

**Children's perspectives on diversity.**  
**A research carried out in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway.**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that everything written in this master thesis, with exception of sentences referred to other literature, is my own reflections, and my own research.

## **Acknowledgment**

It takes a lot of time and effort to write a master thesis. It is also a new experience for me. I would therefore like to say thank you to the people who has helped me through the process.

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## **Abstract**

This master thesis is written based on a research about children's perspectives on diversity carried out in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway over a six week period. Theories and methods used were chosen based on the main thesis question and research questions. The main thesis question is closely connected to the topic of this master thesis and is: *What are children's perspectives on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway?* The research questions are: *How do children experience and reflect on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten? Does going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children's understanding of cultural differences?* and *How are the children's own culture in the kindergarten influenced by the diversity?* The participants' age were also considered when choosing methods which are qualitative multiple methods. These are: one to one interviews and focus group interviews with the use of images, participant observations, drawing activity and a guide tour. Ethical considerations were taken, although some ethical issues were still met. The theory presented and used in this thesis are: theoretical concepts in the sociology of childhood, which are beings rather than becomings, childhood as a structural form and agency. Factors of diversity: culture, language and gender, was included represented as one culture or many? first language and bilingualism and gender identities. The concept of child culture was also used, and discussed whether it is different than adult culture, and the difference between child culture for children, with children and by children.

This master thesis answers how children's perspectives on diversity are in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway. It answers how children experience and reflect upon diversity in a multicultural kindergarten, that the children did not use the words: diversity, culture, religion, appearance and ethnicity, and did not reflect so much over this. Although they were used to hearing different languages and that some children needed a special type of food, they were rather more conscious about gender. Friendships were important to the children, and they played mostly with other children, and cross culture, religion, language, appearance, ethnicity and gender. This master thesis shows that going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children's understanding of cultural differences, in that way that the diversity become what is normal to the children. It also shows that children's own culture in the kindergarten were influenced by more than the cultural diversity, but that it also were influenced by the Norwegian culture, by playing material and by factors of child culture produced by adults for children, in addition to the diversity.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Presenting the topic

### 1.1.1 The topic for this master thesis

The world becomes more globalized. It becomes easier to travel and to move across the world (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). As people travel they bring their culture<sup>1</sup> with them, and the cultures influence each other (Larsen, 2006). The Norwegian society today is often described as a multicultural society, which refers to the multiple cultures that people bring with them into the society (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). It is a much bigger diversity<sup>2</sup> of culture, ethnicity<sup>3</sup>, identity<sup>4</sup>, language and religion in the Norwegian society today than decades ago (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). To live together in this diverse society is a big challenge and at the same time provides great possibilities (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). The diversity in the society will also affect different institutions, including the kindergartens<sup>5</sup> (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). Just like there are different cultures in the society, there will also be different cultures in the kindergartens.

Not only people from different countries would have different cultures, but people are different and have different ways to practice culture in a country as well (Knudsen, 2008). In this sense all kindergartens could be seen as multicultural, although there are kindergartens in Norway today that call themselves multicultural (Fajersson, 2005), and who practice a multicultural approach (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). James (1993) writes that the child culture which is created in the kindergarten would provide a sense of belonging. This

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<sup>1</sup> Culture is defined by Spernes and Hatlem (2013) as something that consist of both outer characteristics, like clothes and food, and inner characteristics, like attitude and values.

<sup>2</sup> Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006, p. 27) write that: "Diversity is about distinctiveness, differences, equality, changeability and something that is alternating or incongruous" (My translation).

<sup>3</sup> Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) defines the concept ethnicity as something connected to a person's family's background, the place the person is from and what believes the person has, together with experiences and what ethnic group he or she belongs to.

<sup>4</sup> A person's identity is defined by something created by the person's: family background, gender, nationality, ethnicity, social class, home place, politic views, age, religion, language, education and work, life style and individual characteristics (Eriksen, 2001), together with language, upbringing and name (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> How a kindergarten in Norway is defined, will be described in the background and context chapter, under section 2.2 The Norwegian kindergarten today.

child culture might have aspects of all the other cultures represented in the kindergarten. As Knudsen (2008) writes that what matters is not what cultural background the children have, but their competence in child culture and play, and as Lasen (2006) writes a positive image of differences could reduce the fear of what is unknown. Children are now seen as active participants in their own lives (Prout and James, 1990), and children's social relationships and cultures, are worthy of study in their own right (Prout and James, 1990; Qvortrup, 2002). Children are the ones who know best how it feels to be children in the specific kindergarten which they are a part of (Tholin, 2007). On this background the topic for this master thesis is: *Children's perspectives on diversity*. The main thesis question will be presented next.

### **1.1.2 Main thesis question**

On this background the following main thesis question have been formulated: *What are children's perspectives on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway?* Significance of this study will be presented next.

## **1.2 Significance of this study**

### **1.2.1 Why is this research interesting?**

As the Norwegian society becomes more multicultural, children as well as adults will meet different cultures in their daily lives. How is it to be a child in the multicultural Norwegian society today? How is it to be part of a multicultural kindergarten? Punch (2002) writes that young children might have a limited vocabulary, and when focusing on cultural diversity, at least with ethnic diversity, some of the children could have Norwegian as their second language. This means that it could be challenging getting the children's perspectives. This might also make it even more important to focus on this, because although the children might have a difficulty expressing themselves, this does not mean that their perspectives are not important, it might just opposite make it more interesting. It is also important to recognize that there is not one common children's perspective but that children have different perspectives, just as adults have (Tholin, 2007). Punch (2002, p. 325) writes that: "As adults we were once children but we soon forget, unlearn and abandon elements of our childhood culture". James, Jenks and Prout. (1998, p. 5) write that: "...childhood is very much an issue of our time". In this sense it does not matter what adult researchers remember of own



childhood, because as the society has changed, the life that children live today may be totally different. It is therefore also important to involve the children in research with children.

As I have a bachelor degree as a kindergarten teacher with multicultural understanding, I am very interested in cultural diversity and in diversity in general. How people address the diversity, what makes us different and what we can learn from each other. I find it very important to recognize the diversity in any child group, and try to see each individual child's perspective and to meet each child's individual needs. I included this observation I made of a young relative of mine some years ago, to show my starting point for what made me choose this topic:

*I was so amazed by this four year old girl. I had just gotten home from a three months stay in Africa, where I had my teacher practical period in a kindergarten. She enjoyed so much watching pictures with me of the children in Africa. She was telling me about her day, and that she had been to the hospital visiting her mother and her new sibling. While she was there she had seen a boy she told me, and: "He was almost like your friend" she said. I did not understand what she meant, so I asked if she could tell me more about this boy. She kept on saying he was almost like my friend, but after a while she also said that he was black. Then I realized what she meant, and I asked her if she was thinking about the children in Africa, which she confirmed.*

This amazed me because it was so clear that she was unaffected of racism<sup>6</sup> and prejudice. She knew there was a difference, but did not really realize what the difference was. I started to wonder if all children are so curious of human differences, and how they reflect upon diversity. There are so many things that are different when it comes to ethnicity, culture, religion, language and also gender. So to look at culture and relations among children that are part of the same kindergarten, but at the same time might be different at several areas, could provide a very interesting read.

It is a potential concern that by doing research on diversity, one would focus more on differences than the similarity, drawing the line that the differences are there. It would also be a risk that it would appear a border between *us* and *the others*, that the researcher would associate with the children of the same or similar ethnical group that her or himself. Becher (2004, p. 82) writes that she has become: "...highly concerned about how to conduct research on cultural differences without contributing to essentialism and stereotyped understandings"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Racism is, shortly summed up, defined by Spernes and Hatlem (2013) to view people with a different ethnicity or culture than oneself as less valuable.

<sup>7</sup> My translation.

Another concern is to overanalyze the observations or children's, answers in the interviews, because the researcher is searching for something specific, and that way finding what he or she wants to find. Still when focusing on children's perspectives and involving the children in the research, is it still the adult researcher who has the power to decide what to include in the writing process from the research (Alderson, 2004). These are issues that are important to be aware of when doing this type of research. What previous research that has been done on this topic will be presented next.

### **1.2.2 What previous research has been done on this topic?**

There have been carried out other studies in multicultural institutes before. For example Howes (2011) writes that she did, together with someone else, an ethnographic<sup>8</sup> study, as part of a larger project that explored race, ethnicity and childcare quality, among children from Spanish families in England (Howes, 2009 in Howes 2011). Singer and Haan (2011) write about their research carried out in multicultural daycare centers in urban areas in the Netherland in groups with two and three year old children. They discuss whether the children develop a sense of togetherness and what teachers and parents do to support positive relationships in a group with different ethnical and cultural backgrounds. Because Singer and dee Haan's (2011) study was carried out in daycare centers in the Netherlands, were it is common for the mothers to work part time, a group of fourteen spaces were used by thirty-four different children. This meant that the group consisted of different children each day, and that they found that forty-four percent of the children in their study did not have a friend. Also in most of the Dutch daycare centers, they did not have a pedagogical approach (Singer and dee Hann, 2011). The premises for their research was then different than for the research done for this master thesis<sup>9</sup>. Devine (2004) also did together with two others a study in primary schools and what she calls second level schools in Ireland, about cultural and ethnic diversity. In the schools were this research were carried out, most of the children had Irish background, so they talked about *us* and *the others* (Devine, 2004) which is very different from this study

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<sup>8</sup> An ethnographic study is defined by Kellett, Robinson and Burr (2004) as a research going over at least one year, were the researcher live in the research field and take part in the participants' daily life.

<sup>9</sup> This will be described in the background and context chapter.

were the minority<sup>10</sup> of the children were ethnical Norwegians, and it was a great diversity of ethnical backgrounds.

It has also been written a lot about multicultural kindergartens and about diversity in kindergartens in Norway (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006; Spernes and Hatlem, 2013)<sup>11</sup>. These might however focus more on how the adults working in the kindergarten should approach the diversity, than how the diversity is viewed from the children's perspectives. Another example is James (1993) who has taken the children's perspectives as a starting point when researching diversity, although it is diversity in relation to health, ability, gender and age. Corsaro (2011, p. 227) writes that: "Until recently there have been few studies of children's friendships and peer relations across racial and ethnic groups". He further writes that he found that children separated themselves by ethnicity and by gender, but that much research still is needed on this area to provide better understanding about diversity in children's peer relations. Also as stated earlier, are there not one common child perspective, society and children's childhood changes over time (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). It will also differ from place to place. This research will in this sense be different than other research done before, and hopefully provide new and interesting aspects for the readers of this master thesis. The intended readers is what will be presented next.

### **1.2.3 Who could find this research interesting?**

The intended readers for this master thesis are people engaged in childhood studies. As this research provides some children's perspectives on diversity and of being part of a multicultural kindergarten, this could be interesting to read for kindergarten teachers and others who work in a kindergarten and are involved in the pedagogical field. Researchers who are doing their own research on children and diversity, or children and culture might find this interesting. Someone interested in the Norwegian kindergarten system and the multicultural society in Norway today, could also find this research interesting, as it could provide them an insight in this. Even parents with children in Norwegian kindergartens could want to read

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<sup>10</sup> Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) define minority as based on the origin word minor, is something which is less, secondary or dependent on something. Spernes and Hatlem (2013) write that one could not talk about a minority without there being a majority. Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) write that it is common to use these two concepts when referring to which ethnicity groups are biggest and who the smallest in the society.

<sup>11</sup> Among others, although these are the once used for this master thesis.

about children's perspectives on diversity. How this research could benefit children will be presented next.

#### **1.2.4 How could this research benefit children?**

If the research methods used, focus not only on providing the best possible data, but also that the methods should be fun for the children, then the research would be more likely to benefit the participants. Alderson (2004) writes about how research could benefit children that: "Children benefit when everyone concerned carries ethical responsibility, instead of denying or transferring it to others" (Alderson, 2004, p. 110). It is therefore important to be aware of the ethical responsibility one has as a researcher, and to follow up on this<sup>12</sup>. To put a focus on children's perspectives when it comes to multicultural diversity, could also benefit these children and other children in that sense that adults working in kindergartens could read this and become known with and aware of children's perspectives and could acknowledge and adjust according to children's preferences in their daily life in the kindergarten. Next the aim for this master thesis will be presented.

### **1.3 Aim of this master project**

#### **1.3.1 What this master thesis aims to discuss**

This master thesis aims to present and discuss a research fieldwork carried out in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway based on the main thesis question<sup>13</sup>. This research was carried out with eight participants aged three till six years old over a six weeks period. It aims to answer the research questions<sup>14</sup> based on this topic and main thesis question. It aims to put a focus on the children's perspectives and to discuss the diversity in children's daily life in a kindergarten that reflects today's multicultural society in Norway. It also aims to show the importance of involving children in research about children. The research questions formulated for this master thesis will be presented next.

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<sup>12</sup> This will be further described and discussed in the ethical reflection part of the methodology chapter.

<sup>13</sup> See section 1.1.2 Main thesis question.

<sup>14</sup> See section 1.3.2 The research questions.

### **1.3.2 The research questions**

Based on the topic and the main thesis question for this master thesis, three research questions form the basis for this research. These are: *How do children experience and reflect on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten? Does going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children's understanding of cultural differences?* and *How are the children's own culture in the kindergarten influenced by the diversity?* How the structure of this master thesis is will be presented next.

### **1.4 Structure of this master thesis**

This master thesis starts with the *Introduction* chapter, which has presented the topic, importance, aim, research questions and main thesis question for this master thesis. The following chapter is the *Background and context* chapter, which will present the research site, which is a multicultural kindergarten in today's multicultural society in Norway. The third chapter of this master thesis is the *Theory* chapter. It will present and define theoretical concepts that are relevant for the topic and further discussion of this master thesis. First: *The sociology of childhood* will be presented followed by *Factors of diversity*. Then *Children's cultures* will be described and discussed. The fourth chapter of this master thesis is the *Methodology* chapter. It will start with describing the process of getting access to the field. Doing research with children will be described and discussed, as will the methods used, followed by ethical reflections concerning this research. The fifth and the sixth chapters of this master thesis are the analyses and discussion part. The fifth chapter is named: *Being part of the multicultural kindergarten*, and focuses mainly on the two last of the three research questions, about if going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children's understanding of cultural differences and how the child culture is influenced by the diversity. The sixth chapter is named: *Children's perspectives on diversity*, and is mainly focused on answering the first research question, which is about how children experience and reflect on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten. The seventh and last chapter of this master thesis is the *Conclusion* chapter, which provides a summary together with a conclusion of points raised through this master thesis, and future recommendations.

### **1.5 Summary**

This chapter has presented the topic; *children's perspectives on diversity* and significance of this study; to promote the children's own perspectives on diversity in their daily life in a

multicultural kindergarten, in today's multicultural society in Norway. The aim for this master thesis is to provide a description and discussion of this study. The structure of this master thesis has also been provided. The background and context for this study will be presented in the following chapter.

## 2. Background and context

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter will describe the research site where the field work for this master thesis was held. Relevant facts will be provided. The chapter opens with describing *Norway as a multicultural society*, and what this means, then it continues with describing *The Norwegian kindergarten today*. Finally, this chapter will describe *The multicultural kindergarten* in general and present the specific kindergarten where the field work for this master thesis was held. First Norway as a multicultural society will be presented.

### 2.1 Norway as a multicultural society

Norway today is often described as a multicultural society (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2009), as stated in the introduction, in contrast to be viewed as a monocultural society, as it could be viewed earlier (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2009, p. 10) write that: “Globalizing processes has led to that the Norwegian society has become a more versatile society, which implies that the population in Norway consists of people with different language, cultural and religious background”<sup>15</sup> According to Statistics Norway (2015) there were people living in Norway who origin from or had parents who origin from over 200 different countries and independent regions as of January 1th 2015. They have moved from their country of origin to work, to be with family or relatives who are Norwegian or other immigrants, or as refugees (Tholin, 2008). Djupedal (2007) write in the strategy plan for equivalent upbringing in practice that without the immigrants Norway would have lacked working capacity and competence on several fields (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). Further that cultural diversity provides important resources through cultural and language competence, which is important for both national and international work (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007).

Children with immigrant background are children whose both parents are born in another country and themselves are either born in Norway or another country (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Most of the immigrant children are from other places than western<sup>16</sup> countries (Larsen

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<sup>15</sup> My translation.

<sup>16</sup> In this master thesis the concepts “western” and “non-western” will be used, because this is a clear definition. At the same time, I recognize that this also may be a problematic way of dividing the world.

and Slåtten, 2010). Together with the native population in Norway, which is the Sami people, there are five national minorities (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). These five minority groups have been defined as national minorities as they have a long attachment to Norway, and these are: Jews, two different groups of Finnish people, one living in the north and one living in the east part of Norway, gipsy people which immerge from India, and Romani people that also immerges from India (Larsen, Lund, Moen and Moen, 2010; Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). How Norwegian kindergarten's are today, will be presented next.

## **2.2 The Norwegian kindergarten today**

A kindergarten is a social arena where children get the chance to meet and play with other children in a pedagogical context (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). The government plays a big part in children's lives in Norway today, it is providing for the children's wealth through institutions like the kindergarten (Larsen and Slåtten, 2010). According to Statistics Norway (2013), 90% of all children in Norway from one till five years old<sup>17</sup>, went to kindergarten, and 92% of these went fulltime. The need for laws protecting the children is a public understanding in the Norwegian society today (Larsen and Slåtten, 2010). Spernes and Hatlem (2013) write that there are two documents that make the basis for all the practice in the kindergartens. These are the law of kindergartens and the framework plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens<sup>18</sup> (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). The framework plan provides guidelines on the values, content and tasks of Norwegian kindergartens (Norwegian ministry of education and research, 2011). It states that: "All kindergartens shall base their activities on the values established in the Kindergarten Act, and on the international conventions to which Norway is a signatory, including the ILO's Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Norwegian ministry of education and research, 2011, p. 4). The framework plan further states that:

*The kindergarten shall, in collaboration and close understanding with the home, safeguard the children's need for care and play, and promote learning and formation as a basis for an all-round development. The Kindergarten shall be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and rooted in human rights. The children shall be able to develop their creative zest, sense of wonder and need to investigate. They shall learn to take care of*

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<sup>17</sup> Children in Norway start school in august the year they turn six.

<sup>18</sup> Which will hereafter be refered to as the framework plan.



*themselves, each other and nature. The children shall develop basic knowledge and skills. They shall have the right to participate in accordance with their age and abilities. The Kindergarten shall meet the children with trust and respect, and acknowledge the intrinsic value of childhood. They shall contribute to well-being and joy in play and learning, and shall be a challenging and safe place for community life and friendship. The Kindergarten shall promote democracy and equality and counteract all forms of discrimination (Norwegian ministry of education and research 2011, p.7).*

The Norwegian kindergarten consists of children from one to six years old. The majority of the adults working in kindergartens are women. The most common structure is to have one leader of the kindergarten, then one pedagogical leader at each department of the kindergarten and some assistants in addition in each department (Larsen and Slåtten, 2010). The pedagogical leaders most commonly have a three year long education as a kindergarten teacher, which it is called today<sup>19</sup>. The NOU<sup>20</sup> about the best for the child states that there should be one kindergarten teacher per twelve children over three years old, and one kindergarten teacher per six child under three years old (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2012). There are no educational requirements for assistants to work in the kindergarten, although some have an education as a child and youth- worker from High school.

The Norwegian kindergartens today are supposed to be institutions for learning as well as care, as a contrast to earlier when it was much more focus on care, since Norwegian kindergartens in 2006 got changed from being a part of the children and family ministry to be part of the ministry of education and research. (Tholin, 2008). It has also become more and more focus on the children's right to participation and involvement when it comes to decisions involving the children's own lives (Larsen and Slåtten, 2010). The framework plan states that the kindergarten also should reflect the diversity of the society (Norwegian ministry of education and research, 2011). However kindergartens located in the urban areas of Norway might have a less international input and in that sense might be more homogenous than a kindergarten in a big city (Tholin, 2008). At the same time Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) write that in most of the areas of Norway there are people with both minority and majority background. The multicultural kindergarten will be presented next.

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<sup>19</sup> Just a few years ago it was called preschool teacher. It got changed because the title kindergarten teacher were found to be more precise when it comes to the profession's competence are and the specific work the education qualify for (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2008-2009).

<sup>20</sup> Norges offentlige utredninger, translated: Norways public investigations.

### **2.3 The multicultural kindergarten**

A multicultural kindergarten is defined by the Strategy plan for equivalent upbringing in practice as a kindergarten where the adults working there view the cultural and language diversity as normality and uses this diversity as a resource (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). Although the Norwegian kindergartens do have a multicultural diversity, it varies how distinguished this diversity is, and if the kindergarten call itself a multicultural kindergarten or not and how the pedagogical approach is. Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka (2006) write about multicultural kindergartens that they are kindergartens with a multicultural pedagogical approach, where the multicultural becomes a natural part of the daily life in the kindergarten.

The kindergarten where this fieldwork was held calls itself a multicultural kindergarten, first and foremost based on the cultural diversity, but the multicultural diversity also becomes a natural part of the kindergarten's daily life<sup>21</sup> (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). The children are aged from one till six years olds, and divided on different departments of the kindergarten. Over half of the children in the kindergarten talk another language in addition to Norwegian, so many of the children have one or both parents who origin from another country than Norway. Many of these children are still born in Norway themselves. Most adults working in Norwegian kindergartens are persons with a traditional Norwegian background (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013), which also is the case for this kindergarten. The multicultural diversity is represented among the adults working in the kindergarten, as some of them also have a minority background, but most of them is ethnical Norwegian. Singer and dee Haan (2011) write that both the kindergarten teachers and the children bring with them personal experiences in the meeting with the kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers bring with them experience from their own upbringing, together with professional training and belief system from the communities where they are participants. The children bring experiences from relations with their parents and siblings and elements of the family's culture (Singer and dee Haan, 2011). All this creates the multicultural diversity represented in Norwegian kindergartens in todays' multicultural society in Norway.

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<sup>21</sup> This will be further discussed in part 5.1.1 Diversity as normality? under the first analysis and discussion chapter.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter has provided insight in Norway as a multicultural society, the Norwegian kindergarten today and the multicultural kindergarten in general, in addition to the specific multicultural kindergarten where this fieldwork was held. The Norwegian society is often described as a multicultural society and consists of people with different language, cultural and religious background (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2009). 90% of all children in Norway go to kindergarten (Statistics Norway, 2013). The kindergarten used for this study has a cultural, religious, language and ethnical diversity, and also defines itself as a multicultural kindergarten. What theory got used for this study is what will be presented in the next chapter.



## **3. Theory**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims to introduce the theories used for this master thesis. Definitions of central concepts will be given, and theories used will be described and discussed. The chapter is divided in three main sections. These are: *The sociology of childhood, factors of diversity and children's cultures*. *The sociology of childhood* describes how children and childhood is understood today in social science, that children is seen as *beings rather than becomings, childhood as a structural form* and the focus on children's *agency*. The part: *Factors of diversity*, will consist of culture, language and gender, as these are aspects of diversity, and will define, describe and discuss whether it is *one culture or many, first language and bilingual* and *gender identities*. The first two factors of diversity were chosen based on the topic for this master thesis, the last one was chosen based on the empirical findings, but is just as relevant for the topic. The last part: *Children's cultures* is a key concept in one of the research questions, it will be defined and discussed. It will contain the topics: *child culture as something different than adult culture, child culture for children, child culture with children* and *child culture by children*.

### **3.1 The sociology of childhood**

#### **3.1.1 Beings rather than becomings**

For a research carried out with children, it would be important to understand how children and childhood is understood when the specific research was carried out. It is also important to be aware of the common view on children and childhood, as a researcher. James (2009) writes that an important theoretical development in the recent history of childhood studies is the shift that came in the 1970s, toward seeing children as social actors. This new shift is called the sociology of childhood. Many researchers have written about the sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2011; James, 2009; Qvortrup, 2002) that in the beginning were referred to as the new sociology of childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1982; Prout and James, 1990). Before this it had been a tendency to view children as becomings rather than beings (Jenks, 1982), that children were seen as someone who was becoming individuals, rather than someone who were individuals (James, 2009). That is why this shift was so important, because before this there was not common to study children to understand their present lives

(James, 2009). Although Corsaro (2011) argues that this still to some extent is the case, that there still is hard to recognized that children are fully members of the society, and not just preparing to be. He also writes that: "...children are active, creative, social agents who produce their own unique children's cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies" (Corsaro, 2011, p. 4). Now childhood is viewed as a social phenomenon (Corsaro, 2011), children's social relationships and cultures, are worthy of study in their own right (Prout and James, 1990; Qvortrup, 2002) and ethnography is a useful method in doing this (Prout and James, 1990). As Qvortrup (2002, p. 65) writes: "What a study based on 'children in their own right' implies is that researchers through the use of scientific instruments describe, explain and interpret aspects of children's life world". This would then for example be to seek for the children's perspectives, and to use qualitative, multiple methods in research with children<sup>22</sup>. Childhood as a structural form will be presented next.

### **3.1.2 Childhood as a structural form**

Childhood is not a natural phenomenon (Jenks, 1982), but rather a social construction (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1982; Prout and James, 1990). Corsaro (2011, p. 4) writes that: "...childhood—that socially constructed period in which children live their lives—is a structural form". Childhood is also a variable of social analysis, it is a part of society and must be viewed in relation to variables like class, gender, social class and ethnicity (Corsaro, 2011; Prout and James, 1990). At the same time it must be clear that there is not just one childhood but many, since childhood also wearies cross-cultural (Prout and James, 1990). Although childhood for the children themselves is temporary, childhood is permanent to the society (Corsaro, 2011). It is in this sense it could be difficult to recognize childhood as a structural form, that children not are preparing for society, but already are a part of society (Corsaro, 2011), as written earlier. Children are active and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives together with the lives of those around them and of the societies which they live in (Prout and James, 1990). As James, Jenks and Prout, (1998) writes is this a clear move away from seeing children as defective and only social in their future potential. Agency is important concept of the sociology of childhood, which will be presented next.

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<sup>22</sup> As will be described in part 4.2.2 Multiple methods, in the Methodology chapter.

### **3.1.3 Agency**

Children's agency is now recognized, and this result in the children's voices being heard and accounted for (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Hence children's perspectives are now viewed as important. Agency is defined by Robson, Bell and Klocker (2007, p. 135) as: "...an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their lifeworlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives". Agency will in this sense be closely connected with the fact that children are social actors in their own lives (Corsaro, 2011; James, 2009; Prout and James, 1990), taking decisions for themselves. Next will culture as a factor of diversity be presented and there will be described and discussed whether it is one culture or many.

## **3.2 Factors of diversity**

### **3.2.1 One culture or many?**

Culture is defined by Spernes and Hatlem (2013) as something that consist of both outer characteristics, like clothes and food, and inner characteristics, like attitude and values, and that through different forms of communication people create their own understanding of the world and the community and distance between people. Although monocultural, as a contrast to multicultural, has been used about the Norwegian society (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013) is people who live in the same society not culturally alike (Eriksen, 2001). People in the same societies could have very different ways of practice culture, and could be influenced by different cultural aspects, across national borders. It is not given that an Indian child feels attached to traditional classic tabla music or that a Norwegian child feels attached to typical Norwegian folksongs (Knudsen, 2008). This would differ from child to child, and from family to family. A Norwegian child might not even have heard music that are viewed as typical Norwegian culture, and might not like or even have tasted Norwegian traditional food like *smalahove* and *lutefisk*<sup>23</sup>. So to take for granted that Norwegian children will identify themselves with this as part of their culture might be the wrong assumption. There is not one Norwegian culture, just like it is not one Egyptian culture. It might also be bigger differences between urban and rural places, than from one country to another (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). In this sense is it important to let each person define what is part of their own culture

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<sup>23</sup> Smalahove is a dinner dish made of a sheep's head and lutefisk is a dish made from aged stock fish.

(Knudsen, 2008). Also this way the society as well as kindergartens is multicultural no matter how many ethnicities represented, because everyone has their own culture.

Although culture differs from family to family, there are also some factors that differ from different parts of the world. For example is there a difference in values from western to non-western societies if these are based on an individual or a collective view<sup>24</sup> (Singer and de Haan, 2011). In many societies religion plays a more important role for how people live their lives than for the most traditional Norwegians (Singer and de Haan, 2011). Religion could be seen as something children are born into, a way of life (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Religion can in this sense be a big part of people's culture, although it is not said that a religion necessarily is connected to a specific cultural or ethnical background. In religions it could be regulations and traditions for food and clothing (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Some Muslims for example only eat meat that is halal<sup>25</sup>. At the same time some Muslims eat meat that are not halal, as long as it is not pig meat, and some Muslims eat all kinds of food (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). This would vary from family to family. So although different religions could have different rules, is it not said that everyone that defines themselves within one religion also follows all the rules connected to the religion. Nor is it said that everyone from a specific country or society have a specific religious believe. The same way people have to define their own culture, they therefore also have to define their own religion and what accounts for them. Other factors that could be a part of the culture, is the language. The culture lies in the language, and the language lies in the culture (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Language as a factor of diversity will be presented in the next section.

### **3.2.2 First language and bilingualism**

Children learn about categories and cultural meanings through language, together with how they can make sense of the world (Montgomery, 2009). In Norway the main language spoken is Norwegian. This is the language that is used in kindergartens and by most people generally. Still, it is not uncommon that children born and raised in Norway start kindergarten without knowing any Norwegian (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). In kindergartens with a diversity of

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<sup>24</sup> Individualism and collectivism is a way to describe different societies. Western societies are often characterized by an individual cultural understanding, while collective cultural understanding is often found in nonwestern societies (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Halal means pure and is a way to butcher the animal (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013).



culture, ethnicity and language one could then find children who speak only Norwegian, who speak only another language, who speak both Norwegian and another language, and maybe someone who speaks even more than two languages. This could be the case if the parents speak two different languages, and the child or children learn both languages at home and Norwegian in the kindergarten. Another case would be if the parents talk two different languages, which they also talk with the children, and use a third language to communicate together. Valvatne and Sandvik (2007) write that if a child learns not only one language, but two languages at the same time, from birth, then one could speak of having two first languages<sup>26</sup>, or having bilingualism as a first language.

As some children would have Norwegian as a first language, the language they know the best, someone would have another language as their first language, and someone would have two or more languages as the languages they know the best, hence having bilingualism as their first language. Bilingual children often use their whole language competence when expressing themselves, which imply that they switch between the languages they know (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). How much the children know in the different languages could differ. This way will the language the children's parents speak, or the children's home language (Howes, 2011), not necessarily be the children's first language, they might know Norwegian better<sup>27</sup>. Some children start kindergarten with a good developed competence both in Norwegian and in another language (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). Other children could have lived their whole life in Norway, and still the kindergarten could be the children's first meeting with the Norwegian language (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). For some children most of their language competence could be on their home language (Sandvik og Spurkland, 2009). When a child is not able to use the language he or she knows the best, this could have consequences for the child's feeling of identity (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Howes (2011, p. 20) writes that: "And having one peer who speaks your home language is a different experience from having your home language spoken by the entire group (Howes and Lee 2007; Howes *et al.* 2009)". A factor of diversity that would seem less complex than both culture and language, is gender. Gender identities will be described and discussed next.

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<sup>26</sup> The word used in Norwegian is: "morsmål", which more directly translates to "mother tongue". Still I choose to use the term "first language" since this is more describing and I find it as a more fitting term.

<sup>27</sup> This way the term *home language* when referring to the language the children speaks at home, ether it is with one or two parents, their first language or one of their first languages, seem like a good term.

### 3.2.3 Gender identities

One way of seeing gender differences, are with biological arguments, that each gender has a set of physical, emotional and psychological characteristics<sup>28</sup> (Pattman and Kehily, 2004). Another way of seeing it is from a social constructionist perspective, that gender is human made, shaped by and through the society (Pattman and Kehily, 2004; Rogers, 2003). For example there are different sections in stores, with pink and purple clothes for girls, blue and brown clothes for boys. Toys are also divided in what the toy stores and toy producers define as toys for girls and toys for boys. Pattman and Kehily (2004, p. 134) write that gender is most often defined in relation to each other: “In other words, what it is to be male is often defined in relation to what it is to be female and vice versa”.

Much research from school settings shows that children chose to play with children with the same gender as themselves, but this is not necessary the case outside of school (Montgomery, 2009). As Thorne (1990) writes that children often play more with children of the same gender in school settings, but in the neighborhood it is more common for children with different gender to play together. Mouritsen (2002, p. 25) writes that: “Girls and boys have different play traditions and activities – as well as a common pool”. She further writes that looking at the children’s games, one could find many indicators that children uses games to create gender identities (Mouritsen, 2002). Thorne (1990) writes that many researchers have compared the separate worlds of boys and girls. She writes that the common results are that boys usually play organized team sports, and rough play in public places in large groups, while girls play turn taking games in more private places and in smaller groups. She further writes that she sees this separation of gender as problematic. This could for example create or maintain a view on girls and boys as one specific way. As Åberg and Taguchi (2006) write that it becomes *a right way* to be a boy and *a right way* to be a girl.

Rogers (2003) write about what she calls three lines of research on children and gender. She writes that the first line comes from a theory of learning called behaviorism, which is built on the principle that behavior that is rewarded will be repeated, but not behavior that is punished or ignored. Åberg and Taguchi (2006) believes that boys and girls act differently because they have an understanding that there is a right way to be a girl and to be a boy. If a little girl gets a lot of attention and smiles, every time she choose to play with dolls, and get ignored or teased

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<sup>28</sup> Then the used term is often sex and not gender.

choosing typical boy toys, she is likely to keep playing with dolls (Rogers, 2003). For example a kindergarten teacher could in the best intention look at a little girl and nudge her towards the family corner, believing that this is where she wants to play, since she is a girl. Even if the girl wanted to play with something else, the kindergarten teacher would influence her choice, and she might choose the family corner, because this makes her feel more like a girl (Svaleryd, 2003; Wahlstrøm, 2003 in Åberg and Taguchi, 2006). Rogers (2003, p. 193) writes that: “In this way her feminine behaviour will be reinforced, and her unfeminine behaviour will be, if not always punished, certainly discouraged”. In order to find their gender identity, the children get in this sense very much guided by the adults in their surroundings.

About the second line of research, Rogers (2003, p. 194) writes that it: “...concentrates on children’s role in observing and imitating gender-appropriate behaviour”. She refers to Bandura and Walters (1963) who proposed that: “...children acquire their gender by *observational learning* – observing and modelling the behaviours of others” (Bandura and Walters, 1963 in Rogers, 2003, p. 194). Bandura and Walters (1963) found that children in traditional cultures, tended to be separated, watch and imitate their mom’s or dad’s activities, while in other cultures where there was not so much separation between genders, toys and TV programs still applied that there is a difference between the genders (Bandura and Walters, 1963). This way the children would still be guided in the process of finding their gender identity, although they might be more in charge of the process.

The third line of research recognizes that children are active in trying to make sense of gender, and it links back to theories about children’s developing understanding (Rogers, 2003). This also recognizes children’s active role in their own lives (Corsaro, 2011; James, 2009; Prout and James, 1990). Next child culture will be presented, and first it will be discussed whether child culture is something different than adult culture.

### **3.3 Children’s cultures**

#### **3.3.1 Child culture as something different than adult culture**

Culture is not understood as things or products, but as ongoing processes (Kampmann, 2001). Culture is not something we are born with, but something we learn through the socialization

process (Larsen, 2006)<sup>29</sup>. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) ask whether it is possible to speak of a separate cultural world of childhood. They write that some people view the culture of childhood, as something to be found in the form of play (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Children's play was earlier, by some researchers viewed as a way to learn about future roles as adults. Today however play is valued as a way children learn to know themselves together with developing trust and respect in relation to themselves and learn how to manage challenges (Lillemyr, 2009). It is also seen as a serious thing, and have received a lot of attention from anthropologists, as well as from psychologists and sociologist, who have claimed that play help children reach important developmental goals and have referred to play as "the work of childhood" (Montgomery, 2009). Lillemyr (2009) states that for the children, play is an agenda in itself, and a natural way of being a child. Mourtsen (2002, p. 22) write: "Today we associate play directly with children. They belong together like adults and work".

Corsaro (2009, p. 301) writes that: "To argue that children produce their own peer cultures does not mean that such cultures are separate from adult culture". Children are still in interaction with adults, and are still a part of the adult culture (Corsaro, 2009; Corsaro, 2011). Child culture must be seen as processes that are ongoing in child relations, as well as in relations between children and adults, and that these processes consist of strategies, negotiations, restorations and new creations (Bronwyn Davies, 1982 in Kampmann, 2001). Children are always participating in as well as being part of two cultures, the children's culture and the adult's culture (Corsaro, 2005 in Corsaro, 2009). Children often follow their parent's traditions, but in addition have their own culture through play. Children could listen to music together with their parents, and separate music in the kindergarten. The music they listen to with their parents could be part of their parent's culture that could differ much from child to child especially between children whose parents originate from different countries. The music the children listen to in the kindergarten could be part of the child culture. The children themselves could even take the songs and give them new meaning, by making them part of their play, or giving them new lyrics. This way it would be the children's own reproduction and new creation.

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<sup>29</sup> The socialization consist of the processes that leads to taking on the norms, values, and mode of life in the society together with developing social skills and independency as an individual (Lillemyr, 1990/2009). The child is not a passive recipient in this process but active in the relations (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006).

In addition to new creations, aspect of child culture is something that is leaned from child to child. Mouritsen (2002, p. 14) writes: “Children, for example, grow into and take over a given culture through a so-called enculturation process...”. In this sense children’s cultures are something that goes from one generation of children to the next. An example of this is the clapping games that children in schools and kindergartens know. These are passed on from child to child, and often survive for generations, although they might change from time to time, as culture is not static but dynamic. As Montgomery (2009) writes that many anthropologists have started to look among other things, how child cultures differ dramatically from each other cross-culturally. Although there earlier have been most documentation about child culture is done by researchers in Europe and the United States (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The concept of peer culture also differs from peer group to peer group (Corsaro, 2009). Because the cultures would differ so much, one could not just talk about one child culture, one would have to talk about children’s culture in plural. This also means that in a setting with children from different cultural backgrounds, the diversity could influence the child culture in the kindergarten. At the same time children are part of different areas where children’s culture are expressed, like their neighborhood and their kindergarten (Corsarro, 2009).

The culture of childhood gives the children the opportunity to feel belonging to a group of children, but at the same time limit how this sense of belonging is achieved and experienced (James, 1993). Within the sociology of childhood, is there, as written earlier, focus on children as social actors with agency (Corsaro, 2011; James, 2009; Prout and James, 1990), Approaches focused on agency and social action sees children's culture not as a 'whole way of life' but as a form of social action and a way of being a child among other children, a particular cultural style particular tied to a time and a place (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Kampmann (2001) writes that child culture is found in three dimensions were child culture is for or to children, with children or of children. Mouritsen (2002) also writes about these three forms of culture, which will be presented next.

### **3.3.2 Child culture for children**

In child culture for children, the adult or adults are viewed as active, and the children the passive recipient (Kampmann, 2001). This could for example be television shows, books and

computer games created by adults and meant for children, but also toys, sweets and advertisements (Mouritsen, 2002). Although even in situations where it is obvious that it is a culture production for children, as for example a television show, the children must still be seen as participants also in this relation (Kampmann, 2001). The cultural content could not be defined only from the adults' planned produced "meaning". It also needs to be understood as a result of that meaning. Because although there is a culture for children, it will at the same time, be established a culture of children, in the sense of contributing and new creation (Kampmann, 2001). Next will child culture with children be described and discussed.

### **3.3.3 Child culture with children**

Child culture with children is often viewed as an ideal definition of exchange, which takes place without power imbalance, but with involvement from both children and adults in cultural actions, based on common interest and motivation (Kampmann, 2001). Mouritsen (2002) mentions leisure activities and informal projects that children and adults organize together. In practice however culture with children is not so often based on common interests and motivation (Kampmann, 2001). It is more common in relation with cultural processes that there is one who overlook the children's and the adults different positions. In relation to this, both children and adults would, also in cultural processes with children, be actively involved in power games, positions, strategies and against strategies (Kampmann, 2001). Next will child culture by children be described and discussed.

### **3.3.4 Child culture by children**

Child culture by children is viewed as being exotic and uninfected by adults and the society and that children alone are the constructors (Kampmann, 2001). Tholin (2008, p. 22) writes that: "Through common experiences in a group, could cultural characteristics be developed"<sup>30</sup>. When young children are interacting without the influence of adults, they would be uninfluenced by cultural guidance attached to ethnicity or background (Knudsen, 2008). This gives the children the opportunity to create their own culture based on similarities and common interests that will become part of their child culture. Although children might not be totally unaffected, because they cannot be separated from adults and the adults' views, as adults are working in the kindergarten beside them. Kampmann (2001) writes that it has

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<sup>30</sup> My translation.

become more conscious about children as producers of culture. Even though, when analyzing child cultural production, it would be considerable to focus on the relationship between the framework and conditions, like the mass produced child culture puts for the children's own culture creations (Kampmann, 2001). Also Kampmann (2001, p. 55) writes that: "With my critique of the three understandings of child culture have I tried to show, that they each a part and together really easily comes to overlook the dynamic and power cogitative processes, *all* forms for child cultural actions are embedded in"<sup>31</sup>. Either one is talking about child culture for, with or by children, the children are active in an explicit or implicit relation to the adults, where it is a struggle about finding meaning, definition right and representation possibilities (Kampmann, 2001).

### **3.4 Summary**

This chapter has presented different theoretical concepts which is central for the analysis and discussion part of this master thesis. The sociology of childhood view childhood as a social construction (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Jenks, 1982; Prout and James, 1990) children as beings, social actors, active in their own lives (Corsaro, 2011; James, 2009; Prout and James, 1990), and children's agency is now recognized (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Culture consist of both outer and inner characteristics (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013), and everyone has different ways to practice culture, and must define for themselves what is part of their culture (Knudsen, 2008). Religion could play a big part in peoples traditions and how they live their lives (Singer and dee Haan, 2011), and could in this sense be a great part of people's culture. In today's society and kindergartens there will also be a variety of languages. Children who learn two languages at the same time, from birth have bilingualism as a first language (Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). Gender could be viewed as a biological phenomenon (Pattman and Kehily, 2004), but also as human made (Pattman and Kehily, 2004; Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) write about what she calls three lines of research on children and gender that children learn from adults what is right behavior for their specific gender, that they learn gender behavior true watching other's behaviors or that they are active in trying to make sense of gender. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) ask whether it is possible to speak of a separate cultural world of childhood and write that some people view the culture of childhood, as something to be found in the form of play. Kampmann (2001) write about

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<sup>31</sup> My translation.

culture produced for children, with children and by children. All this will together with the findings provide an interesting discussion. The next chapter will describe and discuss the methods used for this master project.



## **4. Methodology**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The topic, main thesis question, research questions and the choice of participants, provided the basis for the methods used for this research. This chapter will describe and discuss the methods used for this master project, the advantages and disadvantages of these methods, how they were used and the experiences with using them. It will also present and discuss the ethical challenges met in this research. It consists of four parts. It will start with the part: *Getting access to the field* which will describe and discuss the choice of four year olds as participants, a multicultural kindergarten in Norway as a research site, how contact with the kindergarten got established and entering the field. The second part for this chapter is: *Doing research with children* which will describe and discuss children's involvement in research in general and connected to this research, and how multiple methods were chosen for research with children for this fieldwork. The third part is: *The methods used for this research*, which will describe and discuss the choice of methods, the advantages and disadvantages and the experience with these methods. These methods are all qualitative, so the part will start with presenting qualitative methods in general, then it will describe and discuss: semi structured interview, focus group interview, the use of images in the interviews, the use of a tape recorder, drawing activity and guide tour. The fourth and last part is: *Ethical reflections*. The ethical issues raised are: power relation, consent, the issue of children not participating, confidentiality and anonymity, ownership and my role as a researcher.

### **4.1 Getting access to the field**

#### **4.1.1 The choice of participants**

Because I have a bachelor as a kindergarten teacher and because I find what children learn in their first years really important for their development, I wanted to focus on children in kindergarten age. The choice of topic and main thesis question for this master project: *What are children's perspectives on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway?* also limited the choice of participants. Punch (2002, p. 328) writes that: "Younger children may have more limited vocabulary". As the youngest children in Norwegian kindergartens today are one year olds, it would be very hard to carry out interviews with this age group. The research needed children old enough to express themselves, so the choice fell on children

around four years old. On the other hand because this research focused on children with different ethnicity, language and cultural background, some of the children could still have difficulty expressing themselves in Norwegian<sup>32</sup>.

How many participants a research needs depends on what the aim for the research is (Kvale, 2001). In qualitative interview studies it is often either too many or too few participants, if there are few participants it would be hard to do statistical generalizing, but if there are too many, it would be hard to do interpretations of the interviews (Kvale, 2001). For this research, the minimum of participants was set to eight children. Still it relied on how many children that got their parents' consent to participate, and in the end this is what decided how many participants this research got. To get as good and diverse data as possible, the research also needed both children of different ethnic background and of different gender. Together with choosing participants, a research site needed to be chosen, which will be described next.

#### **4.1.2 The choice of research site**

The research site chosen was a multicultural kindergarten in my home country, Norway. This way, the language, the culture and history, the Norwegian kindergarten system, the laws and the views on children and childhood would all be known to me. This would reduce the risk for any big misunderstandings. It is important that the researcher respects cultural traditions, knowledge and customs (Ennew, Abebe, Bangyani, Karapituck, Kjørholt and Noonsup, 2009). This would be easier when the culture is known to the researcher. I already knew most of the Norwegian songs, fairy tales and children's books they used in the kindergarten, and some of the games played. This way the children might have related more to me, as I knew what they were talking about when referring to a book or a song, and as I could sing along to the songs when they had joined activities<sup>33</sup>. Other advantages of doing research in own society and culture, is that the language is known, it would be easier to get access, taken-for-granted knowledge and the possibility of going back to the field after ended research if needed (Unwin, 2006). On the other hand I had to be aware of taking for granted assumptions.

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<sup>32</sup> This does not mean that the children have a limited vocabulary, just that they have more competence on another language or languages than Norwegian.

<sup>33</sup> Joined activities is called "samlingsstund" in Norwegian, and is common for most Norwegian kindergartens. This kindergarten had one joined activity each day where they sang songs, talked about the weather and read books.

Thinking that one knows the culture and the reasons for doing something could still lead to misunderstandings, if not asked the reason for why they actually chose to do what they do.

Also as the fieldwork took place in a multicultural kindergarten, I still had to be aware of challenges with language and cultural differences, because of the many cultures and languages represented in the kindergarten. One example of this was a girl playing a game with some other children where she took a scarf over a child's head, saying that if the child did not have it on, the child would not be loved. One of the adults working in the kindergarten asked the girl if she was referring to a wedding tradition, which she confirmed. Other times children, who had Norwegian as their second language, could start talking to each other in their first language. So even if Norway as a research site was familiar to me, a multicultural kindergarten as a research site was not that familiar, although it was good to have the knowledge and experience of Norwegian kindergarten practice. After choosing the research site, contact with the kindergarten had to be established. This is the topic for the next section.

#### **4.1.3 Establishing contact with the kindergarten**

The process of establishing contact, started with sending out an email to a kindergarten that would be right for this study, asking if I could come and do the fieldwork for my master thesis. For a research with children, the researcher would need consent from what Alderson (2004) refer to as gatekeepers, meaning in this research, the children's parents, the leader of the kindergarten and the pedagogical leader of the particular department of the kindergarten where the research were held. The leader of the kindergarten replied, giving me the contact information of the pedagogical leader of the department of the kindergarten. After established contact with her, I sent out an information sheet about the research project with my contact information and an informal consent form<sup>34</sup> to give to the children's parents.<sup>35</sup> I wrote that I would send out the interview guide<sup>36</sup> if some of the parents wanted to see this. As this was a multicultural kindergarten, there were parents and children with different ethnicities, and many of the parents had Norwegian as a second language. The leader of the kindergarten therefore asked me to keep the information to the parents as short and concrete as possible. At

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<sup>34</sup> See appendix 2: Consent form (which is in Norwegian).

<sup>35</sup> See appendix 1: Information sheet (which is in Norwegian).

<sup>36</sup> See appendix 3: Interview guide (which is in Norwegian).

the same time it was important to give as exact information as possible to try and make sure no misunderstandings would appear (Dalland, 2007).

Ideally should access be gained by the pedagogical leader in this case, giving the parents information about the research, and then let the parents give back their consent or refusal (Alderson, 2004), or like many did, not replying at all. The parents of eight children gave their consent. Why so many did not reply, could be both because they did not want their child to participate, but it could also be because they had forgotten about it, not understood it or not received the note. As the pedagogical leader said, the parents had received so many informal notes, since this was right before Christmas, and it had been so many things for the adults in the kindergarten to ask the parents to sign and respond to, so this could be one of the reasons why there were no more parents giving their consent for this research. After getting consent, the next thing was, as will be discussed next, to enter the field.

#### **4.1.4 Entering the field**

For the children to be comfortable enough with the researcher for them to share their experiences, what is needed is: "...active listening and mutual respect" (Pattman and Kehily, 2004, p. 134). The first day of the field work was only a one to one interview with the pedagogical leader. The next day I met the children, and had a guided tour as an ice breaker to get to know them, and for the children to get to know me. I presented myself, and told them about the research project. The children were six girls and two boys, aged three till six, but most of the children were four years old. There were children where both parents originated from a different country than Norway, where both parents originated from two different countries than Norway, where one parent originated from a different country than Norway and where both parents originated from Norway. The parents' origin countries were countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. There were children whose family followed Muslim traditions and whose family followed Christian traditions. Although the diversity was so well represented, the boys participating in the research are not represented in all of the methods. They are part of the observations and took part of the guide tour, but are not represented in the interviews or drawing activity<sup>37</sup>. This might have compromised the research, as most of the findings is based on information from girls. I could not start looking for other children to

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<sup>37</sup> This will be further described and discussed in the sections 4.4.2 Consent and 4.4.6 My role as a researcher, under the ethical reflection part of this chapter.

participate while already started the research, and as stated earlier it was difficult to get even this number of participants, as many of the parents did not reply, and I could not force the boys to take part.

After a few days with participant observations, I started with interviews and drawing activity, but most of the days these activities were scheduled I also did participant observations. The research lasted for about 1-2 hours, for 16 days over a 6 week period. I decided together with my supervisor that I should rather stay for a short time per day over a longer period than longer per day over a shorter period of time. Although I might have stayed for a little longer each day, this would probably not have done much different for the outcome of my research. By observing for a short time different times of different days, I was able to capture the diversity in the children's play and activities. The research was planned to last a few more days, but as I experienced the loss of a close relative, I had to go away for a funeral, and the research was cut a few days shorter. How long the research methods lasted depended on the children, how fast they got tired and how interested they seemed. The pedagogical leader was the one suggesting the times, especially in the beginning when I did not know the timetable of the kindergarten, and what I needed to observe. Next doing research with children will be described and discussed.

## **4.2 Doing research with children**

### **4.2.1 Children's involvement in research**

In the later years, there has been a greater interest in promoting children's perspectives, as something different than adults' perspectives (O'Kane, 2008). Researchers seem to have different ways of categorizing researchers' perspectives on doing research with children. One of these is Robinson and Kellet's (2004) definition, which consists of: objects, subjects, social actors and active participants. Another one is Alderson's (2004) levels of children involved in research, which are: unknowing objects, aware subjects and active participants. In use of the first level the children might not even know that they are being researched. In the second level, the children are asked for their consent, and are observed or questioned. In the last level the children willingly take part in the research, and the research has: "Flexible methods: semi-structured interviews with scope for detailed personal accounts, exploring topics through focus groups or drama, diaries, photos or videos, paintings or maps created by the children" (Alderson, 2004, p. 100).

About research with children, Solberg (1996, p. 64) writes that researchers in the research process should: “Set aside what we already “know” about how children and adults differ...”. Trough working with this master thesis I got the experience with interviewing an adult, the pedagogical leader, and both one to one and focus group interview with children. I experienced that the interview sessions were different with the children from the one with the adult. As the adult was sitting on her chair the whole interview, several of the children were moving around in the room, even when the same room was used. It was a challenge that the room being used for the two first focus group interviews was a small room with wall bars, a big mattress, a long round pillow and really big Lego bricks<sup>38</sup>, a room were the children were used to play, so they started running around, jumping and playing. In cooperation with the pedagogical leader, we moved the last interview about the kindergarten and the second drawing activity to a meeting room, where the interview with the pedagogical leader was held. Although this room worked better, even there the children started moving around and playing with the pens that was on the table<sup>39</sup>. The other interviews and the first drawing activity session were held in the common area, because the meeting room was taken. Here it was people passing through during the interviews and drawing activity<sup>40</sup>

The adult also talked more than the children, who had shorter and more direct answers. This might be related to the children’s age, it might also be related to that some of the children had a more limited vocabulary in Norwegian<sup>41</sup>. This also affected my role during the interview. As the adult asked me during the interview if I understood what she was saying, I were the one making sure I understood what the children were saying, by repeating their answers as questions. Also the children seemed in the need of something to keep their focus, like being able to draw as the same time as talking. So even if I had as Punch (2002) writes, that someone does look at research with children as the same as doing research with adults, the

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<sup>38</sup> It was not Duplo, as it was even bigger, the size as books, the kind of Legos some kindergartens have.

<sup>39</sup> This will be further discussed in section 4.4.6 My role as a researcher.

<sup>40</sup> This will be further described in part 4.3.7 Drawing activity.

<sup>41</sup> This also could be seen in the excerpts from the interviews that are included in this master thesis, by some of the ways the children expressed themselves. Although this does not mean that they have a harder time understanding what is being said, but they might.

interview sessions would still have gone differently, and I would had to adapt to the children's needs.

The methods were open for adjustment during the research, for example by letting the children take the lead at some points. When using images in the interview about diversity, I asked the same questions for each image. The children caught up on this and started asking each other, or rather answering the questions without me asking them. This made the children more involved in the interview session, and allowed them to get more ownership to the situation. Also it opened for a more interesting conversation around the images, since the children themselves were in lead of the conversation. The children were this way more of social actors and active participants than objects and subjects (Robinson and Kellet, 2004), and definitely not as unknowing objects (Alderson, 2004) in this research. As Beazley and Ennew (2006, p. 191) write that: "The emphasis of participatory research is on generating knowledge from the perspective of those being researched, rather than from the perspective of the researcher". As the main focus on this master thesis is the children's perspectives, which is why it was important to involve the children as active participants also to better capture their perspectives. In order to do this one would need to recognize that the children respondents are the ones who are the experts (Pattman and Kehily, 2004). One way to involve the children more in research is the use of multiple methods, which will be discussed next.

#### **4.2.2 Multiple methods**

Because children have a limited social experience and an unequal structural position in the society, there are methods that would be better to use with children than methods focused on vocal and written language like interviews and questionnaires (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Researchers should acknowledge that children have different abilities and be open for activities were the children can use their talents and interests (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The use of multiple methods can be helpful, because the methods can supplement each other (Willis, 2006). The different methods allowed me to collect different data that together created an overall understanding. The data from the different methods also provided more interesting findings, than what just interviews would. For example, participant observations provided interesting observations that showed what the children did and were engaged in during their daily life in the kindergarten. These observations supplemented the conversations from the interviews, drawing activity and guide tour. As Alderson (2004, p. 110) writes: "If

researchers rethink their questions and methods in more transparent and honest ways, they may gain more interesting and worthwhile findings”.

Because the data was collected by different methods, this provided a certain assurance that the data was correct, as it could be compared with each other. For example I could compare what the children circled what they liked to play with in the drawing activity, with what they were seen playing with in the observations, and what they said they liked to play with in the interviews. The observations captured how the practice in the kindergarten was and could be compared with the children’s and the pedagogical leader’s viewpoints from the interviews about being part of their kindergarten. As Clark (2010, p. 54) writes that: “Visual methods open up many different avenues for communicating, but interviewing children can help to reinforce understandings gained by other methods or present opportunities to discuss unclear issues”.

During the participant observations and drawing activities, additional conversations appeared that complimented the conversations from the interview sessions. Since it was limited how much the children talked during the interviews, and how long it took for the children to be tired or started playing around, it was good to be able to talk to the children in different settings. Some children do not want to be interviewed, and a spontaneous conversation that leads from participating observation could in these cases be a more natural way for the children to contribute to the research (Løkken and Søbstad, 2013). During participant observations when the children had free play, at one occasion I asked a girl what she had done during Christmas, because she said in the interview session that she did not celebrate Christmas. This way did the data got more exact and detailed, than if it were just based on interviews. Punch (2002) encourage people to use multiple methods, but is afraid that people are not considering both the advantages and disadvantages of the methods. It would be important to reflect upon the different aspects with different methods, before using them. The advantages and disadvantages of the methods used will be discussed in the next sections, but first qualitative methods in general will be presented.



## **4.3 The methods used for this research**

### **4.3.1 Qualitative methods**

Qualitative methods can be used to get a: "...holistic understanding of complex realities and processes" (Mayoux, 2006, p. 116-118), in contrast to quantitative methods where the main focus is on: "...measuring 'how much is happening to how many people'" (Mayoux, 2006, p. 116). A quantitative method could for example be a written questionnaire which aims to get as many answers as possible on the same questions (Dalland, 2007), while qualitative methods could for example be informal interviews and participant observation (Mayoux, 2006). When researching with four year olds as Clark (2010, p. 37) writes: "...young children would be unable to share their expert knowledge if the research method was based on a written questionnaire". To capture the children's perspectives, and answer the research questions and main thesis question in a best possible way, qualitative methods were the clear choice. Semi structured interview as a method is what will be described and discussed next.

### **4.3.2 Semi structured interview**

Interview as a research method is a professional conversation (Kvale, 2001), with a certain structure, characterized by one person, the interviewer asking the questions, and the interview person answering (Løkken and Søbstad, 2013). An interview is defined by Løkken and Søbstad (2013, p. 104) as: "An interview is literally an inter view, an exchange of points of view and experiences that develop new knowledge"<sup>42</sup>. For this master thesis semi structured interviews were carried out with both children and with the pedagogical leader. That the pedagogical leader also was interviewed, the children's perspectives were better captured, when also asking for the pedagogical leader's aspects and viewpoint, and information about the kindergarten's practice.

Semi-structured interviews are neither structured, nor unstructured. They have suggested themes, so that the researcher is free to phrase the questions, and ask them in any order (Ennew et al. 2009; Willis, 2006). I was, in this sense freer to ask follow up questions that would fit the participant's answers than in a structured interview, and still got to talk about the main topics. A thoroughly structured interview guide might not give much other than confirmation of assumptions (Løkken og Søbstad, 2013). An interview guide is a list of the

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<sup>42</sup> My translation.

themes and questions that the interviewer want to ask during the interview session (Kvale, 2001; Løkken and Søbstad, 2013). However it varies if this interview guide has detailed questions or if it is just a list of the overall themes (Kvale, 2001). For this research different themes were formulated together with example questions, but no exact order<sup>43</sup>. There was also room for follow up questions and other inputs so I could adjust after the participants. It was good to see how the conversations were going, rather than to follow a strict interview guide. For the interview with the pedagogical leader, she got the interview guide in advance of the interview, so she started reading and answering the questions herself without me having to ask them. This way I was free to concentrate on what she said, and come with follow up questions as the interview session went along.

The intention was to have three focus group interviews with the children about the kindergarten, three focus group interviews with the children about diversity and then one interview with the pedagogical leader. In reality it was one focus group interview about the kindergarten, one interview with one child about the kindergarten, three focus group interviews about diversity, and then one interview with the pedagogical leader. The reason why there were only one instead of three focus group interview about the kindergarten, was that half the children did not give their consent to participate, so for the second interview none of the children wanted to participate, and for the last one, instead of two participants there were one who gave her consent<sup>44</sup>. The children also seemed, as written earlier, in the need of something to keep their attention during the interview sessions. Interview might in this sense be the method that was most challenging, since it is something the children are not used to in their daily life in difference to for example drawing activity. This could also be the reason why so many of the children did not give their consent. The intention of the interviews about the kindergarten was to get the children's perspectives and experiences of being part of a multicultural kindergarten, and the intention of the interview about diversity, was to capture the children's perspectives and experiences on diversity, both similarity and differences<sup>45</sup>. The focus group interviews lasted from 11 to 23 minutes. Although some longer time were used at some of the interview sessions, as I at some points paused the recording, since the children started playing. The one to one interview with a child lasted for 20 minutes and the

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<sup>43</sup> See appendix 3: Interview guide.

<sup>44</sup> This will further be described in section 4.4.2 Consent.

<sup>45</sup> See the two first research questions, section 1.3.2 The research questions.

interview with the pedagogical leader lasted for 26 minutes. Focus group interview is the next method that will be described and discussed.

### **4.3.3 Focus group interview**

Focus group interviews were originally designed for adults, but that have also been adapted for children (Kellett and Ding, 2004). Focus group interviews are however best used, as was done for this master project, as an addition to several other qualitative research methods. (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). A focus group interview is an interview where there are more than one participant, so that more than one point of view will be showed at the same time, and the participants can contribute to get the conversation going (Dalland, 2007). This was experienced, as the children relied on each other, and sometimes even taking over the interview questions and asking them to each other<sup>46</sup>. In addition to taking over the interview questions, Girl-Z did in one interview session start whispering answers to Girl-W who would say it out loud. Also the children sometimes copied each other's answers. For example in the focus group interview about the kindergarten, I asked what I had been drawing, and two of the children said the word "house" after each other. This could show that the children might have been more secure about answering because they were not alone during the interview session. The child answering second could feel like contributing as much to the interview as the first one answering, and the first one answering could get the feeling of coming with a good answer, since the other child was confirming the answer.

Many researchers recognize that it is more comfortable and less intimidating to speak in a group than in a one-to-one interview, especially with a stranger (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Kellett and Ding, 2004). In the same interview as described over, I asked the children what they liked to play with, Girl-Z started saying: "Mmm...we're playing..." and then Girl-W said: "Lego" and Girl-Z repeated "Lego". In this way the children could supplement and supported each other. The pedagogical leader helped me picking out who would go best together in the interviews, based on who she knew liked playing together, and on who usually talked much, and who were more quiet, to try and prevent the interview sessions for being completely silent, and for the children to be more comfortable with the situation. What was experienced was, as written earlier, that the children could start walking around or playing

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<sup>46</sup> As mentioned earlier in part 4.2.1 Children's involvement in research.

during the interviews. This was not experienced in the one to one interview. This could then be a disadvantage of having focus group interviews that the children could get encouraged by each other to play.

A group does not need to consist of more than two people (Dalland, 2007). This is what most of the focus group interviews in this research did. Four focus group interviews were held. One with three participants, and the rest with two. The interview sections gave me information about how the children viewed their kindergarten, and how they experienced diversity and differences. For example did Girl-Z tell me that they do not use their language in the kindergarten because: “When I say something which you have on our house, then you do not understand, then you do not understand what I am saying”. When I first asked her about the lists of languages hanging in the kindergarten, she replied: “That is only our language”, which showed me that this is a natural part of the kindergarten for her, something she takes for granted. The focus group interview sessions started by me asking if the children wanted to have a joined activity with me, and asked if they wanted to sing something, which they did. The children were used to having joined activities and to sing songs. This way I was able to start the interview sessions with something the children were used to, so that this helped them to be more comfortable with the situation. It also gave me an impression of what kind of songs the children liked. Then I showed them the images I had made and asked questions based on these. The next session will describe more about this.

#### **4.3.4 The use of images**

The use of supporting materials like drawings, images, dolls and toys could be useful in interviews with children (Løkken and Søbstad (2013). The images used, were drawings I made, one of the kindergarten<sup>47</sup> for the interview about the kindergarten and four of different children<sup>48</sup> for the interview about diversity<sup>49</sup>. I chose to draw instead of using pictures to make the images as simple as I wanted, without any elements that did not need to be there. It also made the images more anonymous and might be easier for the children to relate to. The intention of using images during the interviews was for the children to have something

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<sup>47</sup> Because of the issue of anonymity I chose not to include this drawing as an appendix.

<sup>48</sup> Which I made before starting the field work, and before I had been to the kindergarten.

<sup>49</sup> See appendix 5-8.

concrete to talk about, so it would be easier to keep focus. Especially when it comes to children with a limited language understanding in the language used, the use of something concrete could give them a better presumption to understand what is being said (Sandvik and Spurkland, 2009). The use of supporting materials, like images, could among other things reduce anxiety, and lead to more willingness to answer. On the other hand they write that it might also guide the children's answers (Løkken and Søbstad, 2013)

The images were not shown in a specific order<sup>50</sup> so the images got showed in different order in each interview. I asked the participants about the children in the images, what they could tell me about them, what they thought they liked to do, play with, eat, where they thought they lived, and further on. Their answers might have been random, but they might also have made some associations. When I asked about the songs the boy in the image liked, Girl-Z answered, and confirmed that she also liked these songs. The questions might have been too abstract for the children, although they liked picking an image and pass it to each other. They also showed me how they experience diversity in appearance. For example, the children did compare the children in the images with children they knew in the kindergarten. In one of the focus group interviews Girl-X said that the girl in the image looked like she had the same name as Girl-Q. She further described that the girl in the image had almost the same hair as Girl-Q.

One challenge the use of these images gave me, was in one interview session when one of the girls started crying because the other girl picked the last image, even though they both had two images each. She walked away, saying it was unfair. I tried to ask her what was unfair, and asked her to come back. When I did not get any answer I continued the interview session with the other girl. The girl who started crying, continued sobbing in the background, but after a little while, when I asked her to come back to us again, she came back and continued the interview session with us. This was not the only situation I experienced that the children thought something was unfair. Also by letting the children try the tape recorder I experienced this. This will further be described next.

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<sup>50</sup> So the order in the appendix is random

#### **4.3.5 The use of a tape recorder**

There are different ways of recording, for example: "...using a tape/mini-disc recorder, taking notes throughout the interview or writing up notes after the interview" (Willis, 2006, p. 149). During the interviews, I used a tape recorder, because this way I was able to write down other factors, to concentrate completely on what was being said, and to ask good questions (Løkken and Søbstad, 2013; Willis, 2006). I also used a tape recorder during the drawing activity to be able to be completely present in the situation, and later write down what was most essential.

The researcher needs to inform the participants about using the tape recorder, although some participants might feel inhibited by the presence of a recorder (Willis, 2006). During a pilot project, which was a tryout of the methods before starting the fieldwork for this master project, I experienced that my participant got shy when I turned on the tape recorder, even though she agreed to use it. When reflecting over this, I realized that she might have been unfamiliar with the tape recorder, and realized that I could have used some time to let her try the recorder first, to be more secure with it. That is why during the interviews in this study I let the children turn the tape recorder on and off, to feel more secure and in charge of the situation. Still, I had to make sure that all the children were able to try this. In one of the interview sessions, Girl-Q got to start the interview, by pressing the start button, after they had pressed the button two times each. Then the interview session got interrupted by Girl-Z who several times asked why Girl-Q got to press the button one extra time. At later interview sessions, I started and stopped the recorder myself, so I could make sure the participants could press the button the same amount of times.

When using a tape recorder you would need to write down the whole interview after the interview session. The interviews for this master project were written down word by word, everything that was being said, which is called transcribing (Dalland, 2007). This work is important to put the interview in perspective (Løkken and Søbstad, 2013), although transcribing is very time consuming (Willis, 2006). When the interviews are written down, it is easier to structure further work with the thesis (Dalland (2007; Kvale 2001). I transcribed all the six interviews, but for the drawing activity I only wrote down the most essential being said during the activity. It was good to do this work myself, because I could recognize the different children's voices, and it gave me the opportunity to go through everything that was being said. The first drawing activity took about 30 minutes and the second took about 50. The conversations during the activity was a lot of talk about passing color, other people

entering and leaving the room, and other small talk that was not essential for further discussion. It was then good to be able to listen to the recording and only write down the most essential. Other things that got written down were the observations, which will be the next topic.

#### **4.3.6 Participant observations**

An observation is about more than just seeing it is a series of things seen and heard but not yet reflected over (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006). It is about sharpen the senses and get a grab on what is happening in the surroundings (Løkken og Søbstad, 2013). The aim of the participant observations was to see how the children played together, who they choose to play with, what kind of toys they had to play with, and preferred to play with, how culture and language was expressed and how the adults in the kindergarten approach the diversity in the daily life. This was to try and capture the children's experiences with diversity, and being part of a multicultural kindergarten. How the kindergarten reflect the diversity is important for the children's experience with diversity (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). By these observations I was able to capture how they approach diversity in the kindergarten, how the child culture in the kindergarten is, and how the children themselves approach and experience diversity. I saw for example that typical Norwegian children's songs became a part of the common child culture in the kindergarten. Alderson (2004, p. 109) writes that: "Researchers who, with children's consent, observe and talk with them find that children are far more competent in their real everyday lives than they are in labs". This shows the importance of using participant observation and talking to the children in addition to the interviews. Although observation had not worked as a method alone, because it would not have been able to fully capture the children's perspectives.

I was observing free play both inside and outside, language group, joined activity, birthday celebration, celebration of the Sami day, meals, hike day and other organized activities such as adult initiated play outside, and drawing activities. When participating in the language group and the joined activity, I participated by singing along on the songs. I participated on their hike day by going on the hike with them. The observations include all the children participating in this research. I had a tiny book with me and wrote down key words. Lewis (2004, p. 2-3) writes that: "Reflection is a vital part of the research process and is one way in which researchers can develop their expertise and advance their research". Observations were

written down while in the field and at the end of each day after being in the research field, and later reflected on. The observations were written down as key notes, small describing stories and in the form of an observation sheet. The small stories were a good way to structure the observations and to use them in the analysis and discussion part<sup>51</sup>. The observation sheet was a sheet where I wrote down what the children were doing at a specific time three different times of the day, during free play inside and outside, over several days. This way I was able to see what kind of activities the children liked and who they were playing with. It allowed me to see if the children did the same activities and if they played with only the same child, for example a child that they have a common language with, or if this was something that differed. This provided more correct data than if I were to base my information just on other observations. The next section is going to describe and discuss the drawing activity used in this study.

#### **4.3.7 Drawing activity**

The drawing activity were chosen for this master project, because drawings can provide material for further discussions, and it can be good with children who might have difficulty to express themselves verbally (Beazley and Ennew, 2006). As the children in this research was the age from three till six years old, and most of them had Norwegian as a second language or as one of two first languages<sup>52</sup>, this was a good method to help capture their perspectives. Children, at least from western countries, are encouraged to express themselves by painting and drawing (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Children are then used to paint and draw so it could be a good way for them to be able to express themselves. Children that did not talk much could still give their answer to the question what they liked to play with. What they liked to play with is related to the child culture, and this allowed me to see if there were any cultural differences in the choice of toys. What was found was however that it were gender difference rather than culture difference.

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<sup>51</sup> Some of these observations is written in past tense and some is written in present tense, as this provide the reader and insight in the specific moment the observation were done, also some of the observations were written down right away, but others when later reflecting over the day in the field.

<sup>52</sup> See section 3.2.2 First language and bilingualism, under the Theory chapter.



Before starting the fieldwork I tried out a drawing activity with a three and a half year old girl, as a pilot project<sup>53</sup>. The drawing activity was to draw four different drawings, which turned out to be hard for her, as she drew the same drawing four times. According to Haabesland and Vavik (2000), Lowenfeld defines the drawing stage from two until four years old as the scribbling stage. He found that children starts with random scribbling, then go over to controlled scribbling, and later named scribbling. He also states that when the children are around four they begin to give their drawing a certain shape, but it could still be difficult to see what is meant to be pictured in the drawing.<sup>54</sup> To have a drawing activity with children around four years old, might then rely on the children themselves naming and defining their drawings, and explaining what they drew. Although that the children would not have to use so many words, was the main reason for having a drawing activity in the first place.

The drawing activity that was used for this master thesis therefore was a coloring activity. It was a paper with seven different toys drawn on it which they could color<sup>55</sup>. I explained to the children that they could color everything if they wanted to, and that I wanted them to circle around what they like to play with. I told them that I like to build with Legos, and I circled around the Lego to show them. I also said that if there was something they liked to play with that was not on the paper they could draw it on the back. This color activity gave the children more opportunity, instead of putting limits for what the children could manage like the drawing activity for the pilot project might have done. They were still able to draw something in addition if they wanted to, and some of the children chose to do so. They also came with additions to the things that were drawn on the paper, by asking me why I had not drawn these toys, or by drawing them themselves. Some also chose to draw their sister or friend, to show that they were someone they liked to play with.

When using drawing as a method, it is important to let the child explain the drawings because adults often misinterpret or miss vital details that are important to the child (Ennew, et.al. 2009). Even with a coloring activity it was important to ask the children about their drawings

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<sup>53</sup> As mentioned earlier, under the section 4.3.5 The use of a tape recorder.

<sup>54</sup> I found that Lowenfeld's theory is by other authors defined with other ages for the stages, but I decided to rely on the definition of this book, as the other sources was online, and I found another source online using the same definition as in this book. Of course this is a theory and in practice it will always be individual differences.

<sup>55</sup> See appendix 4: Drawing activity.

so they could confirm to me what they had drawn and what they liked to play with. One child had circled everything, even though she only mentioned that she liked to play with Barbie dolls, she might have misunderstood the activity. This method gave room for a conversation around the toys both while they were drawing, and after. It provided insight in what the children liked to play with, by circling and by talking about what they circled and what they colored. For example it showed me that most of the girls participating liked to play with Barbie dolls.

The drawing activity also opened for conversations which probably would not have happened during an interview. Because the children themselves took the initiative to talk about other things while engaged in their drawings, like a trip they had to another country. This allowed me to for example ask if there were toys they could play with in Norway that they did not play with in that other country, and if they had toys from another country and if there were toys they played with at home and not in the kindergarten. This way I was able to put a focus on the cultural diversity when it comes to toys and play. At the same time the children were the ones who started the conversation. In addition to the interviews and observations, this was a good method, although alone it would not be as strong or good method. A method that did not go after the plan was the guide tour, which will be described and discussed next.

#### **4.3.8 Guide tour**

The method guide tour is inspired by what Åberg and Taguchi (2006) write about how they took the children for a walk in the kindergarten. They let the children introduce new children, to what they thought of as important to show them from their kindergarten. It is also inspired by Clark's (2010) tool in the Mosaic approach which is a set of narrative tools which: "...was developed and adapted to use with young children" (Clark, 2010, p. 27). The approach includes the methods: observation, interview, book making, tours, slide shows, map making together with gathering the parent's and other adults' perspectives (Clark, 2010). The aim of the methods is that each one of them will provide an increased understanding of children's perspectives (Clark, 2010). The tours are: "...designed to enable young children to guide adults around an environment, indicating important features from the children's perspectives" (Clark, 2010, p. 36). Since this master thesis aims to capture children's perspectives, this seemed like a good method. The method is adopted from international development where: "...walking tours have been used to gather adults' experiences of their locality, and

subsequently, children's perspectives" (Clark, 2010, p. 139). In the Mosaic approach the tours is documented by the children using cameras and tape recorders and drawings, which is later used to make slide shows and map making (Clark, 2010). For this research the tours were used as a method alone, mainly as an ice breaker.

My expectation was that the children might be shy, and needed some time to get to know me before started talking so much. I also expected that the children might not be that confident in Norwegian. I did on this background not expect to get so much talking, and wanted to start with the guide tour to have something concrete to refer to in the interviews. As Clark (2010, p. 37) writes: "This method does not rely on verbal communication as children can point out features, but rich conversations may be triggered by children walking through their environment". The aim was to give the children the task to show me around, so that they could feel that they had something to show me, and so we could get to know each other, and I could get familiar with their department of the kindergarten, and see what were important for the children to show me.

The adults working in the kindergarten left me alone inside the kindergarten with seven of the eight children participating in the study, while everyone else was outside. The children played with Lego when I came, and they immediately started talking to me, asking me what my name was, and telling me theirs. I told the children that I go to a school where I learn about how children are doing, and I wanted to stay with them to see how they are doing in their kindergarten. Then I asked them if they could show me around. One adult asked them to put away the Legos, before she went out. The children did what she said, and then immediately ran over to a sofa and started looking at books. I tried to ask the children to show me around, but they were all busy with their books. I asked about different things, like what they do on the tables, they explained that they eat, what they play in the area with dolls and toy kitchen, and they answered that they are making food. Some of the children came with me to the toy kitchen but the rest was still in the sofa. At one point the children started running back and forth. I did not want to compromise my role as a researcher by start telling the children what to do.<sup>56</sup> This activity might have been too unspecific for the children according to the children's age. If one of the adults in the kindergarten had been inside with us helping me explaining for the children, maybe telling them to put away the books, it might have worked

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<sup>56</sup> I will come back to this in section 4.4.6 My role as a researcher.

differently. At the same time this might have led to that the children did not choose for themselves whether or not they wanted to participate in the activity. If there were fewer children participating at the same time, it might also have worked better.

Although it was not a guide tour the way I intended, the main purpose was to start getting to know the children, and the children to know me, and to get some idea of what playing material they had in the kindergarten, and this was all achieved. For example I realized that the children only had books in Norwegian available. It worked as an ice breaker, and the children started to get familiar with me. I was able to do observations of the kindergarten and at the same time got a conversation with the children around what they liked in their kindergarten. As Clark (2010) writes tours can give other conversations than a static interview. Also I got a first impression of the child culture in the specific department of the kindergarten. As researchers are dependent on the cooperation from respondents, ethical issues are both morally and practically central in research (Mayoux, 2006). Although there is no simple answer, ethics helps the researcher to be more aware of challenging situations one can meet when doing research, and how one could deal with these situations (Alderson, 2004). Ethical reflection is what will be described and discussed next. The first issue raised will be the issue of power relation.

## **4.4 Ethical reflections**

### **4.4.1 Power relation**

In research it is the researcher who control and define the situation (Kvale, 2001), unrelated to whether the participants are children or adults, and the power relation is weighted towards the researcher (Woodhead and Faulker, 2000). The researcher is the one who decides what the topic for the research is and what to include in the analyzing and writing process. However in research with children, the power imbalance would be even greater because of the different status and age difference (Corsaro, 2011). Still as this is the case, is it important not to use the power over children one has as an adult to gain advantage in a research setting. Children are used to adults being in charge in most situations, and might expect adults' power over them (Punch, 2002). In a research setting this could be unfortunate. In one of the focus group interviews I was asking so many questions that the children seemed to be tired. They had to come up with answers all the time, so Girl-Z ended up saying that the child in the image was dumb. This shows that I as a researcher was the one in charge of the situation, asking the

questions, deciding what we were talking about, maybe pushing past the children's comfort level.

It could be good to try and find research methods that could try and shift the power imbalance. As Clark (2005, p. 46) writes that: "If exchanges between adults and young children are focused on the written and spoken word, then it is difficult for young children to have the 'upper hand'". The use of different research methods, as done for this research, for example drawings, might also be good to use. The power relationship also becomes diffuse in a focus group interview than in a one to one interview (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). This way the children were outnumbering me, and they could, as I experienced, lean on each other and even take over asking each other questions, feel more comfortable and in charge of the situation. What can be challenging however is: "...in allowing a shift in relationships is accepting the place of the unexpected" (Clark, 2005, p. 46). During one of the drawing activities, Girl-Y asked me to color my Barbie and to circle my Barbie. I did color my Barbie, but I told her that I do not play with Barbie dolls anymore but I used to, so that is why I did not circle it. Another ethical issue when doing research with children is about getting consent for the children to participate, which is the next topic.

#### **4.4.2 Consent**

Because the participants for this research was under eighteen years old, the children's parents and caregivers needed to give their consent for the children to participate (Blerk, 2006). Alderson (2004) raise the complex question about when children are old enough to be competent to consent. She writes that this depends on the research, how good the researcher is to explain the research to the children, and on each child's own experience and confidence. This was one of the challenges by getting the children's consent. How to explain the research for the children simple but thoroughly enough so the children would understand and be able to choose for themselves whether to give their consent in participating, or not. According to Alderson and Morrow (2011, p. 101): "Consent may be spoken, or written on a consent form". Since the participants for this research were aged three to six years old, I explained the project verbally, and asked for their consent verbally in return. Making a consent form for such young children, which they would not be able to read, and to sign something you do not understand you might feel that you are pushed in to something. Researchers could make simple leaflets for the adults to read to the children (Alderson, 2004). Although I did not do

this, the pedagogical leader had my informal consent form for the parents, and the information sheet, and talked to the children before I entered the kindergarten.

During the guide tour I presented myself to the children so they would know who I was. I explained to the children, that they were free to resign from the project at any time, and I repeated this during the interviews and drawing activity. It is important that the participants have the ability to resign at any time without experiencing any negative consequences (Dalland, 2007). It was important not to put pressure on the children, but give them the understanding that they were free to choose for themselves. It was hard to know if they really understood what they said no or yes to. It could depend from what they felt like in that specific moment. For example the time for one of the interviews, was the day with the first snow in a long time and all the children were outside. When I asked one of the boys if he wanted to come, he said no. For another interview I experienced that the girls were tired of the interview session, but that one of them did not want to go outside, she said that she did not like snow, because it is cold. This might have been her main reason for coming inside and join the interview session.

Before each activity I asked the children if they wanted to participate. I explained to the children that I was going to write an assignment about the kindergarten, and that is why I wanted to talk to them about the kindergarten. I asked them if it was okay that I recorded the conversation, and I asked if it was okay that I wrote down in my assignment what they told me. I also asked the children if it were okay that I wrote down what they said and did during free play. For the second focus group interview when I asked the children if they wanted to come with me to talk about the kindergarten, two of three children said no. Three children had already done the interview with me, and two were absent<sup>57</sup>. The pedagogical leader said I could wait and ask again in a while. I waited for the third girl, who did say yes to come with me, to finish her bracelet. Then I asked her to bring her chair, and I turned to the other two children to ask them again. Suddenly four children, including the two of them took their chairs to come with me. The pedagogical leader said that they thought they were going to the “language group”. I had to explain that only three children could come with me. When they came into the room they immediately started playing. I tried to explain about my project and

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<sup>57</sup> The same two described in the situation over.

asked if I could record what they were saying, and if it was okay that I used what they said in my assignment. I did not get an answer from all three of them, only one answered yes.

Although I did get some conversation around the image of the kindergarten, I decided not to use anything of it in this master thesis, because it seemed that the children did not know what they agreed to, and they used most of the time in the room, playing around. Alderson (2004, p. 107) writes that: “Sometimes people are afraid to refuse. Researchers need to watch out for cues and gently check how they feel”. In this research I found it extra important to look for cues if the children did not want to participate, because they were so young they might not understand what it meant to be part of the research, even though it was explained to them. Alderson (2004) further writes that she have sometimes ended an interview early or chosen not to go back to participants who have given their consent to take part, because: “...I felt that they were uncomfortable about the research but did not want to say so” (Alderson, 2004, p. 107). This is what I experienced with the focus group interview described over.

During the drawing activity the one boy said that he did not want to color. He decided to draw something instead for a while. He took part in some of the conversation around the drawings, but he threw his drawing in the dust bin after a while and said he did not want it, and started playing around. I respected that he chose to throw his drawing away. Although if he had finished his coloring activity, I might have asked to take a picture, but as he seemed uninterested in being part of the activity all together, I did not ask. Alderson and Morrow (2011) write that the researchers could remind the participants their right to drop out, and that it should be pointed out that it would have no consequences for them if they do not want to participate. I asked several times if he wanted to go outside and play, and after a while he agreed to this, and I followed him outside. The boy described here, was also one of the three children described over, and when he was asked if he wanted to participate for the second interview session, he said no. The other boy participating was absent for the drawing activity and said no when asked to come along for both interviews. The issue of children who was not part of the research who did want to participate, is what will be described and discussed next.

#### **4.4.3 The issue of children not participating**

Sometimes when observing, there were situations which I found relevant, but could not include in the writing, because it involved children not participating in the study<sup>58</sup>. Solberg (1996) writes about the fact that children do not have the opportunity to decide for themselves if they want to participate or not, if their parents do not approve. As written earlier, several of the children took their chairs to come with me for one of the interview sessions. Also some times when I went to ask the children if they wanted to participate in the interviews or drawing activity there were other children there who wanted to come along. It was hard having to tell the children no and that there were only the same children participating time after time. During the first drawing activity, a child that was not part of the study came in and wanted to draw. I said several times that there were only four children that could participate and that the child should go outside and could draw some other time, but the child kept staying, interrupting.

The room could have had something to do with this, as there were windows where the children outside could see right in to where the drawing activity was held. The children also had the opportunity to go right inside where we were and there were no adults paying attention to this. I was afraid to be a too authority adult to compromise my research<sup>59</sup>. I did not want to leave the children to contact some of the adults. I did also not want to tell the children that the parents were the ones to decide if they could participate or not, to not put the parents in a difficult situation, so after a while I gave in, and gave the child a paper. Of course I did not include anything the child said or drew in this master thesis. If I were to come in the same situation again, I would have said that I was only allowed to bring four children, and that the child would have to find some of the other adults, and ask about drawing another time. The next section will concentrate on the issue of confidentiality and anonymity.

#### **4.4.4 Confidentiality and anonymity**

It could be useful to think that the participants in the research are going to read the master thesis, to provide confidentiality and anonymity (Dalland, 2007). Masson (2004, p. 52) writes

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<sup>58</sup> I have still some places in this master thesis included observations where other children were present, but in these chases there is not any descriptions of the children, and they are just referred to as a child, not mentioned by gender (except when written that Boy-V was running after some other boys).

<sup>59</sup> This will further be discussed in the section 4.4.6 My role as a researcher.



that: "Research confidentiality usually entails taking considerable care not to pass information to those connected in any way with the respondent and disclosing information only in ways which protect the identity of those who provided it". To follow up on this the location for the research, in this case the kindergarten where the research were held, will not be mentioned or be able to identify from the information written in this thesis. The participants will be anonymous and their names will not be mentioned. I learned about researchers not wanting to learn their participants' real names to protect their identity, but for research with so young children, were it important to learn the children's names to earn their trust. At the same time as learning the children's names, I gave them numbers that I used for all the writing and reflections, so the names were not written down anywhere. Later I made up new code names, so it would not be the same in the master thesis as used for all the key words, observations, reflections and transcripts right from the research field. I also chose not to mention the countries which the children's parents originated from. There should this way not be any factors written in this thesis that could identify the children participating in this study.

To secure anonymity, recording must be deleted after ended project (Dalland, 2007). The recordings and the pictures taken of the children's drawings, were deleted after the master thesis were finished written, and turned in. I carefully explained about the confidentiality to the participants. I asked the children several times during the research if I could write down what they had said in this thesis, and said that I would not mention their names. This was also written in the consent form for the parents. At the same time I was aware that I could not promise the children my full confidentiality, because if the children would tell me about for example abuse, I could not keep this a secret (Masson, 2004). Thankfully this did not become an issue in this study. When using drawing as an activity, an issue met was the issue of ownership, which will be discussed next.

#### **4.4.5 Ownership**

During both drawing activities, the children asked if they could bring the drawings home with them. When I agreed, the children said: "Woho". This shows the children's excitement to be able to bring home something they had been working on. It could be different opinions on this, if it is important that the researcher keep all the original material, or if it is more important to let the children keep what they have created. Although the drawing activity where made by me, did the children themselves colored, drew and personalized the drawings.

The children might be used to their drawings hanging in the kindergarten and not able to bring everything home with them, but this way they would still have the chance to show their drawings to the other children and adults in the kindergarten and to their parents. I asked the children if I could borrow and take pictures of the drawings. This way I still got the information I needed from the activity. After taking pictures of the drawings, I uploaded the photos to my computer, wrote down according to them, and after ended research, deleted them. I wanted the children to have a good experience with the research, and feel that it could benefit them in some way. This was the reason why I chose to let the children keep their original drawings. Next will my role as a researcher as an ethnical reflection be discussed.

#### **4.4.6 My role as a researcher**

As this research was the first time I did a fieldwork in a kindergarten, I experienced some challenges the role as a researcher gave me. Pattman and Kehily (2004) write about boys in a school-based research that expected the researcher to be a teacher-like figure sitting on the top of a table rather than in a circle. For me the difference did not become this big, because the children were used to the adults in the kindergarten sitting in circles with them and doing activities with them. On the other hand, as a researcher doing research with children in kindergarten age, I found myself at several occasions, torn between the role as a researcher, an authorial figure and a caring adult. Punch (2002, p. 324) writes that: "Adults' fears, assumptions and attitudes affect their behavior towards children". All my earlier experience and knowledge might have played a role in my relation to the children, and how the research went. Also researchers' views on children will influence the communication (Clark, 2005). If the researcher view the children as passive for example, or as active participants (Robinson and Kellet's, 2004), as done for this research. I was aware of how I approached the children and of my appearance in the kindergarten. I used bright color sweaters to try to not seem distant or too authoritarian. Some of the children had gotten the impression that I was there to see how good they were. This was unfortunate and it made me more cautious about how I presented myself to the children.

During the guide tour the children started running around. I got torn between the role of being a responsible adult who should ask them to stop, and a researcher who did not want to compromise my research by take an authority role. I feared that as an authority figure putting boundaries and being strict with the children, the power imbalance would be even bigger, and

the children might have felt obligated to take part in the research and to answer my questions. I asked the children if they could start getting dressed, and show me the outside of the kindergarten, but they said no. The deal I had with the pedagogical leader was that when we were done with the guide tour the children was going outside. It ended with me asking one of the children to ask the pedagogical leader to come. The pedagogical leader came and told the children to get dressed and go outside. They listened to her immediately, and started getting dressed. The children might not be used to an adult not putting boundaries and being strict. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) write that many researchers have tried to become friends with their children participants, but from the children's point of view it could be an uncertain and disruptive action.

Sometimes it was however necessary to put boundaries. One example is during the second drawing activity when one of the girls started to draw with the pens standing in the meeting room. When telling her not to use the pens, she answered that I am not the one in charge. I agreed with her, but explained that I had not been given the permission to use the pens, and that I could get in trouble if we did. Although the children did not see me as an authority figure, they saw me as a caring adult, and expected me to be so. The children seemed early safe on me, and one of the girls wanted to sit on my lap one of the first days of the fieldwork. Some children came to hold my hand when I arrived to the kindergarten, even children who were not part of the study. I helped putting on mittens and boots I also came in situations where children were crying. The children expected me to say something to the child who was the reason why the other child was crying. Since I was not that familiar with the kindergarten and children, and since I was there as a researcher, I sometimes referred the children to some of the adults working in the kindergarten.

The boys in this research were as written earlier only represented in the observations. There were different reasons for this. Still the fact that I am a female researcher might have led to, without me being aware of this, that the research methods applied more to the girls than to the boys. That could be part of the reason why these two boys did not want to participate. On the other hand the children are probably more used to have relations with female adults than male, since most of the adults working in the kindergarten were females. This might be one of the reasons why the children seemed so early safe on me. They might be used to different females coming into the kindergarten as students and substitutes for example. The girls in this study, could also as they are girls, strive to reach up to my expectations because they would

associate themselves more with me, than the boys, and as they would struggle to become girls in the right way<sup>60</sup> (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006). Anyway it is important to reflect over one's own role in a research setting and to be aware of ethical challenges.

## **4.5 Summary**

This chapter has provided insight in the methods used for this master thesis, together with how access to the field was established and ethical issues met. The use of multiple methods worked good in this research with children, because the methods complemented each other (Willis, 2006). The use of images made the interview sessions more interesting to the children, the drawing activity and participant observations worked good to support and supplement the information the interviews provided. It is important to be aware of ethical reflections when doing research, especially with children, and it could be good to reflect over own role as a researcher. This way one could also be aware of the power relation that is present especially when doing research with children (Corsaro, 2011). The next chapter will be the first chapter of the analysis and discussion part of this master thesis.

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<sup>60</sup> This will be presented more thoroughly in the Theory chapter section 3.2.3 Gender identities and discussed further in the analysis and discussion part, section 6.3 Children's experiences with gender.

## **5. Being part of the multicultural kindergarten**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the children's perspectives on being part of a multicultural kindergarten. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is: *The multicultural approach*, which will discuss how the kindergarten's approach towards diversity is represented by the adult's practice and the toys, playing material and decorations in the kindergarten. This will be done by discussing *diversity as normality*, *differences as a resource* and how the focus on *celebration* is. The second part is: *Focus on friendship*, which will contain: *talking about friendship* and *inclusion and exclusion in relation to play*. This part will describe and discuss how in the kindergarten it was a big focus on friendships and inclusion in play, and how this influenced the children. The third part is: *The child culture in the kindergarten*, which will contain: *culture aspects*, *play as child culture*, *child culture for or by children?* and *what influenced the child culture?* This part will discuss how the common child culture in the kindergarten was, and how it was influenced by the diversity.

### **5.1 The multicultural approach**

#### **5.1.1 Diversity as normality?**

To understand fully the children's experience and perspectives on diversity, it would be helpful to start to look at how diversity is valued in the kindergarten which they are a part of. So to understand how going to a multicultural kindergarten would be experienced by the children, and influence the children's understandings of cultural differences, it would be useful to start with how the diversity is part of the kindergarten's practice. Said in other words; how the multicultural approach is. Seeing children as social actors in their own lives (Corsaro, 2011; Prout and James, 1990), as is a common view in the sociology of childhood, one could argue that the children think for themselves when it comes to facing diversity, not influenced as much by the adults in the kindergarten's views and practice. The children still get influenced by their role models and their environment. Their parents' and the adults working in the kindergartens' action and spoken opinions will therefore affect the children's attitude (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Also as Devine (2004, p. 39) writes from the study in Ireland that: "The children's perceptions of inclusion, exclusion, sameness and difference

influenced how they interacted with children who were ethnically different than themselves”. The adults in their surroundings would in this sense play a part in the children’s perspectives.

The pedagogical leader defined the kindergarten as a multicultural kindergarten based on the multiple cultures represented in the child group and among the adults working in the kindergarten. This is also the way Spernes and Hatlem (2013) uses the concept multicultural, although as written earlier, to define itself as a multicultural kindergarten, it also needs to have a multicultural approach (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006; Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). In this multicultural kindergarten different languages were sometimes spoken, and as the children were used to this, saw this as a natural part of their daily life in the kindergarten<sup>61</sup>. As the pedagogical leader said during the interview that it might be hard to explain, but: “...it is not any WOW...it is not a big thing like that...it is just so natural, I feel, the multicultural diversity we have here”<sup>62</sup>.

The children going to a multicultural kindergarten, would not realize that in other kindergartens, it might not be normal to hear many different languages being spoken, they rather relate to what is normal for them. In this sense going to a multicultural kindergarten will influence the children’s understandings of diversity, in the sense that they get used to people having and talking different languages, from a much younger age than when maybe other children starts to realize that they live in a society that consists of people who speak different languages. At the same time the children could relate to children in the same situation as them. In the Irish schools the children’s understanding of ethnic diversity was connected to the children’s relations to difference and normality (Devine, 2004). So for the children to experience something as different, it also needs to be something that is viewed as normal. So what is normal, and if the diversity is seen as normality, would then depend on what seems normal to the children, and what is normality to them. It could for example be aspects they are so used to, that they do not see as something different. In this way the children would maybe not experience the diversity so much if the diversity was normality. On the other hand, do the children not think about the diversity because it is a natural part of the kindergarten, or because it is not visible?

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<sup>61</sup> This will be further described and discussed in part 6.2 Children’s experiences with language.

<sup>62</sup> My translation. This is the case for all the quotation from interviews and observations done for this master thesis.

For the kindergarten to be a multicultural kindergarten, it also depends on if the adults working in the kindergarten view the cultural and language diversity as normality (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007). However would how the adults view the kindergarten, also influence the children's experiences (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). The languages were, as discussed previous in this section, noticeable as different languages were being spoken. Decorations are another way diversity could come to expression in the kindergarten. Different flags were hanging in the kindergarten representing the children's different backgrounds, which would be a good way to represent the diversity (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). On the other hand this might not be a good way to represent the diversity, as the children might identify themselves as Norwegian and not associate themselves with the flag representing the country maybe just their parents or parent are born in, and not themselves. As Knudsen (2008) writes the children may not necessarily identify themselves with everything connected to their family background. The children might then feel like this does not fit with their identity. If this then is done without corporation with the children and the children's parents, the children could get a bad experience with the representation of the diversity. Also would it probably be more important for the children to get recognition for their resources and what they connect with their family background, than that there are flags hanging in the kindergarten.

Even though it could be argued whether or not diversity was normality in this kindergarten, the children's different backgrounds were not seen as deviant and different from the Norwegian culture (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). There were so many different backgrounds coming together in the kindergarten, that it did not seem as one majority culture, and then minority cultures that was viewed as deviant from this, as in the study in Ireland (Devine, 2004; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008). So still the diversity was a normality, although it on some point, for example by the playing material could have been better represented, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **5.1.2 Playing material**

One could argue a lot about what is a good way to represent the diversity, and how the diversity could influence the children. To capture the children's perspectives however, the

children themselves needs to be asked. In the following excerpt from an interview, Girl-Z and Girl-W answer how they think it is to be a child in this specific multicultural kindergarten:

*Researcher: "But how is it to be a child in this kindergarten?"*

*Girl-Z: "Mmmm"*

*Girl-W: "It is..."*

*Girl-Z: "Mmm, it is toys"*

*Girl-W: "It toys"<sup>63</sup>*

*Researcher: "What toys is it?"*

*Girl-Z: "Mmm, we are playing..."*

*Girl-W: "Legos"*

*Girl-Z: "Legos"*

*Researcher: "Legos, yes"*

*Girl-Z: "Aaand Barbie dolls"*

*Researcher: "Barbie dolls, yes"*

*Girl-Z: "And we are playing with beads a little"*

*Researcher: "Beads, mhm"*

*Girl-Z: "And we are doing..."*

*Girl-W: "And we are using big beads, and vi are using, aaaand mother and father and children are we playing".*

It seemed that what the children valued the most with their kindergarten, were playing, and having friends. This could confirm that play is a natural part of being a child (Lillemyr, 2009). The children also played a lot during observations and most of the times with playing material. In this sense it could be an important factor to the children what playing material they have in the kindergarten, as they in the excerpts of the interview listed over started talking about. This would probably count for children generally and not be special for a multicultural kindergarten. One could argue that toys and playing are more important to children than how the diversity is represented in the kindergarten because this is what the children focus on. However it matters for how the diversity is represented what books and songs, together with toys, pictures and food they have in the multicultural kindergarten (Becher and Fajersson, 2008). The playing material could in this sense also play a part in how the diversity is represented, and on how the children feel about their specific kindergarten. And thereby the children's experiences with diversity and their understandings of cultural differences might also be influenced by the choice of toys they have in the kindergarten. The toys observed in the kindergarten were toy cars, clothes, dolls, Barbie dolls, Legos, Jovo, puzzle games, beads, drawing pencils, computer games and a toy kitchen.

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<sup>63</sup> The word for toys and to play are the same in Norwegian, when Girl-W said in Norwegian: "Det leker", it is not certain if she means: "It toys" like in "it is toys" or "it plays" like in "we play". This is why I continue asking about the toys, instead of asking what they play.



The toy kitchen could also be described as a doll corner or family corner, because it was there the dolls and clothing were to be found. Family corners are common for Norwegian kindergartens (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). Different playing material needs to be found in these family corners, so children could explore different identities and take on different roles in their play (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). Also dolls with different appearance would give the children the opportunity to get confirmation of their identity (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). In the family corner there were for example scarfs that the children can use as hijab or headscarf, among other clothes that the children could play dress up with, and they also did use hijab in their play<sup>64</sup>. There were only baby dolls with a very light skin color observed in the kindergarten, the same for the Barbie dolls, although fewest of the children had a very light skin color. The children were only observed playing with a baby doll one time. Then it was Girl-T holding it for a little while. When playing in the family corner they were mostly playing the baby themselves. This could maybe have something to do with the factor that all the dolls had light skin color, and the children might not have identified with them. There were Duplo figures with both light and dark skin color. The children were observed playing with Duplo two times. This way could the children's choice of playing material not be seen as based only on appearance of the toy dolls, but could still have had an influence.

In addition to dolls and clothing in the family corner, were there purses, toy iron, toy casserole, plates and toy food. The toy food observed was hamburgers, chips, fruit, donut, pizza and crackers, which could be described as typical American food. Typical Norwegian play food could for example be fish and potatoes. In other countries there would be other types of foods that are common. On the other hand many Norwegian families today eat typical American food, although there could be children in the kindergarten with many different preferences in food, and food they view as normal. Again this would differ from family to family and not just based on cultural or ethnical background, although there are some types of food that is typical for and connected to different societies. Some of the children came along to show me their family corner as well during the guide tour. Boy-V explained that what they usually play in the family corner is food, and that the food they play with or are pretend making in the family corner is food like: "ice cream, coca cola and chips"

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<sup>64</sup> This will be further discussed in the part 5.3.4 What influenced the child culture?

he said. That he had clear thoughts about the family corner, would seem that this was an important part of their kindergarten, although they were not observed playing in it so much. Boy-V could also have thoughts about the family corner without playing in it, he would still know that it is there and have thoughts about it.

It is also important that the kindergarten have books in different languages (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). As all the books, and almost all the songs observed in the kindergarten were in Norwegian, and also typical Norwegian fairytales were the once chosen to use in the joined activities, it could be argued that the majority culture is what is seen as normal in the kindergarten, although the diversity was seen as normality. One of the aims for the guide tour was to get the children's perspectives on their kindergarten, by seeing what was important for the children to show from their daily life in their kindergarten. What was found could be based on the children's interests in the particular moment (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Girl-Y for example wanted to show me the book *Musevisa*<sup>65</sup>, during the guide tour. She wanted me to sing the song for her. At one point three girls were standing up singing the song. They had probably been singing this song in the Advent gatherings in the kindergarten<sup>66</sup>. Maybe the children wanted to show that they knew the song, a song they maybe liked very much and had been working very much with. This shows that singing songs also is part of what they do in their kindergarten, and that this is something they enjoyed. So even though different languages were spoken, and this became normality, was still the main language Norwegian, and the children did not get to use their language other than by their own initiative. So at the same time as speaking different languages is normality, is at the same time the Norwegian language seen as the common, normal language, in the sense that it was this language that was used by all the children and adults in the kindergarten. Next it will be discussed till what extent differences were seen as a resource in the multicultural kindergarten.

### **5.1.3 Diversity as a resource?**

When the diversity and different cultural aspects is emphasized as a resource to the kindergarten, then the children could also experience this diversity as something positive (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). Even though the diversity was seen as normality,

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<sup>65</sup> Which is an illustrated Norwegian Christmas song written by Alf Prøysen.

<sup>66</sup> This will be further described and discussed in the section 5.1.4 Celebration.

different language and religion were maybe more visible than cultural aspects in itself, and would then be easier to value and to see as resources. Maybe if the different aspects of the children's different cultures were even more visible, for example in fairytales from different cultures, then the children would also be more aware of the cultural differences, and the value of a cultural diversity. If the cultural and language diversity had been visual in the books and songs in the kindergarten, the diversity would that way have been an even more natural part of the kindergarten.

On the other hand it could be very hard to show aspects of the children's different cultures. The children would at least need to be involved in the process, as each child would need to define for her- or himself what is part of her or his culture (Knudsen, 2008). There would for example be little point in singing a song from the home country of someone or someone's parents, if he or she has not even heard the song. Also children might not want to sing the songs they sing at home in the kindergarten, as it might be easier for them to relate to not mixing cultural aspects at home and cultural aspects in the kindergarten<sup>67</sup>. On the other hand, if there is a song in a child's home language that the child likes very much, the child could feel pride in teaching this song to the rest of the group. Åberg and Taguchi (2006) write about a project carried out in a kindergarten, called similar- different. The adults had asked themselves if they view the children's differences as a resource. In this project the children got encouraged to answer what the other children were good at, so the adults would be aware of the children's different abilities. The children had a lot of nice things to say about each other, they knew who knew how to pull up zippers and who knew how to tie shoelaces. When knowing about the different abilities, they could get better use of the abilities, and the children could help out each other. Rather than having to learn everything themselves, they could do everything with help from their peers (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006).

As the example from the previous paragraph is not focused on multicultural resources, to focus on abilities would be good to do in any kindergarten, not just kindergartens with a multicultural diversity. Although in a kindergarten with a multicultural diversity it could be an extra good thing for the children to get to use their abilities, as they might for example have a lot of hidden knowledge from their cultural background and in their home language. For

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<sup>67</sup> This will also be discussed in relation to language, in next chapter, in part 6.2.2 The challenges with different languages.

example songs or fairytales. It seemed that in the kindergarten the similarities and togetherness might have been weighted more than the differences. Maybe the children would have liked more focus on similarities and differences as well. To see diversity as a resource, one would also need to put a focus on the differences, showing that each child has their own abilities and knowledge. In a project about similarities and differences in a kindergarten, where the children were working on making self portraits in different material, Åberg and Taguchi (2006) write that: “We observed that the children showed big interest in comparing similarities and differences in each other’s ways of thinking and acting”<sup>68</sup> (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006, p. 40). In the study from primary schools in Ireland, when focusing on positive sides of the diversity, the children saw it as an opportunity to make new friends, and that they could benefit from each other’s knowledge, for example they spoke of the different knowledge in geography that could help them in geography assignments (Devine, 2004). So it could be good to focus on the children’s different abilities and knowledge, both embedded and not embedded in their cultural backgrounds.

The kindergarten could however have had more focus on this than what was captured in this study. Becher (2004) writes from a research done with children in school, that many children struggle between the cultural norms at home and in the school, and that their parents and teachers do not understand the difficulty in this struggle. To focus more on the children’s home cultures and home languages in the kindergarten, could maybe help the children not to feel such distance between the two arenas. At the same time children in a kindergarten with great cultural diversity would be able to find other children to relate to, if not cultural alike, because everyone has their own culture (Knudsen, 2008) at least children in the same situation. Next will the multicultural approach be discussed in the light of celebrations in the kindergarten.

#### **5.1.4 Celebration**

The pedagogical leader explained that there is a special day in the kindergarten once a year where the different cultures and languages come to expression. The children themselves are active participants on this day in visualization of the diversity. By doing this it is a risk that the different cultures would be represented as exotic (Tholin, 2008), and not as normal and a

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<sup>68</sup> My translation.

resource. This day had however an extra focus on the children's cultural backgrounds, so still the different backgrounds seemed like a natural part of the kindergarten, as written in the previous sections. Different religious holidays were also celebrated, there among Christmas and Id. Before Christmas they had an Advent<sup>69</sup> gathering every day in December in the kindergarten, where they talked a little bit about why many people in Norway celebrate Christmas. They did the same before Id, but not as many days. They also celebrated the Sami day and UN day, and a celebration on the children's birthdays.

During the interview Girl-X started to talk about her birthday on her own initiative. Birthday celebration is an important event to the children, and they often start counting down many days before the actual day (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Girl-X said that she had a diary where she wrote down how many days were left to her birthday. Observation of a birthday celebration in the kindergarten showed that the birthday child got to sit in a special chair and got a crown. The rest of the children and adults were standing in a circle around the birthday child and sang the birthday song in Norwegian<sup>70</sup> and in another language. The birthday boy, who also was part of this study, seemed very proud, as he was smiling at the attention he got. Girl-X explained during the interview that the birthday child also gets to choose what kind of food he or she would like to eat in the kindergarten that day.

Birthday celebration both in and outside of the kindergarten, seemed important to Girl-X, as this was something she chose to talk about during the interview. To have a day where each child would be in focus of the attention could give the children a positive feeling. It seemed like Girl-X was looking forward to this. To put focus on the children in this kind of way, would make the children feel like a part of the togetherness, rather than if focusing on presenting the children's different cultural background, which would also provide a risk of presenting something of the children's backgrounds they do not identify themselves with. As written earlier not all children would associate themselves with food or music of the country of their origin (Knudsen, 2008). Especially if they are born in Norway and their parents country of origin is represented as their' background. The next thing that will be discussed is how the kindergarten's area of interest at the time the field work were carried out were

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<sup>69</sup> This is the period from Desember 1<sup>st</sup> till Desember 24<sup>th</sup>, usually used for preparing for and counting days until Christmas.

<sup>70</sup> "Hurra for deg som fyller ditt år".

working with friendship, and how this influenced the children and their experiences with diversity and being a part of the multicultural kindergarten.

## **5.2 Focus on friendship**

### **5.2.1 Talking about friendship**

In the kindergarten, there was a big focus on friendship. At least at the time when the field work for this master thesis was carried out, they worked a lot with friendship and inclusion<sup>71</sup> and exclusion<sup>72</sup> from play. The girls participating in this study seemed eager to talk about their kindergarten. When asking about their thoughts about the kindergarten: “I wonder what you could tell me about the kindergarten?” Girl-Z answered: “We have good in the kindergarten”. To make sure I captured what she meant, I asked if she have a good time in the kindergarten, and she answered: “M-m”. Girl-X seemed eager and was smiling during the interview. To the question: “How is it to be a child in the kindergarten?” Girl-X answered: “It is fun”. She further explained this by saying that it is fun to play and to have friends. To the question: “What is the best with the kindergarten?” Girl-X answered: “That is to have friends and to play with it”.

That friendships were important to the children were also clear from the drawing activities and the participant observations. As Singer and de Haan (2011) write children likes to play with peers. From observations of free play the children seemed to play more together with other children, than they played alone. During the drawing activities some of the children chose to draw a sibling or a friend on the back of their paper. While they were drawing they talked about how their siblings and friends were someone they liked to play with. In the language groups they also talked about friends, Boy-V seemed very eager and was tapping his feet during the conversation, he listed several boys names to answering who were his friends. The following observation shows how important peer’s opinions could be to the children:

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<sup>71</sup> Spernes and Hatlem (2013, p. 166) refer to the concept inclusion as an: “organizational action to promote participation and equality”. (My translation). It means that all children should have a natural place in the togetherness in the kindergarten (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013).

<sup>72</sup> Exclusion will in this master thesis be understood as the opposite of inclusion, to be defined out of the togetherness.

*Girl-T and Girl-Y are sitting by a small table drawing. Girl-X, Girl-Q and Girl-Z comes over to the table, and stand next to it. Girl-X watch Girl-T draw, and then says: "That was pretty what you have drawn". Girl-Y said: "I have drawn a horse". Girl-X replied: "It was pretty".*

It seemed important for Girl-Y to get positive comments on her drawing. It is important to get support, and it could be especially important to get positive comments from peers. As Åberg and Taguchi write from the project: *similarity-difference*: "To listen to friends that told something good about oneself was of course important for all the children..."<sup>73</sup> (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006, p. 82). That the adults working in the kindergarten choose to work with something as important for the children as friendships, would then be a good resource for the children. This topic might be in big focus in other kindergartens as well, and is important to focus on in all kindergartens, and not just multicultural kindergartens, or at least would be important for children in all kindergartens.

At the same time, the observation above together with friendship being important to children might confirm what Knudsen (2008) writes that what matters to the children is not what cultural background the other children have, or how the diversity is emphasized in the kindergarten, but rather the other children's competence in child culture and play. This was also found in the study in Ireland, that there were other aspects than culture and ethnicity that were more important for the children's friendships (Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008). Children with different cultural backgrounds could on the other hand still have different ways to play. The children's cultural backgrounds would in this sense still matter<sup>74</sup>.

The adults working in the kindergarten were talking with the children about friendship in the language groups and during joined activities. They talked about friend rules that they needed to follow and how everybody should be included in play. They sang Norwegian songs about friendship and read books about being friends<sup>75</sup>. They also had a poster in the kindergarten about bullying and friendship. By working with friendship and that everyone should play with everyone, and working with inclusion in the togetherness, they were at some levels working with preventing racism. Because if the children learn especially in a diverse child group, that everyone can play with everyone, and that everyone should include everyone, then that is a

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<sup>73</sup> My translation.

<sup>74</sup> This will be further discussed in the part 6.1.1 Cultural differences.

<sup>75</sup> Also in Norwegian.

good starting point for togetherness. A positive image of differences could prevent fear of what is unknown (Larsen, 2006). To focus on the togetherness would involve meeting other people with a new and unknown expression as a wish to explore what is similar, rather than what is different (Knudsen, 2008). If the children view each other as a part of the same togetherness, and continue into the world having friends with different cultural, ethnical, religious and language background, then they could meet new people with an open mind. As my young relative, as mentioned in the very beginning of this master thesis, did associate the new person she met with someone a person she knew very well were friends with. The same way could these children<sup>76</sup>, associate new people with someone they know, and even are or have been good friends with.

The children's answers during the interviews were much influenced by the theme they were working with in the kindergarten, that everyone should be friends with everyone. To the question who is your friends, Girl-X said: "That is everyone in the kindergarten", although when asking who she usually played with, she mentioned some children's names. When asking the children during the interviews if the children in the images could be friends, they did not hesitate, they just said yes. This was kind of a leading question, although I was open for both *yes* and *no*, and wanted to get a conversation with the children. It seemed like the children's answers could be learned, and that they also in interview sessions answered that everyone could be friends because they saw this as the right answer.

Although the children at most times answered that everyone could be friends, there were in two different interviews two different girls talking about hitting each other. When asking if the children in the images could be friends, Girl-X answered yes, but when talking more about the images, Girl-Q said: "Yes, but she hits her". When asking why, she said: "She shall hit on we". When asking why one more time, she answered: "I do not know". Maybe she had just experience that someone was hitting someone. Maybe she did not understand the questions, or maybe she was just trying to make a conversation about the drawings. It might feel safer for the children to talk about topics like hitting each other when they can put their feelings onto the images of other children instead of relating to themselves. On the other hand

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<sup>76</sup> As they did in the interviews with the children in the images, which will be described in part 6.4.1 Seeing differences and similarities.



it could also be an aspect of play that Girl-Q did not mean this in a bad way, but rather as part of playing.

The other example was in the very end of the interview and I asked the children if they wanted to go outside to play. Girl-Z answered no, so I asked if they wanted to continue talking about the children in the images. Girl-Z then answered that they wanted to talk about if they are enjoying their kindergarten. I answered her okay, and asked what she could tell me about that. She answered that they hit others. Then Girl-W said in a strange voice: “Everyone should play with everyone”. She also then said that: “It is not allowed to say that one do not want to play together, everyone needs to say: I am going to play with you”. Maybe the children were tired of the adults saying over and over that everyone should play with everyone. Maybe they needed to get out a little frustration. Maybe this was part of showing their agency. As Corsaro (2009, p. 302) writes that: “Children make persistent attempts to gain control of their lives and to share that control with each other. In early childhood years (two to six years old), children have an overriding concern with social participation and develop strategies for challenging adult authority”. The girls were maybe trying to do this.

For a joined activity to provide meaning and be interesting to the children, it must take the children’s own interests as a starting point (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006). In this way would focusing on friendship, something that seemed so important to the children, be a good starting point for making a joined activity that would be interesting and meaningful to the children. On the other hand the adults might have focused on friendships in another way than the children themselves would have. The children might have started to get tired of the adults telling them what to do, and might have found the joined activities and the focus on friendship more interesting if they were able to contribute to the content of these joined activities. As Åberg and Taguchi (2006, p. 38) reflect: “We had for a long time planed the joined activities based on the image that the adults own all the knowledgment, and from that view did we not either have use for the children’s input to the preparations”<sup>77</sup>. The main focus on friendship from the adults in the kindergarten’s perspective was on inclusion in play, which together with exclusion will be discussed next.

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<sup>77</sup> My translation.

### 5.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion in relation to play

At the same time as having focus on friendship and inclusion in play, the pedagogical leader explained that the adults in the kindergarten work so close to the children, that they know who goes together and who does not go so well together. In this way the adults could try to start another activity together with the newcomers to prevent the play from falling apart if the newcomers did not go well with the well-established play. How the adults in the kindergarten are handling conflicts involving children being excluded from play, together with their relationships with the children, contribute to shape the social development the children share with their peers (Howes, 2011).

The adults would in this sense contribute to give the children a good experience with being part of the togetherness in the kindergarten. They could help children to be included in playing situations that are good for the children to be part of, rather than playing situations where the child lacks experience and could end up even with putting an end to the established playing situation. Singer and de Haan (2011) write from their study that the children there were told to let everyone be welcomed into play, but also that newcomers should not disturb already playing children. They write about different types of conflicts they found in their study. These were conflicts about unwelcoming physical contact, objects and play ideas and what they call: “I-want-to-join-in-conflicts”. The last one was very common in the observations in this research. Although the adults sometimes intervened in the children’s conflicts, the children sometimes had to figure it out for themselves. One example on “I-want-to-join-in-conflict” is from the hike day:

*Girl-Z, Girl-X and Girl-Q were walking together during most of the hike. Boy-U ran over to them and asked Girl-X if he could play with them. I did not hear what she answered. Boy-U asked Girl-Z the same question and she answered: “I do not know”. Then Boy-U said “Okay” and went back to the other children he was walking with.*

Also another time Boy-U asked Girl-Z if he could play with her and the children she was playing with. Girl-Z answered that she did not know because they were playing mother, father and child. Children that for some reasons are excluded or choose to withdraw from peers will miss opportunities of play, and will also miss out on developing social interactions and relationship skills in relation with peers (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Even though they talked Norwegian, there were no adults there to oversee the situations and to take action. The children had to figure out the situation by themselves. Both times Boy-U ran off, but neither

of the times did he show that it affected him to be rejected. Nilsen (2000) presents in her PhD a concept which she calls "we-ness"<sup>78</sup>. Nilsen (2005, p. 123) writes that: "We-ness involves an intimate relationship, with meanings such as 'we are together' and 'we are friends'". The we-ness is not a locked concept, if there is a conflict between someone they can always become friends again (Nilsen, 2000). Boy-U who was excluded from play could try again later (Nilsen, 2000), as he also did. It does not mean that the girls did not want to be friends with him, just that they were not playing together in the specific moment. Because even though not including others in their play could seem selfish from an adult's point of view, the children could just want to protect the playing situation they already had established from being disturbed by others (Corsaro, 2009). It could to the children seem unharmed, and it could be hard to relate to the adults talking about having to include everyone in play.

In the first situation there were only girls walking together when Boy-U asked if he could play with them. Since it seemed like the children had a lot of focus on gender, this could be the reason why he was not included. At least in school settings, both children and adults justify the exclusion of children by talking about the differences between boys and girls (Thorne, 1990). The observations shows at the same time that the girls talked a lot about who they were going to play with and who they were not going to play with. For example; Girl-X was saying that Girl-Q did not want to play with her, so she was going to play with Girl-Z instead. On the other hand if it were to continue that Boy-U over and over again would be excluded from play, then it could feel hurtful to him.

In the study in primary schools in Ireland, the children used hurtful words bound in racism to exclude each other (Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008). Since this was a kindergarten and not a primary school, racism could come later, as it seemed it had not anything to do with Boy-U's appearance or ethnical or cultural background, that he was excluded from play. It could of course still be one of those reasons, but the girls did also play together even though they had different ethnical, cultural and language backgrounds. Also in this study the children did not seem to use particular names for particular children, but could rather use gender to include or exclude each other<sup>79</sup>, although it is not certain that this was the case for Boy-U in the two situations described over. Also as written earlier, that children are influenced by the

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<sup>78</sup> In Norwegian she calls this: "Vi-felleskap" (Nilsen, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> This will further be discussed in the part 6.3 Children's experiences with gender.

adult's in their surroundings' actions and opinions (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013) and that what they learn in kindergarten. So for example by having a focus on friendship, that even though similarities might create friendship and togetherness (Larsen, 2006) that everybody could play together despite differences this might work against racism. The "want-to-join-in-conflicts" is probably found in all child groups, the children in this kindergarten could meet other challenges connected to language and culture as well, and being included in play could seem even more important, since some children for example could have difficulty expressing themselves in Norwegian, and peer relations could then seem more challenging. Next will the child culture in the kindergarten be presented and discussed.

### **5.3 The child culture in the kindergarten**

#### **5.3.1 Cultural aspects**

As culture is not something we are born with, but something we learn through the socialization process (Larsen, 2006), and the socialization process is going on both at home and in the kindergarten, the children will get cultural aspects both at home and in the kindergarten. The art of the child culture will then depend on whether the children are at home or in the kindergarten (Kampmann, 2001). The children could be part of one child culture in the kindergarten, and a totally different child culture at home. At the same time as children takes cultural aspects from the kindergarten home with them (Howes, 2011), it could also be the other way around, that the children bring factors from their culture at home to the kindergarten. For example, one time one of the girls was playing a game with some other children where she took a scarf over a child's head, saying the child needed to have it on to be loved. Here one of the adults working in the kindergarten asked the girl, if she was referring to a wedding tradition, which she confirmed. Here she took cultural aspects with her into their playing. This is a good example of cultural diversity, as the girl was very aware of how it should be, although the other children in this situation seemed unsure of her intentions. The kindergarten would in this sense be influenced by the cultural diversity, as the children bring aspects from their home culture into the kindergarten, and the child culture. Also the children then would get experiences with different cultures.

At the same time as play culture is local it is also global, because games can have similarities across cultures, but still differ (Mouritsen, 2002), which also the example over shows.

Although the children had many different cultural backgrounds, the common culture in the

kindergarten seemed to be factors of the typical Norwegian culture, such as songs like *Bæ bæ lille lam* and *Musevisa*. These were songs that all the children seemed to know. The fact that the children do have different cultural and language background could mean that these songs and other Norwegian cultural aspects would be extra important. These aspects could help the children to learn about culture which is common both for the society which they are a part of, and for their friends in the kindergarten. This way the Norwegian culture could create togetherness in the kindergarten. Also as people with different backgrounds brings with them aspects of different cultures, then these become a part of the Norwegian culture (Larsen, 2006). This development of the Norwegian culture challenge the understanding of what is defined as Norwegian (Tholin, 2008). In this sense could for example hijab that is not originally associated with the Norwegian society, be seen as part of the Norwegian culture. Because immigrates that uses hijab could influence others, and especially their children to use hijab, and since these no longer are seen as immigrates but Norwegians, then this would be part of the Norwegian culture. Taco<sup>80</sup> is now part of the Norwegian culture, although it is really based on a Mexican type of food dish. This way the children's different cultures could be influenced by so many aspects, not just their parents' cultural background, and the common culture in the society, but also their friends' cultural backgrounds as they will meet aspects of these in the kindergarten. Next will the aspect of play as child culture be described and discussed.

### **5.3.2 Play as child culture**

Play is an important part of the child culture (Lillemyr, 2009). Children's friendships help facilitate processes of cultural reproduction, because it is mostly together with peers that children play, tell jokes and share ideas (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). The children played with a lot of different toys and playing material, and they played mostly with each other. Kindergartens might have a more important function as a place for the children's play culture, than for being a pedagogical institution (Mouritsen, 2002). This could be underlined by the children's own reflections, as written earlier. Although all children play, it is very different how they play and who they choose to play with (Montgomery, 2009). As shown in the observations. The children played with different children of different cultural backgrounds,

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<sup>80</sup> A common dinner dish in Norway.

with different home language and with different gender<sup>81</sup>. The children had different preference in play. While some were many times in charge of games, others preferred mostly adult lead activities. When asked what they thought the children in the images liked to play with, the children mostly answered toys and activities that they also like themselves. The children played with a lot more than what shows from the drawing activity, were the girls circled gender typical items like Barbie doll and baby doll. The observation sheet provided good information about what the children played with:

*Inside: Making bracelet out of beads, playing in the hallway with a Barbie book, coloring activity lead by adults, sitting on an adults lap, listening to an adult reading a book, making bead pictures, playing dress up, drawing, playing on the computer, solving a puzzle, building with Jovo, painting activity lead by adults, playing in the hallway, playing under a table covered with blankets, sitting on the chairs in a line, laying on the floor, carrying each other on the back, sitting in the window playing hocus pocus with a piece of cotton, sitting in the hallway with some teddy bears, playing with Barbie dolls, running around inside, playing with cars, hiding under the jackets in the hallway, playing with Legos, play fighting on the floor, climbing.*

*Outside: Playing with sledding boards, playing with sticks, playing the shark is coming lead by adults, playing red light lead by children, playing on the swings, taking turns standing on their hands on a small hill, playing with bucket and spade, climbing on a fence, playing on a play apparatus, sliding down the slide, eating snow, laying on the ground.*

It seemed that it were more alternatives for the children to do inside the kindergarten, than in the playing area outside. Spernes and Hatlem (2013) write that in multicultural kindergartens the outside area should also represent the diversity, in outdoor games for example. The observations did not capture this, although the diversity was still represented in the children talking different languages in their play. The children played games learned and initiated by adults. The children did for example play the game: *The shark is coming*<sup>82</sup> initiated by adults, and the game: *Red light*<sup>83</sup> on their own initiative. These are common games in Norway, which they probably have learned from adults, but they can also have learned it from older siblings or from each other. For example as Howes (2011) writes that children bring culture aspects from peer play from the kindergarten home to their younger siblings.

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<sup>81</sup> Although the children most of the times played with children with the same gender as themselves.

<sup>82</sup> In this game one person is the shark, another person is calling the children by names, or by group names, who is going to go run around the shark. When the person shouts: "The shark is coming" the shark is supposed to try and catch the people running, and if they get caught they would also become sharks.

<sup>83</sup> In this game, one person is the red light standing with the back against the other people playing, moving closer to the red light. When the red light turns around everyone has to freeze, and if someone moves, the red light would call their names, telling them to go back to the starting point. If someone reaches the red light without being seen moving, the person says: "Red light" and changes place with person being the red light.

When asking about what the children thought the children in the images liked to play with, they did not only answer toys and activities they play in the kindergarten, but also other things like, jumping rope, lotto and boat. The children might play with different toys at home than in the kindergarten, for example, one of the girls said that she had a sheep toy at home, in her home language. What toys the children have to their disposal will also, together with cultural aspects and of course how many children there are, affect that the children's play is different at the kindergarten than at the children's homes.

One factor that is characteristic for the Norwegian society today, is the use of computers (Lillemyr, 2009). Several times children were observed playing on the computer, but mostly the same children were playing, and mostly more than one child at the time. It is common when computer and computer games are used in kindergartens that there are two or more children playing together (Lillemyr, 2009). Both Girl-Z and Girl-T were seen playing on the computer three times each. One time Girl-Z and Girl-T were playing a computer game together. They were placing objects, and the character in the game said the name of the objects in Norwegian. For example milk and butter. Also because they were playing the game together, they could learn from each other, support each other and comment on each other's choices (Lillemyr, 2009). This specific computer game could strengthen the children's competence in Norwegian, and as they were sitting together they could cooperate on the game.

### **5.3.3 Child culture for or by children?**

The children did as mentioned over, not only play with toys, but also without playing material. One example of a game the children made up themselves, were the frog game. Together with playing this game, Girl-X also mentioned it during an interview. It were during the free play, that Girl-X and Girl-Z were playing together, and Girl-X immediately explained that they were playing funny frogs. She showed me by placing herself in a special position on the floor. However this was the only time the frog game were observed, so it could be argued if it could be called child culture, or if it was just spontaneous play. This would anyway be child culture created by children. It could still be influenced by something the girls had seen somewhere, maybe on television, but it could also be something they had invented by

themselves. Under is an excerpt from an interview about the children in the images, when the girls started talking about a specific playing material:

*Researcher: "What do you think they like to play with?"*

*Girl-Q: "Monter high, monter high"*

*Girl-X: "No not monster high. Maybe Barbie dolls"*

*Researcher: "Monster high? Okay is that some kind of dolls?"*

*Girl-X: "No, not dolls like that".*

*Researcher: "Is it not?"*

*Girl-X: "It is vampires?"*

*Researcher: "It is like that, yes but is it almost like Barbie dolls just that they are scary?"*

*Girl-X: "They like to such blood and stuff"*

*Researcher: "Uh oh"*

*Girl-Q: "That is okay"*

These kinds of dolls, or according to Girl-X not dolls, are made by adults for children. In this sense is Monster high part of the child culture for children. It could seem that this is something that is scary for children, but these children did not seem affected by that at all. That the "dolls" where sucking blood seemed normal and totally okay. Vampires are probably something that is modern and popular in today's western society, so that the children are used to this aspect. At the same time one could argue whether vampires and dolls masked as monsters are proper toys for children. On the other hand, there are also a lot of different toy weapons made for children, like pistols. Boys in most parts of the world play shooting games (Mouritsen, 2002). One could argue if that is proper toys and games for children, and what it could do to their development.

Adults would have very much power over what the child culture consist of. Adults working in toy industries have power over what toys are produced, in the same way as adults working in the kindergarten have a lot of influence over what toys and playing material the children have to their disposal in their daily life in the kindergarten. Parents and adults working in kindergartens do not, on the other hand, have control over the toy producers and the media (Mouritsen, 2002). So even though kindergartens might have a focus on what is good or correct toys and play for children, the media may still influence the children, without the adult's control. On the other hand, Mouritsen (2002) who write about boys' shooting games, do not write anything about boys needing fabric made toys to play these games. It could be argued that the toys are made after the children's interests, and not that the children's interests are formed by the toys available. As the new sociology of childhood sees children as active in their own lives, this would argue that the children are active in their own child culture, having



their own interests, not controlled by advertisements and the media. As Kampmann (2001) and Mouritsen (2002) writes the children are not passive in the child culture, but active. Children are not victims of influence and exploitation, but are making use of the products and relate actively to them (Mouritsen, 2002). At the same time this does not mean that the modern media and products should be allowed uncritically. Rather it is a need for developing a more critical position for there to be created more qualitatively-oriented products (Mouritsen, 2002). Although here a discussion about what is proper toys for children could be raised. This master thesis will however not go into this discussion<sup>84</sup>.

The monster high dolls described over were toys the children had at home and not in the kindergarten, but still part of the child culture, although the child culture in the kindergarten might be different, as they do not have monster high in the kindergarten. This might also be an aspect of the western play culture, and aspect of play cultures in other societies could for example be shooting games (Mouritsen, 2002). The following observation shows a situation in the free play in the outside playing area of the kindergarten. It shows how the children could be engaged in bad things, even weapon, also in their child culture in the kindergarten:

*Girl-Y and Girl-T are playing together in the outside area of the kindergarten. They have one stick each which they put in the snow in front of them and then in their face. "We are putting makeup on" Girl-Y is telling me. They also tell me that they are playing good Barbie, bad Barbie. "I am also bad Barbie" said Girl-Y. I ask how they are bad, and she answers that they have knife, gun and karate.*

This example also brings up the question whether it is the children's interest for scary things that lead to monster dolls and toy weapons, or if it is the existence of monster dolls and toy weapons that leads to the children's interest for scary things. This observation does not answer that. At the same time it shows that the girls do take aspects from the child culture created by adults for children, in this case Barbie dolls<sup>85</sup>, in their own culture production. Here the girls have created the concept of good and bad Barbie. Although they could still have seen something like that, for example in a television show, but they still took it into their own play. The children make use of the products made by adults and relate actively to them (Mouritsen, 2002). They also take information from the adult world to use in new creations in their child culture (Corsaro, 2011). Media productions and other sorts of cultural input, which

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<sup>84</sup> As this could be a big discussion which is not related to this topic.

<sup>85</sup> They did not use Barbie dolls in the observation, but that they were pretending to be the Barbie dolls themselves.

might be seen as adult cultural aspects, are in this sense part of what might be important ingredients in the child culture (Kampmann, 2001).

The girls were playing Barbie dolls, that had make up on, but they also have knives, guns and do karate. If I were to rely on that play is a method for the children to learn about future roles as adults, as the view was earlier as James, Jenks and Prout (1998) and Montgomery (2009) write, than this example could be disturbing. As Corsaro (2009, p. 304) writes: “Young children’ dramatic role play differs from fantasy play in that children take on real roles that exist in society like mothers, police, construction workers and so on”. In this example the girls mixed fantasy and reality, and mostly fantasy. The children were also seen playing mother, father and children in observations, so some of their role play might have been more related to reality, and based on adult roles. So even though the children’s play no longer is viewed as learning about future roles as adults (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Montgomery, 2009), children do take on these roles in their play. In the example over about the good and bad Barbie, this could also be part of the process, seeing what is good and bad, what to do, and what not to do. Still one could question what kind of society we live in, when girls in kindergarten age are playing that they are putting on makeup and then shooting with their guns. On the other hand the children might also use their play to process things they have heard or seen, and this might just be a way for them to make sense of the world. Together with a way the children could develop their identities (Lillemyr, 2009).

As children are participating in the adult culture and in child cultures (Corsaro, 2009; Corsaro, 2011), these will influence each other. The children bring aspects of the adult culture into the child culture, and even the adult culture could be affected by the child culture over time (Corsaro, 2011). The children’s culture is not either for, with or by children, but rather a combination, as discussed over that the children take aspects of the child culture created for children by adults, to make new creations, for example Barbie dolls. In this sense would no child culture be only for children made by adults, as children are not passive but active participants in culture (Kampmann, 2001). Most of the child culture would in this sense be by children, but likely with the inspiration form adult culture or child culture made by adults. What influenced the child culture in the kindergarten will be described next.

### 5.3.4 What influenced the child culture?

The children represented in the kindergarten had different, cultural, language, religious and ethnical backgrounds, but was the child culture and the children's play influenced by the diversity? The children's culture was influenced by many factors. It was very much influenced by the Norwegian culture. How the child culture is depends on which arena the children are (Kampman, 2001). If the children are at home or in the kindergarten or at leisure activities for example, or if there are adults present or not. The child culture will in this sense differ when the children are at home, and when the children are in the kindergarten, and from child group to child group. As written earlier, the girls played with monster high at home, and rather Barbie dolls in the kindergarten. In this sense the children's play and the child culture is also influenced by the toy material the children have to their disposal. The child culture was also influenced by media and culture production made by adults for children as written in the previous section. Because it was just after Christmas when this field work was carried out, the child culture was also influenced by this. For example that some of the children one time on their own initiative was standing up singing *Musevisa*, a Norwegian Christmas song. Also that Girl-Y one time talked about Santa in a playing situation, see the following observation:

*Girl-T shows me that they have drawn with cretaceous on a stone. Girl-Y are coming over to the stone and start talking to me. She says that there is someone living inside the stone, small santas<sup>86</sup>. She says that she want to have them out but can not open the stone. "When they sleep they can not hear, they are like small babies" she says. Then she turn to the stone and says: "Come out santas, if not we are not able to see you".*

Here, Girl-Y made up a story about small santas living inside a stone. In studies of role play in American preschools, Corsaro (2009) found, that middle-class white American children often mixed fantasy and reality in their role play, while poor African-American children stayed close to the reality of real life models, and often included challenging aspects of their lives and of their families living in poverty (Corsaro, Molinari and Rosier, 2002, in Corsaro, 2009). It seemed that most of the play of in the kindergarten were influenced by fantasy, as the observation above also shows. This way it could be argued that the child culture also was influenced by the western culture, which the Norwegian society is a part of.

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<sup>86</sup> In Norway «nisse» is used both for the Santa, and about small santas; made-up people living on farms eating porridge.

The play culture was also influenced by gender specific games, especially the fact that the children many times chose to play with children with the same gender<sup>87</sup>. Also the games and playing material the children played with seemed to be influenced by their gender. Here one could start discussing whether or not there is gender separated child cultures (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), although this master thesis will not go into that discussion<sup>88</sup>. Also as written earlier, most of the data for this research are collected from girls. It would also be hard to define where the lines between a girl culture and a boy culture goes. What girls and boys choose to play with could differ from person to person and situation to situation, also the children sometimes played together cross gender.

Then how was the child culture influenced by the diversity? Together with the child culture being influenced by different cultural aspects, it was also influenced by the diversity in other ways. The children played in Norwegian with children with different home language or they played in their home language with children with the same home language as them. Children that had the same home language also changed between speaking Norwegian and their home language, as is normal for bilingual children (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). This is a factor that would differ from being part of a child group with a diversity of languages, to be part of a group where all the children only speak one language, or only a few children speak another language, and these are all different. In this sense was the child culture influenced by the diversity, as also some words and expression, for example *clean-up* got used in another language than Norwegian, and this became part of the common culture in the kindergarten. Although the children have different languages, it seemed that most of the communication in the children's play was in Norwegian.

In one observation Boy-V played with cars, and he made some noises when playing with another boy, it seemed like spontaneous made up language. Although I have to consider the possibility that I could have misunderstood the situation and the boy actually did speak in another language. However it seemed like he were just playing with sounds. Also during some of the interviews, some of the girls could start making some sounds that sounded just like made up words, but could have been actual words said in a playful tone. This was mostly when in the interviews talking about language. As Lillemyr (2009) writes, children in play

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<sup>87</sup> This will be further described and discussed in part 6.2 Children's experiences with language.

<sup>88</sup> Because this is not really related to the topic of this master thesis, as it is a new discussion.

could experiment with words. The observation over could be a form of doing that. Because of the language diversity, the child culture might have more aspects of playing with sounds, and making up languages, because they hear different words around them that might sound like just random sounds to them. Of course in the example with Boy-V it could also be an attempt of making car sounds.

The use of a headscarf in playing mother, father and children was used. This would be a cultural aspect influenced by the diversity. At the same time as the toys and playing material in the kindergarten would influence the child culture, the children must also have interest for, and know how to use the cultural aspects in their play. A hijab or a head scarf is made from a regular scarf, which means that the children do not necessary need any extra material to play mother with a hijab. Although, the children would not use a hijab in their play anyway if they did not know what it was, or have seen it been used<sup>89</sup>. On the other hand could the children like to put a scarf on the head just to try on different outfits, although when observed used in play, Girl-Y defined herself as the mom in the playing situation.

## **5.4 Summary**

This chapter has discussed being part of the multicultural kindergarten. It started with discussing how the multicultural approach in the kindergarten is, because to understand fully how the children's experience and perspectives on diversity in the multicultural kindergarten is, it could be helpful to start to look at how the diversity is valued in the kindergarten which they are a part of. The diversity was a normal part of the kindergarten's daily life, although it did not seem so well represented in the playing material, songs and fairy tales. It could be good for the children to experience the diversity as a resource, and that all the cultural background are represented in the everyday life in the kindergarten, rather than on one specific day. Children like to play with peers (Singer and de Haan, 2011), and friendships seemed rather important to the children. That the kindergarten had an extra focus on friendship could be a good thing. At the same time the children might have been tired of hearing over and over again that everyone should play with everyone. Children could have their own reasons for exclusion from play, for example to protect their well-established play (Corsaro, 2009). The child culture was influenced by different factors, for example aspects of

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<sup>89</sup> There will be more about hijab in the part 6.4.1 Seeing differences and similarities.

the adult culture, and culture made for children by adults, but also the gender aspects, and cultural aspects. The next chapter is about the children's perspectives on the different factors of diversity.

## **6. Children's perspectives on diversity**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss children's perspectives on diversity. It consists of four parts, divided by four different factors of diversity. First is the part: *Children's experiences with cultural differences*, which will first discuss *cultural differences* and then *different religions*. The second part is: *Children's experiences with language*. This part will discuss: *using different languages* and *the challenge with different languages*. The third part will concentrate on and discuss the factor of difference that the children themselves were the most engaged in; *Children's experiences with gender*. This part contains: *seeking to children with the same gender, talking about boys and girls* and whether or not there are *boy and girl activities?* The fourth and last part of this chapter is: *Children's view on appearance*, which will discuss if and how the children were *seeing differences and similarities* and to *experience being different*.

### **6.1 Children's experiences with cultural differences**

#### **6.1.1 Cultural differences**

When it comes to if going to a multicultural kindergarten influence the children's understandings of cultural differences, what it seems was that differences might come more naturally than it might have with children in kindergarten's with not as big diversity. If the diversity were not so big, then the different ethnical, cultural, religious and language backgrounds would probably be seen as different from the normality, rather than the differences being part of the normality. Culture could be as written earlier both outer characteristics and inner characteristics (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). The children did not use the word culture, and it would probably be a concept that would be too abstract for the children to fully understand. That the children did not seem aware of cultural differences could be because these differences were too diffuse for the children to relate to. Cultural differences might then also not be visual, but could for example be a factor in the way children think or play. It can therefore be hard to capture. So even though play competence matters more than culture in play (Knudsen, 2008), the children's play competence would still be affected by their culture. The children's cultural backgrounds would in this sense still matter in relation to each other.

Although the children might not be aware of the cultural differences or realize that there are any, they could still experience that they are different from each other on some levels, or have some different ways to approach child culture and play. For example could some cultures be more okay with bodily contact, while others are not. As found in the study from the Netherlands that unwelcoming physical contact was one of the elements that lead to conflicts (Singer and de Haan, 2011). This example would not provide good playing situations. Such cultural differences in the children's play were not found in this research, but as stated over, it could be hard to capture. However it still seemed that children chose to play with children they shared some similarities with, as also found in the study in the Netherlands (Singer and de Haan, 2011). If the cultural differences are too big then the children would probably not get along.

Children like to play with peers, and they typically chose to play with peers who are similar to themselves on some key characteristics (Singer and de Haan, 2011). However it does not need to be the cultural backgrounds that are similar. In the study in Ireland there were other factors that were important for creating friendships (Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008). These were to be good at sports, laugh about the same things, not being favored by the teachers together with sharing common interests (Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008). Cultural differences and other factors of diversity might this way not matter if the children share the same interests in other things, for example a specific type of toys.

A cultural aspect of difference in play that was found, was the example of one of the girls in this research taking a scarf over another child's head<sup>90</sup>, as part of a wedding tradition. Here she took in cultural aspects in the playing situation, while the other children part of the play did not seem to understand what was going on, and seemed uncomfortable in the situation. Here they got experiences with aspects of a culture different than the Norwegian culture that was dominant in the kindergarten, and probably different from their own cultural background. It did at least seem that the other children were not aware of this culture aspect. They were probably not aware of this being aspects of culture either. Still this could teach the children that they could have different ways to play, that they have different areas of interest and different backgrounds that could affect the playing situations. Also in kindergartens without so great cultural diversity, it would still be diversity, and the children would still have

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<sup>90</sup> See 5.3.1 Cultural aspects.



different backgrounds that could affect the playing situations, and at least different interests. Still this is an example of a culture difference between the girl and the other children.

The pedagogical leader explained that what becomes foreign to many in the Norwegian society, like hijab, becomes natural in the kindergarten. She said that the children often dressed up with a hijab or headscarf in their play, and that both ethnical Norwegians and children with other backgrounds were part of these playing situations. The observations done for this master project also shows this. Some of the children enjoyed playing in the family corner, and Girl-Y was often playing the mom, and often wore a scarf on her head. In this way is the children's view on differences influenced by the diversity, because diversity became what is normal. On the other hand, this could also mean that hijab is not seen as something different to the children but a part of the diversity, and can then not be considered as something different. Also there will always be similarities and difference, no matter what kindergarten the children are a part of, although the cultural differences might be fewer or smaller.

When showing the children the image of a child with hijab<sup>91</sup>, they had different responses. None of the girls used the word hijab, but they all related to it somehow. Girl-T said that the person in the image was a mom. She also said that she knows someone who wears hijab. She probably has some experiences with moms and hijabs, as she made this association. In the two other interviews some of the girls said that the person in the image with a hijab was old, or they related to older people that sometimes you would see wearing a head scarf. Girl-X thought she looked like a minister. Answering the question if they knew someone wearing that now, Girl-X said: "Yes, those women there". The children showed that they are aware of the use, but do not really know what it is, and seem not to relate it to a specific culture, religion or ethnicity, although Girl-X's response, showed that she knew that there is a specific group of women using hijab. The girls did not seem familiar with children using hijab, but then they probably do not have any experience with this.

An element found from observations and other research methods, was that siblings seemed to be important to the children. For example during one of the interviews, one of the girls started to talk about her sister on her own initiative. She said: "Do you know what? My bed here, my

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<sup>91</sup> Appendix 6: Image of child with hijab.

older sister's bed there". Also both during one of the drawing activity sessions and during observations, some of the girls started asking me about my sibling's names. Siblings could have different meaning in different societies, for example it might in some societies be more common than other societies that siblings take care of their younger siblings (Montgomery, 2009). There is also: "...a wide variety cross-culturally regarding who is termed a sibling and who is not" (Montgomery, 2009, p. 121). The fact that siblings are seen as something very important could therefore be a factor that could play a bigger part in a group of children with great cultural and ethnical diversity. Of course this could also differ, and it is not said that having siblings and the interest in siblings are connected to culture, although how many siblings the children have and the siblings' meaning in the family and to the other siblings, could be connected to culture.

The children seemed to have full control over how many siblings their friends had. This way the children would experience, if not cultural differences, at least differences in family structures, which is also a factor of diversity. It seemed that the interest in their siblings and each other's siblings was something the children, or at least the girls, had in common, although how many siblings the children had differed. It could also differ how much siblings mean to the children, or what status or meaning the children have in the family. This could differ from family to family and from culture to culture. Also since it was mainly the girls who focused on this, it could also be a gender difference, that siblings and family is more important for girls. Then again could it be connected to culture and ethnicity, for example cultures who has a big focus on that girls are the once taking care of younger siblings.

One of the boys was however an only child. He might feel left out, and the fact that he did not have siblings could be seen as different. In the kindergarten however it seemed to be a focus on different family structures as well. During the fieldwork, images of different families were put up next to where they usually had the joined activity. These were images of families with different structures and different appearance. When the adults in the kindergarten practice the multicultural diversity in a good way, then the children could also get good experiences with cultural diversity (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006). This also counts for other differences and factors of diversity, as for example family structures. If the adults show the children that different family structures are normal, the same way as they show the children that different cultures are normal, then the boy would not feel left out for not having siblings. Rather he would be included in the togetherness as one representative of many different family types,

the same way as they were all a part of the cultural, religious, ethnicity and language diversity.

As written earlier food is also something that differs from culture to culture, but also from family to family. There are types of food that are connected to different cultures. For example are fish and potatoes an important part of the Norwegian food culture, but people could still have their own preferences not connected to culture. The food in the kindergarten seemed to be very much influenced by the Norwegian culture. They ate either bread or a hot meal that could be for example soup or fish. On the bread they had typical Norwegian spread like sausages, caviar, yellow cheese, brown cheese, gomme<sup>92</sup> and butter. Girl-X explained that her favorite food was pasta. So even though there will be different food cultures in different societies, it will also be food types that will be adapted also in other cultures than the origin. Another factor that influences the food culture is religion, this together with other factors of different religions, will be described and discussed next.

### **6.1.2 Different religions**

As it was a great cultural diversity in the kindergarten, the children also came from families with different religious beliefs and traditions. For example, not all the children celebrated Christmas. Girl-T said that she did not celebrate Christmas because her mother had said that they do not celebrate Christmas where they are from. When asking Girl-Y if she celebrated Christmas she answered: “Yes, I celebrated Christmas” with a big smile. Although Girl-Y seemed excited about celebrating Christmas, Girl-T did not seem sad because she did not celebrate Christmas. If she had been part of a child group with not as big cultural and religious diversity, but rather a kindergarten were it would be assumed that all the children celebrated Christmas<sup>93</sup>, then she might have felt differently about it, more left out. Rather than talking about Christmas as a common practice, as the pedagogical leader said that they instead of talking about the religious aspect of Christmas, they talked about why some people celebrate Christmas.

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<sup>92</sup> This is a traditional Norwegian dish made from long-boiled milk, often used as spread on bread.

<sup>93</sup> This could also have been the case if the kindergarten did not have had a conscious approach towards diversity.

Religions could provide regulations and have traditions for different kinds of food and clothing, for example halal food (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). During one meal in the kindergarten, Girl-Z asked the pedagogical leader if she could have halal salami on her bread. The pedagogical leader answered that it was only three left, and that these should go to the children that needed halal food. Girl-Z did not ask any following up questions to this, so it seemed the children knew that this was a special kind of food, and who the food was meant for. This way the children got experiences with children eating different food than themselves. Not just that children preferred different kinds of food, but that someone needs this kind of food. So although the children might not be aware of the different religious beliefs, and what are religious aspects and what are cultural aspects, being part of the multicultural kindergarten, the children did experience differences. They experience that some do need halal salami and some do not, and that children who do not need it still can eat it, and might also like it. They experience that some children celebrate Christmas and some do not, and some celebrate Id and some do not. This way the children get experiences with cultural differences and diversity as something normal, rather than one thing being presented as the normal and common, for example Christmas and everything else as different and deviant. Next the children's experiences with using different languages will be discussed.

## **6.2 Children's experiences with language**

### **6.2.1 Using different languages**

Although it is a minority in the kindergarten that has Norwegian as their only language, Norwegian was still the common language in the kindergarten. They had four lists of words translated from four different languages representing the children's different home languages hanging in the department of the kindergarten. When asking about the lists in an interview, Girl-Z answered: "That is only our language". By this she showed me that having different languages was a natural part of the children's daily life, but still not a big deal. Something she was not thinking so much about, because she was just so used to it. The pedagogical leader said during the interview that she sometimes uses some words in other languages in situations with children speaking other languages. In the observations it appeared that they for example used a word for *clean-up* in another language, as mentioned earlier. The pedagogical leader also said that they try to greet the children and parents on their home language when they enter the kindergarten, and that one of the assistants usually starts a joined activity with saying good morning and welcome in all the languages represented in the child group. In this

way the children got used to the language diversity, and got introduced to words in other languages.

Children, especially as young as kindergarten age, who are bilingual, often use their whole language competence when expressing themselves (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006; Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). One example is one of the girls and one of the boys being part of the research solving a puzzle together. While they were solving it they talked together both in Norwegian and in another language. The girl said something in the other language, then said in Norwegian: “Bare tulla” which means “Just kidding”. That they were switching between two languages could improve their language understanding, when both the children understand both the languages communicated on. At the same time the two children could share a conversation not all the children and adults could be a part of. Not all of the children seemed to have the advantage that they could use their home language in the kindergarten. When a person feels that he or she is not able to use his or her first language, this could have consequences for the person’s feeling of identity (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). It could be frustrating for the children not being able to fully express themselves. Therefore it could be comforting being part of a diverse child group were more of the children is in the same situation, and to maybe even have someone there who speaks the same language provides a positive experience for the children.

Some of the children were more confident in the Norwegian language than others, which could be connected to when they were introduced to Norwegian, and how many languages they speak. So although Knudsen (2008) writes that what matters is not what cultural background the children have, but their competence in child culture and play, the language competence will also matter as the children very much used their language in playing situations. As Montgomery (2009) writes it is through languages that children learn among other things about how to make sense of the world. Children who were not so confident in Norwegian and who did not share a home language with someone in the child group were in risk of being left out. However there are children that are not afraid at all to be part of playing situations even when they have very little vocabulary in the language communicated on (Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). Play competence and language understanding could this way also be less important, as for example preference in play could matter more. On the other hand, the children in charge of the games were often children that talked a lot in Norwegian. At the same time, Girl-X and Girl-Q played a lot together. Girl-X seemed confident in

Norwegian and Girl-Q did not seem so confident. Although Girl-X also seemed many times to take the lead in games, Girl-Q was still included.

Children are learning language when they are part of a playing situation or a conversation with other children, were they are using language in the activity (Sandvik and Spurkland, 2009). Maybe this relation worked for the girls, because maybe Girl-X liked to lead and Girl-Q liked to follow. Maybe Girl-X liked having control in situations. Still Girl-Q also chose to play with her. Maybe Girl-Q got to improve her language understanding in relation to her, or maybe this relation made it easier for her to play without that much understanding in the Norwegian language. She could however still have a good understanding, although she might have a limited vocabulary, as the same way as children with good words and sentences still could have difficulty understanding what is being said in less concrete situations, like reading (Valvatne og Sandvik, 2007). It is also possible to be good to communicating without knowing so many words, and to understand a lot even without talking so much (Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). When having two home languages, and Norwegian as a third one, the child's vocabulary could be even limited in the three different languages, and it could be even more challenging for the child to communicate with persons just knowing one of these languages, as again the children would use their whole language competence when expressing themselves (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006; Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007), as they might have a much greater vocabulary in the languages combined, than a child knowing only one language.

When asking the children what songs they liked, what songs they thought the children in the images liked, or asking what songs they would like to sing before the interviews, they mentioned Norwegian songs that they usually sing in the kindergarten. Some of the girls answered that they also sing these songs at home. Girl-Z said she thought the boy in the image liked the songs: *Bæ bæ lille lam* and *Lille Petter edderkopp*, and confirmed that she also like these songs. If the children had been presented to songs in another language in the kindergarten, then the children might have chosen different songs to sing before the interviews, or as their favorites. For example when Girl-X got the question what she likes to sing in the kindergarten she answered: "Nothing". At home she liked to sing an English pop song, but she said she could not sing this in the kindergarten. The children could know songs at home but not use them in the kindergarten, because they know that these songs are in a language that the majority does not understand. Or maybe it might be embarrassing, that there

are some songs for the kindergarten, and some songs that are just for their homes, as also mentioned earlier. Challenges with different languages will be presented and discussed next.

### **6.2.2 The challenge with different languages**

The adults in the kindergarten work on strengthening the children's Norwegian in the kindergarten through language group. What showed in the interview sessions and other activities, and also as written earlier, were some of the children more advanced in Norwegian than others. Some of the children used their home language in play, and the pedagogical leader said that if they are in a good playing situation, she does not want to break that up. On the other hand she does not want the children to use their language to exclude someone from their play. Girl-Z said during an interview that they do not use their home language in the kindergarten, because the adults and other children do not understand them. Even though the pedagogical leader said that she wants the children to be able to use their home language, maybe the fear of exclusion as a consequence from using different languages, overrode this and gave the children, or at least Girl-Z the impression that they could not use their home language in the kindergarten. It could also be Girl-Z's own experience of not being understood that was the background for what she said. The pedagogical leader said that the children are aware of who they can speak their home language to and who they need to speak Norwegian to. Maybe Girl-Z did not have anyone who she could speak her home language with in the kindergarten. If she had, her answer might have been different.

The pedagogical leader explained that in eating situations when there are more children sitting together, the children got encouraged to speak Norwegian, but in playing situations the adults wanted the children to be able to speak their home language. The eating situations observed had Norwegian dialogs, and as written earlier, different languages were used in play. The pedagogical leader found it scary to think about how much that are being said, that the adults do not catch upon. This way it could be many conflicts that were just between the children, without the adults being able to oversee and step in. She said that, one time, there was a word going around, which she did not know the meaning of, when she got it translated, she understood that this was a word used as bullying. In the following observation it shows how the children could experience challenge with language:

*Boy-V was sitting on the floor together with another child. He asked me to come over to him. He explained that someone had called him "dust", which in Norwegian means something near fool, and he asked me what it*

*means. I answered that it is not a nice word to say. Then he asked me again, what it means and I answered that it is nearly the same as “dum”, dumb and “tosk” fool.*

It could be frustrating not understanding everything that is being said in Norwegian. It could be comforting having a peer who speaks the same home language. Still, as Howes (2011, p. 20) writes: “And having one peer who speaks your home language is a different experience from having your home language spoken by the entire group (Howes and Lee 2007; Howes *et al.* 2009)”. The children who had Norwegian as their first language were lucky in this sense, still there could be children they could not communicate so well with, and there would be languages they would not understand. Whether it is Norwegian or another language communicated in, it could be frustrating to the children not understanding these languages. This way the children might always feel left out. As the pedagogical leader said, the different languages could be used as bullying. The bullying might feel even harsher if the children do not understand what they are being called, or the fact that the adults might not be there to stop it because they do not know what is going on. Still, this would be a common situation in the kindergarten that most children could relate to. Either that they could not speak their home language in the kindergarten, or that they hear other languages they do not understand being spoken. Following is a little excerpt from an interview session where Girl-Z explains about her experience with their different home languages:

*Researcher: “Yes, do you use your languages in the kindergarten?”*

*Girl-Z: “No”*

*Researcher: “No”*

*Girl-Z: “We only use it at home”*

*Researcher: “Only use it at home?”*

*Girl-Z: “Yes”*

*Researcher: “But do you want to use your language in the kindergarten?”*

*Girl-Z: “You do not know what it means”*

*Researcher: “Oh, okay”*

*Girl-Z: “When I say something that you have on our house, then you do not understand, then you do not understand what I am saying”*

It was not that Girl-Z did not want to speak her home language in the kindergarten, but that she experienced not being understood. When further asking her if there were some words from her language that she could teach the other children and adults in the kindergarten, she said: “No, they do not understand what I am saying”. She did not seem frustrated over this, just very aware of the reality. It might be easier to relate to having one language at home and one in the kindergarten, rather than mixing them. It might be easier also connected to identity,



it makes a clearer line between the home and the kindergarten, and makes it easier to switch between these two arenas, rather than mixing it. To the following-up question if Girl-Z thought it was sad to not be understood, she said no, but Girl-Q answered: "It is". When asking Girl-Q following-up questions she started talking about something else. Girl-Q might not have understood the following up questions, or she did not understand the other question either. If she did understand, then she might relate to that it is hard not being understood. So at the same time as Boy-V experienced not understanding, the children could also come in situations where they experience not being understood. They could experience this by talking their home language, or by not having enough vocabulary to be able to express themselves in Norwegian.

Even though the different languages were a natural part in the kindergarten, it did not mean that the children were not aware of the different languages represented. Girl-X did not know what she thought about there being so many different languages in the kindergarten, and she said that she did not know anything in other languages. Although one time she did express her vocabulary in English, but this might be something she has learned as a second language<sup>94</sup>, and is not one of the home languages represented in the lists of languages hanging in the department of the kindergarten. She explained that she do not use her home language in the kindergarten, but that sometimes some of the adults would say something to her in that language. She also said that sometimes someone in the kindergarten said something that she does not understand, but that the pedagogical leader usually tells them not to use their home languages in the kindergarten. Again it could be that the children experience that they could not use their home language at all, even though this was not the pedagogical leader's intention. The children might relate to the times they are not understood and the times they got told to talk Norwegian, rather than the pedagogical leader's experience that they should be able to use their home language. So the children seem to have another experience. That the adults sometimes would use some words in the children's home languages, might feel unnatural because the children know that the adults do not understand the language, just a few learned words. This could still be nice for the children, but rather for the children who do not understand so much Norwegian. In this way the adults could use the language lists to communicate and provide better understanding. Following is an excerpt from the interview session where Girl-X explains her experience with the different languages in the kindergarten:

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<sup>94</sup> Since she has bilingualism as her first language.

*Researcher: "But if someone is playing with the same language, and then you are coming and you do not understand what they are saying?"*

*Girl-X: "Yes, but Girl-Z is speaking another language and that do also Girl-Q...but I manage to play with them anyway"*

*Researcher: "Yes. Do they stop speaking that language when you are coming?"*

*Girl-X: "Yes. They use to speak that language to their mom and dad"*

*Researcher: "Yes, but do they speak it together?"*

*Girl-X: "No-o"*

*Researcher: "No. Do they speak different languages?"»*

*Girl-X: "Yes"*

*Researcher: "Okay"*

*Girl-X: "I speak another language I also you see"*

This shows that Girl-X do not view the different languages as a challenge, but rather just as normality similar to Girl-Z. She also said that they usually speak their language with their parents and not in the kindergarten. The children have therefore as the pedagogical leader also said full control over who they could talk their home language to and not. Also Girl-T shows that she is aware of the other languages in the following observation:

*Girl-T is playing outside on a play apparatus, a child walks by talking in another language. Girl-T turns to me and says that she did not understand what the child said. I asked her why, and asked if maybe the child was talking in another language. She said maybe the child was talking and she said the name of a language. I asked if she knew how to speak this language. She answered that she only speaks it at home.*

That Girl-T talked to me about language, could be because I had asked her earlier about language in the interviews. When children hear different languages in their surroundings, they become aware of language in a different way than if they are used to everyone speaking the same language (Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). At the same time as children could feel left out when different languages are spoken, it could be exiting to hear different sounds and wonder about what it means (Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007). Although Girl-T said that she did not use her home language in the kindergarten, she did speak another language than Norwegian in observations. What is interesting about this observation however is that Girl-T first says that she did not understand what the child said, so she came to the conclusion that the child was not speaking Norwegian. Then she said that maybe the child spoke the same language as her. This way her home language became what is different. She might be so used to that language not being understood in the kindergarten that she thinks of this language as a language not to be understood. She might on the other hand know what language was spoken, but did not hear what was being said, and therefore said that the child spoke another language, the same language as her, because she still captured the accent. Again it seems the children that the

language as the other factors of diversity became a natural part for the kindergarten and the children's daily life in the kindergarten. Next the children's experience with gender will be discussed.

## **6.3 Children's experiences with gender**

### **6.3.1 Seeking to children with the same gender**

The children seemed more aware of and focused on gender differences than on cultural differences. When playing, children with different age, home language, cultural and ethnical background and gender could play together. It was however more common that children with the same gender played together than that children with different gender played together. Children as young as three years old could prefer to play with children of the same gender as themselves (Corsaro, 2009). Also in the study in the Netherlands it was found that children with the same gender had a greater chance of becoming friends than children with different gender, and that the children's ethnical backgrounds did not play a part in this (Singer and de Haan, 2011). All of the girls were seen playing together with both girls and boys, except Girl-X and Girl-Q who mostly played together. Although Girl-X mentioned both girl names and boy names when answering who she usually play with, and when answering who were her friends. Boy-V where only seen playing with other boys, while Boy-U played both with boys and girls.

What was found from observations about gender relations in a primary school, Thorne (1990) writes that in western culture at least, there are only two gender categories, and every person is permanently assigned to one or the other with very few attempts to switch<sup>95</sup>, and people does attribute to each other associate characteristics with one of the two genders (Thorne, 1990). People do sometimes have the need for sorting people into groups, for example by gender or age (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). If the kindergarten often group the children by gender, then this could contribute to the children being more aware of this difference. For example as Thorne (1990, p. 107) writes: "When girls and boys are organized as opposing sides in math contest or in cross-gender chasing, members of both sides may express

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<sup>95</sup> Although there are people who also define themselves as another gender than the gender they are from a biological point of view. This is not so common, and I would assume not common in the kindergarten. I did not meet this issue in this research, and will assume for this master thesis that the boys are boys and the girls are girls.

solidarity within their gender and serious antagonism to the other”. The adults in the kindergarten could in this sense contribute to making a division between the genders, although in school settings many activities are organized based on other criteria than gender (Thorne, 1990). This was the case for this kindergarten as well. The children were divided in age groups rather than gender groups, and children of the opposite gender were together both in organized activities and in free play, still the children seemed to mostly choose children of the same gender to play with. The next section is about how the children talked about gender.

### **6.3.2 Talking about boys and girls**

In an interview when referring to the factor that everyone should play with everyone, I asked if only the girls are playing together and only the boys. Girl-X answered that: “No, but the boys ehm will not be with the girls you know”. And she further said that: “Because they think that...that they want to play pirates, because they try to attack all the time”. Girls and boys often have clear thoughts of how children of the opposite gender play and do not play (Mouritsen, 2002), as Girl-X shows from her reflections from the interview. This also shows that children are active in trying to make sense of gender (Rogers, 2003). The following observations from the hike day, shows how the children focused on gender differences:

*One day a week the kindergarten had a hike day. Some of the children were already dressed when I arrived in the kindergarten at 09:30. Girl-Y came to me and asked if she could hold my hand on the hike. Boy-U immediately said that then she was a boy. She crossed her arms and looked down, then said to me that he called her a boy for wanting to hold my hand. A short while later Girl-T was standing by the door. She told me that she had a boy's drinking bottle. Her bottle was black with grey lid. I asked her why her bottle was a boy's bottle, and she answered because her mother had bought it for her. Then I said: “But then it is a girl's bottle, because it is your bottle”, and she answered yes.*

This observation shows that the children used the categories *boys* and *girls*. It could seem from the first episode in the observation that Boy-U used the term *boy* about Girl-Y, because he was jealous. Girl-Y by her reaction seemed like she got offended by the comment. So it seemed here that the children or at least Boy-U had figured out that they could use the gender categories to hurt each other by using it wrong intentionally. While in the study in Ireland (2008) the children used hurtful words for each other based on ethnicity, in this study the children rather used gender. Gender was what became visual rather than ethnicity and culture, and was what the children referred to.

Someone has defined for the children that something is for boys and something is for girls, and made this division clear to the children. It could for example be adults in the children's surroundings that they are looking up to, or it could be the society, or likely both. During one of the drawing activities, the discussion of girl and boy colors were raised. Girl-T was probably referring to this when she talked about her drinking bottle, having heard somewhere that black and grey are boy colors. For example the society could decide this by the colors of the gender specific clothes in the stores, and the parents could promote this, by buying these clothes<sup>96</sup>. The children's parents could also be afraid that their child will be associated with the opposite gender if they do not by these gender specific clothes and colors. In this sense could it actually be the parents' fear and not the children's, although they get influenced by their parents' values. The children will recognize the division between the genders that is in the society, either it is by getting approval for gender-appropriate behavior, by observing gender-appropriate behavior or by trying to make sense of gender, as described in the three lines of research of children and gender (Rogers, 2003). Girl-T seemed however not hurt by the definition boy bottle, as she were the one introducing her bottle this way, however she still saw herself as a girl, and when I told her that her bottle was a girl's bottle because it belongs to her who is a girl, she agreed to this. Girl-T might also have been trying to sympathy with Girl-Y with what she said, although I am not sure if she heard what was going on between Girl-Y and Boy-U since I do not think she was present when that situation took place. These were two separate situations, both happening before the hike, but not at the same time.

During one of the interviews, Girl-Y took one image, the image of a person with a hijab, looked at it and then said: "That is not a girl, not that one!" She was almost crying when she said again: "Not that one". She got to take the last image instead, the image of a person with black hair in braids and a smile. Then she said in a happy tone: "That is a girl!" When asking why it is a girl, Girl-Y answered: "Because she is smiling", the same answer Girl-Z had about why the person with short yellow hair was a boy. This shows that the children had clear impressions on what a girl should look like and what a boy should look like. They did not seem aware enough to name characteristics for the images that made them either one of the genders, although the genders were still important, at least for Girl-Y, as shown over. At the same time was the child in the image that she first got, actually a girl, it was a girl with a

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<sup>96</sup> It could be hard in today's Norwegian society to find gender neutral clothes, even for very small children, as the society has already decided that something is for girls and something is for boys.

hijab. This shows how important it was for Girl-Y to find a girl she could identify herself with.

It seemed like it was important to Girl-Y to associate with the children in the images. When asking why the child was smiling she answered: "Because it is me". Instead of saying what she thought the child in the image liked, she said what she liked. Because the children have so many different culture and ethnicity backgrounds, and because most of the children live in a different country than where their parents originate from, and some also have parents from different countries, it could maybe be hard finding their identity. As their parents will identify with their home country, the children might never have lived in this country, but are born and raised in Norway (Eriksen, 2001). The children would still get cultural inputs from both societies, from their parents on one side and the kindergarten on the other. There are different factors that together create a person's identity, and gender is one of them (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Then gender could be an important factor for the children's feeling of identity. Gender could be something the children find more concrete than culture, and that way becomes more important to them.

That the children were aware of the difference between the genders, would still be something that children in all kindergartens would be aware of, because children would be observing gender differences, influenced by toys and television programs (Rogers, 2003) and could strive to become girls and boys in the *right ways* (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006). Keeping the difference between genders could however be more important in some cultures than others. In some families it could be important to hold on to traditional gender roles, such as women staying home and taking care of the children. Then playing in the family corner could be valued even more for the girls. This could conflict with the view in the Norwegian society, where almost all children goes to kindergarten (the Norwegian child-, youth- and family directorate, 2013), and there is a focus on equality between the genders (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). In this sense some children could meet different gender expectations at home and in the kindergarten, in the same way as with other cultural aspects. Also this way gender specific activities could be even more important to the children, if their parents, who would be their role models in finding their gender identity (Rogers, 2003) value these contrasts between the genders. Next will be the discussion if activities, toys and play can be divided into the categories of gender.

### **6.3.3 Boy and girl activities?**

Some activities were observed done by both genders. Both boys and girls could make bead pictures, play dress up, playing family, playing with Legos and Jovo, listening to a book being read and playing with sledding boards. These activities were common cross gender, but there were also activities that were just observed among the boys, or just observed among the girls. This could be a coincidence of course, but it might not be. There are toys meant for different genders, for example dolls and toy cooking for girls, and toy cars, toy tools and toy guns for boys (Rogers, 2003). What was found in this study was that both the two boys participating were observed running inside the kindergarten, sliding down the slide and playing with cars, while none of the girls were observed doing this. Boy-V was running around inside three times, one time running after some other boys. All the girls except Girl-W said during the drawing activity that they liked playing with Barbie dolls, and all the girls except Girl-Q had circled their Barbie doll.

Some of the girls were observed playing with Barbie dolls in the kindergarten, but none of the boys. This could show that the girls choose toys that are typically made to apply to girls. This could be based both on approval from parents and other adults for choosing Barbie dolls to play with, but also as observing role models, for example their mothers, and mimicking them in their own play (Rogers, 2003), using dolls. Or it could be actively deciding for themselves what they would like to play with, maybe based on their observations of gender, and in this sense all the three lines of research on children and gender could be counting for children today (Rogers, 2003). According to today's view on children as social actors as in the sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2011; Prout and James, 1990), it would be likely to relate to the third line. On the other hand, children will still get influenced by the adults in their surroundings' actions and opinions (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013) and although children can think and decide for themselves, they could and most likely would still be influenced by other factors as well, as for example their parents, and the adults working in the kindergarten, both by watching them, and by being to some extent guided by them. In this sense would seeing all the three lines of research on children and gender combined, better than just focusing on and relating to one of them.

Because the girls were talking so much about Barbie dolls during the drawing activities, I asked Boy-U who was present at the beginning of the second drawing activity, if he also liked to play with Barbie. He said no, but Girl-Y answered that he liked to play with the dog of the

Barbie. He might have answered what he felt were expected of him, as shaped by society (Pattman and Kehily, 2004) and could also have been shaped by reward and punishment from the adults in his surroundings (Rogers, 2003). He might still have felt interest for the Barbie dolls and maybe played with the girls sometimes, as Girl-Y said that he played with the dog of the Barbie. By saying this she still protected his gender identity as a boy, because she said he was playing with the dog, not the dolls.

Section 5.3.3 *Child culture for or by children?* under the previous chapter asked whether the children's cultures and play is influenced by the toys available or if the toys made is based on the children's interests. The same way one could ask when it comes to gender. Is children's play gender specific because there are gender specific toys, or are there gender specific toys because children have different gender related interests? If following the theory based on behaviorism and the children's roles in observing together with imitating when it comes to gender (Rogers, 2003), then the answer would be that the children is influenced by the gender specific toys that are made and are available. As written earlier that gender is shaped by the society (Pattman and Kehily, 2004). Still when children themselves are observing and imitating others, it could be argued that it is the children's own interests, because it is the children's interest in this person that makes them imitate this person. At the same time the person being observed and imitated has the same gender as the child, and this person will then, as a part of the society contributing to shape the child's gender identity, and therefore also interests. At the same time as written earlier the children would not just be influenced by observing, but also by adult's actions and by active trying to figure out gender identities (Rogers, 2003).

At the same time, if focusing on adults as role models for the children in their process of finding their gender identity, the adults in the children's surroundings are very important. However in the kindergarten it were as written in the background and context chapter of this master thesis few men. This could be a problem for the boys' gender identities, because they might not have any male role models in the kindergarten, or at least in their department of the kindergarten. This might have led to it being even more important for the boys to play with typical boys playing material, and with other boys, so they had someone of their own gender to relate to. Or this could lead to the boys trying out more girl activities, because there were no male adults to set an example for the boys, as for example Boy-U playing with the Barbie's dog. In the same way this could influence the boy's feeling of gender identity, could



the fact that there are mostly ethnical Norwegian adults working in the kindergarten influence children with another ethnical background's feeling of identity.

Several of the girls, said that they liked to play with Lego, and circled Legos in the drawing activity, but none of them were playing with Lego in the observations, except for the guide tour when all the children were playing with Lego, except one that were absent. It is not said that Lego are toys that are just for boys rather did it seem that the girls chose more gender specific toys, than gender neutral toys<sup>97</sup>. This might be because in the kindergarten it is found that children tend to seek the same gender for play (Montgomery, 2009). This way could the play and choice of playing material be more gender specific in the kindergarten than outside. Then maybe Lego is something the children play at home, in more gender mixed relations, or alone. Or maybe it was a coincidence that the girls were not observed playing with Lego. Girl-T said she had toy cars at home, even though she was not observed playing with toy cars in the kindergarten. This could also confirm that gender and gender specific toys matter less at home than in the kindergarten. This could show that the children do not necessary have different preferences according to gender, or that they like only gender specific toys. Rather that the play in the kindergarten might be influenced by more gender specific toys and activities, or toys and activities defined as gender specific by the society, as the play and interaction is more likely to be going on in non-mixed gender groups in the kindergarten (Montgomery, 2009).

Who is deciding what boy activities, play and toys are, and what girl activities, play and toys are and is there such a thing? As already written, some interests would seem more gender related then others, for example princess dresses. Some of the girls were one morning during breakfast in the kindergarten, talking about dressing up as princesses, and what Disney princess dress they had at home, and who they were going to dress up as. This discussion is very gender specific because princesses are usually if not always, girls. The girls could also be influenced by each other still it would seem that this is something the girls were interested in. There is still not said that a boy could not share this interest with the girls. To the question what the boy in the image liked to play with, Girl-Z answered cars and to play with food. To the question what the girl in the image liked to play with, Girl-Z whispered something to Girl-

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<sup>97</sup> Of course someone would also argue that Lego are made for boys, especially since there are a specific type of Lego meant for girls.

W who said out loud: “Play-food and Barbie dolls”. When asking if the girl could play with cars too, Girl-W said quietly: “No”. Åberg and Taguchi (2006, p. 50) write that: “Pink colored kitchen equipment and dolls in nice doll clothes attract fast a little Lisa who knows that she has to choose pink and nice loops to be even more correct as a girl, even though she is only one year old”<sup>98</sup>. Again the children showed that the children very well know what is meant for girls, and what is meant for boys.

In another interview about the children in the images Girl-T said that the boy wanted to play with Barbie dolls. So even though the children have an impression of what the children of the opposite gender likes to play with (Mouritsen, 2002), they might still be open for variation, or maybe Girl-T in this example defined her own interests on to the boy. The children would anyway need to decide for themselves what their interests are, as the same as people need to decide what their culture is (Knudsen, 2008). No one can decide a child’s interests based on the child’s gender, as the same way as no one can decide what food or music a child likes based on the parents of the child’s country of origin. Nor could anyone decide what culture or religious beliefs a person have based on the persons appearance. The children’s view on appearance is what will be discussed next.

## **6.4 Children’s views on appearance**

### **6.4.1 Seeing differences and similarities**

The concept culture is sometimes misunderstood, as it often refers to visible characteristics like skin color, when skin color has nothing to do with a person’s cultural background (Spernes and Hatlem, 2012). Instead culture has to do with a person’s appearance in the sense of what clothes the person chooses to wear for example (Spernes and Hatlem, 2012). Skin color could however be related to ethnicity. As most of the children in this research had one or both parents that origin from another country than Norway, the most common appearance when it comes to skin color, was something in between light and dark. The children did not seem so much aware of differences in appearance. None of the children ever named colors when talking about appearance, although during the drawing activity Girl-X raised the question of what kind of color one uses on the skin, but the question got left unanswered. Girl-X, Girl-Z and Girl-W used green, brown and black as skin color for the Barbie doll and

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<sup>98</sup> My translation.

the baby doll. Girl-T used purple and brown for skin color. Girl-Q and Girl-Y used pink, but they used pink for the whole dolls and not just the skin. The girls might also have thought of the dolls hands as mittens. All the Barbie dolls observed in the kindergarten had as written earlier, light skin. One time Girl-X and Girl-Q played with Barbie dolls. They had two adult dolls and two small dolls. All the dolls were light with blond hair, it is therefore interesting that the children did not use light colors for the skin while they were drawing. They might have used color closer to themselves in their drawings. None of the girls colored the Barbie doll's hair yellow either. This could again show that the children chose colors closer to themselves, that it could be important to identify themselves also with the dolls that they actively uses in their play.

When talking about the children in the images the children showed that they were aware of appearance. The children did for example compare similarities between the children in the images. One example is when asking if the child with a hijab were a boy or a girl, Girl-T answered: "A mom". When asking why she thought it was a mom, Girl-T answered pointing to another image<sup>99</sup>: "Because they have the same color. Upon the face". As Larsen (2006) writes that a positive image of differences would help to go away from what is unknown, which the children seemed to have. It did not seem to be any negativity about having different appearances. Spernes and Hatlem (2013) write that from their experience dose many parents and also adults working in kindergartens refer to what they call: "color blind children", children who find it important how the play competence, and friendship competence in the other children are, rather than language, appearance, ethnicity and cultural background. When saying color blind they relate it to appearance rather than culture. Although Larsen (2006) also writes that similarity creates friendship and togetherness, I would argue that differences also could create friendship and togetherness, as Girl-X showed in one of the interviews. When asking if the child in the image could live in the same country where her mom is from, Girl-X said that: "No, they are not completely alike". She pointed to the image of the person with light skin and short yellow hair and said that he lived in Norway. Then she pointed to the image with the person with dark skin and short black hair and said that he lived in the country her mom was from. Then she corrected herself saying: "No, he lives in Africa". The following excerpt is continuing conversation from the same interview:

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<sup>99</sup> Appendix 5: Image of child with dark skin and long black hair in brads.

*Researcher: "But can those two play together?"*  
*Girl-X: "Eh...hm...yes"*  
*Girl-Q: "Hm...yes...maybe"*  
*Researcher: "What are they playing with?"*  
*Girl-X: "If he travels to Norway, and he travels to Africa"*  
*Researcher: "Yes"*  
*Girl-X: "That works"*  
*Researcher: "Then they can play together"*  
*Girl-Q: "But"*  
*Researcher: "Can they talk together then?"*  
*Girl-X: "Then he would have to talk English<sup>100</sup>"*

Even though there was a great diversity also in appearance in the kindergarten, and a minority of the children had a light skin color, did Girl-X still say that the child with light skin color were from Norway and the child with a dark skin color were from Africa. It seemed that her answer was based on the children's appearance, when she could have said that both lived in Norway for example. The children might still know who is originally from Africa, or have parents from Africa, or other continents, even though they are together with a lot of children with different backgrounds and appearance and still live in Norway. Or they might know from watching television shows that in Africa there are mostly children with a dark skin color, that many children with a dark skin color origin from Africa. This could be what Girl-X was referring to, that the child in the image had an African appearance.

Despite the fact that the adults in the kindergarten were working so much with friendships, the children here both were thinking before answering if the two boys could be friends. Instead of just immediately answering yes they took some time to think about this. Although, they did not see a problem in the boys playing together based on appearance, rather Girl-X was thinking about the fact that they were living on different continents. Of course this difference would make it hard to be friends and play together, but as Girl-X said; if they know each other they could still be friends, because they could travel across continents to play together. She was also aware of that they had to speak English together. This might also show that she might have related to other setting, as for example what she has seen on television shows, that to the setting in their kindergarten, where different children with different appearance and different languages play together.

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<sup>100</sup> Pointing to the child with dark skin and short black hair.

In other studies in school settings it has been found that children choose to play with children with the same skin color (Corsaro, 2011). The children in this study as they were in kindergarten age might not do this because of their age, this might come later, because the children in this study seemed to play with children with different appearance, as well as different languages, culture backgrounds and ethnicity. The children also showed this from the interviews, as for example described over that Girl-X concluded that it was the distance and not the cultural differences or difference in appearance that made it hard for the children to play together.

In another interview session about the children in the images, Girl-Y and Girl-T were talking about the same two children as Girl-X and Girl-Q were. Girl-Y said: “Those two are men”. When asking if these two children could play together they both said yes. When asking about what they thought their name was, Girl-Y answered a typical Norwegian boys’ name for the child with yellow hair and Girl-T answered a not typical Norwegian boys’ name for the child with black hair. They both confirmed that they knew someone with those names. Here the girls made associations from the children in the images to someone they knew, probably with some similarity in appearance. At the same time, they also connected appearance to ethnicity and culture, when giving the children names that are typical for different societies. Girl-X did the same thing when saying the two children lived in two different continents. Girl-Y and Girl-T might however not have made the same connection as Girl-X did consciously, as this was more connected to people they already knew with those names. Girl-X did however the same thing with the child in the first image<sup>101</sup>. She said that she thought she lived in Norway, and that it looked like the child was named Girl-Q, but Girl-Q did not agree. When asking why it looked like Girl-Q, Girl-Q answered: “I do not know, do not understand that” and Girl-X said: “It is almost the same hair”. We agreed that the hair color was alike but not the hair style.

During the drawing activity, Girl-T said that: “I only like brown hair, because I have brown hair”. Later during the same drawing activity when talking about hair color, mentioning brown and dark brown, Girl-T said that her Barbie dolls at home: “...do not have that hair”, and I asked what hair color they have. Girl-T answered: “Normal hair”. It turned out what she referred to as normal hair was yellow. I asked: “Does most Barbie dolls have yellow hair maybe?” and Girl-T answered: “Maybe”. That Girl-T viewed yellow hair as normal hair could

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<sup>101</sup> See appendix 5: Image of child with dark skin and long black hair in braids.

be because it is a normal hair color for Barbie dolls. Some days later during free play, when Girl-T was drawing, she drew a man and a woman. She asked if I had a boyfriend, I said that I have a husband, and then she asked me what color my husband has on his hair. When I said yellow, she answered: “Yellow? That is not possible”. She talked about coloring the hair. I said that it is possible to have yellow hair without coloring it and I mentioned a child in the kindergarten I know that has yellow hair. Here Girl-T both view yellow as normal and also as not possible. For a Barbie doll yellow is the normal hair color, but for people, Girl-T viewed yellow as an unnatural hair color, even though there are children in the kindergarten with yellow hair. This could be just her immediate reaction there and then, but it could also be that there are very few children in the kindergarten with blond hair, which it is, so that this is seen as different from the normality, so maybe even just associated with dolls and unnatural hair. To experience being different is what will be discussed next.

#### **6.4.2 Experience being different**

In the interview with the pedagogical leader, she described that children with a Nordic appearance, is a minority in the kindergarten. She said that there was one child that got teased for characteristics of a Nordic appearance, because the other children found these characteristics as something different and strange. The pedagogical leader was kind of surprised that the bullying was because something like that, because what is usual in the Norwegian society being bullied because one do not have a Nordic appearance. The children in the study from Ireland were bullied for having different ethnicity than Irish and a different appearance than was typical in Ireland, especially having a dark skin color (Devine, 2004). In that study not having a typically Irish appearance was a minority in the schools. In this study having a Nordic appearance was a minority in the kindergarten, although this is not the case in the society. Although as written earlier, that the children in this study did not seem to use specific words for specific children, would this example be different. It could seem like racism, although it could be argued that this was just the children’s curiosity towards something that was new to them.

To experience being different could be hard. As Spernes and Hatlem (2013, p. 103) write is: “Kindergarten children can experience that it is hard to stand out from the group she or he is or wants to be part of”. To have a white skin color would not be an important characteristic if most people in their surroundings have a white skin color, but if there are few people with a

white skin color then this could feel like a more important factor for the feeling of identity (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). To be different, or even to be alone with a characteristically appearance could provide consequences not only for a child's feeling of identity, but also for how well the child feels. The pedagogical leader said that after the episode mentioned above, they talked to the children in joined activity about it, and they also talked to the children's parents. She said that they have a lot of focus on friendship, inclusion and anti-bullying, which was really clear from the observations, as written earlier.

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has discussed the children's perspectives on diversity, with a focus on culture, religion, language, gender and appearance. Culture is a diffuse concept that children in kindergarten age will not have a full understanding of. As culture could be both outer characteristics and inner characteristics (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013), the children could experience these in the way children dress, for example with the use of a hijab or in the way children play. Children chooses to play with children who has something in common with themselves (Singer and dee Haan, 2011), either culture, religion, language or gender. By being a part of a child group with a great diversity, the children got experiences some children celebrating Christmas and some children celebrating Id. They also experienced that some children needs to eat food which is halal. The children were aware of the different languages being represented in the kindergarten. Some children used their home language in play, although it seemed that the common understanding was that they did not get understood speaking their home language in the kindergarten, and that they rather used their home language at home. Children as young as three years old could prefer to play with children of the same gender as themselves (Corsaro, 2009), as also found in this study. Both the society and the adults in the children's surroundings contribute to the children's experience with gender, and the development of their own gender identity. The typically Nordic appearance was what became a minority in the kindergarten. The children did see differences in appearance, although they did not use words for this, for example skin color. The next and last chapter will be the summary and conclusion chapter, which is called conclusion.





## 7. Conclusion

This master thesis has presented a fieldwork carried out in a multicultural kindergarten, based on the main thesis question: “What are children’s perspectives on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten in Norway?” One to one interviews and focus group interviews with the use of images, participant observations, drawing activity and a guide tour as methods, provided the findings that made it possible to answer this thesis question. Although it was hard to capture the children’s perspectives on something that for children in kindergarten age is hard to understand, and that they do not have words for, like for example diversity, their perspectives was still captured. It could be argued that the research methods could have been better, to better capture the children’s perspectives on diversity, still it is a challenging topic, and these methods complemented each other good in this fieldwork. In addition to some challenges with the methods, some ethical challenges were met, which have been described and discussed. Theories relevant for this topic and research questions have also been presented and discussed, and the data has been presented, analyzed and discussed based on relevant theories and research questions, together with comparison to other studies<sup>102</sup>.

The research questions: *How do children experience and reflect on diversity in a multicultural kindergarten? Does going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children’s understanding of cultural differences? and How are the children’s own culture in the kindergarten influenced by the diversity?* have all been discussed through the analysis and discussion part of this master thesis.

*How do children experience and reflect upon diversity in a multicultural kindergarten?* The children did not use the words: diversity, culture, religion, appearance and ethnicity. These might be too abstract words for children in kindergarten age. I also chose not to use these words in the interviews and activities. The children still had experiences with this diversity. The children were for example used to children having different backgrounds, in that way that some children are celebrating Christmas and some children are celebrating Id. They did not seem sad because they celebrated the one or the other, this was just the way it was. They also experienced that some children need to eat only halal food and some children do not need this.

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<sup>102</sup> See 1.2.2 What previous research has been done on this topic?

The children were also used to hearing different languages, and they knew who they could speak their home language to and not. The common view seemed to be that it was no point in speaking their home language in the kindergarten, because they were not understood. Some children still used their home language in play, for example Girl-T. The language competence could matter in play because the children very much used their language in playing situations, although they also could play together without having so much competence in the Norwegian language. Girl-X and Girl-Z expressed that they only speak their home language at home. Sometimes the adults said some words in another language to the children using these languages, but this did not come across as normal to the children, as they knew that the adult's working in the kindergarten did not know their home language, and would not understand them if they started speaking in these languages. It might even be easier to the children to relate to having one language at home, and another one in the kindergarten without mixing them. However if the children did have someone they could talk their home language to inside the kindergarten this could also strengthen their whole language competence, as bilingual children often use their whole language competence when expressing themselves (Gjervan, Andersen and Bleka, 2006; Valvatne and Sandvik, 2007).

Gender and gender differences were however more important to the children than differences between cultures, religions and languages. The children could use gender categories to tease each other, and seemed very aware of differences between genders, although it can be discussed who decides these differences, because at least from a social constructionist perspective, gender is shaped by the society (Pattman and Kehily, 2004; Rogers, 2003). There are toys meant for different genders, for example dolls and toy cooking for girls, and toy cars, toy tools and toy guns for boys (Rogers, 2003). The children seemed to have clear thoughts of how children of the opposite gender play (Mouritsen, 2002), and they also mostly chose to play with children of the same gender as themselves (Corsaro, 2009). Gender identity might be more important for the children, as they might struggle with different culture expectations at home and in the kindergarten, than if they did not meet different cultures at home and in the kindergarten. Also there might in some cultures be more important to keep the traditional gender roles, than in the Norwegian society where it is a goal for equality between the genders (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). This could lead to the children struggling more to become a boy or a girl in the *right* way (Åberg and Taguchi, 2006).

The children also experienced diversity in appearance, they saw differences although they did not put words on what was different. Rather they drew lines to children they knew with similar appearance. The typically Nordic appearance which is the most common in the Norwegian society, became a minority in this kindergarten. The children were one time bullying a child with characteristics of this typically Nordic appearance, because this was what became different. However the children did not use racist words actively, as found in the study in the Ireland (Devine, 2004; Devine, Kenny and Macneela, 2008), although this research were carried out in primary schools and not kindergartens, so racism could come later. On the other hand they talked about the episode in the kindergarten afterwards, and they also worked a lot with including everyone in play and in the togetherness inside the kindergarten. If children get used to living in a diverse society early, and get thought that one should not bully each other based on differences, but that everyone is different from each other on some areas, and that everyone could be friends, then children might go out into the world more open for other people and curious rather than prejudiced. As also found in the observation of my young relative in the very beginning of this master thesis<sup>103</sup>, and which also was the starting point of this study. We are all part of a diverse society, no society is homogenous, and we should all learn how to be around each other, and to make diversity a resource.

*Does going to a multicultural kindergarten influence children's understanding of cultural differences?* As the multicultural kindergarten was filled with a multicultural, religious, language and ethnic diversity, the children met the diversity. How this diversity was represented in the kindergarten and in the children's everyday lives therefore mattered. Although children are social actors in their own lives (Corsaro, 2011; Prout and James, 1990), will the action and opinions of adults in their surroundings affect the children's attitude (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). In this sense would the kindergarten's approach towards diversity affect the children, and their experiences and perspectives on diversity. As a multicultural kindergarten is defined by the Strategy plan for equivalent upbringing in practice as a kindergarten where the adults working there view the cultural and language diversity as normality and uses this diversity as a resource (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2007), this would be aspects that would influence the children's experiences and perspectives on diversity. Hearing different languages become a natural part of the children's everyday life

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<sup>103</sup> See part 1.2.1 Why is this research interesting?

inside this kindergarten, which would be different from a kindergarten without such a great diversity.

Flags were hanging in the kindergarten showing the children's different backgrounds (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013). Still the children's different cultural backgrounds could have been shown in different ways. It could for example be better to let the children's resources come to expression in other ways, in children's own initiatives, for example to sing a song in their home language. However to take out cultural aspects from the children's cultural backgrounds without asking them would not be a good way, because the children have to decide for themselves what is part of their culture (Knudsen, 2008). It could be good for the children to get to use their abilities and knowledge in the kindergarten, and they might like to focus on differences, as showed from Åberg and Taguchi's (2006) study. The birthday celebrations seemed like a positive and important experience to the children, as also Spernes and Hatlem, (2013) confirms, and a better way to put a focus on each child than with one day of showing all the children's different cultural backgrounds.

Friendships were important to children, and this is something that would be important to all children, not just in a multicultural kindergarten. The adults working in the kindergarten had a great focus on friendship and inclusion in play. It seemed like the children at the same time as being engaged in this topic also got tired hearing that everyone should play with everyone, and showed their agency in relation to this. The children could have different reasons for excluding each other from play, for example protecting their established play (Corsaro, 2009). That culture could be both outer characteristics and inner characteristics (Spernes and Hatlem, 2013), means that some culture aspects could be hidden, like values that for example could come to expression in play. Knudsen (2008) writes that what matters is not what cultural background the children have, but their competence in child culture and play. Children's interest could be more important, because children chose to play with someone they do have some similarities with (Singer and dee Hann, 2011). As culture also could be inner characteristics, could culture still matter in friendships and play. The children were also very much focused on siblings, and they knew how many siblings the other children had. This could also be a factor of culture, as siblings could have different meanings in different societies. So in some way, going to a multicultural kindergarten influence the children's understanding of cultural differences, even though the children did not have words for this.

*How are children's own culture in the kindergarten influenced by the diversity?* The child culture would be influenced by culture aspects in the kindergarten, from the children's homes and cultural backgrounds and from the society. Books, songs and fairytales were all in Norwegian, and this contributes to Norwegian being the common language and culture, providing a basis they all had in common, cross the different backgrounds. The child culture in the kindergarten got in this sense very much influenced by aspects of the typical Norwegian culture, and also that it just had been a focus on Christmas in the kindergarten. Still some words were used in other languages, for example a word for *clean-up*, which became a part of the common culture inside the kindergarten.

The children enjoy their kindergarten and they like to play with toys and with each other. Play is a natural part of being a child (Lillemyr, 2009). The children played mostly together with other children, mostly with the same gender, so the child culture were also influenced by gender typical toys, like Barbie dolls for example. The children took child cultural aspects made for children by adults, and made new creations (Kampmann, 2001). The children's culture is in this sense not for, with or by children, but rather a combination. For example did Girl-Y and Girl-T play good Barbie and bad Barbie. The children used a lot of different playing material, and this differed at home and in the kindergarten. Two girls made up their own game, called the frog game. One girl brought cultural aspects from a wedding tradition into the children's play in the kindergarten. Some children also used hijab in their play, and they needed to have some experience with hijab to use it in playing situations, although they did not seem to be aware of who in particular uses hijab. The child culture was in this way very much influenced by the diversity.

Working with this master project has taught me a lot. I have learned what to be aware of when doing research with children, both in theory and in practice. I have learned more about the field of childhood studies. I have also learned about children's perspectives on diversity in the specific multicultural kindergarten used for this field work. It must be remembered that what is written in this master these are all my own reflections. I recognize that it is a limitation to what one could gain of information from a research like this. What have reflected upon is my observations, and I recognize that the kindergarten's practice might differ from what was captured in these observations. Also it is my own reflections and discussion, and it is influenced by my own personal views. A recognize also that it might be problematic that I have used so much western literature when the children participating in the study were both

western and non-western. However, this study was held in a western country, and the children were very much influenced by the Norwegian culture. Also some of my references are from the pedagogical field, which is my background, although I have tried to move more away from this in working with this master thesis and into the field of childhood studies.

If I was going to do this research over again or there were something I could have done differently, I would have asked the children more about their reflections on how the kindergarten represented their diversity. I would have asked what they thought about the different flags hanging in the kindergarten, what they could tell me about the flag or flags representing their family background, and how they would have liked the diversity to show in the kindergarten. Still this would have been difficult questions for the children to answer. This is still something I have been wondering about when writing this thesis. I would also be more conscious about the children not participating in the study.

The focus of this master thesis has been mainly on cultural diversity. The research was carried out in a multicultural kindergarten. For future recommendations, it could be interesting to compare this research from a multicultural kindergarten with other multicultural kindergartens, or with kindergartens that does not see themselves as multicultural. This way it could be discussed how much the kindergarten's approach influenced the children's perspectives. Also other factors could be compared, as the children's friendships, experiences with languages and view on appearance. It could also be interesting to talk more about differences and similarities with children, for example to a similar study that Åberg and Tagochi (2006) carried out.

An interesting factor found from this study was the children's focus on gender. It could be interesting to compare with a kindergarten without such great cultural, language, religious and ethical diversity, to see if gender was still as important. Also to see if siblings are as important, and how differences are being viewed. It would also be interesting to do separate research based on children and gender, especially in this age group. It would be interesting to focus on children's perspectives on gender differences even more than was captured in this fieldwork, looking at gender identities even more, and look into the children's gender relations, even cross culturally. Although as referred to in this master thesis Thorne (1990) did a research about gender relations in a primary school. This would still be a little different from kindergartens. Also Rogers (2003) who has been used in this master thesis have written

about gender. I found it very interesting both what is written about gender and the children's own experiences and reflections on this, and although there probably is a lot research done on this topic, I would find it interesting to look more into this. Working with children's perspectives on diversity has also been very interesting and I am excited to finishing this master project and find out where the field of childhood studies will lead me in the future.

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## **Appendix**

## **Appendix 1: Information sheet**

Feltarbeid til masteroppgave med tema: «Barns perspektiver på kulturelt mangfold i en flerkulturell barnehage i Norge».

Jeg heter Unn Ane Halbostad og tar i master i Childhood studies ved Norsk Senter for Barneforskning ved NTNU. Jeg har tidligere en bachelor som førskolelærer med fordypning i internasjonal forståelse og flerkulturelt arbeid.

Jeg har valgt å skrive masteroppgave om barns perspektiv på kulturelt mangfold. Målet for forskningen er å få barnas egne perspektiv på deres hverdag i en flerkulturell barnehage. Jeg tenker å bruke ca 2 timer 3-4 dager uka i 4-6 uker på å samle inn data, og ønsker da å komme til litt forskjellige tidspunkt på dagen så jeg kan observere måltid, frilek, utelek og organiserte aktiviteter. Jeg ønsker da at vi sammen finner ut hvilke dager og tidspunkter som passer.

Jeg ønsker å ha gruppeintervju med barn, samt deltakende observasjon og tegningsaktiviteter, og gjerne intervju med deg som er pedagogisk leder på avdelingen. Det vil ikke få konsekvenser i forhold til arbeidsgiver eller arbeidsforhold dersom du ikke ønsker å delta i studien. Du kan også velge å trekke deg fra studien når som helst, og innsamlet opplysninger vil da bli slettet. Jeg ønsker å bruke lydopptaker i intervjuet for lettere å få med meg det som blir sagt, men det er kun jeg og min veileder som kommer til å lytte til dette. Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt.

Jeg sender gjerne ytterligere informasjon om prosjektet mitt dersom dette er ønskelig.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i juni 2015. Lydopptak vil da bli slettet.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste AS.

Med Vennlig Hilsen

Unn Ane Halbostad

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## **Appendix 2: Consent form**

Feltarbeid til masteroppgave med tema: «Barns perspektiver på kulturelt mangfold i en flerkulturell barnehage i Norge».

Kjære forelder/foresatt

Jeg heter Unn Ane Halbostad og tar master i Childhood studies ved Norsk senter for barneforskning ved NTNU. Jeg skal skrive masteroppgave om barns perspektiver på kulturelt mangfold. Jeg kommer til å være i barnehagen ca 2 timer 3-4 dager uka i 4-6 uker fra 2 januar, for å gjøre mitt feltarbeid. I den forbindelse lurer jeg på om jeg kan få samtykke til at ditt barn deltar i forskningen?

Målet for forskningen er å få barnas egne perspektiv på deres hverdag i en flerkulturell barnehage. Jeg ønsker å ha gruppeintervju med barna, i tillegg til tegneaktiviter og deltakende observasjon. Jeg kommer til å bruke lydopptaker i intervju med barna for lettere å få med meg det som blir sagt, men det er kun jeg og min veileder som kommer til å lytte til dette. Barnas navn vil ikke bli brukt i masteroppgaven. Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, det vil ikke få konsekvenser ovenfor barnehagen dersom barnet deltar i studien eller ikke. Dersom du samtykker til at ditt barn deltar kommer jeg likevel til å spørre barna før hver aktivitet om de ønsker å delta. Barna velger selv hva de vil være med på, og kan trekke seg når som helst i studien uten å oppgi grunn. Dersom du som forelder/foresatt eller barnet ønsker å trekke seg fra hele studien, vil ikke innsamlede opplysninger om barnet bli brukt i masteroppgaven og vil bli slettet etter endt prosjekt.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i juni 2015. Lydopptak vil da bli slettet.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskaplig datatjeneste AS.

Har du spørsmål kan disse rettes til pedagogisk leder på avdelingen, eller direkte til meg. Det er også mulig å få se intervjuguide, dersom du ønsker dette.

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Dersom du samtykker at ditt barn deltar i forskningen, vær så snill å signere papiret og lever det til pedagogisk leder på avdelingen.

Jeg samtykker til at min sønn/datter (navn) ..... deltar i forskningen.

Jeg godkjenner at intervju med min sønn/datter blir tatt opp på lydopptaker og at det han/hun sier kan brukes i masteroppgaven.

Jeg forstår at sønnen/datteren min kommer til å være anonym i denne studien, og at alt som blir sagt kommer til å være konfidentielt.

Jeg forstår at sønnen/datteren min kan trekke seg fra forskningen når som helst.

Dato og Sted:

Underskrift:

.....

.....

### **Appendix 3: Interview guide**

#### **Intervju med pedagogisk leder**

Kan du fortelle meg hva du legger i begrepet «Flerkulturell barnehage»?

Hva gjør dere for å synliggjøre det flerkulturelle mangfoldet i barnehagen?

På hvilken måte involverer dere barna i å synliggjøre det flerkulturelle mangfoldet?

#### **Guide tour**

Kan dere vise meg barnehagen?

Hva har dere lyst til å vise meg i barnehagen?

Hva synes dere det er viktig at jeg får se fra barnehagen deres?

Hva pleier dere å gjøre her?

#### **Fokusgruppeintervju om barnehagen**

Kan dere fortelle meg om barnehagen deres? Hvordan er barnehagen?

Hvordan er det å være barn i barnehagen?

Hva er det beste med barnehagen?

Hva liker dere å leke med i barnehagen?

Har dere slike leker hjemme? (Hvilke leker har dere hjemme?)

Hva er den beste maten dere vet hjemme og i barnehagen?

Hva liker dere å synge i barnehagen?

Synger dere denne sangen hjemme? (Hvorfor ikke? Kan mamma og pappa sangen?)

#### **Fokusgruppeintervju med tegninger av barn**

Hva kan dere fortelle meg om personen i tegningen? Hvem er dette?

Hva liker hun/han å gjøre/leke med?

Kan de leke sammen? Hva kan de leke?

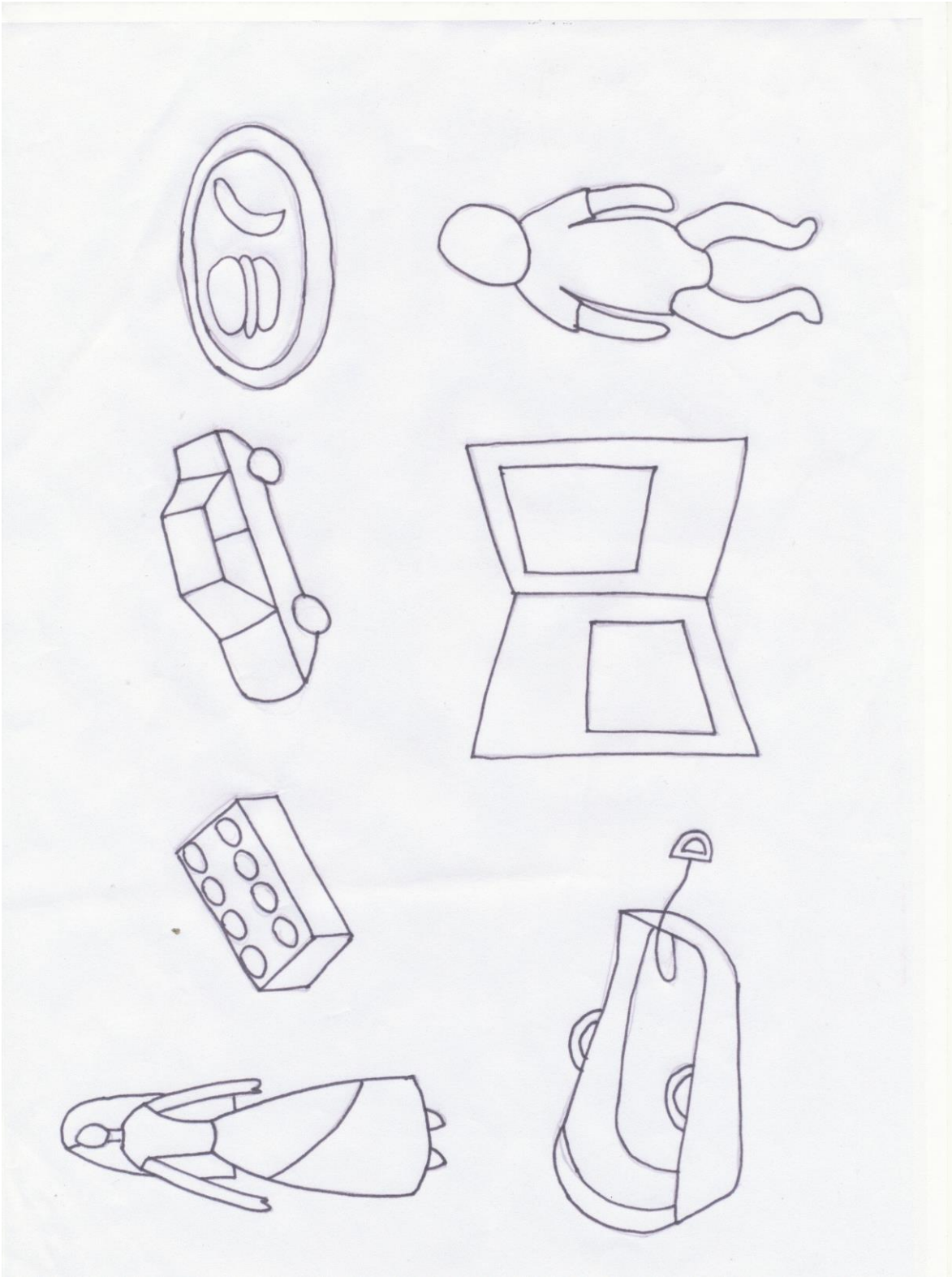
Hvilken sang tror du hun/han liker?

Hvilken mat tror du hun/han liker?

Tror du de liker de samme sangene?

Tror du de liker den samme maten?

Appendix 4: Drawing activity



**Appendix 5: Image of child with dark skin and long black hair in brads**



**Appendix 6: Image of child with hijab**



**Appendix 7: Image of child with light skin and short yellow hair**



**Appendix 8: Image of child with dark skin and short black hair**





