final stage in the first coding round, I also coded in two cycles. First, I was re-reading the data, underlying the important thoughts and actions, giving these the *initial codes*, according to the impression I got as first. These were, for instance *running*, *'I want to go in'*, *eating soup* etc. Many of these initial codes were also *In Vivo codes*, or codes deriving directly from the speech or notes being quoted (*'I want to go in'*). In the second round of coding I specified the codes like *running* → *activity*, *'I want to go in'* → *verbal coping*, *eating soup* → *lunch* etc. Eventually, these got to be divided into themes or categories that were aligning with the research questions and later analysed. Examples of the categories: *outdoor play*, *resistance/adaptation*, *routines* respectively from the previous example.

## 4.8 Limitations of the study

Punch (2002) suggests establishing a trustful relationship with participants in order to obtain valid and honest data. I might say, that after being warmly greeted several times when I returned to the kindergarten after few days of absence, receiving hugs and gifts, drawings and invites home to play with them etc., the relationship between me and my participants seemed to be close. And as I have been in the kindergarten myself, carrying out the fieldwork myself, I had the *evidence* of what I have seen, observed and what kind of knowledge I gained during this period. It is possible that if the same project was carried out by another person with different personality, different *theoretical glasses*, during another time of the year but in the same kindergarten, the data might have been different.

My data might also have been limited by the fact, that I carried the project in *colder months* and therefore, I could not see the difference in children's experiences in summer compared to winter. Although, I could say that my aim was to focus on the weather that might have been *uncomfortable* for children, therefore I do not view this as a limitation as it could have been in different types of studies.

## 4.9 Summary

In this chapter I presented and discussed the whole methodological process from the beginning until the writing stage of this Thesis. I presented the process of accessing the kindergarten, choice of my informants and entering the field. Later, I discussed my methodological choices and methods used for this study, which ethical issues I had to deal with and I finished this chapter with short methodological insight into the analysis and limitations of the study. The next two chapters will focus on the analysis of the data and discussions itself.

## Chapter 5: Children experiencing nature and outdoors

In this chapter I will focus on the question related to children and their time spent outdoors in the kindergarten, their activities and experiences when they are outside. The research question that is addressed in this chapter:

### **Q1: How do the children experience to be outdoors?**

To answer this question, I mostly use the data from the observations, informal dialogues with children and staff members, and mapping the playground activity. I divided the data into three categories; indoors, outdoors and weather.

The first and the second category go hand in hand as I see the relation between children playing and being outdoors and indoors. What was the main thing observed was free play that was connected to children being outdoors and organized play when children were indoors. When outdoors, I observed the use of natural surroundings together with allocated kindergarten's playground, children's fantasy and how the nature may have been used as an area for socialization. When we were indoors, there were most often rules for how children should behave, *limited* play area which children had to share. Here, I looked at the relations between children and adults as well as children between each other. Yet again, this leads to analysing the socialization processes. One important thing that I took into consideration when I divided the outdoor and indoor areas was day trips that were taken to public places that were actually indoors. Therefore, I will talk about indoors only when children were inside the kindergarten and indoor public places will be considered as children being out of doors of the kindergarten, even though there might have been same or similar rules applying as when they are inside the kindergarten.

The last category that will be discussed in this chapter is Weather. As mentioned already earlier in the text, weather is a strong subject that may influence how children behave and experience being outdoors. In this part, I will focus on process of socialization expressed through adaptation and resistance of children, together with experiences of staff members and what role the clothing plays when it comes to diverse weather conditions.

## 5.1 Children outdoors versus indoors

Most of the days the kindergarten uses their outdoor playground within a fenced area twice a day. The schedules around it mostly depends on the season and current weather conditions. In the autumn – winter they usually go out in the morning around 10 AM and inside before lunch, which is around 11:30 AM. In spring and summer, they might go out even earlier. Afternoon outdoor time depends usually on the weather; then it is cold and wet, and children do not have enough spare clothes to change, they might have to decide to go out only once a day. Then, this decision is up to the staff's agreement at that particular point. Although, as winter days are shorter, and the sunlight is limited, they usually go out in the mornings. Afternoon outside play time happens either before or after their snack; again, depending on the season and weather. The snack is at 2:30 PM and in winter time they usually go out before the snack because of the light. In summer time, they either go out after the snack or they can eat the snack outside on the playground. As explained by a teacher, in winter it is not easy to eat the snack outside because of the mittens and gloves, but they have tried it. Both children and staff members enjoy the snack time in summer time a bit better as children can be outside until they are picked up by parents at the end of the day as well as they can go play after eating the snack right away. Children then spend time outside on the playground approximately 1-2 hours in winter time and 2-4 hours in summer time daily.

The staff from the three groups always communicates about the schedule of going out or staying inside as the schedule is not fixed and there are many circumstances that this schedule has to be adjusted to. For instance, when one of the groups has some indoor activity they are supposed to do according to their year plan and it takes more time than they expected, they just stay inside and come out on the playground later. Or they just go out once during that day. This was observed one day, when one of the younger groups of children played nicely inside, according to what the teacher said, so she decided they are staying inside and coming out only in the afternoon. Another observation towards this was when a new girl in the group of older children came to the kindergarten so she stayed there for only few hours. As it was her first day and it might have been overstimulating for her, the teacher also decided to stay inside before lunch, so the children can get to know each other in a calmer environment. This group also came out that day only in the afternoon. This also worked the opposite way, when the two groups wanted to stay inside because of some indoor activity, the third group had to decide

whether they want to stay in as well or they just go out. The teacher said, that in this kind of situation they usually ask children what they wish to do or according to what teachers observe during indoor time; when there is too much noise and children are more active, then they go out, so they can get out the energy. If they are playing quietly or having some sitting activity, they just stay inside as well. One of the teachers also said that it is written in the law that *‘if the temperature is below negative 10, then children should not be outside’*.

During their indoor time, all the groups have a circle time, usually one in the morning and one in the afternoon. During this time, all children sit together with staff members on the carpet in a circle (each group in their own room) and start a day together talking about variety of things and topics. On Mondays they usually talk about what they did during the weekend, where they have been and so on. In addition to this, studied kindergarten has their own units<sup>22</sup>, learning areas according to their year plan. These units are usually discussed during the circle time as well.

#### 5.1.1 Children and places

Children of the studied kindergarten had both indoor and outdoor space available for their everyday use. Whether it was playing, learning or whatever they wanted to, they had an indoor room for each group and an outdoor playground within the fence right next to the kindergarten. As Clark (2013) presents, these places are organized by adults for children based on an assumption of adults regarding what can be good for children. The outdoor area had an uneven surface, with some inbuilt stone stairs, a pavement, some climbing wooden obstacles, a slide with a house, garden benches with tables, a big rock and a sandbox. But otherwise this area was quite untamed and free for children’s use. On the other hand, the indoor area was most of the time organized. As already mentioned, each group had their own room where they stayed most of the time. Only in the mornings before all the children came, there could be a mixture of children from all groups located in one room.

I would like to draw an example of how the classroom of the Spiders looked. They had several cabinets, shelves and cupboards, three tables and chairs for all children (one table was used only as a keeping place for spare things), a sofa, desk with a computer, data projector,

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<sup>22</sup> Kindergarten’s learning themes, according to their year plan

washbasin and, of course, many types of toys and art supplies. This place had very specific rules; no running inside, painting only on the table, when it was dancing or movie time, other toys was supposed to be in the place. This was regulated by the teacher, who had the power to do so (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). One day, when I returned to the kindergarten after I have been away for some time, the look of the interior and placement of furniture was changed. I was wondering why this was done and the answer was, to discourage the running inside the room. The sofa and one cupboard were placed so that the room was separated into smaller parts. The teacher created the place for children by adjusting the furniture and look inside the room and that created some rules for children (Clark, 2013; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014).

Even though that indoor space was organized for children and had certain rules, they were still able to use their agency and adjust the space by creating their own places (Clark, 2013; James & James, 2008). For instance, children from the group of Spiders used the table and chairs as a cave. They did not use any other material, only the table and chairs and even these were standing in place as they normally did. Just some children invented a game about cave and a monster, so some children were hiding under the table and some were trying to get them out by crawling on the floor. Neither the teacher nor I knew what they were doing until we asked them. Here, children used the furniture in the space that was created for them to use it for creation of their space and their game (Clark, 2013).

The outside area within the fence that was available for the kindergarten also had many possibilities for children. One day when it was quite heavily raining, I came out to the playground and found Valter, Erik and Viktor from the group of Spiders under the slide in the house. They were making some undefinable sounds, so I came closer to ask about what they were doing. What they said sounded like '*sheltering<sup>23</sup> from rain*' which was absolutely understandable in that weather. They used the house for what it was probably built for (Clark, 2013; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). But then Valter shouted at me that I have to hide. '*From whom?*' was my question. '*Snakes! We are sheltering from snakes!*' answered Valter and reached out for me. I went inside the house and asked, where are the snakes. The answer was, that snakes were on the slide, sliding down and coming for them. Apparently, the sound of heavy raindrops reminded them of snakes sliding down the slide. They assigned this place another meaning by using their fantasy (Clark, 2013).

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<sup>23</sup> Boys used this term



Many times, during the period I stayed in the kindergarten I saw children playing outside the fence. The teacher then said, that if children want to play there, they usually come to one of the teachers, ask them if they can go out and if they are enough children going out as well as enough staff members out on the playground, children are allowed to go outside the fence to play in the neighbourhood with supervision of one of the teachers. Here, children's agency is taken into account when it comes to decision upon where they would like to play (James & James, 2008). Teacher also continued, that children are allowed to run freely and use the outside area as they wish as long as they are in sight of teachers. So as long as teachers see the children and vice versa, children can use the area outside of the fence as they like to. Nilsen (2012, pp. 216) describes this as 'freedom with responsibility'. The children negotiate the fence, the boundaries which teaches them to be responsible for themselves, as well as being active agents in deciding and expressing where they would like to play (James & James, 2008).

Children were aware of the rules that staff members created for them. But children were also able to follow and adjust these rules for themselves and used these between each other. One day we were walking back to the kindergarten from a trip, I was walking in pair with Aurel. It was icy, and some children were walking slowly on the ice, while Aurel was walking fast enough to cut the line and overtake several children in the row. All of a sudden, we were the second pair in the row and there was only Oskar with a teacher in front of us. Oskar noticed this, turned around and said: *'This is Veronika's and Bruno's place! There can't be two teachers in a row!'*. Oskar was explicit enough about that this place was not ours and that there are certain rules applied to it (Clark, 2013; Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005). Here, a place became a subject of negotiation, which was a phenomenon observed several times during the fieldwork and will be closely discussed in the following part.

### 5.1.2 Children and territories

When it comes to places and areas in kindergarten where interactions between both children and adults and children between each other occur, we can find places that might cause arguments, negotiations and conflicts (Nilsen, 2005). I will now present an example from the studied kindergarten, where children might have gotten into conflict with both staff members and other children.

One day, when it was quite cold and wet, children were occupied by playing a cooking game. Mostly they used the sand and all the toys designed for games in the sand box. After a while the sand was not enough so they started looking for alternatives; sticks, stones, leaves and so on. They were making delicious soups, pizza and cakes when two children from younger group came with the soil from the nearby plant pot. It was much darker and thicker than the sand and it got attention of other children. They started getting the soil, mixing it with rain water in their buckets when a teacher came. The teacher told them that they should not use the soil as there will be nothing left in the pot later and the plant will die. Two girls from younger group took the initiative to guard this plant and whenever other child came to steal the soil, these two girls shouted, that it is forbidden.

In this example, the plant pot and the soil became the area of conflict – the territory (Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005, pp. 126). An adult had a power to make a rule about not using soil from the pot and two girls showed initiative – agency, to make sure no one would break this rule. There were, however, other children who did not want to listen to this rule and tried to negotiate the boundaries by sneaking to the pot and stealing the soil (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2012).

Children did not usually have any stable rules on the kindergarten's playground, this was an area for free play. Only some advice in terms of safety like climbing carefully on the rock or riding bikes so they would not crash into other children. On the other hand, rules indoors were quite common. One of the most often pronounced rules was *walking feet inside, running feet outside*. And then there was a very often negotiated sofa in the room of the Spiders. The sofa was big enough for two, maximum 3 adults and there were 13 children wanting to share this sofa. To avoid conflicts, the teacher divided the children into groups (three, three and four children) and every day, one group was allowed to be on the sofa, and then they switched the next day. The following example shows the negotiation of sofa and one dangerous object that appeared there prior to that.

After the lunch we were watching the TV series about Dinosaurs and Erik was apparently scared so he was sitting on my lap, looking for comfort. After watching the TV, they were choosing pictures of Dinosaurs to draw and colour and suddenly

someone brought a hammer. A real hammer, I did not even see who brought it. The hammer was probably used by the teachers to put together the art activity they had been doing before. Marcela and Klara were playing with the hammer when Oskar and Viktor wanted to join.

Sylvia: *'But you know that playing with the hammer is not allowed, only adults can have it'* and she brought the hammer to me. Klara then started jumping on the sofa then Oskar said that it's not allowed either.

Me: *'And who said so?'*

Oskar: *'I don't know, it's just not allowed.'*

Klara: *'But my mom let me to jump on the sofa at home.'*

Oskar: *'It's annoying Klara!'* He then turned to me: *'can you please tell her to stop? She's not even allowed on the sofa in the first place!'*

Me: *'I can't tell her to stop, I am not a teacher, you know.'*

Oskar: *'Ughh, okay. Klara, can you please stop jumping on the sofa? It's annoying and you are not allowed here today.'*

Klara: *'Okay.'*

Here, a dangerous object appeared in children's hands. A hammer inside was not allowed for children, it was probably laying on the desk after some activity when a teacher used it, and someone from children took it and brought to the others. Sylvia took a position of a guardian in that situation, expressed that a hammer is not allowed and brought it to an adult person – me. She assumed the imbalanced power relationship between us and assigned me a powerful position based on what she was used to (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). This was followed by jumping on the sofa by a child, Klara, who was not even allowed on the sofa that day. Oskar was trying to come up first with a rule about not jumping on a sofa because he probably found it unfair, that someone who is not allowed on a sofa is making him annoyed. Oskar was that day in a group which had the sofa. He did not know maybe how to express the original rule first and he wanted me to step in. I did not have the position or power to do so, so I just said that I cannot. Then he finally got a grasp of his agency and claimed his place – his territory (Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005). In addition to this, Oskar demonstrated the idea of we-ness

(Nilsen, 2005); Klara was not welcome on the sofa that day, but other days the two of them were observed playing together very often. He expressed, that even that they spend time together at some point, it does not necessarily mean that they must spend time together all the time. As described by Nilsen (2005), the fluidity of this relationship was feasible in this example.

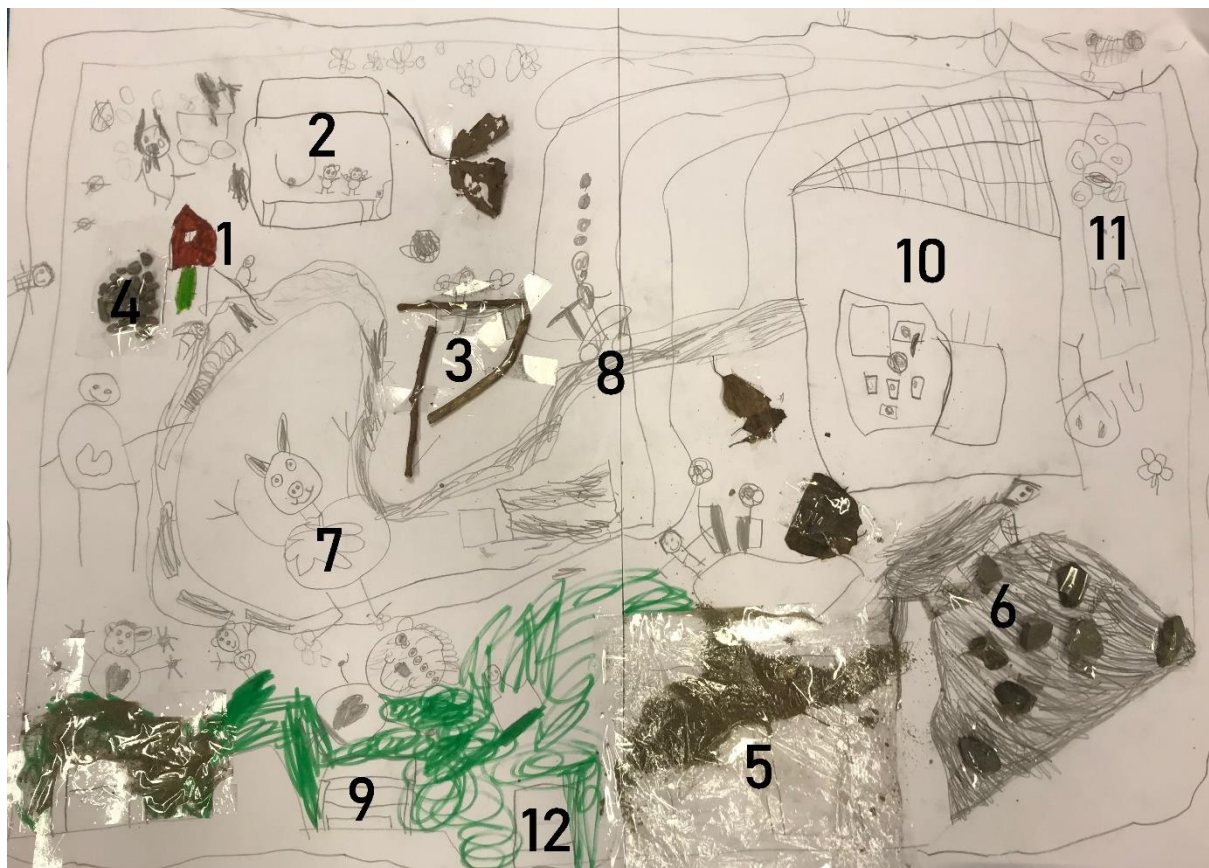
One of the tools that I used during my study was an area map. I used it after approximately two weeks in the field after I got a bit more into my role and children and staff members accepted my presence. What was important for me was to observe first their games, interactions and use of the playground. After that, I talked to the teacher and introduced my idea of creating a map of their playground with children. It was also important for me to see possible difference between my perception of space and the one of the children, therefore I begun with creating my small map while I was walking along the playground. This was also suggested by (Ennew et al., 2009) in terms of creating a small sketch map first and then recreating it again in a bigger scale.

I was walking with the map around the playground, looking for things that were missing on my map. Veronika from the group of Spiders and some other smaller kids were very interested in what I am doing so they joined and they were looking for things which were missing on the map. *'We are missing children! And teachers! And this bike! And that box!'* continued Veronika pointing at particular objects on the playground. Veronika then asked me to have the paper and pencil, so she could draw on the map right away when she sees there is something missing. I gave it to her as I knew, she will know better than me (Punch, 2002). Later, Bruno, Sylvia and Klara joined us as well and Veronika took the initiative and explained what we were doing.

First, smaller children went inside, and Spiders stayed outside for 5 more minutes. I called them to gather around me and I explained the idea of the map and asked if they wanted to help me understand their playground better – their consent for the activity (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Ennew et al., 2009). They seemed happy and said yes. I then gave them plastic cups, so they can pick up some things they would like to put on their map which would represent some special places on the playground. I did not want to specify what kind of object they can pick, I wanted to leave this up to them.

In the afternoon, we sat around the big table with big paper and I explained again, that we are going to make a big map of their playground. I started with an outline of fences and I

drew a sandbox and a big rock. They immediately started complaining that those two are not that close to each other, so I admitted it is a right time to give them pencils and let them draw. I also realized at that point, that I probably should not have started drawing at all and leave it all to them, but what happened might have been a good example of their territoriality – they did not agree with what I have drawn, because it was not their perception of size and the distance between climbing rock and the sandbox (Nilsen, 2009a; Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005). We did a round and all of them added something into our map, some of them even drew themselves and their teacher. Although, all of them were correcting each other, especially Viktor and Oskar, and ensuring that the map will be perfectly representing their playground. They stopped everyone who was not precise enough. Later I helped them to tape leaves, sand, rocks, smaller rocks and wooden sticks onto a paper. Below is the final product that children have created.



Playground map: 1-slide, 2-kitchen, 3-balance post, 4-gravel around the slide, 5-sandbox, 6-big rock, 7-the teacher, 8-pavement with bike, 9-table and benches, 10-hut with bikes and big toys, 11-slide (that was not even there), 12-toy cabinet

After lunch we sat down on a carpet in the circle with this map in the middle and discussed it a bit. I asked them what their favourite place on the playground is and what they like to do there. Because of the understandable power relationship between children and teacher (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014) they were used to turn taking, they started speaking one by one, and when someone mentioned a place and activity that other children could subscribe to as well, they started discussing places and speaking over each other. Teacher that was sitting there as well tried to stop them, so they could get back to speaking one by one, but I said, that it is all right. I wanted them to discuss these places and the map which they created, as they started creating games and places while they were looking at the map (Ennew et al., 2009).

The most frequently mentioned place was the slide. Seven children (Erik, Jana, Ivan, Veronika, Sylvia, Marcela and Oskar) mentioned the slide as their favourite place, plus Klara was very specific about the small stones (gravel) that were located around the slide. She said she liked to gather them and then throw them down the slide pretending the stones are racing. Victor then stepped in and said, that they are not racing stones, they are snakes. Ivan then said that he liked to play rockets on the slide and Marcela seemed to be happy at that moment as she added, that she liked to play rockets there too. Ivan nodded and continued, that it gets even faster when it is raining, so they can be very fast rockets. It was interesting to see how the same place could be interpreted so differently by four children (Clark, 2013). Five children (Erik, Ivan, Marcela, Valter and Aurel) said that they liked the climbing rock. Here, Marcela was very specific about the use of the rock; besides climbing and jumping, she said she liked to play boats, rocket ships and dinosaurs on the rock.

Two girls, Jana and Sylvia liked the balancing post and obstacles, where Sylvia drew herself. She did not say anything about drawing herself there, it was Jana who pointed out that Sylvia was standing on the balance post (I saw her drawing herself there). Jana then expressed, that Sylvia was good at balancing there. By drawing herself on the balance post, Sylvia claimed her favourite place (Nilsen, 2009a; Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005) and Jana showed her appreciation towards Sylvia, through expressing their friendship. These two were also observed playing together very often, having a very warm relationship.

### 5.1.3 Children and play

Preschool age and a kindergarten are time and place for children to play; especially play when children are physically active (Kaarby, 2005). There are many types of games and plays that children engage in during their stay outdoors. These could be running, jumping off the rocks, sliding or rolling down the hills, balancing (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; in Kaarby, 2005, pp. 123-124). Throughout my stay in the studied kindergarten I was able to observe many different types of play both inside and outside. Variety of games were derived from either favourite places, creation of places or relationships between children. But there was one feature that all plays and games had in common; fantasy. In addition to this I observed, that children outside had more freedom and independency within play than when they were playing inside. As presented earlier, the inside area had some specific rules for children, such as limited groups on the sofa, no running, being calmer and quieter inside as well as that inside activities were adjusted according to the kindergarten's schedule. Children outside, on the other hand, engaged in free play. They could choose where to play, what to do, who to include in the game and so on (Nilsen, 2012; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). In the following example I will show one of the observed plays that happened between two younger girls outside.

Two girls from the group of younger children were collecting mud into the bucket and they were saying they have a spider cage/trap in there. They were catching spiders, really big ones and they were going to eat them. Those spiders were afraid of these girls. They said they had a lot of spiders and that they were about to catch worms as well.



These two girls engaged in fantasy free play, where they used buckets and spades, which is part of most often found equipment in kindergartens. These toys have an initial purpose, which is gathering sand/soil/water and other material (Moser & Martinsen, 2010). The girls used these for the purpose that it was made for, but in addition to that, they used their fantasy to create an original play with catching spiders. They both were also very occupied by the fact that the spiders and worms were afraid of the girls. The use of fantasy in creation of play was visible also the other day during the trip in the autumn. On our way to look for a place to eat lunch, we met a man with a leaf blower. Children immediately started approaching this man and pretending, that the leaf blower was a monster and is trying to catch them. The leaves that were flying in the air were representing the fire that this monster was spitting out of its mouth.

One day, the group of Spiders split in half and we went on a small trip in the neighbourhood after lunch with a small group of children. Such going on trips or visits behind the fence was already presented earlier. It gives children the grasp of their own agency as they can decide where to go and what to do and they can get used to the responsibility taking (Moser & Martinsen, 2010; Nilsen, 2012). It was a rainy day and children discovered an enormously big puddle which was almost knee deep. They, of course, started jumping into it. Erik was completely soaking wet. We came back to the preschool after approximately 45 mins and Erik had to go immediately inside because he could get sick. Although, he was humorous about it and at least he said he was the first in the room. He saw the opportunity to compete and he seemed to have so much fun.

Engaging in risky play is quite common for kindergartens in Norway. It's a concept when children are allowed to climb the trees, climb the rocks, manipulate with sharp object and anything, that might have been viewed by 'western society' as risky or dangerous. Possible injuries are of course taken into account, but Norwegians have an opinion, that these kinds of games teach children responsibility and ability of controlling their own body (Moser & Martinsen, 2010). Here, we can again apply the concept of 'freedom with responsibility' (Nilsen, 2012, pp. 216). When it comes to risky play observed in the studied kindergarten, children usually used the climbing rock or the trees for climbing outside of the fence. No injuries were observed apart from some falls and in most of the cases these children did not even cry. More dangerous seemed to be walking and running on icy surface during the coldest days. Then, some children slipped and fell on the ice and possibly got some scratches on their faces. Or when they were using bikes and the speed was too high, some bikes crashed either



into each other or into other children. But otherwise, children tackled these risky situations quite well.

#### 5.1.4 Children eating lunch on trips

The oldest group of children, the Spiders, usually goes on whole day trips once a week. They can go out hiking into the woods, visit the seaside, or just go play on the playgrounds in the neighbourhood. They leave the kindergarten in the morning around 9-9:30 AM and come back around 2 PM, so they eat their pre-packed lunch somewhere outside. The two remaining groups of younger children go out as well, but usually only into the neighbourhood and not for that long. These groups usually get back into the kindergarten for lunch and then spend some time out on the playground after the lunch. When the older children are coming back to the kindergarten, they either stay on the playground with other two groups or they just go straight inside, depending on the season, weather and how tired children come back from the trip. Here, I would like to focus on the lunch eating routine.

Eating their meals is not only seen as getting some food of energetic and nutritious value. Children spend time with preparing the tables for lunch, being responsible for the task they get assigned when preparing the table and then sharing the social value of eating lunch together with other children and staff members. They usually discuss anything and everything; what happened during outdoor play, during indoor activities, at home, on the way to the kindergarten or on trips and so on. By this, eating lunch gains the social value, that is important for children in preschool age. By getting used to tasks from setting the table to sitting nicely and discussing things they like to, we can also talk about socialization process (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2009b).

Besides that, children have a warm meal every day, except of the trip days when they have their lunch packed in boxes from home. These lunch boxes are something very special for Norwegians (Aase, 2008; Nilsen, 2009a) and even children coming from different countries are getting used to it. It usually contains some slices of bread with spread, cheese or ham and children ate it when we were sitting outside somewhere on the bench, or even in the hallway sitting on the floor. Some of the children had a traditional lunch box with slices of bread, but some of the non-Norwegian children had different meals like rice with vegetables, pasta, French toast and so on.

Eating lunch on trips was something very different from eating lunch inside. Inside, children had certain rules, assigned seats, they were supposed to be more-less quiet and calm while eating. Sometimes, a child did not want to eat the food that he or she has been served. Teachers usually tried to make these children at least try a few bits before they were allowed to leave the table. The table here was a special place made for eating lunch at that moment that was created and organized by adults (Clark, 2013; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). On the other hand, when children ate their lunch on a trip, the place was never stable, and children never knew where they will be eating lunch today. First, the group had to find a place to sit and eat the lunch; this could have been a bench in a park or a hallway in a museum. A bench in a park was probably created for eating as one of the many purposes that it could be used for, while hallway in the museum was probably never intentionally made for eating lunch. But by sitting down there, taking out the lunch boxes and eating, children assigned this purpose to this place (Clark, 2013).

There were usually no rules when eating lunch outside. Children could sit wherever they wanted and with whoever they wanted, they sang and laughed, they were allowed to go away from the eating place and come back. As they had packed lunch, it was up to them what they wanted to eat, whether it was yoghurt, pasta salad or a slice of bread. These lunch boxes were usually filled with variety of tastes, so children's agency manifested in process of choosing their food (James & James, 2008). Many times, children also had packed with them some *good stuff*; either candies, sliced fruits and vegetables, or a bit of chocolate. These they then shared with other children. Here, the relationships between children was visible, they usually shared most candies with those, who they liked to spend time the most that day. There was a visible concept of we-ness which was already presented, as these children sat and shared food with other children, they showed their relationship with each other, but this was changing every time they ate lunch outside (Nilsen, 2005, 2009a).

In this part, I focused on children and their experiences outdoors in terms of use of space, imagination within creation of places as well as their relationships between each other. In the following part I will discuss the weather as an influential factor of children's outdoor experiences.

## 5.2 Experiencing the cold

I spent my fieldwork in the kindergarten mostly during the coldest months in the year in Norway; 6 days in October, 10 days in November and 7 days in January. Therefore, the temperature was always around zero degrees Celsius and the most frequently used words in my field diary were rain, cold, snow or ice, slippery, wet, mud and drizzle. And because of that the most observed and discussed terms in this part will be clothing, weather and coping with it.

### 5.2.1 'My hands are ouchie'

One of the most important things to assure when children are to enjoy the outdoors during colder days is to make sure they are warm enough. Being cold usually takes away the joy. Nilsen (2008) describes, that making a child warm is a responsibility of both parents and staff but also children themselves. While adults make sure that children have enough and proper clothing, children have to be aware of what kind of clothes to use when and where to find the clothes to change in case they are wet. Nilsen further presents the rational child subject as a self-aware child with agency, able to reason the particular situation and express verbally his/her wishes and needs (2008). The next two examples show the two possible expressions of the same wish.

It was a typical October morning, the sun was hiding behind the clouds, air was quite fresh but still not as cold as in winter. One could still feel the remnants of summer. It was around 6-7 degrees Celsius and quite wet outside so children were wearing their rain clothes. Two children from the younger group were playing with the buckets, wet soil and rainwater, they were cooking some soup. It was one of my first days, so I was just standing by observing, when suddenly one of them came to me and said: '*My hands are ouchie*'. I could not really help her, so I suggested her going to a teacher. She then went and told the exact same thing to the teacher and they went together to the changing room to find her gloves.

Here we can see, how not only proper clothes are essential when playing outside when it is cold, but also child realising she is cold, standing up, leaving the play to express she is cold. She also realised my position towards hers as she went straight to me, not to any other child (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). I was the closest adult she found and as she repeated the same statement after approaching a teacher, I am sure she would do the same straight away if I was not around. She first showed the ability to play with bare hands with cold rainwater and wet soil as would the robust child subject do and then she showed the features of the rational child subject by walking up to the adult and verbalizing that she is cold (Nilsen, 2008).

Another child from the younger group, who was not confident in neither English nor Norwegian yet, followed me around the playground for several minutes. First, I thought it was some kind of game, so I started making funny faces at her, but she was not responding with any facial expressions. I asked her then if she is all right and she walked to me, took of my glove and grabbed my hand. She was freezing. I just waved at the teacher to come closer, so someone could help the child to get what she needed.

In this second example, the wish or the message was the same; cold hands. This child probably did not know how she would express she is freezing, so she used her body to send the message to an adult, she took the action (Nilsen, 2008; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). Even though that she was not coming from Norway and was probably not used to the weather yet, she assessed the situation quickly and without any word she achieved what she wanted.

Most of the days children spend on the kindergarten's playground. There they know, that if they are cold, they might get a chance to get into the changing room and pick up either more clothes, use the bathroom or change the clothes if they are wet. But during the whole day trip, there are not so many options for these. Therefore, they need to have extra clothes with them in their backpacks and not get cold or wet too early. Another example presents two children debating on the current situation after a trip:

After a long whole day trip, we were walking back to the kindergarten up the last hill, Veronika and Klara said they were really cold and tired. But that they still have to continue walking, otherwise, they would stay in the forest, teachers would leave, and their moms and dads would never pick them up, because they would not find them. They can rest when they get to the kindergarten.

Here, both girls were tired and cold, and they wanted to rest, but they realised that they would never come back to the kindergarten, if they stopped there to take a break from walking. They reasoned and discussed, what would happen if they just stayed in the forest; their parents would never pick them up from kindergarten and no one would never know where they are. Instead of crying and asking someone to carry them back to the kindergarten, they did not want to make victims of themselves (Nilsen, 2008). Furthermore, they used their bodies to continue on the way to the kindergarten, so they could rest when they get there (Nilsen, 2008; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014).

Besides the ability to verbalize the needs for more clothes or reasoning when children are tired, Nilsen (2008, 2009a) emphasizes the bodily movement in order to keep warm or warm up again in case a child is cold. In the studied kindergarten, sometimes it was children, who realized they were getting cold, so they started playing a running game. Once, while we were outside the fence of the kindergarten's playground, the teacher suggested a game to keep children warm during a rainy and cold day. This was a game when one was catching the others and if he or she caught someone, this child immediately joined the position of a catcher. It would be perfectly normal just that this game was running in slow motion. I joined the game myself and I was very surprised how warm I could get from a point I was nearly freezing just by running in slow motion. All children and staff members played and had fun together.

In this part of the chapter I focused on drawing examples of coping and adaptation strategies of children in situations when they were cold. As presented earlier, 'all adaptation is socialization' (Hellesness; in Nilsen 2009b, pp.3), we may conclude that these adaptation and coping strategies of children were important part of their socialization process. Especially when taking into account that these children are coming from countries outside of Norway where they might not have been used to be exposed to such kind of weather conditions.

### 5.2.2 'I want to go inside'

It is not always as easy as presented above, that children can express their wishes, accept the situation and adapt to it. In some cases, children might just turn off and not be able to follow the rules, in this case scheduled outdoor time in the kindergarten. There is an imbalanced power relationship between adult and children in the kindergarten as Åmot and Ytterhus (2014) present, and this relationship is constantly negotiated by children who are trying to push the boundaries; 'children use body and staff use rules' (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014, pp. 265). The next example will present the situation outside when two girls are trying to get into the building.

It was one day in January when kindergarten's playground was covered with a bit of snow that was already melting. The air was very fresh, and it could have been just slightly over zero degrees Celsius. Two girls from the younger group were coming up to the teacher several times in order to get inside the changing room to find extra gloves, another hat or scarf and every time they got inside, it took them very long time to get outside again. The teacher noticed that they might just try to avoid being outside so the last time they came with a request for new mittens, teacher said that they now have enough clothes and they are not going inside. The teacher also warned other staff members outside, that these two girls are repeatedly trying to get inside. Girls came up to the different teachers with the same request and all of them said the same; you are not going inside now. Eventually, they both took off their shoes and jumped into the melting snow which ended up with wet socks and they, of course, had to be taken inside.

These two girls were acting against the rules that were set by adults. This behaviour Nilsen (2009b) describes as indirect and open resistance. Girls indirectly expressed their wish to go inside by taking off their shoes and getting their socks wet, and this was exposed to the sight of staff members. To complete this example, Åmot and Ytterhus (2014) present in their study, that this kind of behaviour make adults respond, mostly in the way the child desires. In this kind of situation an adult, a staff member, has to react by taking children inside in order to dry their feet and change their socks. Otherwise, they would risk a child would get sick. I can see the parallel between what I have observed and what happened during their study, when a

boy tried to get inside by peeing in his pants. This was also a situation that could not be left ignored. A child had to be taken inside to change the clothes and explain that this kind of behaviour is not accepted. It all just added up by two more girls joining this boy in order to achieve the same thing (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). In my example, staff members had to act immediately, probably to avoid other children wanting to copy this behaviour.

On the other hand, we may also say that these girls were smart enough to assess the situation and take the action towards what they wanted (Nilsen, 2008). They used their agency, they took the action and were aware of the consequences (James & James, 2008; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). In this case, the consequences were in their favour and eventually they got what they wanted, even though they resisted the rules. I will present the next example with a very similar situation, where the action of staff members was different.

It was heavily drizzling again today, and our group went outside last, sometime around 10:30. Others from younger kids were outside already from 10 and some of them were hysterically screaming and crying, because they were cold. Teachers were trying to warm them up, initiated running games or insisted on putting on gloves, but it did not work for these kids. They were not reacting. After some time, a manager came out to pick up two kids and took them inside. The last crying one was refusing to put on her gloves, was not responding at all, so she was left *ignored*. She kept following adults screaming and trying to get the attention, but when no one watched her, she eventually calmed down, put on her gloves and started playing with other kids.

These children in this example were acting against the features of robust and rational child. They were refusing to play outside in cold weather, did not want to take any action in order to keep themselves warm and they just kept screaming and crying. This way, they made themselves victims (Nilsen, 2008). Even though staff members tried to make these children warm, they did not respond so they were not getting any more attention from adults. From what I have observed during my stay in Norway, this seems to be a common practice in a situation, when a child behaves against the features of robust child. By this, it seems to aim to help create the rational child, thus help them assess the situation, realize what their problem is and act towards solution (Nilsen, 2008). However, there were two children that were taken inside by

the manager and I wanted to follow that up, in order to find out why these two could go in and the last one could not.

The manager then said, that one of the boys that was taken inside was so scared, because he could not feel his fingers and it hurt. Therefore, the manager explained, that all the blood was in his heart and belly and then when he finally got a bit warmer, the blood was coming back to his fingers and that hurt a lot. I found this situation very valuable as, even though there were rules such as scheduled outdoor time, the first and most important action was to make sure the child is all right. The staff member was responsible for making this child comfortable again in this situation. Moreover, even though the boy cried and victimized himself, he verbalized that he could not feel his fingers (Nilsen, 2008). Which probably indicated he might be in danger of getting frostbite. To look back at a girl who came to me saying her hands hurt, not feeling own fingers might have a different level of severity.

Another example I want to present is also child wishing to go inside, but this child verbalizes and argues for he wants; Erik, from the oldest group of children. During the fieldwork, I observed and experienced him trying to get inside when it was *too cold* for him, so the teacher was kind of prepared for this kind of interaction. He was also the one who suggested that I have to go inside when it is cold when I was introducing myself to the group.

Erik didn't have his gloves and he was playing for an hour with water and sand, so he came to the teacher saying, his hands are freezing.

Teacher: *'Next time, you need to bring your gloves, Erik.'*

Erik: *'I will go inside to wash my hands now.'*

Then he came back saying, that his hands are still cold. He wanted to go inside, but teacher insisted on staying outside a bit longer.

Teacher: *'We are not going inside yet, Erik. You have to hide your hands into your sleeves or warm them up with your breath,'* and she showed him how. He did the same thing and then he said, it was a bit better.

Nilsen (2009b) describes this kind of behaviour as direct and open resistance. It is kind of resisting behaviour when a child tries to negotiate the rules by argumentation. He had the



full attention of the teacher and the teacher tried to emphasize the rule of staying outdoors. Erik, of course, did not have enough proper clothing to cope with the cold weather (Nilsen, 2008) as he did not have any gloves with him that day in the kindergarten. This boy was also occupied with the idea of being inside and warm one day we were on the trip. Staff members got an idea of buying a coffee in the cafeteria which could possibly let all of them eat their pre-packed lunch inside. Erik was fascinated by this brilliant idea of eating lunch inside, to be finally warm after the whole day outside. This plan did not work out as the staff of the café did not allow eating our lunch in their cafeteria and Erik seemed to be disappointed, but the teacher tried to explain, that we will eat the lunch outside and then we can play right away.

Both forms of resistance are seen as a part of a long process of socialization (Nilsen 2009b), process of children learning and getting used to the environment. The children presented in the examples were still practising their agency, even though they were using it against the rules of the kindergarten (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). The teacher from the studied kindergarten also revealed during the interview, that this is a well-known process and they all are expecting it to happen:

*'We are here in Norway, children have to get used to the weather. In the beginning, it might be hard, and we can see that the smaller kids, especially the ones in the smallest group they will be crying at first, especially in winter time, it's the hardest. They will go out and they will cry, they will say that they are cold and all these things. But yeah, you know, it's just in the beginning. After a while, they get used to the routine that they will be going out and they get to learn that.'*

The teacher expressed, that the staff members are aware of these situations in the kindergarten and they are prepared to deal with them. Children coming from outside of Norway and especially the youngest ones are not used to the practice of being outdoors regardless of weather. Therefore, children have to get used to this practice and staff members and parents can help them by providing them proper clothing, establishing the joyful relationship to being outside by, for instance playing, and by giving them enough time to adapt to it.

### 5.2.3 'The drying machine broke'

Having proper clothing for all types of weather conditions is one thing but having dry clothes when it is constantly wet outside is another one. I observed, that children in the studied kindergarten had mostly winter overalls and rain clothes, these pants and jackets made of vinyl which is 100% waterproof but also very thin. Then they had several woollen and fleece layers, some hats, scarfs, socks and mittens or gloves, some winter and rain boots. But it happened many times that it was so wet outside that children could not go out a second time during that day because of soaking wet clothes. I remembered from my previous teacher's training that the kindergarten I stayed in here in Norway had a quick drying machine for clothes. It looked like a tall closet-like fridge and they had it in their changing rooms. Therefore, I was interested in this option for the studied kindergarten, so I asked about the dryer.

*'We had one before, but all were using it incorrectly and it was not possible to dry everything and then it broke, so we don't have any now,'* said the teacher.

Afterwards, I was talking to the manager about drying the clothes and it seemed to be a bit upsetting for the manager, because children cannot spend more time outside due to the wet clothes. As they do not have any option to dry clothes, the manager asks parents always to bring two sets of outdoor clothes for children, so they can be outside even in the afternoon. But it does not work, only very little children have extra outdoor clothes. Even if they wanted to let children be outside more and even if children wished that as well, missing enough proper clothing makes this impossible (Nilsen, 2008). The manager also did not agree with a habit of having wool or fleece right under the rain suit, as the suit does not breathe and then it gets moisty underneath and children are cold immediately when they stop moving. In the next example, I would like to emphasize the importance of correct clothing and shoes.

Klara came to me after she has been sitting in a house on the slide for at least 15 mins and said: *'I am cold on my feet, I want to go inside.'* I did not want to sound like a teacher, so I responded that I also get cold on my feet when I do nothing, and I was hoping she would get a hint. But she just kept sitting there complaining she is cold.

Teacher saw that Klara looked uncomfortable, so she invited her to go sliding down the hill outside the kindergarten's playground with other children. But Klara still did not want to go, so we went without her. After a while, Klara also joined us for sliding, when other groups were lining up for going inside as she was the only one from the older group who stayed in the kindergarten's playground. She had fun, she laughed, but when I asked her on the way in, if it was fun, she froze in her face and said no. In the boots room, she found her winter shoes and I noticed at that point, what she was wearing (rain shoes, which are waterproof but very thin) and I immediately understood, why she was probably cold; she didn't have proper shoes for snowy conditions.

In this situation, Klara just remained silent about her shoes and no one else noticed as she just insisted on going inside. Maybe if she has expressed that she needs other boots, someone would either helped her or let her go inside to change her shoes. But as she did not use her voice to express what she wants what would be in line with the rules, she did not want to go running, sliding or at least walking to keep herself warm, she was just left without any attention (Nilsen 2008, 2009a; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). As already mentioned, leaving a child without any attention in this kind of situation seem to be a common practise in Norwegian kindergartens as it should learn the children express what their problem is.

To remind parents and children as well as staff members, kindergarten had a leaflet on the main door to the changing room about importance of correct clothing. This leaflet was in Norwegian, English, Spanish and Arabic to reach out the widest range of parents possible. It was distributed by a Norwegian sport clothing store with a heading *Tøyvettregler* which means *Common sense for clothing*<sup>24</sup> or a *Dress code*. This was a modification of Norwegian well known *Fjellvettregler*<sup>25</sup> which translates as *The Norwegian Mountain Code*<sup>26</sup>. These rules of common sense or rules of thumb express how it is important to have correct clothing, what kind of clothes children should wear and why. The same applies for the rules in the mountains, like planning the trip carefully according to the personal fitness, letting someone know where one is going, be prepared for cold and intense weather and so on. These rules can be found in the Appendix 5 *Tøyvettregler* together with translation.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.stormberg.com/blog/2018/08/27/stormbergs-toyvettregler/> Accessed November 5, 2018

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ut.no/fjellvettreglene/> Accessed November 5, 2018

<sup>26</sup> <https://english.dnt.no/the-norwegian-mountain-code/> Accessed November 5, 2018

#### 5.2.4 'I will take a short walk now to keep myself warm'

It is not only children who experience rough conditions in winter in Norway. Adults working in the kindergarten are also challenged at some point. One teacher from the studied kindergarten told me, that children are small and fast, have lots of energy so when they want to warm themselves up, they just run and run and run. And they even have fun by just running around. But for an adult that might not be very physically fit, running for more than a minute might seem to be very challenging. But on the other hand, it is the adults who are the role models for children in every occasion and if it is the adult who initiates the running game, usually many children will join (Krognes, 2018).

Another teacher who was also coming from outside of Norway was talking to me about how uncomfortable it is to be cold. It was not raining but the air was quite moist and cold so if we were not moving for a while, we would start freezing. After a while this teacher ended our conversation by telling me: *'Now I am getting a bit cold on my feet, excuse me, I will take a short walk now to keep myself warm.'*

One teacher coming from a country where they barely have winter came to me asking if I am cold as she saw me wearing only a very thin jacket. It was not really that cold outside and the sun was shining back then so I just responded, that I am fine, and I already somehow got used to the winter in Norway. This teacher then started laughing that we Europeans are used to the winter. I laughed as well, but then I said no matter how warm I am dressed, I still get cold on my feet and hands. The teacher was wearing very thick winter jacket, woollen scarf and a hat but no gloves as she said she is usually never cold on her feet and hands. So, we were talking a bit about keeping ourselves warm when the teacher said they usually have hot chocolate, coffee or tea they bring outside in the cups to warm up their hands and keep warm by drinking something hot.

One day I missed my bus, so I was walking to the kindergarten quite a long time, while it was snowing and raining at the same time, about 2 degrees. I did not have any hat or gloves, and I only had woollen sweater and a vinyl rain jacket, so I got really cold before I got there. That day was the first time I actually went inside before kids came from the playground, because it was unbearably cold for me. I also realized it is not fun to be freezing and once my body was too cold, I could not do anything to warm it up. I felt very uncomfortable. I also realized the powerful position an adult staff member has in the kindergarten, which allows the

teacher to go inside without debating this and arguing (Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). The only rule for them is to be enough adults outside to watch the children. Staff members also have their breaks, have to get in when some children need to use the bathroom, change clothes and so on.

### 5.3 Summary

In this analytical chapter I tried to draw an example of indoor and outdoor activities in a kindergarten in Norway, where the attending children had various cultural backgrounds. I was searching for their experiences outside as opposed to inside, where I found some differences. Children in this kindergarten spent 1-4 hours outside depending on the weather. When they were playing outside in the fenced area of kindergarten's playground, they were usually engaging in free play, created a variety of places with their playmates, and used a wide range of toys and materials to which they usually assigned special purpose. Their vivid imagination also manifested itself during the mapping activity, when children drew the map of their playground followed by a discussion about places and activities there. The kindergarten's playground was organized in a way as most of the playgrounds in the area; sandbox, slide, bench, rocks and so on. Even though the playground was organized by adults for children (Clark, 2013), through their imagination and use of agency the children created places and assigned purpose that could differ among the children. For instance, a slide could have been used for its primary purpose – sliding. However, several children expressed that they liked to use the slide for a variety of imaginary plays, like rockets or attacking snakes. Through the mapping activity together with observations I was able to investigate on the concept of *we-ness* (Nilsen, 2005) which was fluid throughout the study. Children might have had preferences of who to play with when they were outside, but some of them changed these play groups once they came inside. What might have been the reason to this was the certain rules that applied to children when they were inside, such as no running, or the groups division on the sofa. These rules might also indicate a territory thinking in children, when they decided to guard certain places.

In the second part of this chapter I focused on weather as an influential factor of children's experiences outdoors. There were many areas and situations which were influenced by a variety of weather conditions. When it was sunny and relatively warm, children usually had no complaints and they played freely without any limitations in their activities. Running

or cycling were the top activities during warmer days. When it became colder, windy with some rain, children needed special waterproof clothes and shoes. They could easily get cold on their hands or feet if they were dressed inappropriately or they refused to wear gloves. In these situations, children sometimes expressed the discomfort in several ways, but mostly, they either came to the teacher with a request for more clothes, to go inside or they just refused to do anything and cried. The children who were able to cope with this situation, express what was wrong and eventually do something towards the desired state were acknowledged by staff members, offered comfort, help and attention. On the other hand, children who resisted, cried and did not want to do anything about their discomfort were usually not given attention until they realized, that they needed to express what was wrong and what they needed. As the studied kindergarten was an international setting, some children were not fluent in neither Norwegian nor English. In the situations of discomfort, these children often cried until they realized, that even taking an adult's hand and dragging this person towards the entrance to the dressing room meant expressing their desire for gloves, for instance. Through this, these international children slowly adapted to the practice of being outdoors regardless the weather, and they also found ways to get the attention of staff members and express, that they were, for example cold.

## Chapter 6: Outdoors as an area for learning

In this chapter I will focus on the topics related to learning in the kindergarten. The research question that is addressed:

### **Q2: How is nature and outdoors used as a learning area?**

To answer this question, I use the data from the interview with preschool teacher and then observations and informal dialogues with both children and staff members. After the transcription and coding of the material was done, I created the categories or themes to help me organize the data. Even though both research questions are addressed separately I see the parallel in the data material.

The main category that I would like to focus on in this subchapter is Learning, or educational aspects of kindergarten. According to the data I collected, I divided the learning into two groups; Skills and Nature/Environment. Within skills, I would like to look at how children developed variety of skills in the studied kindergarten, especially social, motor and academic skills. These will be presented and discussed in 6.2 part of this chapter. The following part, 6.3 of this chapter will focus on learning opportunities for children in the kindergarten directed to nature and environment.

### 6.1 Learning according to official documents

One of the goals of the White Paper on Quality of Kindergartens is to ‘strengthen the kindergarten as a learning area’ (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009, pp. 1). There are specific topics that a kindergarten should focus on within learning established in the Framework plan (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017), these are presented in part 2.4.3 of this Thesis. As the teacher revealed in the interview, and other staff members and the manager confirmed as well, the Framework plan is the key document for the kindergarten within all the guidelines and tasks to follow and fulfil. My aim was not to evaluate the kindergarten or the staff, but I find it important to use the Framework plan as a guide throughout this analytical chapter together with other related literature.

## 6.2 Children mastering their skills

Kindergarten is an area for children where they can master their skills, whether these are social, motor, language skill etc. Adults, the staff members are there to give them a stable and stimulating environment, lead them and supervise them throughout the process as well as leave them to investigate and explore on their own (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). Throughout the data material I discovered several groups of skills that children were developing and mastering while I was present in the field. There are, of course, many other skills to be explored and discussed, but I picked the ones that I observed the most in terms of nature and outdoor environment. In this subchapter I will try to answer the second research question about use of nature and outdoor as a learning area in the kindergarten.

### 6.2.1 Social skills

Kindergarten is a good place for social interactions. The studied kindergarten was even more interesting in this aspect, as it was a multicultural space for both children and adults. Because of this, the emphasis on interactions and communication was big; whether it was in terms of staff member-child interaction or child-child interaction. Everyday language in the kindergarten was English, even though, most of the staff spoke at least some Norwegian. In the three groups there were always 2-3 staff members per group where at least one was fluent in Norwegian language, so the children got support in both languages. Framework plan presents the importance of communication and language development in early ages as well as it is one of the tools for socialization (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017; James & James, 2008).

#### *Communication and language*

The kindergarten's everyday language was English, however, some per cent of children were Norwegian so these spoke Norwegian whenever they wished to. Although, the kindergarten had a *Norwegian day* one day per week when they focused on the language competencies. In case of children coming from countries that did not have Norwegian or



English language as their mother tongue, staff members encouraged them to speak and learn the language by, for instance, showing pictures of actions, using body language, using iPads or computer or singing and dancing. This was usually followed by repeating the words and expressions in both Norwegian and English several times. During their circle time, they usually went through the specific topics they were focusing on right in that moment, e.g. emotions, and the staff usually showed cards with the emotions (cards with faces on them showing different emotions), explained or talked about the card in English and then in Norwegian. Children then got to repeat the same. This was an observation from the first days I spent in the field with the group of younger children, who did not have developed both languages yet. Learning the language of majority may be seen as a part of socialization process, especially if we look at the definition found in James and James (2008, pp. 127), when an individual ‘fits into a given society’ within process of socialization.

Some parents seemed a little bit concerned about children not speaking neither English nor Norwegian, but teachers usually ensured them, that *‘kids are like sponges, they absorb very quickly’* as explained by one teacher. As I was present almost at the beginning of the school year, I was able to observe how were children getting used to the language differences and how they adapted to it. Especially those not speaking any of the majority languages in the kindergarten seemed to be struggling a bit from the beginning. They were laughing during the activities together, led by the staff, but now and then I saw them playing alone or just wandering around. Sometimes, a teacher would send some children to include that lone child into their games, but many times these children went and invited this child to their games themselves. As articulated in some official documents regarding the preschool education, kindergarten should be a good place for inclusion of children, especially those with minority background (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009). And this was observed on every day basis.

During one of the observations, there were two girls (girl 1 and 2) from one country outside of Norway, and one girl (girl 3) from another country outside of Norway, all from the younger group of children (3-4 years old) playing together on the kindergarten’s playground. None of them were fluent in neither Norwegian nor English and they were speaking their mother tongues to each other. The girls 1 and 2 had no problem understanding each other and they were playing with the spades around a plant pot. They were running around it, making sounds like when two swords come across when the girl 3 came. She wanted to join them, so she started chasing the girls 1 and 2. The girl 1 stopped girl 3 with quite significant *‘NO’*,

putting a hand on the chest of girl 3. Girl 1 showed the girl 3 the instrument in her hand saying ‘SPA-DE’ emphasizing the syllables. The word for that instrument was similar in both Norwegian and English, they just changed the pronunciation. ‘Spade’ said the girl 2. The girl 3 was nodding her head but she stood still. So, the girl 1 who stopped the game took the hand of the girl 3 and lead her to the big closet full of outdoor toys, handing her the spade. The girl 1 then repeated the word for the instrument and eventually invited her to their game. This was also particularly mentioned by the teacher during the interview that they focus a lot on children’s social skills:

*‘When they play outside they develop how they will interact with each other how they will know the rules of the game.’*

In the example above, children’s bodies and nonverbal signs became the instrument of communication. This seems to be an important part of adaptation of new children in such multicultural setting and it helps in their socialization process (James & James, 2008; Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014). From the beginning, it might have taken longer time for children to find out what are they communicating, but after few occurrences they figured out the easiest way, how to talk to each other even though they did not have the same language. This was particularly important in choosing their playmates and inclusion in we-ness; here, a spade was an instrument that allowed the last girl to join these girls. Without that, she would not have been accepted (Nilsen, 2005).

### *Responsibility and behaviour*

The studied kindergarten has defined one day per week for outdoor trips. Depending on weather and season, they were visiting woods, parks or museums and galleries. During my stay they only went to the indoor kinds of trips and visited other playgrounds on the way, but I was told that they usually go to the woods when the ‘weather is better’. Anyways, as told by a teacher, these *‘trips give children the opportunity to watch out for each other and take good care of their friends because when [they] are on hiking trips, somebody might fall down, and it gives opportunity for other kids to show that they care for their friends’*. As observed, when someone falls, children always ask the one who has fallen if he/she is all right. Most of the time when someone fell during one trip, it was nothing serious, so they laughed afterwards. But they

did ask every time that happened. Through this, children learn to build relationships and show that they care for each other.

Before going on trips, especially with the group of oldest children, they usually ask the teacher how is the weather and what they should wear. Then they pack their rucksacks according to what the teacher says. Sometimes, children advise each other what kind of extra clothes they should pack with them. Before leaving the kindergarten, they all check their rucksacks one more time if they have everything they need; a pair of extra gloves, hat, lunch box and a water bottle are essential (James & James, 2008; James, 2009; Nilsen, 2009a). They also repeat several times what they are wearing so they are warm enough. When on trips, teachers give children certain amount of freedom, so they can get to practise how to deal with it and how to behave responsibly for themselves. Staff usually express verbally that they trust children, but they also have to be reliable; as already presented earlier, children are allowed to run far in the front or stay far behind the teachers but up until the point when they still see each other. This is the negotiation of boundaries and the practice of children's agency, as they learn how to be responsible, reliable and independent when they are out on the trip (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2009b, 2012).

One of the trips I was present on was a trip to the church. Before going in, the teacher told the children how to behave inside, that they should be calm and quiet, behave nicely and have walking feet. They had to be reminded from teacher a few more times after we went inside to stay calm and quiet. On the other hand, during a different trip into the library, the teacher asked the children how they should behave in the library before we went in.

*'We don't run! We don't jump! We must be quiet! We can borrow one book at a time! We don't throw books! We have to carefully turn pages! We don't sit or step on books!'*

Me: *'Did you talk about the library etiquette before you came here?'*

Teacher: *'Yes, we repeated what we usually talk about before we go to the school library on Fridays. They remember it.'*

This was an ordinary city library, but children remembered the etiquette from what they are used to every week at school. The difference between these two examples from the data was the way children got to grasp the rules of the specific place and their previous experience. In the church, the teacher **told them** how they should behave before as it is not that often they go into the church, while they are used to go to the school library every week. In the library

example, the teacher only **asked them** about how they should behave. I see the point in the level of experience and how much the children are used to the specific environment. The more they go to specific places where they have to follow specific rules, the more they can get used to it. Nilsen (2011) talks about this as a practice, that needs to be exercised many times so children can get used to it. Even though the practice that Nilsen (2011) talks about is skiing, I can assume that learning how to ski and learning the rules of accepted behaviour can be compared as both may be seen as process of adaptation and therefore socialization process (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2009b, 2011).

### *Cooperation and relations*

A kindergarten is a place where children can practice their negotiating and argumentation skills as well as offer them support in building their relationships and understanding the participation in the society (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). They are able to experience these on their own as well as know the outcomes of their actions, in other words, they get to practice their agency (James & James, 2008). The studied kindergarten had three defined days when they had *play groups*; these groups were usually established by the teacher and who belongs to which group and when was always changing. The teacher revealed, that they observe the children and their play, their relations to other children and then try to separate those who play together the most. Through this they are focusing on cooperation and relations between children and they always try to make it differently. Sometimes they have free play, sometimes they go out with only one group, sometimes they get an assigned activity. But all the time they focus on building the stronger relationship between the children, with an *ideal goal* that everyone likes everyone.

One day, after we were walking to the kindergarten from the trip, we stopped by a playground. There were several hiding snow walls built with a lot of prepared snowballs, so some kids started playing snowball fight. Balls were though very hard/frozen and Valter hit Viktor in his cheek. Victor then started crying, getting all the attention of teachers and other kids.

Valter to Viktor: *'I am sorry!'*

Viktor to Valter: *'Sorry is not enough!'*

Viktor kept crying when I learnt from the teacher, that they were reading a story about Daniel the Tiger, and that saying Sorry is not enough as it might be superficial. They have to learn to comfort a friend when they do something wrong. After a while, Valter came to Viktor, he tapped on his shoulder and said he was really sorry. The tense situation loosens a bit and then it got all fine. This was also an example when the two boys played roughly and one of them got hurt and they both had to take responsibility for their actions (James & James, 2008). In addition to that, playing rough snowball fight could have been considered as a feature of robust child, which Nilsen (2008) describes and was presented earlier as well.

### 6.2.2 Motor skills

Children practising their motor skills all year round both inside and outside is commonly seen in Norwegian kindergartens. Here, children are able to experience happiness of movement, gain the understanding of their own bodies, develop and master their motor skills and coordination (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). During the interview, the teacher said:

*'When we are out, children develop their gross motor skills, fine motor skills when they go climbing the trees. They learn to balance, they develop their big muscles, and when they are picking up the stones or pebbles then they get to use their fine motor skills. Yeah, and in autumn time we go outside and pick up leaves, twigs and pine cones and we climb up the trees. And when it's winter time we go sledding and when it's very slippery, we still go out and children get to learn or develop their sense of balance or like in autumn as well, we go rolling' [laughs].*

The teacher then talks about the physical durability, which was observed many times outside during the study. One day, when there was a lot of snow everywhere, some children asked the staff members to go behind the fence to go sledding/sliding down the hill. They grouped up (around 10 children from all the groups) and accompanied by two adults from the staff team they went outside the fence. They had to run up the hill to be *first on top*; the faster they ran, the more times they could slide down the hill. As they established the rule of waiting in the line, they had to be really fast, otherwise they spent time waiting in the line. This was an opportunity for them to also practise their patience and endurance in running up the hill as well as using their bodies, so they can avoid a crash (Nilsen, 2008).

During most of the trips, children just walk to the neighbourhood or to the city. Only when they do to the woods they take the public transportation. Therefore, through this they have the opportunity to exercise their big muscles while walking or running along the way, going through up and down hills carrying their rucksacks. Several times I had problems in catching up their tempo once they started running.

Another example of children using their body to prevent an *unhappy* situation during play is situation on the playground's slide. It was during the same day on the same playground when Valter hit Victor with a snow ball in his cheek. It was winter, cold and icy day and Valter was sliding down a pretty steep slide. He slid down but the speed was too high, so he fell off and landed on his wrists. He started crying saying that it hurts, teacher comforted him and after a while he was fine. Teacher then just said that it's too slippery and they have to be careful. They can break with their feet towards the sides of the slide. Valter then tried in again using his feet against the slide and the speed was immediately lower. He then practised that several times applying the pressure of his feet towards the ends of the slide in different moments, finding out how to slide very fast but still break at the right moment so he does not fall of the slide. He figured out how to use his own body to help him play safely as well as he realized that more he will practice, the easier it will be (Nilsen, 2008; 2011).

As indicated in the study of Fjørtoft (2001), children playing outdoors and not only on their playground, can develop and master their motor skills through every day practice and being exposed to the outdoor environment. This was observed in my study as well, even though I did not attempt to test children with specific fitness tests like Fjørtoft (2001) did. Kaarby and Tandberg (2017) asked staff members of kindergartens several questions regarding the motion of children outdoors and in nature. When being asked how often the staff members give children the opportunity to experience different kinds of movements outdoors, almost 47% responded *very often* and 41% responded *quite often* (N=411). When the similar question was asked, only about experiencing the movement in nature, responses were 46% and 38 % respectively (N=412) (Kaarby & Tandberg, 2017, pp. 31).

A sense of balance can be a particular skill for children that they get to master in kindergartens in Norway. In some places, when it snows for several days, then it gets a bit warmer so the snow melts. Immediately, it starts freezing overnight and all the melted snow turns into ice. There is a possibility to get the spikes for shoes which can be attached by a strap around the shoe and help with the grip on ice. These can be purchased in sizes for both children

and adults. In the studied kindergarten, most of the staff members had these but children did not. When I asked about the spikes for children, teachers usually said that some of the children have them, but they do not usually use them. The staff wants the children to learn how to balance and practise the stability on ice without this additional aid. They also used the sand, salt or gravel on ice when it was too slippery, but still, some children managed to fall. Some of them cried, especially the little ones as they seemed to get irritated that they are not able to walk, it was distracting them from playing. Only once I experienced that a child fell so hard he hit his head and scratched his cheek on ice. Otherwise, the children were usually having fun and laughing if someone fell. Initially, they asked their friends if they are all right and when the answer was yes, they started laughing and continued in their game.

### 6.2.3 Academic skills

Almost everything that is done and taught inside can be also done outside (Ekrehagen Barnehave, n.d.). As told by the manager of the kindergarten, they try to promote this idea among the staff members and encourage especially the staff in the group of oldest children to 'do the learning' outside. When I asked the teachers about the outdoor learning, they said they usually follow the wishes and interests of children at that particular moment. They listen to the voices of children, through which they acknowledge their agency (James & James, 2008). Teachers approach the learning processes outdoors quite informally depending on the mood of children, what they are talking about in their units or anything that pops up during the trip or playtime on the playground. One teacher then added also that it is a part of the Framework plan and their own agreement between the staff to teach children both inside and outside.

Framework plan in general talks about the learning processes in the kindergartens, which can be good and stimulating environment for children. This helps to open children's minds towards the learning and exploring the world through play, through use of their own bodies while being supported and supervised by staff members (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). As this subchapter focuses on academic skills that children may obtain in kindergartens, I will elaborate on the two topics that were observed the most and which can be found in the Framework plan as well; Arts, culture and creativity, and Numbers, spaces and shapes.

### *Creative activities*

Children in kindergartens can access variety of material from arts to play to enhance their fantasy and creativity. Arts and culture can be exercised both indoors and outdoors while using variety of approaches, tools and techniques (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). As found in Moser and Martinsen (2010), children may *ignore* the primary purpose of tools like spades and buckets for sand box and making the sand castles. As observed during the study, children for example used spades as swords in their game. During the different game, spades were used as a border or wall, so children kept their play area and their places marked and the ones not invited into the game were not allowed to come through (Sack, 1986; in Nilsen, 2005; Nilsen 2009a).

Cultural background of children was a topic pronounced in the kindergarten almost every day as it was a multicultural setting. From the beginning of the school year, children in younger group had a weekly activity, when a parent of one child came to the kindergarten and had a presentation about the country they come from. Children then listened to the songs, looked at the pictures of interesting monuments, landscapes, fashion, animals etc. from that specific country. Sometimes they also tasted the national food. During that week they created flags and something originating from the country. Children in the older group created a whole world map, drawn flags of their countries and then they put them on the map. Many times, they then talked about who is coming from where, how it is in their home country like and so on. It seemed to help the socialization processes for children coming from different countries, when other children knew, they are different in some way (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2011).

### *Academic activities*

There are also certain academic skills that children can gain in the preschool settings. Framework plan focuses especially on mathematic skills and numeracy (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). The topic Numbers, spaces and shapes aims at children getting the ground knowledge and enjoyment of numbers and counting, being able to observe the space through their body and their own perceptions and gain problem solving skills. Most



of this can be done indoors, but the teachers transferred the learning process also outside of the kindergarten.

One of the most often practice was reading the books out on the playground when the sun was shining. Or at least when it was not raining. The teacher took children individually to read their books borrowed from the school library together with them, while sitting on the bench on the kindergarten's playground. Another often observed practice was making necklaces from beads during their numeracy unit. The teacher took the material outside on the bench (thread and beads) and then called children by groups to the bench to make the necklace. The teacher always told different number of beads to each child, so they got to practice their counting skills as well as soft motoric while they were picking up the beads from the bowl, putting them on the thread and then making a knot. The teacher also revealed, that they can also create the numbers and letters on the ground from pebbles and twigs when they are learning about the numbers and alphabet. This is usually done during the free play of children outside, when the teacher just calls one child by another for few minutes and then they get back to playing. Teacher said that children then do not get bored so quickly when they only have to focus on learning for such a short time knowing they will get back to playing soon.

Another observation of more academic learning in the studied kindergarten was the exercise during their unit about physics and motion. The group of oldest children went out on the playground alone just with the teacher (no younger children were present) where they were assigned a task to get the empty plastic box up the slide. Few of the children tried it individually and it was quite simple. Then the teacher started putting books into the box, so it was heavier and heavier, and children had to cooperate at least two-three of them to get the box up on top of the slide. When the box was completely full of books, they even had to use the rope when one was pulling the rope while sitting on the top of the slide and two others were pushing the box from sides towards the top.



Presented picture shows the described observation. Children then said it was heavy, but it was fun. They followed up with a discussion about the motion in the class afterwards, but it was interesting to see how easy and entertaining was the process of learning, even though they were not really told they will be learning something.

### 6.3 Children and nature

The main topic of this study was nature and children. In addition to the main research question about nature as a learning area, I eventually found it interesting to look also at how children learn about nature and environment. Therefore, I would like to focus here on how this was done in the studied kindergarten and how teachers provided children with knowledge about nature and environment. Kindergarten as an institution can encourage children to experience nature all year round, build a close relationship towards nature, learn about the environment and natural phenomena. Nature and outdoors may be used in the kindergarten as an area for play, learning and exploring (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). Together with this, I find it important to take a look again on a quote, that was introduced in the beginning of the Introduction to this Thesis.

The Norwegian child is expected to live an active outdoor childhood. The relationship between young children and their wider environment is strongly emphasized, in particular [...] with nature. Apart from being fun and healthy, staying outside through the year teaches them to live with strongly demarcated seasons and extreme weather conditions. Without learning to enjoy this, life in Norway can be constrained and difficult. (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003, pp. 616).

This quote encompasses the importance of nature in lives of people living in Norway and an impact of it on the legislation and official documents that set the foundation to educational institutions in Norway. It also represents the idea of a robust child subject in nature in Norwegian kindergartens which Nilsen (2008) presented. These ideas all together help to build and explain the discourse of nature, that I have been looking for throughout the whole study.

The big part of the interview with the teacher was focused on learning about nature and environment. The teacher explained their own ways of teaching children both indoors and

outdoors. Inside, they usually talk about what they see outside through the window; weather, season for instance. They then discuss on what kind of clothes they should be wearing according to what they see outside, they also check the temperature, so children get the connection and understand the number on the thermometer and the current weather conditions. When they are outside on the trip, they discuss the season according to what they see around; colour of the leaves on the trees, if there are any leaves at all. *'Through experiencing nature then children get to learn more about it'* as said by the teacher during the interview. Before winter they use to go on trips to the lake, along the river, visit the seaside and the teacher said it is a good way for children to learn about *'different forms of water'*, while they can see it by themselves and not only on the pictures or in the video.

One of the questions I asked during the interview was children learning about the environment. Kindergarten usually incorporate this into their units and they also have a cleaning activity<sup>27</sup> once a year, when they clean whole surrounding of the kindergarten, normally with help of parents. Children then take the actions, they get to help with taking out the trash and eventually see how nice is their surrounding when it is all clean (James & James, 2008; James, 2009).

During indoor stays, especially during art activities, teachers try to make children save the paper; the paper comes from trees and they do not need to throw the whole piece of paper away after they make one small mistake. And if they need to throw it away, there is a special *'blue bin'* for paper as well as other special bins for plastics and the regular trash. Children get to learn and understand why it is important to sort out the trash and not leave any trash on places where it does not belong to. Then when they see the trash outside during the trip, they alert each other and the teacher, and they take the piece of e.g. plastic and search for a bin. Again, when they eat outside on the trip themselves, they remember to take the trash with them back to the kindergarten, some of them even have a special small bag where they can put their trash. *'And they don't need to be told, it's automatic for them'*. Children learn by this practice to take care of the nature and that they are only *'guests in the nature'* (Gelter, 2000; Nilsen, 2009a, pp. 112, author's translation). The teacher then finishes the topic by saying that it is visible how children are aware themselves about the issue and that it is important to give them this foundation for caring for the environment in this young age.

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<sup>27</sup> Dugnad: As observed during the few years of living in Norway, this is a communal kind of cleaning activity, which goal is to create better and nicer looking neighbourhood/gardens/surroundings together with a social gathering around a meal, cake or coffee.

## 6.4 Summary

In this analytical chapter I have presented the results of my study related to children and their learning opportunities in and about nature. The data used to compile this chapter were obtained from interview with the kindergarten teacher and from observations and informal dialogues with children and staff members throughout the study.

I investigated on children's learning outdoors in the kindergarten, which I divided into groups of skills; social, motor and academic skills. When children played outside, they got to learn the rules of the games, how to interact with each other or negotiate particular situations, show responsibility for themselves as well as for other children. Children got to learn the expected behaviour towards staff members and in public places. Most articulated motor skills were sense of balance and physical durability, exercising their big muscles as soft motor skills. Within academic skills, children most often practised numeracy and physics outside.

In addition to this, I wanted to focus on children's knowledge about nature and environment. Children in the studied kindergarten learnt about the nature and environment through the circle times indoors and trips outdoors. They usually talked about the phenomena they saw around them, and they got to experience it themselves. Teachers explained the issues about recycling the trash, how they can do it and children took the initiative in cleaning their surroundings as well as they showed the responsibility for themselves when in nature, e.g. by not leaving the trash anywhere.

Together formed such practices can be connected to the discourse of nature; beginning from the legislative and the state documents presented earlier in the Thesis, through the kindergarten schedule that was discussed as well to the staff and children. The importance of nature was visible during the study as well as the use of nature as an area with learning opportunities.

## Concluding remarks

For completion of this Thesis, I spent 20 days in a time frame of 4 months in an international kindergarten in Norway. I conducted a fieldwork with qualitative approach, where I actively observed children and staff members of an international kindergarten. I had informal dialogues and discussions with them on daily basis which helped me to understand their practices related to use of nature and outdoor areas. Close to the end of my fieldwork I used a mapping activity, when children created a map of their playground followed by a discussion about the places and favourite activities there. Through the mapping activity I gained the understanding not only of the use of outdoor space, but also how children used their imagination and agency in order to create, recreate and organize their own places, how their relationships with playmates worked and how they negotiated places between each other. At the end of the fieldwork I interviewed one teacher from studied kindergarten who supplemented the ideas and knowledge that I gained during the study. I mainly searched for learning opportunities and how this was done in the group of Spiders, a group of 13 children approximately 5 years old.

Children's play is a crucial part of childhood for children in kindergartens in Norway. This was not only part of the Framework plan (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017), it was also observed on daily basis during my fieldwork as well as during my previous teacher's training. Children in the studied kindergarten had two main arenas for play; indoors and outdoors. Children playing outside of the kindergarten engaged in free and risky play, they could decide who to play with or which toys and materials they wanted to use. On the other hand, children inside had to be compliant to rules that sometimes limited their play choices, playmates preferences and space usage. Either way, in the decision-making process they took the responsibility for themselves and they had to deal with potential consequences (James & James, 2008; James, 2009; Nilsen, 2008).

The negotiation of places and rules and taking responsibility during play were parts of the socialization process (James & James, 2008; Nilsen, 2009b). This was also visible during days when the weather might have been uncomfortable; when children got cold or wet they had two choices or coping mechanisms. They either expressed their problem which lead towards the dealing with this problem or they simply refused to do anything about it. Children that were able to play in cold rain water or play rough snow ball fights who eventually got cold

and wet, were seen as robust and rational child subjects (Nilsen, 2008) when they chose to cope with the situation by expressing their discomfort and searching for a solution. The children who did not want to do anything about their discomfort, they did not want to join the games that were initiated by staff members to keep children warm, those children were usually left without any attention. Only once during the whole fieldwork was a child taken inside by the manager, because he did not feel his fingers. There was a risk of getting a frostbite and it was a situation, where staff members needed to act immediately in order to avoid medical complications.

This brings me to the importance of clothing while being outdoors. Children in the studied kindergarten had certain types of clothes according to the certain weather conditions. For rainy days children used special rain dress made of 100% waterproof material, rainboots and sometimes even rain gloves and hats made of the same material as the rain dress. For colder weather, wool and fleece was recommended as well as proper winter attire and boots. During rainy days, children sometimes went outside only once a day in comparison to other days when they could be outside twice a day. This was because of the lacking extra clothes or opportunities to dry the clothes. Extra clothes were important also while being on day trips, when children did not have the opportunity to simply come to the dressing room to grab extra hat or gloves. Here, it was also essential that the children had correct clothing according to the weather before they left the kindergarten, and only a few spare clothes in their backpacks in case they got cold.

During the trips, children had the possibility to gain knowledge about the world and nature around them, how to behave both in the forest and public places, collect the trash and not leaving any *traces* of them visiting the place. Taking care of the nature was one of the important practices, that teachers and also scholars saw as a part of being in Norway. This also leads to the discursive thinking about nature as a value of Norwegian people and how this in fact influences the lives of children (Aase, 2008; Gelter, 2000). Nature as a discourse has an important role when it comes to official documents and their task in setting the frames for preschool institutions in Norway. These then influence the way the schedule in the kindergarten looks as well as the adaptation to the common practice of being outdoors.

The discourse of nature also influences the learning processes in kindergartens. As mentioned and observed, everything that is done inside is possible also outside (Ekrehagen Barnehage, n.d.), the children of the studied kindergarten not only played outside, but they could also engage in the learning processes outside. Usually, the learning processes were carried out through playing activities when children did not even notice they were learning.

For instance, counting the stones or exploring the physics with the box full of books that children had to take up the slide. But one of the most important learning activities that I observed during the study, was learning to enjoy being outdoors regardless the weather (Borge, Nordhagen & Lie, 2003). This learning or getting used to the outdoor practice was crucial in case of children coming from outside of Norway, especially during their initial adaptation period. As a foreigner myself, I was interested in searching for differences between Norwegian and non-Norwegian children through my outsider perspective, but eventually, I did not find any. Both Norwegian and non-Norwegian children were able to adapt quickly to the diverse weather conditions as well as they were able to show discomfort in many ways. This leads me to the concluding ideas about children and childhood as socially constructed (Prout & James, 1990). The society in which children live and the adults that might have powerful position in children's education can influence the way that children grow up and experience the world around them. Therefore, it is important to take into account the context and the viewpoint that one takes when assessing children's experiences (Franck & Nilsen, 2015).





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# Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of introduction

Appendix 2: Information letter

Appendix 3: Consent form and Interview guide

Appendix 4: NSD application

Appendix 5: Tøyvettregler (Common sense for clothing); including English translation





Date  
09.06.2017  
Our reference  
Your date  
Your ref

To whom it may concern

## Letter of introduction

We hereby confirm that Andrea Benkova, (b 16.05.1994), is a student in the programme *Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies* at Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway. She will undertake fieldwork and data collection autumn 2017, in Norway on the topic:

*Outdoor experiences of children living in Norway*

We would be grateful for any assistance given to her during this process. This includes granting interviews, assisting her in making appointments, handing out materials and making information accessible to her.

We ensure that the information collected is treated confidentially, and that the fieldwork bears no costs on the institutions and persons visited.

Yours sincerely,

Tatek Abebe  
(sign.)  
Associate Professor  
Programme leader of Master in Philosophy in Childhood Studies  
Norwegian Centre for Child Research  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Cathrine Solem Hoen  
Student Advisor



NTNU  
Norwegian University of Science  
and Technology  
Department of Education and Lifelong Learning

Address	Org. no. 974 767 880	Location	Phone	Executive officer
	silje.andreassen@ntnu.no			Cathrine Solem Hoen cathrine.solem@ntnu.no Phone: 73597676

Please address all correspondence to the organizational unit and include your reference





## **Request for participation in Master project 'Outdoor experiences of children living in Norway'**

This is a Master's project in Childhood studies at the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, NTNU, which aims to study how children in an international preschool setting in Norway experience nature and being outdoors. My name is Andrea Benkeova and I will e.g. look at how children cope with diverse weather conditions, outdoor activities and their preferences. I am also interested in how children gain knowledge about nature and environment.

Coming to Norway as an international student left me amazed by beauty of nature and the relationship people living in Norway have towards it. I have observed that children in Norwegian preschool settings spend plentiful time outside as well as during holidays with parents. Based on my own experience, it might be challenging to adapt to different environment and lifestyle. I would like your school to take part in this Master project and contribute to add to the scarce knowledge about living in Norway and experiencing nature in an international setting. It is very important to learn directly from you in order to do this Master project. Important to note, is that I have no intention of evaluating the school, children or teachers.

### **What does participation in the project imply?**

I would like to do fieldwork in your preschool during 6-8 weeks in the autumn term 2017. This implies that I will observe the outdoor activities, talk with children about being outdoors and if convenient for you, maybe prepare e.g. drawing activities on topics such as weather and seasons, outdoor activities and nature experiences. Asking children to show me their use of preschool outdoor area is a possibility as well. I also hope to do short interviews (individual and/or in groups) with children, teachers and parents, if they agree. Questions will concern coping with diverse weather conditions, relationship to nature, children's outdoor activities and so forth. Apart from taking notes, I am planning to use a voice recorder for interviews, if participants give permission to do so.

### **What will happen to the information about you?**

All information will be treated confidentially; it will be securely stored and only me and my supervisor will have access to it. From the very beginning of the research, all information, such as names and places, will be anonymized.

**You don't have to, if you don't want to.**

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and participants can at any time choose to withdraw without stating any reason and without any consequences. Adult informants will be asked to give their consent to participate in interviews by signing a consent form. Regarding child participants, parents will be informed in collaboration with the school, and should notify me in case they do not wish their children to participate. Otherwise, children will be asked individually for each activity if they wish to participate or not.

If you have any questions concerning the project, please contact me. I am also happy to meet you or some of the staff before you make the final decision.

Do you want to participate? It would be very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Benkeova

## Appendix 3 – Consent form and Interview guide

### **Consent form – Preschool teacher**

Main aim of this interview is to get to know outdoor routines of children in preschool, theoretical framework used in preschool, usage of outdoor areas as a learning area and how are children educated about nature and environment.

This interview will be recorded with a voice recorder and it will be deleted right after the recording is transcribed into a paper form. Nevertheless, during the interview, it is important to not mention any names, places or anything that might be identified and connected to a preschool, staff or children. I am open to send you the summary of this interview to check for possible corrections, misunderstandings or any additional points.

There are no right or wrong answers for my questions and therefore I ask you to answer honestly according to your best thoughts about the question. You have of course the right not to answer when you feel that way or end the interview without any personal consequences.

### **Consent for participation**

Hereby, I state that I am willing to participate in interview

-----

(Signed by participant, date)

## **Interview guide**

### **Background questions**

- How long have you been working in this kindergarten?
- For how long have you been a teacher?
- How do you like Norway and how long have you been living here?
- What is your relationship towards nature, sports and outdoors?

### **Main questions**

- How much time do children spend outside? (time-schedule, lunch, snack, trips etc.)
- Under which circumstances do they stay indoors even if it's the time to go out?
- Who decides when to go out and inside? Do the children have this opportunity?
- What framework plan do you as a teacher use?
- How do you use outdoors as a learning area? (What is possible for you to teach them while they are outdoors? How do you think it would be possible to improve using outdoors as a learning area?)
- How do you teach them about nature and environment? / How do children learn about nature and environment in preschool?
- Do you have any ideas on why it can be important for them to learn about environment in preschool?

### **Closing question**

- Is there anything that was not mentioned in the interview and you would like to add that?

Thank you for your precious time!

## Appendix 4 – NSD registration

The image shows a screenshot of the NSD registration interface. A modal dialog box is open in the center, titled "NOT SUBJECT TO NOTIFICATION". The dialog contains the following text:

**NOT SUBJECT TO NOTIFICATION**

You have stated that neither directly nor indirectly identifiable personal data will be registered in this project. Hence the project will not be subject to notification, and you cannot submit a notification form.

Read more [here](#).

The background shows a registration form with the following sections:

- 1. Intro**
- Will directly identifiable personal data be collected?  Yes  No
- If yes, please specify\*
  - Name
  - Social security number
  - Address
  - Email
  - Phone number
  - Other
- If other, please specify\*
- Will there be collected background information that may identify individuals (indirectly identifiable personal data)?  Yes  No

Help text boxes provide definitions:

- Directly identifiable:** A person will be directly identifiable through name, social security number, or other uniquely personal characteristics. Read more about [personal data](#).
- Indirectly identifiable:** A person will be indirectly identifiable if it is possible to identify a person through a combination of background information (such as place of residence or workplace/school, combined with information such as age, gender, occupation, etc.).

Additional text: NB! Even though information is to be anonymised in the final thesis/report, check the box if identifying personal data is to be collected/recorded in connection with the project. Read more about what [processing personal data](#) entails.

At the bottom right, it says: NB! In order for a voice to be considered as identifiable, it must be registered in combination with other background information, in such a way that a person can be recognised.



### Trelagsprinsippet



STORMBERGS

# Tøyvettregler

1. Planlegg barnehagestart og merk alt av klær
2. Tilpass klærne etter årstid og vær
3. Ta hensyn til lek i klatrestativ – unngå skjerf og snøring i halsen
4. Vær forberedt på lek i regn og kulde
5. Ta med nødvendig skift
6. Ta trygge klesvalg. Vær obs på fastsydde hetter og knapper som kan falle av
7. Bruk synlige reflekser på alt yttertøy
8. Vend i tide, det er ingen skam å returnere tøy som kan være farlig
9. Spar på kreftene og unngå bekymringer - kjøp sikkert barnetøy

**STORMBERG**  
SMÅ TURER ER OGSÅ STORE

# Trelagsprinsippet

Barn er ute og leker i all slags vær. Da er det viktig å kle seg riktig. Trelagsprinsippet er en god huskeregel, også når barna skal lære å kle seg selv.

## 1. lag



### Ull-/Superundertøy

Det innerste laget skal transportere fukt bort fra kroppen. Det skal være tynt og tettsittende.

Ull er best, og holder på varmen selv om det blir vått. For barn som reagerer på ull er bambus eller superundertøy gode alternativ.

## 2. lag



### Ull-/Mellomplagg

Mellomlaget skal gi varme. Klærne skal sitte litt løsere på kroppen, da luft mellom lagene gir god isolasjon.

Ull er et godt alternativ til fleece som ellers er mye anbefalt til dette laget. Tilpass tykkelsen etter behov.

## 3. lag



### Parkdress/Skalltøy

Ytterlaget skal holde vær og vind ute. Det bør være vind- og vanntett, og kunne slippe ut fukt fra de andre lagene.

For de minste er parkdress et godt valg. For eldre barn er skalljakke og skallbukse å anbefale.

OBS: Unngå bomull på vinteren! Bomull holder på fukten og blir fort kaldt. Ull er gull, og holder på varmen selv om barna blir våte.

# STORMBERG

SMÅ TURER ER OGSÅ STORE



### **Stormberg's common sense for clothing (*Stormbergs tøyvettregler*)**

1. Plan the kindergarten start and mark all the clothes
2. Choose clothes according to season and weather
3. Be careful when playing on a jungle gym – avoid scarves and laces around the neck
4. Be prepared for play in cold and rainy weather
5. Take with you the necessary change of clothes
6. Make safe clothing choices. Be careful about fixed hoods and buttons that can fall off
7. Use visible reflexive elements on all clothes
8. Return in time, there is no shame in returning clothes that can be dangerous
9. Save your energy and avoid concerns – buy safe children's clothes

### **The 3-layer principle (*Trelagsprinsippet*)**

Children play outside in all kinds of weather. Therefore, it is important to wear correct clothing. The 3-layer principle is a good rule to remember, also when children are dressing themselves.

First layer: Woollen/Super underwear. The inside layer should transport moist away from the body. It should be thin and tight. Wool is the best and keeps the body warm even if it gets wet. For a child that reacts to wool is bamboo or super underwear good alternatives.

Second layer: Wool/Middle layer. The middle layer should give the warmth. The clothes should fit a bit loose on the body so the air between the layers gives good isolation. Wool is a good alternative for fleece which is otherwise very recommended as a middle layer. Adapt the thickness according to your preference/need.

Third layer: Playsuit/Shell dress. The outer layer should keep the weather and wind out. It should be wind and waterproof and it should be able to release the moist from the other layers. For the smallest ones is an overall good choice. For older children it is recommended to wear shell jacket and shell trousers.

Important note: Avoid cotton during the winter! Cotton keeps the moist and becomes cold quickly. Wool is cool (Wool is gold) and keeps children warm even if they get wet.