

Children`s activities in Norwegian kindergartens. Part 1: an overall picture

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What is daily life like in Norwegian early year's institutions? You may have an idea..., but we have almost no research-based knowledge about the variety of activities going on in this institution called "barnehage"(kindergarten). The present study was undertaken to explore this issue. Kindergarten-teachers (31) reported qualitative descriptions of children's activities in kindergartens several times a day for a whole week in 2008 (Bergen, Norway). Based on 798 activity reports, the present study provides an overview of characteristics in the daily life of young children in kindergartens, which theoretically highlights their cultural formation. Our study shows that most activities took place in small groups; the activities were typically not planned and were a result of the children's own initiative (about 80 percent). Frequent activities were categorized as art performance, role-playing, construction games, playing with toys, reading books, playing in the sandpit or using playground equipment. Planned activities (20 percent) had clear relevance for some subject areas (such as language/communication, art/creativity, health and physics), whereas other subjects seemed to be more neglected (such as religious, ethical and social issues). Variation in children's activity is followed up in a separate part 2 of our study.

Keywords: Activities in kindergartens, quality in kindergartens, cultural formation in childhood.

Introduction

The reason for this study is rooted in a curiosity about the state of affairs in Norwegian kindergartens: *What is going on there? How is the kindergarten arena constituted and formed? More specifically put: What kind of activities do children and teachers engage in?* We believe that keeping a focus on activity patterns may lead to broadening our knowledge about children's kindergarten experiences. The study has an explorative approach in the sense that it is based on observations of how children were involved in practically all types of activities that go on in a particular week. About 800 observations have been categorized and statistically analyzed to provide an overall picture of characteristic patterns in the children's daily kindergarten life.

In order to put the present study in a wider context we will introduce that the Norwegian Government in recent years has given political priority to increasing the number of places in kindergartens. The latest statistics show that 97.3 per cent of children aged 3–5 attend a kindergarten while the number for children aged 1–5 is 89 percent (Statistics Norway). Even though so many children attend a kindergarten, we know little about what is actually going on there. A search in the Nordic Base of Early Childhood Education and Care – (Ministry of Education) shows that some small-scale

ethnographic-inspired studies have been done on the subject of everyday practice. Empirical studies of the content in Norwegian kindergartens are, however, an exception. Balke and colleagues' (1979) reported activities and artifacts applied in kindergartens in the 70s (Balke, Berg, & Fagerli, 1979) are further commented on in our discussion. More recently, Østrem et al (2009) studied the implementation of the new curriculum in Norwegian kindergartens. They reported that kindergarten teachers claim to have become more conscious about the subject areas in the new Framework Plan (see Table 2). Nevertheless, the researchers conclude that it is hard to see concretely how teachers actually work with the various subject areas (Østrem et al, 2009, p. 158). We conclude that we certainly need more research on children's activities in kindergartens and hopefully our study can be a contribution to this research field. We admit, however, that our study provides mainly empirical evidence along with a platform where more theoretical discussions about the social and cultural consequences of the activity patterns described can be raised. In our view, theoretical perspectives on children's daily activities have to be further developed in kindergarten research. The present study is part of the research project Kindergarten as an arena for cultural formation¹, which aims to contribute to new knowledge and understandings of how education is cul-

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turally unfolded, structured and shaped. In line with these aims, this article will provide new insight into what kind of activities, artifacts and themes are made available to children and how children and teachers are involved in these activities.

Theoretical framework

Socio-cultural contexts are conditioning the way kindergartens institutionally act and organize practices. The epistemology of a country's ECE programme and practice is therefore closely related, in an interwoven way, to its demographic situation, political ideas and national historical events. In this perspective, a national curriculum is not only a question of implementation; it is discursive and negotiated over time. Children's cultural formation, learning and development takes place through participating in early year's institutions and therefore such practices can be studied through observing everyday activities (Rogoff, 2003; Hedegaard & Fler, 2008; Ødegaard 2013).

The concept "cultural formation" embodies the essence of early childhood education and is well suited for exploring and developing new insights and knowledge. In this article cultural formation is taken to the forefront and activity is chosen as a core concept for studies of institutionalized everyday practices.

Cultural formation means the shaping of new meaning, identities, and practices. It is assumed that by studying children's activities we can understand more about how children shape and are being shaped in a web of structural, material, psychological and relational conditions. When children use artifacts that are made available in the early year's settings content and curriculum are shaped. Artifacts contain forms or signs that carry history and meanings from other places and from other times. By getting a better grasp of what kind of activities that are dominant versus absent or seldom practices, we can get insights and knowledge about processes of possible cultural formation and a picture of what kind of everyday experiences can be unfolded.

The term "activity" serves as a foci point in the design; in the instructions to the observers as well as in the analysis. Researching children's and teachers' activities in an institutional setting call for socio cultural theoretical conceptualization (Engeström, Punamäki-Gitai, & Miettinen, 1999; Rogoff, 2003, 2008). When children participate in activities they are included in collective developed patterns of actions rooted historically. Teacher's actions are consciously or unconsciously part of such patterns. "Activity" in this study embraces spontaneous activities in small groups and alone, as well as planned teacher activities both indoor and outdoor. The term activity is as already pointed out, seen in a socio-cultural frame, so even if an activity seems like an individual form of activity it is considered social because the institutionalized setting conditions the way a child can be related to time, space and human relations.

The findings from this study will enable us to learn how daily practices shape conditions for learning and cultural formation, and to raise questions accordingly.

Children's early learning is in particular an educational issue in many countries and will therefore also be addressed in the present study (e.g. OECD and PISA). Hedegaard and Fler have formulated a direction for further research on early childhood, which is very much in line with the basic ideas in our research project. In their words:

"It is children's intentional activities and the interactions in which they take part in their everyday social situations- and how other participants contribute to these situations through their interactions- that should be studied (Hedegaard and Fler, 2008, p. 5)".

This means that even if the term activity is a crucial concept, the analysis does not follow any specific kind of activity system analysis, but are rather be considered close to the empirical base and close to what Barbara Rogoff calls *guided participation* which refers to "the processes and systems of involvement between people as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity" (Rogoff, 2008, p. 60). This includes both face-to-face interaction, as well as side-by-side joint participation. The "guidance" referred to in guided participation involves the direction offered by cultural and social values, as well as social partners. Such guided participation, and can also, as we see it, be studied as the absence of guided involvement in the activities.

Data and participants

Many kindergartens in Norway have a formal teacher training collaboration with their local teacher training university. All local kindergartens collaborating with Bergen University College were invited to participate in our project. We required that the observers had to be educated as kindergarten teachers, and they were asked to report observations in their group of children (the organizational unit to which they belonged) 3–4 times a day, every day of one particular week (or the following week). We specified the ideal number of observers dependent on the total size of the kindergarten (roughly 1 observer for 20 children), but we accepted participation also with a smaller number of observers. Thirty-one observers at 18 kindergartens participated in our study. It is clear that only a small percentage of the invited kindergartens participated (about 25 percent) and some of them with a smaller number of observers than we asked for. We will argue, however, that the present study should not be regarded as a traditional survey. It should be noted that the participants were not asked to simply fill in a questionnaire, they were asked to contribute observational reports requiring hours of work during a whole week. We will therefore argue that it is not reasonable to compare the percentage participation in our study directly with traditional survey studies. On the other hand, it is a critical issue, whether the sampled observations show a representative picture of the content in Norwegian kindergartens, and this issue is further commented on in our discussion part below.

All observers received information about the project and detailed instructions for reporting observations.

The day was divided into four parts and we asked the observers to report 1–4 observations for each of the four time periods. Each activity was reported on a separate standardized form with both fixed alternatives and open space for their own descriptions. It was emphasized that we were interested in their qualitative description of the reported activity including characteristics of participants, what was said and done, responses, use of equipment, physical location and so on.

A dominant trait by Norwegian kindergartens is that a lot of different activities take place at the same time. In the project-planning it was therefore a major challenge to *elaborate guidelines for selecting a specific activity*. In the final guidelines it was stated that an activity could involve one, several or many children. The activity could be planned, spontaneous or just daily routines (such as eating and cleaning up, etc.). The observers were instructed to first select the most obvious and distinct activity at a certain time point (reported as First Activity in Table 1). An obvious and distinct activity was defined as an activity easy to recognize due, for example, to the number of children involved, type of equipment, loud voices etc. It should be noted that an obvious and distinct activity does not necessarily mean participation of many children, but it is clear to the observer "what's going on". Such activities are referred to as clear in the following, and examples of clear activities could be children painting pictures and a child "reading" a book. A simple definition of unclear activities is everything that is not clear. Many activities in kindergarten change rapidly and may also be a playful mixture of different activities. In other words, it may be difficult for the observer to report "what's actually going on". In our guidelines we explicitly asked the observers to look for such activities and report them as Second Activity in a particular time period (Table 1). If the observers didn't recognize any clear/unclear activity at a certain time point, they were asked to report the type of activities that were actually taking place and mark the observation as clear or unclear. If the observers reported more than two activities during a spell of work, we didn't ask specifically for clear or unclear activities. The guidelines for selecting an activity were tested and discussed with observers in three kindergartens before data collection (pilot), and the observers had an open support service (phone number) for some hours every day of the data collection week. This service was only used twice, which indicates that the information given was clear. The 31 observers contributed 798 observations in our study.

For each observation, the observers reported whether the planned activities were linked to specific subject areas and with regard to spontaneous activities, it was reported whether children or adults initiated the activity. The standardized observational form gives information about where the activity took place (indoors/outdoors, a particular room/area or somewhere outside the kindergarten), and finally, we asked the observers to assess to what degree they regarded the reported activity as typical in their kindergarten

(at that time of the year). The observers reported standardized information about the children involved in an activity, but this issue is presented in the following part 2 of our study (Kallestad & Ødegaard).

The observers also filled in a questionnaire the last day of their reporting job, which is referred to as Dataset 2 in the present report. Based on these data, we know their attitude to the performed observational work, their experience with selecting activities and reporting them in our standardized form. We also asked them in general about the particular week (that was reported), the characteristics of the total group of children (where only some of them were included in the reported activities) and finally we asked the observers to assess the pedagogical quality of the kindergarten and their own satisfaction with their workplace. All this information is useful for placing the reported activities in a broader context described by the observers.

Method and analysis

Overview of observational reports

All observations and questionnaires were returned to the project by post in an anonymous envelope. The data analyses were performed with the statistical program SPSS. Each observation was coded as a case (labeled with a random number for the actual kindergarten and observer).

In the result section we first present simple descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the observational reports. These results show how the kindergarten teachers fulfilled their observational task (how many reports on average at each time point, Table 1), and furthermore we highlight some characteristics in the overall picture of reported activities.

Prevalence of different types of activities and the number of children/adults involved

An important aim of the present study is to present an overall picture of the kind of activities that were reported often or seldom. The observers were asked to both label the activity and describe the content of the activity, and, based on this information, we developed and adapted categories of activities in a continuous "dialogue" with data. This procedure required of course the researchers' subjective assessment (first author). Regarded as traditional quantitative research, this procedure may be seen as critical, but regarded as qualitative research this interpretation of data is the normal research activity. Main categories and sub-categories were constructed. For example, "Painting" was set up as a sub-category under "Art performance" etc. This result is reported Table 3, which shows main categories of activities and percent of the total observations distributed across different activities. In further analyses of activities we apply only the main categories of activities presented in Table 3. Each main activity was recoded as a dummy variable (occur or not) across all cases (observations).

Relationships between the number of children involved in an activity and the type of activity reported

was investigated by a correlation analysis (Pearson's correlation). The number of children involved was measured by two different variables. "Number of children 1" was coded 0 or 1 (for 6 children or less/more than 6 children) and "Number of children 2" had four values (indicating 1, 2, 3 children and 4 or more). The results are presented in Table 4. The observers were also asked to report adults participating in activities (including themselves) along with data on the sex and occupational role of the adults.

Results

Overview of observational reports

The kindergarten teachers were asked to report 1–4 observations four times a day for one week. The number of reports each day was relatively equal, with the highest number on Tuesday day (174 observations) and lowest on Friday (141 observations). The day was divided into four parts or spells of work. The teachers report some more observations in the middle of the day, which is natural because not all of them are at work when the kindergarten opens in the morning and closes in the afternoon. Most observations were reported in the second spell of work (302) and lowest at the end of the day (123 observations). The observers were asked to report 1–4 observations for each spell of work (as mentioned above). Normally they reported 1–2 activities as shown below.

Table 1. Number of observations reported as first, second, third or fourth activity at a particular time point

	Number of observations
Reported as first activity	424
Reported as second activity	247
Reported as third activity	93
Reported as fourth activity	34

The table above does not tell us how many of the observers who reported four activities within a spell of work (all 31 observers could have done it once or just a few of them several times). Closer inspection of data shows that 11 teachers (of 31) reported four activities one or several times, and 19 teachers reported three activities one or several times. This information will be taken into account when we describe the overall picture of children's activities.

The teachers marked each observation as a clear/unclear activity in line with the definition outlined in our introduction. They were also asked to report first a clear activity and secondly a less clear activity if both types of activities were taking place during a particular spell of work. Our results show that 73 percent of the observations were marked as a clear activity. The activities were normally regarded as very common or quite common by the teachers (over 80 percent of the observations). About two-thirds of the activities took place indoor (68 percent) and only 7 percent took place outside the kindergarten (trips and excursions).

In our study, it was an important aim to highlight the degree of planned versus spontaneous activities in kindergartens. We found that almost 80 percent

(78.9 percent) of the reported activities were not planned, and 77 percent of these activities were a result of the children's initiative. Twenty-one percent of the observations were reported as planned activities, and these activities were normally planned by adults (78 percent of the cases, and 14 percent of the activities were planned by adults and children together). It should be noted that planned activities also include daily routine-activities such as meals, dressing, cleaning up etc.

When the teachers reported a planned activity (about 20 percent), we asked them to indicate whether this activity was relevant for any of the seven subject areas listed in the Framework Plan. About 14 percent of the activities had relevance for these subject areas according to the answers from our teachers and more detailed results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Planned activities distributed across various subject areas

Subject area	Percent (n = 115)	Percent* (n = 138)
1: Natural science, environment and technique	5.2	8.7
2: Communication, language and text	18.3	21.7
3: Numbers, space and form	7.0	10.2
4: Art, culture and creativity	33.0	33.3
5: Ethics religion and philosophy	1.7	1.5
6: Society and local community	1.7	3.6
7: Body, motion and health	20.0	21.0
8. Combination of 1–7 above	13	x

*) Category 8 is distributed across category 1–7 which means that some activities are registered several times because of relevance for several subject areas. As a consequence the number of observations increase from 115–138.

The results in Table 2 clearly shows that subject area number 4 (Art, culture and creativity) is referred most frequently (33 percent), whereas subject area number 2 (Communication, language and text) and 7 (Body, motion and health) were also relevant for a substantial proportion of the planned activities (22 and 21 percent). It is also evident that subject area number 5 (Ethics, religion and philosophy) and 6 (Society and local community) were rarely mentioned.

Prevalence of different types of activities

Table 3 below shows the percent of observations distributed across the main categories of activities. Indoor and outdoor activities are separated in the table, but it should be noted that role-playing is included in both arenas. We suggest that the measures in Table 3 can give an overall picture of what characterize children's activities in kindergarten (see also discussion). From a methodological viewpoint it may be argued, however, that some of the teachers influence this overall picture more than others because they contributed a higher number of observational reports. We therefore decided to also examine the frequencies when restricting the number of observations to a maximum of two within

each spell of work. These results are listed under the heading "selected observations" in the table below. Based on the results we conclude that the most eager observers do not influence the total data material and we therefore include all observations in further analyses.

Table 3. Percent of observations distributed across activities

Activities	Selected observations* (n = 671)	Total observations (n = 798)
Indoor activities		
Art performance	13.9	13.0
"Play with..."	12.7	13.0
Role-play	10.9	11.0
Construction	10.4	10.8
Reading books	9.2	9.8
Music activities	4.6	4.5
Other indoor activities	9.7	9.0
Outdoor activities		
Play in sandpit	6.1	6.3
Using playground equipment	5.7	5.4
Excursions/trips	4.8	4.6
Role-play outdoor	4.0	3.9
Play with natural materials	3.3	3.6
Play with bikes	1.6	1.8
Other outdoor activities	1.5	3.1

Table 3 shows that art performance is a dominant activity in this study. Almost half of the observations within this category are descriptions of children drawing and folding paper. About 15 percent of these activities were described as crafting with beads and the same prevalence for playing with modeling clay. In other observations the children were making different decorative ornaments.

The observations categorized as art performance were normally a clear activity according to the teachers (87 percent of the observations). Art performance activities were planned to a certain extent (37 percent) but most of the activities were not planned (62 percent) and in this case they were initiated by both children and adults (52 and 37 percent and 11 percent both).

An equally frequent activity is categorized as "play with...". Most of these observations (36 percent) contain children's play with cars and trains/railways and play with dolls, doll houses and doll prams (20 percent). Other observations within this category show children playing with plastic animals (15 percent) and board games (13 percent). "Games with rules" were also included in this category, with 8 percent of the observations. It may be noted that for activities within this category, somewhat more observations were reported as unclear (34 percent of them). The activities coded as "play with.." were typically not planned (89 percent) and reported as children's own initiative (82 percent).

Role-playing was also one of the most frequent reported activities, in fact the most frequent activity if we summarize indoor and outdoor activities (11 percent + 3.9 percent). It should be mentioned that activ-

ities in other main categories also had in many cases an element of role-play (for example when playing with dolls, cars, in the sandpit, in climbing frames etc.). In this way it is reasonable to argue that role-playing is the most dominant activity in this study even though this finding is not that clear from Table 3. The descriptions of children's role-playing vary, but the most common scenery is family role-play and often involves preparing and serving meals (32 percent of the observations). In quite a few cases animals were involved in the role-play (10 percent). Other keywords would be doctor (7 percent), travelling (6 percent), various occupations (6 percent) and just a fantasy world (6 percent).

Various construction activities represent about 11 percent of the activities. The typical activity is playing with "Lego/Dublo" (44 percent) and other building bricks and cubes (20 percent). Some observations are descriptions of children playing with puzzles (17 percent) and building "huts, castles" and other bigger structures (12 percent) (1 observation of this activity was also found outdoors).

In about 10 percent of all observations the children focus on books and reading. In some cases this activity took place as a gathering for many children (circle time, 17 percent). In some of the observations the book was only a starting point for a conversation (14 percent). A few cases of drama play were also included in this category.

Only 4.5 percent of the observations were defined as singing, dancing and music activities. Within this category most of the activities took place in the form of a gathering with many children (circle time, 53 percent).

"Other indoor activities" is reported as 9 percent of the observations in Table 3. The most common description within this category is preparing meals (including serving fruit) (19 percent) and having a meal (11 percent). Some observations describe physical indoor activity as running in corridors, jumping etc. (21 percent). Some activities describe daily routines as dressing, tidy up, washing hands etc. As the labeling indicates, this category also contains various activities that occur seldom and for this reason they are not sorted out and defined in specific main categories. This procedure may hide interesting findings of what seems to occur very seldom in kindergartens. From this perspective we will pay attention to two findings. We found only three observations which could be defined as experiments in natural science (0.4 percent of all observations) and only one (0.1 percent) observation including use of digital tools (Internet).

Outdoor activities were reported to a lesser degree than indoor activities (which is a result in itself). The highest frequency was reported for activities in the sandpit (6.3 percent). The descriptions show children constructing roads and buildings (26 percent), playing with water and sand (26 percent) and making "cakes" (18 percent).

As shown in Table 3, 5.4 percent of the activities were categorized as playing in climbing frames, swings

and slides. A few cases of running/jumping and use of sleds were also included in this main activity.

We found that 4.6 percent of the observations could be categorized as trips or excursions outside the kindergarten. In these observations, nature outings were the most common (32 percent of this category). Visiting swimming halls/sports halls (19 percent of this category) and trips to other playgrounds (14 percent of this category) were also reported. We found only four reports (11 percent of this category) on visits to "other institutions (museums, aquariums, cinemas and institutions for elderly people), which means 0.5 percent of the total activities reported (798).

Other outdoor activities reported, will only briefly be commented on. Table 3 shows 3.9 percent role-play outside. These activities often take place in "houses, boats and cars" at the playground. Play with natural materials (3.6 percent of all observations) often means water and soap and in some cases water and snow (together 69 percent) and materials from the forest (earth, stones etc.). The teachers reported activities with bicycles (1.8 percent), play with balls (1.4 percent), running and "games with rules".

In general, most of the activities described above were reported as clear (in the range 65–80 percent) and most of them were not planned and a result of the children's own initiative. A few exceptions from this main pattern may be mentioned briefly. Music activities were normally very clear (94 percent) and as much as half of the activities were planned (53 percent). Trips and expeditions were planned in 57 percent of the cases (typically by adults) and unplanned activities within this category were also mostly initiated by adults (59 percent)

Number of children involved in various activities

All the results above focus on the prevalence of various activities independent of the number of children participating. It may be argued that an activity reported frequently may be less important if just a few children are involved compared to an activity that is reported relatively seldom but involves many children. This issue shows that the number of children involved could be relevant in an assessment of how these activities influence children's cultural formation.

In general, we found that small groups of children participated in most of the activities. In about half of the observations we found 1–3 children and more than five children occur only in 25 percent of the observations. Relationships between activities (recoded as dummy variables) and number of children involved were investigated for all activities and by applying two different recodings of number of children. All significant findings are presented in Table 4 below. The results show that trips/excursions and music activities were typically performed with many children, (note that these activities were reported relatively seldom, see Table 3), whereas role-playing, construction activities and "play with..." normally involved just a few children ("play with..." in many cases an activity for only one child).

Table 4. Pearsons correlations (with sig level) between activity variables and number of children*

Activities	Number of Children 1*	Number of Children 2*
Music activity	.22 (.000)	.18 (.000)
Excursions/ trips	.29 (.000)	.20 (.000)
"Play with...."	-.11 (.002)	-.17 (.000)
Construction	-.08 (.038)	-.11 (.002)
Role-play indoor	-.13 (.001)	-.05 (.166)
Role-play outdoor	-.10 (.009)	-.06 (.125)

*) Number of children 1 recoded as 0/1 for 1–6 children/more than 6 children

Number of children 2 recoded to 6 values for 1/2/3/4/5/6 and more children.

Adult's participation in children's activities

From a theoretical viewpoint it is important to explore adult participation in children's activities. The observers reported adult participation in about 70 percent of the observations and they were typically partly involved. (Different occupational groups were rather equally involved and men were represented only in 6 percent of the observations). Our interpretation of the present study is, however, that the adult's role is rather invisible in the qualitative description of activities. It seems like adults in many cases had a rather passive observational role, which means that participation in many cases should be interpreted as being present.

Discussion

Methodological considerations

The present study claims to highlight children's activities in Norwegian kindergartens, which is of course a very important knowledge base for all professional discussions about quality and policy within this area. Our contribution to this field should be assessed in light of all methodological challenges concerning selection of kindergartens, teachers' selection of observations, construction of main categories of activities (Table 3), interpretation of prevalence as a meaningful approach to cultural formation and finally the time point for data selection (one particular week in October 2008). All these challenges are further outlined and discussed in Part 2 of our report. Our conclusion at this point is that the present study can highlight children's activities in kindergarten and point out some important issues for debate, in spite of methodological restrictions in our research design. In the following we will discuss some main findings.

Activities typically take place spontaneously in small groups of children

Mapping children's activities shows that they typically play spontaneously in small groups (two to five children). About 80 percent of the reported activities were not planned and these activities were typically a result of children's initiative (in 77 percent of the cases). The adult's role is not sufficiently highlighted in our data, but it is our impression that the adults often had a rather passive role. Based on this finding the anticipa-

tion could be put forward that *child-centered education* has developed in close relation with historical and cultural ideas active in Norway and other Nordic countries. It may be suggested that ideological historical conditions have formed a habitus of child centeredness (Knudsen & Ødegaard, 2012; Alvestad, 2011).

The present study shows that children are active and take initiative in their own daily life, which can be interpreted as a democratic value and in line with political aims. At the same time this finding raises several important questions that should be critically discussed as briefly pointed out below. From a cultural learning perspective it should be further explored whether the learning quality in unplanned activities is at the same level as in planned activities. At this point we have to rely on other studies and future research. This is not the place to conclude on this issue, but we will mention that some research suggests that planned activities in kindergarten seem to have better learning quality compared with spontaneous activities (i.e. Samuelsson Pramling & Ødegaard Eriksen, 2011). It should also be further explored how "children's initiatives" are distributed in the whole group of children and whether some groups of children risk being excluded from learning activities in this structure. Finally, we need to discuss critically whether the high level of activities initiated by children contributes to conserve or stimulate learning cultures and a developmental environment in kindergartens. Before closing this section, we will add that Østrem et al (2009, p. 158) also found that informal learning situations were typical for Norwegian kindergartens.

Kindergartens' attention to various subject areas

New issues arise when we now turn to the planned activities in our data. Kindergartens are as mentioned above obliged to emphasize all seven subject areas listed in Table 2 above, but it should be noted that it is not claimed that all subject areas are equally emphasized. It is also important to underline that the present study is not particularly designed to study how kindergartens cover the various subject areas. Some will probably argue that such planned activities often are restricted to certain time periods during the year and for this reason mapping of activities a particular week may be an inadequate approach. In spite of these precautions, our study points out that subject areas were emphasized differently, a result that raises some important questions. First, it seems relevant to discuss what is actually the minimum acceptable emphasis on a particular subject area, and how kindergartens can develop a system to observe children's activities and apply such data in an assessment of learning and development quality in their kindergarten. Secondly, it may be discussed whether teachers have sufficient didactic competence within all subject areas and whether it is wise to offer teacher education where some subject area can be omitted in favour of a particular subject profile. Finally we challenge further research to show that children in kindergartens actually are involved in social, ethical/religious and philosophical issues. Some will probably argue that such issues are nat-

urally involved in daily life without being reported as an activity. We suggest that the developmental quality of kindergartens probably would benefit on making these issues more explicit as planned activities. "Daily life" in kindergartens is very busy. The opportunity adults have to follow up a child's invitation to have a serious talk is limited. In our view, the challenge for teachers is therefore to plan activities where the attention is directed at social and ethical/religious issues (cf. Asplund Carlssen & Samuelson Pramling, 2009; Samuelsson Pramling & Ødegaard Eriksen, 2011; Paley, 1997)

The present study invites a discussion of what subject areas become visible and invisible in kindergartens when the content of the day seems to be highly dependent on children's own choices and attention. Our results show that indoors the activities often were art performance, role-playing, construction games, play with toys (cars, dolls or plastic animals) and some reading activities. Outdoor activities were reported to a less extent but typical observations showed children playing in the sandpit, on climbing frames, swings and switchbacks. It may be noted that this activity pattern has clear similarities with the report presented by Balke and colleagues back in 1979 (Balke et al, 1979). In our view, a majority of the reported activities in the present study could be associated with subject area numbers 4, 2 and 7 in Table 2, whereas few activities had relevance for subject area numbers 5 and 6. It should be underlined that this interpretation of data shows a very similar pattern to what is outlined about planned activities above. At this point it is also relevant to bring in Dataset 2, where the teachers assess strengths and weaknesses with regard to staff competencies in their kindergarten. The results show exactly the same pattern. On average the kindergartens were very well qualified with regard to subject area numbers 4, 2 and 7, whereas their competence was more critical within subject areas 5 and 6, all according to our informants. Based on these results we conclude that various subject areas seem to be emphasized differently in kindergartens. It is reasonable to suggest that art performance is well covered whereas more studies should highlight whether social, ethical and religious issues are sufficiently covered in children's cultural formation.

Focusing on particular activities, we will underline that of almost 800 activities we only found one report where digital tools (PCs) were used and only one report was categorized as a science experiment. In our view, these findings do challenge our kindergartens. It may also be surprising that music activities were reported relatively seldom, but as mentioned these activities often included many children when they occur in our data. It may also be noted that only 7percent of the activities took place as trips and excursions outside the kindergarten.

Conclusion

About 800 observations of children's daily life in Norwegian kindergartens highlight the cultural formation of children in kindergartens. We clearly see that children's play dominates the pattern of activities through spontaneous small group activities: typically role-play, construction games, play with toys, in the sandpit or in playing arrangements outdoors. In our view, these elements of play are

extremely important in children's development and it also represents a valuable part of the type of kindergarten education we have established in Norway. On the other hand, the level of planned activities is lower than we expected and it raises a discussion of the professional role of adults in kindergartens. We think some more planned activities in kindergartens could be a valuable contribution to pedagogical quality and this does not mean that we argue for making kindergarten like school. It simply means that we hold the idea that

a professional kindergarten teacher is aware that he/she shapes conditions for children's cultural formation both by playing a withdrawn role as well as by being a co-constructor in the process of children's activities. It is worth mentioning that our study also shows that art and creativity are an important aspect of children's cultural formation in kindergarten whereas some other subject areas seem to be rather invisible, which poses a particular challenge for kindergarten teacher education.

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Что делают дети в норвежских детских садах? Часть 1: Общая картина жизни в детском саду

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На что похожа повседневная жизнь в норвежских дошкольных учреждениях? У вас могут быть какие-то представления на этот счет, но у нас практически отсутствуют подкрепленные достаточными исследованиями знания о том, чем в реальности заняты дети в этом месте под названием «детский сад» («barnehage»). Данное исследование было предпринято нами как раз с целью выявить всё многообразие детских занятий. Воспитатели детских садов (31 человек) на протяжении целой недели по несколько раз в день составляли качественные отчеты о характере детских игр и занятий (исследование проводилось в 2008 году в городе Берген, Норвегия). На основании 798 подобных отчетов о детской деятельности была составлена общая картина того, из чего состоит повседневная жизнь маленьких детей в детском саду — картина, дающая теоретическое представление об уровне их культурного развития. Наше исследование показало, что в большинстве случаев дети занимаются в маленьких группах; их деятельность по большей части не спланированная, а спонтанная, являющаяся результатом собственных инициатив со стороны детей (около 80 %). Наиболее часто встречающиеся виды деятельности были обозначены нами как художественная деятельность, сюжетно-ролевая игра, игры с конструированием, игры с игрушками, чтение книг, игра в песочнице или на детской площадке. Спланированные виды деятельности (20 %) имели очевидную привязку к каким-то одним темам (таким как язык и общение, искусство и творчество, физика и здоровье), в то время как другим темам уделялось гораздо меньше внимания (например, вопросам религии, этической и социальной проблематике). Вариативности детской деятельности посвящена отдельная, вторая часть нашего исследования.

Ключевые слова: деятельность в детском саду, качество детских садов, культурное развитие в детских возрастах.