

Karianne Franck

Constructions of Children In-Between Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Centres

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, January 2014

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management
Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB)



NTNU – Trondheim
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology



**NORSK SENTER FOR
BARNEFORSKNING**
NORWEGIAN CENTRE
FOR CHILD RESEARCH

NTNU

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

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Preface

The process of working on this thesis has been a valuable learning experience, which I have enjoyed immensely. The initial excitement I felt when reading the announcement and project description of this PhD position has continued to grow throughout the process.

This thesis could not have been done without the openness of day-care staff members participating in the study. I am very grateful to the staff for including me in the day-care's everyday life and for all the valuable conversations. And a special thanks to the children in the day-care units who showed me the greatly diverse ways of being a child.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen who has been my supervisor and who created the innovative project overarching this thesis. Her continuous support, valuable feedback, and thorough readings and comments have been immensely helpful. I have learned a lot from her critical reflections and eye for detail. It has been a privilege to have such an engaged supervisor. Thank you!

Several people and institutions have in different ways contributed to this thesis through seminars, conferences, journal reviews, and informal discussions. Throughout the PhD period I have been located at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, and I want to thank NOSEB for accommodating my needs and providing an academic environment with exciting research and inspiring colleagues. In particular, my fellow PhD scholars: Thank you for support, friendships, and sense of belonging. A special thanks to Ingvild, who has made coming to work every day a pleasure.

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Finally I give my thanks to family and friends for their care and support. My father who is my tower of strength, thank you for a unique friendship. To my beloved Stian who relentlessly stands by my side, thank you for listening and giving me confidence and encouragement. And my dearest Leander for filling my life with joy and happiness.

Karianne Franck

Trondheim, July 2013.

Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen er et bidrag til kritisk refleksjon rundt hvordan noen barn i norske barnehager blir konstruert som avvikende fra det som anses som normalt. Fokuset er på barn som barnehageansatte mistenker og er bekymret for at kan ha særskilte behov eller en form for nedsatt funksjonsevne. I avhandlingen omtales barna som «in-between», - noe som sikter til barnas utydelige og uavklarte posisjon utenfor 'normalen'. Avhandlingen retter et kritisk blick mot hvordan barnehagelandskapet de siste årene er blitt preget av et økt fokus på kartlegging og evaluering av enkelt barns evner, læring som forberedelse til skole og oppdagelse av særskilte behov. I den forbindelse reises spørsmåltegn til hvordan og på hvilke grunnlag grenser trekkes mellom såkalte «normale» barn og «avvikende» barn i en barnehage setting. Studiet er situert i nyere barndomssosiologi, og trekker i tillegg på post-strukturelle perspektiv fra funksjonshemmingsforskning. Basert på intervju med seksten barnehageansatte og kortere feltarbeid i fire barnehager analyseres de ansattes beskrivelser og refleksjoner omkring barn de er bekymret for. Fokuset er satt på hva slags forståelser og diskurser som gjenspeiles i de ansattes forklaringer på hvorfor et barn mistenkes for å ha særskilte behov eller nedsatt funksjonsevne.

Avhandlingen består av tre artikler som utforsker og illustrerer barnehageansattes beskrivelser og diskusjoner i uformelle settinger og intervju. Artikkel 1 viser hvordan barnehageansatte veksler mellom flere forståelser av barn og barndom. Første del illustrerer hvordan avvikskonstruksjoner av barn henger sammen med diskurs om utvikling og alder, og knyttes videre til kartleggingsverktøy utbredt i norske barnehager. Andre del fremhever de barnehageansatte sine kritiske refleksjoner omkring bruk av kartleggingsverktøy og hva som ansees som normalt. Artikkel 2 utforsker hvordan noen barn ikke lever opp til ansattes forventninger i dagligdagse situasjoner i barnehagen. I analysen er evalueringer og beskrivelser av barn knyttet til en overordnet diskurs om 'det kompetente barnet' i Nordiske barnehager. Artikkel 3 fokuserer på hvordan barnehageansattes ord og uttrykk bidrar til å posisjonere noen barn som annerledes og avvikende fra resten av barnegruppa. Ved bruk av begrepet "continuum" diskuteres perspektiv på nedsatt funksjonsevne og grensene mellom hva som anses normalt og avvikende.

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The articles

Article 1: "Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Institutions

Article 2: "In-between competence. Adult expectations of children in Norwegian day-care centres"

Article 3: "Excluding to include: Exploring a process of constructing children as impaired in the Norwegian day-care setting"

Appendices:

Appendix 1: NSD

Appendix 2: Interview-guide

Appendix 3: Letter to administrative leaders of day-care institutions

Appendix 4: Letter to day-care staff members

Appendix 5: Letter to parents of children in the day-care units

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is a contribution to critical reflection on how some children are constructed as deviating from what is considered ‘normal’ in Norwegian day-care institutions¹ (Norwegian—barnehage). In this study I focus on day-care staff members’ concerns and suspicions of children possibly having special needs or impairments of some sort. I explore understandings and discourses related to constructions of children as ‘in-between’—meaning children positioned outside what is perceived as ‘normal’ without being labelled by any other category—yet. As stated in the words of one staff member describing her concerns for a child: *We do not know what it is, but we sort of know that there is something.*

The study has been conducted in four Norwegian day-care units, two for children one to three years old and two units for children three to five years old. In-depth interviews with 16 staff members and participant observation for three months was completed. I explore day-care staff members’ discussions, descriptions, and reflections regarding children suspected of special needs or impairments during everyday life and interviews. The objective is to illustrate lines drawn between what is understood as ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’, and frames for understandings and evaluations of children constructed as deviating and positioned in-between. Situated in social studies of children and childhood, I emphasise how children and childhoods are culturally and socially constructed (James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982; Prout, 2005), acknowledging that discourses and how one describes, assesses, and reflects on children is intertwined with how one treats and acts towards children (cf. Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1998). From the platform of social studies of children and childhood, I critically examine norms, expectations, and perspectives on children and childhoods (Alanen, 2001; Nilsen, 2003). By recognizing children, normality, deviance, and impairment as socially constructed, I aim to explore taken-for-granted understandings and practices within the day-care field. With this critical stance I hope to raise reflections and consciousness about

¹ In this thesis, day-care is the preferred term, instead of similar concepts such as kindergarten, pre-school or early childhood education and care. This is done in order to accentuate a distinction from international early educational institutions focusing on preparation for school, and to refer to the whole age group of children one to five. As a way to vary the language I refer to day-care institutions, day-care centres, and day-cares.

perspectives and practices related to categorisation and testing of children's abilities. I have focused on how discourses circulating the day-care field define and limit what makes sense and are acceptable ways of talking, writing, and conducting one's self (Foucault, 1999; Hall, 2001). The analysis also demonstrates awareness of how staff members modify and contradict understandings of children by manoeuvring between several discourses. Post-structural and critical approaches within disability studies have influenced my understanding of categorisation of differences and the constructiveness of impairment (Goodley, 2012; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Shildrick, 2012). Drawing on critical perspectives regarding categorisation and binary oppositions (Bauman, 1991; Davis, 1995) I aim to destabilize and highlight the blurred boundaries between categories of 'normal'/'deviant' and 'able'/'impaired'. I emphasise an understanding of identities as shifting, unstable, and context-dependent within a day-care field where recent influences seem increasingly preoccupied with positioning children in fixed, static categories and testing their skills and abilities.

1.1 'Discovering' children's (in)abilities

The focus of this thesis, on constructions and boundaries between normality and deviance, relates to discussions in both academia and policies regarding perspectives, traditions, and practices within the day-care field². Combined with a vast increase in children attending Norwegian day-care centres, more attention is being directed towards the pedagogical content of day-care institutions and its place in the educational system (Arnesen, 2012). Day-care institutions are depicted in current policies as key arenas for preparation for school and early intervention. They are given a mandate to detect and diminish differences in order to provide children with equal opportunities when attending school (St. Meld³ 41, 2008-2009). The day-care institutions are given a responsibility to 'discover'⁴ children's special needs and to initiate measures to reduce future problems (Mørland, 2008; St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). 'Special needs' for children under school age is defined as having more extensive needs than common for their age (NOU, 2012). Hence, day-care centres are encouraged to compare children's abilities based on age and classify some children as deviating.

² An elaborate account of the Norwegian day-care field is given in Chapter 2.

³ St. Meld is Norwegian short for White paper.

⁴ The term 'discover' is used in policies and guidelines (Norwegian - oppdage). However, I argue in this thesis that the practices do not 'discover' but construct the issues in question.

Following the emphasis and guidelines of policies, a practice of using standardized tests and mapping materials to evaluate individual children has become widespread in day-care centres (Østrem et al., 2009). Standardized mapping devices target a wide range of aspects, such as social, emotional, language, and behavioural issues. The results are that children are more than ever being monitored, evaluated, and measured against a norm related to expectations of what a child should be capable of at a certain age. This inevitably leads to some children failing, becoming perceived as having deficiencies, or as having special needs. There is in particular an increasing focus on language skills, and in 2009 it was suggested that it be mandatory for all day-care centres to offer mapping of three year old children's language skills (St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). Language is in policies connected to learning, and the importance of early intervention is seen as preventing a negative spiral (St. Meld 16, 2006-2007). For example, delayed language development is said to risk evolving into reading and behavioural difficulties, lead to feelings of defeat, low academic capabilities, ditching of classes, dropping out of the education system, and end with the individual in low income jobs or on welfare (St. Meld 16, 2006-2007). Hence, the emphasis of the policies on 'discovering' special needs is tied to future-oriented ideas of children's roles as school pupils and working participants of society as adults. In some ways, potential processes of exclusion in school and society are mitigated by ensuring children have certain abilities and skills as early as possible (Arnesen, 2012). Hence, a need is created for evaluating and monitoring the individual and 'discovering' potentially problematic differences as early as possible.

Consequently, there is a strong focus on the individual child's skills and abilities, where some differences in abilities become defined as deviating and legitimize specific interventions (Kampmann, 2004). In contrast to predominantly informal and local ways of monitoring children's development in Norwegian day-care centres, there is nowadays a widespread use of mapping devices. Such tests and devices produce a different type of knowledge that makes it possible to compare and classify children (Rose, 1990; Turmel, 2008). Classifying children as lacking certain abilities or as deviating from normality may have vast consequences in children's lives and day-care practices. On one hand, the testing and mapping of day-care children is intended to lead to specific initiatives and early efforts that will diminish differences in children's learning outcomes and stimulate skills in preparation for school. Further, day-care centres may receive extra resources in order to better accommodate a child by initiating changes in the day-care environment and special efforts to teach a child certain

skills and abilities. On the other hand, a child risks being constructed as having unwanted characteristics, being unable, or as not living up to expectations, which may further influence how adults act towards him/her in a broad sense. Portraying a child as lagging behind developmentally or as incompetent in certain areas will likely alter the way both staff and parents treat the child and how they interpret the child's conduct. A child risks becoming a 'case' that needs to be worked on and she or he may be subject to 'correctional activities' to diminish unwanted differences between him/her and other children. Day-care staff can also refer a child to external experts and authorities⁵ when concerned for a child's development. External experts are, for instance, invited to observe a child at the day-care facility, and they recommend how to treat and act towards the child, and they may recommend further evaluations. Furthermore, understanding a child as deviating, possibly having special needs or impairment, can lead to diagnoses, treatment programmes, and medicalization. Interventions can help and support some children and their families to improve well-being and functioning within society and educational demands as well as improve the practices of inclusion and accommodation within day-care institutions. However, a focus on context, relations, the environment, and systems surrounding a child seems to be diminishing relative to the increasing focus on the individual and narrowing of what is regarded as 'normal'. As an increasing amount of children begin attending day-care centres at one or two years old, it is likely that impairments or special needs will be 'discovered' while in day-care. Day-care staff members thus have a central role in evaluating and providing parents and external experts with their understandings of a child's abilities.

The increasing focus on individuals' abilities combined with practices of early intervention and standardized evaluations can be seen as connected to international neo-liberal tendencies. Drawing on neo-liberal discourses, practices of increasing standardisation and accountability are internationally emphasised in the early childhood sector (Moss, 2012; Osgood, 2006; Woodrow, 2008). These tendencies are also found in the Norwegian and Nordic contexts (Gulløv, 2012; Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012a; Korsvold, 2008; Olsen, 2012). An increased emphasis on tests and mapping materials for monitoring children includes a standardisation of children, as well as the day-care staff members' practices, related to ideas of accountability and measurability found in neo-liberal discourses. Proponents of policies that are increasingly

⁵ Such as PPT, see Chapter 2 for more details.

focussed on standardized evaluations proclaim a belief in accurate, objective, and stable representation of reality (cf. Moss, 2010). Within neo-liberal discourses, children can be said to present a future resource for society, hence the strong focus on early intervention to ensure individuals' skills and abilities. While these new tendencies may be said to represent a shift in focus, they do not necessarily imply a replacement of previous discourses. Rather, one can say that previous perspectives have been weakened as new rhetoric is added (Kryger, 2004). For instance, a perspective of child-centred discourse celebrating children's participation and competences can be seen as intertwined with new ways of monitoring, governing, and controlling children⁶ (Strandell, 2012). Children as autonomous, participating, and active co-constructors of their own reality continue to be emphasised within the new rhetoric. New discourses of children as competent actors with choices and rights not only present children with freedom and respect, but also with demands and responsibilities (Strandell, 2012; Kampmann, 2004). Following the neo-liberal tendencies norms and standards from which children are understood and evaluated are connected to aspects of a child-centred discourse. Competence, choice, flexibility, and self-regulation have come to represent standards for what children *should* be capable of (cf. Ellegaard, 2004), leaving some children to fail to live up to these expectations—thus becoming constructed as incompetent, incapable, and deviating.

1.2 Research questions and aims

This thesis is part of a project titled “Children with (dis)abilities: Practices and values in Norwegian day-care centres”⁷ (Nilsen, 2008b). The starting point of the project was to bring attention to the understandings and practices used in day-cares centres related to children staff members suspect might have special needs or impairments but have not been diagnosed or labelled in some way.

The research questions⁸ of this thesis are:

⁶ See section 2.3.1 for further elaboration.

⁷ Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen was project manager. Located at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research (NOSEB), NTNU, and funded by the Research Council of Norway; Programme for Practice-based Research & Development in Pre-school through Secondary Schools and Teacher Education. PRAKSISFOU, 2006-2010.

⁸ The research questions of this thesis are based on the overarching project's research questions, translated from Norwegian:

- In what ways are children constructed as deviating and possibly impaired in day-care centres?
- How do staff members' evaluations, descriptions, and practices regarding children 'in-between' relate to discourses and understandings of children and childhoods?
- How are boundaries drawn between children perceived as 'deviant' and children perceived as 'normal'?
- What constitutes staff members' expectations of normality?

I have attempted to answer the questions through short-term fieldwork and in-depth interviews with staff members in four day-care units. Using qualitative methods⁹, I was able to produce detailed data focusing on contexts and discourses within the studied day-care centres.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute with insight about day-care staffs' understandings and perspectives regarding children constructed as in-between and deviating as possibly impaired, problematizing the frames of normality to which these children are compared. With this work, I want to produce and distribute knowledge that can disrupt taken for granted norms and practices and encourage reflexivity within the day-care-field. Heightening the blurred boundaries of categories and destabilizing views that define children's differences as deviance are, in this thesis, a way to introduce knowledge and raise questions on a practical, political, and research level. On a practical level, the questions and reflections raised in this thesis can be of value in the education of pre-school teachers and others working in day-care institutions. In addition, I seek to contribute with knowledge and reflections to the on-going debates regarding practices and perspectives used in day-care institutions—which inform and include national policies and white papers. I hope to contribute to the research field of early childhood education and disability studies both nationally and internationally. Research on (disabled)

•How are 'children with impairments' constructed and with what consequences for children and staff members' practices?

•What space for variety of child-identities do adults in day-care centres provide, how do they frame their practices in regard to where and how boundaries are drawn between children with impairments and able-bodied children, and between different children and normal children?

•What sort of normativity surrounds staff members' practices regarding children with impairments and children with abilities? What values and knowledge-models are explicitly or implicitly embedded in the staff members' practices?

⁹ Methodology further discussed in Chapter 4.

children is seldom focused on children between categories and seldom problematizes issues of impairment connected with understandings of childhoods as socially constructed. The use of critical perspectives from social studies of children and childhood and post-structural approaches within disability studies in this thesis can, as such, offer new possibilities and perspectives. Following, I aim to further develop discussions and perspectives established within academic fields preoccupied with day-care institutions, disability, normality, and children.

Researching children positioned outside normality and in-between categories with a critical stance towards categorisation and labelling of young children has proved to be a difficult undertaking. The aim to grasp and illustrate the ambiguous without making it static and fixed during the process of exploration and presentation is challenging and somewhat paradoxical as the staff members of this study in many ways face the same challenges when having to describe and present children. I have tried to resolve this challenge by staying close to the empirical data and accentuating contexts while at the same time attending to commonalities and patterns within the data in order to expand, challenge, and create new knowledge. In my analysis, I thus attempt to not construct rigid categories and closed 'boxes' of knowledge, but rather to open up issues for further exploration by focusing on taken-for-granted understandings, contexts, and instability of categories. With the use of theoretical concepts and perspectives that emphasise discourses, subject positions, and processes of social construction, I strive to stay close to the data and the phenomenon studied, but also question the premises on which the phenomenon is based (cf. Søndergaard, 1999).

1.3 Central research in the Nordic context

The topic of this thesis has many interesting parallels and commonalities with the international field of early childhood education, and I accentuate this throughout the thesis by drawing on international literature, concepts, and discussions. Nevertheless, the Norwegian day-care field has a particular character and tradition, which is similar to other Nordic countries. In this section, I will thus give a small overview of relevant research from Norway and other Nordic countries regarding normality, deviance, and understandings of children and childhoods in day-care institutions.

The uprising of new tendencies and practices has encouraged a variety of studies that critically examine the day-care field. While there has been a documented lack of research within the day-care field, in particular in regards to disabled children and special needs (Borg, Kristiansen, & Backe-Hansen, 2008; Gulbrandsen, Johansson, & Nilsen, 2002; Hopperstad, Hellem, & Kjørholt, 2005), there are several recent projects and publications that touch upon similar issues as I do in this thesis.

For instance, the project of this thesis is in a network with a larger project titled “Day-care centres in transition: Inclusive practices”.¹⁰ This project aimed at producing knowledge and further understandings of the day-care institution as an arena for inclusion related to child diversity, majority-minority relations concerning disability, as well as multi-cultural questions. The collaboration resulted in a book discussing a relational minority and majority perspective and practices of differentiating children in day-care institutions (Korsvold, 2011). Within this project, researchers Ytterhus and Lundeby (2011) directed attention towards disabled children and inclusion in day-care institutions. Their research interests and publications have in general focused on children with pre-defined and established impairments. This thesis aims to contribute with a different angle and objective by exploring debatable and indistinct impairments of children and construction of deviance within the day-care field. While others have studied children’s own perspectives regarding disability, impairment, and exclusion (Ytterhus, 2002) this thesis directs attention to the day-care staff.

The focus of this thesis also relates to a growing amount of literature critically examining normalising institutions and inclusion/exclusion processes (Bae, 2004, 2009, 2010; Arnesen & Simonsen, 2011; Ytterhus, 2002, 2012; Simonsen et al., 2009; Nygård & Korsvold, 2009).

There are several PhD theses within the Nordic context that have discussed issues related to differentiation processes and constructions of a ‘normal’ pre-school child within an institutional context and categorisation of children as having special needs or as deviating (Nordin-Hultmann, 2004; Markström, 2005; Palludan, 2005; Lutz, 2006, 2009). This

¹⁰ Funded by the Research Council of Norway, Randi Dyblie Nilsen was project manager. The project was a collaboration between Norwegian Centre for Child Research, the Department of Social Work and Health Science at NTNU and the University College of Nord-Trøndelag. Main contributors were: Randi D. Nilsen, Borgunn Ytterhus, Tora Korsvold and Kirsten Lauritsen.

includes postmodern or post-structural theories critical to the individualization of children's behaviour (Nordin-Hultman, et al., 2004).

Further, there is quite a lot of research that analyses the development and recent changes undergone on perspectives on childhood within the day-care setting, including political and ideological dimensions in the organization of childhood (Kampmann, 2004; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Seland, 2011; Højlund, 2009; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012a). In particular, contemporary increase in policies emphasising learning and preparation for school together with ideas of early intervention and inclusion have been topics for discussion in several Nordic publications (Arnesen, 2012; Solli, 2010, 2012; Vist & Alvestad 2012; Alvestad, 2011; Kryger, 2004; Pramling-Samuelsson, 2010). With a variety of approaches, changes in day-care practices and in understandings of children and childhoods have been debated in research (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006; Brembeck, Johansson, & Kampmann, 2004; Kjørholt & Qvortrup 2012a). In particular research and publications outlining and debating contemporary and historical issues in the day-care field, such as common practices, expectations, and understandings of children and childhoods have informed this thesis (Nilsen, 2000, 2003, 2008a, 2012; Korsvold, 1998, 2006, 2008; Kjørholt, 2004; Seland, 2009; Arnesen, 2012). Understandings and perspectives of children and childhoods have been particularly significant since a shift in the 1980s and 1990s emphasised children as, among other things, participating, active, and competent. Several authors have deliberated on how these understandings of children have become intertwined with new pedagogical ideals of standardisation, quality, efficiency, and goal-orientation (e.g., Kampmann, 2009; Gulløv 2009, Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Kjørholt, 2005; Brembeck et al., 2004; Arnesen, 2012). In particular, there have been heated debates regarding the testing and monitoring of day-care children. Several critiques are directed at the growing formalisation of assessments and documentations of children in regards to the content of tests and individual plans, the altering of the objectives of day-care institutions and the staff members' roles, and the governing of and subject positions made available for children (Østrem et al., 2009; Østrem, 2010; Rapport, 2011; Gitz-Joansen, 2012; Holm, 2010; Vallberg Roth, 2009, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson, 2010; Alasuutari & Karila, 2010; Gjems, 2010). The amount of critical research discussing changes in day-care institutions has highly inspired and influenced me during the writing of this thesis.

1.4 Positioning and delimiting the thesis

A study of practices, understandings, and discourses related to issues such as normality and deviance has an all-embracing potential, and new ‘routes’ and ‘roads to travel’ seem to constantly be appearing. Hence, it is necessary to delimit the scope, theoretical orientation, and interests of this research. First and foremost, the research questions to be approached in this thesis are addressed by day-care staff members, and not the children, parents, or others.¹¹ This does not, however, indicate a valuation regarding what perspectives are most important, but it has been done in order to make the study time-manageable and to allow thorough exploration. The topic of inquiry is directed at the basis for constructing and categorizing day-care children, not the consequences of being positioned as deviating, impaired, or having special needs. However, the importance of the thesis’ focus on the first steps of constructing children as deviating and possibly impaired derives from being aware that it may have large impact on the lives of children and their families.

The deconstructive branch¹² within social studies of children and childhood (Alanen, 2001; Nilsen, 2003) has been highly influential with its critical perspective towards established notions of children and childhood. A critical analysis has guided the work of the thesis by providing a constant reminder of staying open and reflexive and demarcating theories and research that establish what and how children are or should be like. Connected with a focus on social constructions, the methodological choices have been chosen to provide descriptions of everyday situations, detailed stories, and descriptions of children based on staff members’ resourcefulness in order to produce detailed, contextual, and nuanced data, while restricting the potential of producing clear-cut classifications that allow for comparison and systematization in a manner that is pursued by other theoretical and methodological perspectives.

As mentioned, a theoretical position within social studies of children and childhood has been complemented with influences from post-structural and critical approaches in disability

¹¹ Within the project overarching this thesis a master thesis has been produced that focuses on the perspectives of parents who have experienced the process of their children being diagnosed (Wilhelmsen, 2012).

¹² See Chapter 3 for further elaboration on branches within Social Studies of Children and Childhood.

studies. Early on, it became central in this thesis to examine the concept of impairment¹³ (Norwegian ‘nedsatt funksjonsevne’) as it has a central role as part of the overarching project’s Norwegian title and the thesis’ intent to explore constructions of deviance as related to possible impairments. Impairment is commonly and officially defined as referring to a bio-medical condition (NOU, 2001) however it also entails a complex theoretical element. This has contributed to the design of this thesis, which is slightly different in its approach to the day-care field than other critical research (mentioned above), since I have in some instances included contemporary international debates within disability studies. There is, as stated, a lack of research that critically addresses issues of children with impairments in Norwegian day-care centres. With the change in concept from an overarching notion of disability to include a notion of impairment¹⁴ in Norwegian studies and policies, I found a need for more theoretical discussions on the standing idea of inherent and biological deviance in children. Disability studies and the concept of impairment are most explicitly discussed in Article 3 and are set as the background of the other two articles because of the limited space in articles. I have, however, elaborated on the issues in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 3) in order to inform the reader further about the theoretical starting points of the thesis and articles. Such a theoretical focus has, however, entailed a downplay of the special pedagogical/education field. Having overlapping interests with disability studies, I found it beneficial to associate only one of them to have a clear focus in an already complex and intricate field.

Another adjoining field to this thesis is child welfare. During my work, I noticed how discussions on early intervention, evaluation, and mapping of individual children at times became intertwined with discussions on child welfare, family situations, and child negligence. In interviews, staff members at times indicated that a child’s conduct deviated as a result of living with parents who had substance abuse issues or psychological problems. There is no doubt that early intervention is important when children are living under unsatisfactorily and potentially harmful conditions, however, this seems at times to be confused with positioning children as having inherent deviating qualities. I find it necessary to disentangle the issues of child welfare from constructions of children as deviating or possibly having impairments and have not included empirical data regarding children behaving differently when explicitly explained by staff members that the behaviour resulted from child welfare issues. I do,

¹³ See Chapter 3 for further discussion on the concepts of disability and impairment.

¹⁴ For more in-depth discussion on change of Norwegian concepts of disability and impairment, see Chapter 3.

however, find it important to note that the increasing tendency to focus on the individual child and his or her qualities and skills involves a risk of missing, ignoring, or covering up relational problems such as a problematic family and home situations. I suggest that it is possible that at times, diagnosing, labelling, or perceiving children as problematic places responsibility or problems that are related to adults on the child.

The approach to and topic of this thesis also relates to research on inclusion of minorities and children of migrants (Palludan, 2005; Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008; Gulløv, 2008; Nygård & Korsvold, 2009). While I have not explicitly engaged with these issues, I draw upon the focus of literature on normalization and statements about the present situation in Nordic day-care centres. The strong focus on language, preparation for school, and mapping individual day-care children's skills indicated in policies is also directed at a concern for children who do not have Norwegian as a first language. I have, however, not dealt with the issue of cultural minorities and migrants in this thesis in order to limit the field studied. In addition, the data produced while questioning issues of special needs, impairment, and deviance did not bring forth discussions on children with cultural or language minority backgrounds.¹⁵

Through analysis with presentations of parts of the data produced during interviews and fieldwork, I aim to illustrate recognizable dilemmas, ways of thinking, and practices within the day-care field. I critically examine these recognizable descriptions of children and situations in order to illustrate how they are based on specific and implicit expectations, discourses, and knowledge about children, normality, and deviance. By exploring common understandings and ideas with the use of the chosen theoretical approach and concepts, I aim to open up the taken-for-granted and destabilize the established.

¹⁵ An absence that could in itself be interesting to note as it calls into question, for example, whether understandings of deviance in children with cultural and language minority backgrounds raise concerns other than those for the majority. However, I did not encourage discussions on these issues while conducting interviews or during fieldwork.

1.5 The structure of this thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters and three journal articles. The following four chapters and articles include:

Chapter 2: In this chapter, I illustrate parts of the Norwegian day-care field, outlining policy, practices, discourses, and understandings of children.

Chapter 3: In the theoretical chapter, I discuss the theoretical approach and concepts of the thesis. I present and connect two academic fields,¹⁶ social studies of children and childhood and disability studies, and establish the position of the thesis within the two fields.

Chapter 4: In the methodology chapter¹⁷, I present the day-care units and fieldwork conducted and discuss my methodological choices. I go through issues such as gaining access, participant observation, interviews, analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: In this chapter, I summarise the articles and discuss how they relate to each other and the research questions. I also make some comments on further research and final remarks regarding the thesis.

The articles in the thesis have all been submitted to international, peer-reviewed journals and are at different stages before publication.

¹⁶ Papers related to the theory chapter have been presented at two conferences:

Franck, K. & Nilsen, R. D. (2012, June). *Theoretical parallels and intersections between Childhood studies and Disability studies*. Paper presented at the meeting of ESA Research Network 4. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Franck, K. (2009, February). *Nedsatt funksjonsevne som begrep*. Paper presented at Begrepsseminar Skådalen kompetansesenter. Oslo, Norway.

¹⁷ Methodological contemplations were at an early stage presented at a conference:

Franck, K. (2009, April). *Understanding the construction processes regarding 'children with disabilities' as a cultural category in Norwegian day-care centres—Methodological challenges*. Presented at NOSEB international conference: Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market: Exploring early childhood education and care. Trondheim, Norway.

The articles in the thesis consist of:

Article 1: “Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Institutions”

Accepted for publication in *Childhoods Today*.

Author: Karianne Franck

This article¹⁸ illustrates how day-care staff members shift between different understandings of children and childhood. First part focuses on how descriptions of deviance are related to a discourse of development and age, and connects this to the widespread use of mapping devices. While the second part highlights day-care staff members’ critical reflections on issues of mapping devices, normality, and what constitutes a ‘normal’ child.

Article 2: “In-between competence. Adult expectations of children in Norwegian day-care centres”

Submitted for publication in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*

Authors: Karianne Franck and Randi Dyblie Nilsen.

In the second article¹⁹, there is a discussion on how day-care staff practices and evaluations of children are informed by a discourse of the competent child. In the analysis, several expectations of competence related to specific contexts in the day-care centres are outlined, illustrating how some children become positioned as incompetent and deviating when they fail to live up to certain context-dependent expectations of competence.

¹⁸ Parts of the article were presented as a conference paper:

Franck, K. (2011, September). *Children with (dis)abilities—Practice and values in day-care centres*. Presented at European Sociological Association (ESA) 10th Conference. Geneva, Switzerland.

¹⁹ The article has been presented at two international conferences:

Franck, K. (2012, July). *Constructing the (in)competent child in Norwegian day-care centres*. Paper presented at 4th International Conference Celebrating Childhood Diversity. University of Sheffield, England.

Franck, K. & Nilsen, R.D. (2012, August). *Competence and context*. Paper presented at European Early Childhood Education Research Association, 22nd EECERA Conference. Porto, Portugal.

Article 3: “Excluding to include. Exploring a process of constructing children as impaired in the Norwegian day-care setting”

Reviewed for publication in *Disability & Society*.

Author: Karianne Franck.

In this article, ways in which staff members’ construct some children as deviating and possibly impaired is explored through their descriptions and statements. The analysis illustrates how staff members discursively position three boys as deviating and different from other children by using concepts and expressions related to culturally informed ideas about what constitutes a ‘normal’ child and a proper childhood in Norwegian day-care centres.

Chapter 2

The Norwegian day-care field

This chapter provides context and background information regarding the field of study. I intend to outline discourses, policies, and central characteristics within the Norwegian day-care field as a way to contextualise and elaborate on some of the issues discussed in the articles included in this thesis. Understandings, perspectives, and practices characteristic of the day-care field are distinguished in this chapter as two discourses; one presented as a ‘traditional’ discourse and the other as a shift in discourse characterized by new focuses, understandings, rhetoric, and practices. As discourses²⁰ define and limit how children are understood, positioned, and constructed (Foucault, 1999; Hall, 2001), they impact what is perceived as ‘normal’ and when a child is positioned outside normality.²¹ For that reason, I aim in this chapter to outline discourses circulating the day-care field and beyond as a background to the thesis’ exploration of constructions of children in-between, in other words deviating from what is considered ‘normal’ and suspected of having special needs or impairment. The day-care field is a complex and intricate area where several discourses operate at the same time, simultaneously overlapping and contradicting each other. It has therefore been necessary to a certain degree to simplify and focus on ‘typical’ cases in order to present the field in a coherent and comprehensible manner.

First, I will inform more specifically on the issue of day-care centres and children with impairments, including formal processes of defining special needs for children below school age, since this is part of the background against which the day-care staff and children perceived as in-between have to operate. Afterwards I will, as mentioned, outline what could be called a ‘traditional’ discourse in Norwegian²² day-care institutions, which includes changes, practices, and understandings of children and childhoods. Following, I elaborate in detail on the current situation with national policies and guidelines introducing different practices and discourses within the field. The new tendencies are discussed as both drawing

²⁰ For further elaboration see Chapter 3.

²¹ For further discussion on the issue of normality see Chapter 3.

²² The Norwegian day-care field has many parallels and similarities with other Nordic countries. I thus draw from literature from several Nordic researchers when appropriate.

on and altering previous understandings of children. Lastly, I discuss an increasing practice of using tests and standardized mapping on individual children in day-care centres, including the directives of policies and guidelines.

2.1 Inclusive day-care environments

Children with impairments have prioritized admission to day-care centres (Day-care declaration Act §13). In 2011, close to 15,000 children with impairments or special needs attended day-care centres. About 6,500 (2,3%) day-care children received special educational support (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2012), and one study shows that 48% is related to difficulties in language development and 20% to social or behavioural difficulties (Cameron, Kovač, & Tveit, 2011).

There are very few segregated day-care institutions in Norway due to a long tradition of inclusion and emphasis on children with impairments attending ordinary day-care institutions (Tøssebro & Lundebj, 2002). Already in 1975, in the Day-Care Act, disabled children were given priority to attend day-care facilities. Overall, it is emphasised in policies that day-care institutions should accommodate all children and adapt to each individual child.

Kindergartens must offer all children a rich, varied, stimulating and challenging pedagogical environment, regardless of their age, gender, level of function and social and cultural background. This means that the care and activities provided must be adapted to each individual child and to the relevant group of children. (Framework Plan 2011 in English, p. 14)

Following national guidelines, the day-care field is part of a discourse in which disability is framed in a relational perspective²³ (NOU 2012). A relational perspective directs attention to how society and contexts disable people with impairments. A relational perspective focusing on social barriers is explicitly evident in the Framework Plan stating: “When planning the design of a kindergarten, the societal aim of reducing barriers to people with disabilities must be taken into consideration. The planning, location and construction of new kindergartens should be based on principles of universal access” (2011, p. 19). In practice, however, this has succeeded to varying degrees, and not all day-care institutions built after 2000 fulfil the requirements (NOU, 2012).

²³ See Chapter 3 for discussion on relational perspective, disability and impairment in Norway and beyond.

While the Framework Plan does not explicitly discuss children with impairments in day-care centres in depth, the Ministry of Education and Research has published a guide linked to the Framework Plan that is directed solely at children with impairments in day-care institutions (Mørland, 2008). The guide describes various aspects related to working with children with impairments in day-care institutions. Rights and participation, individual plans, collaboration, day-care staffs' competence, play - and learning environments are central issues in the guide. It is directed at the day-care staff and their values, attitudes, and understandings, and some questions for discussion are listed at the end of each chapter. The focus is on play, development, and preparing for the transition to school in a general sense. The guide has a section regarding 'discovering' children with special needs, referring to observations, assessments, and tests, and lists common tests, forms, and mapping devices. It also (briefly) mentions some critical arguments regarding how the use of such materials can delimit staff members' image of a child by referring to Nordin-Hultman (2004).

'Discovering' children's special needs after children start day-care is even more relevant now than previously since children begin attending day-care at an earlier age, and since full day-care coverage reduces the need to diagnose a child before attending in order to achieve prioritized admission (NOU, 2012).

2.1.1 Special needs among day-care children

Children under the compulsory school age who have need for special pedagogical support have the right to receive this support as stated in the Education Act § 5-7. Expert assessments are to be made by the Educational-Psychological Service (PPT) [Pedagogisk-psykologisk tjeneste]. There is no lower age limit. PPT is a service provided by the municipality or the county municipality and is a professional advisory and guidance service that functions as an expert authority regarding children, youth, and adults' needs for special education. The PPT experts have backgrounds in psychology, pedagogics, or special education. Day-care institutions and schools (in collaboration with the parents), or parents refer a child to PPT. An evaluation done by PPT may consist of charting measures that have already been implemented by the day-care (or school), and statements from other agencies, conversations about the child, observations, and tests. The evaluation will state whether the child needs special educational assistance or training. It will also provide advice on what kind of help/learning is needed and available. PPT often collaborates with Centres for Child and

Adolescent Mental Health, habilitation services, health services, and child welfare services. Examples of the challenges PPT work with are listed as language difficulties and speech impairments, general learning difficulties or problems in a specific subject area, reading and writing difficulties, difficulties with mathematics, non-verbal learning difficulties, problems with concentration, social and emotional problems, behavioural disorders, and vision or hearing problems (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013a).

As mentioned in the introduction, special needs for children under school age is defined as children who have more extensive needs than common for their age (NOU, 2012). The definition is directed at the individual, it refers to what is common or 'normal' in comparison to other children, and refers to children's age as criteria for comparison. The definition is thus not very exact and open for variations in interpretation. This is also taken into consideration by the 2012 green paper. The main intention for giving special pedagogical support for children under school age is to best prepare a child to start elementary school (NOU, 2012; St. Meld. 18 2010-2011). There is, in other words, a future-oriented perspective with emphasis on school embedded in the initiatives of early intervention with special pedagogical support. The focus is explicitly on a child's development and learning.

In 2010-2011, a total of 1.65% of all children less than six years of age in Norway received special pedagogical support. The number rises to 2,2% when counting only children attending day-care. Most of the children are three to six years old. The numbers above entail a doubling of the number of children with special pedagogical support since 2001/2002 (NOU, 2012). The 2012 green paper lists several potential causes for this increase. On one hand, more children in need of special support are said to be 'discovered' because more children attend day-care now than before. There is also increased attention to early intervention and special needs, and limited resources within day-care centres could contribute to a focus on defining children as having special needs in order to receive necessary resources. In addition I find it important to question how understandings of children and normality and the tasks of the day-care, particularly in regards to learning, preparing for school, and documentation of individual children, can contribute to an increase in special pedagogical/educational support. As mentioned in the 2012 green paper, a local investigation in the Municipality of Østre Toten (Aasen, Kostøl, Nordahl, & Wilson, 2010) on the increased amount of school children with special needs pointed to an intensified focus on early intervention, which had resulted in a

growing amount of day-care children being identified as having special needs. In addition, the report illuminated an over-emphasis on the individual child. It was argued that tests and assessments should be reduced and a more system-oriented perspective within the PPT incorporated (Aasen et al., 2010). The 2012 green paper followed up on this with a discussion on whether or not and to what degree an assessment of a child's possible special needs by PPT should address the individual child (as it is in today's practice) or include a child's environment and surroundings. The arguments against including the environment are based on fact that the environment of a child may change quickly; for example, a crucial adult in the day-care may become sick, or changes in the family may give reason to re-assess a decision on special support being given or not. In addition, questions are raised whether PPT has the capacity to include an assessment of the environment. The argument in favour for assessments including a child's environment is that there may be causes and solutions in the environment. For example, the cause of special needs may be due to large groups of children in the day-care institutions. It is also stated as natural to presume that the context and environment of a child is already informally included in assessments and discussions, thus it will not produce a large degree of additional work in the assessment process. In addition, not including positive resources in a child's environment may lead to un-necessary socio-economic costs. The authors of the green paper thus recommended that an assessment of special needs should have a relational perspective, which includes an assessment of the child's environment.

Whereas PPT allocates special education hours for children, evaluating children's medical situation and diagnoses is often done by the Regional Habilitation Services. Habilitation services for children and youth have the responsibility to give interdisciplinary specialist health services to children and youth age 0-18 with impairments and/or chronic illness. This includes diagnostics and functional assessments, training, advice, and counselling for the individual children and families as well as more generally for the municipalities. Habilitation and rehabilitation has the same definition; they are planned processes with clear goals and where several actors cooperate to give the necessary assistance to a user's own effort to achieve best possible operability and ability to manage independence and participation socially and in society. Habilitation is the commonly used notion when it comes to children and youth, often indicating that a person was born with the condition. The habilitation services have an interdisciplinary staff; the three largest groups consist of special pedagogues

(special educators), physiotherapists, and psychologists. As such, it has many of the same kind of professionals as the PPT.

While PPT and the habilitation services are authorities on assigning special needs and diagnoses, it is other adults within the daily life of children who assess if and when to contact these authorities. Day-care staff members are often the ones who raise concern for a child and begin evaluating a child's abilities.

2.2 'Traditional' discourse in Norwegian day-care institutions

Today there is more or less full day-care coverage in Norway. Children from the age of one have been given a right to attend, and about 90% of all children in Norway spend their days in day-care institutions before starting school (Statistics Norway, 2012). The day-care has expanded as a public good together with the expansion of the welfare state (Kampmann, 2004; Korsvold, 1998). In the following, I will provide an overview of what could be called a 'traditional discourse' in the Norwegian day-care field, paying attention to the day-care practices and understandings of children from the 60s to 70s and towards the 80s and 90s. This is done in order to provide context for and insight into how today's practices and focuses present a rupture and mix with a previous discourse.

The first Day-Care Declaration Act in Norway was introduced in 1975. At that time, national guidelines and legislations were first and foremost directed at structural elements of the day-care field, while leaving the pedagogical content to be administered by local day-care owners and pre-school teachers (Korsvold, 1998). However, the role of day-care centres in society has undergone several changes since then, from being a social and family welfare project focusing on children's welfare to being part of work-and gender equality policies, and now as part of the educational arena. Together with a change in the social function and role of day-care units, the focus and intention of practices and understandings towards children and childhood have altered.

Day-care centres were initially regarded as a supplement to the home and the family, mostly created by women and characterised by activities traditionally associated with home and family life (Korsvold, 1998; Nilsen, 2000). Day-care institutions emphasised a home-like environment, with a focus on a cosy and pleasant atmosphere and close child/adult relations (Nilsen, 2000; Korsvold, 1998; Alvestad & Berge, 2009). A traditional component of the

Nordic day-care centres is a focus on free-play situations, meaning that children initiate and choose their own activities (Nilsen, 2000; Ellegaard, 2004; Palludan, 2005). Playing outside and in nature is emphasised and highly valued (Nilsen, 2000, 2008a). There is also a lot of focus on children being social; peer-relations and play as a social activity are emphasised (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Gilliam & Gulløy, 2012; Markström, 2005; Ellegaard, 2004). During free-play, adults aim to limit their interference; however previously as well as today, adults define possibilities and impose limitations on the children by deciding on localities (outside or inside, which rooms), group compositions, and play materials. The traditional characteristic of a home-like cosy atmosphere in day-care centres has also contributed to establishing the value of peace and quiet, which has also led to practices such as trying to calm children's voices and bodily movements if they are considered too noisy or unruly (Nilsen, 2000; Palludan, 2005). At the same time, there are long traditions emphasising the importance of children being active and adventurous, thus the day-care context includes both expectations of some degree of hustle and bustle and a value of peace and quiet.

Within the frames of a home-like environment, focus on development and learning entailed that staff members concentrated on accommodating and adapting the environment so that it became stimulating and appropriately challenging for the children (Alvestad & Berge, 2009). Developmental psychology had from the 60s established a dominant position within the day-care field closely connected to pedagogical arguments. Developmental psychology in different variations focusing on age and stages of development formed a basis for theory and knowledge about children (Kampmann, 2004). The focus on children's needs, development, and learning did, nevertheless, have a holistic approach targeting children's well-being and prosperity (Alvestad, Johansson, Moser, & Søbstad, 2009; Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012b). As such, the day-care centres' responsibility for children's development and learning focused on preparing the physical layout and materials for the entire child group. In other words, the day-care centres sought to organize the environment to promote development and learning. The traditional focus was on general development and initiatives were aimed at the group more than single individuals (Kampmann, 2004). While in the 1970s adults were still explicitly the authorities and meant to teach the children and ensure their development, this should not be confused with a focus on formal learning. The traditional discourse can be said to have a holistic approach to learning, where learning is understood as processes everywhere, in all situations, and inextricable from the day-cares activities, care, and play (Seland, 2009). The

term ‘educare’ could be used to describe a pedagogy that merges education with caring practices (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012b). While day-cares centres traditionally also intended to provide educational benefits, they were not perceived as part of the educational system. Norwegian and Nordic day-cares facilities have a long tradition of not being preparatory facilities for school, which is quite different from other European pre-school institutions.

2.2.1 Child-centred discourse

Understandings of children were altered in some respects during the 1980s and 1990s to have a stronger focus on children’s rights, participation, and children as active contributors to their own learning and environment. The emergence of a child-centred discourse constructed the child as active, reflexive, autonomous, and robust (Brembeck et al., 2004; Kjørholt, 2001). This emphasis on children’s rights and voices as active contributors lessened the previous authority of adults. Internationally and academically, the field of social studies of children and childhood²⁴ contributed to a rupture with developmental perspectives and understandings of children as passive, dependent, immature, and vulnerable by heightening children’s voices, rights, and perspectives (cf. Jenks, 1982; Thorne, 1987; Qvortrup, 1994). Child-centred perspectives came into the Norwegian context early; Norway can be said to have been a forerunner in conceptualizing children as competent and active agents (Kjørholt, 2002).

Within a child-centred framework, a focus on the here-and-now and children’s perspectives are emphasised (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012b), thus strengthening a focus on day-care children as children, not as future school-children or future adults. The emergence of a child-centred perspective established as mentioned children as co-constructors of their environment, thus more emphasis was placed on children’s voices, participation and experiences. As such one can say there was a rupture with previous developmental thinking, understandings of children as passive and adults as experts with authority. However, in many instances a child-centred discourse continued in line with aspects of a traditional discourse in the Norwegian and Nordic day-care field, such as highlighting children’s self-governed activities, free-play, well-being, and a holistic approach to learning.

As such, when referring to central characteristics of the Norwegian day-care field, or a ‘traditional’ discourse, I emphasise day-care centres as arenas for self-governed activities,

²⁴ For more information on social studies of children and childhood see Chapter 3.

free-play, holistic approaches to learning as part of everyday activities, and a child-centred perspective focusing on children's well-being here-and-now and constructing children as competent, robust, participating actors. A traditional discourse also refers to the day-care institutions' independent status in relation to the educational system.

2.3 New tendencies in the day-care field

From the middle of the 1990s, political and administrative authorities progressively became more involved in the content and qualitative dimensions of the day-care institutions (Kampmann, 2004). As day-care centres have increasingly become a part of public affairs, with expansion in numbers and guaranteed places for children, the state has become increasingly involved in its content and quality. A large number of policies, white papers,²⁵ and the implementation and revisions of a Framework Plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens (2006, 2011) now provide guidelines and demands on the pedagogical content of day-care centres. Following this, new discourses and understandings of children and childhoods influence the day-care field.

When transferring administratively to the Ministry of Education and Research in 2005, the Norwegian day-care institutions became part of the educational system. The administrative shift was done partly as a way to (re)confirm the day-care as a pedagogical enterprise and to heighten its status in society. Together with this political and administrative shift, changes in the discourses have also developed, in particular increasing the focus on learning and preparation for school. The previous distinction between the day-care institution and school seems to be rapidly blurring in Nordic countries, as there is generally an increased emphasis on academic learning and knowledge (Arnesen, 2012; Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006). The focus on learning is at times intertwined with an objective to enhance the quality of Norwegian day-care centres (St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). From being an autonomous institution, day-care facilities are today "working in accordance with centrally defined educational objectives" (Gulløv, 2012, p. 100). Norwegian government guidelines and the rhetoric of white papers illustrate this shift towards a growing emphasis on learning as lifelong and formal learning, preparation for school, and early intervention. The Framework

²⁵ The most recent white paper directed at day-cares "Framtidens barnehage" (St. Meld. 24, 2012-2013) is quite extensive, drawing on several green papers, reports, and White paper no. 41 from 2008-2009 (St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009).

Plan has also been said to shift focus towards understanding the day-care institutions as an educational arena (Arnesen, 2012; Vist & Alvestad, 2012; Seland, 2009). For instance, by introducing seven topics for learning, the Framework Plan was seen as marking a shift from learning in a general sense towards more predefined goals and objectives in the day-care field. The implementation of the Framework Plan also seemed to enhance attention to learning by introducing a clearer technical focus and contributing to external expectations of producing “school-ready” children (Østrem et al., 2009).

However, the Framework Plan (2006, 2011) also explicitly recognises childhood’s intrinsic value and the day-care’s distinctive character and traditions. Overall, in policies the tradition of a here-and-now focus on childhood is stated as important to preserve, nevertheless a focus on learning and education permeates the policies (cf. St. Meld. 18 2010-2011, NOU, 2009). The day-care field can be said to be embedded in several somewhat overlapping and paradoxical discourses that underline the importance of both preparation for school and childhood’s intrinsic value in the here-and-now.

2.3.1 Combining the new with the old

New tendencies in the day-care field do not necessarily contradict the previous, but there has been a shift in attention from socializing norms and values towards the individual’s learning and children being capable of mastering certain tasks (Gulløv, 2012). There is an increasing tendency to focus on children’s individual skills and abilities, which combined with child-centred perspectives that emphasise children as competent participating actors, leads to new demands and incentives towards children.

A perspective on children as competent active agents initially and primarily focused on children’s well-being as children in the present here-and-now. However, a discourse focusing on individual skills and learning outcomes is at times combined with perspectives of children as competent by emphasising children as inquisitive and with a desire for learning. As such, the mix and combination of child-centred perspectives and an emphasis on learning and preparation for school gives new incentives to understand children as active, participating, and competent agents. Following, new combinations and understandings of children have come to produce demands and practices of flexibility and self-regulation (Kjørholt & Seland, 2012; Strandell, 2012.). For instance, based on child-centred perspectives, children are constructed as choice-makers and consumers (Kjørholt & Seland, 2012; Seland, 2009). The

cost-effective architecture and organization of day-care centres as ‘bases’ instead of traditional units (Norwegian—basebarnehage) were in many ways legitimized by emphasising children’s right to (and responsibility for) flexibility and choice (Seland, 2009). A perspective and discourse emphasising ‘the competent child’ has become a descriptive category that entails several expectations on how children should behave. An increasing focus on individuals’ skills and abilities transforms a notion that all children are competent in their own right, and contributes to create standards of competence from which some children fail and risk becoming constructed as incompetent²⁶ (cf. Ellegaard, 2004).

Understandings of children as competent and with self-control have also created expectations of children being compliant as a form of invisible pedagogy (Kampmann, 2004). A combination of child-centred focus and an emphasis on individual skills and abilities thus include a focus on self-control and self-direction. Child-centred perspectives have embedded a covert outcome of obedience through children’s own deliberations and choices (cf. Burman, 1994). Thus, despite Nordic day-cares centres’ strong focus on self-governance and choice for children, it is an *institution*, which indicates an institutional (and generational) order and structure to which children are expected to conform (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012). Hence, a focus on children as competent and capable has not only given children freedom and room to manoeuvre, but has also established new normalization practices, with certain demands, assessments, and evaluation criteria directed at the child (Kampmann, 2004).

2.3.2 Early intervention and inclusion

Early intervention is aimed at providing children with equal opportunities for learning and evening out future social differences (St. Meld 16, 2006-2007; St. Meld 31, 2007-2008; St. Meld 41, 2008-2009). Day-care institutions are often stated as having a positive impact on social differences, and early intervention initiatives during day-care are said to be cost-effective and yield good return both for the individual and for the society (St. Meld 41, 2008-2009). As such, day-cares are stated as important arenas for preventing, ‘discovering’, and initiating action for children who are perceived as having special needs (St. Meld 41, 2008-2009).

²⁶ For further discussion see Article 2.

Inclusion measures in the day-care field can be said to have a focus both on the well-being of children in the here-and-now, and as a preventive measure for future social problems. As such, day-care institutions should ensure all children's inclusion in daily life as well as prevent future discrimination, bullying, and social differences (Framework Plan, 2011). Acknowledging that children are different and have diverse backgrounds, day-care centres are depicted in policies as crucial locations for the levelling out of future differences in school children's learning outcomes. This entails that the day-care field has a responsibility, not only to create an inclusive environment here-and-now, but also to facilitate inclusion and equality in the future by preparing children for school. Arnesen (2012) has discussed how ideas and rhetoric of inclusion in policies have changed from a focus on community, friendship, and social preparation for school in terms of day-care centres being a place of community and interaction with other children towards inclusion as an aspect of learning, reducing differences in learning outcome, and enhancing school results. Hence, exclusion processes seem to be explained through a focus on children's learning development, and efforts to achieve social equality and inclusion are directed at early intervention and target children's individual skills and abilities (Arnesen, 2012).

Shifts and changes in policies and guidelines are interrelated with changes in day-care practices, where one clear apparent change is the extensive use of standardized mapping devices used to evaluate and register children's skills and (in)abilities. The attention directed to early intervention has become intertwined with practices and focuses on documenting and mapping individual children in order to 'discover' those who do not follow the expected development of skills and competences.

2.4 Evaluating individual children's abilities and development

Together with an emphasis on learning and early intervention there is an intensification of documenting and measuring children's abilities and skills—particularly language and behavioural issues. In Norway as well as in other Nordic countries, there is a growing trend of monitoring every single child with observations, documentations, explanations, and corrections directed at the individual child (Andersen, 2009; Holm, 2009, 2010; Nordin-Hultman et al., 2004; Østrem, 2010; Østrem et al., 2009). The aim is often to 'discover' children with special needs as early as possible in order to initiate early efforts and preventive interventions (St. Meld 16, 2006–2007; St. Meld 18, 2010–2011; Mørland, 2008). Initiatives

of ‘discovering’ special needs and using mapping devices draw on ideas of development as related to age and stages. While developmental psychology has a long history of influencing pedagogical thinking in the day-care field, recently the focus has altered with more emphasis being directed at the individual child and the development of specific skills and abilities.

While an evaluation of the implementation of the Framework Plan (Østrem et al., 2009) pointed to an increase in individual documentation, the Framework Plan itself does not emphasise tests and assessments of individual children. Instead, the focus is mostly directed at documenting the day-care as an institution, its practices, and plans in order to promote reflection and discussions among the staff. In regards to documenting individual children, the Framework Plan (2006/2011) states:

Documentation linked to individual children can be used in connection with cooperation with external welfare services if this is done in collaboration and understanding with the parents/ guardians of the children. If specific goals are to be set for individual children, there must be a reason for this, and the goals must be set in collaboration with the parents and any partners outside the kindergarten. This type of documentation is subject to a duty of confidentiality. (p. 46)

So while the Framework Plan does not necessarily promote the monitoring of individual children, more recent policies have nevertheless promoted such a practice especially in regards to language.

Language is emphasised within policies as crucial for further learning and education. A national study illustrates that about 90% of the municipalities have initiatives for mapping children’s language in public day-care. Following, 65% map children’s language skills once a year and 25% map when they are concerned about a particular child (St. Meld 41, 2008-2009). While the benefits of focussing on documentation and learning in the day-care sector have been questioned in white paper 41, the importance of early intervention (in particular to language difficulties) are nevertheless highlighted and it recommended that it be mandatory for all day-care centres to offer three year old children language mapping. This suggestion ignited debates among professionals, in which critical voices raised concern that such mapping tools often end up steering and governing practices and that quality can be reduced as attention is narrowed towards aspects possible to map (NOU, 2010). When looking to other Scandinavian countries, a green paper (NOU, 2010) underlined how Sweden and the Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket] expressed scepticism in regards to extensive

mapping of children pre-school aged. The Swedish National Agency for Education illustrated for instance how staff had become too preoccupied with individual children's achievements. The Swedish curriculum proposal clarified that one should not focus on individual children's learning results, but rather the institution's responsibility to accommodate learning. The official report also states that in Denmark in 2009, it was announced that the previous mandate (to which the Norwegian proposal in white paper 41 refers) of offering mapping to all children was going to be phased out (NOU, 2010).

In the more recent white paper 24 (2012-2013), the government introduced a policy that made it mandatory for all day-care institutions to offer language mapping for children considered to have special needs in regards to language. In other words, standardized mapping of *all* children is not implemented as mandatory, only for those considered as deviating by having more extensive needs than what is common for their age. One could say the emphasis on day-care centres to 'discover' special needs has become reinforced by the mandate to test and evaluate those suspected of having special needs. What this actually entails greatly depends, however, on day-care staff members' understandings and perspectives on children and normality.²⁷

It is important to note that most of the tests and mapping tools do not only assess language and communication skills, but also address social capabilities and cover a whole range of conduct and activities. For instance, the observation material "Alle med" (loosely translated as 'All included') has one part that focuses on language, while a child's socio-emotional issues, play, well-being, everyday-activities, and sensory/mobility issues are considered in the other five parts. The most widespread tool, TRAS, includes assessments of a child's social interaction and attention abilities. So, the mapping of language as it is expressed in policies and reports entails a much wider mapping of children's perceived skills and abilities.

2.4.1 TRAS

TRAS is the most commonly used mapping tool in Norwegian day-care centres, and is also used in Sweden and Denmark (Holm, 2010, Swedish National Agency for Education, 2008).

²⁷ As discussed further in Articles 1 and 2.

TRAS²⁸ originally was short for ‘early registration of language difficulties’ and was aimed at children who were perceived as having verbal and/or written language difficulties. However, the intention expanded as the focus became a registration of language development in general, and the term ‘difficulties’ was changed to ‘development.’ TRAS is meant to facilitate day-care institution’s work of following children’s language development and identifying children with language difficulties. The target group is children two to five years of age, and the mapping material is directed at professionals working with day-care children.

TRAS testing relies on adult observations of individual children during daily activities, and the staff members answer questions directed at particular age groups regarding eight areas (e.g., language, communication, attention, sociability). Each area is divided into ages (2-3, 3-4, 4-5), and has three questions for each age group. For each question an adult records the answer in the registration form by colouring parts of a circle: completely, partly, or not at all depending on how well the child manages to do what is asked of his/her age group.

The theoretical foundation of TRAS is stated as socio-cultural and constructionist, but there is a strong developmental psychological orientation regarding age and expected behaviour (Report, 2011). Whereas it upholds an understanding of language and communication as creative processes where children draw on experiences and interactions with their environment and care persons, the registration of observations is nonetheless based on ideas of age-specific development.²⁹

2.4.2 Critique of mapping devices

The government in 2008-2009 appointed an expert group³⁰ to evaluate the most commonly used mapping devices and tests in Norwegian day-care centres. In December 2011, the report was published and serious concerns about the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the eight devices, tests, and programmes commonly used for mapping the language of children were raised (Report, 2011).

²⁸ TRAS consists of a registration form (1st ed., 2002, 2nd ed., 2006), a handbook (2003), and a notebook (2008). The material was first published in 2002, produced in Norway as a collaboration between the University of Oslo and special pedagogical resource centres (for more information see TRAS handbook).

²⁹ Construction s of normality and knowledge with TRAS is further discussed in Article 1. Issues of categorisation and normality are also elaborated on in the Chapter 3.

³⁰ Consisting of: P. Ø. Andersen, E. Björklund, D. Bleses, M. Gjervan, B. Hagtvatne, & H. Valvatne.

The evaluation report emphasised how there has been a shift in the last few decades in the understanding of children and their development, differentiating between models underlining social relations and context on one side and development as age related hierarchical stages on the other side. Almost all the mapping devices evaluated (including TRAS) were criticized for emphasising the latter, thus having an understanding of ‘normal’ development related to age and certain milestones. Østrem (2010) also problematized the understanding of language development as age dependent demonstrated through TRAS materials and how the evaluations are directed at other social behaviours. This is as mentioned highly relevant, as the tests and devices refer to a wide range of child activities and conduct. The evaluation report (2011) also highlighted some of the problematic and complex perspectives related to standardized evaluations of individual children in general. Drawing on national and international literature, the report requested more ethical discussions and inquiries into the perspectives related to individual documentation. The evaluation report problematized, among other things, how mapping of individual children is dependent on the context in which it occurs, which includes social and cultural premises. As such, the mapping of language could be described more as constructions, which do not only say something about children’s abilities, but reports on how the adults construct and systemize cultural stories about the children³¹ (Report, 2011). The expert group in the report refers to an understanding of social constructions of knowledge and truth, and stress the necessity to direct attention to the ones constructing the knowledge. However, at the same time, the connection between young children’s language difficulties and problems later in life is stressed in the report in terms of, for example, continued language learning and educational difficulties. In particular, the connection to later problems is stated as greater for children already socially at risk and children with minority languages.

In general, the expert group points to the risks of giving mapping devices too much significance in terms of producing ‘objective and neutral’ knowledge, and how the use of tests possibly transform staff members performing the mapping into technicians. Hence, they assert the importance of giving the observer the opportunity to systematically reflect on her or his

³¹ Cf. Article 1.

own role and significance, and recommend mapping language environments and pedagogical practices as well as individual children.³²

2.4.3 Introducing a language guide

With the strong critiques and severe problems pointed out in the evaluation report (2011), the Ministry gave the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training the task of producing a guide about mapping and stimulating language development based on the report in order to secure the quality care in day-care institutions (St. Meld 6, 2012-2013). This guide was recently published and consists of three main parts discussing language stimulation, documentation, and evaluation of language and language acquisition (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013b). The guide emphasises to a large extent the day-care and its language environment, both in regards to initiatives to stimulate language and in regards to evaluation and documentation. It focuses on language as part of everyday activities and play, and is directed at the entire child group. The guide also includes information on regulations and procedures related to documentation and evaluation of individual children. For instance, information about a child's skills and development counts as sensitive personal information and is thus subject to certain laws and regulations (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2013b). Laws and regulations connected to the use of mapping devices has seldom been on the agenda for those selling the tests or among the majority of municipalities and day-care centres using mapping devices (Pettersvold & Østrem, 2012). A recent white paper (St. Meld. 24, 2012-2013) states that there should be clarification of the regulations to ensure both the children's protection of privacy, but also to allow day-care to continue practices of documentation and evaluation.

The guide thus brings up important issues and deals with many of the criticism raised by the report of 2011. However, the holistic approach to observing and stimulating children and mapping the language environment of day-care units mostly relates to children perceived as 'normal.' The guide points out that when day-care staffs 'discover' a child who deviates from the expected development of children of the same age, they must discuss whether to evaluate the child's language further with, for example, the use of standardized mapping devices, and whether to refer a child to external experts. While emphasising that children at the same age can have different language abilities, the guide includes a rough outline of children's language

³² Cf. Article 1.

development connected to age. As such, while opening up for diversity, the guide also establishes a frame for what is to be considered as ‘normal.’

2.5 Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the day-care field in which constructions of children as deviating from what is considered ‘normal’ operate. Hence, the chapter elaborates on the larger contexts connected to this study. I have in particular emphasised recent changes in policies and guidelines that indicate a shift in the day-care institution’s mandates, practices, and understandings of children. In this chapter, I have illustrated a growing focus on age-appropriate development and individualistic approaches within day-care centres (cf. Kampmann, 2004; Strandell, 2012). A crucial aspect is a shift towards more emphasis on individual children’s learning, preparation for school, and evaluating their individual skills and abilities with the use of standardized tests and mapping devices. In particular, this is directed at children who raise concerns among the day-care staff. Standardized tests and evaluations can be said to create a different type of knowledge about children (cf. Foucault, 1994; Rose, 1990) and a classification of children based on comparing a child’s unique development to that of a generalized child³³ (cf. James, 2004).

New national incentives concerning day-care institutions demand increased control and evaluation (Gulløv, 2012), which is evident in the focus of policies on documentation and evaluation of both day-cares and individual children. Neo-liberal tendencies can be said to have contributed to a more instrumental way of conceptualizing the role of day-care institutions (Gulløv, 2012; cf. Moss, 2007), focusing on learning and producing predefined outcomes (Korsvold, 2008). Whereas care giving previously was a goal itself, present policies depict day-care centres as key arenas to prevent and solve social problems and "[identify] potential problematic individuals" (Gulløv, 2012, p. 99). The increasing focus on learning, preparation for school, early intervention, and ‘discovering’ special needs emphasise individual children’s skills and development and practices of tests and mapping devices. While this represents more recent changes within the day-care field, it is particularly interesting to note how new tendencies draw upon and mix with previously established child-centred perspectives and understandings of children and childhoods. Although a child-centred

³³ Standardized tests and mapping material is further discussed in Article 1.

approach in many ways represented a rupture with previous perspectives, it is today combined with a focus on individual children developing the skills necessary for future participation in school and society. Hence, previous child-centred understandings of children as competent, participating actors have been altered into criteria of expectable, desirable, and achievable skills and abilities, in other words, constituting what is perceived as 'normal' (cf. Kampmann, 2004). While it might seem contradictory, the emphasis on children as, for example, competent, participating and active agents becomes intertwined and somewhat transformed within discourses and practices of monitoring, evaluating, and scrutinizing the individual child more than ever before. Children's initiatives, self-regulation, and freedom can be regarded as new ways of governing and controlling children (Strandell, 2012). The increasing focus on the individual child establishes a basis for a new form of normalization practice, where children as active agents, competent and free, constitute demands and criteria for assessments and evaluations of an individual child's development and daily conduct (Kampmann, 2004). New practices of normalization are constructed where control is to be internalized through self-regulation and self-evaluation. In addition, expectations and demands are not explicit, thus a child is expected to figure out what is expected and make the 'right choices' without being told what to do (Kampmann, 2004). While children before were most likely perceived as disobedient when disregarding institutional demands, a child now risks becoming constructed as inherently deviating or as lacking some important ability when not living up to situational and institutional expectations. These issues are further discussed in the three articles. With a critical stance towards the increasing testing and categorisation of day-care children, the articles explore different aspects of constructions of children in-between and deviating as possibly impaired or having special needs in Norwegian day-care institutions. Focusing on the day-care staff members' descriptions and discussions, the aims of the articles are to illustrate dilemmas in understandings of children as (not) 'normal', illustrate context dependent expectations related to a discourse of the competent child, and illustrate constructions of deviance associated to an idea of inclusion. The articles' focus on discourses and children as socially constructed phenomena is intended to contribute to destabilize categorisations of normality and deviance (or ableness and impairment), issues that involve an engagement to several theoretical concepts and academic fields, as elaborated on in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Theoretical perspectives and positioning

In this chapter, I attempt to clarify and elaborate on the theoretical platform of this thesis, striving to make perspectives and positions as explicit and clear as possible. Examining constructions of children in-between and deviating requires an in-depth exploration of theoretical perspectives and concepts. The starting point and research questions of this thesis challenge accepted and established ways of thinking and knowing. In everyday communication, one often operates with taken-for-granted understandings of children and childhood, as well as ‘normal’ and ‘disabled’ (cf. Tøssebro, 2004). When one attempts to destabilize these taken-for-granted ideas, one needs to firmly explain one’s own position and perspective in order to create an explicit and visible platform from where to approach the argument. Thus, I aim to clarify and elaborate on the theoretical basis and approach embedded in the research questions. How can one understand children and impairment as socially constructed?

3.1 Socially Constructed

A starting point for this thesis is that children, childhoods, disability, impairment, normality, and deviance are all socially constructed phenomena. Since social constructionism as a theoretical or epistemological stance is interpreted and used in different ways, I will elaborate on this thesis position.

Social constructionism invites a critical stance towards taken-for-granted understandings of the world (Hacking, 1999). As an epistemological and theoretical starting point, social constructionism stands in opposition to what is referred to as positivism and empiricism in traditional science, challenging assumptions of objective knowledge and unbiased observations. According to social constructionism, our knowledge and common understandings are constructed between people, both from the past and in the present (Burr, 2003). A basic premise is languages’ role in constructing reality, also called “the linguistic turn.” This entails a shift from understanding language as neutral communication of facts, to understanding how language constructs representations of reality, representations that also construct reality. Reality is thus understood as available to us through our categorization and

discourses (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). “The argument is that the reality represented does not determine the representation or the means of representation. Instead, the process of signification itself gives shape to the reality it implicates.” (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998, p. 99.) Following this standpoint, language and categories are in this thesis not treated as reflections of pre-given ‘natural’ patterns or ‘discoveries’ made about children, rather I treat them as one representation of reality among many possible.

When establishing a phenomenon as socially constructed, a divide and separation between the biological/natural and the social has often been (re)produced. For instance, the division of sex and gender made it possible to discuss social and cultural aspects of gender without reference to the biological differences between sexes. Gender was thus established as a (socially constructed) category defined by a broad network of social relations (Hacking, 1999). However, this approach uses the socially constructed category (gender) as an add-on to physiology/biology (Hacking, 1999). In similar ways theorists in other fields have constructed social categories as add-ons to the biological. For instance, within disability studies the divide made between disability and impairment³⁴ depicts disability as socially constructed and imposed on a biologically impaired body (Oliver, 1990). Or within social studies of children and childhood, where childhoods are depicted as socially constructed in contrast to biological immaturity (James & Prout, 1997). This divide between the social and the natural can be understood as continuing within a modernist framework that structures reality in oppositional categories. One fails to challenge binary thinking and to disrupt values and practices based on taken-for-granted ideas of nature, facts, and biology. Social constructions as add-ons, separated from what is perceived as natural or biological can be referred to as ‘weaker’ versions of social constructionism (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011), and do not destabilize dichotomies such as social/natural, able/impaired. Weaker versions of social constructionism tend to retain modernist understandings where facts, events, and subjects exist independently of the terms used to describe them (Aranda, Zeeman, Scholes, & Morales, 2012). As such, social constructionism has been criticized for partaking in a modernist project and for being inconsistent and limited as a theoretical approach (cf. Prout, 2005; Shildrick, 2012). However, arguing for a ‘stronger’ version of social constructionism is also target for critique, where some claim it adheres to a universal constructionism, thus perceiving everything as mental

³⁴ See Section 3.4 for further discussions.

and nothing as real until it is spoken of (Hacking, 1999). I argue that stating that something is socially constructed does not make it less real (cf. Hacking, 1999). A somewhat stronger version of social constructionism does not necessarily entail a negation of physical reality or reduce everything to be social, but rather points to the *inseparability* of the dualities. A social constructionist approach in this thesis thus points to how reality is perceived, discussed, experienced, and reached through discourses. While also acknowledging that materiality has unavoidable consequences for people and certainly exists, the point is that we have no unmediated or direct access to it.

Stating something as socially constructed includes a theoretical position that is not completely resolved, as a relativist critiques could be made. However I do not find it essential to propose an answer to these complex epistemological questions or offer a definitive solution. Rather I find it important to assert how a position focusing on constructions is fruitful in order to explore, re-open, and re-pose issues, and leave behind the search for guaranteed knowledge (cf. Henriques et al., 1998).

In sum, when I refer to something in this thesis as socially constructed I do not refer to a social or cultural dimension added on top of an underlying natural reality; I refer to how discourses, categorisations, and social relations construct and are inseparable from the material or biological, caught in a mutually constitutive relationship.

3.1.1 Discourses

The concept of discourse relates to a variety of theoretical work, and is applied in a variety of ways in research. I have tried to explain the use of the term in this thesis by relating it to Michel Foucault (1994, 1999) and literature further developing his ideas. The concept of discourse lacks a clear-cut definition, however, discourse can be said to provide rules of what it is possible to say, and making the boundaries of what makes sense and meaningful related to certain issues.

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (Hall, 2001, p. 72)

The term discourse is applied in this thesis as decisive for what counts as knowledge and what is perceived as making sense. Language, statements, conversations, and discussions in everyday life can be seen as discursive practices that reproduce and operate within a larger discourse containing forms, conditions, and criteria for what is understood as truthful (Hook, 2001). This stands in contrast to an understanding that personal intentions are expressed through ‘empty’ language, that the world already has a meaning that language only needs to bring forth (Foucault, 1999). In contrast, a focus on discourse is related to the (re)production of knowledge, truth, and power at a certain time in history. There are at the same time ongoing changes, mutations, and divisions of what qualifies as legitimate knowledge. This does not entail that truth is ‘relative’ or that anything can be claimed as truthful in a context, as Foucault points out that conditions for ‘truth’ are highly specific and stable within a matrix of historical and socio-political circumstances (Hook, 2001). The key is to pay attention to what is reasonable and qualifies as knowledge within a social-historical and institutional setting. Within institutional settings a discourse can be seen as ‘reality constitutive,’ whereas certain utterances and practices appear ‘normal’ and ‘truthful’ (Neumann, 2001). Exploring discourses entails focusing on how truths and knowledge about what it means to be a child are (re)produced and made possible in certain institutionalized relations (Kjørholt, 2004). Discourses have a disciplining power as they define what is acceptable and not, what is desirable and not (Foucault, 1994, 1999). The discipline is covert and implicit, as in the perception of what is deemed ‘normal’.³⁵

In this thesis, I approach discourse as a way to illustrate some of the underlying assumptions that make day-care staff members’ conversations and practices towards children acceptable and meaningful. I shed light on how their arguments and evaluations are conditioned by the unspoken assumptions of well-known discourses circulating the day-care and society. There can be many discourses circulating and used regarding a topic. Discourses are understood as discontinuing practices, crossing and touching each other, but also ignoring and excluding each other (Foucault, 1999). Discourses are not non-contradictory or uniform processes, and the rules and limitations set by a discourse are not internal to one discourse, but include combinations from other discourses. “The rules delimit the sayable. But . . . they do not imply a closure” (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 105). Thus, recognizing people as active agents while

³⁵ Discussion on the concept of normality in Section 3.2.1

not being able to position one's self outside a discourse, one has the opportunity to resist, shift, or mix discourses dependent on context and function (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Children and childhoods are thus understood as constructed by a variety of conflicting discourses (Kjørholt, 2004). As such there are always degrees of unpredictability and openness as processes are highly complex and include struggles and resistance (Henriques et al., 1998).

That discourses delimit the sayable and that there are divergent discourses within a field are crucial starting points for understanding how day-care staff members' descriptions of children in-between are explored in the articles of this thesis. In Article 1, I outline how some of the day-care staff members' statements and descriptions in my study relate to various, at times contradicting, discourses and understandings concerning children, development, and normality. Article 2 relates to a particular discourse of "the competent child" within the Norwegian (Nordic) day-care context, and I try to illustrate how this discourse is part of producing limitations and possibilities on how children are positioned. The third article examines in greater detail how the statements and utterances of day-care staff construct deviance and possible impairments from the premise that their understandings are defined and limited by cultural values and ideas of the 'normal' and accepted within the Norwegian day-care setting.

3.1.2 Subject positions

The concept of subject positions conceptualizes how discourses and discursive practices are processes that provide positions where people may locate each other or themselves (Neumann, 2001; Henriques et al., 1998). Discourses (re)produce for example certain subject positions accessible for children in day-care centres (Nilsen, 2012). While I am aware that children also position themselves and are part of constructing the discourses surrounding them (cf. Markström & Halldén, 2009), in this thesis the focus has remained on what subject-positions are created for the children by adults (staff members) and how the children become positioned. This is central as there is a generational order in the day-care field (Alanen, 2001; Alasuutari & Markström, 2011) where adults in relation to children have the power to position and construct knowledge regarding children.

The concept of subject positions moves away from a fixed and individualistic concept of identity, pointing to a possible movement where discourses may shift and positionings may

change. Underlying my use of social positions is a commitment to a perspective of identities and self as instable, uncertain, and fluid³⁶ (Davis, 2002; Shildrick, 2012). I do not regard the self as a stable grounding category, but as depending on context and social relations. Competences, (dis)abilities, normality, and deviance are thus understood as non-static with the possibility of shifting (cf. Lee, 1999; Prout, 2005), including contradicting and non-coherent subject positions (Henriques et al., 1998). In contrast to evaluating children with understandings relying on a conceptualization of a unitary and static individual (Henriques et al., 1998) with inherent qualities and characteristics, this thesis emphasises a relational and contextual perspective. Children's conduct is perceived as entangled and inseparable from context, emphasizing an understanding of children (and adults) as non-static, with possibilities to shift between, for example, positions of competence and in-competence³⁷ (Lee, 1999; Kjørholt, 2005).

3.2 Categorization and children in-between

This thesis deals to a large degree with how children are constructed and positioned in reference to constructed categories of 'normal' and 'deviant' (including special needs or impairment). The thesis has a critical starting point that, as influenced by Foucault, asserts a right to be different on one hand and at the same time is critical to that which separates an individual from others (cf. Foucault, 1982). There is a critique raised against the power embedded in categorization practices from which individuals become understood and possibly understand themselves through notions of a fixed identity:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault, 1982, p. 781)

An understanding of individuals having fixed identities and inherent qualities contributes to a certain way of categorizing and classifying people. An order is imposed through language with the naming and classification of the world into dichotomies (Bauman, 1991).

³⁶ This is also discussed in Section 3.5 and Article 3.

³⁷ Further elaborated in Article 2.

The children described in my study are positioned in-between categories; they are children who the day-care staff members worry about. Children positioned in-between can be seen as highlighting the constructiveness of categories since they point to blurred boundaries and thus allow us to question a taken-for-granted nature of categorization. In the second article Bauman's concept of 'not-yet-classified' (1991, p.57) is used to illustrate this point. Not-yet-classified points to how some are in a grey area and perceived as unfamiliar or strangers; which means that they are perceived as something that can be known, understood, and categorized in the future, possibly in another system of classification or when familiar. In this thesis, children in debatable and indistinct positions could be said to inhabit a grey area; however, they represent a possibility of being familiar and classifiable in the future. In similar ways, Bauman's concept of 'undecidables' (1991) is appropriate for the children positioned in-between as it indicates that the children have the possibility of being assigned to more than one category. Every time one tries to fit them into a category, possibilities for new ambiguities are constructed. The position of undecidables can be said to undermine a modernistic framework of oppositional categories: "They unmask the brittle artificiality of division. They destroy the world. They stretch the temporary inconvenience of 'not knowing how to go on into a terminal paralysis'" (Bauman, 1991, p. 59). As an unbearable position to deal with, the quest for defining and labelling continues in (amongst other places) the day-care institution. Developing tests, evaluations, more definitions, and more precise classes of "other" can be viewed as attempts to capture the ambiguity. As said, it is a futile project as it gives only more occasions for ambiguity (i.e., Bauman, 1991).

There are numerous differences between children, while categorization depends on recognizing and highlighting certain differences while ignoring others (Bateson, 2002). This does not signify that units are necessarily completely static or stable, as even if they persist, their participants, characteristics, and boundaries transform and should be seen as highly flexible. While I present a critical stance towards increasing practices of categorizing children, I do see how a certain degree of categorisation is a necessary way to make sense of the world and social reality (cf. Bowker & Star, 2000). The critique is directed towards how it should not necessarily be an easy endeavour. Meaning that it should be a process of reflection, discussion, and wondering, scrutinizing the very foundation of the classification system. Made in interaction with society and in relation to context and social structures; categories could be useful when they are dynamic and changing depending on context. Classification

would then be a continuous process that excludes and includes (Bauman, 1991). “The only good classification is a living classification.” (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 326), in which processes are dynamic and change depending on new ways of selecting similarities and differences, or excluding and including. Problems arise when categories become rigid and taken-for-granted as part of society’s whole structure. The construction, history, and premises of the categories thus become closed from insight and revision; they become naturalized, and are taken for granted as natural facts that are no longer questioned.

3.2.1 Normality and a ‘normal child’

Categories structured in oppositions, as dichotomies, depend on each other for meaning (e.g., the mutual dependency between what is considered ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’). However, they stand in an asymmetrical relationship, where one side is privileged and treated as taken-for-granted (left silent), while the other remains in focus as degraded and devalued (Bauman, 1991). While what is deemed ‘deviant’ or ‘abnormal’ often becomes scrutinized, evaluated, and monitored, the ‘normal’ is left as taken for granted and implicit. However, it is not that which is considered ‘deviant’ or abnormal that in itself is cause for concern, the ‘problem’ is rather created in relation to standards of normality (Davis, 1995). Thus exploring deviance must include explorations of what is understood as constituting normality.

By pointing to social, cultural, and historic-specific constructions, it is possible to challenge an assumption of ‘normal’ as a universal concept.

A common assumption would be that some concept of the norm must have always existed. After all, people seem to have an inherent desire to compare themselves to others. But the idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature, than it is a feature of a certain kind of society. (Davis, 1995, p. 24)

Today’s notion of ‘normal’ emerged together with a new way of thinking from the beginnings of the 19th century: numerically, statistically, probabilistically. The concept of ‘normal’ can be said to relate to three different meanings: normal as healthy, as average, and as acceptable (Turmel, 2008). Within the concept is a tension as it signifies both the average and what is to be desired (Canguilhem & Cohen, 1978; Turmel, 2008). Formed through science, medicine, and surveys, the rise of the category of a ‘normal child’ can be placed at the end of the 19th century (Turmel, 2008). The weighing and measuring of height of infants can be seen as the first step of a wave of tests, evaluations, and charts based on the notion of the ‘normally

developing child' (Armstrong, D., 1995; Turmel, 2008). The concept transformed from its early stage to its more intricate meaning that refers to behaviour, cognitive abilities, and social capacities a century later (Turmel, 2008). Developmental psychology's focus on children's development in universal age and stages contributed to not only the close monitoring of physical body but also of 'the unformed mind' of a child in the medical gaze in order to identify deviances (Armstrong, D., 1995). Test and evaluations were developed to measure physical attributes and also cognitive and psychological qualities of a child (Turmel, 2008). By examining and testing children, standards of what constituted 'normal' functioning and behaviour for certain ages were constructed, which enabled the normality of any child to be assessed by comparison (James, 2004; Jenks, 1992; Prout, 2005; Rose, 1990). In the same process the 'abnormal', pathological, and in need of intervention was also constructed and there was a proliferation of professions concerned with identifying and attending to children's abnormalities (Prout, 2005). It is not difficult to relate this history to the contemporary focus on monitoring and testing children. However, while the perceived 'not normal' used to be more directly referred to as deviance and seen as inferior, it has been replaced with a discourse emphasizing special needs (Vehmas, 2010).

3.2.2 Diagnosing deviance

Behavioural and psychological diagnoses³⁸ have increased immensely among children in western societies, to the extent in some cases that the term "epidemic" can be used (e.g., ADHD) (Hannås, 2010; Timimi, 2004; Timimi & Leo, 2009). The Norwegian society is no exception, and the medicalization of children with ADHD in Norway was by a UN representative compared to alarming tendencies in the USA (Hannås, 2012). In addition to ADHD, children are also subjected to being labelled with other disorders such as conduct disorders, developmental disorders (autism, Asperger), and emotional disorders. With the focus of this thesis, I also critically question the increasing use of diagnostic labels on young children in Norway, as well as internationally.

Diagnoses are part of a medical discourse as diagnostics entail a perspective focusing on individuals as having inherent (unhealthy/unaccepted/unwanted) qualities. Without going too

³⁸ This section focuses on mental and behavioural disorders and diagnoses among children, however the position of this thesis includes a broader debate that problematizes categorizations of impairment in general (including physical). This is elaborated on in Section 3.5.

much in detail on how a medical perspective defines characteristics of various diagnoses, it is noteworthy that many diagnoses of conditions onset in childhood refer to otherwise ‘normal’ child-conduct understood as turned excessive (cf. ICD-10, 2010). Children’s conduct used to diagnose ADHD for example could in many ways be described as a continuum³⁹ (Prout, 2005), where particular children behave in manners some consider extreme (Graham, 2008). The question thus becomes where to draw the line between the behaviours of so-called ADHD children and others (Armstrong, T., 1996; Prout, 2005). In order to define what is regarded as excessive, diagnostic guidelines in the ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders refers for instance to age-appropriate and context-dependent expectations of how children should behave (2010: 207). In other words, contextual expectations of normality and understandings of children and childhoods in relation to age and development are central to whether a child becomes diagnosed. The educational system is in particular an interesting context to observe the outcomes of institutional demands on a variety of children (e.g. Slee, 2011). What meaning is given to children who fail to meet certain demands and expectations? Whereas previously children were being labelled disobedient or ‘bad,’ could one say there is now a shift towards being labelled as medically disordered? A breakdown in adult authority and the need to control unruly children could contribute to social dilemmas, creating ideal contexts for the use of, for example, ADHD diagnoses (Timimi, 2004, 2005). The use of psycho-pathologizing discourses within educational settings could also be seen as contributing to constructions of some children as having disorders (Graham, 2008; Graham & Slee, 2006). Discourses and perspectives have serious effects on how we divide, give meaning, and act in the world. The next theoretical sections will elaborate on two academic fields, challenging and establishing perspectives and understandings central for this thesis.

3.3 Social studies of children and childhood

This thesis is positioned within social studies of children and childhood, and influenced by the field’s critical perspectives on established notions, norms, and knowledge about children and childhoods. Social studies of children and childhood as an interdisciplinary research field emerged and matured during the 1980s by several international researchers (James, Jenks, &

³⁹ Cf. Article 3.

Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982, 1996; Qvortrup, 1994). Jenks (1982) was one of the pioneers who pointed out that children had not been analysed as a social practice and research had failed “to constitute the child as an ontology in its own right” (Jenks, 1996, p. 10). New perspectives and approaches within social studies of children and childhood have been referred to as a paradigm shift (James & Prout, 1997). For this thesis the most relevant part of the shift is an understanding of childhoods as socially constructed. Within this understanding there is no such thing as a pre-discursive, neutral, or natural childhood or concept of a child. The focus thus remains on discourses of childhoods, where different constructions and representations may operate at the same time (Montgomery & Woodhead, 2003). In this thesis I draw upon social studies of children and childhood as a critical stance towards traditional developmental psychology and future-oriented perspectives on children and childhood.

3.3.1 Challenging developmental perspectives on children and childhood

Social studies of children and childhood emerged with a critical stance towards how children and childhood had been understood and approached in the social sciences. Critiques were in particular directed at the field of child psychology, which had emerged during the 20th century and was the dominant discipline concerning childhood (Jenks, 1982; James & Prout, 1997). The history of child psychology is a complex matter, and towards the end of the 20th century there was growing criticism from both within and outside the discipline (Burman, 1994; Henriques et al., 1998). I will not attempt to give an overview of the various orientations within psychology regarding children and childhood; my objective is rather to illuminate the critiques and contributions of social studies of children and childhood.

As mentioned, social studies of children and childhood was established as a critique and counter-position to traditional developmental psychology by pointing out how children and childhoods should not be understood as ‘natural’ or universal, but rather socially, historically, and culturally constructed. Strong emphasis was placed on how the character of childhoods, including how it is interpreted and practiced, varied significantly in history and between cultures (James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997). The critique was in particular directed at traditional developmental psychology’s contribution to the establishment of norms and standards for what constitutes a ‘normal’ child (Jenks, 1992; Prout, 2005). The idea of natural developmental stages has had immeasurable impact on everyday conceptualizations of

children, and on paediatric care and practice (Jenks, 1992). From processes intertwined with the emergence of paediatrics, welfare policies, practices, and institutions such as schools and nurseries, norms and standards of how a child should develop have been firmly constructed (Rose, 1990; Armstrong, D., 1995; Prout, 2005; Turmel, 2008). In contrast, social studies of children and childhood maintains that what children can do and their alleged shortcomings are not so much rooted in biology, but rather historically, culturally determined, and intertwined with adults' interests (Qvortrup, 2004).

With the emerging idea of childhoods as socially constructed, Jenks (1996), among others, pointed out how traditional developmental psychology and other theorists of childhood were not merely descriptive but rather represented different ways of constituting the child and childhoods. In other words, psychology or knowledge produced in any other fields, 'facts,' and norms are seen as the outcome of culturally specific productions (Burman, 2012). One such 'fact' is the notion of children's needs; which has been constructed as part of standardized developmental models of childhood. Children's needs appear to describe natural, timeless, and universal qualities of childhood (Woodhead, 1990). However, in his critique Woodhead (1990) illustrates how the notion of children's needs conceals "a complex of latent assumptions and judgements about children" (p. 63). Even if it is seldom discussed, studies of children's needs, development or socialization take shape within a context of adults having power over children, including power of definition (Thorne, 1987).

In agreement with social studies of children and childhood, I am critical of the understandings and consequences of traditional developmental psychology's emphasis on children's development according to age and appropriate stages. I regard such a perspective as only one way of interpreting and constructing children and childhoods, which in turn constructs what it was supposed to describe. And while understandings of children and childhoods have changed and traditional developmental psychology challenged, understanding children according to age, stages, and what constitutes 'normal' within the child-care setting, everyday talk, policies, and practices remain. Some would even say it is the dominant discursive regime in early childhood institutions (at least in the Anglo-American world) and that policy-makers and practitioners are unaware of how developmental psychology has been challenged (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Child development discourses have also offered criteria for defining 'quality' in institutions, where quality refers to universal, knowable, objective standards

(Dahlberg et al., 1999). However, quality can also be seen as the product of discursive practices, subject to negotiation, and always contextualized. I am critical of how child development and quality discourses measure and introduce systems of classification that reduce the complexity of everyday life and produce simplified and normalizing images of children (cf. Dahlberg et al., 1999). Since understandings of children according to development in ages and stages are in some instances still taken-for-granted ‘truths’ about children, I find it imperative to continue in accordance with social studies of children and childhood and other academic directions critically addressing these issues.

3.3.2 Challenging future-oriented perspectives

Understanding children and childhoods through ideas of development depicts children as incomplete, immature, and un-finished, and childhood as a process where one prepares for adulthood (Jenks, 1982). Children and childhoods become, in many instances, constructed through future-oriented theories and perspectives, in which children and adults are compared, and define children by their shortcomings. This was heavily critiqued by Thorne (1987) and Qvortrup (1994) among others, who argued what has now almost become a slogan: Children are ‘human beings, not only human becomings’. This was in contrast to previous understandings at that time where “Adults [were] understood by their present actions and experiences in the world; children [were] understood more by their becoming, as adults-in-the-making” (Thorne, 1987, p. 93). Social studies of children and childhood highlight children as social ‘beings,’ to be taken seriously as competent and cultural co-constructors of ‘reality.’

Sociological accounts had from the 1950s been strongly influenced by traditional developmental psychology, and socialization became a concept to explain the process of transforming children from incompetent, irrational, asocial, and acultural into social adults. Within the framework of socialization children’s doing easily translated into learning, which locates children’s experiences as part of development (Thorne, 1987). In social studies of children and childhood, perspectives of socialization that portrayed children as passive and conforming to adults’ directions have been questioned (James & Prout, 1997). As an alternative way of understanding, ‘socialization’ can be seen as a dialectic process of adaption and resistance (Nilsen, 2000). Within this perspective, on one hand ‘socialization processes’ have a power dimension, in which adults are premise providers, and on the other hand resistance is underlined as children are depicted as active subjects in relation to the adult

generation (Nilsen, 2000). Perspectives and approaches within social studies of children and childhood were at the forefront of understanding children as competent, active agents. A perspective often presented as a paradigm shift that has replaced previous understandings of children as vulnerable, dependent, and in need of care (Kjørholt, 2005).

Ideas and perspectives of children as competent (in their own right) have in some parts also become intertwined with practices of measuring and evaluating children's skills.⁴⁰ For instance, the competent child has within the Nordic welfare state become more of a descriptive category of how children are expected to behave, leading those who are not perceived as competent to be viewed as a problem because they fall under adults' expectable standards (Brembeck et al., 2004; Kampmann, 2004; Ellegaard, 2004). The conceptualisation of the competent child within the Nordic welfare state can be portrayed as

...a reasonable, responsible and reflexive child, a child who takes the responsibility for his/her own learning, who is a critical and conscious consumer, and who is able to take part in democratic processes.
(Brembeck et al., 2004, pp. 21-22)

As such, while a shift towards understanding children as autonomous and competent does give rise to new possibilities, there are also discussions within social studies of children and childhood that have pointed at how notions of children as competent are not neutral or necessarily unproblematic, as they also create limitations and particular understandings of children and childhoods (Gilliam, Bundgaard, & Gulløv, 2007; James, 1993; Brembeck et al., 2004; Vandebroek & Bie, 2006).

3.3.4 Branches within social studies of children and childhood

Social studies of children and childhood is not homogenous in its focus and approach. Alanen (2001) has identified three branches within the field; structural sociology of childhood, sociologies of children, and (de)constructive sociology of childhood. While the branches have blurred boundaries between them and at times do overlap, I find the structure useful as a way to position the thesis within the research field of social studies of children and childhood.

The structural sociology of childhood can be regarded first and foremost as macro-oriented approach (Nilsen, 2003). It is concerned with large-scale and durable patterns of childhood in

⁴⁰ See Article 2 for further elaboration.

societies (Prout, 2011), and has an explicit critical stance and strong political engagement, focusing on historical and social changes in society. Qvortrup is one of the most prominent figures of this branch, focusing on childhood as a social structure that also interacts with other social structures such as class, gender, and ethnicity.

Sociologies of children emphasise children's voices, experiences, and participation. Previous research is seen as rendering children as too passive, thus this branch focuses on including children's voices, often using them as informants, and illustrating their everyday lives and competences (Nilsen, 2003).

The (de)constructive sociology of childhood is post-structurally oriented, focusing on the rejection of children and childhoods as natural or universal phenomena. Central to the research founded in the (de)constructive sociology of childhood is a critical analysis of established notions of children and childhood. The (de)constructive branch in sociology of childhood produces a point of departure for further critical reflexivity of dominant cultural ideas and norms regarding children and childhoods (Nilsen, 2003).

This thesis is situated in the (de)constructive sociology of childhood with a strong focus on social construction, influenced by a post-structural orientation. The first article relates to this as it explores how day-care staff and mapping devices position children as deviating based on certain discourse of age and development, while at the same time the staff members open up boundaries in their discussions on normality. The second article explores more directly expectations connected to being a day-care child in Norway as part of a discourse that frames children as competent, thus constructing some children as incompetent. The third article about constructing possible impairment points to how Norwegian conceptions of a 'good' and 'normal' childhood are an integrated part of how the staff members positions some children as deviating with their statements and wording.

3.3.5 Social studies of children and childhood; on issues of materiality and children's bodies

Clarifying the thesis' approach towards materiality and the body is crucial as it pervades perspectives and analyses of how day-care staffs refer to and describe differences in

children's conduct as inherent qualities.⁴¹ As it is a crucial issue in the topic of the thesis, the following provides a brief outline on how central authors within social studies of children and childhood (James et al., 1998; Prout, 2000, 2005) have approached the issue of children's bodies and materiality by referring to Turner's (1992) discussion on 'foundationalist' and 'anti-foundationalist' approaches and the following critique raised by Shilling (1993). Foundationalist approaches consider the body a real, un-problematically pre-given material entity (Prout, 2005) and the task of sociologists becomes to analyse interpretations and experiences in different contexts (James et al., 1998). In the anti-foundationalist approach, on the other hand, a distinction between the body and representations of it is not made (James et al., 1998). One could see Turner's divide reflecting discussions of social construction versus naturalistic categorisations (Shilling, 1993). Shilling's critique of Turner pointed to the dynamic nature of the body as a process incorporating both the social as well as biological factors. He argued for a move beyond a divide of naturalistic and social constructionist approaches by emphasizing a dynamic and relational perspective. While interesting, I find it puzzling to see how Turner and discussions referring to '(anti-)foundationalist' concepts are still used in order to illustrate perspectives on children's materiality and body, seeing how discussions on body and materiality have developed to a great extent in other fields since then. Despite some interesting points in Shilling's critique of Turner and Prout's (2005) introduction of other theories such as Action Network Theory, Complexity Theory, and others, I find that the discussions on the body, materiality, and constructions have been profound, nuanced, and that they include a wide range of possibilities within the field of disability studies. Directions within disability studies have been able to focus on the body and impairment as a discursive product without losing its materiality and without construing the person with impairment as passive or only acted upon.

However, it has been a long process within disability studies and the discussions are still going strong. I therefore find it necessary to give an overview of the various theoretical perspectives within disability studies as a way to illustrate discussions and a move towards post-structural perspectives.

⁴¹ I touched upon the issue of materiality in the beginning of the theory chapter, an elaboration on impairment will be given in sections 3.4 and 3.5. See also Article 3 for discussion.

3.4 Disability studies

Disability and impairment are central notions within this thesis and its focus on constructions of children as deviating (with possible special needs and impairments) in day-care institutions. The issues of normality, deviance, and special needs highlighted in the analyses and articles are in many ways interrelated with constructions of impairment. Based on in-depth discussions on disability and impairment within disability studies (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Koch, 2008; Shakespeare, 1994; Tremain, 2005; Watson, Roulstone, & Thomas, 2012), I found perspectives, concepts, and dilemmas in this field to be particularly fruitful—even if they at times are understated and constitute more of backdrop to the article’s analysis.

The perspectives and definitions of disability and impairment have vast consequences in policies, practices, and the lives of dis/abled children and adults. There are great differences between the practical outcomes of definitions of disability as an individual’s flaw or own lacking and definitions that focus on how society does not accommodate for all human variation and thus constructs some people as disabled (Tøssebro, 2004). There are many approaches, theories, and perspectives in which disability is researched. Highly relevant for this thesis, I will give an overview of some of the most influential approaches and discussions internationally, in particular from the UK and Nordic countries. I will also discuss the concepts of disability and impairment introduced in Norway (NOU, 2001). Following, I will elaborate on the international post-structural perspectives that have influenced this thesis (Goodley, 2009, 2012b; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Shildrick, 2012; Tremain, 2002, 2005). I will position myself within the field and try to connect some of the theoretical issues of disability studies with the field of social studies of children and childhood.

3.4.1 The medical model

There is not really any group of people or researchers who explicitly defend ‘the medical model’ on a conceptual level (Grue, 2010). The term ‘the medical model’ represents disability as an ‘abnormal’ and tragic event, - a type of discourse that is often naturalized as common sense in western societies (Holt, 2004). The medical model in disability research is based on an essentialist perspective and, as such, associates being disabled with fixed and essential characteristics (Smith, 2009). Coming from a clinical perspective, its focus is first and

foremost on damage, defect, or impairment of the individual (Söder, 2000) and represents disability as a biological given, a random and tragic event (Holt, 2004). Following, the medical model has been criticized for its assumption that it is the medical condition itself that causes a state of dependence between disabled people and able people (Smith, 2009).

3.4.2 The social model of disability

Davis (1997) characterizes the disability movements in the UK into two waves. In the first wave, new identities and definitions were created when individuals pulled together to work for political ends and establish basic rights. The second wave emerged in the 1990s and consisted of people who were used to the rights already established and saw the need for more nuanced understandings, diversity, and redefinition of disability in more complex ways.

In the first wave there were many intellectual and political groups fighting for new definitions of disability, challenging the medical and individualistic accounts that historically had dominated the understandings of disability (Shakespeare, 2006). The social model emerged from arguments of the UPIAS⁴² and Oliver in the early 1980s (Shakespeare, 2006). In the social model, contrary to the medical model, disability is understood in terms of social barriers and oppression of impaired people (Oliver, 1990). At the heart of the social model is the divide between two concepts: disability and impairment. They are to be understood as separate issues: disability as mentioned caused by social barriers and oppression of people with impairments, and impairment as an individual's biological/medical condition. The focus is set on disability and the social and political discrimination, bureaucratic categories, and disabling barriers that create disability (Oliver, 1990). The most important contribution of the social model is the attempt to move away from biological and medical understandings where the responsibility of disability lies with the individual (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997). Politically the social model, with its simple and memorable definitions and content, has been very effective. One of the reasons for the clear-cut distinction of disability and impairment was political necessity; it allowed for important issues to be addressed (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). The social model was thus first and foremost a political project of emancipation (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002), and helped to improve self-esteem and build a collective identity among disabled people (Shakespeare, 2006).

⁴² In the 1970s the network Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) was one of the forerunners of the social model of disability, inspired by Marxism.

3.4.3 The un-theorized issue of impairment

With the second wave in disability research, the simplicity of clear-cut distinctions and definitions within the social model became apparent as drawbacks (Davis, 1997; Shakespeare, 2006). Among other things, and particularly relevant for the positioning of this thesis, critiques were directed at the crude distinction of disability and impairment and how the social model continues within a modernist paradigm since it draws upon modernist dualism.⁴³ “The distinction between impairment and disability (re)produces a society/nature dichotomy (Thomas and Corker 2002), implicitly suggesting that impairment is a natural given” (Holt, 2007, p. 785). While the social model has had an important function, it nevertheless left the idea of ‘impairment’ un-theorized (Shakespeare, 2006; Tremain, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 1997) and disability became a disembodied notion (Hughes & Paterson, 1997). Several researchers were not content with how impairment became taken for granted as an ahistorical, pre-social, and objective entity and there emerged different approaches attempting to theorize and include impairment within the field of disability, without going back to medical and individualistic models of disability (e.g. Connors & Stalker, 2007; Tremain, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Thomas, 1999, 2004)

Researchers such as Shakespeare (2006) and Vehmas and Mäkelä (2008) can be seen as having argued for a critical realist perspective. Vehmas and Mäkelä emphasize the material realities of impairment and the difference between ‘brute facts’ (existing independent of human beings and their views) and ‘institutional facts’ (exist within human institutions). This approach has not only been a critique of the social model of disability, but also raises critique towards post-structural perspectives.⁴⁴ Vehmas (2012) elaborates on how impairment in general is often a brute fact (e.g., 21 chromosomes as ontologically objective physical phenomena) and includes institutional fact as it is connected to a meaning as undesirable for people’s function.

Other parts of the world have not been as preoccupied with the division of disability and impairment as the UK with the social model of disability. In North-America, what is known

⁴³ As discussed in Section 3.1, the divide between disability and impairment has similarities to how social aspects are constructed on top of or as add-on to a biological dimension. While arguing for a complete focus on the social, the perspective nevertheless has an embedded nature/social divide.

⁴⁴ Post-structural approach is elaborated on in section 3.5.

as ‘the minority model’ developed clearly influenced by American Black civil rights and queer politics. The model focused on people with disabilities as being marginalized in society and becoming devalued, discounted, and denied their civil rights, equal access, and protection (Goodley, 2010). With the rise of the minority model and the social model, a break with individualizing perspectives of disability *as* impairment and turned to socio-political, structural, and economic exclusion of people with impairments was initiated and disability studies was established as a field. I will now take a closer look at the Nordic relational approach.

3.4.4 The Nordic relational approach

While disability studies in the USA and UK have had very close ties to disability rights movements and political activism, in Scandinavia disability studies has been more closely linked to the welfare state with research funding directed at evaluating social reforms (Söder, 2009). Within this evaluative tradition there is the risk of "being caught in the reformer’s perspective” (Söder, 2009, p. 70) and there has been a lack of theory as it has developed in an ideological and practice-oriented field (Gustavsson, 2004). The researcher might end up in the role of a ‘controller’ of on-going reforms and programs (Gustavsson, Tøssebro, & Traustadottir, 2005). However, the close connection to social reforms also gives opportunities to study how lives of disabled people are influenced by societal conditions and public policy. Nordic disability researchers have been acutely critical to policies and reforms, in particular questioning if the political aims have been fulfilled in regard to prevailing ideals (Gustavsson et al., 2005).

Nordic disability research is known to adopt a relational perspective, seeing it as “impossible to understand disability without studying the interactions between the individual and context” (Gustavsson et al., 2005, p. 38). There is a strong emphasis on empirical observation at basis for this, and it demands both theoretical and empirical sensitivity (Gustavsson et al., 2005). While Gustavsson (2004) identified variations of the relational perspective, I prefer to define the Nordic relational model in broader strokes as it is explained by Tøssebro (2004) and recognized internationally (Shakespeare, 2006).

In the Nordic relational model, disability is understood as “a mismatch between a person’s capabilities and the functional demands of the environment” (Tøssebro, 2004, p. 4). Compared to the social model of disability, the relational model has a more socio-contextual

approach to disability (Shakespeare, 2006). As a key feature of this approach is a mismatch between the individual's abilities and the environment (including society); disability is then understood as constructed within this relation. For example, a deaf person is not disabled in a setting where everyone speaks sign language. There is also more of an emphasis on situational aspects. For example, a person with visual impairment is not disabled when using a telephone (Tøssebro, 2004).

3.4.5 Norwegian concepts of disability and impairment

The Norwegian title of the project overarching this thesis uses the concept of “nedsatt funksjonsevne.”⁴⁵ This concept is a Norwegian version of the English concept of ‘impairment’ referring to the biological/medical condition of the individual, and came into use in Norway in 2001 (NOU, 2001).

Before the introduction of a concept similar to impairment in the Norwegian context, the term ‘funksjonshemming’ (or ‘funksjonshemning’) was commonly used as an umbrella term (translates into disability). Disability as an umbrella term incorporated both the individual's condition and the environment and society. The importance of including societal/environmental factors in regards to disability has a long history in the Norwegian context. The role and responsibility of society had been increasingly emphasised in official definitions of disability. And a Nordic relational model (explained above) is a basis for understandings and definitions of disability. While explicitly stating continuation of this relational model, the use of an umbrella term of disability was deemed too inconsistent and insufficient for demarcating against a biological perspective (NOU, 2001). Thus, there was said to be a need for several terms referring to disability. Looking to the English language and concepts from both the World Health Organization⁴⁶ and social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), a divide between disability and impairment was established in the Norwegian language as three concepts were introduced:

⁴⁵ The term was used in the announcement of funding from the Research Council of Norway.

⁴⁶ Disability is stated in the ICF WHO 2002 as outcomes of interactions between health conditions and contextual factors, which involve dysfunctioning at one or more of these levels: impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

- "Redusert/nedsatt funksjonsevne/funksjonsnedsettelse" (can be translated as impairment) refers to loss of, damage to, or deviation in a body part or in one of the body's psychological, physiological, or biological functions (NOU, 2001).
- "Funksjonshemmende forhold" (can be translate as disabling circumstances or disabling conditions) refers to the gap or disparity between the condition of people with impairment and the demands posited by the environment and society to function in areas of significance in order to establish and maintain independence and a social way of life (NOU, 2001).
- "Funksjonshemmet" (can be translated as disabled) refers to people who have their practical conduct of life considerably limited because of the gap or disparity between the persons' impairment and the environment/societal demands.

It is noteworthy that the starting point of establishing a divide between disability and impairment in Norway in 2001 was quite different from the UK during the early 1980s. In the UK at that time it was very important to divide disability and impairment in order to construct a field that could approach the social dimensions of disability, moving away from the traditional individual focus within a medical perspective. In Norway, the understanding of society and the environment's role in producing disability was well established in 2001. In addition, the divide was introduced in Norway at a time when several strong voices internationally had raised critiques regarding the crude distinction between impairment and disability. Whilst the new terms in the Norwegian context was said to maintain a relational perspective, I would argue that in differentiating and conceptually establishing each part of the relation one risks emphasising the parts more than the relationship. I question whether the Norwegian introduction of 'impairment' has increased and legitimised a sole focus on the individual and a medical perspective, in particular since the use of the term seems to have grown immensely, potentially taking over the focus on disability.

3.5 Poststructuralist approaches and critical disability studies

Poststructuralist approaches to disability studies have been the most influential for this thesis. I will therefore elaborate on poststructuralist perspectives within disability studies and the following emergence of critical disability studies.

As mentioned, with the social model of disability dominating much of the field of disability early on, many academics started to express concern about the theoretical deficiency of the field (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002), in particular the lack of theoretical consideration given to the body and impairment in the social model. Despite acknowledgments of how important the social model had been pragmatically for disabled people in terms of rights and policies, it was contended that it nevertheless could not adequately account for postmodern complexities (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002). The social model of disability can be understood as operating within an epistemology of modernism retaining a binary logic and all-encompassing narratives such as Marxist meta-narrative (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002, pp. 2–3). Arguments were made for moving away from universal, meta-narratives and for a dialogic relation between impairment and disability (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). The introduction of post-structural/postmodern approaches deconstructed and challenged binary ways of thinking and questioned the idea of an autonomous, independent subject (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002). In other words, fixed dichotomies such as able/disabled are contested within this perspective (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2012; Shildrick, 2012; Shildrick & Price, 1996).

Post-structural approaches focus on discourses and language as constructing and regulating forms of knowledge. Tremain (2002, 2005), drawing on Foucault, has been a central author on the subject of impairment and the use of a poststructuralist approach. In contrast to work within disability studies that assumed a realist ontological stance (entailing an idea of trans-historical and transcultural objects existing in nature), Tremain drew from Foucault and held that “there are no phenomena or state of affairs that exist independently of the historically and culturally specific language-games in which we understand them and with which we represent them” (2002, p. 32). With the strict separation of disability and impairment, impairment could be seen as some objective “entity which biomedicine accurately represents” (Tremain, 2002, p. 34). Tremain argued that impairment should not be seen as value-neutral and merely descriptive, but rather a prescription, part of the historical contingent practices that have objectified it. By drawing on the work of Foucault, Tremain asserted that impairment was grounded in a construction of the body as a thing and object for medical examination and the ‘dividing practices’ in which science categorized, distributed, and manipulated subjects who initially were part of an undifferentiated mass. Tremain’s (2002) analysis demonstrates how

impairment has historically become a naturalized object that disciplines and divides people while obscuring constitutive power relations.

With referrals to Foucault in particular, poststructuralist perspectives argue that impairment should be analysed as an effect of discourse and language. A poststructuralist approach follows a claim that “impairment is no longer a biological fact, but a discursive product” (Hughes & Paterson, 1997, p. 333). The body as abled or disabled is understood as constructed through a “constant reiteration of a set of norms” (Shildrick & Price, 1996, p. 94). This emphasizes disability and impairment as a fluid and shifting set of conditions instead of a fixed category (Shildrick & Price, 1996). With this perspective, impairment is no longer underlying a socially constructed notion of disability as something essentially real. In contrast to perspectives defining impairment as biological or as a ‘brute fact,’ there is no reference to an essential ‘truth’ or reality as “Post-structuralism replaces truth with discourse and scrutinises the latter” (Goodley, 2010, p. 104). There is as such no idea of a real ‘natural’ aberrancy or deviance, as materiality and the body are emphasized as always mediated through discourse and constructed by processes that divide and categorize (Goodley, 2010).

Instead there is a focus on how all forms of embodiment are shifting, unstable, and flexible, relating to the shift from understanding identity as a static, fixed characteristic towards a focus on identities and the fluidity of all categories (Shildrick, 2012; Davis, 2002). This constitutes a more nuanced approach to the question of difference and provides grounds of questioning the way bodies marked as abled or impaired have been taken for granted and treated as self-evident, thus problematizing and unsettling categorical clarity and focusing on the blurred boundaries between diverse forms of embodiment (Shildrick, 2012). This can be linked to a concept of ‘continuum’⁴⁷ as a critique of binary thinking and a way to visualize the blurred and fluid boundaries between categories. By imposing standards of normality, the continuum becomes deconstructed (Davis, 1995) or divided and cut-off, thus constructing separate categories and fixed positions. The use of the concept ‘continuum’ facilitates visualization of and emphasises how oppositional categories of disabled/impaired and abled-bodied are not self-evident or ‘natural.’ Following the need to destabilize ideas of normality (cf. Allen, 2005; Campbell, 2009).

⁴⁷ See Article 3 for further examples on my use of the concept of a continuum.

There is also a direction within disability studies named critical disability studies (CDS), which is still in its infancy. Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) question whether CDS should be regarded as a maturation of the field or a radical paradigm shift. CDS includes post-structural perspectives from researchers as mentioned above (cf. Shildrick, 2012; Goodley, 2010) and rejects a vision of the social sciences modelled in the natural sciences, viewing the working of society and culture as more dynamic than what can be captured quantitatively (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). CDS draws on the history of disability studies and recognizes the advantages made by a social model of disability, while also pointing to how language and terms used in disability studies have been co-opted by governments and professional areas of rehabilitation and special education. This has been done in a manner that does not thoroughly engage with the perspectives and can actually be said to contribute to normalization practices (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). CDS is thus a rupture or maturation of previous models, inspired by Foucault's critiques of institutions, technologies, and caring practices that classify, normalise, manage, and control people.

In terms of children, Goodley (2007; 2009, 2012; Goodley & Roets, 2008; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2010) is one among few researchers who use post-structural approaches on issues of children, disability/impairment, diagnoses, education, and pedagogy.⁴⁸ He Draws on CDS and unsettles categories⁴⁹ and argues for alternative discourses (Goodley, 2007).

3.6 The position and approach to impairment of this thesis

As said, the work of this thesis is founded to a large degree on poststructuralist approaches to disability and impairment. I do not regard impairment to be a biological fact or neutral description of the material world, but rather a historical, cultural product of discourses that needs to be scrutinized and opened up. I agree with Allen (2005) that no one is impaired on his or her own, but is rather constructed as such in reference to an idea of normality. As mentioned, this is not to trivialise the pain, suffering, problems, and limitations of people experiencing impairments. However, I emphasise how the categorisation and understanding of impairment is constituted on particular historical and cultural contexts and following discourses from which it cannot be separated.

⁴⁸ He also draws on literature from social studies of children and childhood.

⁴⁹ Such as 'Down Syndrome,' 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder,' 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,' 'learning difficulties,' 'Special Educational Needs.'

Discussions within disability studies have been relevant for this thesis in regards to issues of deviance/normality and staff members' first few suspicions and worries concerning a child. The concept of impairment refers to a person's ability, and an evaluation of that person's ability to live up to certain expectations of normality. Within the Nordic relational model, as mentioned, disability is understood as the gap or mismatch between a person's ability and the environment/society's demands on that individual. While I do sympathize with the focus on relations, I find the notion of an individual's abilities in the Nordic model too static and close to the idea of biological flaw/impairment. The relational models divide between an individual's ability and environment seems unsatisfactory, even if the focus on the relation is emphasised, since it simultaneously establishes the two parts as separate issues. The Nordic relational model's focus on context addresses some of this, as the individual's ability could be seen not as a characteristic or trait of that person but something existing in interaction in a particular situation. However, to some extent, the relational model seems to have incorporated an idea of people having inherent inabilities; while regarded as not always relevant in a particular situation, the condition as a person's trait is often depicted as fact and not problematized. I regard discussions and the destabilizing of impairments as crucial in order to avoid processes that first and foremost 'discover' and define what is perceived as inherently, biologically flawed (despite an intention to create an inclusive environment and society).⁵⁰ As such, I adhere to post-structural approaches and perspectives that discuss impairment related to discourses, Foucault, and an aim to unsettle categories and taken-for-granted notions of normality.

3.7 Concluding remarks: Connecting the fields

Both social studies of children and childhood and disability studies are international interdisciplinary academic fields, with rather strong influence in Nordic countries today. I have to varying degrees drawn from both fields in the articles, since I find several of their perspectives to fruitfully conjoin and supplement each other. While both fields include a variety of wide and diverse approaches, I will try to outline some similarities and differences

⁵⁰ Cf. Article 3.

between them in the following.⁵¹ As simplified as an outline must be, I believe it will be helpful in understanding how I understand and draw on these fields in my articles.

Both fields were based on criticizing dominant understandings and perspectives regarding children/disability. Social studies of children and childhood directed a strong critique against widespread understandings of childhood as a biological, natural category as well as the strong individualistic perspective on the child, as in classical developmental psychology. Disability studies similarly critiqued the understanding of disability as a biological and natural category, which focused on the individual as tragically flawed in some way. Both critiqued how their target groups (either disabled people or children) were portrayed as dependent, passive, incomplete, and vulnerable, denying them a position as social actors.

The respective academic fields made use of a social constructionist approach in order to create a divide from the previous biological, naturalistic perspectives. Disability studies, with the social model of disability at the forefront, established disability as a social phenomenon by focusing on society's oppressive structure (Oliver, 1990), influenced by a materialist and functionalist approach (Tisdall, 2012). The social model of disability established disability as socially constructed by opposing it conceptually to impairment, constructing a dichotomy between disability (social barriers) and impairment (individual medical condition), focusing fully on the first. Social studies of children and childhood also highlighted social constructiveness by questioning the universality of children and childhoods historically and culturally. The field did not operate with a dichotomy in the same sense as disability studies, but nonetheless established a clear focus on children and childhoods as socially constructed phenomena.

Social studies of children and childhood managed, however, to keep a focus on both the macro and the micro levels and, thus, included a strong emphasis on children's experiences and voices (James et al., 1998; Alanen, 2001). In contrast, within disability studies there was initially a reluctance to rely on personal and individual experiences (Tisdall, 2012), but this started to diminish during the 1990s as the conceptual divide (disability/impairment) became heavily critiqued and the issues of individual experiences and impairment was brought

⁵¹ This has been elaborated in a conference paper: Franck, K.. & Nilsen, R. D. (2012, June). *Theoretical parallels and intersections between Childhood studies and Disability studies*. Paper presented at ESA Research Network 4, Jyväskylä, Finland.

forward (Hughes, 1999; Shakespeare, 1994; Hughes & Paterson, 1997). An increased amount of attention has since then been placed on disabled people's voices and experiences of impairment. Some authors central within disability studies also referred to social studies of children and childhood; arguing for including the voices and perspectives of disabled children and their experiences of impairment (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Davis & Watson, 2002; Shakespeare & Watson, 1998).

This thesis is positioned within the branch of deconstructive sociology of childhood⁵² and post-structural approaches within disability studies (as mentioned above). These fields relate to each other quite well theoretically as they both draw from Foucault and discourse and problematize taken-for-granted notions and central concepts within each field. Within social studies of children and childhood this has been directed at deconstructing dominant cultural ideas and normative understandings of children and childhoods (Nilsen, 2003), whereas in post-structurally inspired disability studies, the concept of impairment as biological phenomena has been deconstructed and the dichotomy of disability/impairment argued against (Goodley, 2012; Tremain, 2002). As central aspects have been deconstructed and criticized in both approaches (usually with somewhat different interests and focus), I draw from both fields in this thesis for the exploration of how Norwegian day-care children are positioned as in-between and further constructed as deviating and possibly impaired. The understanding of what constitutes a 'normal' child and the consensus on impairment as biological 'fact' has contributed to constructions of children as deviating. Thus, in this thesis I maintain a critical position and attempt to unsettle the premise of what seems to be a diminishing acceptance for diversity among children.

While I have argued strongly for the theoretical positioning of this thesis, it does entail some limitations and problematic encounters. For one, the theoretical positioning argued for, while including some valuable and desirable insights, does exclude other ways of theorizing and understanding. Exclusion of perspectives might even have been heightened, as explaining and positioning within (quite complex) theoretical perspectives has increased a need to emphasise differences and disagreements instead of focusing on similarities and commonalities among perspectives. In addition, as the theoretical perspectives are used to destabilize and produce a

⁵² See section 3.3.4.

break from common understandings there is a risk of becoming *too* different from how one would relate to the world and one's self on a day-to-day basis (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Söder, 2000). An overlap between private and public theories and beliefs is not necessarily wanted, however at the same time the academic theories should be able to "enrich our self-understanding and affect the way we act" (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2009, p. 223). In the thesis, I attempt to accomplish this by staying close to the empirical data and field of study. The theoretical perspectives might differ from common understandings and offer new alternative readings, yet the empirical data attempt nevertheless to relate the thesis to everyday reality and practices.

Chapter 4

Method and methodological reflections

In articles there is limited space to discuss method, thus in this chapter I intend to provide a thorough account of the research process. In addition to describing and reflecting on my research practices and processes, this chapter includes a description of methodological choices intertwined with theoretical perspectives. As mentioned, I set out to explore how some day-care children become positioned and constructed as in-between and deviating from what is considered 'normal' and possibly impaired or having special needs, including constructions of boundaries between what is perceived as 'normal' and 'deviant' in the context of day-care institutions. Adhering to the initial research project (Nilsen, 2008b), I decided to focus on the adults in the day-care centres, and chose to use qualitative methods in order to produce in-depth and contextual data. The qualitative approach allowed me to conduct an exploration of everyday life in day-cares centres, which involved emphasising staff members' understandings and experiences in a manner that included nuances, context, and complexity (cf. Mason, 2002). I conducted fieldwork in four Norwegian day-care units, which consisted of a short period of participant observation with field-notes and in-depth interviews with 16 staff members (tape-recorded and transcribed).

Qualitative methods may be performed in a variety of ways and do not necessarily follow any specific theoretical orientation. In this thesis, the methodological framework is predominantly influenced by qualitative methods that draw on constructionism and post-structuralism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Søndergaard, 2002, 2005). However, there are also different approaches and orientations within constructionism (Hammersley, 2007), and as such I intend, in this chapter, to clarify more precisely my approach and process of research within this framework. A central aspect of a constructionist approach is the assumption that the object of analysis per definition is a fluid, instable, and ambiguous phenomenon, shaped in the meeting with the researcher (Mik-Meyer & Järvinen, 2005). This stands in contrast to orientations that attempt to uncover or reveal what people 'truly mean' or see methods as a 'window' into objective realities (Nordberg, 2005). I have been interested in understandings, expectations, and categorisation-processes of children as constructed in daily practices. Central elements and theoretical concepts influencing the qualitative inquiry are focus on

context and language as a process of social construction, which is connected to discourses that define and limit understandings and subject positions available for children. I have, throughout the research, endeavoured to produce knowledge regarding processes differentiating children connected to context instead of, for example, searching for typical characteristics of children positioned in a particular category or group. I adhere to a constructionist approach, emphasising how categories are relative and context dependent (cf. Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008).

The manner in which I conducted the fieldwork also borrowed from social anthropological literature and ethnography (Geertz, 1993; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The use of participant observation is one example of a method directed at grasping contexts within which social events, behaviours, institutions, and processes are intelligible and may be (thickly) described (Geertz, 1993). I have also emphasised the production of data about daily life situations and experiences in the day-care field through interviews with staff members (Søndergaard, 2005).

Literature and insight gained from methodological and theoretical discussions have informed and framed my methodological choices in this thesis. However, qualitative research cannot be reduced to a set of guidelines or techniques to be followed. In the following sections, I attempt to clarify how the research has been conducted and to reflect upon the phases from gaining access to the field to producing data during fieldwork and interviews, and to analysing the material.

4.1 The day-care institutions visited

This study was conducted in four day-care units situated in two Norwegian municipalities. I conducted three weeks of participant observation in each unit and interviews with a total of 16 staff members (14 women and 2 men). The initial plan was to complete the fieldwork during the fall of 2009, and conduct the participant observation before the interviews. After having completed fieldwork in two day-care units, the plan was however disrupted by unforeseen

events⁵³ and I decided to complete the interviews, while postponing participant observation in the last two units until spring 2011.⁵⁴

The following table illustrates the day-care units I visited, numbers of staff members and children, and when interviews and participant-observation were conducted.

Day-care unit	Staff members	Children	Interviews	Participant-observation
1. Toddler unit (1-3 years old)	3	9	Fall of 2009	Fall of 2009 (3 weeks)
2. Children age 2.5–5 years old	3	16	Fall of 2009	Fall of 2009 (3 weeks)
3. Toddler unit (1-3 years old)	5	15	Fall of 2009	Spring 2011 (3 weeks)
4. Children age 3-5 years old	5	24	Fall of 2009	Spring 2011 (3 weeks)

Table 1: Overview of day-care units and fieldwork carried out.

The coloured sections in the table represent two day-care units within the same day-care institution, situated in two different houses but sharing the same outdoor play area. The two day-care units below were set in different day-care institutions but share the same administration. Those units were located within the same area of the city, but at two different sites, sharing house and outdoor space with other units. All the day-care units of this study were located in mixed socio-economic areas at the outskirts of the city, surrounded by various houses, department buildings, parks, and green-fields with patches of woods. The day-care centres did not have any specific profile or recruit any specific social group.

Characteristic layout for all the day-care units⁵⁵ indoor localities were wardrobe areas, bathroom, a common area, which included both play area and table(s) for eating and

⁵³ A swine-flu epidemic broke out and the day-care institutions were a high-risk environment for contamination, thus not recommendable for me since I was pregnant.

⁵⁴ After a one year maternity leave.

activities, and additional room(s) for play (not necessarily for any specified activity). The toddler units also had a small room for changing diapers and washing. The outdoor areas were all fenced in, containing a mix between grass and gravel, between wild flowers and trees, and equipped with sand-boxes, play-apparatuses, tri/bicycles, and a shed containing different play materials. Typical routines for the day consisted of children arriving between 7:30 and 9:00, breakfast and free-play, and then changing clothes and having free-play outside before lunch around noon (usually eating inside, at times outdoors if the weather was nice). After lunch, most of the toddlers napped in carriages outdoors (for half an hour up to a couple of hours depending on the child). Meanwhile, the other children had quiet time indoors where they laid on mattresses perhaps listening to music or stories. Afterwards children had free play indoors or outdoors again. This (simply described) routine also featured adult organized activities, such as painting, special group activities, projects, circle-time with singing songs or celebrating special events such as birthdays. All the day-care centres also regularly went on field-trips, to the library, woods, other day-cares, or parks nearby. During my stay, one unit also spent a whole week outdoors at an area next to the woods and fjord.

4.2 Negotiating access and selecting settings

Before entering the field I had to negotiate access with ‘gatekeepers,’ meaning those persons with control over key sources and ways of accessing the field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In this study, there were four gatekeepers who needed to be addressed before commencing fieldwork in a day-care unit (cf. Nilsen & Rogers, 2005). First the project needed to be approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data services (NSD)⁵⁵; secondly, the municipalities in which I wanted to do fieldwork needed to approve the project; thirdly, the administrative leaders of day-care institutions needed to offer their approval; and lastly, the pedagogical unit leaders needed to approve the study. The initial contact thus began with requesting formal permissions by the gatekeepers, which was not a problem with NSD and the two municipalities I contacted.

⁵⁵ The day-care centres in this study were organized in units as separate sections with fixed groups of children and adults, thus different from ‘basebarnehager’ with ‘bases’ and a more flexible organisations and architecture (cf. Seland 2009; Kjørholt & Seland, 2012). While I initially wanted to include ‘basebarnehager’ in this study, I did not achieve access to the day-care centres I contacted.

⁵⁶ See appendix 1.

The process of gaining access from the administration leaders within one of the municipalities was, however, a time consuming process. As the topic of the thesis refers to issues assumed to be present in most day-care centres, I selected institutions in one municipality based on general internet information, prioritizing day-cares situated in various parts of the city, with non-specific profiles (for example, without specifications of disability, nature, culture, etc.). I began by sending out letters⁵⁷ to administrative day-care leaders with information about the project requesting permission to do fieldwork and interviews. However, negotiating access with administrative leaders was not an easy endeavour. Several day-care centres did not respond or apologized that they did not have time or had recently been involved with other researchers and projects and thought it best to not have more disturbances for a while. In the end, I had sent out eight letters before one administrative leader responded positively and invited me to have a meeting with the pedagogical leaders of the day-care units. In the meeting, information about the project was given, orally and in writing, in addition to consent forms for the staff members and information letters to parents⁵⁸. After discussing it with the rest of the staff members, two pedagogical leaders invited me to conduct interviews and participant observation at their units (one for toddlers and one for older children) located at two different day-care centres. As mentioned, interviews were completed during the fall of 2009, while participant observation was completed in the spring of 2011 (see Table 1).

The second municipality also responded positively, and had already made contact with two day-care centres for me to visit. This was a slight misunderstanding, as I had not intended for the municipality to select and contact day-care institutions. Nevertheless, I followed their initiative and arranged meetings with both day-care centres. Collaboration with one of the day-care centres was however disrupted,⁵⁹ so I visited two units at the second centre. During the information meeting there were two pedagogical leaders who invited me into each of their units. The leaders then gave written information (including consent forms) and discussed the project with the staff members. Further, information letters were handed out to the parents of

⁵⁷ See appendix 3.

⁵⁸ See appendices 4 and 5.

⁵⁹ The collaboration with the second day-care institution was disrupted at the last minute because of the mentioned swine flu epidemic. Since I had to postpone the participant observation, the pedagogical leader withdrew from the project and I could not conduct the fieldwork.

children in the units. Fieldwork in both the units was completed in the fall of 2009 (see Table 1).

This process of gaining access to do fieldwork in day-care institutions illustrates how access and recruitment is a relational issue in which the participants of the study selected me as much as I selected them. During the initial contact with day-care centres, the administrative leaders functioned as gatekeepers (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), yet later, the pedagogical leaders were the ones deciding whether or not to invite me into the daily life of the units. Negotiating access can be seen as a continuing aspect of fieldwork, including negotiation of positions and roles during participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

4.3 Participant observation

The participant observation of this study includes, as mentioned, three weeks at each of the four day-care units (three months in total). I usually spent half days three or four times a week in the day-care units, thus reserving time to write extensive field notes at the end of every day. The purpose of conducting participant observation in the four day-care units was to experience the daily life of staff members and children. This is important in order to achieve a nuanced view and context-dependent experiences. While interviews constitute the main method in this study, participant-observation is important as it complements the data with experiences of concrete situations and various perspectives that go beyond the context of the interview (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). While ethnographic fieldwork in a traditional sense is conducted over a long time span, short-term fieldwork at several locations can also be fruitful, depending on the focus of inquiry (Hannerz, 2003; Nordberg, 2005). For instance, this study focused on a particular segment of the field, and I did not try to grasp the entire 'field' by giving detailed accounts of the day-care profession or processes of change over a long time (cf. Hannerz, 2003). Exploring discourses, understandings of normality, deviance, and available subject positions for children are issues I regarded as possible to observe also during short-term fieldwork (cf. Nordberg, 2005). The different locations I visited can be seen as 'linked' (cf. Hannerz, 2003) since they are all part of the Norwegian day-care field, with common traditions, national guidelines, professional background, and discourses. While longer fieldwork could have provided more material of a different kind, conducting fieldwork in several locations provided an opportunity to explore possibilities and limitations in discourses circling and moving within the day-care field and beyond (cf. Nordberg, 2005).

4.3.1 Field notes

Despite not conducting traditional fieldwork, I have been influenced by ethnographic traditions (Geertz, 1993; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In particular I have drawn on notions of ‘being there’ as valuable experience and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1988, 1993). ‘Thick description’ reflects the importance of grasping the complexity and context in which practices occur, and taking elaborate and detailed field notes in order to be able to represent and interpret understandings from the field. In the case of this study, I wrote down detailed descriptions of daily life in the day-care centres, conversations with staff, and separately noted my understandings, thoughts, and contemplations regarding incidents and issues that emerged. I did not take field notes during the participant observation, except in one day-care unit where they were so accustomed to researchers that they expected me to do so. Most of the time however, I waited until I left the day-care and then wrote elaborate descriptions. Despite attempting to write as detailed as possible, field notes are always a selection, as one cannot write down everything (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). What become inscribed in field notes are interpretations (of interpretations), which represent attempts to understand the small parts into which one becomes included by the participants. The limitations this presents are manageable as “it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something” (Geertz, 1993, p. 20). As such, in an attempt to understand ‘something’ I conducted fieldwork and the activity of ‘being there’—a familiar and somewhat mystified notion in anthropology (Hannerz, 2003). There is no recipe for what fieldwork precisely consists of or how to conduct it as it is remoulded and reinterpreted to deal with particular circumstances (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I thus approached the fieldwork first and foremost in appreciation of the importance of ‘being there,’ creating experiences and impressions together with the participants of the study. What experiences and observations were produced depended, however, on a continuous process of relationships and positionings in the field.

4.3.2 Positions and relations in the field

With no experience of working in day-care institutions, the day-care field was a new context for me. My background⁶⁰ differs from that of pedagogical professionals who produce a lot of research in the day-care field, as well as from the staff members participating in the study. As a researcher, there needs to be a balance between being close to the field and having the

⁶⁰ I am educated in social anthropology (Hovedfag).

necessary distance for reflexivity and to notice aspects taken for granted by the ‘locals.’ In other words, there are advantages and challenges whether one is positioned as an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’ (Corbin Dwyer, & Buckle, 2009).

Being an insider (or outsider) of a group does not only refer to being a member of the community in which one is conducting research, it also includes whether one shares other characteristics with the people studied. In this case, as a female adult I shared gender with the majority of day-care staff members, while my different background positioned me as different from the staff. I find it difficult to assess how my similarities and differences with the staff impacted the fieldwork and relationships, however I did not experience any obvious problems in establishing relationships and felt that most staff members were eager to talk to me and include me in their daily lives in some way or another. I find it fruitful to think of my research position as occupying a ‘space between’ inside and outside, as there where both aspects of differences and similarities that shifted in relevance depending on context. Thus I understand my research position within a dialectical framework that emphasises fluidity and preservation of “complexity of similarities and differences” (Corbin Dwyer, & Buckle, 2009, p. 60).

My different professional background included a position similar to that of a novice; I observed, asked questions, tried out things, and made errors (Hammersley & Aitkinson, 2007). This could have reduced staff members’ possible concerns and nervousness for being evaluated and judged, as the position of a novice is unsuited for that of a critic or expert. This can be seen as particularly important in the context of the day-care field and in relation to day-care staff, which is a group consisting predominately of women, some with limited education, and “engaged in work that receives little recognition from society at large” (Bae, 2005, p. 284). In my ‘novice’ position I strove to communicate openness, curiosity, and willingness to learn and establish mutual recognition. A relationship characterised by a process of recognition includes adhering to the diversity and on-going changes within a day-care unit (cf. Bae, 2005). However, it is difficult to evaluate whether I actually managed to establish a relationship of recognition with all staff members. The asymmetrical relationship between researcher and the day-care staff would probably not be possible to erase, despite my attempts to position the staff members as ‘experts’ and myself as ‘learning’ or a ‘novice,’ since I, as the researcher, am ultimately the one who decides how to represent, interpret, and describe their statements and discussions.

4.3.3 Observing and participating in different contexts

The method of participant observation can be seen as a continuum related to the degree of participation. In this study I was closer to the notion of observer than participator in the field (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), yet I experienced degrees of participation in certain situations and contexts. My observations and positions depended on possibilities and limitations within the units' daily rhythm and pace and the participants' expectations and activities. This led to different ways of conducting participant observation in the units and in the various everyday situations. However, my main focus was on the staff members, observing and conversing with them during everyday life in the day-care units.

When conducting fieldwork in the first toddler unit, I spent a lot of time sitting on the floor like the staff members, mixing between playing with children and talking with the staff about their everyday life. I did not contribute to daily chores as the unit was small and calm and the staff did not invite or encourage me to do so. During outdoor time I would however more often contribute by attending to a child who perhaps wanted to hold hands or needed support when walking. Outdoors, the adults would at times gather in small groups of two or three while observing the children, and I attempted to include myself in those groups.

In the second unit, with children 2.5–5 years old present, the pace was higher and the staff members were busy. The pedagogical leader was engaged in many meetings and other responsibilities, thus not always present at the unit when I visited. In some instances a substitute⁶¹ replaced her, but a lot of time the unit was left with only two staff members and 16 children. As such I at times participated in the daily routines such as helping during mealtimes. The kitchen duties took a lot of the staff members' time, and on many occasions, I was the only adult observing the children during free play inside. The children in this unit were very eager to play with me both inside and outdoors, and they initiated conversations and play or wanted to hold my hand.

In the third unit, a toddler unit, I had interviewed some of the staff before the participant observation, but some had been replaced with new staff members (who were informed and gave written consent). During the time in the unit I mostly observed, focusing on the staff members and their activities inside, and positioned myself as customary for the staff members

⁶¹ Not included in the study.

by observing the children when outside. In this unit, I took part in a staff meeting after having finished the fieldwork and I was given time to present some of my preliminary thoughts on the study and discuss topics. This part of the meeting was tape-recorded and used as part of the data.

In the fourth unit the staff members were experienced with researchers coming in, and they made clear how they expected me to sit, observe, and take notes. As such, I took field notes during the observations inside, something I had not done before. They also expected me to pay particular attention to two of the children who were followed closely by two staff members since they were perceived as quite different and as having special needs. I followed this request to some extent, and accompanied those staff members. This led to a more narrow focus than in the other units; however, as the two children played and interacted with all the other children, the observation included several children and staff members. It also led to a closer relationship with one staff member and some in-depth informal conversations (not taped) regarding special needs and practices.

Overall, I focused mostly on observing and conversing with the staff, asking questions, and discussing everyday life and issues related to the project. When leaving the field I had a feeling of deep respect and admiration for the work they do. It also felt strange leaving some of the children, with whom I felt a relationship was beginning to develop despite the short period of time I was there. Experiencing and being with the children complemented and enriched my experience, understandings, and the empirical material. Most of the children were curious to know who I was and what I was doing in the day-care. They were told I was just visiting, and I told them I wanted to learn about their everyday lives at day-care. Some children expressed interest in my presence quite quickly, expressing wishes to play or be physically close; others seemed a bit unsure of me during the first couple of visits. In general, my relationship with the children varied, depending on the children's initiatives. I usually did not initiate play or activities with the children, but responded positively and interestedly when approached. However, as mentioned, in some units I tried to help with smaller practical tasks when it seemed necessary or when asked, thus participating closer with the children. In particular, outside I would play and hold hands when a child wanted to. When doing the interviews after three weeks in two of the units, my familiarity with the children helped me to ask relevant questions and enabled me to relate to the staff members' descriptions of and

discussion regarding particular children. On the other hand, in one unit, spending time with the children who had been discussed during interviews (over a year before) gave grounds for more in-depth informal conversations during participant observation, during which possible changes and follow-up issues from the interviews were discussed.

4.4 Interviews

Qualitative interviews can be seen as social meetings set up by the researcher, where information is created in a dialogue by the people present (Järvinen, 2005). In this study, the meetings took place at the day-care institutions and consisted of individual in-depth interviews for the duration of one to one and a half hours that were tape-recorded and later transcribed by a professional and checked by me. As mentioned, 16 staff members participated in the study. Most of them had several years of experience in the day-care field. The staff members interviewed had different professional backgrounds and positions within the day-care units: pedagogical leaders, assistants, educated pre-school teachers, special pedagogues, and child and youth workers. While initially the project was directed specifically at the pre-school teachers, this was altered before entering the field based on an awareness of how other staff groups were just as important in the daily practices and close to the children.

I regard the knowledge produced in the interviews as resulting from a relation, an 'interaction' between the interviewer and the interviewee (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As such, I was not collecting data from informants, but producing data and knowledge together with the participants. As this thesis is formulated around the understanding of the self as a process, constantly negotiated and materialized in interaction and context, it would not make sense to see interviews as collecting or extracting inner thoughts or facts from interviewees (Järvinen, 2005). As such, interviews were intended to produce conversations with detailed descriptions and discussions regarding children and issues of 'discovering' special needs and possible impairments. I had a focus both on what staff members emphasised and brought forth during interview conversations, and the manner in which they described, explained, and discussed the topics.

4.4.1 Conducting the interviews

I used semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide⁶² with topics and open questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews began with me giving short information about the project, based on the same information the staff members had received in writing when consenting to participate. This included how I wanted to learn about their practices and reflections regarding the increased attention towards early intervention, prevention, and ‘discovering’ children with special needs, including how such challenges take place in the individual day-care unit and everyday practices.⁶³ In two of the day-care units I had already conducted fieldwork before the interviews, as mentioned. Thus, I had already discussed aspects of the study in informal conversations.

Next, I informed the participants once more about consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, and how the tape-recordings would be deleted at the end of the project.

The first question or topic raised in the interviews was directed at whether there were children in the unit (or from previous experiences) that came to mind when hearing about the project, and if so, if the interviewee could tell about one or two children. In almost all instances the topic of the project represented well-familiar challenges and practices for the staff members. Most of them had many experience with being concerned for a child possibly having special needs or impairments. In most units there were children whom the staff had previously and during my stay evaluated, observed, and discussed in staff meetings. Some children had also been observed and evaluated by external experts before my visit, and a few children were undergoing evaluations for possible impairments and diagnoses at the regional habilitation service.⁶⁴ The interviews were thus an opportunity to reflect further on issues the staff members were already familiar with in the day-care setting.

The interviews began with the staff members deciding on a child they wanted to describe and continued with stories about that child. I asked each interviewee to describe what it was about this child that raised concern or suspicion of special needs or impairment. I encouraged the staff member to tell where and in what situation it was noticeable, when she or he first noticed

⁶² See appendix 2.

⁶³ See appendix 4 for information letter to the staff.

⁶⁴ See section 2.1.1 for explanation.

the reason for the concern, with whom, when, how often, and how it seemed to affect the child. I asked for changes and courses of action related to specific situations and events, and strove to produce detailed stories and descriptions that included contexts and experiences from everyday life in the day-care units. The questions were intended to be specific and simple, encouraging stories about concrete experiences in order to produce multifaceted descriptions (cf. Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005). Depending on how the interview conversations developed, I continued with questions regarding involvement of parents, day-care practices, mapping devices and testing, external services, early intervention, and so on. After descriptions of children and everyday situations, the last dialogue was intended to open up more reflection and discussion on the issues. Overall, the amount of questions I asked depended on the extent to which the staff members talked freely, as I aimed to let their stories unfold and be open for the unexpected. The direction and content of the interviews were thus open for what staff members brought forth, limited by the given topic of the study (cf. Alvesson, 2003).

In hindsight, when reading through the transcribed interviews, I noticed issues I could have asked more about, or places where I perhaps could have responded differently. However, I guess such retrospections and doubts are part of my process in learning the craft of conducting interviews. In particular, it is a craft mostly learned by practice and experience and rests on personal judgements and skills without explicit steps and predetermined rules (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Thus, the interviews and the content of the data produced varied depending on my process of learning the craft, and on how the interaction between me and the interviewee developed before and during the interview. Nevertheless, I produced interview data that included detailed, contextualised descriptions of children and the staff members' understandings, practices, reflections, and interpretations of aspects relevant for the research questions.

4.5 Local documents and mapping material

In addition to the participant observation and interviews, I collected local documents and mapping material in some of the day-care centres. In the first two units (toddler and older children) I collected local documents regarding focus areas, project work on implementing the Framework Plan, and information on initiatives and early intervention—mostly developed by the local municipality. In this day-care institution they also used the standardized mapping

material, TRAS,⁶⁵ to document and evaluate all of the day-care children twice a year before parent-meetings. This was quite time-consuming work, and I discussed the units' practices both during the participant observation and in interviews. In addition, the day-care units at times used another observation material, 'All included'⁶⁶ (Norwegian: *Alle med*), which is directed at registering child capabilities regarding six areas (socio/emotional abilities, play, well-being, everyday activities, perception/motor development, and language)⁶⁷ in a similar design as TRAS. I collected a few examples of filled out (depersonalized) registration forms used to evaluate individual children with both TRAS and 'Alle med'.

The other two units (toddler and older children) used individual plans created locally as a way to document each child twice a year. These plans had a simple design that outlined a handful of focus areas⁶⁸ that were open, concentrating mostly on resources of the child, some general goals and activities and reflections on achievements. Underneath each headline, the staff members would write keywords or sentences regarding the child. Thus the individual plans were less standardized than the premade mapping devices. I collected two examples of filled out individual plans. These day-care units also used the mapping material TRAS, not on every child, but on those they were concerned about and regarded as possibly having difficulties in some areas.

In this thesis, I have mostly focused on the use of standardized materials (e.g., TRAS) because its use is new, much debated, and an increasingly common practice in Norwegian day-care institutions. In hindsight, I do however regret not collecting more examples of individual documentation of children (both standardized tests and individual plans), and observing the staff members' process of filling them out. Such data could have complemented and allowed for more in-depth exploration regarding parts of this study.

In sum, the data of this thesis consist of elaborate field notes taken directly after (a few times during) participant observation in four day-care units, 16 individual interviews (tape-recorded and transcribed), and a small collection of local documents, mapping materials, and individual plans.

⁶⁵ For further discussion see Chapter 2, and Article 1.

⁶⁶ My translation.

⁶⁷ My translation. (Norwegian: sosio/emosjonell, lek, trivsel, hverdagsaktiviteter, sansing/motorikk, språk).

⁶⁸ I cannot specify the areas and content as it would compromise the anonymity of the day-care centre.

4.5 Process of analysis

The empirical material and analyses in this thesis includes a continuing process of reflection and interpretation (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Nilsen, 2005). As such, I recognize interpretations as not neutral or value-free, but made by the researcher within certain perspectives and concepts.⁶⁹ This is what makes the interpretation possible, although it also suppresses other types of interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Initial analysis began during fieldwork while taking field notes and sorting out what to include and exclude. Decisions were obviously influenced by the project and research questions, however previous ideas, notions, and foci were modified, challenged, and reassembled as experiences in the field intertwined with theory, perspectives, and understandings. Analysing is a somewhat intangible process and cannot be reduced to a strict step-by-step recipe or guideline. However, I will try to outline some of the phases I have gone through.

4.5.1 Initial engagement with the data

The empirical material (data) in this thesis consists of transcribed interviews, field notes, and local documents. My engagement with the data began with close and detailed readings, looking for what seemed to be key elements, interesting, repetitive, but also striking and odd in relation to the research questions (cf. Rapley, 2011). The data was imported onto a computer programme called NVIVO, a tool that facilitates and supports systematization and organization of the material by the user (in such a way that the researcher conducts the analysis and process). Based on ideas emerging from readings of the material and influenced by the research questions and prior readings of empirical and theoretical work, I began to label segments of the material with keywords (cf. Rapley, 2011). This was done in NVIVO, as I marked sections in the texts and created labels ('nodes'). The labels made up lists, with 'sub-labels,' where some text sections were connected to several labels. The programme made it easy to gather the material under each label, but also to move between data when labelled and the original transcribed interviews and field notes. While studying the data under each label, I began exploring key properties and dimensions, moving between labels and searching for links, combinations, repetitions, and exceptions. It is important to note that labelling material entails analytical choices about what to highlight, which also creates a sort of outline that

⁶⁹ See Chapter 3 for further elaboration on this thesis' theoretical perspectives.

influences how one sees and understands a phenomenon (Rapley, 2011). The labels made in this study were a form of descriptive and thematic coding, focusing on the empirical material. Many of the labels referred to child conduct the staff had described in some way as concerning or deviating from what they considered 'normal' (e.g., amount of crying, activity levels, peer relations, social interactions), and other labels were more directed at everyday situations in the day-care centre (meal-times, transitions, specific practices), or staff members' explanations on why a behaviour was concerning (well-being, school, being in a new day-care unit). In addition there were labels referring to topics discussed (mapping devices, diagnoses, and parents' involvement). It is important to note that the labels and data sections were not treated as static, but rather labels were continuously evaluated, reviewed, adjusted, altered, and modified (cf. Rapley, 2011).

The use of computer programmes such as NVIVO does have potential downsides in the analytical process (cf. James, 2012). It is important to be aware of the risk that programmes can produce 'neatly packaged chunks of data' in a manner that hamper more than help the interpretative analysis (James, 2012). It is crucial to not treat the labelled sections of data as static or de-contextualised and disembodied segments. I believe, nevertheless, that the downsides can be overcome by being mindful of complexity and not taking shortcuts in the analytical process, but rather engaging thoroughly with the material by reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes, thus refining one's understandings (cf. James, 2012). In some ways, using a computer programme also has the potential to facilitate reflexivity and awareness of complexity and context—not by organising and sorting slices of data, but by facilitating a continuous move between the labelled data sections and the context from where it was drawn in the interviews, field-notes, and documents.

The entire process of analysis can be said to involve a constant move between the particular and the abstract, in other words between what was said, done, and observed, and exploring norms, patterns, rules at the level of concepts, and themes (Rapley, 2011). Nevertheless, labelling statements and stories of staff members presented me with an acute awareness of the paradox in the fact that I categorise and divide the empirical material while in many ways criticizing the day-care unit for categorising children. As such, I must emphasise that I do not categorise and label the data on basis of preconceived and standardized principles on children's development, nor staff members' practices. As stated by Bowker and Star (2000),

some classification is necessary however, it should not be an easy endeavour. I have not wanted to force the material into pre-given patterns and theories. I rather strive for the labels to derive from the empirical material while being aware that previous knowledge (empirical and theoretical) and the research questions influenced the focus and attention given to certain issues (cf. Nilsen, 2005).

4.5.2 Representing the participants

In the analysis, I have treated the staff members as belonging to the same group, not differentiating them based on educational background, work position, gender, disability, or any other category of identity.⁷⁰ This has been deliberate in order to not fix the interviewee to a particular background or characteristic, and thus avoid interpreting their statements as linked to specific identities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This is an attempt to have an open approach that allows a variety of voices to be included. I do however lock the participant of this study in the category of ‘staff member,’ which can limit their voices in the analysis and exclude other possible interpretations. Hopefully the category is nevertheless represented as somewhat open, characterized by shifts and divergent reflections.⁷¹ The empirical data is thus interpreted and analysed as part of a common institution that shares certain practices, discourses, and understandings, while also including awareness of how the staff members express themselves in ways that are ambiguous, equivocal, and inconsistent (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

I have not differentiated or divided the children in the analysis based on predefined groups and categories of age,⁷² gender, class, disability, ethnicity, and so forth. First and foremost the starting point of the study was not focused on particular age groups or impairments. The intention was to explore more an overall picture of how children become constructed as in-

⁷⁰ Not differentiating the staff was also done for anonymity reasons, since there is a limited number of staff members participating in the study.

⁷¹ E.g., Article 1.

⁷² In Article 1 I found age relevant for the staff members’ descriptions, thus I discussed the issue of age as a way of understanding children. At other times the analyses mention age and gender of a child as additional contextual information. However, my analytical approach explores the data material without differentiating age groups or gender, and the knowledge produced in the articles is not discussed as connected to specific age or gender groups.

between, possibly impaired or having special needs, with a focus on what understandings and framework informed day-care staff members' positioning of children as deviating from normality. Concerns and suspicions (and testing and evaluations) of children as potentially having impairment or special need are directed at all ages. When analysing I placed attention on what seemed to constitute commonalities and patterns in how staff members described and discussed children.

Research perspectives emphasising data as produced in interaction and interpreted, not as collected and processed, often relates to a focus on the researchers themselves. At times this can result in a 'confessional mode of writing' dominated by self-reflection and self-examination (cf. Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). While replacing an objectivist style, it does however potentially risk slipping into self-absorption (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). In this study I have not represented my own participation in a confessional mode. Based on a constructionist approach I nevertheless attempted to expose my 'voice' and participation, and as such underlined how representations of data and analysis are not regarded as neutral or objective. My voice as a researcher was made visible and exposed by making clear the critical starting point and perspectives of the study, and the selected research questions and focus of the inquiry, including the theoretical perspective and position from which analyses were done and represented. I have also been sensitive in the use of language, refraining from language that, for example, advocates a 'truth,' universality, objectivity, or establishes data as 'found,' which potentially closes the analysis for alternative readings and interpretations. Instead, in conducting the analysis in this thesis, I tried (and succeeded to varying degrees) to emphasise reflexivity and a non-reductionist focus by using language that points at 'perspectives,' 'understandings,' and 'producing data,' and thus renounced any claim to know exactly how reality *is* or how people *are*. This sensitivity follows from the theoretical starting point of social constructionism and a focus on knowledge and understandings as part of discourses.⁷³

4.5.3 Exploring understandings and discourses

An overarching analytical question in the exploration of the empirical material has been what and in what manner the staff members described children they perceived as in-between or possibly having special needs. I searched for patterns in their ways of representing the children, what became emphasised as important, and in what contexts. I began with an open

⁷³ See Chapter 3 for further elaboration on social constructionism and discourse.

starting point and then explored the material in more detail after having some idea of what was illustrated in the material. There is a somewhat alternating process between theory and empirical material as they are “successively reinterpreted in light of each other” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 4). Theory and previous literature can be seen as contributing to a ‘dialogue’ with the data, and as such assisting my process of interpretation (cf. Nilsen, 2005). The use of theoretical concepts thus contributed to my process of gaining insight and understanding by ‘lifting’ the empirical experience to a more abstract and general language (cf. Nilsen, 2005).

In this thesis, the concept of ‘discourse’ in many ways frames the analytical exploration of the data. This entails a focus on what is defined and accepted as assumptions and understandings about children, normality, and deviance (cf. Hall, 2001). I have explored how staff members’ evaluations and descriptions represent children based on certain understandings and discourses. Following a theoretical framework refuting universal or natural standards from which to describe and evaluate children, what is perceived as ‘normal’ or deviating by the staff members is analysed as constructions situated in cultural and discursive contexts. While dominant discourses often are quite stable and resistant to change, people can manoeuvre between several discourses circulating a field.⁷⁴ The staff members’ descriptions, discussions, and reflections are thus explored in light of shifting and context-related understandings (Nilsen, 2012; Neuman, 2001; Henriques et al., 1998).

In closely reading the empirical material and through working with the data, I explored, as mentioned, what I perceived to constitute patterns, key issues, and particularly interesting aspects. For instance, I focused on the manner in which staff members described and explained child-conduct as deviating, trying to grasp how their accounts were made comprehensible and what assumptions were implicitly expressed as taken for granted (Søndergaard, 2002). The accounts were thus seen to construct particular versions of how the thesis’ topic can be represented and explained (Alvesson, 2003). I explored the staff members’ descriptions for clues to certain wider discourses and perspectives that provide validity and meaning to their statements (Wetherell, 1998), as such, relating them to discourses circulating the day-care field in policies, evaluations, mapping materials, and in academic literature. Based on my interest in constructions and positions of children outside of

⁷⁴ Cf. Article 1.

what is perceived as ‘normal’, analytical questions were related to issues of what was included (and excluded) when the staff explained and described what they regarded as deviating, special needs, or possible impairments (cf. Søndergaard, 2002). In other words, I focused on constructions of boundaries between ‘normal’ children and ‘deviant children’ based on descriptions where certain differences in specific contexts were highlighted and interpreted as deviating (cf. Bauman, 1991; Bateson, 2002). However, since such issues might seldom be stated explicitly, it is necessary to interpret the discursive practices (Søndergaard, 2002). The issues explored in the analysis are not focused on whether the staff provided accurate accounts of the children, but rather focus on how they expressed understandings of a child and his or her conduct related to contexts.

The analysis in the articles differ, but overall particular attention is paid to what frame of reference ensures that the staff members’ statements and expressions make sense, what presuppositions, expectations, and assumptions are embedded in statements, and what the use of certain terms, concepts, and ways of expressions actually *do* (for example, exploring the use of ‘restless’ as differentiating and positioning children as in-between or deviating⁷⁵). In writing up the analysis, arguments are meant to be presented as somewhat transparent, letting readers follow a line of thought and make up their own mind to whether or not they find arguments and judgements logical and reliable. I included small extracts and statements from interviews with the staff members in the articles’ analyses, since the transcribed interviews provide more direct quotes. However, complete transparency can be seen as impossible (Hammersley, 2007), which is particularly noticeable within the limited space of journal articles.

4.5.4 Generalizations

In the analysis I explore what I regard as patterns in the data, and ‘generalizations’ are made by, for example, illustrating typicalities in the manner staff members described children or certain expectations commonly related to specific contexts. However, I find it important to emphasise that these patterns are not attempts to make universalizing generalisations, but rather generalizations as context-bound typicalities (Halkier, 2011). In other words, ‘generalizations’ does not here relate to producing knowledge as universal or law-like

⁷⁵ Cf. Article 3.

regularities, but rather a possibility of “developing abstractions that may apply across contexts” (Bradley, 1993, p. 438). This was done by examining specific statements or situations closely, and then using these understandings developed to inquire about other situations (in other words, building from the ground up) (Bradley, 1993). One of the strengths of qualitative research is that explanations and interpretations are connected to context, while also producing possibilities for cross-contextual generalities (not to be confused with de-contextual generalisations) (Mason, 2002). This entails refuting a common misunderstanding listed by Flyvbjerg (2006), namely that “General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge” (p. 221).

4.6 Ethical considerations

The day-care staff members were given written and oral information about this project beforehand, and written consent was collected from the participants. The day-care units, staff members, and children who attended the units have all been kept confidential and made anonymous; neither real names nor detailed personal descriptions were used in the thesis. However, the responsibility of representing them has made me reflect on how critical perspectives towards practices, constructions, and discourses may be interpreted as critiques directed at day-care staff members. This has been a struggle, as I have wanted to illustrate some critical aspects on how children become categorised and perceived, while at the same time communicate utmost respect for the difficult position and important work of the day-care staff. I hope I have managed to strike a balance between acknowledging the day-care staff of this study and raising critical remarks regarding the larger structures and discourses circulating in the day-care field. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the issues raised in this thesis relate to national policies, whitepapers, and guidelines emphasising, for instance, early intervention, preparation for school, and ‘discovering’ special needs.

Following the writing of this thesis, I have contemplated the consequences (cf. Kvale, 2008) both in regards to day-care staff in general and in regards to children who are positioned in-between. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to day-care staff members’ reflections, education, and practices (as mentioned in the introduction), and as such affect children who attend day-care in a positive way. However, writing about children in-between or as deviating does entail the danger of reproducing boundaries and (re)establishing the rigidity of

categories—as I turn a passing event or a fleeting conversation that only existed in that moment to an account in writing that exists in its inscription and can be revisited (cf. Geertz, 1993). As such, on the one hand I have attempted to give sufficient empirical examples regarding what staff members found concerning and problematic about a child. On the other hand, I have avoided summarizing or constructing a list of what was perceived as ‘problematic child conduct’ since this would risk reproducing standards of normality and deviance.

Ethical dilemmas also occurred while attending the field, such as when I felt the need to step out of the role as observer and researcher and take responsibility for a situation. In one day-care unit I noticed a child who seemed to be bullied and excluded by the other children. The child would often seem to withdraw himself and not say anything to the staff. In one situation some boys were running around throwing things at him while he sat on the sofa reading a book. I was in the opposite side of the room observing the boys with no staff member present at the time. I thus decided to walk over to the boy, sit beside him on the sofa, and ask if I could read the book with him. He responded positively, and the other children stopped their actions and a couple sat down with us. This was one example of how I tried to deal with certain situations during the field. After having observed several more situations where peers called names, threw things, or excluded him, I started to pay closer attention to how this child and the others interacted and how the staff responded. Concluding three weeks of fieldwork, I was left with the impression that the adults were not aware of the situation (or they did not respond to it) and that the other children’s bullying was frequent. A dilemma of whether or not to talk with the staff members about this situation was produced as I did not want to interfere with their practice or portray myself as an ‘expert’ who criticized them. In the end, I decided to ask about the child’s peer relations after the interviews, and inform about my experiences with the child group in regards to that particular child. When doing so, I got the impression that they were not offended, but rather grateful as they pointed out how this was one of the benefits by having me observe the unit; I represented a ‘new set of eyes.’ I appreciated this comment as a (small) sign of reciprocity.

In hindsight I regret not having given even more back to the units I visited in the form of a continuous dialogue during analysis and writing the articles. Such a process would have provided more possibilities of giving back to the field (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007)

and also contributed to the interpretations and analyses. In the analysis and writing of the thesis, it is difficult to represent sufficiently the complexity and reflexivity I experienced as part of everyday life in the day-cares units. There is a troubling feeling when presenting critical remarks and making arguments regarding one aspect, as it ignores alternatives and delimits the perspectives. Close in my memory is the comment from one staff member after hearing I had a background as a social anthropologist: *Oh so you are one of those who problematize everything*. While that is a large part of what I do, her comment is a constant reminder to strive to be of relevance to the practical field (cf. Söder, 2000), despite an inclination to problematize and unsettle ‘everything.’

4.7 Quality in the qualitative research

In this thesis I have focused on staff members’ descriptions and discussions made possible and limited by discourses related to understandings and categorisations of children, normality, and deviance (implicitly and explicitly). How to assess the quality of research can be claimed to differ depending on theoretical and methodological orientation and the research questions (Hammersley, 2007). Following the foundation and focus on social constructions of this thesis, I refer to validity of the research in the sense of “defensible knowledge claims” (cf. Salner, 1989, p. 69; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 247). My orientation and exploration focuses on processes that construct the issues at hand, hence not on the day-care staff members’ capacity to represent things or relations that exist independently (cf. Hammersley, 2007). As such, I have attempted to make my interpretations and understandings valid, not in reference to objective facts or as representing one single individual, but as parts of the matrix of discourses circulating the day-care field. The knowledge claims in this thesis are context dependent, yet they may transcend contexts. My understandings and interpretations of the data have been further tested and criticized, not based on a process of verification, but validation as an argumentative negotiation (cf. Salner, 1989). Following, I have negotiated my understandings and interpretations through dialogue and processes of questioning, critiquing, re-evaluating, and reflecting during presentations and discussions with others in the research community.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Including my supervisor, colleagues at NOSEB, participants in several international conferences, and peer-reviews from international journals.

In addition, I find it useful to consider validity as “quality of craftsmanship” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 248). Hence, validity is understood as something that permeates the entire research process, not some final verification. On one hand, validity thus is an issue of whether the theoretical presupposition and the method and design of the study are adequate to explore the research questions. As such, it has been important for me to elaborate and make as transparent as possible my theoretical positioning, the research questions, and the methodology. Further, the validity of the thesis includes the manner in which I have carried out the research (cf. Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Thus I have elaborated on how I conducted interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed by a professional (then checked) and how I did the participant observation with elaborate field notes taken right after or during the fieldwork. In addition, I have attempted to make my focus of inquiry and the interpretations formed in the analysis process as explicit as possible, supplemented with empirical examples to allow a reader to follow and reflect on my line of argument. Having that in mind, I nevertheless have to request and depend on readers to rely on my judgment as a researcher in regards to conducting the research and analysing the material (cf. Hammersley, 2007).

In this chapter I have provided an account of the research process and my methodological reflections. The focus has been on presenting day-care units I visited and outlining the different phases of producing and analysing the data material of this study. Combined with my theoretical reflections and positioning⁷⁷ and an elaboration of the day-care field context,⁷⁸ I have intended to create a back-drop for the articles in this thesis. The articles constitute the analyses of my study, however, with limited space and possibility of illustrating the empirical material as they are written for publication in international journals. The articles nevertheless illustrate some key aspects in the empirical material, accentuating how certain discourses and understandings of children and childhoods, normality, and deviance contribute to construct some children as deviating from normality and position them as in-between. In the next chapter, I will shortly present the articles, and then discuss and tie them with the research questions. I will also make some remarks on further research and final comments.

⁷⁷ Chapter 3.

⁷⁸ Chapter 2.

Chapter 5

Discussion and final remarks

In this chapter, the thesis' three articles are first shortly presented, and in the next section I connect and discuss their content and analyses in relation to each other and the research questions. I outline suggestions for further research and offer final remarks.

5.1 Presentation of the articles

Article 1: Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Institutions

Accepted for publication in *Childhoods Today*

In this article, my analysis focuses on day-care staff members' discussions and reflections on children in relation to understandings of normality and deviance. Emphasis is placed on what understandings and discourses frame staff members' conversations during everyday situations and interviews. This is then connected to a recent increase in mapping practices in day-care centres, of which TRAS is the most commonly used mapping device for evaluating children's abilities.

The analysis accentuates how day-care staff operates with shifting understandings and divergent ways of reasoning. From exploring patterns in the data, I direct attention to and illustrate that staff member's descriptions and explanations of why a child is considered as deviating from normality is based on a discourse that defines and limits understandings in terms of age and development. This is further discussed in relation to the manner in which mapping devices reduce the complexity of children by constructing simplified images that can be compared and evaluated.

Further, the analysis demonstrates a way of reasoning expressed by the staff members in which they are apprehensive about and modify understandings related to age and development. When questioned about norms and standards of what they consider 'normal', the staff emphasised diversity and expressed reluctance towards fixed standards of age and development. I also illustrate how they critically reflect on the use of mapping materials and their own role in evaluating children. The article accentuates how day-care staff members shift and modify their expressions both explicitly and through the use of body language. The

analysis thus points to how staff members' descriptions and explanations related to deviance are somewhat opened when discussing what they consider 'normal.'

Article 2: In-between competences. Adult expectations of children in Norwegian day-care centres

Submitted for publication in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*

Article 2 is an exploration of the expectations and contexts from which staff members position a child as in-between 'normal' and 'deviant'. The analysis focuses on what staff members bring forth as 'not normal' when describing a child they are concerned might have special needs or impairment. The analysis illustrates how day-care staff members' descriptions and reflections position some children as incompetent within a discourse of 'the competent child.' A discourse of the 'competent child' prevails in the Norwegian (Nordic) day-care setting, however it can be said to serve as a descriptive category that informs expectations of how children are to behave. As such, some children fail to meet the expectations and are perceived as not competent (cf. Brembeck et al., 2004). We question in this article whether tests and mapping practices contribute to the transformation of the notion of competence into standards from which children are measured and classified.

The analysis illustrates how some children are described as not living up to various expectations of a 'normal' competent child in terms of being social, active, independent, and flexible in the 'right way.' The staff members' expectations are, in the analysis, illustrated as connected to certain situations and daily practices in the day-care centres. Following the article discusses how expectations can be seen as part of an institutional order (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011) and point to alternative understandings, such as relational and context dependent understandings of subjects and (in)competence.

Article 3: Excluding to include: Exploring a process of constructing children as impaired in the Norwegian day-care setting

Reviewed for publication in *Disability & Society*.

In Article 3, I analyse day-care staff members' statements as contributing to the differentiation of children and construction some children as deviating (with possible impairments). The backdrop includes a paradox in Norwegian society where emphasis on equal opportunities for individuals with impairments and breaking down social barriers is

intertwined with an increasing search for young children's individual inabilities, impairment and special needs. As expressed through the article's title, the intention to include involves exclusion by defining some children as different and deviating. The article is both an empirical analysis of how deviance is discursively constructed within the day-care and a contribution to more theoretical discussions within disability studies on the topic of impairment. The analysis explores day-care staff members' descriptions and discussions regarding three young boys attending different day-care units. In the article, I illustrate how day-care staff members' expressions, terms, and use of language construct those boys as deviating from other children. I use the concept of a continuum (Davis, 1995) to conceptualise the blurred boundaries between 'able' and 'impaired' and 'normal' and 'deviant,' thus emphasising how the day-care staff deconstruct or break a continuum into opposing categories through their choice of expressions, terms, and language. Further, their descriptions and discussions are seen as connected to understandings, values, and ideals in the Norwegian day-care context.

5.2 Discussing the articles and the research questions

In this thesis, I explore the ways in which some children are constructed as in-between and deviating from what is considered 'normal' (possibly having special needs or impairments) within the day-care setting. The articles focus on staff members' descriptions of children positioned in-between, - hence considered deviating but not yet classified. Staff members had concerns about these children before my arrival.⁷⁹ In everyday conversations with me, each other, and during interviews, the staff members described, elaborated on, and explained why a child was considered as potentially having special needs or impairments, which included examples of a child's 'not normal' conduct and demeanour in daily life situations. A central purpose of this thesis is to contribute to destabilize categorizations and taken-for-granted understandings and assumptions in order to expose them for reflection (cf. Søndergaard, 2002).

The research questions of this thesis have been addressed through a qualitative study. I conducted short-term fieldwork in four day-care units and interviewed 16 day-care staff members. This section discusses the articles as they intersect and connect and how they relate

⁷⁹ See Chapter 4 for discussion on method.

to the research questions. The research questions are partly mixed and intertwined in analyses as they touch upon the same issues in slightly different manners. However, in the following I have chosen to divide the questions into two sections in order to enhance central elements of the articles.

5.2.1 Constructions of children as deviating—discourses and understandings

In this section I focus in particular on the first and second research question, and how the articles respond to these and connect to each other. The research questions are:

- **In what ways are children constructed as deviating and possibly impaired in day-care centres?**
- **How do staff members' evaluations, descriptions, and practices regarding children 'in-between' relate to discourses and understandings of children and childhoods?**

The first and second research questions focus on the ways in which children are constructed as deviating and with possible impairments in day-care institutions, with a focus on how staff members' descriptions and discussions regarding children in-between relate to discourses and understandings of children and childhoods. All the articles respond to these questions, yet from different angles. Thus the analyses illuminate various aspects of the issues.

Article 1 emphasises, among other issues, the heightened use of mapping devices in Norwegian day-care institutions. As discussed in Chapter 2, there has been a vast increase in the use of standardized tests and evaluation devices to assess individual day-care children's skills and abilities. The day-care field is depicted in policies and guidelines as a key arena to 'discover' children with special needs, which is intertwined with an increasing emphasis on preparation for school and formal learning. Against this backdrop, I explore in Article 1 staff members' descriptions and discussions in everyday conversations and interviews regarding children they suspect might have special needs and impairments. The analysis illustrates that staff members' explanations for why a child is perceived as deviating from normality are framed by a developmental discourse where norms of assessment are linked to children's age. Discourses provide possibilities and limitations on how to understand children's conduct (cf. Foucault, 1999; Hall, 2001) and the day-care staff members' descriptions illustrate how certain understandings and explanation of children's conduct is rooted in a developmental discourse. Understanding children with reference to development and age is common within

the day-care field and beyond in western society (cf. Dahlberg et al., 1999; James & James, 2008). As such, particular differences among children are explained by the staff members as deviating based on children's conduct measured and evaluated in relation to standards of age and development. Article 1 also illustrates that this way of reasoning is embedded in the definition of special needs for children below school age, which refers to a child having more extensive needs than common for his or her age (NOU, 2012). As such, deviance is in many ways understood as 'lagging behind' in relation to age-appropriate development. Following this way of reasoning, Article 1 further discusses how standardized mapping devices construct deviance by creating a reduced and static image of a child that can be compared, measured, and ranked (cf. Rose, 1990; Turmel; 2008). In the article, I critically examine the most commonly used mapping device, TRAS. I also describe how day-care staff members critically discussed the use of TRAS and, in particular, their reflections on their own position as observers and registrars that evaluate children's abilities.

The discussion on mapping devices in Article 1 connects to Article 2's discussion on deviance and 'the competent child.' While mapping devices are not the key element of analysis in Article 2, the article raises the crucial question as to whether the use of standardized tests and assessments tools contribute to specific understandings of 'the competent child' as a standard and norm.

Overall, all three articles discuss the space of normativity surrounding the day-care staff as part of discourses that define possibilities and limitations for understandings and construct standards from which certain children are constructed as deviating from normality. As I emphasise in the 'kappe' and in Article 1, there are overlapping and divergent discourses informing the field, and children can be seen as constructed by a variety of conflicting discourses (Kjørholt, 2004). In Article 1 this is illustrated by a focus on shifts and divergent understandings in staff members' conversations. However, despite conflicts and shifts, certain knowledge about children may in an institutional setting appear as truthful (Neuman, 2001). Article 2 emphasises how staff members' descriptions and practices relate to one particular discourse: that of 'the competent child.' Complementing Article 1, Article 2 goes in-depth into the content and contexts of understandings of children in the day-care context and beyond.

The manner in which some children are constructed as deviating in the day-care context is, in Article 2, related to subject positions of incompetence. The analysis in Article 2 illustrates what the day-care staff brought forth in their descriptions and reflections on children positioned in-between. Children in-between were conceptualised in relation to Bauman's (1991) notion of "not-yet-classified" (p. 57) as the staff members expressed that they had not yet found out what was wrong. However, when the staff members explained why a child was perceived as possibly having special needs or impairments, they described what they considered deviating child conduct as lack of competencies in performing everyday tasks and activities. This is illustrated with several empirical examples and analyses on how a child was described as not performing common behaviour in 'the right way,'⁸⁰ such as eating, playing, being active, etc., thus risks being understood as incompetent. As such, staff members' expectations and evaluations of children are explicitly connected to certain daily life situations and the institutional setting, emphasising how assessments of children are intertwined with context-dependent expectations and institutional practices.

From a critical stance towards recent policies, Article 2 argues that initiatives of early intervention and the 'discovery' of special needs of children are context-bound, value-based, and intertwined with certain understandings of children and childhoods. Thus Article 2 reconfigures day-care staff members' manner of describing and reflecting on children in-between as de-contextualised and addressing a child as inherently flawed in some way. Article 2 further points to how children in-between are constructed as deviating in relation to expectations of competence intertwined with conceptualisation of a unitary and static individual (Henriques et al., 1998). As an alternative, the article comments on a relational perspective from which children can be understood in terms of shifting positions of competence and incompetence (Prout, 2005; Kjørholt, 2005; Lee, 1999). In both Articles 1 and 2 I take a critical stance on the static and decontextualized images that portray 'deviant' children as possibly having special needs and impairments. I emphasise how real life complexities are reduced through developmental discourse and mapping devices in Article 1, and how children are described as inherently flawed and their context-bound conduct generalized as incompetence in Article 2.

⁸⁰ Analyses of Article 1 and Article 2 have several interrelated elements and could be combined in future research exploring how expectations of competence and age and development perspectives intersect. This would provide a further investigation of the standards from which children become evaluated.

Issues regarding identities and construction of categories are further discussed in Article 3. Here I engage with the notion of impairment as a discursive construction (Hughes & Paterson, 1997) and explore constructions of deviance in the day-care as part of a process potentially constructing impairment. The starting point is a critical view on day-care practices of monitoring, testing, and categorising children. I question whether intentions of creating inclusive environments accommodating to all children implies that day-care centres have to first find out what is ‘wrong’ with some children. This is further discussed as a paradox connected to understandings of disability and impairment as divided in social and biological phenomena. Hence I argue for a perspective that destabilizes the social/biological dichotomy and notions of individuals’ inherent qualities. A key element of the theoretical stance in Article 2 and in the analysis is a use of the concept ‘continuum’ (Davis, 1995) to conceptualise the blurred and fluid boundaries between categories. This is further underlined with the contention of self and identities as discursive constructions, dependent on context and relations (Davis, 2002; Shildrick, 2012).

Article 3 is as such, aligned with the other two articles that emphasise context and refute a view of individuals with static, inherent qualities that can be objectively measured and categorised. Nonetheless, the issue is approached from a different angle and with other concepts in Article 3. This article engages more explicitly with post-structural perspectives and debates in disability studies than the other articles; however, Article 1 draws on the field in regards to, for example, destabilizing issues of normality (cf. Campbell, 2009; Allen, 2005). Discussions within disability studies and in connection to social studies of children and childhood are further elaborated on in the ‘kappe’ in order to illustrate a theoretical framework from which understandings of the articles can be expanded. For instance, all the articles are critical to the emphasis in policies on ‘discovering’ special needs, and the theoretical contemplations in the ‘kappe’ provide more in-depth discussion on understandings of special needs, impairments, deviance, and normality as socially constructed phenomena.

My analysis in Article 3 differs somewhat from those in the other articles as I approached staff members’ descriptions of three boys as illustrative of how staff members’ discursive practices position some children as deviating and possibly impaired. I explore day-care staff members’ expressions, statements, and phrases such as *restless (from inside)* and *lacking calm* in regards to how these represent a shift from ways of describing similar accepted child-

conduct (e.g. *active*) and how such ways of describing children draw on ideas of inherent inabilities and create a discontinuity with so-called ‘normal’ child conduct. The manner in which the children are constructed as deviating from other children is further illustrated by the fact that statements are rooted in expectations and ideals of how to be a ‘normal’ child in Norwegian day-care centres. Hence, I explore discursive practices with a social constructionist view of deviance and impairment, and further connect this to practices in the day-care field. The analysis is thus intertwined with the other articles as I explore and illustrate expectations of a ‘normal’ day-care child in relation to constructions of some children as deviating.

Overall, through analysis of the three articles, I explore constructions of children as deviating in the day-care setting through staff members’ descriptions of children in-between. This is explored further by focusing on how discourses and following understandings and expectations of children in the day-care setting can inform standards and boundaries between ‘normal’ children and ‘deviant’ children. This includes an exploration of day-care staff members’ constructions of normality. Overlapping with the previous discussion, I will elaborate on these issues in depth in the following section.

5.2.2 Drawing boundaries and constitutions of normality

In this section I will discuss the articles related to the research questions:

- **How are boundaries drawn between children perceived as ‘deviant’ and children perceived as ‘normal’?**
- **What constitutes staff members’ expectations of normality?**

The articles exemplify similar and different responses to these research questions. While some of the issues were touched upon in the previous section, I would like to further elaborate on the issues of boundaries and normality in relation to evaluating children in day-care institutions.

A main element in the empirical material of this study is how staff members’ descriptions and discussions of children suspected of special needs or impairments were, to a large extent, related to a child behaving either too much or too little in a way otherwise accepted as ‘normal’ or to children not doing something ‘the right way’ in a specific situation. As such, the staff members described child conduct they considered deviating as variations or

unaccepted versions of what was considered ‘normal.’ Thus the manner in which boundaries are blurred between what is considered ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ was illustrated in the data. This may stem from exploration of descriptions of children in-between, as focus on boundaries and relations between categories become accessible. In Article 1 I draw from particularly on Bauman (1991) to theorize and explore the constructed dichotomy of ‘normal’/’deviant’. In Article 3, as mentioned, I use the notion of ‘continuum’ borrowed from Davis (1995).

By drawing on Bauman in the ‘kappe’ and Article 1, the asymmetrical relationship between normality and deviance, in which the first category is often taken for granted, silent, and privileged, can be seen. In Article 1, I illustrate ways in which boundaries between children are constructed within a discourse that imposes standards for development and age. I emphasise, as mentioned, that this is typical when the staff members discuss and explain deviance, and that this way of thinking is further established in the mapping devices that are commonly used. However, I continue by exploring how staff members open up and modify the boundaries by questioning the issue of normality when they discuss what supposedly is ‘normal,’ and when focus is set on taken-for-granted standards and norms. I highlight reflexivity within staff members’ discussions on normality and the fact that boundaries of ‘normal’/’deviant’ are not necessarily rigid and static in the day-care setting. The constitution and meaning connected to categories of ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ are in a mutually dependent relationship (cf. Bauman, 1991); therefore, it is particularly interesting to note how day-care staff members reflect critically on explicit standards of normality. Seen in relation to policies and guidelines directed at ‘discovering’ special needs and mapping of children, the day-care staff critically discuss their position and involvement when registering supposedly ‘objective’ observations of children using TRAS. As mentioned, a definition of special needs relies on understandings of what is *common* for children at a particular age, and in similar ways evaluations of children often depend on a normativity that is taken for granted. Normality can thus be seen as implicit or with elusive and blurred boundaries (cf. Campbell, 2009).

In Article 2, I expose normativity surrounding the day-care field as informed by the discourse of ‘the competent child.’ In this article, the focus is set on how staff members describe children as being ‘not normal’ in reference to expected performance on tasks and certain contexts. Boundaries between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ are in this article explored in relation to boundaries of competence and incompetence in the day-care field. The analysis exemplifies

how normality is constituted by expectations of competence related to daily life situations and routines in the day-care setting. Expectations of, for example, independence during meals or being active with self-control create certain subject positions for children in day-care centres. Children risk being positioned as different by not fulfilling expectations in daily life situations, and further being positioned in-between what is considered 'normal' and 'deviant'. Following this line of thought, I reflect in the analysis on day-care units as institutional settings with institutional (and generational) order and demands of a well-functioning institution (cf. Alasuutari & Markström, 2011, Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012). Demands on children being competent as self-managers are, as such, seen in light of a recurrent political, economic, and educational issue regarding the adult-child ratio and workload of staff members.

In Article 3, I explore how some children are discursively positioned as different and deviating from what is average and common for children. My use of the concept 'continuum' is also to conceptualise how day-care staff member's descriptions cut-off or break the continuum of 'normal' ways of being a child, which then creates separate categories of 'normal'/'deviant' and able/impaired (cf. Davis, 1995). Constructions of children as deviating are interrelated to how boundaries are established between the categories. Children perceived as deviating are described in a manner that positions them as not fulfilling ideas, values, and norms of what constitute a 'normal' and acceptable child in Norwegian day-care settings. This contributes to the breaking of the continuum and constructs boundaries with which children can be differentiated and categorized.

In different ways I focus in each of the articles on boundaries and constitutions of normality relating to the manners in which children are constructed as deviating in day-care centres. In Article 3 I focus on boundaries that disrupt a continuum and position children in oppositional categories, I illustrate in the other two articles how certain lines of thinking, discourses, and practices circling the day-care field ('age and development,' 'competence,' mapping devices) constitute a form of normativity that inform standards and boundaries that contribute to a certain way of dividing and evaluating children. In the articles I thus approach and illuminate in various ways issues related to a contemporary stress on 'discovering' special needs and standardized evaluations of children within the day-care field in policies and practices. With a critical starting point, the intent is to foster more reflection on understandings and practices in

the day-care field, and to argue for opening definitions of normality instead of narrowing it through increasing demands of evaluating, measuring, and standardizing children.

Complementing the articles, the 'kappe' provides an elaboration on the discourses and line of thinking that informs the analysis and writing of the articles. Similar to the manner in which day-care staff members' descriptions and discussions have been analysed as part of discourses, so does this thesis operate within certain discourses and perspectives. As such, the 'kappe' represents and reflects on perspectives and ways of reasoning from which I approached the topic of inquiry, both explicitly as part of positioning the thesis, and implicitly in the manner in which issues are presented and discussed.

5.3 Further research

Several issues related to this thesis would benefit from further research. This thesis can in many ways be seen as an introduction to elements in need of more detailed exploration. The kind of knowledge produced in this study further establishes critical perspectives and illustrates central ways of understanding and constructing children in terms of 'normal' and 'deviant.' It does so by focusing on the day-care field and without going into the manner in which other categories of difference influence the way children are constructed as 'not normal.' For instance, it could be possible in a larger qualitative study to explore in what ways certain differences in age, ethnicity, disability, gender, and social-economic backgrounds are relevant in adults' understandings of children as possibly impaired or as having special needs. A larger ethnographic study could produce information in greater depth regarding 'differences that make a difference' when it comes to categorizing children (cf. Bateson, 2002). It would also be fruitful to continue in line with the perspectives in this thesis and include perspectives from parents and children.

The thesis' focus on discourses and frames for constructing and understanding children can be seen as contributing to and encouraging further exploration of the consequences and practical outcomes of differentiating and categorising children. The increasing practice of and focus on mapping and 'discovering' special needs is intended to lead to the minimizing of differences and accommodation of individuals' difficulties. Thus, questions relating to the manner in which special needs or impairment impact practices and treatment towards children are highly important, not only for children who are perceived as deviating in some way, but also to

understand how this focus and the perspectives underlying it may impact and alter practices and understandings of all day-care children.

Another extension of the topic of this thesis would move us outside the perimeters of the day-care centre towards, for example, the psychiatric treatments and diagnoses of young children. While there is critical literature discussing the growing epidemic of psychiatric diagnoses among children (Hannås, 2010; Timimi, 2004; Graham, 2008), the area of interest is small compared to the resources and research being done from medical perspectives. In the Norwegian context, it is also timely to examine the use of the concept of “nedsatt funksjonsevne” (impairment) introduced in 2001 (cf. NOU, 2001). I suspect the concept has in many ways replaced the relational term “funksjonshemming” (disability), potentially representing a step backward towards an overarching individual focus. In addition, there seems to be a need for international research that critically discusses impairment’ as a bio-medical category (referring to both physically and mentally defined disorders) when it comes to children, something that should be interesting since research on disabled children in particular has been dominated by a medical perspective focusing on impairments (Priestley, 1999). In general, I argue that disability studies should focus on children in a manner that includes a deconstructive perspective on established understandings of childhood. Similarly, I argue that social studies of children and childhood should engagement with international discussions on disability. These are all issues I regard as highly in need of further research, both for producing knowledge and insight and for contributing to the development of practices with regard to how we treat children.

5.4 Final remarks

With this thesis, I have wanted to contribute in to a debate on practices in the day-care field by questioning the manner in which particular children are considered deviating in some way or another. The content and quality of day-care institutions are high on the agenda in media and politics, which emphasises individual children’s skills and abilities, early intervention, preparation for school, and ‘discovering’ special needs. My contribution is a critical exploration of the ways children are constructed as deviating from what is considered ‘normal’ by focusing on understandings and discourses that frame day-care staff members’ descriptions and discussions on children positioned in-between. Thus, this thesis explores the basis upon which some children raise concerns and are differentiated from other children. The

intention is to expose and encourage discussion of taken-for-granted notions and discourses that limit the way we understand children. Insight and knowledge from this thesis may provide grounds for further reflection and debate regarding evaluations of day-care children and the increase of special needs and behavioural diagnoses among children. The overarching question is then whether the notion of normality is narrowing and what the consequences will be.

The critical starting point and perspective of the thesis addresses societal tendencies and discourses that contribute to the formulation of practices and legislations. As such, critical remarks and interpretations are not intended to be directed towards individuals or persons who are concerned for a child or for children who have received help based on diagnoses or labels of special needs. I acknowledge that at times it can be necessary to evaluate and diagnose a child in order to receive resources to improve support and accommodation. Hence, on an individual level, one often has to operate within given structures and lines of thinking to make the best out of difficult situations. However, on a wider level, I find it important to destabilize and critically question societal tendencies and institutional practices that contribute to the differentiation of individual children, and thus to possibly alter the frames in which individuals have to operate. Governmental guidelines and policies have become increasingly involved with the content of day-care institutions, leading as mentioned to increased emphasis on testing, standardized evaluations, and learning in preparation for school. While the intentions of these policies are to create institutions that accommodate individual differences, I question the paradox of having to exclude some children as deviating in order to achieve inclusion. Instead of finding ways to make children conform to (narrow) expectations of adults and society, maybe expectations, understandings, and discourses supported by institutions should expect to accommodate the diverse ways of being a child?

I hope this thesis will, in some way, provide opportunities for discussion and reflection. On a policy-making level, I hope it will contribute to the re-evaluation of recent tendencies to monitor and evaluate children at a younger and younger age. Early intervention and standardized testing of children can be seen as a normalizing practice. This is not the same as early intervention for children who are living in unsatisfactory circumstances or in concern for children's well-being; I wish for more focus on children's well-being and less on their inabilities.

In practice, such issues might not be easy to disentangle. Nonetheless, I hope this thesis inspires discussion and reflection on the taken-for-granted and implicit assumptions that frame some children as deviating from normality. On one side, staff members' concerns are often framed by their care and affection for the children; however, their concerns also relate to standards, expectations, and practices constructed as part of institutional discourses that circle and guide the day-care field. The latter is scrutinized in this thesis, and based on my short experiences in the field, I was impressed by staff members' reflexivity regarding their own practices and understandings when they were given the opportunity. As such, in relation to discussions on quality in day-care centres, I would argue that providing necessary resources (including space to reflect on their practices) would be much more beneficial than a focus on standardizing day-care practices through testing materials or so-called evidence based programmes.

In addition, I hope this thesis contributes new knowledge and perspectives to the academic community. The focal point on children constructed as deviating but still in-between categories represents a slightly different focus than children established in various categories. It has been hard to grasp and produce knowledge concerning these children while being sensitive to a risk of further labelling and categorising. I have tried to approach the difficult topic of this thesis by relying on a theoretical platform that combines fairly complex academic fields and discussions. This has led to in-depth discussions regarding theory and perspectives in order to present limited, but important, analytical explorations in the articles. As such, this thesis hopefully expands discussions on understandings of children, normality, deviance, and disability/impairment on both empirical and theoretical levels.

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Article 1

Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Institutions

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Normality and Deviance in Norwegian Day-care Institutions

Karianne Franck

franck@svt.ntnu.no

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Introduction

In this article I explore day-care staff members' discussions and reflections on children regarding normality and deviance. Attention is placed on everyday conversations and interview statements regarding children with conduct and demeanour that deviates from what is perceived as 'normal' in the day-care context. The children in question evoke concern among the staff, but they have not (yet) been diagnosed as disabled or as having special needs. The article is based on a study of four Norwegian day-care units, where short-term fieldwork and in-depth interviews with staff members were conducted.

In recent years there has been a vast increase in the use of mapping materials such as standardized tests and evaluation forms to monitor and assess individual children in Norwegian day-care institutions (Østrem et al., 2009). Given the growing preoccupation with categorisation of children as having special needs or diagnoses in Norway and beyond (Hedegaard Larsen and Pøhler, 2009; Rose, 2006; Solli, 2012; Timimi, 2005), it seems timely to question whether ideas of what constitutes 'normal' have become narrowed. Normality and deviance are opposing concepts that depend on each other for meaning. However, they are in an asymmetrical relationship where the first (normality) is valued and, to a large extent, taken for granted, while the latter is degraded and scrutinized (cf. Bauman, 1991). How children's conduct is understood and what is regarded as 'normal' or 'deviant' is in this article understood as defined and limited by discourses (cf. Foucault, 1999; Hall, 2001). The analysis

illustrates how day-care staff members understand and evaluate children as deviating within a discourse of age and development, but also how their reflections on normality modify and question such understandings of children. I will first explore in what manner staff members explain why a child is perceived as deviating and how this is connected to discourses that inform policies and commonly used mapping materials. Then I analyse staff members' critical reflections on mapping materials, and how they relate to the concept of normality.

The Norwegian day-care field

In national policies and guidelines, there has been a recent increase in emphasis on formal learning, preparation for school, and early intervention (Arnesen, 2012). Pedagogical practices in Norwegian day-cares have traditionally merged education with caring practices, emphasizing well-being, joy, self-esteem, play, children's initiatives, and self-governed activities (Kjørholt and Qvortrup, 2012). However, the shift in focus has increased the attention towards children's individual skills and abilities, and encouraged documentation and standardized evaluations of children's development. The day-care field is seen as a key arena for discovering children's (presumed) special needs as early as possible (Mørland, 2008; St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). Early intervention is thought to be cost-effective because initiatives during pre-school age are assumed to have a strong impact on children's future education and participation in the labour market (St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). Mapping materials are used extensively to discover and document children's development related to particular capabilities (Østrem, et al., 2009). The number of children being evaluated and tested has grown rapidly with day-care institution's focus on early intervention and preparation for school in addition with the fact that now almost all children in Norway attend day-care (about 90%) (Statistics Norway, 2012). It has also been suggested that it be made mandatory for day-care centres to offer language testing for all three year olds (St. Meld. 41, 2008-2009). While children's development was previously evaluated to some extent in day-care centres, it was done informally and locally as part of everyday practices. A traditional focus that down-plays formal learning and emphasizes a here-and-now perspective is still strong in the day-care system, producing a contrast to the emphasis on early intervention and preparation

for school. Thus, there is some strain in terms of how to understand children and what to focus on in the day-care field. Day-care staff members have to manoeuvre between the focus on everyday life with all its complexities, shifts, and diversity and the responsibility of discovering special needs and mapping children's capabilities.

TRAS—the most commonly used mapping material

TRAS (Tidlig Registrering av Språk Utvikling - Early Registration of Language Development) is aimed at mapping and assessing language skills for two to five year old children. It is the most commonly used mapping material in Norway (Østrem, et al., 2009) and is also used in day-care institutions in Sweden and Denmark (Holm, 2010; The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2008). The mapping covers more than language skills, and includes the following themes: social interaction, communication, attention, language comprehension, language awareness, pronunciation, word production, and sentence production (my translation). Themes are divided in three age groups: 2–3 years, 3–4 years, or 4–5 years, with three questions aimed at each group. A registration form is used for documenting the 'results' of observations. This form shows a circle in the middle of a two-page spread that is surrounded by the themes and questions. The circle is divided into separate numbered spaces for each age group and the following questions. The questions are to be answered by the staff registering whether a child is capable, partly capable, or incapable. Staff members are expected to indicate ability or lack thereof by colouring the appropriate space of the circle completely, partly, or not at all. The same registration form is used on every evaluation, so previous registrations are visible when filling out new observations.

Theoretical approach

In line with Social studies of Children and Childhood, I regard understandings of children and what constitutes a 'normal' child as socially, historically, and culturally constructed (James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982). Hence, I do not regard there to be a universal or natural standard from which to describe and evaluate children; rather, I think it is necessary to analyse evaluations and descriptions of children as representations of children based on certain understandings and discourses. What

becomes perceived as 'normal' or 'deviant' is, in this article, understood as constructed in particular cultural and discursive contexts. Post-structural approaches within Disability Studies have influenced my starting point and understanding of deviance, special needs, and impairment as discursively constructed categories, and the importance of destabilizing ideas of normality (i.e., Allen, 2005; Campbell, 2009).

In the analysis presented below I explore how discourses contribute to constructions of deviance and understandings of normality, defining what is deemed acceptable and desirable. I draw on Foucault's (1999) meaning of discourse, which refers to that which makes statements meaningful and intelligible. Discourses construct the issue in focus, meaning that they define and limit what are acceptable and intelligible ways to talk, write, and conduct one's self in relation to a specific issue (Hall, 2001). In the institutional setting of the day-care, discursive practices produce a certain kind of knowledge about children that appears truthful (Neuman, 2001; Kjørholt, 2004). Knowledge is intertwined with power relations as it can constitute a 'truth' and have real effects when applied in practice (Hall, 2001; Foucault, 1980). Power can, however, be resisted and negotiated (Foucault, 1980). People may manoeuvre between several discourses circulating a field. While discourses may "delimit the sayable ... they do not imply a closure" (Henriques et al, 1998: 105). Children, normality, and deviance are not constructed by one single discourse, but rather by a variety of conflicting discourses (Kjørholt, 2004). In exploring day-care staff members' statements, I thus emphasise that their understandings are shifting and fluid (cf. Neuman, 2001; Henriques et al, 1998; Nilsen, 2012).

Method

The methodological approach of this study consisted of short-term fieldwork and in-depth interviews in four Norwegian day-care units. Semi-structured interviews, tape-recorded and fully transcribed (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), were conducted with 16 staff members, half of whom were from two toddler day-care units (age 1–3) and the other half of whom were from two units that cared for older children (age 3–5). In this article, the names of all staff members have been changed, and I have translated statements into English. The interviews included a variety of staff members: leaders,

assistants, pre-school teachers, special teachers, and child and youth workers. I asked them to talk about the children they were concerned about and who were considered to possibly have special needs. In particular, they were asked to elaborate on why they had concerns and to describe everyday situations. They were encouraged to talk freely, to let their stories unfold in order to produce elaborate and detailed descriptions (Staunæs and Søndergaard, 2005).

I also conducted participant observation for three months. I followed the staff, asked questions, and talked with them about the issues they raised. I took elaborate field notes, sometimes during the day, but mostly when the day was over. Participant observation allowed me to take part in everyday routines, staff meetings, activities with the children, and informal and spontaneous discussions with staff. Getting to know the staff and some of the children enhanced the quality of the interviews as I could ask more relevant questions and relate to their discussions. Further, I collected written documentation and mapping materials, which were also discussed during interviews. In analysing the data, I studied patterns within and between interviews and everyday conversations. I systematically investigated descriptions and stories that exemplified how and why a child was perceived as deviating. I explored the ways of reasoning used by staff, following these as clues to certain wider discourses and perspectives that provide validity and meaning to their statements (Wetherell, 1998). In the following section, I present analyses of statements that describe and explain deviance among children. I explore what kind of knowledge about children is produced and how it is connected to mapping material commonly used in day-care centres. Then I focus on staff members' critical reflections of mapping material and their divergent expressions and statements about children and normality.

Describing and discussing deviance

After daily interactions for months or years, staff members know the children they describe very well. However, when assessing a child, the knowledge they produce is limited to and defined by how they relate to various discourses and understandings of children and childhood. The manner in which they perceive a child is based on their assessment of that child in relation to socially constructed, accepted, and established

norms and standards. When a child's conduct raises concern regarding special needs or possible diagnoses, it is relative to ideas of normality and 'a normal child.' 'Normal' not only refers to what is understood as common and average, but also to what is perceived as acceptable and desirable (Turmel, 2008), thus descriptions of a child as 'normal' or not need to be seen not as mere observations, but rather valuations of that child (Rose, 1990).

The staff members in this study often described a child as different by referring to the child's conduct as 'not normal.' In other words, deviance was a departure from a perceived normality. A common statement and affirmation of deviance would be, "*it just isn't normal behaviour.*" Further, when describing daily situations to elaborate on why a child raised concern, the staff commonly used age as an explanatory factor. For instance, when staff member Ingvild described a girl she was concerned about because of her presumed delayed motor development, she stated:

And she still can't ride a tricycle, for example, to step on the pedals. And now she's, after all, she is four. (Yes, right.) Four and a half soon.

Ingvild described how the girl could not ride a tricycle despite being four years old. Attempting to explain her concern for the girl, Ingvild referred to the girl's age and inability to perform a specific activity (riding a tricycle). Her explanation does not make sense without being part of a discourse where norms of performance are linked to particular ages. Developmental discourses are common within the day-care field (Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi, 1994; Dahlberg et al., 1999) and in general, as age has played a fundamental part in how children and childhood is structured, understood, and perceived (James and James, 2008). Age is, in other words, a key conceptual device that has made it possible to establish norms despite variations between individuals (Rose, 1990). A developmental norm creates a standard based on ideas of the average age for children to perform particular tasks or activities (Rose, 1990). Thus, a child's unique development can be measured against that of a generalized child (James, 2004). A girl not being able to step on the pedals at four years old is, within this framework, thus understood to be failing to meet developmental expectations. In this way, the staff member operates within a discourse that defines

and delimits how to make sense of a child not stepping on tricycle pedals (cf. Hall, 2001), and a certain kind of knowledge is produced that contributes to classify the child (cf. Foucault, 1977). One could say an assessment of the child's conduct is used to evaluate whether the child is perceived as 'normal' or not.

As mentioned, national policies emphasise day-care centres as key arenas to find out if a child has special needs. 'Special needs' in children below school age is defined as a child having more extensive needs than is common for his or her age (NOU, 2012). In other words, national policies encourage the evaluation of children by comparing capabilities related to age and the further categorisation of some issues as 'deviant'. Hence, workers in the day-care field are guided into a certain way of perceiving and understanding children; they are told to evaluate children based on age and to separate some children as deviating from the rest. It is no surprise that day-care staff members in this study described children's conduct as deviating or 'not normal' by referring to age and development.

Another example of this line of thinking is when staff member Tone described her concerns about a child:

The play that is barely evolving now is the type of play that should perhaps have been there a year ago. [I] started to think of age-appropriate development and such things.

The notion of age-appropriate development calls for classification of children according to parameters and benchmarks related to pre-defined developmental and behavioural norms (cf. Turmel, 2008). This enables "the normality of any child to be assessed by comparison with this norm" (Rose, 1990: 146), thus producing knowledge about a child in a manner that measures and ranks him or her. When this is done, children's situations and conduct become objectified and possible to control, providing 'order' to the diversity of children (Turmel, 2008). Age and development standards provide a way for those in the field to manage children's "variability conceptually and [govern] it practically" (Rose, as cited in Turmel, 2008: 256). The governing or controlling of children's diversity can be seen as embedded in notions of

early intervention and is made visible by the mapping practices used to identify differences.

Mapping material and early intervention

The most commonly used mapping material (TRAS) registers how staff members understand children's capability to perform specific tasks or activities in relation to their age. In other words, the material registers how well a child lives up to adults' expectations of age and capability. The dominant perspective on children and childhood in TRAS is based on universal stages of 'normal development', perceived as hierarchical steps in a ladder (Report, 2011). Mapping practices are means to ensure a child's 'normal' development and actively promote certain capacities (cf. Rose, 1990). The techniques for documenting individual children in writing renders them subjects and objects possible to describe, judge, measure, and compare (cf. Foucault, 1977; Rose, 1990).

A central purpose behind mapping practices is to help staff become aware of children with special needs in order to initiate additional support. Intervening as early as possible is, as mentioned, presumed helpful to prevent future problems. For example, it is portrayed in a national white paper that delayed language development risks evolving in a negative spiral to reading and behavioural difficulties, low academic motivation and development, eventually dropping out of the educational system, and ending with low educated jobs or welfare (St. Meld. No. 16, 2006-2007). Early intervention is thus stressed as a cost-effective initiative (St. Meld. No. 16, 2006-2007). Mapping is said to be in the best interest of the child as a means to provide opportunities in school, and at the same time in the best interest of society by producing well-functioning adults. However, an alternative understanding is that mapping and evaluations are a means to discipline children and construct 'useful' individuals through an economically profitable exercise of power (cf. Foucault, 1977). Mapping materials can be understood to "document their [children's] uniqueness, to record it and classify it, to discipline their difference" (Rose, 1990: 135). Early intervention is targeted at children who fail to live up to adults' expectations, and differences become perceived as deficiencies or deviance that should be diminished

and reduced, or in other words disciplined by normalising practices. The kind of knowledge produced about a child in the mapping material can, as such, have explicit consequences for how day-care staff members treat that child. It can also have more undetectable and covert consequences; while not all mapping leads to special initiatives, the way children are described, represented, and categorised nevertheless has profound implications on how adults treat and act towards children (cf. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1998). Parents are also often presented with the mapping results of their child, which may evoke concern and encourage specific ways of dealing with presumed deficiencies and problems of their child. A child risks becoming a 'case' and, as such, being subjected to 'correctional activities' at home as well as in day-care institutions.

Day-care staffs' critical reflections on TRAS

In this study, two of the day-care units used TRAS on all the children twice a year before parent-staff meetings. The two other units used TRAS forms on the children they were particularly concerned about.

Many of the staff members in this study expressed reluctance and discontent with how observation and registration in the mapping material was used to represent a child. As one staff member put it, "*It isn't the truth written there.*" The knowledge about a child produced in the documentation was thus not necessarily perceived as 'truth' by the staff members. The circle in the middle of the TRAS registration form portrays a static image of a child that is constructed by day-care staff. Staff members are guided by the form to focus on certain aspects, generalizing and comparing children's conduct, and to register the results as the child being either capable, partly capable, or incapable. Staff members in this study reflected on how the material was based on their judgment of a child's conduct, and frequently expressed how they themselves were part of the knowledge constructed by the test. It was noted that particular adults provoked different types of conduct from a child, and that staff members, for example, had different levels of tolerance for noise and boisterous conduct. Thus the staff members reflected on how adult's different standards and relationships with a child influenced how that child was represented in the form. This

led the staff members to be highly critical of the common practice of sending a child's registration form to other units, schools, or external agents. One could say they were critical of using the TRAS form as knowledge and representation of a child, since they understood the results in the form to be context dependent. I would further interpret their reluctance as connected to how results registered in a form could change how a child becomes to be treated and acted towards.

In contrast to the shifting and elusive character of real lives, devices such as TRAS produce a stable image of a child (Rose, 1990). The forms simplify and reduce staff members' observations and understandings about diversity and make certain differences visible and notable (cf. Rose, 1990). The (partly) coloured circle on the TRAS form has a strong visual impact and reduces the complexity of lived experience to a well-arranged and ordered image. The complexity and uniqueness of the child is translated into an "ordered space of knowledge," and the child becomes "a knowable individual" (Rose, 1990:136). This stable image fixates individual differences, reduces complexity, and dismisses context, making it possible to describe, analyse, and classify the individual child.

Staff members, however, were critical about the validity of the knowledge produced and noted that questions were vague. One staff member, for example, referred to a question in the TRAS form and asked with a sigh, "*To keep a conversation over some time; what does that mean?*" By doing so, the staff member pointed at the ambiguity, in the absence of norms, of judging the child as either capable or incapable of keeping a conversation. As such, while the answers registered in TRAS represent a fixed, stable, and rigid picture of a child, the questions asked are open to interpretation as they are vague and intangible.

The classification of a child as deviating was in this study produced in terms of mapping material and taken for granted and implicit norms of age and development, nevertheless reflections by the staff members on the mapping forms, and further on normality and what constitutes a 'normal' child contributed to accentuation of nuances, context and complexity.

Constituting normality

Conceptions of normality have mainly developed from attention directed at children who worry courts, teachers, doctors, and parents (Rose, 1990: 123). In other words, studying deviance reflects perceptions of normality and the able (Campbell, 2009). By explaining how a child does not live up to expectations of normality, one implicitly defines expectations of what is perceived as 'normal'. When staff member Ingvild described a girl who was not stepping on the pedals of a tricycle at four years old as deviating, she simultaneously expressed expectations of a 'normal child' being able to step on pedals at that age. However, the expectation of normality based on age and development was left implicit and more or less taken for granted. Her explanation of the concern in relation to the girl's age was offered in a manner that suggested that I would understand the concern without further questions. She defined the deviance, but the reference point—the norm—remained unspoken. As mentioned, oppositional categories such as 'normal' and 'deviant' depend on each other for meaning, however they have an asymmetrical relationship, where 'normal' is privileged and deviance is degraded (cf. Bauman, 1991). When explicitly asked to define the essence of normality, the staff members in this study were quite reluctant. For instance, as the conversation with Ingvild continued, I asked her what would constitute 'normal' child conduct.

*Karianne: Yes. So when do they learn to step on the pedals? I have to ask —
(Laughs a bit).*

Ingvild: It varies a lot. It varies a lot.

Karianne: I don't know anything about those ages —

Ingvild: No — but — well, now, many do learn when they are three. But it varies a lot.

The conversation shifted from the staff being asked to describe deviance to being asked what is 'normal' (when a child should be able to step on the pedals). Ingvild stated "*it varies a lot,*" and I encouraged a more specific response by stating that I do

not know anything about those ages. Then, she (somewhat reluctantly) stated that many learn when they are three, but she continued to emphasise how it varies a lot. In other words, she referred to what could be seen as average and thus 'normal,' but introduced the aspect of variety. When asked to explain what is 'normal,' she seemed apprehensive about giving too rigid an answer and rather emphasised diversity among children. Looking back to her statement about deviance, she described quite specifically that not being capable of stepping on pedals is 'not normal' and relied on the discourse and understanding of children developing skills according to age in her explanation. In contrast, when being asked what is 'normal' and expected, she modified her focus on age appropriate development and emphasized variety ("*it varies a lot*"). Trying to describe the essence of what is 'normal,' or able, is often more challenging than describing deviance. The able, or norm, can be said to have an elusive core, and trying to define it often ends up in circular reductionism by stating what it is not (Campbell, 2009).

Emphasizing diversity and complexity

The staff member in the above example emphasized that the age when children should be able to step on tricycle-pedals varies a lot, which I see as a shift from a discourse of age and development to one that values diversity and normalises individual differences. In this study, the idea of differences as 'normal'—thus not something to be concerned about—was accentuated in everyday conversations and interviews. Frequently, the staff members would say "*— but children are all so different.*" With such statements, they established difference or diversity as 'normal.' Often this was uttered right after having discussed a child as deviating or lagging according to what is considered age-appropriate development, hence possibly contradicting the entire reasoning behind previous statements of deviance. I never observed any questioning of the contradiction in the statements, nor was the idea of children being different as 'normal' elaborated on or explained in my presence. Rather, the statements seemed expected and accepted, and its content taken for granted. Seeing how normality's boundaries can be elusive and vacuous (Campbell, 2009), the manner in which staff established diversity as 'normal' without further explanation can be seen as avoiding the issue of delimitation and establishing

boundaries of normality. As mentioned, age and developmental standards order children's diversity (Turmel, 2008), and mapping materials reduce the complexity of real lives into well-arranged material forms (Rose, 1990). When staff members emphasize the diversity and complexity of children (as 'normal'), they imply that children 'in reality' — without being subject to standards and norms — are diverse, impossible to compare, and unique.

The staff also expressed in gestures that standards and norms should not be understood as firmly set or as 'truth.' For example, they consistently used quotation marks and bodily language. In a staff meeting, I observed a staff member say, "*She is still lagging 'four months behind'*" while gesturing quotation marks with his hands. In this way, he expressed his concern for the girl by referencing her age in connection to expectations of development. At the same time, his use of quotation marks modified and indicated his reservation of his own categorisation. During an informal conversation, a staff member stated:

The movements he makes aren't as good as for an ordinary five year old — I mean ordinary in quotation marks, you know.

The "*you know*" at the end of the sentence was in other instances expressed by staff members by a particular tone of voice, a look, or form of body language. The staff members thus categorised based on age and development, however, they also drew attention to the limitations of such knowledge by modifying rigidity in conceptions of normality. The use of quotation marks can be related to a kind of postmodern practice where there has been a considerable use of quotation marks as a way to emphasize a critical positioning or to point to certain phenomena as social constructions rather than natural characteristics (Papastephanou, 1999; Saraga, 1998). The use of body language can be understood as softening and modifying the stable and fixed image of a child produced by evaluations of age and development.

Questioning normality

During an interview staff member Mari said:

But what — I ask myself this question every day, what is normal then? (Yes, yes) Yes. (It's a terribly difficult question). Yes. Because there is no correct answer to what's normal. Are we supposed to make like, like, ideal children who are all alike? (Yes.) Or shall we be allowed to be different? That is, I think children should be able to be different.

Mari takes an explicitly critical stance and questions the notion of normality when she argues that there is no correct answer to what constitutes 'normal'. She does not draw on the same understandings of children having special needs and childhood as related to age and development. Rather she challenges the knowledge of 'a normal child' and the notion of measurable standards of normality. Tenets of developmental psychology have for some time been subjected to challenge both from within psychology (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1998), and by other academic fields such as Social studies of Children and Childhood (Jenks, 1982; James and Prout, 1997; Prout, 2005). The day-care staff members' reasoning and critical comments on normality and childhood thus connect to different academic perspectives that have challenged the ideas of development and age that previously dominated the field of childhood research. Mari also questioned the day-care practice of making "*ideal children who are all the like.*" Thus, she can be understood to question the disciplining practices (cf. Foucault, 1977) of early intervention and the trend to reduce differences among children.

Mari's explicit critical remark illustrates how many day-care staff members were apprehensive about and highly reflexive in regards to mapping material and the focus on evaluation. The recent developments within the day-care field — an increased focus on preparation for school, special needs, and evaluation — have produced widespread mapping practices and critical reflection and resistance at the same time. This is, at times, expressed in the same sentence as staff members manoeuvre and draw upon different discourses and understandings of children and childhood.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to explore how day-care staff describe and reflect on deviance and normality in relation to children they were concerned about. When analysing staff members' statements I have not intended to investigate what they perceive as 'normal' and not, but rather to explore underlying frameworks for understanding normality and deviance. Seeing how day-care children are more than ever before monitored, tested, and categorised, I have wanted to highlight how constructions of deviance are based on values and ideas of normality. I have also aimed to show how children's differences are constructed as deficiencies and deviance when measured against certain norms and standards. The article points to how mapping practices reduce the complexity of real life to a stable image of a child, thus producing knowledge that makes it possible to measure, judge, and compare children (cf. Rose, 1990; Foucault, 1977). The article also aims to illustrate how day-care staff members are reluctant about and resist rigid and fixed descriptions and evaluations of children by focusing on diversity, thus opening up the boundaries of what constitutes a 'normal child'.

In the first section, I explored how day-care staff members relate to norms and standards of age and development when describing and explaining their concerns for a child. This is connected to the ways in which mapping practices and notions of 'early intervention' and 'special needs' encourage and define certain type of knowledge and understanding of children's normality related to age and development. Day-care staff members thus operate within a discourse that provides a specific and limited way to make sense of children's conduct. However, in the second section of the analysis, I emphasized how staff members are also critical about mapping and at times reluctant to define normality. They often acknowledge diversity among children. Following the staff members' statements about normality, I illustrated how drawing a fixed line or boundary between what is perceived as 'normal' and what not, is somewhat resisted and avoided by the staff. The focus is on a pattern in their discussions and descriptions of deviance that relate to a taken for granted and implicit idea of normality as ages and stages, while confronting the issue of normality makes the staff emphasize diversity and variety as 'normal' and express

critical reflections on the idea of a 'normal child.' I connected this to the asymmetrical relationship between 'normal' and 'deviant' (Bauman, 1991) and stressed how exploring normality reveals its elusiveness (Campbell, 2009). When children's deviance is systematized and categorised, for example by mapping practices and diagnoses, understandings of normality seems to be tacit and taken for granted. However, when day-care staff members are encouraged to reflect on normality, they open up the boundaries between the oppositions in critical reflections and an emphasis on diversity. Thus I ask if a shift from monitoring and searching for deviance in children towards more critically examining the implicit and taken for granted constitutions of normality might offer more space, acceptance and tolerance for children's differences.

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Article 2

In-between competence

Adult expectations of children in Norwegian day-care centres

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In-between competence

Adult expectations of children in Norwegian day-care centres

Karianne Franck

Randi Dyblie Nilsen

There is a growing practice in day-care institutions in Norway and other Nordic countries to monitor, identify, and categorize individual children (Arnesen, 2012; Andersen, 2009), and political documents stress the importance of discovering special needs and early intervention (St.meld.nr. 16, 2006-2007; St.meld.nr. 18, 2010-2011). These new policies and practices of evaluating individual children in institutional settings can be seen as part of a contemporary international trend of diagnosing and labelling children (James & James, 2004). Based on interviews and fieldwork in Norwegian day-care institutions, we explore how day-care staff members understand and evaluate children is connected to the discourse of competent child. In the Nordic welfare society, the discourse of competent child informs how children are expected to behave, leading those who fail to meet certain expectations of competence to be considered a problem — as not competent (Brembeck et al, 2004; Kampmann, 2004). In this article we present an analysis of staff members' descriptions and practices related to children who are suspected of, but not yet defined with, possible impairments and special needs. Thus the children are positioned in that debatable and indistinct space between normality and deviance.

In Norway there is an increase of policies and practices that aim to promote the discovery of children with special needs [Norwegian - særskilte behov] as early as possible (in the day-care institutions and elsewhere). However, we point at how this “discovery” is context-bound, cultural dependent, value-based, and intertwined with ideas of children and childhood. In line with Social Studies of Children and Childhood (Jenks, 2005; Prout, 2011; Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012a), we find it necessary to pay attention to the local, contextual understanding and practices in those places where social constructions of children and childhood occur (Nilsen, 2008, 2012; James & James, 2004). In this article we explore how understandings of

children are informed by expectations and characteristics of a competent child in Norwegian day-care institutions.

Current practices and policies in day-care institutions

Norwegian early childhood has become highly institutionalized the last few years; in 2011, close to 90% of children aged one to five attended day-care institutions, with a large increase in children age one to two (Statistics Norway, 2012). It is vindicated by Norwegian law that disabled children have priority, there are very few segregated day-care institutions and every institution has the responsibility to accommodate *all* children (Tøssebro & Lundeby, 2002). There is a long tradition in Norwegian day-care centres to emphasize play, social relations, and community. However, recent policies demand a stronger focus on preparation for school (Arnesen, 2012). Nature and being outdoors in all kinds of weather has deep roots in Norwegian day-care history and continues to be seen as important (Korsvold, 1998; Nilsen, 2008). In the institutions visited in this study, daily routine starts with breakfast, then a free play period indoors or in the playground. The children have lunch around 11.30 a.m., followed by an outdoor nap (in strollers) or quiet time indoors. Then the children have a snack before playing indoors or outdoors again. In between free play periods, there are activities such as circle time, drawing, reading, and singing. Day-care staff members also organize field-trips, often into the woods, to the library, or to other day-care units. Most of the day is dedicated to free play, as children's own initiative, participation, and freedom to choose are highly valued (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012b). The described routines concur with daily practices in other day-care institutions in Norway (e.g. Seland, 2011).

In Nordic countries, there is a move towards policies and practices that are already widespread elsewhere. In the UK for example, a discourse of risk and protection prevails: “the being of the child in the present has to be safeguarded against risk in order to protect the future adult s/he will become” (James & James, 2008: 112). Neo-liberal politics that are based on a view of young children and education as investments in the children's own and the nation's future are now praised as valuable and as contributing to lifelong learning, which is a recent concept within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy and practice (for a further discussion of this, see Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012a). This context is an important backdrop for the discussion as to how the discourse of competent child is descriptive —

indeed; some children may fail to live up to the expectations this discourse implies (Brembeck et al, 2004).

The study

In this study, individual interviews with staff members and participant observation in Norwegian day-care institutions were carried out (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Field-notes were made and interviews transcribed. Sixteen staff members participated; some worked in a unit for children aged 3–6, others in a unit for toddlers aged 1–3. In the semi-structured interviews, staff members were encouraged to describe and reflect on children who raised concern regarding their conduct and demeanour. Further, in an attempt to produce inspiring dialogues with detailed stories and unfinished reflections (cf. Søndergaard, 1999), they were asked to elaborate on and offer examples and concrete descriptions of everyday experiences. Three months of fieldwork supplement the interview data with a richer context and understanding. The day-care staff consisted predominately of pre-school teachers, teacher assistants (with and without relevant education), and special educators.

Field-notes on staff members' everyday talk, informal discussions, and interview-data are analysed in reference to the discourse of competent child. We draw on Foucault's (1999) concept of discourses as defining what is accepted as meaningful and what makes sense to say and do. Indeed, discourses govern the way something can be put into practice (Hall, 2001). A discourse of competent child can thus be seen as producing possibilities and limitations on how to understand and act towards children. We apply the theoretical concept of subject positioning to understand how children are constructed within discourses (Nilsen, 2012; Neumann, 2001; Henriques et al, 1998). While being aware that children also position themselves and participate in constructing discourses and institutions (Markström & Halldén, 2009), this study concentrates on the positioning of children by adults as adults have the power to define, pinpoint, and act on children.

The children in this study can be seen as not fitting into a priori categories and become positioned similar to what Bauman calls: 'not-yet-classified' (1991, p.57). In other words, they inhabit a grey area that is unknown but that *can* be known. In the following we draw on the interviews to illuminate how some children do not live up to expectations of norms related to the competent child discourse. Evaluations of children in the day-care centres are thus

explored in reference to how certain commonly accepted norms and standards are imposed on the individual child (i.e. Cannella, 1999).

In analysing the data, we searched for what is included and excluded (Søndergaard, 2002) when a child is positioned in the space between what is perceived as normal and deviant. We explore how some ways of being and behaving are excluded while others become selected and generalised as characteristics that contribute to the categorization of children. In other words, how certain behaviours in certain contexts are converted to inherent individual qualities. As such, competence is in this article understood ‘not as a psychological property of an individual but as relational and constitution or attribution that is socially constructed and negotiated’ (Christensen, 1998, p.189).

The departure of this article is the discourse of competent child in day-care institutions in a Nordic welfare state where this discourse serves as a descriptive category.

There seems to be at least two main conceptualizations of the competent child. One draws mainly on discourses of human rights and presents a kind of universal child who has the right to be met with respect no matter what age or how s/he performs his/her competence. The other understanding takes its point of departure in a specific setting, the Nordic welfare state, wherein the child’s competence is carefully – though not necessarily explicitly – described. [...] A consequence of this latter definition of the competent child is that not all children are competent. Competence is something that one needs to qualify for [...] (Brembeck et al, 2004, p.21-22)

The discourse of competent child is fundamental to and highly celebrated in the policies and practices, homes, schools, and day-care institutions in Nordic countries (Brembeck et al, 2004). Social studies of children and childhood has been on the frontlines of child-centred scientific thinking, forging a view of children as competent social beings of value in the present, not just as future school-children or adults (Qvortrup, 1994; Thorne, 1987). Such a view was a hallmark of Nordic countries (Kjørholt, 2002) long before it was suggested as a new paradigm in international research (James & Prout, 1997). The long-standing and strong commitment to child-centeredness is evident for example in schooling, day-care, the law, and social institutions (Kjørholt, 2002).

In the following analysis, we will outline and discuss some important expectations related to what being a competent child might mean in the institutional and cultural context of Norwegian day-care centres. Further, we attend to ways in which these expectations influence how children are positioned and categorized.

Expectations of being social

There is a strong expectation in Norwegian day-care centres for children to be *social and active*, which is apparent both in this study and in other studies in Nordic countries (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012; Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Ellegaard, 2004). With deep roots in history, an emphasis on social competence pervades the policies and practices in Norwegian early childhood education and care (Korsvold, 1998; St.meld.nr. 16, 2006-2007). It is therefore not surprising that the most common concern of staff members in our study pertained to children perceived as not managing social relations and situations as well as expected. What are considered acceptable ways of being social is highly cultural and context dependent, generally as well as in relation to the immediate context of an institution for young children.

This study illuminates the strong expectations of getting along with peers, which is in line with the emphasis, routines, and practices that the Norwegian (and Nordic) ECEC both historically and currently put on the importance of peer interaction (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012; Korsvold, 1998). Thus a child for example uninterested in other children caused great concern. When staff members described children they perceived as not coping well socially, they typically emphasized *a child's unwillingness to share space or toys, conflicts with peers, being too passive, or being too abrupt or dominating*. Shortly, children are expected and wanted to react with fluidity to peers. One of the staff members described concerns about a four-year-old boy who breaks with expected normalcy in his peer-interactions. First she tells that the day-care has not received any reports or diagnosis on the boy, but that they wonder about his behaviour.

Staff: We do not know what it is, but we sort of know that there is something.

Karianne: Yes. What do you react to?

Staff: Well, it's sort of behavioural I guess. (Yes) There is some language issues and such ... but ... [I] can say we, we react because, cause it isn't ... normal behaviour really, right.

Karianne: If I had arrived to the unit, in what way what would I have noticed?

Staff: [He] likes to confront other children, related to making noises and — la la la la la (I see). Goes up to other children so that they'll get irritated and angry ... pushing and shoving. (Okay). You cannot trust him because if he has a stone, like, then there is no hindrance to hit or throw it. Right? (No) So he has to be watched very carefully.

Confronting other children, making noises, aggravating, provoking and angering other children, pushing and shoving, to hit or throw stones are given as examples of what is regarded as not normal behaviour by the staff member. The staff member first establishes the boy as different from other children by emphasizing that despite there being no formal report or diagnosis; they *know* that there is something to be concerned about. But they *do not know what it is*, hence the boy becomes positioned in-between normality and deviance, and as *not-yet-classified* (Bauman, 1991). When asked to elaborate on what staff members react to, she indicates that his behaviour is not normal. In other words, the perception of the boy as different is based on a general evaluation of his behaviour as deviating. When requested to be more specific, the staff member gives examples of his behaviour with peers. Thus, breaking with expectations of social competence in the context of peer-relations is part of a more general assessment of the boy as not displaying normal behaviour, which legitimizes his position as different and not competent. The boys' behaviour among peers thus becomes generalised as a characteristic or individual flaw.

Language and verbal communication

In terms of peer conflicts and constructions of a social child, adult expectations in this study included that children should be able to *express themselves and their feelings verbally* and/or ask for help from the adults. (cf. Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008; Nilsen, 2008; Ellegaard, 2004).

In one interview, a staff member described and explained why she is concerned about a four-year-old boy who has great language skills, but hits other children during play and gets into conflicts with peers. *So there is some poor communication then, maybe. (Yes) [He] isn't very good at — sort of — using words to express what he feels. (Yes) He is good at — he knows the alphabet, for example. (Yes) But he can't say, "now I'm angry".* The boy fulfils adult expectations regarding language skills, but does not live up to expectations of how to communicate verbally. This causes concern since it is expected of children to be able to reflect and communicate their feelings in words; not only to staff members but also to peers. A common social rule that is communicated to and by children in Norwegian day-care centres reflects this expectation: you shall not hit but talk (Nilsen, 2000). In line with recent policies, early education practice has put an emphasis on individual children's language (Nygård & Korsvold, 2009). The boy above is perceived as competent in certain language skills, but in-

competent in adequate use of language for communicating. When explaining her concerns for the child's abilities the staff member chose to exemplify what was considered 'not normal' by describing the latter. As such, the extract illustrates how not fulfilling expectations of communicating verbally with expected competence contributes to position a child as deviating from what is considered normal.

Learning to be social the 'right way'

The expectation of children being social in particular ways is in tune with a range of recurrent practices observed during fieldwork. Sharing objects and space and/or taking turns were emphasized in different situations. For instance, toddlers were taught to take turns and share by passing fruit around the table. In relation to a child perceived as lacking social skills staff would also stay close and help her/him along with suggestions on what to do next or to explain playful actions. They expressed the importance of working in groups and of not singling out a particular child. However, in some cases the adult played with the child just one on one to teach the child desirable play conducts. For example, if the child showed an interest in cars, the adult would pretend to also want one of the cars in order to teach the child to share. And further, while the child might only 'drive' back and forth, the adult would initiate role-play and for example suggest that they should 'drive to the store to buy groceries'. Sometimes an adult formed a small group to initiate play in a separate space, including a particular child together with a few selected children. The staff thus tried to teach children specific skills to enable the child to meet expectations of social competence.

Expectations of being active

In conjunction with expectations of being social, there are expectations of children being active in a particular way. As mentioned, a substantial part of the daily schedule in Norwegian (and Nordic) day-care institutions is *free play*, in which the children are expected to be actively involved in child initiated play and other activities. The staff in our study expressed concern about children who they felt did not manage the free play context, mostly because of the way they engaged. This is exemplified in the following excerpt, which also illustrates how expectations are related to specific situations.

Staff: And so she has concentration, or [...] she has very little calm.

Karianne: Do you have any examples on situations where you notice this then?

Staff: Yes, meals are great, and circle times are also great, really. (Yes) So it isn't maybe those kinds of situations. But it is mostly in the free play that she ... that she sort of just drifts, and can't sit down with an activity and play.

This staff member describes the girl as different, emphasizing that “she has very little calm”. However, when the staff member is asked in what situations this is noticeable, she first establishes how the girl fulfils expectations during meals and circle time. In other words, she is perceived as competent in those adult-structured situations, but not in the context of free play. Thus the position as different is legitimized by the girl not being perceived as *properly active* during free play. She is drifting and does not concentrate on playing or sitting down with an activity. A competent child on the other hand should occupy him/herself with an activity, preferably with other children, and not “drift” during free play (Ellegaard, 2004; Palludan, 2005). While being active is expected of the children, it is important to be calm as well. To drift purposelessly is perceived as being active in a negative way. Free play provides children with opportunities to interact and play with limited interferences from staff, but play also includes regulatory aspects in the institutional setting (cf. Ailwood, 2003; Nilsen, 2000). In this study some children were categorized as different because they were considered to move about *too much* (Franck, forthcoming).

Free play allows for children's self-governed activities, the children are expected to control their voices and physical movement to a certain degree indoors. But during adult guided situations like circle time it is demanded to sit quiet and calm on chairs (or the floor), and the girl discussed above met these expectations which is quite common for children to struggle with (Nilsen, 2000).

Expectations of being independent

Gullestad (1997, p.32) points out that ‘independence has long been a key notion with much rhetorical force in the upbringing of children, as well as in many other contexts in Norway’. Being able to, learning how to, and to actually perform practical tasks and fend for one's self in daily situations is expected of the children in day-care institutions (e.g., Nilsen, 2008; Seland, 2011; Alasuutari & Markström, 2011). Staff members expect even very young children to eat and drink by themselves (without too much mess), climb up to be seated in

high chairs, or get into their strollers. Such expectations became apparent particularly when unmet and in references to the staff's observations of parents' actions:

He was two years old this summer. So he's nearly two and a half. (Yes) And he's spoon-fed. (Yes) Usually, if it's porridge and such things, if its bread then they [the parents] put tiny pieces of bread in his mouth. [The parents] even lift his glass when he is going to drink no less — so one could just be a nestling then...

The parents' practices towards their child are implicitly presented as a negative contrast to staff members' practices. The staff member is discontent with the way the parents feed the child, and compares the boy to a nestling: dependent and passive. Being able to eat and drink without help is a practical task and accomplishment highly valued by the staff in this study, and complies with an expectancy of children as independent and self-managing in Nordic day-care institutions (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Gulløv, 2008). This was e.g. apparent during lunch, where toddlers were given knives to put spread of their own choice on bread. Encouraging self-governance some day-care units emphasized children's choice to eat breakfast and play or go outside on their own initiative. Kjørholt (2005) even points to self-governance of changing diapers in a Danish day-care.

Independence is also expected in other daily practices, as illustrated in the following. The staff member reflects on how parents' busy daily lifestyles impact children's development:

What I think has been typical, what I think has become more and more the last few years, and ends up badly effecting the child's development, it can be a bit like, now we have several [children] that I might want to call under-stimulated. (Yes. Right) I do not think there necessarily has to be anything wrong with the child (No, no) that makes the child lagging behind or not managing or not understanding...

Karianne: What in a way- are you thinking ... they should have been?

Staff: Well, to make it easier to understand, so maybe children who are carried till they're two years old — that are lifted up and down from chairs, sofas, in and out of cars...

Karianne: So you notice it here when they arrive at the day-care centre?

Staff: Yes. Pretty much. They can be a bit careful... a bit clumsy children. (Yes) Children who, yes, tumble a lot, who don't have the energy to walk a lot. (Yes) Maybe they cannot climb up their chairs when they are one and a half, two years.

Paralleling the comment on parents' feeding practices, the lifting and carrying of children are negatively evaluated. The consequences of such practices are described as producing under-stimulated children who lag behind on physical control, skills, and energy (being careful, clumsy, tumbling, lacking energy, and trouble getting onto chairs). In contrast to what they say about parental practices, the staff members encourage independence of children; handling situations without help, to walk as much as possible, and to avoid lifting or carrying the child (cf. Nilsen, 2008). Expectations of being independent in everyday life contribute to the categorization of certain children as different: under-stimulated and lagging behind.

Expectations of being flexible

The daily schedule of day-care institutions involves several transitions during which children have to move across place, activity, and social compositions (Seland, 2011; Nilsen, 2000). For example, there are transitions between free play and lunchtime, and getting dressed in the cloakroom and going outdoors. It is expected that the children are flexible and (learn how to) handle transitions easily (Brown, 2007). In our study, failing to meet expectations of being flexible in transition situations was related to difference.

Staff: He has a behaviour that we wonder about. Yes... One might think: Are there some autistic traits here, or is it something else? Or is it just that he is immature in some aspects? We don't know.

Karianne: Where; in what situations do you notice it?

Staff: But it is like he...what is difficult for him, is all transition situations. (Yes) Then he yells. He yells intensely. (I see) Yes. And he can act out, he pushes and pinches and yells. Uses his yelling immensely.

Yelling intensely, pushing, and pinching are all perceived as improper ways to behave, and the staff member says that this behaviour emerges during transitions. Within an institutional context, children are required to be flexible and manage transitions well. In the above excerpt, the staff member wonders if the conduct of the boy is an autistic trait, which would then categorize him as different. Alternatively, in drawing upon a developmental frame — although still undesirable — the behaviour might be understood as immature, in which case the boy is perceived as normal and expected to mature and become more flexible. For now, the boy is positioned as in-between; being understood as inflexible means that a child is not fulfilling the expectations the day-care institution has of children.

Concluding remarks

Children are often busy and preoccupied with their own projects when they are required to stop for a new situation. The boy who responded with intense yelling during transitions could be viewed as an agent who performed resistance. Resistance points to children as competent subjects and acknowledges their agency in relation to implicit and explicit control (Nilsen, 2000, 2009). Restlessness during circle time might also be interpreted as non-verbal and implicit resistance (Nilsen, 2000, p.226). Perhaps the adult organized situations are carried out in a non-appealing way, thus legitimizing children's disinterest.

Alternative understandings of children's conduct might forge reflexivity among adults who work with children, and we argue that this is of particular importance in light of the recent emphasis on monitoring, documenting, and testing individual children in day-care institutions.

In this article, we have presented an analysis of central expectations of children as competent in Norwegian day-care institutions. We have illustrated the strong expectation of children to act with adequate social and communicative competence, of particular importance in peer-relations. We exemplified how expectations of an active child subject during free play is framed by limitations and how expectations of being independent by self-managing daily routines and being flexible during transitions is expected as part of the institutional order.

In sum, we have attended to that in the context of Nordic day-care institutions it is presupposed that all children have certain competences (Ellegaard, 2004; Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Gilliam & Gulløv, 2012), and that there is a downside for children who do not meet the requirements, as they are at risk to be categorized as deviant. While children are active participants in constructing their everyday life, there is an institutional and generational order in the day-care institution, with a demand of a well-functioning institution (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Gilliam & Gulløv 2012). Criteria and expectations of assessing and categorising children are thus related to an institutional order with its rules, norms, practices, and routines (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011). International and recent neo-liberal influences emphasising documentation in day-care institutions through standardized tests and assessments tools substantiate a specific understanding of normality. We question the risk and consequences of this relatively new trend, which may contribute to understanding the competent child as a standard or norm for evaluation.

Framed by a discourse of competent child as well as more recent emphasis on assessment and early intervention, we have explored how expectations in this institutional context contribute to construct some children as different with a focus on positionings of some children as in-between and not-yet-classified. Day-care staff frequently mentioned that they had not figured out what is wrong with a child *yet*. An urge to categorize and search for diagnosis was often explained by staff members as based on a need to know how to behave correctly towards the child. This relates to Bauman's words: 'To understand ... is to know how to go on' (1991, p.56). Indeed, a position of not-yet-classified is an uncomfortable position to deal with (Bauman, 1991).

Based on staff members' descriptions and reflections, our analysis points to how expectations of competence in specific situations evaluate a child in relation to constructions of normality and categorisation of difference. Despite the context dependency of their expectations, the staff members' practices and evaluations were mostly directed at the individual child and hers/his perceived inherent skills. Hence, it is the individual child who is viewed as flawed in some way. This separates the conduct of children from the actual context, and we suggest that such an understanding relies on a conceptualisation of a unitary and static individual (Henriques et al, 1998). Alternatively, one can understand children's actions and conduct as entangled and inseparable from context, thus emphasising a more relational perspective where children (and adults) are understood in a non-static mood, with possibilities to shift between positions of context-bound competence and incompetence (Prout, 2005; Kjørholt, 2005; Lee, 1999). In other words, a conceptualisation of shifting subject positions (Henriques et al, 1998) in diverse situations and contexts opens up new understandings and reflections, which might benefit both children and the adults who work with them on a daily basis, as well as policy makers and the research community.

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Article 3

Excluding to include:

Exploring a process of constructing children as impaired in the Norwegian day-care setting

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Excluding to include: Exploring a process of constructing children as impaired in the Norwegian day-care setting

Karianne Franck

Introduction

Norwegian policies and legislations are typically based on a relational understanding of disability that emphasises society's responsibility to break down social barriers and create social institutions that are accommodating to everyone. In other words, there is a focus on how "to change the environment to fit people with impairments" (Tøssebro 2004, 3). At the same time however, the Norwegian welfare and educational systems require medical and psychiatric diagnoses to facilitate individuals with impairments. Defining and diagnosing children is thus seen as a crucial first step in order to create equal opportunities and inclusion within the educational system. Day-care institutions are perceived as key arenas for the discovery of children with special needs and impairments (St. Meld. 16 2006-2007; St. Meld. 18 2010-2011; Mørland 2008) as about 90 % of all children in Norway aged 1-5 attend day-care (Statistics Norway 2012). Accompanying the increased focus on discovering special needs is an extreme growth in practices aimed to monitor and evaluate day-care children (Østrem et al 2009). This article explores how day-care children's deviations or impairments are not *discovered*, but rather *constructed*. Based on interviews and short-term fieldwork in four day-care units, I analyse staff members' statements as constructing what they set out to describe (Foucault 1999; Hall 2001). My starting point is that impairment is a discursive construction (Hughes and Paterson 1997, 329) rather than a value-neutral description. Descriptions of children's deviance are thus understood as prescriptions (Tremain 2002), and impairment as something *added* to a child (Allen 2005, 94).

The article focuses on descriptions of three boys who raised concern since their conduct and demeanour was perceived as deviant. The analysis reveals how staff members discursively construct the boys as deviant and different from other children by using concepts and expressions related to culturally informed ideas about what constitutes a normal child and a proper childhood in Norway.

Norwegian day-care institutions and understandings of disability

There has never been a widespread use of segregated day-care institutions in Norway, and it was vindicated by law in 1975 that disabled children have priority when in need of day-care (Tøssebro and Lundeby 2002). Day-care institutions have thus been a central arena for inclusion processes, and it is stated in national white papers that they should offer all children, no matter their individual ability or background, good developmental and learning opportunities (St. Meld. no. 18 2010–2011). As such, day-care centres are preoccupied with being inclusive arenas without social/environmental barriers. At the same time however, day-care staff members have a responsibility to discover special needs (Mørland 2008), which entails a focus on assessing individuals' possible deviations from a pre-established norm. While external authorities formally label children as having special needs and diagnoses⁸¹, day-care staff members are often the first ones to raise concern about possible deviations and impairments. The preoccupation with discovering special needs is inextricably linked to ideals of creating inclusive institutions. Somewhat simplified, the idea is that if one discovers and defines children's deviations, the institutions can adjust and take measures to better achieve equal opportunities and inclusion. One could say many inclusion measures rely on the logic: "Changing what is wrong with society, [...] implies finding out what is 'wrong' with the people in it" (Grue 2010, 169). In other words, producing inclusive day-care institutions requires first the establishment of what is 'wrong' with some children. Hence, the focus on individual deviations comes first, and social aspects become secondary.

This represents a paradox, since the intent is to move away from a focus on the individual as deviant and to emphasise the environment and society as disabling. For example, stairs are disabling for people who cannot walk. Hence, an environment that contains stairs is disabling because it does not accommodate people who cannot walk. This perspective is characteristic for a relational model of disability, which is typically relied on in Nordic countries (Tøssebro 2004). A relational understanding sees disability as a "gap between individual functioning and societal/environmental demands" (Tøssebro 2004, 4). In addition, Nordic countries are influenced by the social model of disability, and the conceptual divide

⁸¹ For example; The Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT), and the Habilitation services for children and youth. (Habilitation is defined as the same as rehabilitation, but is the preferred term in regards to children and youth, and indicates that one was born with a condition).

between ‘impairment,’ which is defined as an individual’s biomedical condition, and ‘disability,’ which is identified as the social barriers and oppression of people with impairments (arguing for a sole focus on disability) (Oliver 1990). Both a relational and social model of disability thus shift attention away from a biomedical perspective—which focuses on the individual condition (impairment)—towards disabling social accounts.

The paradox arises when a focus on individual impairment or deviation is treated as primary or as more fundamental than social issues—despite an acceptance of relational/social models. This paradox can be seen as related to the un-theorized and taken for granted notions of individuals with biomedical impairments that are often embedded in social/relational perspectives. In addition, the frequent use of concepts distinguishing between the individual biomedical condition (impairment) and the social/environmental issues confronting an individual with impairment (disability) is not as straightforward as it appears, as these concepts are inextricably interconnected (Shakespeare 2006). Based on this, a focus on social aspects becomes difficult without first recognising an individuals’ impairment. The conceptual divide can thus be seen as contributing to impairment being perceived as more fundamental than disability, as one cannot define the latter without the first.

With a critical view on the practices scrutinizing, testing, and categorising day-care children as possibly deviant and impaired, I thus find it beneficial to look to post-structural approaches that destabilize ideas of impairment and individuals’ inherent qualities.

Theoretical position

This article is influenced by post-structural perspectives on disability/impairment, in particular the growing field of Critical Disability Studies (Goodley 2012; Shildrick 2012; Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009; Tremain 2005). In addition, I draw on Social Studies of Children and Childhood⁸² (James and Prout 1997; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Jenks 1982); an interdisciplinary research field that emerged in the 1980s and that grew rapidly in (Northern) Europe. Social Studies of Children and Childhood established itself by challenging previous understandings of children and childhood as natural and universal phenomena (James and Prout 1997). The field contains diverse approaches that focus on childhood as a social structure, children’s agency, participation, and post-structural orientations (Alanen 2001).

⁸² Also known as Sociology of Childhood.

With an emphasis on children and childhood as socially and culturally constructed, the field provides a platform for critically examining established notions and dominant cultural ideas and norms (e.g., Nilsen 2008; Jenks 1982). There has not been a vast amount of research combining Social Studies of Children and Childhood within Disability Studies. However, arguments to connect the fields started in the late 1990s (Priestley 1998; Shakespeare and Watson 1998), and the combination has among other things provided emphasis on disabled children's voices (Davis and Watson 2001; 2002) and reconceptualization of disabled children (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010; 2011).

In this article, the fields are interconnected as the analysis explores how cultural and local ideas of children and childhood intersect with constructions of deviance and impairment. Drawing on Social studies of children and childhood perspectives highlight how ideas of what constitutes a normal child are socially and culturally informed (rather than universal or natural), which is useful in order to explore how some children become constructed as the opposite of a perceived normal, namely deviant and impaired.

Stating that children, normality, impairment, and deviance are socially and discursively constructed invites a critical stance towards taken-for-granted definitions and understandings (Hacking 1999). Instead of seeing language and categories as neutral communications and reflections of pre-given natural patterns (or discoveries made about people) I regard them as one representation among many possible that contributes in constructing what it sets out to describe (Henriques et al 1998). Representations make sense and become meaningful as part of discourses. Discourses are regulated systems of statements, which define acceptable ways to talk, write, and behave (Foucault 1999; Hall 2001). In regards to impairment as discursively constructed, I agree with Tremain (2002) and *'hold that there are no phenomena or states of affairs that exist independently of the historically and culturally specific language-games in which we understand them and with which we represent them'* (Tremain 2002, 32). I regard it as necessary to overcome modernist dichotomies such as impairment/disability (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009; Shildrick 2012), and refrain from approaches that leave the category of impairment un-theorized (Hughes and Paterson 1997). This article thus draws on an understanding of the impaired body as a social body (Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009) and impairment objects (e.g., ADHD, SEN, Autism, EBD) from

which children are increasingly scrutinized and assessed as practices that construct what they attempt to describe (Goodley 2010, 114).

I apply Davis' claim that '*[t]he construction of disability is based on a deconstruction of a continuum*' (1995, 11) as a critique of binary thinking and a way to visualize and conceptualise the blurred and fluid boundaries between those commonly known as disabled (impaired) and non-disabled. I interpret deconstruction to be how a continuum is divided or cut off, thus constructing separate categories. Emphasising ways of being as a continuum illustrates how categories of disabled/impaired and non-disabled as two oppositional categories is an illusion and the boundary separating those who count as disabled (impaired) and non-disabled as not self-evident. As such, I use the concept of a continuum in order to destabilize categorical, binary thinking.

The starting point is the recognition of the commonality between disabled and non-disabled—represented as a fluid continuum. Underlining the concept of continuum I find it crucial to commit to a perspective of instability and fluidity in understanding identities and self. As such, I regard disability, impairment, and ability as inherently unstable and fluid categories, akin to the instability of the wider concept of identity (Davis 2002) and the poststructuralist contention that the self is a discursive construction—not a stable grounding category. The point is that parameters of all forms of embodiment are uncertain, dependent, and unsettled (Shildrick 2012). In this sense, the self is not regarded as an autonomous stable core, but as shifting and fluid, depending on context and social relations. The instability in question here refers to a refusal of a clear distinction between disabled and non-disabled forms of embodiment. Following such a perspective one will continuously be in a process of shifting positions across a continuum.

In contrast, the *deconstruction* of a continuum implicates a different (modernistic) way of thinking where individuals can be measured and compared to certain standards and categorised in reference to an ideal normative centre. For example, certain standards of functioning (e.g., how well one can see, walk, hear) cut off a continuum and establish a separate category of disability/impaired (Davis 1995). As the human body is made quantifiable, an individual can be seen as falling beneath a standard and positioned in a category opposite to a perceived ideal. I use the idea of a continuum being 'cut off' when a boundary is (re)established that positions people in two oppositional categories. In this article,

I analyze how some children's conduct is described in a manner that constructs it as deviant and that locates these children in the category of impaired.

Method and analysis

The method for this study included semi-structured interviews and participant observation in four Norwegian day-care units (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). I interviewed 16 staff members in four day-care units and followed their everyday activities during three months in 2009 / 2011. The children in the units ranged from 1–5 years old, half attending units for 1–3 year olds, and half for 3–5 year olds. During participant observation, I witnessed the staff discuss their concerns about children by stating how someone 'lagged behind developmentally' or did not have 'normal behaviour'. Everyday practices also illustrated how some children were perceived as different, as they were for example monitored more closely or subject to special initiatives. In staff meetings, I listened to discussions on how to tell the parents that they thought a child needed to be evaluated for impairments by external experts. The boys in this article had already been referred to evaluation and testing before my arrival. As such, issues of children perceived as deviant, but without any diagnosis (yet), were common to the staff. Some called them "grey-area" children. The interviews conducted gave the staff an opportunity for further reflections as I asked them to describe everyday stories. When telling me their concerns about a child, I would ask them when and in what situations they first started to wonder about a child's conduct, and in what way they found something worrying. I encouraged as many details and nuances as possible from concrete situations in order to avoid merely producing general statements and opinions about children (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2005). The names of staff and children have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.

I analyse staff's discussions based on transcribed interviews and field-notes. The analysis focuses on *how* staff members discuss, describe and legitimize their concerns for children. I explore patterns and paradoxes in the material, investigating what is included and excluded (Søndergaard 2002). I focus on what way differences are accentuated, presented, and constructed in descriptions of children and context (Thomas and Loxley 2007), key analytical-questions being: how do children become positioned outside of the realm of a perceived normality and how do dominant ideas of children and childhood contribute to the construction of differences as deviance?

Day-care staffs' descriptions and constructions

In this study, concern for a child being impaired emerged often as unknown but suspected: *'We do not know what it is, but we sort of know that there is something'* said one staff member. Staff told me they frequently were the first ones to express concern about a child's development, discussing a child's conduct with the parents and bringing in external experts to observe and refer children for further assessments. As in the school environment, a teacher's attitude, tolerance, pedagogics, and beliefs can have enormous influence on whether a child gets 'picked up on the radar' (Graham 2008, 12).

In this study, day-care staff listed a wide range of child conduct and characteristics that gave them concern for children's abilities. The conduct they brought forward were not unheard of; rather it was the degree of the conduct that caused concern. What was perceived as deviant was a child doing either too much or too little of what was considered normal behaviour. In other words, some children *'engage in normal behaviour at levels that are considered extreme by others'* (Graham 2008, 12) Following the concept of children's actions as a fluid and shifting continuum, at some point, staff members' choice of words and phrases cut off the continuum and position a child in a category opposite to what was deemed normal and desirable.

The day-care staff

The group of staff members participating in this study were heterogeneous and made up of women (predominately) and men with different educational and professional backgrounds. The statements used in this article were made mostly by pre-school teachers, teacher assistants, and special educators working as permanent staff in two different units. Assistants do not necessarily have any higher education, however many in this study had worked in day-care institutions for several years or even decades. They often make up the majority of the adults in the day-care, and take care of the children during daily routines. Pre-school teachers in this study were leaders of day-care units; they have Bachelor degrees and are responsible for planning daily routines, parent conferences, and often test children's abilities. Special educators have a Master's degree or equivalent and work with children who are perceived as impaired or as having special needs.

The boys

The following analysis explores descriptions made by day-care staff regarding three boys in two different day-care centres. All three boys had attended day-care since they were 1–2 years, as is common in Norway. It is important to note that the descriptions of the children are based on those of staff members. They do not claim to reveal the truth or evaluation of the boys.

Thomas (3, 5) was said to lag behind developmentally on several issues, including language and social interests. A special educator was assigned to work with him during his time in day-care. The day-care staff had discussed their concerns with his parents and a physician had referred him to the local hospital habilitation services for children. There, various professionals (doctors, neuropsychologist, psychologists, physiotherapists) report on how they perceive a child's functioning levels, possibly establish a diagnosis, and offer counselling. Thomas did not receive a diagnosis during the time of this study. In my interviews, day-care staff members expressed great concern regarding his activity level and restlessness.

Peter (5) had staff concerned because of his language, mobility, and social performances, and in particular his activity level. Peter had, when he was two years old, been referred to the local hospital's habilitation services (like Thomas). He had not received a diagnosis, but the staff had been given advice on how to work on his linguistic and physical skills. The staff told me that at the time of his evaluation he was not as restless as he is currently. The restlessness had started when he was three-four years, and the staff wanted to get him evaluated once more before starting school.

David (3, 5) was described as too active, constantly shifting activities and unable to concentrate. Since some day-care staff members worried and found his conduct deviant, they had called in an external expert to observe David while in day-care. The expert concluded that there was no need to refer David to further evaluations. Some of the staff members said this was because the expert had been there on one of David's "good days." There were disagreements among the day-care staff on how to interpret David's conduct, and not all of them were equally concerned.

The main concern of staff members regarding all three boys was their level of activity. The following analysis focuses on how the staff's descriptions contribute to the construction of the boys' active conduct as deviant.

Thomas (from active to restless)

The staffs' main concern regarding Thomas was his restlessness. When describing Thomas one staff member said in the interview:

He moves all the time. (Yes⁸³) He is actually never—this one is never still. (Oh no. No...). No, he has an incredibly high activity. (So it's...) So he, well he, well, it isn't entirely true what I'm saying, he is of course still, he is still, because what he likes best is to play board-games. (Oh yes). And when we play, he sits still. But it has to go very fast. (Okay). It must not become boring. It has to go very fast. [...] Yes, but one notice he is restless, because it is almost like you get restless by sitting next to him, if you know what I mean. (Yes, I understand, it's a bit contagious). Yes, it's contagious. (Oh yes, yes). It is a bit like—it is very like... a tension when he is part of something. [...] Like full speed ahead (Yes). [...] He has incredibly high activity, and it has to go fast...

This extract illustrates how a staff member described a child's activity level when it is deemed negative, as not normal, and possibly indicative of a disorder. The staff member starts out claiming that Thomas moves *all* the time, and is *never* still. Later she points to that he *can* sit still when he is doing what he likes best, playing board-games. This way of generalizing and exaggerating in the beginning, and then modifying the statements in regards to specific contexts, was common in the interviews. To be active are of course common conduct of children (and adults), however, when describing the conduct of children they perceived as different staff members tended to use statements about these children that included phrases such as: 'all the time,' 'never,' and 'incredible.' Such statements play a part in discursively positioning a child, in this case Thomas, as deviating from what is accepted as normal. The notion of normality and what constitutes normal in today's society refers commonly to ideas about the average, drawing on statistical reasoning (Davis 1995; Turmel 2008). The boys in this study are described in ways that position them as deviating too much from the average to be perceived as normal. These descriptions typically included adverbs, exaggerations, and

⁸³ The statements in parentheses are from the interviewer. All interview extracts were translated to English by the author.

generalizations such as the aforementioned ones about Thomas moving ‘all the time’ and ‘never’ being still. The construction of ‘normal’ as the average also entails an ideal or desired way of being (Davis 1995). In Norway, children are expected and wanted to be active. One can say there is an ideal image of an active, participating, self-initiating, and curious child. Free-play and being outside are important activities in Norwegian day-care centres, where children are expected to run around, preferably in nature (Nilsen 2008). However, there are some implicit expectations within the day-care about how to be active the right way and what is considered ‘the right way’ is highly context-dependent (Franck & Nilsen (unpublished); Nilsen 2000).

In this study, when a child was perceived as not being active in ‘the right way,’ one of the typical ways of describing him or her was by using the term ‘*restless*’ (as Thomas in the above example). Restless has a different connotation than the word active and draws on other ideas about children and childhood. The Norwegian term used was: ‘urolig,’ which means having to move or say something all the time, not being calm. This is quite similar to the English notion of restless—as unable to stay still or quiet. Both terms imply a lack of ability or lack of self-control. While self-control is highly regarded for adults in western societies, it is also expected to a high degree of children in Norwegian (Nordic) day-care centres (Brembeck, Johansson, and Kampmann 2004). Self-control is not here referred to as performing obedience, but is understood more as a personal characteristic and a way of being. Self-control is considered an important characteristic of a child in light of the shift away from understanding children as vulnerable and dependent towards seeing children as self-governed, independent, and competent (Brembeck, Johansson, and Kampmann 2004; Nilsen 2008). It is important to note that these ideas represent perspectives on how children *are*, thus breaking with such expectations represents a rupture with what is perceived as a normal child. While conduct described as restless or lacking self-control are at times designated as symptoms of diagnoses such as ADHD (Prout 2005)—in the Norwegian day-care setting these aspects can be seen as taking on an additional dimension, as they break with well-established cultural ideas connected to what constitutes a normal child.

So while being active is highly regarded and expected of children in Norwegian day-care centres, describing a child as *restless* constructs the child as deviating from other active children. If one visualises ways of being active as a continuum the use of the term restless

cuts off the continuum and contributes to positioning the child on one side of a categorical boundary. This is in contrast to seeing a child's conduct as shifting and fluid depending on context and social relations, moving across the continuum.

When staff members described the boys as restless, they often emphasised how they perceived this restlessness to come from within the child. Pointing to what is perceived as problematic as coming from inside the individual child represents another way of discursively deconstructing a continuum of shifting and flexible ways of being to construct static categories marking a fixed identity.

Peter (restless from the inside)

Peter was five years old when I interviewed the staff members in his day-care unit. When describing Peter, his restlessness was often the main topic:

Staff: This is a boy who is, he is incredibly restless. Yes. (Yes. Like physically?). Yes. (Cannot sit still and...?). A bit un-concentrated, but—yes, he is, has something—it comes from within, I think, his restlessness. (Yes). It seems like it. And very impulsive (Yes) [...] [I] have now gone through different issues, but ... well—it can be—he can, maybe it has to do with.... Does he have ADHD? Really, or is it just that he becomes so...he might get restless because he maybe can't, that is, what should I say? One is supposed to perform, and if you are a bit scared you might not be able to do what you are supposed to, so one can get restless because of that too. (Yes). I do not know what comes [first]. (I see). But then it seems like the restlessness comes from inside. It seems like; whatever we do it gets like that.

The staff member starts by telling me how incredibly restless Peter is, and a bit un-concentrated. She points to how she thinks his restlessness comes from within. She explains how she has reflected on Peters' conduct ('been through different issues') from questioning if he has ADHD to whether he is scared to perform. She has however concluded that it seems to come from inside, and that whatever the day-care is going to do, Peter gets restless ('it gets like that'). Placing the restlessness within the boy reflects an understanding of Peter's conduct as an individual characteristic or trait, which disregards the context in which Peter is restless (Armstrong 1996). His restlessness is not regarded as dependent on context (as she says

‘whatever we do it gets like that’) or understood in relation to Peter’s environment and the people he is with. The manner in which the staff member refers to the restlessness as coming from inside the child can be seen as a way of psychologising issues of children and childhood, thus placing Peter in a non-contextual position (Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi 1994). While there are long holistic traditions in Nordic day-care centres that focus on relations and the socio-environmental aspects in pedagogics (Kjørholt and Qvortrup 2012), there are also strong ties to developmental psychology and notions of skills and abilities being inherent in the individual (Franck, forthcoming; Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi 1994). Developmental psychology’s object of the ‘developing child’ is premised on locating certain capacities within the child (Walkerdine 1984, 154). One could claim that to portray Peter and other children as ‘restless from the inside’ only makes sense when the individual is understood as a fixed subject with certain inherent abilities and an inner (psychological) world (Taylor 1989).

The restlessness as portrayed by the staff constructs an unwanted trait of the child, and an emphasis on the individual can be seen as strengthened. Peter has not (yet) been identified as having any impairment, and the staff members’ description is about the discovery of a possible individual deviation. However, I regard the staff members’ descriptions as exemplifying how impairment is constructed discursively by using notions and referring (implicitly) to taken for granted ideas and norms perceived as facts and knowledge about children and childhood.

David (lacking calm)

Another typical way the staff members described the three boys was to focus on how the boys were not ‘properly’ calm. A staff member described how David’s conduct was a cause for concern by elaborating on how he did not rest properly or find peace as she expressed it:

And then he is really active (laughs a bit). No, but ... well, he can relax and enjoy himself (yes) but not like the rest of us, we can lay flat out, some kids lay completely motionless, but I still have never seen him lay completely still on a mattress and truly found peace and, yes [During resting-time]. Well, then each of them has their own mattress and it isn’t—his butt goes up and down...

The staff member describes David as different from other children as he does not rest and is not still during the day-care centre’s resting-time, contrasting him to other children who are

completely motionless while resting. It was quite common during the interviews to describe what was odd or different with a child by referring to a lack of calm or inability to find peace. Regarding the first boy, Thomas, one staff member described him as *not having calmness in the body*, conceptualizing calm as an individual trait. As such, Thomas is described as inherently lacking something.

The focus on calmness or lying still on a mattress was similar to restlessness not usually mentioned in reference to obedience, education, listening to authorities, or the institutional structure of the day-care. The staff expressed concern for the children who were not calm in reference to the children's personal well-being. In other words, they did not complain about David disturbing the other children or disobeying the adults, they worried he would not thrive and enjoy himself if he did not have the ability to find peace and be calm. The Norwegian term 'kose seg' was often used, which means to snuggle, to be at ease, and to enjoy one's self in a relaxed way. A focus on being calm and cosy can be understood in connection to the Norwegian day-care settings' long tradition of creating a home-like environment, emphasising intimacy, warmth, and safety (Nilsen 2000; Korsvold 1998). When for example the staff wanted Thomas to take a break from running around, they did not command him to sit still. Instead they told him to: 'Sit down and snuggle up for a while' (in Norwegian: '*sett deg ned og kos deg litt nå*'). So when the staff members describe David (and Thomas) as not being able to be calm and find peace, they draw on central cultural values and presumed needs of a child.

There is no exact standard that cuts off the continuum of active and calm conduct; however a divide becomes discursively constructed in the manner in which staff members describe the boys as different from other children and as lacking an important ability. Once again the boys' conduct is not seen as situational or relational, but as a fixed trait, positioning the boys as deviant.

However, the positioning as deviant can be negotiable. As with David, the different staff members and parents did not agree. For example, one staff member told me that David's father spoke up in a parent-meeting, saying: '*No, now we must calm down. He is three years old—he is an active boy.*' The use of the term active by the father can be understood as re-introducing a commonality among three year olds being active, thus repositioning David as a

normal three-year-old boy. The father discursively reconstructs a continuum between his boy and other children the same age.

Concluding thoughts

The day-care staff in this study expressed an awareness of social and relational aspects of disability and recognised the importance of changing social practices and making the day-care accommodate to *all* children to avoid creating social barriers. Nevertheless, as I have illustrated, their descriptions often focused on the individual child and a lack of abilities and deviation from what they perceived as a normal child. This paradox resonates with governmental policies, which highlight a relational understanding of disability, including day-cares' responsibility to accommodate to all children, while at the same time emphasizing testing and monitoring of individual children's abilities, early intervention, and discovering special needs and impairments. In line with Grue's observations (2010), the day-care staff in this study can be seen as responding to the same logic and justification: first finding out what is wrong with an individual in order to fix what is wrong with society (or the day-care). I relate this paradox to the conceptual divide between disability and impairment. With this divide, the social construction of disability is imposed on top of a biological impaired body. Hence, within such a perspective it becomes necessary to establish impairment before directing attention to the social aspects (disability).

In contrast, I recognize impairment as discursively constructed and not a biological or natural category. In this article, I have explored the construction of impairment by drawing on the concept of deconstructing or cutting off a continuum. By destabilizing the taken for granted of what is depicted as able-bodied and impaired, a continuum conceptualises the blurred boundaries between what is perceived as deviant and normal. The continuum represents the variety of ways in which children behave in different social contexts. I focused on how child conduct—such as being active—in some instances is constructed as deviant through the use of terms and statements like restless, coming from inside, inability, not like the other children, and a lack of calmness. The shift in terms from active to restless, and drawing on ideas of inherent qualities and inabilities, establishes a discontinuity with what is deemed normal child conduct. This is done by the way these statements draw on dominant cultural ideas, values, and norms of what constitutes a normal child and acceptable child conduct in Norwegian day-care settings. The manner in which the boys are described thus

constructs them as deviant, and positions them in opposition to what is perceived as normal child conduct. Despite attempts to focus on social aspects of disability and break down social barriers, without destabilising the naturalness of what constitutes impairment, and even more so, the ideal of normality, a focus on the individuals' deficiencies and practices of constructing and excluding individual children as deviant seems to continue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Randi Dyblie Nilsen
Norsk senter for barneforskning
NTNU
7491 TRONDHEIM



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

Vår dato: 03.06.2009

Vår ref: 21987 / 2 / IBH

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 11.05.2009. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 02.06.2009. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

21987

Behandlingsansvarlig
Daglig ansvarlig

Barn med (nedsatt?) funksjonsevne - praksis og verdier i barnehagen
NTNU, ved institusjonens overste leder
Randi Dyblie Nilsen

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

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

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

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

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2011, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen


Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim


Ingvild Bergan Hordvik

Kontaktperson: Ingvild Bergan Hordvik tlf: 55 58 32 32
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. nsdmaa@sv.uit.no

Appendix 2

Intervju guide

[Interview-guide]

Oppstart av intervjuet:

[Starting the interview:]

- Info om prosjektet (jfr. Informasjonsbrev)
[Information about the project (cf. Information letter)]
- Anonymitet, sletting av lydfil, skriftlig samtykke
[Anonymity, deleting sound files, written consent]

Intervju:

[Interview:]

Del 1.

[Part 1.]

- Da du hørte om prosjektet, var det noen barn (i din avdeling?) du kom til å tenke på? Mistanke/bekymring for særskilte behov/nedsatt funksjonsevne? Kan du fortelle om et av de barna?
[When you were told about the project, were there any children (in the unit?) that you came to think about? Suspicion/concern for special needs/impairment? Could you tell me about one of those children?]
- Hva var det med dette barnet som gjorde deg bekymret? (så detaljert som mulig)
[What was it about this child that made you concerned? (as detailed as possible)]
- Kan du beskrive hva det er som bekymrer deg ang han/henne i daglige situasjoner?
[Could you describe what is causing you concern in regards to him/her in everyday situations?]
- Hvor? I hvilke situasjoner? Med hvem? Når? Hvor ofte?
[Where? In what situations? With who? When? How often?]
- Når ble du først oppmerksom på ... (det som bekymrer)?
[When did you first notice what ... (that which is concerning)?]
- Hva var man bekymret for i forhold til ... ?
[In relation to what were you concerned?]
- Hva gjør det til et problem? For de ansatte? For foreldre? For barnet?
[What makes it problematic? For the staff? For parents? For the child?]
- Ble andre voksne involvert? Hvordan foregikk det?
[Did other adults become involved? How did it occur?]
- Hva ble sagt til foreldre?
[What was told to the parents?]
- Ble praksisen i barnehagen rundt barnet endret? I så fall hvordan?
[Did the day-care's practices towards the child change? If so, how?]
- Endret barnets oppførsel seg? På hvilken måte?

[Did the child's conduct change? In what way?]

- I hvilke situasjoner merket man eventuelt endring? Hvilke merker man ikke endring?
[In what situations did you notice possible changes? In which did you not notice change?]
- Er det noen barn du tidligere har jobbet med som du har vært bekymret for at har hatt særskilte behov?
[Are there any children you previously have worked with that raised concerns regarding special needs?]
- På hvilken måte? (osv. lik ovenfor)
[In what way? (etc. like above)]

Del 2.

[Part 2.]

- Bruk av kartleggingsverktøy
[Using mapping devices]
- Har du opplevd at man har meldt til PPTjenesten eller andre eksterne instanser?
[Have you experienced contacting PPT or other external authorities?]
- Hva var årsaken til det?
[What was the reason?]
- Hvordan foregikk det?
[How was it handled?]
- Hva gjorde PPTjenesten/eller andre?
[What did the PPT/or others do?]
- Opplevde du endring hos barnet?
[Did you experience changes related to the child?]
- Hva tror du hadde vært forskjellen hvis de ikke hadde blitt involvert?
[What do you think had been different if they (PPT or others) had not been involved?]
- Hva slags utfordringer ligger i at barnehagepersonalet skal oppdage barn med særskilte behov? Eksempel?
[What kinds of challenges are related to that the day-care staff should discover children with special needs? Examples?]
- Tidlig intervensjon og forebygging? Melde i fra? Tidlig innsats?
[Early intervention and prevention? Reporting? Early initiatives?]
- Diagnoser blant barn, erfaringer..
[Diagnoses among children, experiences..]
- Kan du si kort om din bakgrunn i barnehager og utdanning.
[Could you shortly describe your back-ground from working in the day-care field and education.]

Appendix 3

Til styrer barnehage.

Informasjon om deltagelse i forskningsprosjekt

Norsk senter for barneforskning (NOSEB) er i oppstartsfasen med et nytt forskningsprosjekt *'Barn med (nedsatt?) funksjonsevne' – praksis og verdier i barnehagen*. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd i 3 år. Prosjektets leder og veileder er professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og Karianne Franck er tilsatt som ph.d. stipendiat.

Barnehagen som institusjon kan sies å ha endret seg mye de siste årene, noe som gir nye muligheter og utfordringer for personalet. I Rammeplanen vektlegges blant annet barnehagens tilrettelegging i forhold til barns utviklingsmuligheter og funksjonsnivå. Det er et økende fokus på forebygging og tidlig intervensjon, og barnehagen er tillagt et særlig ansvar i å forebygge vansker og oppdage barn med særskilte behov. I vårt forskningsprosjekt ønsker vi å lære om hvordan slike utfordringer utspiller seg i den enkelte barnehage og dens hverdagslige praksis.

I denne sammenheng vil vi gjerne opprette et samarbeid med dere og gjøre feltarbeid i deres barnehage. Dette innebærer å være tilstede i deres barnehage 2-3 dager i uka i en periode på 1-2 måneder. Vi har et ønske om å lære *av* de voksne i barnehagen, og vil ha fokus på konkrete situasjoner, hendelser og praksis, ikke enkeltpersoner. Vi vil høre personalets refleksjoner vedrørende egen praksis.

For å lære om barnehagens hverdagsliv og voksnes praksis vil vi bruke feltarbeid som forskningsmetode. Feltarbeid i barnehager er gjennomført i tidligere forskningsarbeid av professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og vi har gode erfaringer med dette. I dette prosjektet gjennomføres feltarbeidet av Karianne Franck, og vil innebære: uformelle samtaler og

individuelle intervju og gruppeintervju av ansatte, kombinert med deltagende observasjon, samt innsamling av lokale 'dokumenter' (som for eksempel ulike planer, diverse kartleggingsverktøy). Intervju vil ta ca en time, og vi vil tilpasse oss deres travle hverdag og være fleksible for når dette kan gjennomføres. Deltagende observasjon vil her si å delta i barnehagepersonalets hverdagsliv, men forskeren vil ikke ta aktiv del i deres arbeidsoppgaver og heller ikke gripe inn og endre det pedagogiske opplegget. Dette er altså ikke et utviklingsprosjekt eller et evalueringsprosjekt. Barna vil ikke være direkte delaktig i undersøkelsen, men det vil være et fokus på de ansattes praksis i relasjon til barna.

Deltagelse i prosjektet er frivillig. Vi vil følge gjeldende forskningsetiske retningslinjer, alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og lagrede opplysninger vil bli anonymisert senest ved prosjektslutt. Også i skriftlig og muntlig formidling av resultater vil vi anonymisere enkeltpersoner og kamuflere hvilke barnehager vi har besøkt (for eksempel vil vi endre navn og andre opplysninger). Vi kan opplyse om at prosjektet er godkjent av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste, som har som oppgave å ivareta personvern og etikk i forskning.

Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen har doktorgrad i pedagogikk og skrevet faglitteratur om barnehage, barn og barndom. Karianne Franck er sosialantropolog, og vil på bakgrunn av prosjektet skrive sin doktoravhandling i tverrfaglig barneforskning ved Norsk senter for barneforskning, NTNU.

Et av hovedmålene med prosjektet er å framskaffe kunnskap og formidle denne med tanke på å bidra til perspektivering og refleksivitet i utdanning av førskolelærere og profesjonens praksis.

Vi vil gjerne ha et møte for å gi ytterligere informasjon og diskutere om eventuelt hvilke av avdelingene på deres barnehage kan være aktuelle. Vi vil fremheve at det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet, og at dere har rett til å trekke dere ut av prosjektet på et hvilket som helst tidspunkt uten å måtte oppgi noen grunn for dette.

Kontaktinformasjon:

Randi Dyblie Nilsen på telefon 73 59 62 48/40, eller e-post Randi.Nilsen@svt.ntnu.no

Karianne Franck på telefon 73596360, eller e-post karianne.franck@samfunn.ntnu.no

Vennlig hilsen

Randi Dyblie Nilsen

Professor

Prosjektleder

Karianne Franck

Ph.d. stipendiat

Trondheim, 9. sep. 2009

Appendix 4

Til personalet ved barnehager.

Forespørsel om deltagelse i forskningsprosjekt

Norsk senter for barneforskning (NOSEB) har et nytt forskningsprosjekt '*Barn med (nedsatt?) funksjonsevne' – praksis og verdier i barnehagen*. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd i 3 år. Prosjektets leder og veileder er professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og Karianne Franck er tilsatt som ph.d. stipendiat.

Barnehagen som institusjon kan sies å ha endret seg mye de siste årene, noe som gir nye muligheter og utfordringer for personalet. I Rammeplanen vektlegges blant annet barnehagens tilrettelegging i forhold til barns utviklingsmuligheter og funksjonsnivå. Det er et økende fokus på forebygging og tidlig intervensjon, og barnehagen er tillagt et særlig ansvar i å forebygge vansker og oppdage barn med særskilte behov. I vårt forskningsprosjekt ønsker vi å lære om hvordan slike utfordringer utspiller seg i den enkelte barnehage og dens hverdagslige praksis.

I denne sammenheng vil vi gjerne opprette et samarbeid med dere og gjøre feltarbeid i deres barnehage. Dette innebærer å være tilstede i deres barnehage 2-3 dager i uka i en periode på 1-2 måneder. Vi har et ønske om å lære *av* de voksne i barnehagen, og vil ha fokus på konkrete situasjoner, hendelser og praksis, ikke enkeltpersoner. Vi vil høre personalets refleksjoner vedrørende egen praksis.

For å lære om barnehagens hverdagsliv og voksnes praksis vil vi bruke feltarbeid som forskningsmetode. Feltarbeid i barnehager er gjennomført i tidligere forskningsarbeid av professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og vi har gode erfaringer med dette. I dette prosjektet gjennomføres feltarbeidet av Karianne Franck, og vil innebære: uformelle samtaler og

individuelle intervju og gruppeintervju av ansatte, kombinert med deltagende observasjon, samt innsamling av lokale 'dokumenter' (som for eksempel ulike planer, diverse kartleggingsverktøy). Intervju vil ta ca en time, og vi vil tilpasse oss deres travle hverdag og være fleksible for når dette kan gjennomføres. Deltagende observasjon vil her si å delta i barnehagepersonalets hverdagsliv, men forskeren vil ikke ta aktiv del i deres arbeidsoppgaver og heller ikke gripe inn og endre det pedagogiske opplegget. Dette er altså ikke et utviklingsprosjekt eller et evalueringsprosjekt. Barna vil ikke være direkte delaktig i undersøkelsen, men det vil være et fokus på de ansattes praksis i relasjon til barna.

Deltagelse i prosjektet er frivillig. Vi vil følge gjeldende forskningsetiske retningslinjer, alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og lagrede opplysninger vil bli anonymisert senest ved prosjektslutt. Også i skriftlig og muntlig formidling av resultater vil vi anonymisere enkeltpersoner og kamuflere hvilke barnehager vi har besøkt (for eksempel vil vi endre navn og andre opplysninger). Vi kan opplyse om at prosjektet er godkjent av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste, som har som oppgave å ivareta personvern og etikk i forskning.

Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen har doktorgrad i pedagogikk og skrevet faglitteratur om barnehage, barn og barndom. Karianne Franck er sosialantropolog, og vil på bakgrunn av prosjektet skrive sin doktoravhandling i tverrfaglig barneforskning ved Norsk senter for barneforskning, NTNU.

Et av hovedmålene med prosjektet er å framskaffe kunnskap og formidle denne med tanke på å bidra til perspektivering og refleksivitet i utdanning av førskolelærere og profesjonens praksis.

Vi trenger deres skriftlige tillatelse til å gjennomføre dette prosjektet (se svarslipp). Barn og foreldre i deres barnehage vil informeres om vår tilstedeværelse, og vi vil samarbeide med dere om hvordan dette best kan gjøres.

Vi håper at dere er positiv til vår forespørsel og vil undertegne svarslippen nedenfor. Vi vil fremheve at det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet, og at dere har rett til å trekke dere ut av prosjektet på et hvilket som helst tidspunkt uten å måtte oppgi noen grunn for dette.

Skulle dere ønske flere opplysninger kan dere kontakte Randi Dyblie Nilsen på telefon 73 59 62 48/40, eller e-post Randi.Nilsen@svt.ntnu.no eller Karianne Franck på telefon 73596360 eller e-post karianne.franck@samfunn.ntnu.no

Vennlig hilsen

Randi Dyblie Nilsen

Professor

Prosjektleder

Karianne Franck

Ph.d. stipendiat

.....

.....

Jeg gir mitt samtykke til å delta i prosjektet '*Barn med (nedsatt?) funksjonsevne*' - praksis og verdier i barnehagen.

Appendix 5

Til foreldre i barnehage

Informasjon om forskningsprosjekt i deres barnehage

Norsk senter for barneforskning (NOSEB) er i oppstartsfasen med et nytt forskningsprosjekt *'Barn med (nedsatt?) funksjonsevne' – praksis og verdier i barnehagen*. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd i 3 år. Prosjektets leder og veileder er professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og Karianne Franck er tilsatt som ph.d. stipendiat.

Barnehagen som institusjon kan sies å ha endret seg mye de siste årene, noe som gir nye muligheter og utfordringer for personalet. Vi vil høre personalets refleksjoner vedrørende egen praksis. I Rammeplanen vektlegges blant annet barnehagens tilrettelegging i forhold til barns utviklingsmuligheter og funksjonsnivå. Det er et økende fokus på forebygging og tidlig intervensjon, og barnehagen er tillagt et særlig ansvar i å forebygge vansker og oppdage barn med særskilte behov. Prosjektet ønsker å lære om hvordan slike utfordringer utspiller seg i den enkelte barnehage og dens hverdagslige praksis.

Vi har et ønske om å lære *av* de voksne i barnehagen, men vi er her mer interessert i situasjoner, hendelser og praksis enn i enkeltpersoner. **Barna vil ikke være direkte delaktig i undersøkelsen, men det vil være et fokus på de ansattes praksis i relasjon til barna. Ingen identifiserbare opplysninger om barna vil registreres.**

I denne sammenheng vil vi være tilstede i deres barnehage, periodevis i løpet av høsten 2009 (eventuelt januar 2010)¹.

For å lære om barnehagens hverdagsliv og voksnes praksis vil vi bruke feltarbeid som forskningsmetode. Feltarbeid i barnehager er gjennomført i tidligere forskningsarbeid av professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen, og vi har gode erfaringer med dette. I dette prosjektet gjennomføres feltarbeidet av Karianne Franck, og vil innebære: uformelle samtaler og individuelle intervju og gruppeintervju av ansatte, kombinert med deltagende observasjon, samt innsamling av lokale 'dokumenter' (som for eksempel ulike planer, diverse kartleggingsverktøy). Deltagende observasjon vil her si å delta i barnehagepersonalets hverdagsliv, men forskeren vil ikke ta aktiv del i deres arbeidsoppgaver og heller ikke gripe inn og endre det pedagogiske opplegget. Dette er altså ikke et utviklingsprosjekt eller et evalueringsprosjekt.

Vi vil følge gjeldende forskningsetiske retningslinjer, alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og lagrede opplysninger vil bli anonymisert senest ved prosjektslutt. Også i skriftlig og muntlig formidling av resultater vil vi anonymisere enkeltpersoner og kamuflere hvilke barnehager vi har besøkt (for eksempel vil vi endre navn og andre opplysninger). Vi kan opplyse om at prosjektet er godkjent av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste, som har som oppgave å ivareta personvern og etikk i forskning.

Professor Randi Dyblie Nilsen har doktorgrad i pedagogikk og skrevet faglitteratur om barnehage, barn og barndom. Karianne Franck er sosialantropolog, og vil på bakgrunn av prosjektet skrive sin doktoravhandling i tverrfaglig barneforskning ved Norsk senter for barneforskning, NTNU.

Skulle dere ønske flere opplysninger kan dere kontakte Randi Dyblie Nilsen på telefon 73 59 62 48/40, eller e-post Randi.Nilsen@svt.ntnu.no eller Karianne Franck på telefon 73 59 63 60 eller e-post karianne.franck@samfunn.ntnu.no

Vennlig hilsen

Randi Dyblie Nilsen

Professor

Prosjektleder

Karianne Franck

Ph.d. stipendiat

ⁱ I informasjonsbrev til foreldrene i to av barnehagene ble tidsrommet endret. I de brevene stod det: *I denne sammenheng vil Karianne Franck være tilstede i deres barnehage, periodevis i løpet av vår/sommer 2011.*