Children's right to participate in Early Childhood Education and Care

A comparative study of educators' perspectives in Mexico and Norway

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II

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IV

Abstract

This comparative qualitative study addresses the ways educators within Early Childhood Education and Care institutions understand children's participatory rights as defined by the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, and how they manage to translate these beliefs into practices. This study draws on a constructivist approach to childhood, as well as socio-cultural theory, in order to approach concepts such as action and agency.

This multiple-case study looks at two ECEC centres, one in Mexico and the other in Norway. They were chosen for their similarities, forming part of the same field of education and committing to similar pedagogical visions, and for their differences, mainly related to socio-cultural contexts and provision. The research design is built on semi-structured interviews and observations of educators in San Cristobal de las Casas and Oslo.

Major differences were unveiled through the comparison of these two cases. These concern understandings of childhood, participation, and rights. While such discourses are in Norway rooted in pedagogical and political traditions and easily taken for granted, the same concepts are within the Mexican case envisioned and worked with as a form of political resistance to the hegemonic socio cultural discourse. The greatest similarities between the two cases are related to collaborative issues along with the importance of the school culture and structure for educators to be able to transform their beliefs into real life practices.

Acknowledgments

X

Figures, Tables and Appendices

Figures:

Appendices:

Table of contents

1 Introduction

In view of the growing acknowledgment of the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and of children's participatory rights as outlined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), research is needed to discuss and explore how principles and theories can be fulfilled in real-life educational practices. With this goal in mind, this study focuses upon two ECEC centres, one in Mexico, the other in Norway, and how they practice children's right to participate. In particular, this study focuses upon the views of educators as those who have the most direct contact with young children and who are key stakeholders in influencing developments in policy and practice.

This chapter will present the background, rationale and purpose of the study, its research questions and the two cases it focuses upon, and the structure of the overall thesis.

1.1   Background of the study

1.1.1 The field of Early Childhood Education and Care: A global trend

The importance of ECEC

Acknowledging that "The early childhood years set the foundation for life" (*EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2015:46) have led to the growing interest for and expansion of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The worldwide level of enrolment of children in pre-primary education have increased by about 60% since the 1990s, bringing that number to nearly 184 million in 2012 (*EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2015). However, questions as to how to fulfil the goal of quality early childhood education are yet to be answered.

This has brought the international community, more specifically the OECD Education Committee, to acknowledge the need for international empirical and analytical studies on the subject (Skilbeck, 1993). Acknowledging the connection between quality ECEC and early years development of cognitive, physical, emotional and communicative skills, nations worldwide are increasingly looking outwards, seeking information and inspiration from other countries and their education systems. Great variation in quality in early childhood programs

throughout the world strengthens the need for exchange of information and evaluative programs (Wortham, 2013).

This is motivated by the understanding that the early years are a privileged time to lay the foundation for future learning, through systematic stimulation and development of children's skills, preparing children for school and limit levels of dropouts (Skilbeck, 1993). Indeed, there is a worldwide assumption that not only is quality education, protection and care of children a right in itself, but also that it benefits the wider society: "Getting the foundations right carries huge future benefits: better learning in school and higher educational attainment, which result in major social and economic gains for society" (*EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2015:47). Indeed, beside the concern for child protection, the international trend of migrations, changes in family structures, and the enrolment of mothers in the workforce, created the need for the building of structures and institutions systematizing the education and care of children under school-age (Wortham, 2013). There is thus a certain tension between different views on the purpose of education: Instrumental and normative.

Purpose of education: instrumental and normative values

In his review of the OECD view on the utility of education, Skilbeck (1993) mentions the growing interest at national and international scales for improving educational systems and links it to the fact that governments now more than ever have come to acknowledge education as a major condition for people's and nations well-being. The focus of the OECD on quality education has been driven since the 1960s by the understanding that an educated workforce leads to economic growth and social order. This liberal understanding fits into a human capital approach to education that considers education in terms of investment, a resource serving the needs of the market, productivity and international competition (Robeyns, 2006). In fact, the emphasis is increasingly laid on learning outcomes, evaluation and individual competition, privileging the development of measurable skills. This pushes educational professionals to inform and adjust their practices according to standards of efficiency and economic factors fitting in the newer and growing learning paradigm of school readiness, thus dedicating increasingly more time to mapping and documenting learning activities and children's skills (Otterstad & Braathe, 2010).

On the other side of the spectre is the view on education based on a human-rights approach. This view considers education's intrinsic value, defending human beings' right to education independently of the use they may make of it in the future and of the costs and returns to

society of such investments. The challenge lays in turning these rights into realities (Robeyns, 2006). This human rights approach can also be considered as having instrumental grounds (*ibid*.). In fact, the instrumental value of education does not solely entail questions of economic nature. Indeed, creating spaces for democracy within educational institutions, starting with early childhood institutions, can help counteracting the trend, led by the spreading of neoliberal ideology, alienating communities from politics by drifting the attention away from critical thinking towards questions of technical and managerial nature within educational institutions (Moss, 2007)

1.1.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

As a consequence of the work of organisations such as NGOs to induce change within legislation and a shift within social studies concerning childhood and its paradigm, the concept of children's participation gained recognition, to the point of being included as a key feature in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Skelton, 2007).

As the UNCRC states:

> "Article 12
> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.
>
> Article 13
> 1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."
> (*United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child*, 1989)

Recognizing children's right to participate in matters concerning their own lives, goes hand in hand with a shift in understandings of childhood which is no longer viewed as solely the preliminary stage to adulthood, a life phase where children are unfinished beings in the process of becoming something else, adults. Rather, viewing children as human beings implies acknowledging the intrinsic value of childhood as autonomous life phase, and

children as entitled to rights here and now, not only in the future. More than that, the UNCRC recognises children as agents, capable of influencing their social realities (Skelton, 2007). However, there is still a gap to bridge between the theory and the practice of children's participation in real life. The fact that children, or human beings in general, are entitled rights even formalized into conventions is no guarantee for these to be implemented into real practices. If the actors responsible for implementing these rights and the corresponding measures are not clearly identified, documents such as the UNCRC are reduced to rhetorical listings of legal rather than morally binding rights. For example it could be enough for a government to state their intention to prevent the violation of a right to satisfy their legal commitment to the Convention, thus leaving the actual implementation of that right unfulfilled (Robeyns, 2006).

What is, then, participation? While the concept will be defined and discussed in a later section and then throughout the paper, it is useful to remember that it entails both intrinsic normative and instrumental values. Indeed, it can be argued that promoting children's right to participate in educational as well as settings of community development, isn't solely motivated by the views of children as full human beings entitled to equal respect as adults, in other words a moral principle. Rather, defending children's right to participate is highly linked to the views on society and specific purposes, for example learning democratic behaviour and values to strengthen democratic systems. But dominant discourses on children's participation could also be motivated by the intention of reproducing or strengthening pre-established system of values and social order, with little space allocated to resisting those, rebelling or creating new ones (Skelton, 2007).

1.2   Presentation of the study

1.2.1 Rationale and purpose of the study

Exploring how ECEC educators within a Norwegian and a Mexican context make sense of the meaning and practice of the right of children to participate as stated in the UNCRC, using educators' agency as point of departure, this multiple case study ought to provide insightful reflections as tools for present and future professional practices in preschools.

The Global meets the Local

The global trends promoted through international organisations such as the OECD, impact local educational traditions, at state level and subsequently micro level within individual schools. School-readiness, measurement and evaluations and, more generally, an ever-growing focus on learning discourses and strategies within ECEC, challenge local traditions (Otterstad & Braathe, 2010) such as Norwegian social pedagogical traditions or Mayan cosmology and ancient knowledge. Besides, as global actors, the United Nations and its organizations have the power to shape and define hegemonic discourses on childhood, quality education and participation (Skelton, 2007). Few societies on the planet are exempt from these influences. In that sense, local realities, as unique as they may be, are tied to each other through their subjection or resistance to global trends. In other words, education realities at local level are confronted with similar dilemmas, choices, challenges and need for reflections. This assumption is what this study aims to build upon, through the comparison of two cases chosen for their strikingly different sociocultural contexts and realities but both embedded in the international field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

Adults as key stakeholders

> Just because some children participate and demonstrate social agency does not mean that they don't need looking after. We cannot ignore that the fact that the majority of the world's children/children of the majority world are in vulnerable positions which are not of their making. They are of adults' making, and frequently distant adults who fail or refuse to see the consequences of their actions (Skelton, 2007:178).

This quote underlines the responsibility of adults who are to support children in their development, upbringing and education, to acknowledge through their practices that the asymmetry embedded in the adult-child relationship doesn't entitle them to abuse of their power or justify overrunning children's voices. On the contrary, with power comes the need for awareness of the vulnerable position of children, and that respect and protection are crucial to the practice of authentic participation. Educational professionals are, therefore, in a privileged position: that of both providing a service and defining it (Biesta, 2006).

As the EFA global monitoring report states, much of the quality criterion of ECEC relies on the staff in charge of the education and care of the children, their training and interpersonal skills. However, the question as to what level of education should be required from ECEC staff remains open (*EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2015). In general, it can be said that as a consequence of acknowledging the importance of the adult-child relationship for the

development of the child, and an increased focus on learning and school-readiness discourses, the ECEC sector has witnessed an increased staff professionalization. Good collaboration with the families is also acknowledged as essential to the success of ECEC programs (Cochran, 1995). In spite of Skelton's advocacy of a need to understand participation from a children perspective (Skelton, 2007), this study focuses on grasping the understandings of some significant adults in children's lives, educators, and how they negotiate these understandings into practice.

Considering the need for ECEC educators to reflect on and evaluate their practices to improve the quality of their programs, and the importance of supporting them in this practice (Wortham, 2013), it is hoped that this study can contribute with findings and discussions meaningful to further work in this area.

An educational research project

When policy makers look for models and policies to borrow to better and develop the educational system in their own country, they usually turn first to countries that share similarities with their own, being in the same geographical area, sharing the same language, countries with which they are linked through politics, and more generally to countries either more developed or similarly developed than their own (Bray, 2007). In that sense, the rationale behind this study finds foundation in a different understanding of how local and global linkages can benefit the educational world, as it seeks to inform the educational debate and academia as well as policy makers through the comparison of case studies that are deliberately different in terms of geographical areas, political, social and cultural contexts, language and developing status.

This study considers that there is more to educational research than instrumental and practical purposes. It also has a cultural purpose, helping to understand problems or practices through the exploration of diverse understandings and perspectives on social reality, facilitating professionals' examination of their own practice and opening for further research (Biesta, 2010).

> If we really want to improve the relationship between research, policy and practice in education, we thus need an approach in which technical questions about education can be addressed in close connection with normative, educational and political questions about what is educationally desirable (Biesta, 2010:49).

This view on research is the foundation to the present study's purpose. Rather than an evaluation, or pretending to provide recommendations for ideal practices, it aims at

6

contributing to the discussion on children's right to participate and the privileged position of the adults in that context, a discussion that will hopefully be enriched by the comparison of the chosen strikingly different cases.

1.2.2 Research questions

In order to fulfil its general purpose, this study is centred on three specific research questions covering three different but complementary factors, ordered in a somewhat hierarchical way to lead us to answer the following main research question:

"How do educators in Mexican and Norwegian ECEC centres negotiate children's right to participate in their practices?
The words "negotiate" and "practices" have been consciously chosen to encompass the different aspects involved in the realization of children's participation as outlined in the three specific research questions to be found bellow. To qualify educators' practices as negotiation emphasizes the procedural nature of educators work where both personal and contextual factors are involved, and takes into account the potential complexity and diversity of educators' experiences. In turn, the term "practices" has been chosen to encompass not only concrete pedagogical "palpable" activities but also reflections and intentions, in an understanding that all of these are intertwined and part of the educator professional practice.

Specific research questions
1. How do educators make sense of children's right to participate?
To answer this question the study will look at how they justify children's right to participate, how and why they consider this right relevant in a preschool context and for what purpose, what the concept of participation actually means for them and possible challenges in defining it.

2. How do educators perceive their role in the realization of this right?
Here the emphasis remains on the educators' perspective. However, it builds on the previous question in a progression towards the personal involvement of the educators through their practices. Different aspects will be examined to answer this question, such as adult-child relationship, the different possible adults roles and implied adult practices.

3. How do ecological factors affect educators' ability to negotiate principles of participation in their work?

The ecological factors taken into account range from the schools' organization, curricula, the inclusion of individual vision in the school's/curricula's vision, educators personal histories, as well as socio-cultural aspect at micro and macro levels.

1.2.3 Introduction to our two cases

The Norwegian Case

The first case is located in Oslo, Norway. This Scandinavian country, with a population of nearly 5 214 000 is one of the richest in the world, with a GDP of 613 876 NOK (72 629 USD) per capita ("Statistisk Sentralbyrå," 2016). In 2014 there was 284 414 children from 1 to 5 years old enrolled in ECEC centres or "barnehager", representing 90,2 % of all children in that age group ("Statistisk Sentralbyrå," 2016).

The term "barnehage" meaning literally "child garden" is a good illustration of how the Norwegians have viewed the purpose of ECEC. Indeed, it is of Norwegian tradition to mark the difference between these pedagogical institutions and school (Cochran, 1995). Priority would be given to spontaneous, unplanned and child-initiated informal learning activities in connection with play and social interactions, a tradition defined by the OECD as Social pedagogical (Otterstad & Braathe, 2010).

However, ECEC, which was until then a matter of the Ministry of Family Affairs, became responsibility of the Ministry of Education in 2006, a shift materialized with a new curriculum for ECEC (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). The intention behind this shift was to acknowledge ECEC as a fundamental stage in the education course of the child, essential to the building of a competitive knowledge-based and multicultural society, and marks a shift towards greater emphasis on learning and school-readiness discourses (Korsvold, 2004).

The latest ECEC curriculum, called "National framework for day-care centres' content and tasks" (Rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver) was published by the Ministry of Education in 2006. The document is divided into 3 main parts including an explanation of ECEC's social mandate, description of content such as activities and disciplines, and a part on planning, documentation, evaluation and collaboration with other institutions (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006). The document emphasises the intrinsic value of childhood

as a life phase that isn't solely a preparation to adulthood, and acknowledges children's right to develop at their own pace, as agents entitled to participate and initiate their own learning processes together with the pedagogues (Otterstad & Braathe, 2010).

In addition to this National Framework, compulsory for all ECEC centres in the country, whether public or private, each of those has to develop its own yearly framework or pedagogical plan for the year (Årsplan).

The ECEC centre chosen for the purpose of this study is a public one, enrolling about 45 children from 1 to 6 years old within 3 classrooms, each of which is allocated an average of 3 adults, 1 pedagogical leader and 2 assistants. The centre is located in the area of Furuset, in the Alna district in the eastern part of Oslo. This district counts with 57 ECEC centres, 34 of which are public (Oslo.Kommune, 2016). With over 50% of its population being of immigrant background (either first or second generation) (IMDI, 2015), this reflects in the ECEC centres population, with the vast majority of children speaking a language other than Norwegian at home (IMDI, 2014).

These variables inform and influence our case's curriculum and plans, and its staff's activities and practices. Its curriculum ("Årsplan") specifies its vision as being the stimulation of children's curiosity and eagerness to learn, with an emphasis on the value of the community for children's development. Play, as a learning tool, as well as its intrinsic value are identified as the centre's main focus area (for 2015).

The Mexican case

This study's second case to be explored is located in Mexico, more specifically in the centre of the city San Cristóbal de las Casas, in the mountainous region of Chiapas. With a population of over 110 million people and over 60 different languages, Mexico is a multicultural nation with one of the most complex educational system in Latin America (Fletcher & Romero-Contreras, 2013). Over the past decades the number of children aged three to five to attend preschools increased significantly, bringing the total number to about 50% of potential enrolments in 2005 (*ibid.*).

Since 2002 preschool education (three to five year olds) is part of the mandatory basic education, which was followed by reforms within the organisation of preschool centres. However, the mandatory first grade of preschool is yet to be implemented. To cope with these challenges, other initiatives were encouraged by the Mexican government, such as SEDESOL (Child care centres, Secretary of Social Development), allowing private actors

(individuals as well as groups) to open day-care centres directed at children aged from 1 to 6. By 2013 there was over 9000 of these across the country (Fletcher & Romero-Contreras, 2013). One of them is the centre this study explored.

It was created in 2005 by three teachers committed to providing quality educational services for children in their town, San Cristobal de las Casas. This small city of approximately 186,000 inhabitants (INEGI, 2016) is embedded in the strong socio-cultural and political context of Chiapas, a region rooted in Indigenous Mayan culture and deeply marked by the Zapatista movement. As a consequence, San Cristobal de las Casas has seen the rise of movements promoting educational practices alternative to the mainstream public system, such as the Zapatistas autonomous school, or others. Central to these are critical views on the ideologies promoted by mainstream education, resistance to ideologies of exploitation, emancipation and defence of indigenous rights, and ecology.

Our specific case was built on the will to provide an educational service that would answer the needs and rights of the most disadvantaged population of Chiapas. Legally constituted as an NGO, it is of private provision, receiving funding from different sources, also families. The organization regroups ECEC and primary education and defines itself as an educational community, thus laying strong emphasis on involving families in the work of the school. While the national curriculum for ECEC, published in 2011, emphasises the learning abilities of young children and need for quality ECEC to cope with social issues such as illiteracy, poverty, and changes in family structure (SEP, 2011), our case's curriculum specifies a pedagogy aiming at the holistic development of the child, with freedom and promotion of peace as its founding principles. Our case study only considers the ECEC centre, which at the time of the fieldwork enrolled 8 children aged one to three and 12 children aged 3 to 5, with 2 adults per group, one of which having the additional responsibility of coordinating the project. While the project was originally directed towards a mixed population of children with 60% of them coming from disadvantaged families of the area (children raised by single analphabetic mothers from indigenous communities), the organisation is today not in the financial position to provide such service and has for the past 3 years redirected its activities to children of families who can afford the school fee. However, it is in the search of financial means to recover its capacity to fulfil its original mandate.

1.2.4 Definition of terms

Early Childhood Education and Care

This study encompasses centres in two different countries describing themselves in their respective languages using different terms. In Norway, the term "barnehage" regroups children from one to six years old, while in Mexico, children are regrouped within levels: "maternal"(1 to 3) and "prescolar" (3 to 6). In English different terms can be used as well, such as "kindergarten", daycare centres, "nurseries", and "preschools". To avoid confusion this study will use the term ECEC centres.

Educators

Much of the previous research on the topic/in ECEC has focused primarily on preschool teachers because they are viewed as the ones with the pedagogical responsibility. This research considers that we can't limit the expectation and scope of the study to preschool teachers with a pedagogical education only: Assistants and staff without a pedagogical education are equally responsible in the face of children's right to participate and the realization of it. Moreover, the division of responsibility is not always clear, and the staff within the Mexican case isn't divided along the same criteria and principles as in the Norwegian case.

In Norway, the terms used are "Pedagogisk leder" ("pedagogical leader"), "Barnehagelærer" (Preschool teacher), "Assistent" ("assistant") and "(Barne- og ungdomsarbeider" ("children and youth worker"), while the Mexican case would qualify all adults as "acompañante" ("companion"). As a consequence, and to avoid confusion, this study will use the term "Educator" to refer to the adults working within ECEC centres.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be organized in the following way:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study's topic and rationale, the cases compared as well as the research questions and the outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents the main theories used to discuss the study's topic. Different concepts are explained, organised in two main sections, corresponding to the study's two different levels of analysis.

Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to understanding and discussing this study's topic. It presents different studies, most of them both international and comparative.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology chapter presents the study's design and explains different methodological choices and procedures, such as sampling, data collection and analysis. Ethical questions are also presented.

Chapter 5: Findings.

This chapter presents the results from the fieldwork that took place in both Mexico and Norway.

Chapter 6: Discussion.

Here the findings are discussed in a comparative manner, using theories and assumptions from literature.

Chapter 7: Conclusion.

This last chapter provides a summary of the thesis as well as some recommendations for further research.

2 Analytical frameworks

This chapter aims at providing a theoretical background for understanding the key concepts at the core of the study and which are introduced through the research questions.

The main research question (How do educators in Mexico and Norway negotiate the children's right to participate in their practices?) clearly poses the key concepts to be analysed in the study, the main terms being "negotiate" "children's right" "participate" and "practice". These terms are deconstructed through the use of three specific research questions that make explicit the concepts which need to be framed theoretically. These three questions correspond to two levels of analysis: the two first specific research questions (How do educators make sense of children's right to participate?/How do educators perceive their role in the realization of this right?) focus on the educators' perspectives and beliefs about key concepts, while the third research question (How do ecological factors affect educators' ability to negotiate principles of participation in their work?) addresses the relation between educators' perspectives and their practices.

To address these two levels of analyses the study will employ two theoretical frameworks. The first, *action-centred education*, was developed by Gert Biesta in his book "Beyond learning. Democratic education for a human future" (Biesta, 2006), which proposes a shift from the idea of child-centred education to a focus on the concept of *action* as framing the relationship between the adult, the child, and pedagogical practices. To support this, several other theories will be presented which build on views on Childhood, democracy and the adult-child relationship.

The second analytical framework was developed by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson and presented in their book "Teacher agency: an ecological approach" (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015) which focuses on educators as crucial stakeholders and meaning-makers and examines factors which sustain and enable educators' understandings of the concept of participation and its practical implications.

2.1 Towards an action-centred education

2.1.1 Understanding children as actors

As Milne's 2013 review demonstrates, the concept of childhood entails different meanings and different legal and pedagogical implications according to the cultural context it is embedded in (Milne, 2013). However, the UNCRC and its statements on children's right to participate is arguably testament to a change in the understanding of childhood at a global level. Until the 1980s the western discourse on childhood embraced what could be called a traditional standpoint which emphasized childhood as the immature and preparatory phase to adulthood, usually divided into separate stages of development, wherein children needed to be protected and guided by the adult (Ballesteros, 2015). This led to the romantic view of the free and naive child, and childhood as a space unattainable to the adult wherein the child develops and creates its own culture separate from the adult world (Kjørholt, 2007). Pedagogical discourses marked by this view considered adult interventions towards regulating the child, such as the increasing institutionalisation of children in ECEC centres, as a threat to the child's world. This view led to educational practices emphasizing children's freedom centred on free play.

The twentieth century saw the development of educational science and the acknowledgment of children as the building blocks of society. Such instrumental views on children's education gave rise to questions about both the authoritarian position of the adult towards the child and children as beholders of rights. These increasing foci on children's rights materialized with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924 later led to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Milne, 2013). As a consequence of this process, in the late 1980s, a shift took place which led to new discourses on childhood. Rather than the adult's and child's life worlds being thought of as distinct, childhood was now acknowledged as constructed through interpersonal relations between children and their peers as well as with adults (Johanson, 2010). This discourse recognizes the child as a legitimate social actor and participant of society. In fact, it can be argued that

> (…) under the pretext of respecting the child's independence, he is debarred from the world of grown ups and artificially kept in his own, so far as that can be called a world. This holding back of the child is artificial because it breaks off the natural relationship between grown-ups and children (…) (Arendt, 1977: 184).

Viewing children as actors implies acknowledging children's participation as embedded in social life itself; as human beings they contribute to relationships, to the construction of meaning, and processes of social reproduction. This discourse on children as participants is very much related to the notions of democracy, freedom, and equality which are hegemonic in modern societies (Kjørholt, 2007). However, the possibility for children to participate and exert real influence as agents is often more symbolic than real, usually being limited to issues concerning only themselves, such as activities they may want to engage in. This breed of participation offers children no real prospects to challenge the decision-makings of adults, thus granting them only partial citizenship (Milne, 2013).

2.1.2 What is Participation?

The extent to which children's agency is revealed through their participative potential is developed in Hart's essay *Children's participation, from tokenism to citizenship* (Hart, 1992). Hart provides a definition of participation that although not directly addressing pre-school children is useful to understand the concept this study concerns: If participation is understood as the influence one has on the surrounding world from birth by simply existing, Hart distances himself from that conceptualization and instead focuses on participation as the process by which decisions are shared in ways that affect both the community as well as oneself. To elucidate the different ways participation is conceptualised and applied, Hart uses the model of a ladder in which each rung represents a level of child participation:

On the lowest rung children are manipulated to satisfy adults' interests, for example by being consulted about issues but denied any feedback, or asked to perform certain tasks without being explained why ("Manipulation"). Moving up a rung towards true participation we find situations where adults still use children to front their cause, such as their participating in an event with little knowledge of its purpose, but in contrast to the previous rung, without pretending to be inspired by the children ("Decoration"). One rung further up on the ladder are situations in which children are ostensibly given a say but actually have little or no real chance to express themselves and make choices on their own terms ("Tokenism"). The next five rungs of the ladder represent different levels of participation whereby children can perform according to their capacity and development. This ladder can be represented as follows:

Figure 1: Hart's Ladder of participation

8) Youth-initated, shared decisions with adults

7) Youth-initated and directed

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth

5) Consulted and informed

4) Assigned but informed

Degrees of Participation

3) Tokenism

2) Decoration

1) Manipulation
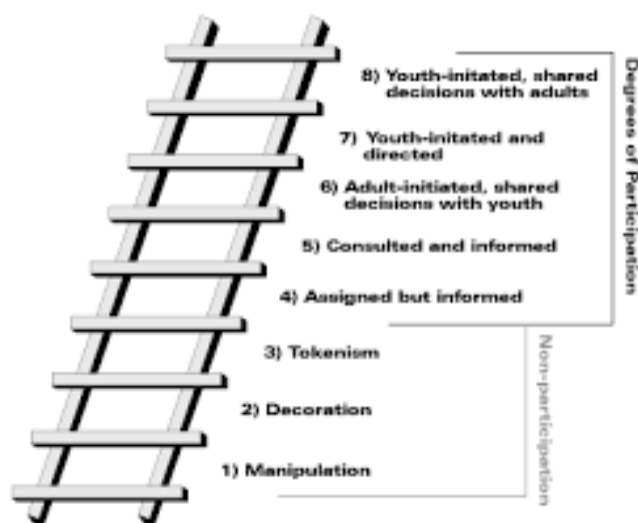
Non-participation

Although it is not necessary for children to always pertain to the highest level of participation, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to participate according to their ability. To satisfy the criteria for meaningful participation, according to Hart, an activity or project should involve the children understanding its purpose, the decision-making processes behind it, and the possibility of the child making an informed choice to participate in the activity or not. This meaningful form of participation can reach different levels, represented by the five last rungs of the ladder: from being assigned roles but informed of their purpose and context (rung 4), to being consulted in the process (rung 5), and involved in the decision-making process (rung 6). Both child-initiated and directed activities are yet another example of true participation which is for instance represented in children's play. The ultimate level of child participation is to be found when the activities are child-initiated and the decisions shared with adults (Hart, 1992). It is important to note that this ladder is not meant as a tool for measuring participation but as "a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation in projects" (*ibid*.:8). This study thus views the ladder as a basis for reflection and not for measuring or evaluating levels of participation within cases.

Supplementing Hart's model with further conceptualizations of the principle of participation allows for the appreciation of what it could imply in educational terms.
Skjervheim (1996) defines participation as involving oneself in someone else's matter.
Participation therefore implies a three-level relationship between oneself, the other, and the

16

matter; a relationship implying a shared focus as co-subjects on a common issue. In this sense, the opposite of participation lies in objectifying the other, because it implies standing on the outside of the matter at stake. Instead, participation means taking the other seriously and letting oneself be influenced by the other's opinions. Rather than a mechanical understanding of human beings as objects, participation has, therefore, to be understood in terms of the dialectic model rooted in the Socratic dialogue; instead of objectifying the other in order to dominate them, true dialogue builds on the equal relationship between two subjects who strive to convince rather than persuade each other (Skjervheim, 1996). Participation is the foundation of democracy; as a result arguing for children's right to participate brings up the question of the links between education and democracy and to what extent education should promote democratic practices within and outside its institutions.

2.1.3 Education and democracy

The relationships that arise from the social interaction between people and education through participation within a community of practice contribute to the shaping and sustaining of democratic processes. Dewey describes democracy as being a "form of life" rather than a mere form of government. In that sense, educational institutions are representations of the wider society (Oelkers, 2000). Seeing as modern society is marked by liberal ideology, which emphasizes individualism at the expense of the community, what does this mean in educational terms?

Moss claims that liberal ideology, beyond promoting the interest for and development of hegemonic values like competitiveness, technical educational performances, and individualism within education, systematically de-politicises public life, prioritizing technical and managerial issues rather than critical reflections (Moss, 2007). To counteract this global tendency of political alienation, he argues for the understanding of early childhood education as a space for political and, more specifically, democratic practices. Democratic practices are here considered means to foster critical thinking, acknowledgment of diversity, creativity, and ultimately emancipation from oppression. Potential societal change, therefore, arises from the involvement of children in decision-making and the practices of institutions together with the involvement of the adults collaborating with them, such as educators (*ibid.*).

Democratic practices at the micro level education centres shape the nature of relationships within them. Learning about democracy happens through direct experience of and participation in the life of the institution (Hart, 1992). In this way, the best way to learn about and prepare for democracy is through democracy. It is thus assumed that children who experience participation in school life will develop a democratic personality. More specifically, democratic behaviour develops through the interpersonal relationships between children and adults (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009).

Educational discourses tend to associate democratic education with the preparation of students for democratic life and the production of the democratic citizen; rational beings that would serve the democratic system. This instrumental understanding of democratic education contains several shortcomings. Indeed, it emphasizes the development of individual skills rather than the relational and social context in which they develop. Additionally, this individualism extends to the understanding of democracy itself as depending on the democratic qualities of individuals. This approach emphasizes a need for homogenous values and behaviours while downplaying the importance of adapting to plurality and learning how to live with others who differ from ourselves (Biesta, 2006).

As this study focuses on the adult's perspectives rather than on the child's learning and development processes, the following sections will bring our attention back to the role of educators in fostering democratic participation.

2.1.4 Participation and emancipation: The role of the adult

Traditionally, relationships between adults and children are marked by a form of authority, considered necessary to compensate for the child's immaturity, in order to guarantee the continuity of a social reality through which children have to be guided. However, this conception of authority is challenged by models that downplay this hierarchy (Arendt, 1977). In that sense the educational activity is characterized by conservatism, referring to the need to protect both the child as newcomer and of the world:

> Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction" (Arendt, 1977:193).

Children and adults live jointly in the same world. However, the idea that children constitute a world or community of their own, wherein adults have little or nothing to do, challenges the normal relationship between adults and children, and the authority exerted by the adult over the child. Being freed from the authority of the adult does not mean that children are freer or more able to emancipate themselves. An emphasis on children as belonging to a world that adults must not interfere with is thus endangering children's introduction to the adult world and their possibility for emancipation. This is why adults must not withdraw from their authority and responsibility:

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt, 1977:196).

Using Freire's terms, an adult who does not assume this responsibility would be an oppressor. The oppressor is one whose actions are motivated by egocentric paternalism which objectify the other, the oppressed. "Any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (Freire, 1993:37). Freire advocates a pedagogy wherein the oppressed develop consciousness of their own oppression and act upon it to transform it, confronting patterns of domination and realizing a liberation process for all, including the oppressor *(ibid.)*. Transferring this idea onto conventional educational terms would make the educators or adults the oppressors and the children the oppressed minority. In that sense, the children's emancipation could only happen once they themselves become aware of their status in their relationship with adults, which would in turn lead the adults to realize they are oppressors and to accordingly change their behaviour, teaching approach, and relationship with children. The consequence would be mutual liberation and the creation of a relationship based on love.

However, in the case of ECEC and younger children, it can be argued that if the latter are to have such an impact their expressions of discontent, and awareness of oppression and injustice, manifested through their will to participate, it must first be interpreted and accepted by the adult. The pedagogical relationship is, therefore, shaped by the adult's ability to hear the voice of the child and respond to it. If the adult refuses to see and hear the child and

acknowledge its awareness of being oppressed, liberation will fail to take place and the relationship will continue to be characterized by oppression. A willing adult, who cannot enter the children's world entirely, can on that account remedy this incapacity by striving to become child-oriented. This implies observing children's ways of expressing themselves and using empathy and imagination to interpret them, especially in the case of children who are unable to express themselves through language. Nevertheless, a child's perspective would thereby to a large extent remain that of the adult's or merely the interpretation of what the child as subject experiences (Sommer, Pramling-Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2013).

As educators are already socialised into and adapted to social conventions, norms acting as glasses which shape their interpretations, it can be challenging for them to understand children's experiences. In this sense, the adult is being challenged pedagogically in their relationship with something (someone) they know nothing about, and is faced with the question of how to meet the other, the child, in spite of the adult-world they belong to. An education that aims at socializing the child into the world order's social conventions is, therefore, homogenizing rather than acknowledging and promoting the child's otherness and uniqueness. In this sense, it can be argued that pedagogy and social conventions are mutually exclusive, pedagogy being alternatively centred on and promoting heterogeneity. The only way to distance oneself from conventions and enter a truly pedagogical relationship is, therefore, through reflecting upon those norms, a process whereby the adult does not attempt to direct the child but consciously chooses to place otherness at the centre of their pedagogical practice (Saevi & Husevaag, 2009).

To summarize, the adult's awareness of their own authority and responsibility, as well as of their influence as socialized individuals in the pedagogical encounter with the unique child, is crucial for the realization of children's right to participate. As we will see in the next section, participation unfolds in the intersubjective space between the adult and the child, when individuals respond to each other's initiatives and through this encounter become agents.

2.1.5 Action and the intersubjective space

According to Biesta (2006), an educational relationship is made up of three main concepts. The first is unconditional trust and refers to the fact that the learning process entails the risk

of being transformed through it. When entering the educational relationship, the possible outcomes and the other's reactions are unknown and impossible to predict. In addition, this relationship is founded on the principle of violence: beyond the mere acquisition of external knowledge, learning can be understood as a reaction to the new and different. In this view, education places the individuality and subjectivity of the learner at the centre of the relationship. Biesta uses the expression "coming into the world" to describe the process through which the individual brings something new and unique into the relationship. In fact, this is a process that can only take place in contact with the world and the other. The social is the prerequisite to affirm one's subjectivity. Providing spaces where the learner has the opportunity to respond to the other is a core educational responsibility. However, responding goes beyond merely expressing oneself. The relational aspect of coming into the world suggests a form of violence, as the educator has to assume the responsibility of putting the child in these situations and challenging the child's subjectivity, forcing them, in a way, to take a stand as to who they are. This leads to the third concept, that of responsibility without knowledge. Indeed, the educator is responsible for providing space for the child's uniqueness to fully express itself which may disrupt the normal order of things i.e. social conventions. In this sense, the educator takes responsibility for something they cannot know in advance. The responsibility of the educator goes beyond taking care of the child, the newcomer. The educator is also responsible for the world into which the newcomer is introduced and must in that sense create spaces for this uniqueness to express itself, spaces "in which beginnings can come into presence" (Biesta, 2006:107).

Going beyond both individualistic and social conceptions, Arendt uses the concept of action to develop a political understanding of the democratic person (Arendt, 1958). She argues that to act is to take initiative, bringing something new and unique into the world. However, we can only truly be subjects and act if others respond to these initiatives. These others, who also bring their own beginnings into the world, react to our actions in unpredictable ways, making it impossible to be in total control of the new we bring to the table. Skills and knowledge by themselves are not enough for a person to be democratic. The encounter between action and the other is what gives rise to the democratic subject. In this view, democracy is described as the situation in which human beings have the opportunity to be both subjects and act. In the context of ECEC, an educational encounter fostering participation and democracy is one where the adult (the educator) responds to the child's actions and expressions of

individuality. By doing so the adult, as subject, is him or herself given the space for their own individuality and uniqueness to play out. The meeting between both the child's and the adult's subjectivity is what allows them to be actors. This is the condition for the true and democratic participation of the child-actor to be realized.

2.2 Framing teacher agency in an ecological approach

2.2.1 Defining agency

Agency has been defined as the capacity of human beings to take action independently and make their own choices. In sociology the concept has often been understood in terms of its interplay with the idea of structure, an interplay enabling or limiting social action. Distancing themselves from a simplistic and individualistic conceptualization of agency as the capacity of human beings to take action (an ability that someone might possess or not as a result of personal qualities) Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) consider agency as the product of the interplay between the individual's effort, creativity, and reflexion, and the conditions set by their environment. Such a definition of agency acknowledges that individual autonomy is not the only determinant in one's agency, but that it is indeed largely shaped by external factors developed within social contexts that are internalized and which structure agency into what Bourdieu would call "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977). It allows for a broader understanding of how individual action and intentions might be enabled or constrained by contextual, cultural, structural and material environments.

Priestley et al. (2015) build on a theorizing of agency as being the result of influences from the person's past experiences and projections of the future being expressed in the present, to further define the concept of agency. This temporal-relational understanding suggests that the more experiences the teacher has the more projection to the future they would be able to form, which would result in a greater ability to respond to the dilemmas posed by present situations and thereby reach a high level of agency. As agency can only be manifested in the present time, it is highly influenced by the relevant social contexts. According to Priestley et al. (2015) these contexts are not only social but also material, referring to physical resources and constraints:

22

Figure 2: Model for the ecology of teacher agency:

The model above shows that the influences from the past (the iterational dimension) include both teachers' personal and professional experiences. The projective dimension refers to both short and long-term projections into the future. The practical-evaluative dimension, in which past and future dimensions are acted out in the present, includes both cultural and discursive elements, the material and structural aspects.

Past experiences shape teachers' beliefs, values, and ultimately their personal capacity. These include both personal and professional (including teacher education) experiences. Personal experiences and experiences within other professions are said to be the most significant influences on agency. The short and long term aspirations of teachers towards their work are grounded in their values, beliefs and identity. These manifest in teacher's daily activities and environment in the challenges, relationships, and other situations which force teachers to make decisions, compromise, and shape their agentic capacity (Priestley et al., 2015.).

As social practice agency is not fixed but relational, always evolving, in harmony with changes in context in which teachers are continuously interacting with other individuals' intentionality. Agency is, therefore, developed at both individual and group levels. Furthermore, increasing one's agency would largely depend on one's capacity to navigate and expand one's network of relationships, the latter serving as a resource, or in Bourdieu's terms, as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

2.2.2 Educators as meaning makers: The value of the educator's perspective

This study focuses on the educators' perspectives on theory and practice, perspectives which constitute an integral part of their agentic capacity. In the context of this study, if we are to make use of the concept of agency and its ecological dimensions, understanding the value of educators' perspectives and how they are constructed is essential. Indeed, built in relation with context, these perspectives can tell us as much about educators as about their environments, thus allowing for the questioning of the extent to which the participating educators' testimonies depend on the context they are situated in, as well as drawing parallels with other contexts.

The educators and the context their practice is embedded in interact with each other. Indeed, educators construct their actions and meanings through interaction with their surroundings. The environment provides objects and symbols which carry meanings differing according to how people interpret them. It is through the interpretation of these symbols that meaning is constructed (Potts, 2007). Moreover, considering that the manner in which actors experience their environment influences the way they act, Habermas defines the intrapersonal sphere of subjectivity as one of the essential ways by which individuals experience the world. This consists of individual experiences and is made available to others through expression and interactions (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). Further, Mead's view on symbolically mediated interactions suggests that both constructing and sharing meaning is made possible through one's sense of identity together with one's ability to perceive others' perspectives. What makes it possible for meanings to be shared is a common structure for the perspectives of individuals (*ibid.*) In this sense, meanings that are socially constructed and interpreted are as equally valid and important as any objective fact or truth (Potts, 2007).
Teachers are important stakeholders within the complex web of educational processes, interests, and relations. The concept of agency acknowledges teacher's professional judgment and experiences of educational realities (Priestley et al., 2015). As Dewey reminds us, educators are not merely receptors and transmitters of knowledge and skills. In fact, he argues that education should be free to determine its own ends independently of external social conditions, and by that he also implies that educators should defend their position as independent professionals capable of critically contributing to the shaping of educational

objectives. In their day-to-day practice educators ought to reflect upon their work in order to better their future practices. However, this process must necessarily arise from educators' own initiative and judgment in order to qualify as educational science (Dewey, 1929).

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter two analytical frameworks were presented, each of which allow a better understanding of the two levels of analysis of this study.

➢ First, the concept of action-centred education is helpful to understand what participation and democracy mean in educational terms. Central to this framework is the fact that children's participation is highly dependent on the educational relationship with the adult. Rather than isolating the child within their own life-world, the educator has the responsibility of both introducing them into a new world and protecting them from it. An educational relationship fostering participation and democracy is indeed built on the idea of two subjects faced with and responding to the uniqueness of the other. This is highly dependent on the ability of educators to truly listen to children's unique voices as subjects in order to create spaces for participation, freedom and emancipation. This framework will be used in order to answer our two first research questions aiming at exploring the meaning of participation and educators role in enabling participatory practices.

➢ Further, Priestley et al.'s ecological approach to agency allows for the understanding of the factors that may shape educators' perspectives and reflections on participation and their ability to enact it in their daily practices. Educators' perspectives and practices build on their past experience, beliefs and values, as well as their short and long term projections, and are highly dependent on structural and cultural factors embedded in present contexts. This conceptualization acknowledges educators as essential stakeholders within educational institutions and permits reflection on the possibility of educators to influence and shape their educational context as professionals and potential social critics.

The next chapter will provide concrete examples and studies to shed light on and develop our understanding of the key concepts and theories introduced above.

3 Literature review

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the influence of adult agency for children's participation both internationally and in the specific local contexts of this study. Crucial to exploring adults' agency is understanding that educators' ability to support children's participation is the result of the interaction of various factors, such as educators' experiences, interpersonal relations, and contextual factors among others. These contribute to shaping both beliefs and everyday educational practices (Priestley et al., 2015; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009).

Understanding how educators negotiate the principle of children's participation in their practices makes it necessary to explore two sets of topics: First, the literature (Ballesteros, 2015; Ceylan, Ulutas, & Ömeroglu, 2009; Egan, 2009; Karila, 2008; Lindhal, 2015; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Otterstad & Braathe, 2010; Pettersvold, 2014; Priestley et al., 2015; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Sheridan, 2007; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009) provides an understanding of the links between educators' beliefs and discourses about participation and their own role in realizing this right (section 3.1), structured in three sections - *views of the child* (3.1.1.); *participation* (3.1.2.) and *educators' responsibility* (3.1.3.).

In a second section, the literature (Bleach, 2014; Egan, 2009; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Pettersvold, 2014; Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno, & Úcar, 2010; Priestley et al., 2015; Roer-Strier, 1996; Sheridan, 2007; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009; Varol, 2013) will help focus the chapter upon ecological factors that may affect educators' agentic capacity to realize the principle of children's participation (section 3.2). This section is divided into *personal and professional experience* (4.3.1.); *short and long term projections* (4.3.2.); *school structure, culture and resources* (4.3.3.) and *other factors* (4.3.4.).

3.1   Educators' beliefs and discourses

Educators' beliefs are an important starting point for understanding educational practices since they reflect values and assumptions that have a direct impact on how educators behave and the decisions they make (Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012). They are dynamic constructs, built on educators' past experiences, influenced by and changing with time, experience and

context (Priestley et al., 2015; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012). In fact, according to Ceylan et al. (2009) it is possible to predict what kind of educators student teachers will be in the future based on their current beliefs about children and teaching. They claim that it is essential that they acquire positive beliefs and attitudes towards children prior to their enrolment in preschool teaching, something that would be highly dependent on their personality and feelings towards the vocation.

3.1.1 Views of the Child

The two main conceptions of childhood that have dominated the discourse in Mexico for the past decades are on the one hand traditional, viewing children as immature objects of protection, and on the other hand modern, based on the UNCRC, considering children as actors and subjects of rights, with an emphasis on their right to participate (Ballesteros, 2015). These two discourses are often merged into one, ambiguous, discourse, with a direct impact on educational practices. Ambiguous concepts, especially if coloured with a protectionist discourse, make it possible for adults to fill them with the meaning they wish to give them. One of these concepts concerns what is in the best interest of the child. The conceptualisation of the principle, far from being universal, is heterogeneous and closely linked to social understandings of childhood. In fact, in some Mexican foster care institutions professionals tend to view the principle as a legal framework aiming at protecting disadvantaged and marginalised children (*ibid.*). In that way, these professionals undermine the idea that the principle of the best interest of the child entails being heard and participate in issues concerning its life, thus reproducing a traditional conceptualization of childhood making possible an asymmetric relationship and subjugation and dependency of the child to the professional. Understood that way the principle of the best interest of the child could be of mere rhetoric value, an excuse to justify adults' decisions without taking the child's wishes and right to participate into account. Indeed, contradictions within views on the child reveal the purpose educators associate to education, inconsistencies that appear to be common in the discourse of educators worldwide. For example Priestley et al. (2015) found that in spite of their awareness of children being responsible agents Scottish teachers continued to express their views about their students in terms of their capabilities, suggesting that they understand education's purpose mainly in instrumental and qualification terms (Priestley et al., 2015).

Contradictions within beliefs and discourses have a direct impact on the extent to which teacher's agency is enacted in their daily practices. In the case of what is in the best interest of the child, the principle entails an element of protection, but is not reduced to that only – it also implies the children's participation in situations affecting them. However, viewing the principle guaranteeing the child's protection has a tendency to downplay the participative aspect of the concept, thus prioritizing and reproducing traditional understandings of childhood, education, and the adult-child relationship (Ballesteros, 2015).

Projects and in-service trainings that aim at fostering reflection and professional development among ECEC staff, may help remedy this ambiguity and disconnection between theory and practice. Indeed, it has been shown that professional development programmes helping the staff to share and explore their beliefs have a direct impact on how relationships are experienced and developed (Mesquita-Pires, 2012). This leads to the development of educators' professional practices in order to create an environment enabling children participation, and ultimately makes it possible to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

3.1.2 Views on participation

Participation is yet another of those concepts prone to ambiguity. In fact, educators' way of defining it is often contradictory. While learning discourses in Norwegian day-care centres have traditionally been stressing informal learning through spontaneous activities and play, they are now more and more reflecting the international trend emphasizing preparation for school, performance and testability (Otterstad & Braathe, 2010). This is reflected in two main theories on learning. On the one hand, learning can be viewed as acquisition, implying a body of knowledge to be made available to the child that has to appropriate it. On the other hand, learning can be understood in terms of participation, a theory that developed as a reaction to a cognitive understanding of the learning process. Indeed, it considers learning to happen in interaction between the child and its environment, a dynamic meaning-making process relating learners and discourses (*ibid.*). These contradictory views are both present in Norwegian primary school and day-care centre professionals' beliefs about learning and readiness for school, as Otterstad and Braathe (2010) show: Arguing for the importance of preserving the child's freedom to play and develop on its own terms, and of marking their difference from school, the school learning discourse was still very much present in the practice of these Norwegian professionals who organized groups to work on mathematics and

other learning goals. The day-care professionals thus viewed learning as acquisition more than as participation.

Such contradictions between educators' statements and practice can compromise children's practical ability to participate. Defining participation as children's ability to influence and make decisions about issues that concern them doesn't mean educators are willing to make it a reality by sharing the pedagogical responsibility with the children. In fact, viewing participation in terms of decision-making can be seen as limiting rather than empowering. This was the case with the Swedish preschool staff Sandberg and Eriksson (2010) met; their beliefs tended to underline the adults' as solely responsible and capable of leading and organizing pedagogical activities, thus undermining children and viewing them in terms of their shortcomings rather than abilities (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010).

Participation and democracy in practice

If it is generally accepted that it is essential to listen to children and give them a voice, it follows that conflicting understandings are found in the way it is practiced, one of the greatest challenges being for children to participate in a meaningful way, beyond the mere fulfilment of adults' expectations, as shown in Hart's ladder of participation. Another challenge relates to defining what would be an optimal participation, keeping in mind the best interest of the child. How participation and its practices are understood, are closely linked to understandings of democracy and the extent of democratic practices desirable in the context of ECEC.

The concept of democracy is often taken for granted, which is why Pettersvold (2014) found it necessary to investigate how Norwegian preschool-teachers understood it together with the idea of children's participation, and what consequences these understandings could have for children's experiences of democracy. Three main understandings of democracy are thereby identified in teachers' discourses, sometimes coexisting in one and the same practice: *Liberal democracy* refers to participation practices where the individual's freedom to decide over itself is the highest priority. In an ECEC context, this means that children should be free from the adult's control and free to make their own decisions without having to follow the decisions made by the group. In that context, participation is associated with the development of creativity and the ability to take initiatives, making it necessary for adults to respect children's wishes even when they go against what was planned. In these practices, the study shows that individual freedom to choose is actually transformed into an obligation, to choose,

to take a stand as to what one wants to do. Teachers would assume every child has wishes, and use selected activities to make these visible in terms of choice. Considering participation practices as adequate when children can make choices within frames that are given to them, children were seldom included in the process defining the frame for participation. Concerned with what is in the best interest of the child, teachers who emphasize a freedom discourse attempt to minimize authoritarian attitudes by explaining why certain behaviours are not desirable, rather than forbidding them altogether. This liberal view of democracy poses some challenges when faced with a group situation when the individual child isn't isolated. The responsibility put on the individual child to take a stand might often be too big for it to handle, and requiring children to be independent may undermine the necessity for children to learn to socialize (Pettersvold, 2014).

The same research unveils another way of understanding democracy: *Majority-rule democracy*. This participation practice considers that children benefit from experiencing how the group rules at the expense of their own individual freedom. Choice-making in that context is based on voting. The advantages seen by teachers is that it gives children a realistic experience of democratic participation, submitting themselves to the decision of the majority, and that it pushes even the more silent children to express an opinion, without at the same time giving the individual child more responsibility that it can handle. It also has practical advantages as it systematizes the participation practice, which saves time. On the downside, this practice doesn't allow children to have an impact on the final decision or argue for their choice. A consequence could be for children to feel disempowered without real influence on the democratic decision-making process.

Finally, informants expressed views on participation consistent with practices of *deliberative democracy*. This understanding emphasizes the importance of children talking to each other, learning to accept the existence of different viewpoints, thus developing the ability to weigh arguments up against each other in order to come to a decision. All ways of expression (verbal and non-verbal) are intended given equal weight, to make sure that all children get heard. Here, creating a good dialogue requires playing down formal rules determined by the adults, and instead include the children in the making of common rules. This would be done in assemblies where the children would have a leading role and the adults would assist, a process consistent with the highest rungs of Hart's ladder of participation. Teachers also emphasized the importance of participation having an object, a purpose; what children

participate in or to is what makes participation real. In the case of ECEC this object of participation is pointed out to be the academic content present in the activities, which are for that purpose often organized into projects children can work on and get involved in for a longer period of time. This organizing of the activities in small groups may be more inclusive and makes it easier for more silent children to participate. However, it can be argued against organizing children into homogeneous age groups, on the grounds that being confronted to difference not only entails the possibility of learning from each other, but also that of finding one's own voice (Pettersvold, 2014).

Other studies have also linked education professionals' understanding of democracy with their actual attitudes towards children's participation. How they view citizenship and children's empowerment can be used to measure their level of democratic-orientation, as in Turnsek and Pekkarinen (2009) comparison of Slovenian and Finnish ECE teachers' attitudes. In that context, pro-democratic oriented teachers would justify socialization as necessary for children to acquire the skills they need to be able to participate actively in society. On the contrary, placing the individual child in a subordinate position to the group and justifying restrictions in children's participation as a lesson of socialization are characteristics of counter-democratic oriented teachers.

Principles stressing the role of children in their own learning process and the importance of the relationship with adults enabling their participation are the cornerstones of democratic education (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009). Emphasizing the involvement in decision-making, the principle of participation redefines the relationship between individuals and their environment, based on a respectful dialogue between equal partners, here children and education professionals, thus repositioning the educators from know-it all authorities to enablers of an inclusive democratic life within preschools (*ibid*.): Teachers' pro-democratic orientation is directly linked to the understanding they have of their own role as teachers. Indeed, as Turnšek and Pekkarinen (2009) have shown, pro-democratic oriented teachers view their responsibility as "enabling children to participate in the decision-making about the things which are important for them" (*ibid*:32). On the other side, counter-democratic attitudes consider the adults to be the sole responsible for the child's development, and the child as having to appropriate the norms and rules of its environments.

The following section will discuss the topic of the adult's role further.

3.2 Educators' responsibility

Teachers' sense of professional responsibility and understanding of their role as teachers can be understood in the light of their discourse about children and learning processes (Priestley et al., 2015). Also, it can be argued that educators' beliefs regarding their profession contribute to shaping not only their own identity as professionals but also the profession as a whole (Karila, 2008). From this point of view, it makes sense to explore educator's role as professionals for the realization of children's right to participate from an educator's perspective.

The literature indicates that three main categories appear important to define responsibility and professionalism from an educator's point of view. First, educators characterize their role either in terms of their authority towards children, thus downplaying children's ability to take responsibility and participate, or as fostering horizontality, dialogue and partnership between themselves and children. Second, educators mention self-awareness and self-criticism as cornerstones of professionalism. The third category underlines the educators' responsibility for creating an enabling environment for participation to unfold.

Authority and Horizontality

Holding onto traditional conceptualization of childhood and emphasizing the need for children to be protected at the expense of their right to participate fosters adults' position of authority towards children, adults who may envision their role to be filling gaps in skills and abilities thus assuming a directive role. As Ballesteros (2015) found in his study of Mexican foster care institutions, professionals may indeed consider themselves as the only ones entitled to apply the principle of the best interest of the child: Considering children to lack the necessary skills to know what they actually need entitles the adults to intervene and tell them what is best for them, especially if they consider themselves specialists, qualified and trained to make such judgments on behalf of the children. The feeling of responsibility towards the child and society may be used to justify them deciding what is in the interest of children: becoming well adapted to society. This argumentation focusing on the child's shortcomings and the adults' know-how represents an adult-centred understanding of the adult-child relationship which, when prevailing, downplays the necessity for the professional to question themselves and their practice (Ballesteros, 2015). Further, as Priestley et al. (2015) argue, such a view may either provide teachers with excuses to drift away from their responsibility

32

as facilitators of knowledge encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, or, on the contrary, position them as protectors of children's interests against what they judge flaws of the education system or harmful practices. The latter would reflect a high level of agency as they take charge of their practice in the light of their own convictions about education, children and their own role as professionals.

The quality of education professionals' relationship with children is commonly referred to as the key for the learning environment within the classroom. A liberalistic understanding of democracy and participation downplays the omnipotent role of the adult by emphasizing the individual child's freedom of choice (Pettersvold, 2014). In this context, the adults take more of an organizer's role, responsible for creating the frame within which children can make choices. However, adults may not give up their position of authority. Their power of definition may unfold in the invisible: the planning and organizing of activities based on what adults' observe, their reflection on how children in any situation can be given the opportunity to participate. Downplaying the adult's authority occurs in the way they communicate with children, showing flexibility towards rules or limits and admitting their mistakes. Similar processes happen in a majority-rule democratic view of participation where adults also behave as organizers, using methods such as dividing children into age groups to create the conditions adequate for all children to participate.

In contrast, within a deliberative democracy the role of the adult changes. Rather than making up rules for the children to follow, educators would prioritize a good dialogue with the children and if necessary make rules together with them, guiding them rather than deciding over them. This position is especially visible and referred to in situations of conflict solving. Here, educator's role as a guide helping the children to find a solution to their conflict is underlined. More generally, their role is to make children's interests visible, a principle leading the pedagogical work away from topic-based and towards project-based and children-led activities. In a deliberative understanding of democracy, participation is described as a complex process where the interaction and cooperation between children and adults is essential. It is also demanding for the adults whose main challenge is to remain flexible, trusting children's thought-process and decision-making process, and holding back on their impulse to correct or control them. Their main task becomes being constantly alert to signals sent by children, capturing their interests, and looking for answers through their dialogue with them. They see themselves as learning from children. It is then part of their professional

responsibility to tolerate chaotic situations rising as a consequence of letting children express themselves and lead the activities. As professionals they must commit to the goals and methods used such as project work and constantly reflect critically on their own practice and adapt it (Pettersvold, 2014).

Self-awareness and reflection

Another important topic regarding professionalism in the education field is the ability of educators to reflect on norms and discourses, appropriate and adapt them to fit their beliefs, creating meaning, developing values in an on-going and reflexive process of self-development (Egan, 2009). This constructivist approach thus views participation in meaning making as key for the development of educator's professionalism.

The capacity to reflect critically is contrasted with automatically blaming contextual factors or the children themselves for failures in participation practices. It relates the adults' competence and professionalism not only to how they apply their knowledge and skills, but also to their capacity to develop self-awareness and a sense of responsibility towards children's educational and participatory experiences (Sheridan, 2007).

Although educators may acknowledge the importance of their role as professionals, their values and attitudes, understanding of the concept of participation and methodologies as well as organisational factors, studies show that emphasizing the importance of giving children opportunities to influence at micro-level and of interpreting their intentions, doesn't necessarily correlate with higher levels of meaningful participation in the educational activities of which the adults remain in charge of organising (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). This is also shown in a comparison of Greek and Cypriot pre-service educators beliefs and how they play out through their intentions at practical level (Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012). In fact, educators, the ones new to the profession in particular, may need to feel in control and self-assured, a feeling they may associate with being professional, which may lead them to organizing the activities in a rigid way using ready-made tools, and avoid destabilizing critical self-reflection (Lindhal, 2015).

Environment

At another level, professionals may view their responsibility towards promoting participation in terms of improving the environment in which educational experiences unfold. This includes organizing the space in such a way as to make access to and choice of activities

34

more available to children, make material visible and accessible, reorganising the daily routine to allow for more flexibility, variation and autonomy. Creating an enabling environment can be argued to have a direct impact on relationships and interactions within the school and the group, creating an atmosphere fostering communication and support among children, children and adults and among staff (Mesquita-Pires, 2012). Educators have identified the ability to establish and maintain good relationships with peers, children and parents as an important of aspect of educators responsibility and professionalism (Bleach, 2014). In that sense, educators negotiating the principle of participation through organizational criteria also become the warrants and scaffolds of interaction and relationship patterns in between individuals where control is shared and reciprocity and cooperation are central, a space for the potential for true participation to unfold. Besides, interactions that promote educators child-oriented attitudes, focusing on their role as listeners, can foster educators' sense of professionalism and reflections on their role as educators in children's educational experience (Egan, 2009).

3.3   Factors affecting teacher agency

It has been shown that educators' beliefs are key to how their practices unfold (Priestly et al, 2015), and ought to be studied in their own right. What ecological factors contribute to shape these beliefs? Can external factors change educators' beliefs? How? How are ecological factors, educators' beliefs and participation practices related?

Contextual factors, such as lack of resources or time, lack of opportunities to develop professionally and relationships with their colleagues, are often blamed in order to justify discrepancies between what educators believe and what they actually practice (Varol, 2013). As Bourdieu (1977) showed, external structures and social contexts are internalized by individuals, shaping and limiting to a large extent their autonomy and agency. In fact, Priestley et al. (2015) argue that teachers' discourses are shaped by how they are situated within their professional environment, as well as policy and research, the factors influencing their agency thus being, to a large extent, beyond their control and influence.

3.3.1 The place of personal and professional experiences

Studies have shown that education professionals' beliefs are largely influenced by the school's teaching culture: Teachers' attitudes being integrated in the institution's local culture, factors such as co-workers', leaders' and families' expectations are of great influence on teachers' beliefs. In line with Bourdieu's idea of structuralism that orient individuals towards integrating their surrounding cultural context into their own behaviour and attitude (Bourdieu, 1977), contextual factors such as the culture within which educators are living and working may impact upon the degree to which teachers value, understand and implement democratic principles in the classroom. Studies suggest that it is the combination of teaching experience and various variables associated with the work environment which shape teachers' democratic attitudes (Turnsek & Pekkarinen, 2009), as the attitudes of teachers with less than 5 years of work experience in some ECEC institutions were similar to those of teachers with 26 years of experience (*ibid*.).

Education vs Experience

There seems to be a stronger correlation between educators' democratic orientation and their years of experience than with their level of education (Turnsek & Pekkarinen, 2009). In fact, even though teachers with higher education are more prone to support the child being active in its own learning and development than teachers without such education, the correlation is not consistent enough to predict teachers' pro-democratic orientation based on level of education. Besides, more academic training doesn't necessarily correlate with higher quality flexible and child-oriented practices. Rather, it can lead practitioners to emphasize academic adult-led activities (Roer-Strier, 1996).

However, preschool teachers' continuing education may be crucial for developing working methods to enable children's participation. Continuing training can have a stronger impact on educators' personal development, interpersonal relations within the centre, and educational practices and strategies, than their primary training.

Educators have acknowledged the value of their professional training and participation in training projects for their ability to develop their practice and cope with the challenges entailed in their responsibilities as both educators and leaders for their assistants. However, some are sceptical to enrolling in training courses as they consider the foundation for their work to be respect for children, a value they claim to already possess (Pettersvold, 2014).

This can be associated with agency's projective dimension, in the sense that teachers who chose to pursue their professional development through special trainings may have more progressive and democratic-oriented values than those who chose not to undertake such professional trainings (Turnsek and Pekkarinen, 2009).

The effect of such training and its applicability to the centre daily life depends on the involvement of the whole staff so to build a sense of community, teamwork and shared beliefs and attitudes within the centre (Pineda-Herrero et al., 2010). Promoting reflections and awareness in direct relationship with the educators daily practices, context-based approaches to professional development foster positive and productive relationships between staff, relationships promoting the active participation of the whole community in reflecting, collaborating and improving the educational environment (both material and relational) in a way that would foster children's participation (Mesquita-Pires, 2012).
However, although educators may claim the contrary, it is not always obvious that knowledge and skills acquired through training are, in fact, transferred to classroom practices. Detecting educators', individuals' or teams', needs for training and close follow up of such training may have positive impact on the applicability of newly acquired skills and attitudes. Moreover, engaging in continuing training may impact positively on the centre disposition for developing innovating and fostering learning communities, which in turn has the potential to improve children's educational experiences (Pineda-Herrero et al., 2010). It is suggested that the key to improving practice and professionalism is for educators to have the opportunity for both reflection, encouraged and made available by their leaders and colleagues, and space for experimenting in order to increase their skills, knowledge and awareness and develop communities of practice within the ECE centre (Egan, 2009). Such training programmes involving the whole staff fosters equality between partners hence trust in each other, self-confidence and helps sustain individuals' motivation and enthusiasm towards their own professional development, both at individual and team level (Bleach, 2014).

Individual stories
The effect of professional development training programmes at an individual level are also influenced by participants' personal experiences and personalities that impact their dispositions to training and ability to make the best out of it (Bleach, 2014).

Priestley et al. (2015) have shown how past experiences contribute in creating habits that influence professional's ability to deal with unforeseen dilemmas and show flexibility in their everyday practice. This iterational dimension of agency is reflected in teachers' beliefs and discourses. Indeed, their personal and professional experiences shape how they project themselves into the future and deal with issues within the practical-evaluative dimension, the here and now of educational practice. For example, informants who have worked in the educational system longer may have the most developed, nuanced and complex discourses, and their practices may be influenced by their own education and the changes in the education system and policy they may have witnessed. Informants with less experience within education may have less elaborate and nuanced discourses, which can hinder their agentic ability to negotiate their practice in the practical evaluative dimension. This suggests that teachers' professional beliefs are of more significance for this ability than external expectations (Priestley et al., 2015).

Whereas coming from a different professional background can be argued to be a drawback in terms of educational discourse, there are exceptions to the rule. Indeed, individual personality, background and values may compensate for the challenges entailed in the daily teaching practice, as a resource enabling to maintain a critical perspective towards curriculum, policy and other expectations, and remain true to personal visions. However, having a definite discourse and strong beliefs and values may only be enacted within the frame of one's own classroom, showing that it not enough to achieve agency, and reminds of the importance of other ecological factors (*ibid*.).

3.3.2 Short and long term projection

One of the key dimensions of agency is concerned with teachers' ability to give a sense of direction towards the future to their professional practice, a projection that builds on the beliefs they have acquired through their experiences and that unfolds in the present. This projective capacity allows teachers to view educational practices and policies in a wider perspective and has a lot to say for their ability to deal with policy, curriculum and other constraints. The projective dimension of agency is directly linked to what teachers see as the aim of their practice and thus to the purpose of education in a wider sense. The instrumental projections of socialization and the development of skills are commonly referred to as the purpose of education, and outplay values such as participation and individual responsibility.

38

Priestley et al (2015) suggest that this tendency reflects the fact that educators' aspirations may be mainly short-term, focusing on teachers' daily activities and needs to fulfil purposes in the practical evaluative dimension such as maintaining a good atmosphere in the classroom or fulfil curricular goals. Further, teachers might find it difficult to connect here and now practices with long-term purposes and effects. The invisible character of long-term visions is the reflection of restricted and weak orientations towards the future and perspectives on the purpose of education. This in turns hinders teachers to make use of their convictions and discourses in an agentic way, especially taking into consideration the ecological contexts surrounding these issues, such as schools' structures and cultures, a topic that will be addressed in the next section. In that sense, it can be argued that if education is to be improved, developing such long-term visions is the responsibility of professionals'. It can be argued that envisioning the result of one's pedagogical work in the long run can lead to constructive self-criticism towards one's own practice, which in term can strengthen children's opportunities for participation (Pettersvold, 2014).

3.3.3 School culture, structure and resources

In a school context, structures refer to the social positioning of actors and the organization of the relationships between them. Understood that way, structures thus provide resources by which people's agency is shaped and influenced, and retroactively impact on the same structure, allowing for or hindering the development of a culture within the school. While it could be assumed that teachers' beliefs about teaching have a direct impact on the teaching culture developed at school-level, it has been shown that the developing culture of accountability and assessment present throughout the education system influence teachers' discourses and practices to a great extent. This happens even when teachers have different personal aspirations and convictions, thus enrolling them in the hegemonic discourse of their professional environment. Teachers' efforts are, in fact, often more oriented towards adapting to and making the best out of the wider school culture than realizing personal long-term aspirations and goals (Priestley et al., 2015). Moreover, teachers from different schools sharing similar beliefs, can experience differences in their agentic potential for reasons embedded in the schools' structures, as is the case in two Scottish schools: In the first school teachers were frustrated over their limited possibilities to develop their practice according to their visions, which they attributed to the narrow character of relationship between colleagues

restricting collaborative practices. On the contrary, teachers from the other school perceived its culture as encouraging sharing and collaboration between teachers and a high level of support and guidance from their leaders. This is typical of a structure characterized by horizontal and reciprocal relationships promoting dialogue and facilitating the development of strong yet informal bonds and communication patterns between actors. These features seem to play an important part in channelling and promoting individuals' agency (Priestley et al., 2015)).

Further, it is crucial that the whole kindergarten staff be committed and included in the development of knowledge and skills necessary to foster children's participation. Not only preschool teachers but also the assistants should know the purpose of their practices and be able to justify them. This integration of complex concepts within every member of staff's daily practice is a time-consuming process aiming at building a common culture within the ECEC centre. A key element in that respect is thus not so much an individual issue as it is of relational character: for both managers and teachers it important to feel valued and supported in the realization of their agentic potential. Beliefs and discourses are thus viewed as significant when embedded in the overall vision of the school rather than only fostered individually (Priestley et al., 2015).

Further, the development of a feedback culture that supports the development of the staff's ability to reflect on and question their own practices (Pettersvold, 2014). Besides, it seems that the creation of a solid kindergarten culture of practice depends to a large extent on the involvement of the leadership in cultivating and grounding the reflections and knowledge that develops in the kindergarten's daily life. For example, in Pettersvold's study, preschool teachers claimed that the lack of cooperation between the leadership and the overall staff had negative consequences for the development of the staff's skills and the establishment of good participation practices (Pettersvold, 2014). Similarly the school's leadership in Priestley et al.'s study considered that in order for the staff to be willing to act in an autonomous and creative way, it was its responsibility to develop a culture of trust among teachers (Priestley et al., 2015).

Material resources

Studies have shown that not only the structures and relationships within teams and the overall staff's values and attitudes, but also organizational, material and time-constraints are

40

important conditions for children's ability to participate (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). Further, the practical-evaluative aspect of agency is supported by the management and organization of material resources, important for implementing participation practices. Structural changes such as reorganizing rooms and supplies and working in small groups, influence teachers' educational practices, allowing them to dedicate their resources to share activities with the children and free time to document and make visible children's participation, fostering flexibility within activities. Other factors such as time and number of adult per children seem to have a significant impact on effective and meaningful participation practices (Pettersvold, 2014). However, it has also been shown, that resource shortages, in terms of material resources as well as low adult per child ratio, can be compensated by the educators' attitudes towards children. For example, a comparison of Swedish and German preschools concluded that although Swedish preschools had more adults per class and more material resources available than the German ones, Swedish educators also used more time away from children, while German educators made up for their resource constraints by joining their efforts in understanding children's perspectives (Sheridan, 2007).

3.3.4 Other factors: the wider context

Policy

As much as the inside life of schools, both structure and culture, matter for teachers' agency and their beliefs, these phenomena have to be understood in relation to the wider sociocultural and political context they are a part of. For example, teachers' democratic values may be influenced by the cultural discourses surrounding them (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009). Policy may also influence teachers' professional discourses and beliefs (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers, to a great extent, adopt the language and concepts framed by policy. The consequence of such internalization is that it seems to influence what teachers envisage as the purpose of their practice and it becomes challenging for teachers to critically distance themselves and their practice from these external demands and expectations (Priestley et al., 2015). This raises the question as to what extent teacher training can distance practices from their culturally determined educational patterns and views and instead foster a professional culture proper to the educational field (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009). Besides, beyond underlining the importance of context for the values of teachers, this suggests that

democratic changes within preschools go hand in hand with political actions and changes in the wider society.

In Norway, children's right to participation is included in the ECEC bill and framework. This change of focus in the official documents is important for how preschool teachers have come to understand the concept of participation in an ECEC context. While it may have been unclear and abstract to some teachers at the beginning, the concepts of democracy and participation are now part of ECEC centres daily vocabulary. In fact, interviews conducted in 2012, six years after the implementation of the new ECEC framework, reveal how time and the professionals' efforts to analyse and discuss the official guidelines have allowed them to develop both their understandings and their practices, improving their ability to realize children's right to participation (Pettersvold, 2014).

Expectations and pressures

As explained in an earlier chapter, the demands laid on education systems worldwide are marked by an ideological shift towards neoliberal ideals of competitiveness, which displays in practices oriented towards performance, evaluation and accountability. These outside expectations of educational practices put teachers under pressure and have a tendency to silence their own personal beliefs about the purpose of education and how their teaching practices ought to be (Priestley et al., 2015). Put in the context of agency and its dimensions, it can in fact be said that these expectations, on the one hand, impact practices in the practical-evaluative dimension, as they shape specific relations between school professionals and external actors, and contribute to developing local cultures within the schools, and, on the other hand, influence the projective dimension when shaping teachers' beliefs and aspirations. Nevertheless, the iterational dimension plays an important part in that context, as teachers' personal and professional experiences have the potential to define how they respond to policy demands, enabling them to adapt, challenge or resist such expectations and pressures.

Taking these factors into account it is possible to state that performativity expectations limit teachers' ability to act as professionals, demanding they play the part of transmitting externally predefined goals instead of enabling them to take responsibility for their practices and contribute in the development of curriculum and educational discourses. Teachers' agency is thus weakened.

42

3.4 Conclusion

The studies presented above highlight the following results:

➢ Educators' beliefs about the concept of participation and their role towards realising it are highly dependent on how they view the concept of childhood and the child itself. The relationship between the educator and the child as well as understandings of participatory and democratic educational practices are characterized by an ambiguity between protection and empowerment, ambiguity that may weaken children's possibility for meaningful participation. Taken for granted concepts, such as democracy, need to be defined and discussed, to allow educators to develop their awareness, self-criticism, ability to learn from each other and develop a learning and collaborative culture within the institution, and bridge the gap between implicit beliefs and concrete measures and practices.

➢ Here we are using the ecological approach to agency to understand both how different factors can influence educators' beliefs (which in turn impact their practice), and how the same or other factors might have a direct impact on their agentic potential.
Studies show that early experiences and personal values and attitudes are of greater significance for the shaping of beliefs in adulthood than level of education. This can be coped with by developing awareness of one's own beliefs. Continuing in-service development programme can lead to improvements in educational practices if there are closely linked to the educators' daily experiences and professional context so to be easily transferrable.
Lack of long-term educational visions may hinder educators in translating their beliefs and convictions into their daily practices. The relationships among staff, either constraining or promoting flexibility, cooperation and the staffs' ability to reflect on and develop their practice has an impact on educators' agency. Further, factors located at a macro-level such as policy, culture and societies expectations may hinder educators in making independent choices and translating their beliefs into practice.

In the next chapters the attention will move to the specific research project this study draws on, starting with a presentation of the methodology and research design used to gather and treat the data collected in Mexico and Norway.

4 Methodology

This chapter will describe the research strategy and design as well as the different procedures used to gather and analyse the data. The main concern throughout these processes was to be consistent with the purpose of the study, the choice of theories presented earlier, and the main research question: "How do educators in Norwegian and Mexican ECEC centres negotiate children's right to participate in their practices?" and the subsidiary research questions:

1. How do educators make sense of children's right to participate?
2. How do educators perceive their role in the realization of this right?
3. How do ecological factors affect educators' ability to negotiate principles of participation in their work?

The chapter will start by presenting and justifying the choice of case study as the study's research strategy (section 4.1). A presentation of the data collection and research procedures (4.2) as well as analysis procedures (4.3) will follow. The chapter will end with describing the measures taken to secure the quality of the study (4.4) and ethical issues that were encountered during the research process (4.5).

4.1   Research strategy and design: A multiple-case study

The field of comparative education often advocates the use of quantitative methods, satisfying its growing interest for statistical information, generalizability, and transferability of data on a global scale. Nevertheless, this study, which aims at exploring the educators' perspectives on the practice of participation and the conditions affecting their agency, is based on a qualitative approach. This makes it possible to better "capture the meanings that research subjects attribute to their own particular, yet whole, situations" (Fairbrother, 2007:43).

Considering the comparative aspect of the study and its interest in two wholly different schools and contexts, a case study approach was judged the most appropriate. Using case study as research design allows for the generation of "thick descriptions", as coined by (Geertz, 1983), of a phenomena, setting, and institution, providing the reader with a more

44

comprehensive picture of the case, incorporating the local context, the physical environment, the behaviour of participants, and the different dynamics between the participants concerned (Cousin, 2005). To achieve this the researcher may use a variety of methods, as will be discussed in a later section.

Additionally, "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009:4), especially if they are not clearly separated from their contextual conditions, which is the case in the present study. Case studies can be explanatory, descriptive or exploratory, depending on the purpose and research questions. In the present case, the research questions are "how"-questions, emphasizing an explanatory approach. However, methods may overlap and this study does, to some extent, build on both exploratory and descriptive accounts (*ibid.).*

Considering that there exist different types of case studies, the present one can be defined as 'collective'. Indeed, if the two cases share similarities, both the units of analysis and the contexts in which the cases are embedded are different, allowing for the exploration of the issue across contexts as well as within each of them (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Additionally, the two cases selected have characteristics of instrumental case studies, as coined by Stake (1995); both focus on a particular issue within selected ECEC institutions, taking into account contextual factors, with the purpose of reflecting on practices in the wider field of ECEC (Cousin, 2005). Yin (2009) uses the term multiple-case study to describe the same approach, and, as it seems to offer greater possibilities for conducting a quality study than single-case studies, and is appropriate to satisfy the comparative aspect of the research, it was chosen as its design.

The two cases chosen for this study, located in different areas of the globe, in radically different socio-cultural and economic contexts, were specifically selected for their differences and the contrasting perspectives they were assumed to offer. It can be argued that a comparison of such a nature, beyond exposing differences, may unveil similarities across contexts as well as unique specificities of the cases, which might not have been discussed if not confronted through comparison (Mills, Bunt, & Brujin, 2006).

4.1.1 Levels and units of analysis

Bray and Thomas (1995) developed the following framework, represented as a cube, for understanding and working with different levels of analysis and achieving in-depth and holistic analysis in comparative education research.

Figure 3: A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses
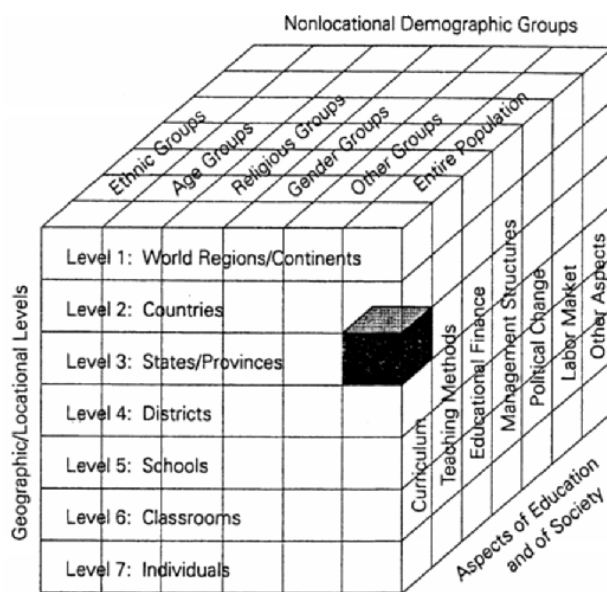
Source: Bray & Thomas (1995), p. 475.

As this framework shows, there are different dimensions for comparison: a locational dimension, a non-locational dimension, and a dimension focusing on aspects of education and society, each composed of various levels. This three-dimensional representation shows how analysis of studies within comparative education can and to some extent should be multi-leveled in order to attain holistic understandings of the phenomena at stake (Bray & Thomas, 1995).

Using this framework, it is clear that this study works on all three dimensions at different levels: The geographical/locational dimension is essential since contextual factors of a socio-economic and cultural nature, bound to the location of the ECEC centres, cannot be dissociated from the study of phenomena within these. It is a critical dimension to the comparative aspect of the study, as

46

> pedagogy does not begin and end in the classroom. It can be comprehended only
> once one locates practice within the concentric circles of local and national, and of
> classroom, school, system and state, and only if one steers constantly back and forth
> between these, exploring the way that what teachers and students do in classrooms
> both reflects and enacts the values of the wider society (Manzon, 2007:116).

As a consequence, within the geographical dimension, the study is concerned with country, region, schools, and individuals as levels of analysis. Further information on these factors will be provided in the next section.

The non-locational dimension is helpful to locate educators as a level of analysis, as is the dimension covering aspects of education and society which points not only at the concepts of participation and agency, but also issues of curricula, pedagogies, and management of the school. The three dimensions are interlaced and inform each other, as will be developed later. However, as a comparative study, not only are the dimensions and levels of analysis compared but also special attention should be paid to the units of analysis. Indeed, it has been argued that the units to be compared should have enough in common for their differences to be significant (Manzon, 2007). The next section, concerned with the sampling of participants, will show how differences as well as similarities between units of analysis were taken into account in the selection process. However, it must be said that this study is not only concerned in showing differences but also reflects on possible similarities across and beyond contextual differences, which makes being aware of the situated aspect of the analysis even more crucial.

Taking the educators' perspectives and agency as a starting point, while at the same time placing strong emphasis on the contextual characteristics, structural as well as cultural, of the schools and geographical areas, was a key moment when deciding the study's units of analysis. Defining the research questions and settling on the choice of theoretical frameworks helped determine the unit of analysis to be the educators, with the schools as embedded units of analysis. Choosing small entities as units of analysis (schools and educators) rather than countries or systems, directed the study from conceptual understandings towards educational realities (Manzon, 2007), an intention in line with the purpose of this study.

4.2 Data collection and research procedures

4.2.1 Sampling

This research project used purposive sampling, a strategy whereby the researcher chooses participants based on their relevance to the project and its research questions (Bryman, 2012).

Country/region

The first case is located in Mexico, more specifically in San Cristobal de las Casas in the State of Chiapas in Southern Mexico, while the second case is located in Norway, more specifically in Oslo, its capital city.

Oslo was chosen as the second case's location for reasons of accessibility, not only because it is the city of residence of the researcher, allowing for more time to be allocated to fieldwork, but also because of the high number of ECEC centres located in this capital city. Additionally, as a multicultural city which has experienced a significant rise in the number of ECEC centres over the past years, Oslo provides an interesting context in which to conduct our study, while offering a strikingly different counterpart to the Mexican case. Indeed, as seen in chapter 1, the Mexican centre of San Cristobal de las Casas is rooted in a socio-cultural, economic as well as political context that bares the marks of the inequalities and multiculturalism found at national level. Further, it is embedded in the culture of resistance and political activism found at regional level.

While the geographical location of the two cases provide strikingly different socio-cultural contexts for the practices found within these institutions, both countries have in the past decades seen a significant, although not equal, rise in the level of enrolment in ECEC institutions, mirroring a similar acknowledgment of the importance of ECEC.

Institutions

The socio-cultural context presented above as well as the researcher's knowledge of the centre's pedagogy considered relevant for the purpose of the study, were the main criteria for the choice of the Mexican case. This centre was created fifteen years ago as the private initiative of three enthusiastic social workers from both Europe and Mexico, with backgrounds in education and social work, who wanted to make quality education available to the population of the city and more particularly to disadvantaged indigenous families. Of

48

private provision, it has its own curriculum, which, as explained in chapter 1, describes its vision and pedagogy emphasizing freedom, peace and holistic development as core principles.

The organization provides both ECEC and primary education and defines itself as an educational community, thus placing strong emphasis on involving families in its endeavours. Parents would take turns helping in the kitchen, participate in regular meetings in the form of assemblies, and participate in or even organise workshops for children and/or parents.

At the time of its creation the organization provided ECEC services for both infants and children under 6, as well as primary education, with 60% of the places reserved for children from the surrounding indigenous communities, particularly children raised by single and often illiterate mothers. However, at the time the fieldwork took place the organization of the centre had changed, principally due to lack of funding. The ECEC centre and primary school worked more independently than before and also did not have the financial means to enrol disadvantaged children. The case study focused on the ECEC section of the organization located in the very centre of the city in a rented two-floor town house with a small patio.

The Norwegian ECEC centre chosen for the purpose of this study is located in a lower socio-economic area in the eastern part of Oslo. This district counts 57 ECEC centres, 34 of which are public (Oslo.Kommune, 2016). Over 50% of the population of the district is of immigrant background, either first or second generation (IMDI, 2015). This is reflected in the ECEC centres' population, with the vast majority of children speaking a language other than Norwegian at home (IMDI, 2014). These variables inform and influence our case's curriculum and plans, and its staff's activities and practices. Its curriculum ("*Årsplan*") specifies its vision as being the stimulation of children's curiosity and eagerness to learn, with an emphasis on the value of the community for children's development. Play as learning tool as well as its intrinsic value are identified as the centre's main focus area (for 2015). This will be developed in more details in the following chapter.

The choice of this specific centre was made on the basis of a series of criteria that helped narrowing the number of potential participant centres. The main criterion was the centre to be of public provision, for its pedagogy to be as representative of the regular Norwegian kindergarten as possible and provide an interesting counterpart to the Mexican case that is of private provision. Centres dedicated to special needs education or another language than Norwegian were excluded. Two other main criteria were age of the children enrolled (one to

six years old) and size of the centre (the smaller the size the more feasible it would be to get a holistic picture of the centre). These guaranteed some basic similarities between the two cases.

Participants

At the time of fieldwork the Mexican ECEC centre enrolled 9 children aged 1 to 3 on the first floor under the responsibility of two Mexican adults, while the second floor was allocated to a group of 12 children aged 3 to 6 and their respective 2 educators, both originating from Spain. The legal representative of the organization would also take part in some of the weekly activities, making him the case's fifth participant. The participants came from different background with varying levels of education and professional experience.

The Norwegian centre enrols approximately 45 children from 1 to 6 years old across 3 classrooms, each of which is allocated an average of 3 adults (1 pedagogical leader and 2 assistants). As showed in Appendix 4 on informants' participation, several employees worked part time, which brought the number of potential participants to 13 (including the centre's director). Participants were both pedagogical leaders in charge of the overall functioning of the classroom, pedagogical planning, and coordination between classes and with families, and assistants, who support the work of their respective pedagogical leader and are also expected to take initiative and work in an autonomous way both within and between classrooms. The majority of the employees had specialized training at varying levels (higher education in the case of the leaders, or vocational education as well as in-service trainings for most of the assistants).

Main differences and similarities between cases

As the purposive sampling strategy illustrates, the centres were chosen based on a set of criteria that would secure some basic similarities. The age of the children enrolled was the most important characteristic, as were the size of the centres, which being relatively small facilitated the gathering of in-depth information about the whole centre and the realistic observation and interviewing of as many informants as possible. Also, both centres employed educators with a wide variety of backgrounds, with and without formal training and experience within education.

Both centres had included the concept of participation in their curricula. Although they may have done so for different reasons and understand the concept differently, this common feature is a determining factor informing the relevance of the centres to the project. The main differences between the two cases are their locations in radically different sociocultural, political, and economic contexts, and their provisions; one being public and following the national norms and curricula, the other being private and created as a form of resistance to national educational norms and policies.

This combination of similarities and drastic differences not only provided an interesting foundation for exploring the issues here concerned, but made the research process interesting and challenging, as the conflict between these realities would lead to new perspectives on the topic.

4.2.2   Instruments

Throughout this study observations, including participatory observation, and interviews, were obvious methods to collect the necessary data, along with analysis of various documents and informal conversation. This is typical of case study method and allows for the building of a holistic picture of the case. As was done in the present study, actively converging the different sources of information, instead of treating them separately, allows for the development of a holistic understanding of the phenomena at stake (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Triangulation of evidence sources is also useful to strengthen both evidence and argumentation in case of contestable assertions (Cousin, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews

In line with the concern of qualitative research for flexibility I chose a method that would allow adaptability to the interview situation and the informants: semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3). Before the interviews took place a list of questions were prepared and ordered within topics, keeping in mind that they might need to be adapted and reordered later on and during the interviews, according to the informants' answers, while trying to use the same phrasing in all interviews. It was important to use semi-structured rather than completely unstructured interviews to make sure that the specific topics of interest would be covered and to strengthen the comparability across cases (Bryman, 2012).

Before preparing the interview guides I had narrowed my topic and investigated different theories, concepts, and relevant empirical studies, which I utilized along with my personal experience as an early childhood educator to define main themes and categories and later to formulate questions. I started with phrasing the questions in English to then translate them into the specific field languages (first Spanish, then Norwegian). This posed a series of challenges, as I was concerned with staying as close to the original meaning of the questions as possible while at the same time making the necessary adaptations for the local languages. Starting both fieldwork immersions with periods of observation allowed me to make modifications, including the adding or reformulation of some questions to obtain information about phenomena I had observed or aspects which had not previously occurred to me but appeared important. The interview guide thus evolved during the fieldwork, and I would keep a written version of all modifications to ensure I would address all topics with each of the informants.

Following the research questions and chosen theoretical perspectives the interviews aimed at gathering the informants' reflections on the following topics:

-Meaning of participation, and of participation as a right, in both theory and practice.

-Informants' own role regarding participation.

-The adult-child relationship and interactions.

-Challenges related to the practice of participation.

-How the personal and professional experience of the informant may influence his/her work.

-The organization of the centre.

-The national and the centre's curricula.

-The collaboration between employees.

-The overall purpose of ECEC in society.

As can be seen in the interview guide (Appendix 3) I began with introductory questions to put the interviewee at ease and gain rapport, and then used a combination of open ended questions (often starting with "how") follow-up questions which bounced on the answer to get deeper into the issue, and direct questions. Where appropriate I would prompt "yes or no" answers, which I would build on with interpreting questions to ensure I had understood the interviewee's point, and I would on some occasions need to use structuring questions in order to direct the interview in specific directions.

52

Critical to the quality of the interviews was to make the participants comfortable and promote a natural dialogue between us as part of an informal and relaxed exchange. For this purpose, the interviews were designed in such a way as to allow informants to express themselves freely and without interruption. This proved valuable in the many cases wherein I had to improvise new questions, encourage informants to develop their answers, and build trust by distancing myself from the conventional image of the interviewer as expert. For this reason, it was also important to make the purposes and objectives of the interview transparent and fully understood, and clear that they could interrupt the interview at any given moment. The interviews' conversational and spontaneous character was facilitated by the fact that all informants agreed for the interviews to be recorded on a voice recorder.

Their semi-structured nature allowed me to adapt the questions to the interviewees' answers, needs and personalities. However, as a novice, having to adjust the questions quickly and take into account the answers to formulate new questions simultaneously was a challenging experience, even though I had practiced and tested the interview guides on trial participants prior to fieldwork.

Observations

Participant observation

I chose participant observation because I was aware that a certain amount of contact and interaction with the children would be unavoidable. The observations would be planned to a certain extent; I would for each day have previously defined a clear goal for how many and what type of situations I needed to observe, as well as which educator I needed to focus on. In practice, it was not always possible to realise these objectives, but as I kept a record of all observations made (available in appendix 5) it was possible to keep track of the amount of work which lay ahead.

It was necessary to observe as many, if not all, of the educators present in the centre, in a wide range of different situations: circle time ("*El saludo*" in Spanish or "*samling*" in Norwegian), free play, organised activities (other than circle time), meals, transitions, and free play outside. These moments or situations were identified as common to both centres, and were considered to comprehensively cover the range of activities throughout the day. The data collection procedure took the form of writing narratives; objective accounts or descriptions of situations involving interactions between educators and children and between

educators.

A checklist was framed in advance to ensure I would file appropriate situations and not forget essential details. Crucial to providing thick descriptions is the recording of as much information as possible to include even what may appear insignificant, such as the arrangement and decoration of the classroom. This offers potential readers the impression of being observers themselves and the opportunity to understand or judge how the researcher interpreted the data (Cousin, 2005).

The checklist comprised the following points:

-Moment of the day: Circle time, free play, organised activities, meals, transitional activities, free play outside.

-People: Who is involved (educators, children)? How many are involved (one-to one interaction or group interaction)?

-Context (time): What time of the day is it? What happened right before the observed situation (what provoked the interaction?)?

-Context (space): Where in the school are we? How is the room organised? What is happening around the observed interaction (children playing, other interactions)? What is the general atmosphere?

-Nature of the interaction: Is it conversational, discipline oriented, related to organizational issues, marked by humour and play…?

-Start: Who took initiative concerning the interaction (adult, child, children…)? How did it start (question, assertion, order…)?

-The role of the adult: Is the adult leading the interaction? How does the adult respond to the child/children/other adults?

-Verbal and nonverbal communication: How developed are the adults' verbal expressions (full sentences, complexity of concepts)? What is the adults' tone of voice (altered or natural)? How is the adult's body language (eye contact, physical contact, expressive, passive…)?

-Involvement of third parties: Are other children/adults involved?

-End: How does the interaction end (agreement, interruption…)?

The observations were very informative when it came to identifying and understanding interaction patterns and the educators' practices. However, my presence and their awareness of my topic of interest could have influenced the way they acted to a certain extent. I

54

attempted to handle this concern by being as present as possible over an extended period of time thereby limiting the risk of the participants performing rather than being natural in their practices. For this reason, my presence in the schools stretched over one month in Case 1 and two months in Case 2.

The data collected from the observations were recorded in the form of narratives. This method offered several advantages as described in the proceeding section.

Use of narratives

The narrative approach, or "*Praksisfortellinger*" in Norwegian, is a method that is commonly used by education professionals to develop the ability to critically reflect on their practices (Bold, 2012). As a research tool, it is acknowledged as adequate when researching unique social contexts because of its adaptability. Narratives can take different forms, depending on the purpose and nature of the research, and it is the researcher who has to choose the best fitted form of narrative (*ibid.*). In this case, and for the purpose of the study, I have chosen to adapt the narrative approach to the concept of "*praksisfortellinger*" as commonly used in the early education field in Norway. Allowing education professionals to analyse their own and others' experiences, the use of narratives can thus contribute to better understanding of educational issues, to develop knowledge, and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Halmrast, Taarud, & Østerås, 2013).

Narratives were created as part of an on-going process while observing events or right after observation. They were a useful tool to contextualize the answers collected during interviews, but were also used to inform the interview questions in a retroactive way. Due to my experience of working as an early childhood educator I was familiar with writing and working with narratives, which made the process easier. I was, therefore, also conscious of the challenges involved: to grasp all the details of a situation, the atmosphere, participants' tone of voice or emotions, body language, as well as the phrasing used, and what happens around them. An additional challenge involved accurate transcriptions of these events which would enable subsequent reflection and interpretation. Concerned with trustworthiness, and wanting potential readers to be able to understand the origins of my interpretation and inferences, I chose to write the narratives in the most neutral and objective way possible, avoiding using normative wordings or conveying judgement through the phrasing. It was especially important to avoid that the narratives reflect more about me as a subjective

observer, with her own experiences, rather than the participants and the situations observed. The narratives were used to describe and compare educators' practices with the interviews.

Observation of staff meetings

Both in Mexico and Norway I had the opportunity to observe meetings involving all (or almost all) members of staff after working hours, and an additional smaller meeting with a fraction of the staff in the Norwegian centre. In these meetings I was sitting at the same table as the educators and would take notes throughout. Both groups were very welcoming and open to my presence during the meeting, occasionally interacting with me, as to make me feel comfortable and almost part of the group.

Preparing for the observations I was looking for both content and form; what would be said about participation, the educators' role, the school in general, culture as well as structure, and how these concepts would be communicated, along with patterns of interaction between staff members. The concern was always to get the most information I could out of these observations in order to build a more complete picture, and for the eventuality that I need to slightly change the focus in the future; ostensibly insignificant information at this moment of time could reveal itself to be crucial later.

The information recorded would include:

-Purpose of the meeting and topics discussed.

-Discussed topics compared to planned topics.

-Process in which conclusions are drawn.

-Opinions expressed (individual and collective).

-Informants' assigned or informal roles during the meeting (leader, moderator, observer…)

-Level of contribution of each participant (number of interventions).

-Quality of the contributions (questions, comments…).

-Responses to participants' interventions.

-Overall atmosphere (relaxed, tensed, informal conversations, use of humour…)

The overall purpose of these meetings was to discuss issues related to the practical and organisational aspects of the schools´ everyday life, but first and foremost to exchange reflections of a pedagogical nature, allowing interactions within the groups which could lead to the construction of new meanings.

4.2.3 Research procedures

Preparation

I made contact with the Mexican school by mail 6 months before my fieldwork and they confirmed almost right away that I was welcome. The solicitation for fieldwork had been discussed as a group several months prior to my arrival during a staff meeting, or "assembly" as the school would call it, in accordance with the centre's democratic and horizontality principles. When I arrived for my first meeting with the staff, all were well informed of the project, although unsure of what their contribution would be. After handing out the consent forms and explaining the voluntary character of their participation, all were enthusiastic and eager to contribute by being observed and interviewed, and included me as part of the staff. As soon as contact was established and the Mexican school confirmed its participation, the search for the Norwegian participants began. Applying the criteria for selection described earlier brought the number of potential participating ECEC centres from 590 to 270. Following that process, an email was sent to each of those 270 centres (whose email addresses were retrieved from the web page of the city of Oslo (Oslo.Kommune, 2016). 47 of them returned my email, out of which 18 responded negatively while another 18 answered that they would later get back to me but failed to do so. Out of the 11 positive answers, I received 5 after I had already committed to the chosen centre of study. Only 3 of the ECEC centres which initially showed interest answered my follow-up inquiry, leaving me with 3 centres to choose from. Two of them had over 200 children enrolled, while the third was a small centre with 45 children. This last one happened to show the most interest in and enthusiasm for the project and was, therefore, a natural choice, and it also had a smaller size closer to that of the Mexican centre.

Because comparing and conducting fieldwork in two different countries require a consequent amount of time-consuming research, preparation and adaptation to the local contexts, it was an advantage that I was familiar with both contexts, having been and worked in San Cristobal de las Casas before, and living in Oslo, as well as with the general curricula of the schools, prior to conducting fieldwork. That way, I could have somewhat realistic expectations of the fieldworks and I saved the time one could expect to use to adapt to a foreign context. As will be developed in later sections of this chapter, the fact that I had worked myself as an early

childhood educator in Norway and Mexico, and that I speak both local languages fluently, were clear advantages during preparation to fieldwork, data collection and analysis.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork was planned to be carried out from the 1st of October to the 30th of November 2015, allocating the month of October to the Mexican centre and November to the Norwegian centre. However, for practical reasons (the scheduling of interviews and having to work part-time while conducting fieldwork in Oslo) I extended the fieldwork in the Norwegian centre to the 20th of December 2015.

As I knew both the school, town and spoke the local language, I was sure that I would be adequately prepared to the realities of the fieldwork in Mexico. However, looking at my planned schedule and the actual completed activities, I quickly realised that I would have to change most of my strategy in order to adapt to the realities of the school. Indeed, during my first face-to-face meeting with the educator in charge, he explained what expectations they had of me and my presence in the school. I thought that I would do a limited amount of observations avoiding too much contact with the children to make the data collection more effective and avoid being disrupted by children's interactions. Instead, the school asked me to contribute and participate in the school's activities. This resulted in me being at the school, in almost constant interaction with the children, as if I were one of the staff, close to 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. This was necessary in order to collect enough data from observations, as I couldn't focus on only doing that, but had to divide myself between observing and participating. In fact, the narrative method chosen required writing down the events as quickly as possible after observation took place to avoid forgetting too many details and render the event in the most realistic way as possible (see previous section on data collection method).

I kept a journal organised as a calendar where I wrote the planned and expected research activities, such as what kind of observations I would need to gather, what group I would need to follow, what contextual information I needed, what interviews I would do or try to schedule for each day, as well as new ideas that would develop along the way.

The participant observation technique was challenging but also beneficial as I could get a first hand sense of the school's culture, relationships and collaborative aspects. It also opened doors to situations and events I might not have accessed otherwise, informal conversations

with the educators, who sometimes even asked me for my opinion as professional, which provided me with information on the educators' thought process.

Scheduling interviews on the other hand was far more challenging: as there was no possibility for the participants to take breaks during working-hours, they had to take place on their free time. I thus had to adapt to their availabilities.

Appendix 4 gives an account of the performed observations and interviews within the Mexican school. It shows that all potential employees were both observed and interviewed, including the NGO's legal representative (the centre does not have a formal director or leader) and a teacher from the primary school section of the organization (referred to as "External") who participated in a staff meeting on the topic of children's reading and writing skills.

The transition between the Mexican and the Norwegian fieldworks was marked by the doubts and questioning I had developed towards my research purpose, research questions and instruments. I had not heard from the Norwegian kindergarten since a visit I had paid them a few days before leaving to Mexico and where two members of staff had confirmed that they had heard about the project and were willing to participate. Coming back to Oslo I immediately took contact by phone and scheduled my first visit just for a few days later. Although I was informed that all employees had been previously introduced to the research project during a staff meeting, and that the centre as a whole had accepted to participate, it appeared that most of the employees were unaware of what the study was about and what was required from them as participants. Presenting the topic of my study to each employee individually and distributing a written consent form was thus my first task. While one assistant refused to be interviewed, all of the employees agreed to be observed. Due to time constraints the participants to be interviewed had to be chosen on the basis of the study's needs for information, seeking a wide range of contribution from all categories of employees (leaders, assistants, trained, untrained, experienced, newly employed). Due to the high rate of part-time employment in the centre, sickness, holidays, and other unforeseen events, some interviews had to be postponed, or even cancelled, in which case another employee would be solicited. As shown in Appendix 4, three of the four formally trained pedagogical leaders were interviewed, and 3 of the possible 7 assistants were interviewed (one per class), of which 2 had received formal training. Both an assistant and a pedagogical leader were neither interviewed nor observed due to their absence during the period in which fieldwork took

place. The centre's director was also interviewed, and observed, not in interaction with children (his role was limited to administrative tasks), but during staff meetings.

Conducting fieldwork in the Norwegian kindergarten was very different from my previous experience. I was not required to participate in any activity, and when I asked to the participants if they had any preferences as to how I should behave during observations, they answered that they were used to having students observing and that my presence didn't bother them. I thus started to observe the interaction in one of the three classrooms, whose leader I had talked to on the phone the week before, and did my best to follow, in a discrete way, the three educators of that class in their interactions as they were moving around the school. This same day I went to all classrooms and met the other educators, introduced myself and handed in the letter of informed consent. I originally scheduled 2 days of observation with each class, thinking that, as I was not required to participate, the observations would be much more effective than in the Mexican school and that I would need less time. It soon appeared that I would in fact observe much more than 2 days a week in each class, for several reasons: First, educators were quite mobile and would move from one class to another, leading to the opportunity to observe them in different, unpredictable contexts or classes. Second, some educators where absent, working part time, on holidays or sick leave on the days I had originally scheduled, so I had to come back to have a chance to observe them. Despite my efforts to reschedule observations I was not able to observe all educators. As I didn't have the time to reschedule indefinitely I had to decide that I had enough data for the purpose of the study. This also had consequences for the scheduling of interviews. Contrarily to the Mexican case, the interviews in Oslo had to take place during working hours, which placed a new set of constraints on the organisation of fieldwork. Because of this time constraint I asked specifically the participants I thought would be the most interesting and informative for my study, making sure to have informants across all three classes, ranging from pedagogical leader, to assistants with and without formal education. Two educators asked to be interviewed (although one couldn't because of her schedule), one refused (feeling uncomfortable with the interview situation), whereas in other cases I chose not to prioritize interviewing some educators because of data collected through informal conversations, as well as time constraints. Appendix 4 provides with a detailed list of participants and their involvement in fieldwork.

60

4.3   Data analysis procedures

Guided by the flexible and highly contextual nature of the study's qualitative design and of case study design more specifically, the data collection and analysis started simultaneously. First impressions and observations from the field, as well as unpredictable events, drew my interest towards issues and topics which were unforeseen prior to my being in the field (Cousin, 2005). Qualitative data analysis entails an interpretive process whereby the researcher adopts a grounded theory approach, looking for data to inform the topic, rather than making the data fit preconceived hypotheses. In this process the data may be organised by themes before considering whether they can inform the topic so as to limit the sway of the researcher's preconceptions and broaden the scope of reflection, putting distance between them and the data (*ibid.*). This strategy was adopted from the very beginning with the categories being changed over time to fit the collected data. Additionally, although theoretical foundation was an important initial step in the development of the study design, the approach to theory had to be open to changes. Having a rigid analytical framework at the beginning of the research process risks bringing about a deductive approach to data collection which may result in the researcher missing important information and, even more dangerously, making the data fit the theory rather than the other way around (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Creating a relationship with the participants was judged an important step for facilitating meaningful insights into the informants' practices and the centres' functioning. This was made possible by the choice of a qualitative approach to the research process, bearing in mind that this sort of involvement and contact with the participants implies a risk of bias. This aspect will be developed in a later section.

In this study, data emerging from different sources had to be analysed, which was no minor task. While in the field I created a database aimed at organising notes from observations (see Appendix 5). This proved useful for both data collection, as it made visible any absent observations and allowed better time management and organisation of further data collection, as well as the subsequent process of data analysis. Indeed, this database made it easy to observe the data both separately and in relation to each other, and to locate information easily at any given point in time, which improves the reliability of the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The first findings to be analysed were the interviews. They were coded using *Nvivo* according to the themes that would appear in the participants' speech. These themes were then organised in three main categories, following the research questions they would help answer. The interpretation of the narratives produced from observations was a critical phase in the analysis process. One fundamental characteristic of the form of narrative chosen for this study is that the objective account of events provides spaces within the text for reflections and a range of possible interpretations. In this process of translating the objective account of events into meaning, the subjectivity of the reader or researcher is involved. There is no single way in which to analyse narratives, but rather a myriad of methods, depending on the purpose of the research (Bold, 2012). To avoid making the beginner's mistake of considering each data source and their findings separately, which would not serve the case study's holistic purpose, the data analysis process focused on converging the data, making connections between them (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In fact, the narratives were coded along the same themes as those identified in the interviews. When an informant had been both observed and interviewed, narratives and interview were paired using *Nvivo*. This permitted the linking of theory to practice and the identification of consistency or contradictory elements.

The transcribed observations of staff meetings were analysed in a final stage, using the same main categories used for the narratives and interviews.

The national and each centre's curricula were considered valuable sources of information in relation to the participants' testimonies. However, because the study's purpose and research questions focus on the educators' own perspectives and practices, the aforementioned documents were not analysed in detail but rather used as complements to the observations and interviews. The process consisted of finding equivalents in the texts to the themes or categories referred to by the participants in order to understand to what extent they would concord or differ, in order to deepen understanding and inspire discussion.

The documents to be analysed were the early childhood education curricula of the two countries as well as the specific curricula developed by the ECEC centres (see appendix 8 for more information):

Case 1, Mexico:

-*Programa de estudio 2011, guía para la educadora. Educacion básica preescolar*, (SEP, 2011): Mexico's latest ECEC curriculum.

-Curriculum Case 1: To keep the ECEC centre anonymous this document is not referenced.

Case 2, Norway

-*Rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver*, (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006): Norway's latest ECEC curriculum

-Curriculum (*Årsplan*) Case 2: To keep the ECEC centre anonymous this document is not referenced.

4.4   Validity and reliability issues

Certain criteria have been developed to judge the quality of research. These relate to the validity and reliability of the research: While validity refers to whether the tools developed actually fulfil their purpose and measure the planned concepts (internal validity being concerned with the correspondence of collected data and theories developed and external validity with the generalizability of findings), reliability shows whether repeating the same procedures would lead different researchers to similar results. However, applying these criteria to qualitative research, and case study research in particular, is controversial. It can be argued that they are more relevant and applicable to quantitative studies, because of their concern for measurements (Bryman, 2012). Critics have argued that case study research is too subjective and does not allow generalization. Determining causal relationship in case study research poses an additional problem, that of making sure that inferences are indeed correct and have a solid foundation. However, several tactics can be adopted in the face of this criticism. Being a case study, this research shows a high level of interpretation on the part of the researcher, which cannot be avoided, but could lead to issues of trustworthiness and validity. This risk can be reduced if the researcher takes some precautions such as reflecting on their own positions and bias (see later section on experience), triangulating their evidence sources, (which I carried out with the triangulation of data from observations and interviews), and providing as detailed and "thick" descriptions as possible to give the reader the opportunity to understand the origins of the interpretation of the researcher, as well as warn them of possible bias (Cousin, 2005). Moreover, reliability issues are in the case of this study approached using narratives (see section on data collection methods) providing an objective and neutral description as starting point for later analysis.

In this particular case, seeing as the data is not shared in the style of a monography, trustworthiness and transparency will be achieved by inserting translated citations from interviews, narratives and relevant documents in the text, as evidence to support the interpretation of data. In addition, the translated excerpts in original language can be found in appendix 6 to secure the reader of the accuracy of the translation.

4.5 Ethical issues and reflections from a beginner-researcher

4.5.1 Protecting the participants

Preliminary work

Before starting the fieldwork it was necessary to register the project with the Norwegian Data Protection authority, and commit to the protection of the participants' personal information. For the project to be accepted it was important to guarantee that certain measures were taken to ensure that the participants would not be identifiable throughout the project as well as in the final dissertation. These measures included protecting field notes, ensuring no one other than the researcher would have access to the computer and other devices used to collect the data, and using pseudonyms to guarantee the confidentiality of participants.

Avoiding harming the participants in all kinds of ways is an important source of concern for researchers (Bryman, 2012). For this reason, respecting the participants' anonymity is crucial, so that they can express themselves freely without fear of being judged or even punished for their views. The confidentiality of the data collection was made clear from the beginning in a consent form that was handed personally to each of the participants upon arrival in the field. The consent form also specified the voluntary nature of participating in the project and that the participants could change their mind at any point in time and withdraw from the study, with the immediate deletion of all information relating to that individual (See the consent forms in Appendix 1 and 2). Concerned with being loyal to the participants the topic of the study was also presented in the consent form and further elaborated orally to make sure the participants were making an informed decision when accepting to be part of the project.

When children are involved

As this study focuses on the educators' perspectives and practices, it was made very clear from the first contact with the ECEC centres that children would not be observed or interviewed. It was important for both ethical and practical reasons, since including children would have required authorization from their families and delayed the fieldwork. Nevertheless, contact with children was unavoidable, and observing the educators' practices and relationships with children implied observing the latter's responses and initiatives. However, these observations were only used to provide context to the narratives. No names were ever written down and background information on the children or their families was not solicited. In a similar concern for protecting the identity of the children, photographing them was not permitted.

Although children were not considered informants as such, the potential relationship that could develop between the researcher and the children during fieldwork was a concern from the very beginning. The Mexican centre that includes a classroom of one to three-year old children had asked me in advance to limit my interactions with them as much as possible, to avoid the formation of strong bonds between us. In contrast, they asked that the observations of the elder children be of a participant nature, to make my presence more manageable and natural for both adults and children.

An additional ethical concern was that, as the children were not considered formal participants, their consent to be observed in their interactions with adults was not solicited. The participating adults, the educators, as well as the school's leadership made the decision on behalf of the children when they agreed to participate. It was then my role as researcher to determine when my presence was not welcome, and to judge when the educators and children needed to be left alone.

4.5.2 Language and research

The fact that I, as multilingual, carried out research in the local languages of the involved centres (Spanish and Norwegian) and use English as the study's language, may be significant for the knowledge produced here. An issue in translating observations and interviews into English is that meaning may be altered by the choice of words used depending on one's relationship with the different languages. Translation implies more than transferring meaning across languages, but also interpreting them and making choices coloured by one's own

understandings (Temple, 2008). The contexts wherein I commonly use these three languages (English, Norwegian and Spanish) are different, ranging from academic, to professional and informal. This might have influenced the way I registered and interpreted my participants' expressions. Through the affective aspect of language the narratives produced by the multilingual researcher tell as much about the researcher as the participants (*ibid*.). During interviews, language is significant in the way data is collected, as formulation of questions and the researcher's reactions to the informants' contributions may vary depending on the language used. Translating observations and interviews into a second language, in this case English, implies some additional ethical concerns: being aware of the way the researcher represents their informants through their translations (*ibid*.).

Although some of the participants could have been interviewed in English, there is an undeniable advantage linked to the use of native language. It secured a certain level of equity in the treatment of the participants and their chances to express themselves and feel at ease with the interview situation. I see it as an advantage that the observations and interviews were conducted in the same languages used within the centres to allow some consistency in the use of concepts. In a way, English was used as a bridging language providing a sense of equity, softening up some of the challenges inherent to translating concepts, for instance that of participation: being the language of reference it helped locate equivalences between concepts across languages. The interview guides were first written in English and tested on English speakers in Norway. During the translation to Spanish, some questions had to be formulated differently in order to fit the Spanish language (idioms, customs, vernacular, underlying meanings), generating new ideas, which subsequently brought about substantial changes in the interview guide. The same process was repeated in Norway, with the changes made during the previous fieldwork being incorporated into the new interview guide.

Moreover, this situation meant the services of a translator were not required, saving both time and money, and allowing for a first hand understanding of the interactions free from an intermediary. An interpreter sharing common assumptions with the participants, related to the socio-cultural context or language for example, might also affect shortcuts in the mediation which could in turn impede the researcher from gaining detailed information from the participants (Williamson et al., 2011). An additional advantage was that having worked in both countries in the area of early childhood education in the local languages I had developed a sense of how to use the language in these settings and was able to adapt to them.

66

4.6   Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research process from its design, sample, data collection and analysis procedures as well as the steps taken to ensure its quality. The chapter's main issues can be summed up as followed:

- ➢ The choice of multiple-case study as research strategy helped provide thick descriptions and develop holistic understandings of the functioning of the centres, comparing them across contexts.
- ➢ The ECEC centres were selected using purposive sampling. The first case is located in San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico, and the second in Oslo, Norway. While they differ in their geographical location, sociocultural and political contexts, as well as provision, they share similarities (size, age of children, common pedagogical principles) that make their comparison interesting and informative.
- ➢ The data was collected during a period of three months through semi-structured interviews and participant observation that were transcribed in the form of narratives. The data was analysed along themes using the coding program *Nvivo*.
- ➢ The validity and reliability criteria were approached by triangulating data from several sources of information, reflecting on my position as a researcher and the possible bias linked to the interpretative nature of the research, as well as through the use of narratives which provide neutral accounts of events allowing the reader insights into the interpretation process of the researcher.
- ➢ Throughout the research process several ethical issues such as anonymity, transparency the presence of children and the use of several languages and how to make use of my professional experience, raised particular concern.

In the following chapter the data collected during the fieldwork will be presented and discussed.

5 Findings

In this chapter the data gathered during fieldwork will be presented. The different topics presented follow the main themes identified during the coding process. Excerpts of interviews will be provided as well as some of the observations in order to fulfil the comparative purpose of this study.

Note that some observations are presented in their short version and marked with an *, the detailed observation being filed in Appendix 7. The chosen interview-quotes can be found in Appendix 6 in their original language.

5.1   Educators' beliefs about participation and democracy

5.1.1 Views on the child

Understanding children's participation is related to how we perceive childhood and the child. Participants of both ECEC centres were asked how they justified children having the right to participate.

As this Norwegian educator expresses below, children are considered people and entitled to the same respect as adults, a sentiment shared and expressed by each of her colleagues: "Everyone has the right to be respected, whether you are one or fifty years old, there is no difference. You meet people, and people are babies or adults, it doesn't matter" (1).
This is a view shared by adults within the Mexican case, as the following educator articulates: "I think that when you decide to accompany a person, whether child or adult, in whatever institution, it is your duty to accompany towards participation and create spaces for freedom. If you accompany a person you choose to accompany the other's freedom of choice." (2). This statement shows how, in the Mexican centre, children's rights are viewed in direct relation to the educators' duty. This position questions the relevance of a rights discourse when cut off from active practices and the commitment to one's responsibility as an educator and social actor within an educational institution, as is further exemplified here: "The responsibility you have as an adult in this accompaniment is that of giving space for the other being, it is to open for the development of each one's particularity." (3).

68

Ideas related to this right were explicitly or implicitly mentioned by various participants in the Norwegian school, be it in rather vague terms: "I haven't got more right to my opinion than two-year olds. They have the same right to their opinions as I do." (4) "It isn't only the adult who talks and has opinions. So we must listen." (5). Additionally, Norwegian participants justified their notions of participation with an implicit understanding of children as actors: "The most important thing when it comes to participation is that children be active in their own daily life." (6).

It is interesting to note how educators use the same wording, "competent" and "actors" being vocabulary used explicitly: "When I think of participation I think about a view on children where they are active actors in their own lives. Participation implies seeing children as competent, as actors with relevant input on how they want their lives to be." (7). In contrast, Mexican participants do not employ this common wording of children as actors. Instead, they would describe the child as free and creative, with the notion of the child as actor implicitly embedded within it: "It is important to acknowledge the other's freedom as child, as person and allow them to be faced with a blank sheet so that they can create their own story." (8).

5.1.2 Purpose of participation

Educators were asked to justify participation beyond the principle of rights. Here we can distinguish between instrumental and intrinsic views on participation.

The goal of participation mentioned the most across schools comprises that of developing the ability to socialize with other children. However, this instrumental purpose is referred to in different terms in the Norwegian and Mexican schools. Norwegian participants use the explicit term of social competency, emphasizing the development of certain skills through participation: " If children don't develop social competency they will have trouble making friends at school, and later in life." (9).

Also, the emphasis is centred on the ability of the individual child to meet the group, as a condition for developing this social competency: "It is important that they be seen and heard as individuals, be part of a group, participate in their everyday life, have friends." (10). "After some work they accepted that she would be with them. This is the most important, to create bonds, something in common." (11). "One feels important for those who are around, not only for oneself, it is about taking care of each other, of your friends." (12).

Socializing here emphasizes the individual and his/her internal process. Alternatively, in the Mexican centre the words "skill" or "competency" are not mentioned. Rather than socializing being an individual process of the child in their encounter with the group, it seems that participants consider the group, or community, as the point of reference within which the individual unfolds: "Each one has to look for their space, their role in the group. This education doesn't come from a passive being, it comes from valuing the collective process." (13). Socializing goes beyond the individual's development; it is a collective process.

The issue of social competency is closely linked to that of preparation, a discourse found mainly in the Norwegian school: "The day they leave the kindergarten they should be confident children. Our motto is "confident, happy and strong children". It is very important because they will face a much harder daily life at school." (14). Indeed, children seem to need to learn to socialize and behave with others in order to be successful at school, and later in life: "We have to make children feel confident and strong and happy and prepared for school, in order for them to have the best opportunities to succeed in life." (15). This also relates to developing participative skills: "We want to have democratic decision-making, because they will have to be part of democratic decision-making at school." (16).
In the Mexican school, socializing is not linked to school readiness nor the preparation of the individual child. Rather the focus remains on the group. The ability to relate to others is here linked to the survival of the group as such, the inclusion of all in a community: "We work for the community, for the group, from the group as entity, as care." (17). This quote sheds light on the different way the two cases treat the idea of group. Mexican participants refer to the group as an entity, a concept, transcending activities marked by time and representing more than just the identity of the group, but the centre as a whole. Norwegian participants, however, refer to the group in terms of organized, methodological, punctual gatherings: "We separate children across age groups." (18). "We have a school-group."(19).

Developing autonomy is another strong theme recurrent in the answers of participants across both schools. The concept of autonomy is directly referred to by the Norwegian educator below: "We have a girl who was very shy, now (…) she can make contact with others, take initiative in play, contribute a lot. (…) She doesn't need to be around me, she feels more independent." (20).

70

Observation box. 1: Free play (Norwegian case). Autonomy: challenged in practice.

The educator comes into the classroom with a child. The classroom is full of children playing on the floor and at the table. As the child is silent and doesn't make a step towards the other children, the educator asks: "Do you want to puzzle?" the child doesn't answer but sees the computer and goes towards it. She has some crayons in her hand. The educator sees her and says, "Can you put your crayons down first?" and without waiting for an answer, takes the crayons and puts them away. Her colleague says: "I can give you a chair". She picks a chair and lifts the girl up onto it.

In both contexts autonomy is a skill that is developed gradually through time, participation being a means to achieve it, as this Mexican educator expresses: "Participation in the nursery doesn't imply much responsibility, but it does at preschool level. (…) for example with Maria, we are going to ask her to answer and she will not, another time we will let her not answer, so that next time she will feel like answering a little bit, then we will thank her for answering, and little by little she will answer more and more." (21). However, developing autonomy is mainly referred to in the Norwegian school as a building block, contributing to a perspective focused on preparation for school and later life. ECEC in this sense is a preparatory stage in children's lives: "I want children to be self-confident, dare saying when something is not ok (…), make it on their own, feel they don't always depend on an adult, but that they can do things by themselves, decide by themselves, make themselves heard." (23).

Further, the purpose of participation is closely linked to the building of the child's identity. Identity is built through self-discovery. In the Norwegian case the process is viewed as dependent on the child's ability to be left alone and manage their own time and interests by themselves, as these two educators remark: "I think kindergarten is a place where children discover who they are, get to know themselves (…) they cannot be themselves if the adult controls a lot. (24) "They set the frames by themselves. (…). In general I think they look for what they need by themselves." (25).

In the Mexican case the process of self-discovery is linked to the confrontation with the group: "If you want to be alone it's easy, (…) but the group allows developing the individual. The group is the regulator. The group will help you to be the maximum of what you can be." (26). Another educator adds: "We work from the idea of assembly, from the respect of everyone's voice. We work on the child's ability to listen to the other's voice and its own voice." (27).

In both cases this process is linked to the perceived adult role as passive and stepping back, an idea to which we will return later.

Observation box 2: Circle time (Mexican case – preschool level). On the importance of letting one's voice be heard by the group.

One child (yy) arrives late to the circle: everybody is already sitting around the table. A child passes him a candle, symbolizing that it's his turn to share something, but the child doesn't react. The educator asks him "do you want to share something with us?" the child says no with his head. The educator goes to him, sits down by his side and tells him with a low voice: "I think it's important that you share something with us". The child remains silent. The educator continues (to another child):" let's see; xx do you remember what happened yesterday?" the boy mentions that "he (yy) pushed me and it hurt". The educator: "yy, do you remember?" The child nods. "Remember that you were going to bring a letter to xx? The child takes an envelope out of his pocket. The educator helps him open it. "Look, here is a drawing that yy made to say sorry to xx!". He encourages yy to give it to the other boy who is sitting on the other side of the table. He hesitates to take it. "Take it xx, it is a gift from yy".

5.1.3 Meanings of participation

The purpose participants linked to the concept of participation is directly dependent on the meanings they attach to it. The theme most referred to by participants in both cases is that of participation as expression. However, the meaning they attach to the idea of expressing oneself varies across cases.

The Norwegian participants all mention the possibility of expressing one's ideas in terms of what could be interpreted as freedom of expression: "Children's participation means they have the right to be seen and heard." (28). It is interesting to see that once again Norwegian participants use the same wording to describe how expression results in participation: "To participate doesn't necessarily mean to do what you want all the time, (…) but that you are seen and heard." (29). "As a pedagogue I have to make sure that all children have the same opportunity to express their intentions, and be seen and heard." (30). The terms "being seen and heard" mirror the recommendations found in the curriculum.

This suggests another perceived adult role, this time as active protagonists in realizing participation, implying the interpretative role of the adult.

Observation box 3: Transition (Norwegian case). On interpreting the child's intention.

An educator goes back and forth in between classrooms. A girl, who cannot speak, follows her. The educator takes her hand and says, "come with me, we are going to the kitchen and find your food. I think you are hungry."

A few participants across both schools make the link between expression and action.

As one Mexican educator states: "participation is pleasure in action, 'pleasurisation'!" (31). Suggesting the necessity of linking interests and intentions with practical consequences, the following Norwegian educators state: "We observed children playing, and we used it to make plans and continue working with children." (32). "You can hear that children want to do something, and organize things so that they can do it." (33).

Observation box 4: Weekly staff meeting (Norwegian case). On the planning of activities by the adults.

Three educators (one from each classroom) and the leader are sitting around a table in the staff room. They are exchanging information about what each classroom are working on.
Leader: "Has classroom 1 been working on a topic lately?"
Educator "I don't know actually. This week we are going to observe what they do. Lately there are more table activities, a little less playing."
Leader: "Why is that so?"
Educator: "I don't know. We have to investigate that".
The educator bends towards the leader's list of activities and explains what is written:
"The school group and feelings: it's about how to interpret feelings, it's a topic about interactions".
An educator gives examples of what the activity could consist of: "the older children could demonstrate the activities to the youngest during a circle time activity"
Another educator comments, "This sounds interesting!"
The other one answers "Yes, maybe, maybe not, we'll see."

In that sense, expression must result in a concrete practice i.e. have a practical consequence in terms of what is actually done for it to be called participation. However, these statements suggest the implicit role of the adult as being in charge of linking participation to action.

Another strong theme, much discussed among participants, is that of choice. However, the idea of participation as the ability to make choices is envisioned differently in our two cases. In the Mexican school, the choice-making-process of children leads the pedagogical work: "Some days we come with specific propositions and the children decide if they want to follow them or not. Other days it's much more open, but always parting from a topic that they choose themselves. The topic of cavemen, they chose it themselves in the assembly. All the curricular activities that we work on are led by the topic." (34).

In contrast, the idea of participation as choice is far less clear in the Norwegian school and even controversial, reflecting uncertainties as to how to define participation.
Some make a sharp difference between participation and choice making: "Participation cannot happen without acknowledgment. Then it's not participation, it is just decision-making." (35). At the same time the same educator stated the following: "I think it is good for children to steer their own daily life. (…) They need to be allowed to decide a lot for

themselves. (…) If they want to play they can play, if they are hungry they can eat their lunch." (36).

Some encompass decision-making within the concept of participation: "Participation means being aware that it is not me who decides, it is not me who knows what is best for you. But you and me together will find out how your day is going to be." (37). "Everybody is allowed to make decisions." (38).

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Observation box 5: Free play (Norwegian case). The child's free choice and the adult's decision-making.

An educator is sitting at a table repairing a book. A girl comes to her and says, "I want to puzzle". The educator, without moving from her place, points at a puzzle lying on the table and says, "Here, you can play with this one." Pointing at another child sitting at the table: "You two can play together."

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Participation understood in terms of choice and decision-making is here envisioned as a collaboration between adults and children. Children can thus make decisions and choose between options set by the adults. This controversy is apparent in the ways they choose to define democratic practices more generally. These are referred to in terms of voting, a process first and foremost framed and led by the adults: "Some wanted to play "school" in the room where we have the train station. (…) so they got two stickers to choose from (…). We see what idea gets more stickers, that will be what the room will become (…). That's a democratic election." (39).

In the Mexican school the concept of democracy is approached differently: "We don't use the term democracy, (…) because it is an adult construction. The child has its imagination, its world, (…) within these worlds we look for participation. We use the words assembly, listening, respect… more than talking, it is about practicing, reflecting." (40).

In the Mexican case's conceptualization of democratic life, horizontality is key: "According to our capacities we try to create a horizontal space where we all learn from the older child's idea, and we all attend the youngest's needs." (41). This horizontality is illustrated by a Mexican educator with the example of ownership: "If a child brings a toy, passing the door your toy becomes our toy. So you need to learn that you bring it to share it with the risk that something might happen to it. That is what we try to question with ownership. Instead of owning, being. If you are not ready to share, don't bring it… Here it is for all of us." (42).

Here we can see that democratic processes of participation are linked to the idea of children taking responsibility for their action, predominant in the Mexican school: "From the moment that you decide to accompany the other in their decision making, the other takes

responsibility for their decision. For example, the toys children bring from home. They take responsibility for their objects. But you are accompanying them." (43).

Taking responsibility for choice and actions is conditioned by the quality of interaction between the child and the adult and contributes to defining the relationship: "We declare that you can disobey all you want, but you must explain it, give me an alternative. Between what I suggest and what you suggest there is a meeting with a series of consequences. You propose and assume the consequences. I'm the most sensitive structure you will find." (44).

Observation box 6: Conflict solving (Mexican case – preschool level). Taking responsibility for one's object.

It is the end of the day and the children and educators are tidying up the room. A 4-year-old girl starts crying because she can't find her doll. The educator bends towards her and looks her in the eye: "Look, I'm going to help you find your doll, because it is important to me that you are ok. But I'm going to tell you that I'm going to look for it when we have finished ordering the room." The girl continues crying and the educator explains more about the fact that she needs to take responsibility for her things. The girl cries without stop and doesn't manage to calm herself down. She follows the educator downstairs to mealtime but doesn't calm down. The educator keeps on talking to her. Then the educator finds the doll in the next room and hides it behind her back. The girl sees it and starts laughing and tries to grab the doll. The educator explains that she is going to put the doll in a safe place until she has finished eating and cleaning. The girl starts crying again even louder. Another educator arrives and takes over. She sits the girl on her lap and continues talking to her while stroking her back. In the kitchen the educator tells me "She uses crying as a strategy, but for me it is important that she learns to take responsibility."

However, Mexican participants acknowledge that learning to take responsibility as actors materialized in participation is a process that needs to be learned: "Participation in the nursery doesn't imply much responsibility, but it does at preschool level. We ask for more autonomy." (45).

Observation box 7: Mealtime (Mexican case – Nursery level). The adult guiding the child towards taking responsibility.

Some children have finished eating and an educator follows them to the bathroom. Her colleague stays with 4 children at the table. One girl wants to leave the table and leaves her plate there (instead of bringing it to the kitchen) and the educator says: "what happens with your plate?" The girl doesn't answer. The educator continues: "when we finish eating we bring our plate to the kitchen, remember?" no answer. "You are a big girl, you know what you are doing." The girl nods. "So?", the educator replies. Then the girl takes her plate to the kitchen.

Participation entails a social aspect, not only as a purpose, as seen in earlier examples, but also in its essence, as these two Norwegian educators express: "Participation means that you have a voice, you are part of the group." (46). "When you have helped them to get friends and get included in the group you see that their voice is getting stronger." (47).

Valuing participation as inclusion in a community is also strong in the Mexican school: "Participation is framed by the values of community living." (48). In this sense being part of the group implies participating. On the other hand, this suggests that not finding one's place within the group means one is not participating. This idea is found implicitly within the Norwegian case: "Maybe the one you want to be included cannot play the game so you have to help her. (…) If they accept her and she manages to play then you can move on." (49). "I think that participation happens when they can physically be part of the activity, with an adult or other children." (50).

Participation also has indirect meanings, drawn from the instrumental understanding of its main purpose. Indeed, Norwegian participants refer to participation as a means to learning: "Children don't know they are learning language, in a way you use participation as a way to meet your instrumental learning goals." (51).

Participation is thus a methodology: "New research shows the best way of learning language is through play. You win much more from taking children's interests as a starting point. Then I can put in extra elements. It becomes hidden learning." (52).

Here it is interesting to observe, in the way it is expressed, how participation is seen to lead to but is separate from learning; children, being unaware of their learning process, are made passive, while the adult plays the active part: "Children can decide what they want to do. As long as you can see the situation's learning potential, it is ok." (53). "It is nice that they come with ideas. Then we show them support. We can help them and put in some knowledge." (54).

*Observation box 8: Circle time (Norwegian case) – A summary of three episodes. ***

1. Twelve children and two educators are gathered in a corridor, sitting on benches facing a wall where a white poster is hanging. One educator is sitting among the children while the other one sits by the poster. The goal of the activity is to introduce the topic of Christmas to the children. Children are asked to say one thing they associate with Christmas which the educator then writes on the board. When everybody has said one thing, she closes the circle by announcing lunch.
2. All the children sit on benches in the hallway. An educator arrives and tells them to queue in the form of a bridge and sing a specific song on their way out of the corridor. The other educator assists in putting the children in a line and guiding them in the right direction.
3. The children are gathered in a circle sitting on a bench and the educator on a chair. She informs the children of the songs they are going to learn and practice, as well as explaining the lyrics. She explains that they are going to practice because they are going to present the songs to the other children.

Here the educators adopt the roles of teachers and organizers with clear learning goals. Children are asked to participate, but within the organized frame set by the adult. The activity is adjourned on the terms of the adult.

In the Mexican school the same instrumental view is expressed, but in more subtle or indirect ways in terms of participation as experimentation: "In the nursery we want them to experience all areas, there are different levels, preschool children can plant, work the soil more, but those from the nursery can start discovering what is in the earth, developing a relationship with it. So participating also includes experimenting." (55). However, the idea of learning is secondary: "We emphasize the collective, because this is an education that is not primarily cognitive, in the sense that if you know you are and if you don't know you have no value. Being doesn't come from knowing. Being comes from being." (56).

Observation box 9: Organised activity (Mexican case – preschool case). A summary*

Six children and an educator are gathered in a room. The children are sitting at tables while the educator stands by the blackboard. The activity's goal is to become familiar with letters and writing and the educator adopts the role of instructor and organizer. His focus is on explaining the purpose of the activity and informing children of his ideas, while at the same time giving them the opportunity to do other things, leave the room, or chat. He goes from child to child to help them with what they are doing. Authority shows when children don't pay attention to what he is telling them, and always comes with an explanation.

Moreover, further implicit definitions of participation involve children getting their basic needs fulfilled as this Norwegian educator states: "The youngest ones need to sleep, rest. You have to see what they need. Who needs the most help. In other kindergartens they are concerned with the active ones, but what about the others, they don't know how they feel and what they need." (57). This suggests a passive understanding of participation on the children's side, participation being equalled to existing as a human being and depending on others for their survival, and consequently, an active role for the adult as a major protagonist in making participation a reality.

5.2 Educators' beliefs about their role and responsibilities as adults

Different understandings of the concept of participation and of its realization in practice imply different adult roles.

5.2.1 Adult's attitude

Participants from both schools refer to adult's attitudes towards children as main factors in the realization of children's participation. A determining aspect is the adults' awareness of their own practice and position in the school and the group, as demonstrated in the reflections of this Norwegian educator: "I'm part of this life (…) you are inside their lives, that's why I don't feel that I have to change anything." (58).

Her Mexican counterpart also states: "Right now we are in a moment called "taking the presence back". (…) We make the space our own and we build this feeling of group." (59).

The adult's role is described as a process of self-questioning and self-observation. A Mexican educator mentions that: "The major responsibility is self-questioning, about my own values, my own proposal as human being in this world." (60).

These statements from the Norwegian case illustrate that this awareness is not something punctual. Rather, it must be constant. "What is necessary is constant awareness, about where I am, where I'm needed so that children can express their opinion. We must be aware that we must be active and go look for the information." (61). It is important in order to make the invisible, the taken for granted, conscious and visible: "It is something we must think about all the time. A lot about how we work is unconscious. I think participation is such a big part of us, at least the way I was raised, that it can be difficult to make the difference between what I know and what I think I know." (62).

In this process, the adult must adopt a child's perspective, trying to take children's needs as a starting point: "With Per we could think that he doesn't want to be in contact with the adult, but it is not true. You need to get to know him. If he is unsecure he goes away. So it is about reading the different children, see their needs and act thereafter. This becomes their participation." (63).

That is important also in Mexico: "I think that in this type of pedagogy the adult's ego has to be put aside to watch what is happening with the child. It was hard because I constantly wanted to suggest things to do…" (64).

In their testimonies, Norwegian participants seem to equal children's participation with adult awareness of children. This blurs the line between participation as a child's process or an adult's and moves the attention away from the child to the adult's role. The adult becomes a

78

condition for participation; almost as if the child's participation is only present the moment the adult observes/allows/participates in it. In some situations they suggest that the adult must provoke interaction and children's communication in order for them to fulfil their role and enable participation: "The youngest can't speak that much so I have to ask or sometimes guess." (65). "If you want the youngest to participate you have to study and observe them a lot." (66).

In the Mexican school, a child's perspective also implies that the adult understand and reflect on their place in the group, as being one of many: "The responsibility you have as adult in this accompaniment (…) is to open for the development of each one's particularity. And at the same time that of the group, without becoming the judge, (…) because you are part of the group." (67).

5.2.2 Adult-child relationship

To allow for participation to occur, participants from both schools remark that the relationship between them and the children be a cornerstone, and it is their role to build, develop and sustain it. Here, certain steps have to be taken, as expressed by this Mexican participant: "The first days, it is all about playing, one comes closer to the children, and when they drop their guard bonds are created, and these become stronger and then they stabilize." (68). His colleague refers to the fact that this relationship building depends on the adult's attitude: "They are free not to want to come closer to me. I will be here, the moment they want to come to me. I prefer that they come little by little than forcing the process." (69). This process is also emphasized in the Norwegian case: "In the beginning if some children are shy, then I don't go directly to them, I sit down and I start talking about small things, ask them what they like to do so we get to know each other, later a relationship is built." (70). When a relationship based on trust is built, fruitful interactions can happen. These interactions allow adults to develop their knowledge of children, as a Norwegian educator mentions: "They must have a relation of trust with me for them to be willing to present their wishes to me." (71).

Participation and knowing children, their interests, needs, and ways of communicating go hand in hand. These two Norwegian colleagues emphasize this aspect in two different ways. One sees it as a condition for the adults to be able to give children the opportunity to

participate: "I have to know the children well enough so that I can find ways for them to shape their own days. What do they need, what do they want, what are their interests." (72). The other sees participation as a means: "We use children's participations mostly to get to know children." (73).

In both schools the ideal relationship the adult must strive to build is one based on equity, dialogue, and reciprocity. However, if the Norwegian participants mention dialogue and reciprocity, they do so in terms of a means for them to fulfil their role as educators with a pedagogical responsibility, "In the 'school group' we can talk, about the fact that we prepare for school, and at school you can't choose if you want to join or not." (74).
The participants in the Mexican school emphasize dialogue and reciprocity as a condition for community living: "My thinking is: I am going to pay attention to him because he is paying attention to me." (75). "Sometimes we get lost in complicated theories… Sometimes it is the most simple thing: you and me; how do we solve this issue." (76). Adults' here view themselves as an integral part of this community: "If we talk about being a community, then our needs as adults, taking care of ourselves, are also important." (77). "I ask myself about my own limits as a person. To what extent do I allow… until what point can I… in order not to hurt myself and not hurt them." (78).

Observation box 10: Circle time (Mexican case – preschool level). Reciprocity and equity between the adult and the child.

The children are sitting around the table together with an educator. A girl is playing with a toy while the educator is explaining an activity. She twice asks the girl "what do you think?" but gets no answer. Then she takes the toy and asks again. The girl answers "yes". The educator explains, "I take the toy away because it's distracting me. I don't know about you, but me, it doesn't help me."

5.2.3 Flexibility - Theory vs practice

Faced with the daily life of their ECEC centres, participants from both cases mention flexibility as an educator's main task. As a Mexican educator mentions: "The norm… it's complicated, but at the end it's about those decisions that the adult can change. It is elastic." (79). In this sense, they acknowledge the discrepancies that arise when children's participation is given space, between what they may plan and what may happen in practice. As his Norwegian counterpart states: "You may have a plan and it may not end as you thought it would if you listen to what the children want within that plan." (80).

80

Another Mexican participant refers to the spontaneous character of practice: "Your boss is how things develop, unfold during the day. It is a surprise. You can never come and say: today I will do that. Here is where the ego is, I get frustrated because I haven't done… but I did things much more productive and important than those I had planned at home." (81).

Moreover, many Norwegian participants describe it as the adults' responsibility to adapt to the heterogeneity of needs, demands, and interests represented through children's individualities. Here are a few examples:
"We have a child with autism. It brings the expectations that we find ways to work that takes care of the individual's integrity." (82). "In theory there shouldn't be any difference between a one year old and a six year old. In practice you have to be much more aware with a one year old because it is more difficult to grasp their intentions." (83). "They have different competencies when it comes to making their opinions count. Some are good at making contact, some are good at communicating, some have been in the kindergarten a while and are very confident, some are not." (84). "The challenge is to see those who can't express what they want. So that everyone can participate at their own level." (85).

In the Mexican school, seeing as the group is the arena where individuality can unfold, adapting to heterogeneity is a process that happens within the group itself: "The group gives them a place. For example Eric says 'well I'm not him, I cannot do that', (…) but he found another place within the group, where he feels more confident. What they do is a construction at a psycho-emotional level." (86).

Educators must also adapt to the variety of situations they may encounter during the day, as explained by these Norwegian educators: "It all depends on the situation. If it is only me with many children in the classroom, then we must wait for another adult to fix it, in case I have to go out of the classroom to get painting for example." (87). "A lot has to do with organization, if someone of the staff is sick. But then it is about simplifying: how can I do it the easiest way possible so that they don't miss on what they have been looking forward to." (88). In the Norwegian centre "there are 45 children and 45 ways, and in six months we have to think of new things." (89).
As a consequence, flexibility is shown through the methods adopted, the roles taken by the adults, and their ability to improvise, which is also the case in the Mexican centre: "We are

always questioning the method. There is never only one way. There is a general idea, and then it's like, how do we go towards it? More than anything it's about letting the other live, do, around that proposal." (90). "For me it is like that: if the rule helps us, that's great, but if it doesn't, well we put it there ourselves, we can take it away when we want." (91). Flexibility is here more than a method, it is a way of understanding education: "It depends on how we feel as well. In an education like this, where you educate and talk about the heart, the relationships between the hearts, well then when your heart is happier it has an influence. This is a living thing, we are people, things are very intuitive." (92).

5.2.4 Frame setting and challenging – limits to participation

Informants were asked what challenges are associated with a practice centred on children's right to participate.

The main limitations to participation mentioned by Mexican participants revolved around security and the need to set frames around children's daily life. "The big enemy is the question of security. (…) This is what you get in exchange of having open spaces." (93). This opinion is shared by those in the Norwegian center as well: "You don't always have to use authority, but when you go on a walk, you have the responsibility, so you have to sets the limits." (94).

Observation box 11: Free play (Mexican case – Nursery level). Limitations to freedom: the adult's explanation.

An educator is organising some shelves in the room. Some children are playing with a box, getting inside it and sitting on top of it. They do it at the same time and use their strength to fit in the box. The educator sees what is happening and says: "stop, stop! Look at what is happening, I think we are going to leave the box. We have to take care of each other's body and xx is getting hurt. Also, we broke a box already the other day." And she takes the box away.

However, the role of adults in this setting is envisioned differently across cases.

In Norway, it goes hand in hand with the idea of the adult as teacher and organizer: "You can't choose not to join the "school group". Because it is about preparing for school and face expectations." (95). "Freedom is limited because now we need to eat, change diapers, we need to fulfil these physical needs, then it is more organised." (96).

In Mexico, the adult is the link between the individual and the group: "There is a routine, a foundation that we have to maintain, limits that are there for the care of the other and for the care of the group." (97). "Sometimes you have to be confrontative, you are the adult who helps him to relate to the collective, you need to say stop. So that he understand how to be in the group." (98).

5.3   Purpose of education – links between education and society

Practices in the here and now are influenced by educators' beliefs, as discussed earlier. Their understanding of the purpose of education will have an impact on how they envision their role as educators and on the shaping of their practice. Participants were specifically asked how they viewed the role of ECEC education in society and of their school in particular.

Across both centres educators' first answers showed they viewed the purpose of education in terms of its impact on the individual child. The purpose of ECEC was described as children's happiness by this Mexican participant: "That the child grows up happy: respecting its rhythm, listening to the child, teaching it, loving it, hugging it, it feels safe. That's the idea of the happy child." (99).

Happiness is complemented by the Norwegian participants with ideas concerning preparation for school and life in general, along with the development of identity: "We want to make children confident, strong and happy and prepared to school, so that they have the best

possibility to make it in life. Give them a good start. Both in relation to knowledge and stand on their own." (100). "The safest place where my kids can be is the kindergarten. Then you know they get it all. Knowledge, development, the social aspect, emotionally, cognitively, language. You can see the difference between children who have been in kindergarten and those who go directly to school." (101).

The second topic addressed by participants included the impact of ECEC in the wider society. In Norway, they viewed it in the following way: "It is about contributing to the upbringing of the next generation. To be a teacher in kindergarten allows meeting these people right at the start." (102). "It plays a big part in society. Families depend on kindergarten. (…) the kindergarten give advice and support to families." (103).

Some participants from the Mexican school developed their thoughts about the mission of ECEC along the lines of the political role of education: "The impact is on the person and on society. Because a person who views life differently is constructing change, and contributes to changing the world." (104). "This project is committed to the idea of a changing pedagogy, respecting the kids, a social projection, the idea of bonding with the world, from participation and solidarity." (105). The role of education cannot, according to them, be separated from local reality: "(Chiapas) is an agitated state. From the Zapatista movement, and other things that happened to give another sense to life, there is the need to open spaces where people can express themselves. So places like (this school) give the opportunity to know and value this kind of spaces." (106). "It's a project that takes into account the surrounding social reality. Contrary to closed schools that don't allow seeing the world on the other side of the fence (this school) has always been present in the network of the town, of people committed to an education for transformation, to accompany those who are going to do something different, our children." (107).

In this case they described their own roles as educators as inherently political: "It is the politics of life. The tools I'm using, the options I give, imply values, questions to reality. That's a political practice." (108). However, being politically involved entails further adult responsibility and awareness of their practice: "I don't want to make them anarchists. I don't want it to come from theory. Five per cent of what they learn from us is through the word, 95% is what they observe, the attitude they see, these personal attitudes should transcend the

classroom. They see the process you are involved in. But we are very careful with the issue of intentionality…" (109).

5.4 Personal and professional experiences

Teachers' personal paths and experiences

Participants across both schools present a great variety of personal stories and paths that led them to work in their ECEC centres.

In both centres there are educators who started "by accident", as they were given the opportunity without looking for it and without having any previous experience as educators. What is interesting to observe is how participants link their personal stories with their current positions as educators.

In the Norwegian centre, some refer to their working with children as arising from a straightforward choice justified by their previous care for children: "It was a natural choice for me, I've always cared for children." (110). Others justify their choice by their abilities or skills as pedagogues: "I feel that being an educator I have the opportunity to do something I know I am good at." (111). Further, a few Norwegian educators mention their wish to work in this specific centre because of their identification with its pedagogy: "I applied here because of how they work. I knew their views on children were like mine." (112).

In the Mexican case, however, all educators began working as educators in the ECEC centre because of special bonds to its pedagogy and vision. Their testimonies show that they shared a common understanding of ECEC and its social mission when they started. Two of the four educators were social workers committed to social action in their country before coming to work in Mexico: "I was interested in (the school's) pedagogy because of my experience within free education and social work, and I thought I could continue learning from that school." (113). These varying motivations may be linked to the nature of the institution more than to cultural differences.

When it comes to the two participants without professional experience as educators, their personal stories as part of the local community had led them to develop and identify with the school's mission and vision: "Some time ago I worked with xx (colleague) doing theatre of the oppressed, that also works from questioning the social reality. I also studied social

development. And my family has an indigenous heritage, a different way of seeing life. It allowed me to view things differently." (114).

Informants from both schools describe it as an advantage to have known the school from previous personal experience, either because they had their own children enrolled in the school or because they grew up in the neighbourhood, as these Norwegian participants mention: "I had experience from before, my kids went to this kindergarten. But it's very different when you are an employee." (115). "I have been in this kindergarten as a child myself, and my mother was a pedagogical leader here, so I know the kindergarten quite well. But it is different to work here." (116). This relates to educators' motivation, as expressed by this Mexican educator: "There are thousands of ways of working on your own professional itinerary within the world of education, it has a lot to do with who you want to be as a person. To be educator is a life lesson." (117).

Personal characteristics are also described as an important factor when it comes to understanding and practicing participation. Some show they are aware of personality traits that may hinder or help them in their agentic practices. This Mexican educator states that: "I am who I am, so the process of the group has a lot to do with who I am. Beyond having your career, your titles, it's about the personal process you are going through, where you come from, what you have to give, what is your quality." (118).

Some, such as the following Norwegian participant, argue personality traits can be compensated by developing self-confidence and awareness of their strength as educators: "It is something I have to work on with myself, to give children the possibility to use the whole house. (…) It is a need to control that I have to let go a little. I don't think I'll ever get rid of it, but it has become better." (119).

Linked to the topic of self-development is that of educators' learning process. From their initiation into the schools to the time of fieldwork, all informants across both cases mention the continuous learning process entailed in their work and respective positions. As these two Mexican participants elaborate: "I tell myself 'you are learning too. Allow yourself to be in this process.' It is important because we are sharing, they are learning and I am learning from them too." (120). "I'm aware that I have a lot to learn, and that it's going to be like that my whole life." (121). Being aware of this learning process is almost seen as a condition for being an educator: "People who have this internal questioning are people I think that have

something to bring to the table. In general, when working with people it's important to question oneself and the institution." (122).

When it comes to educator's formal education, informants disagree as to its significance and impact on the quality of their work. The Norwegian educators have different opinions on the impact of their formal education on their practice: "When you have been to school you understand what you are doing. You have this competency. When I was a regular assistant I didn't have much experience. Now I can see things differently (…) I can see who needs me. You have this knowledge. (…) You understand the pedagogical work, when you are in meetings and talk about children and pedagogical goals and stuff, what you can do, how you can contribute." (123). "I had worked a lot before I (got the title of) educator. So I don't feel it is very different. What you have is a diploma. That's the biggest difference for me. A lot I learnt at school I had heard before because I was here, in the system, with children, for 15 years." (124).

The learning process is in the Mexican centre informal: "I asked if I had to read something, and he (the coordinator) told me I had to live it day by day, through practice, observing a lot. That's how I am learning." (125).

5.5   Structural and cultural factors

5.5.1 Collaboration culture

Good collaboration between colleagues is viewed as a cornerstone of educators' possibilities to learn and develop their practice.

The following Mexican educator states that: "(my colleague) is very open, she gives me the confidence to say 'look, I don't know how to solve this.' She is my partner and she gives me the freedom to experiment." (126).

Learning from each other is also valued by Norwegian participants: "We go around and see how others are working, so we can take ideas back to our own classroom. The others can see sides of children I hadn't noticed and I get a better picture of the child, that obliges me to change my attitude towards that child for example." (127).

In the Mexican centre the individual's contribution to the team is mentioned as something that is important to promote: "It's very good to be open to the new ones who arrive because

they also have things to bring to the table. It's something that is alive, the team too is alive, changing, the different influences enrich it." (128).

Many understand educators' responsibilities in terms of their inclusion in a community of practice, as in the Mexican centre: "The bonds between educating teams is like another aspect of community-living, there is a common project, that is taking care of the project, the children, but it doesn't imply a unique truth, a unique educative style. The more complementarity and education styles the better." (129).

Responsibilities are indeed not held by one but by many, an aspect also present in Norway: "I have a co-responsibility, (…) it is about seeing the totality, what is there to do, that we are one kindergarten, that works as a whole." (130).

Concrete collaboration practices are materialized through meetings and discussion. Informal daily conversations are often more achievable than formal meetings in both Mexico ("We don't manage to talk formally about cases each week, but we always comment what is the most relevant day by day." (131).) and Norway ("We struggle a little to have meetings every week, but we talk when we can in the classroom." (132).).

Observation box 14: Staff meeting (Norwegian case). A summary*

In the largest room of the centre eight educators and the leader are sitting around a table. The goal is to evaluate last year's year plan. Two educators are responsible for presenting and mediating the meeting. The document is distributed to the staff. The atmosphere is cheerful and relaxed. After a few minutes the leader announces the start of the meeting and starts reading the document. He makes breaks after each paragraph to allow the others to make comments or ask questions. Educators primarily discuss the formulation and wording of set goals. The emphasis is on making the ideas clear and concrete and avoid that concepts or goals are taken for granted. Participants take time to explain their ideas; in general they are taking their time so that everybody understands. Out of eight educators half of them are actively participating and the rest are more silent, making a few comments from time to time. The personality trait of the participants is salient, as the mediators, keeping a list of those who wish to make comments, are focused on maintaining order and control.

A good collaborative culture is also viewed as important for individual educators to be able to realize their potential, maintain their motivation to engage, and take initiatives. A Norwegian educator schedules the planning of activities to allow her assistants to come up with ideas: "We have a private group on Facebook, (…) they can come with suggestions." (133).

Central here is the idea of educators being acknowledged as individuals whose personalities, ideas, and knowledge are valued and taken into account. The following Mexican educator values being able to be himself thanks to the presence of his colleague: "The other adult is here, containing the child and myself when I act like a clown." (134).

88

Acknowledging her colleagues' different paths and knowledge the following Norwegian educator proffers: "I doubt we have equal practices, because we are marked by the people who work here. To understand a concept like participation takes years. It has to do with the perspectives you have before you arrive here. When I arrived it spoke to me, others have another way to go." (135).

Flexibility in day-to-day life, organization, and regulations are also mentioned as crucial for the adults to make their beliefs and visions a reality, a point on which Norwegian participants concord: "We can almost do as we want, as long as it doesn't compromise safety and health. Here you can contribute, participate at all levels." (136). The job is organised so that each employee has a lot of freedom. Compared to school." (137). Flexibility in this sense is referred to as adaptability to children and situations and as a space for adult's personality and creativity to unfold: "I feel completely free, to do whatever I think about, feel like doing." (138). The consequence of all educators having a say in daily practice is that "it's not always that obvious in the classroom who is the leader and who are the assistants." (139).

5.6 Other factors

Participants of the Norwegian case mention pressures such as the expectations placed upon them from educational authorities: "There is a lot of pressure when it comes to working on language, it is important that children learn to master the language as much as they can before they start school. But there are limitations. They should be able to develop at their own tempo." (144). These expectations are posing challenges for both their abilities to realize their agentic potential and children's participation: "Expectations lead our daily life more… but we are not that good at following all of these expectations. (…) We try to do it in a way that works for us, not for those who decide above us… and for the children they don't know." (145). "Inside these 4 walls we have freedom. Outside it is different, there are things coming from those who decide, above us, then we are limited." (146).
At the same time the challenge is described by some as productive, pushing them towards even more awareness and reflections: "Expectations influence us in the sense that it is tiring to feel limited. That we always have to find new ways of doing things to make things work… because we think kindergarten shouldn't be like school and to protect the participation perspective." (147).

Curriculum is also described as an expectation to fulfil: "It is mandatory to use the curriculum. We use it when working on themes. It is important for me that we go through the 7 disciplines during the year." (148). However this Norwegian educator's opinion isn't shared by some of her colleagues: "How much I use the national curriculum varies… sometimes I focus a little more on it, sometimes I do things I think are important. We have the year-plan anyways. This is the one we should keep in mind." (149) "I am more spontaneous in the here and now. But from time to time you can do something with the year-plan in mind." (150). The curriculum is also described as more of a tool which is to be used critically: "The curriculum has little influence on the planning of activities. We use it more for discussions on values." (151).

This idea is found throughout the Mexican centre as well, the educators' critical thinking being considered more important than the strict application of the curriculum: "I haven't read all of the curriculum, because the real curriculum is a living thing, changing at the same pace as the team develops." (152).

5.7 Conclusion:

In this chapter we have presented and compared the findings gathered across both our cases. The topics developed by the informants in both cases concerned the following eight themes:

-Their views on children referred to persons entitled to rights,

-The instrumental and intrinsic values of participation, including socializing, preparation, autonomy, responsibility and identity-building, and fulfilling learning goals and basic needs.

-The meaning of participation as self-expression, action and decision-making,

-The role of the adult to be centred on awareness and self-questioning, fostering a positive adult-child relationship based on trust, reciprocity and dialogue, being more or less active protagonists in children's experience of participation, being flexible as well as setting limits.

-The purpose of education at individual as well as collective level

-The impact of experiences on their beliefs and ability to enact them in real life.

-The structural and cultural factors such as the collaboration culture, for educators' agency.

-External factors such as expectations and pressures hindering educators agency or pushing them towards more autonomy and criticism.

These findings will be further discussed in the following chapter.

6 Discussion

In this chapter the findings gathered in our two cases will be discussed using the theoretical frameworks outlined earlier, as well as the literature presented in chapter 3.

The discussion will be organized along the guiding themes provided by our three research questions and the topics presented in the findings chapter. The first research question will allow us to develop themes relating to the views of educators towards the child and childhood as well as discuss the discourse on rights linked to participation, followed by the different meanings educators allocate to the principle and practice of participation. The second research question explores the adult-child relationship and the tension between authority, the need for children to be protected, and freedom. The adult role, as envisioned by participants, will then be debated and contrasted. To answer the third research question focus will move towards the factors participants believe influence their agency, found both in their past experiences, future aspirations, as well as centre-specific structural and cultural organization.

6.1 Research question 1: How do educators make sense of children's right to participate?

As we saw earlier, making sense of participation is closely intertwined with beliefs regarding childhood and the child, the-concept of rights, as well as of democracy. Comparing the meanings given to participation, it should be kept in mind that the concept is highly dependent on and constructed within its respective contexts (Tapia, 2011).

6.1.1 Views on children: taken for granted or challenged?

Defining the Child

A basic educational question is concerned with what being human means (Biesta, 2006). When we look at participants' testimonies of how they view the Child a marked difference can be observed between the Norwegian and the Mexican approach of defining it. Indeed, the Norwegian participants seem to have developed a particular vocabulary in order to describe the Child. When they describe it first and foremost as a person entitled to rights in the same

way as adults, they also justify participation with the idea of the Child being a competent actor, complete with its own free will. The recurrence of the same terms can also be noted with the majority of interviewees; "being active in their own lives". What does that reveal? On the one hand it could reflect a common understanding of Childhood, developed through collaboration and discussion. On the other, it could be a sign that the concept has become institutionalized to such an extent that it is taken for granted by the staff. In both these cases it is worth questioning whether such institutionalization and internalization of a concept, to the extent of it being expressed in the exact same terms, may weaken its actual application.

The Child is here clearly given innate qualities, that of competency and agency. Could such assumptions serve to define ideals of normality (Kalliala, 2011)? Could defining what children are before having met them have a homogenizing effect and weaken the possibility for the Child to be its unique and individual self? According to Biesta, wanting to define in advance what kind of subject the educational activity will produce, with an ideal of what it means to be human in mind, hinders children's ability to show who they are to the world and to develop a sense of their unique identity (Biesta, 2006).

In the Mexican case, participants would recurrently use the term "other" when referring to the Child. The right to participate as well as the role of the educator were not justified with the specific skills or characteristics encountered with the Child. The terms "actor" and "competency" were never referred to. In that sense, the question of what it means to be a Child, or even in more general terms what it means to be human, was left open. By referring to the child as the "other" educators show that they are aware of the power of definition and thereby refuse to predefine what the ideal child should look or behave like. Their discourse is in this sense resisting traditional conceptualizations of the educational relationship whereby the goal is imagined as socialization into predefined norms through the acquisition of certain qualities and skills. Instead, it cultivates heterogeneity and the possibility for learning to become the manifestation of subjectivity and individuality interacting with the "other".

The right aspect

The Norwegian participants refer to children's right as something obvious and a consequence of them being people to the same extent as adults, an idea they seem to take for granted and not to question. This is not necessarily surprising considering the long democratic tradition present in Norwegian society and welfare system, cultural discourses at the macro-level being

of significant influence for the values developed by professionals (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009).

Taking into account the socio-cultural reality which the discourses are embedded in also helps analyse the statements gathered in the Mexican case. Firstly, two out of the four educators were Spanish, born, raised, and educated in Spain which represents experiences that can be said to have shaped their approach to education and their understandings of democracy. In fact, the whole project was founded and its curriculum written with the contribution of Spanish educators. Secondly, participants make direct reference to the surrounding political and socio-cultural reality of Mexico and more specifically the state of Chiapas itself, defending an alternative model of education based on the idea of children as entitled to rights and equity between adults and children. This ambition of promoting resistance to the hegemonic education models embodied in the Mexican public education system and liberal ideology, may be a reason why Mexican participants seemed to question the idea of children's rights more naturally than their Norwegian counterparts.

Going deeper into what a rights discourse on children, education, and participation entails, it can be argued that taking such rights for granted puts their actual application at risk. Indeed, considering rights in uniquely legal terms which are endorsed first and foremost by governments poses the risk of their remaining at a conceptual and rhetoric level only with no guarantee of their impact on the actual lives of children (Robeyns, 2006). A rights discourse should also entail a moral aspect involving the personal commitment of those individuals who are a position to do something for the realization of such rights, such as education professionals. This position is expressed in both cases though in a more explicit way by Mexican participants who refer directly to children's rights in terms of adults' duty and mission. Indeed, children's rights imply certain adult roles and responsibility, a point to which we will return below.

6.1.2 The meaning of participation

The UNCRC in the following articles mention, although indirectly, the child's right to participate.

> Article 12
> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Article 13
1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
(*United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child*, 1989)

These articles and the concepts they refer to can be interpreted in various ways by education professionals.

Purpose of participation

Instrumental views on participation are opposed by conceptions that value the *intrinsic* educational value of participation with its evaluation going beyond quantifiable measurements. The consequence of such educational values is that participation adds to the quality of education processes themselves (Tapia, 2011).

In both cases participants view the importance of participation partly in terms of preparing the child for life. However, the discourses of the Mexican participants are subtler than the Norwegian ones. Indeed, in the latter direct references are made to school-readiness, the ability to make friends, and developing autonomy. Children are in other words expected to develop certain qualities. The recurrence of the terms "we want children to be…" shows that adults' expectations are meant to be fulfilled, participation thus being seen as the socializing process of children within pre-established norms.

Preparation for school and life more generally is thus understood in terms of learning outcomes, an understanding which is not entirely foreign to the Mexican case. While educators there do not make direct reference to the idea of school readiness, they do stress the importance of developing autonomy. However, less focus is placed on preparation in the sense that the purpose of participation is not justified according to external factors, such as adaptation to social norms or school readiness. Also, contrary to the Norwegian discourse which sees the development of a sense of identity as a condition for being able to adapt to and act within the established order of things, identity building and self-assertion within the group is viewed by the Mexican participants in relation to internal individual processes. While these capacities also have to be learned, the outcomes in this case remain open. In fact, participants referred to the child's potential to disobey as fundamental to the participation

94

process. This could be interpreted as a form of preparation for later life in society, but with an emphasis on the potential of individuals to *transform* rather than reproduce the existing social order. As Biesta (2006) argues:

> The most important question for us today is no longer how we can rationally master the natural and social world. The most important question for us today is how we can respond responsibly to, and how we can live peacefully with what and with whom is other (Biesta, 2006:15).

Viewing education and participation as preparation for predefined norms coincides with a liberal ideology where results and efficiency predominate. A consequence of this is that the educational process is reduced to its technical aspects (Biesta, 2006), implying the fulfilling of pre-set goals in the most effective way possible. This effect reduces participation to only those situations that can be managed, defined, and organized, instead of focusing on its intrinsic value, independent from and transcending the situations and events of which the adults are in control.

If we identify children's participation as intrinsically important in the here and now, independently of how children will develop, make use of their skills, or with what kind of citizens they will later become, the purpose of education is also viewed, and often predominantly according to its instrumental role. However, two different such roles can be distinguished. First, an instrumental economic role, either personal or collective, in line with a human capital approach, which considers education valuable as long as it is profitable with the skills developed through participation seen as an investment with an economic return (Robeyns, 2006). However, there are also non-economic instrumental roles of education. With participation in mind such roles could at a personal level be imagined as developing critical thinking so as to be able to make sound choices concerning one's own life. At the collective level, learning "to live in a society where people have different views of the good life (…) is likely to contribute to a more tolerant society" (*ibid.*:71).

Taking these roles into consideration one could argue that while Norwegian educators emphasize participation mainly in instrumental terms, both economic and non-economic, Mexican educators additionally define participation by its intrinsic and non-economic value.

Participation as expression

In both cases, in line with Article 12:1 of the CRC, participation is referred to as the possibility for children to express their views. Building on this perspective, several questions can be raised: to what extent is participation as freedom of expression taken for granted? Is

freedom of expression enough for participation to be achieved? How does expression translate into participation?

As we saw in the previous chapter, Norwegian participants routinely use wording ("being seen and heard") to define participation in terms of children's expression. Regarding their views on the Child, as competent actors in their own lives, this routine terminology raises doubts as to whether participation is taken for granted by the educators at a collective as well as individual level. In such cases several problems could arise. First, as we saw earlier in the case of ambiguous concepts such as that of Childhood (Ballesteros, 2015), when phrases are used in a routine manner and left open for educators to fill them with the meaning they wish to, their meanings lose strength. Secondly, while the whole staff may understand and use the phrasing in a similar manner, such automatization could lead to the idea remaining just that, an idea, a principle, little critiqued and with no or limited translation into real practice. This particular phenomenon mirrors the rights discourse discussed above, which relegates the right to expression to mere rhetoric.

In fact, as Lundy (2007) argues,

> Article 12 is one of the most widely cited yet commonly misunderstood of all of the provisions of the UNCRC. It is often mentioned under the banner of 'the voice of the child', or 'pupil voice', as it is more commonly referred to in education. Other abbreviations include: 'the right to be heard', 'the right to participate' and/or 'the right to be consulted'. While these provide a convenient shorthand which helps to avoid the use of Article 12's long- winded and somewhat awkward construction, each has the potential to diminish its impact as they convey an imperfect summary of what it requires (Lundy, 2007:930)

The terms "being heard" and "voice" are also recurrently used by the Mexican participants. However, they are not used in a rhetorical vacuum but rather within the specific context of the assembly as part of the pedagogic vision and methodology.

Participants across both cases provide examples of how this participation as expression unfolds. These suggest certain adult roles, which we will return to later, that are crucial to understand the idea of expression. Indeed, as the CRC implies, freedom of expression is not enough. Children's views also have to be "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." (*United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child*, 1989), meaning that adults have to go beyond merely listening to children's voices and take what they say seriously. However, this also gives adults the power to define the extent to which children's

views be taken into account based on their judgement of the child's maturity (Larsen, 2009), thus making the principle of the child's voice rather fragile.

As several participants across both cases mention, it could be argued that expression becomes participation when it results in action, a concrete practice. In that sense, participation is understood as influence (Lundy, 2007), towards which expression is the first step.

Participation and decision-making

Closely linked to the idea of influence is that of decision-making. Participants from both cases understand participation as the opportunity to make choices, but to differing extents and with different implications.

In the Mexican centre, choice is key to participation which even leads the pedagogic work in the sense that children choose freely what they want to do during the day, and are free to refuse the suggestions of the adult. In the Norwegian case, the relation between participation and choice and decision-making is much less clear. Contradictions in participants' discourses regarding the importance of making one's own choices and decisions could be yet another sign of the concept being taken for granted. Some participants made a direct link between the two, while others hesitated and showed doubts, as if they wanted to avoid reducing participation to just freedom of choice. This raises the question of how children's expression can be given due weight and result in participation if it is not an integral part of a decision-making process (Lundy, 2007).

Across both cases the idea of choice is linked to understandings of democratic practices. On the one side, the Mexican centre's pedagogy builds on the practice of the assembly where children discuss and make decisions together with the adults about activities, respecting individual wishes as well as collective ones. On the other side, the Norwegian participants linked democracy and choice through the example of voting. These understandings make the Norwegian conceptualization of democratic practices in the ECEC centre consistent with the principles leading a majority-rule democracy. In such practices participation is, through the voting process, systematized by the adult with the child learning to surrender to the decision of the majority, downplaying his/her own individual freedom (Pettersvold, 2014). On the other side, the Mexican participants' understanding of democracy is more consistent with practices of deliberative democracy, where decisions are reached through discussion and argumentation, an approach wherein children lead the deliberative process with the assistance of the adults (*ibid.*). This is referred to directly by the participants in terms of children

learning to listen to their own voice as well as the voice of the other through practices such as the assembly.

These two contrasting framings of the decision-making process suggest different adult involvement. As Article 12 suggests, "In some decisions, at some point, the adults' views may be irrelevant and the child's view should prevail. In instances such as these, notions of 'consultation' and 'participation' are effectively redundant" (Lundy, 2007:939).

Participation and children's needs

Children being involved in decision-making, having freedom of choice, and learning to deliberate, does not however detract from the child also having the right to be safe and their best interests protected (Lundy, 2007). This raises the question of how children can participate to a meaningful extent and still be protected from responsibilities they are unable to handle.

All participants across both cases mention the importance of fulfilling children's needs, such as sleep, food, and hygiene, with safety being seen as the greater limit to participation. However, at the same time they do not identify with a protectionist discourse emphasizing children's shortcomings and weaknesses (Ballesteros, 2015) but rather consider the fulfilment of such basic needs to be the foundation for further participation to be possible. In the case of the youngest children, participants also mention basic needs such as emotional safety and trust to be the first forms of participation. They also agree on the fact that participation is a process that has to be learnt little by little, with levels of participation expected to rise along with the child's capacity and maturity, the adult thus assuming the essential role of guidance and support. However, the idea of giving responsibility to the child is emphasized more strongly in the Mexican school, when children are asked to assume the consequences of their actions and choices. In the Norwegian centre, responsibility is placed on the adult through the framing of participation practices in voting processes and other organized activities. The implied adult role and responsibility will be further developed when discussing the second research question.

Participation and socialization

As in other studies on the topic (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010) participants across both cases made the link between participation and being part of the group, of the community.

In this sense, participation is the means to as well as the consequence of socialization.

However, a major difference can be observed between the Norwegian and the Mexican understandings of socialization. Indeed, the Norwegian participants underline the importance of children creating bonds with other children through play, in a way consistent with the Nordic tradition of viewing children as creating their own lifeworld, or culture, to which adults have little access and should to some extent stay away from (Kjørholt, 2007). In contrast, the Mexican participants view the group in terms of community, to which both adults and children belong. While Norwegian educators stay on the side and observe or facilitate interactions between children, their Mexican counterparts, who emphasize horizontality and reciprocity of relationships, do not seem to view their position as outside the lifeworld of children but rather as part of the same community. The responsibility of the adult in this socialization process is thus also different, a point that will be further discussed below.

Viewing participation in terms of socialization raises questions concerning the place of the individual in such a process and the consequences it may have for it.
Socialization understood as the learning of skills, as the capacity to relate to others, and the developing of specific competencies, as is described by the Norwegian participants, emphasize the end goal to be the individual's preparation for and survival in the social world, be it at school or later in life. Concern for adaptation to social norms, which belong to the "old" world of adults, can be argued to promote homogeneity and downplay children's uniqueness (Biesta, 2006). Norwegian educators who underscore the importance of participation in the group for the development of self-confidence and identity, a sense of knowing oneself, are thus in their contradiction showing the complexity of finding the balance between the individual and the group, the new and the old. One interpretation that can be drawn from their statements is that the predominating idea entails the individual having to adapt to the group and, as a consequence of that, develop a sense of identity.
The difference between the above and the Mexican participants' view is subtle. These latter participants emphasize the group as prime entity, as a regulator. The idea of the child having to find its own space and position within the group is also present, however the idea of learning predefined norms is downplayed. In fact, these very norms are set by the group, as living entity, the individual child being active in the process this entails. Heterogeneity is thus the foundation of the socializing process, the child expressing both its views and its individuality in its meeting with the other. Contrary to the Norwegian perception, which

mostly emphasizes learning social skills as preparation for the future, the Mexican view is more oriented towards the here and now of the social process. The focus is not on the production of a specific kind of subject, the well-adapted socialized being, but is closer to what Biesta (2006) and Arendt (1977) would call the coming into presence of unique beings. The encounter between such unique beings who acknowledge each other as such is precisely what allows action to take place. As a result of this a new kind of community may be born, one that does not stem from pre-established norms and technique, but one which comes about from the individual response to the different other (Biesta, 2006). This corresponds to two different learning discourses, learning as *acquisition* and learning as *reaction* or response (to the Other). While the former is present in both cases it can be said that the latter is predominant in the Mexican participants' discourse, which mentions education as being centred on question and doubt, rather than answer and know-how.

6.2 Research question 2: How do educators perceive their role in the realization of children's right to participate?

6.2.1 The adult-child relationship: protection and authority

As described in the previous chapter, all participants acknowledge the building of a relationship between themselves and the children to be the cornerstone of participation. The main difference between the two cases can be said to be how this relationship is being used and the adult roles it implies.

Both traditional and protectionist or modern and empowering views on Childhood often coexist within education professionals' discourses (Ballesteros, 2015). Participants from both cases defend a modern view on Childhood, although to some extent the idea of the child's protection and traditional discourses on Childhood were mentioned. In the Norwegian school participants made direct reference to children needing to be assisted and helped in daily tasks and school life. However, it is worth discussing whether it is a sign of contradiction and ambiguity or rather a natural aspect of child upbringing.

There are indeed different ways of understanding the idea of protection. One stems from a traditional understanding of Childhood which views the Child in terms of their shortcomings

100

and helplessness, evaluating them according to their abilities, and shaping the adult role accordingly as an all-knowing authority.

While the word authority often has negative connotations, associated with the educator's status, it can be argued that authority is in fact inseparable from the pedagogic practice (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001). This comes from the fact that adults are introducing children to a world they are themselves already socialized into (Saevi & Husevaag, 2009). An alternative way of understanding the idea of protection is related to the responsibility of the adult to guide the Child into an "old" world while at the same time taking care of what is new in the Child (Arendt, 1977). This means, contrary to views defending the inaccessibility of the child's world for the adult, that adults should not take distance from what appears to be the child's culture if they are to coherently assume their responsibility.

From the results of this study it cannot be stated that participants of either case fully identify with the understandings of protection and authority described above. However, the way the adult-child relationship is defined along with the idea of socialization provides clues as to some general tendencies. The Norwegian educators emphasize to a greater extent their role as setting frames around children's activities, choice-making, and participation. This could be consistent with the Nordic tradition viewing the adult world and that of the child as separate, the adults thus positioning themselves on the outside and setting the frame. However, this separation can be argued to be a Western notion rather than universal (Kjørholt, 2007). Meanwhile, the Mexican educators give children more freedom, letting the group regulate social behaviours and decision-making processes, while simultaneously positioning themselves within the same community as the children. Here, the adult being involved in the child's world challenges the paradoxical idea that freedom and authority can coexist. This mirrors the idea of reciprocity within the relationship that participants across both centres argue to be fundamental to one which enables participation. Indeed, acting as a subject depends on the presence of other subjects who can respond to our initiative (Arendt, 1958). However, different understandings of reciprocity can be identified. Norwegian educators essentially refer to reciprocity as a dialogue allowing for an exchange of ideas and dialogue, thereby permitting the understanding of children's points of view and the subsequent fulfilment of their educational responsibility. In the Mexican centre, participants go further and explicitly refer to the acknowledgment of both parts, the adult and the child, where both are listened to, respected, and taken care of.

6.2.2 Participation by or on behalf of the child?

The Norwegian participants recurrently define their role as that of making children's intentions visible in order to create opportunities for participation. In this process they must learn to know children and their interests, observe them in play, and listen to the conversations they have with their peers in order to have an idea of what they wish to do and are interested in. They can then plan activities taking these new ideas into account. The result of this process is then described as children's participation. Questions can, however, be raised as to the meaningfulness of this type of participation, it being a process which children are essentially unaware of. They are observed and listened to but are not actually active in the process of planning the subsequent activities. In that sense, the extent to which their views are given due weight depends entirely on the interpretation, good will, and organizational capacity of the adult, with the ensuing risk that some of these observed intentions be prioritized at the expense of others, without the concerned children noticing. Moreover, independently from the controversial issue of children living in a separate life world from the adult, it can be argued that the adults, in spite of their best efforts, cannot experience first-hand what the child is living. Nonetheless, the adult role presented above, where the educator has to actively interpret children's utterances and intentions, calls for an attitude that can be defined as child-oriented (Sommer, Pramling-Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2013). Adopting a child's perspective allows the adult to come closer to understanding the child's world. However, in this process the adults must be aware that the child perspective they adopt will always be tainted by their own mindset and will always remain an interpretation. With this in mind, a participation approach whereby the children's intentions have to be observed and transformed into activities by the adults, can be questioned as not only downplaying children's active role as participants but also risking the children's intentions and experiences being transformed according to educators' interests and good will. One way of remedying this risk is to actively inform children of how their views and interests, observed or directly communicated, are taken into account (Lundy, 2007).

The Mexican educators' ways of making use of children's views are strikingly different from the Norwegians. Although interpretation to some degree still informs the adult's position in the sense that the adult has the responsibility of supporting the child who needs help to form and express their views (Lundy, 2007), the pedagogic process is centred on the principle of the assembly and of community. The practical consequence of such pedagogy is that

decisions are made explicit to the individual and the group. The adults here act as a support provider for children in order to transform interests into activities and discussions.

6.2.3 Reciprocity and responsibility

As mentioned earlier the idea of reciprocity is an integral part of adopting a child's perspective. Within such an approach the interaction between the educator and the child is marked by a dialogue where both contribute to the educative experience (Sommer et al., 2013). The encounter between these two subjects who listen to each other, respond to each other's initiatives, and involve themselves in the other's matter, is what fosters participation (Skjervheim, 1996). In that sense the pedagogical encounter between the adult and the child is of an ethical nature (Larsen, 2009). Because educators are in the position of making decisions regarding other human beings, their practice and interaction with the children is inherently moral (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001).

This ethical encounter between subjects, based on equity and reciprocity, implies a shared responsibility. Both the adult and the child have the moral responsibility to take care of each other through their shared focus and by listening to each other. This suggests an understanding of participation that goes beyond the organization of activities, creation of practical opportunities, or the learning of particular skills. Instead, participation is here viewed as inherent to the encounter and interaction between subjects.

The practical consequence of such an understanding of participation involves the educator identifying the ways in which children relate to others, peers or adults, and to assume responsibility within these interactions. This suggests a radically different adult role than the one exposed earlier. Indeed, adults in the Norwegian centre, viewing participation as depending on their own ability to recognize children's interests and desires in order to make them visible, promotes the passivity of a child's role in the process. Alternatively, the preceding viewpoint emphasizes the active role played by the child, whose participation cannot be organised by the adult but rather sustained and encouraged through adult involvement in this meeting with the other.

The idea of accompaniment as the main task of the adult, a phrasing used in the Mexican centre instead of "educator", reflects the reciprocal and dialogical nature of adult child interactions. At the same time, it acknowledges the responsibility of the adult as a fellow being in a position of authority who guides the child in its participatory processes. This

contrasts with a top-down approach where the adult has the power of organizing the child's experience, opening or creating limiting frames around children's right to participate. While it would be rather radical to limit the Norwegian educators' understandings to such roles, the findings demonstrate that it is in the Mexican centre where the idea of reciprocity and dialogue between equal partners, and participation as transcending the role of adults as organizers, is made the most explicit.

6.2.4 Adults' attitude

Participants across both cases mention the adults' attitude to be an integral part of their role as professionals and a condition for the realization of children's participatory rights. While the previous paragraphs have discussed adults' attitudes towards children, here the focus will move towards their own role as adults and professionals.

Educators are expected to reflect critically on both their practice and themselves as adults interacting with children (Larsen, 2009). This is made explicit by all of this study's participants in both Mexico and Norway. In Norway participants underlined the importance of reflection to avoid relying on taken for granted assumptions about the right to participate. However, they also mentioned that they did not find the practice of making this right a reality particularly challenging, while they saw their main and most difficult task as cultivating their awareness about children's needs and intentions. In Mexico, participants emphasized self-reflection but also self-questioning - the importance of challenging their own position as adults - as crucial. This process puts into question not only their assumptions and positions as professionals but also as human beings, and can thus be experienced by many as a painful undergoing (*ibid.*) This is a difficult task which makes, according to these Mexican participants, the practice of participation equally difficult.

Directly linked to the process of self-questioning and reflection is the topic of self-development. Participants across both cases acknowledged the importance of being open and willing to learn to strengthen their understanding of participation and of their own roles, which in turn was expected to impact on children's experience of participation. However, while learning was in the Norwegian centre described as the result of interactions with other adults, through meetings and discussions (a point to which we will return later), Mexican participants emphasized to a greater extent a learning process fostered by interaction with the

104

children. This last perspective mirrors the principle of reciprocity wherein both adult and child contribute to the relationship and learn from each other. It also reflects the vision of the Mexican centre which locates the educator and the child within the same community in which horizontality is a guiding principle.

6.3   Research question 3: How do ecological factors affect educators' ability to negotiate principles of participation in their work?

As our second theoretical framework suggests, educators' agency depends on the interaction between factors arising from their past experiences along with their projections in the future, which in turn play out in the present time. These three dimensions are respectively termed iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative. In this section, we will discuss how these all contribute to the shaping of the educators' beliefs discussed above and how they allow for the linking of these beliefs into practices.

6.3.1 Iterational dimension

The attitudes and viewpoints concerning children that educators develop prior to committing to the profession can impact their ability to translate their beliefs into practices (Ceylan et al., 2009). These beliefs develop through the medium of personal and professional experiences as well as their individual personalities. As seen in the previous chapter, the educators participating in this study came from a wide range of backgrounds and brought with them to their professional life varying life stories and experiences. While several Norwegian participants justified their choice of working as educators as straightforward and based on an interest for children and education developed through time, the Mexican participants chose to engage in education in their specific centre because of their identification to its pedagogy and vision. While participants' different life itineraries inevitably played a considerable part in leading them to care for children and develop an interest for education and care, relying exclusively on this interest as enough to sustain a practice over time is open to question: "Preschool teachers' loving their vocation and adopting a positive attitude towards it will enable them to develop a positive viewpoint towards children" (*ibid.*:2250). This quote

suggests two things. Firstly, that the profession of educator should be seen as a vocation, implying vision and commitment over time, and secondly, that educators should adopt a positive attitude towards it. This latter point can be interpreted as the necessity of being willing to engage in continuous self-development and question one's own assumptions, as discussed earlier. As a Mexican educator argued, "there are thousands of ways of working on your own professional itinerary within the world of education, it has a lot to do with who you want to be as a person. To be educator is a life lesson". In other words, educators should seek to orient their attitudes and viewpoints built in the past towards the future, and avoid taking them for granted.

This argument similarly applies to the use they may make of their education, formal or informal, and life stories. Only a few Norwegian participants had a formal education within ECEC prior to becoming educators. Those that did had the position of pedagogical leaders and were responsible for the quality of the service provided within their classrooms and for guiding their assistants. The majority of these aforementioned assistants also had some kind of formal education which was alternatively carried out while in service or after some years of practice. As other studies have demonstrated, levels of academic training do not necessarily correlate with higher quality practices within the classroom (Roer-Strier, 1996). Rather, experience has been proven to be of higher significance than level of education for its impact on educators' attitudes towards children (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009). This suggests that the capacity of the individual educator to reflect on and transform these experiences into appropriate behaviours and attitudes in the classroom is key to their agentic capacity. In this process, collaboration between leaders and assistants is crucial, as will be discussed in a later section. The above phenomenon also applies to the Mexican centre, where none of the participants had a formal education within ECEC. While two of them had had relevant education prior to working in the centre, their experience as social workers or life stories more generally were used to justify their practice and motivation.

While participants within the Norwegian centre disagree as to the importance their own education had for their practice, some qualifying it as crucial while others as less so, Mexican participants did not refer directly to their formal education but rather emphasized their experience, professional and personal, as the pillar their practice is built around. It could, therefore, be argued that these are signs that the impact of formal education on practices is determined more by personality and individual characteristics, and that being aware of and

106

questioning one's experiences represents an empowering asset in the realization of educators' agentic potential.

6.3.2 Projective dimension

A line can be drawn between educators' beliefs built in the iterational dimension and the visions and ambitions they project in the future. In both cases both short and long-term projections can be identified.

While the short-term projections are similar across cases, focusing on the direct impact of the education process on the individual child and their experience in the here and now, the long-term projections of Mexican and Norwegian educators are rather different.

It has been argued that the ability to link short term projections with long term aspirations is significant for the translation of beliefs into practices (Priestley et al., 2015), as well as for the self-observation and criticism necessary to strengthen children's opportunities to see their participatory rights fulfilled (Pettersvold, 2014).

Norwegian participants locate their role as educators within the instrumental long-term goal of socializing the child and preparing them for school and life in society. In a sense, this projection can be said to be less personal than it is inherent to ECEC as a social institution. Alternatively, Mexican participants mention neither preparation nor socialization as a long-term goal. Rather, they locate their professional mandate within the social and transformative aspects which the centre aims to realize within the surrounding socio-cultural reality. Their professional mandate is thus also personal, drawing upon the beliefs and attitudes acquired in the iterational dimension.

Long-term projections tell us what educators value as the purpose of education. Based on our findings, it can be argued that Norwegian participants prioritize socialization through the transmission of skills which allow children to adapt satisfactorily to social norms. On the other side the Mexican participants emphasize to a greater extent the aim of their educational practice to be the development of individualities, or subjectification as Biesta (2010) would say. This term refers to practices where the goal is the development of subjects with the potential to challenge pre-existing norms and orders. This interpretation would be consistent with the Mexican participants' conceptualization of childhood and the adult-child relationship discussed earlier, which is centred on the acknowledgment of heterogeneity.

6.3.3 Practical-evaluative dimension

Beliefs built through past experiences, as well as educators' short and long-term aspirations, play out in their daily practices. In the practical-evaluative dimension these beliefs also interact with factors inherent to the institutions' culture and structure, a process that goes on to both impact these beliefs and attitudes and determine educator's ability to translate them into real-life practices. Two main topics were developed by the participants, which will be discussed in the following section.

The importance of collaboration

As has been shown in previous studies (Priestley et al., 2015) the nature of the relationships between colleagues has an impact on individual educators' possibilities to shape their practice according to their beliefs and visions. Narrow relationships characterized by vertical and inflexible structures have a tendency to limit educators' agency while horizontality, flexibility, effective communication, and the informal bonds between colleagues, support educators in their ability to practice what they believe. In both the cases here, it can be said that the latter pattern prevails. Indeed, in the Mexican case, horizontality forms a fundamental and explicit part of the centre's vision and project. The staff shares the educative responsibility, and while some have additional coordinating responsibilities, they all hold the same title as educators. Further, it is interesting to note that while the Norwegian centre officially has a vertical structure, consisting of a director, pedagogical leaders, and assistants, educators maintain that the responsibilities are shared, that they all have the possibility to influence decision-making, and that they all enjoy a certain level of freedom. As one educator mentions, "it's not always that obvious in the classroom who is the leader and who are the assistants". The explicit or more implicit horizontality of relationships between educators is also fundamental for the development of a common culture within each respective centre which here greatly concerns children's participatory rights. Indeed, in order to bridge the gap between discourses and reality and integrate such a complex concept within practices, it can be argued that not only the leaders but the whole staff have to be included in the process. Teacher agency includes all teachers as professional educators, not only those assuming leadership over others (*ibid.*). Staff meetings in the Norwegian centre are held regularly between the assistants and pedagogical leaders within each classroom, between representatives from each classroom, and between the staff as a whole. Regular meetings are

also seen by the Mexican participants as a cornerstone of a good collaboration practice which enables them to learn from each other and develop their practice both as individuals and as an educative community. Moreover, research has shown that educators tend to prioritize conforming to the centres' discourses (*ibid.*) over their own. This makes the inclusion of all educators in the development of the centres' culture very important considering that such inclusion allows individual visions and aspirations to be represented, which in turn is expected to strengthen educator's ability to put them into practice. Further, participants across both cases emphasize the importance of seeing their individualities acknowledged with the valuing of the heterogeneity of their personalities, experiences, knowledge, and contributions seen as central for their motivation and effective practices. This acknowledgment both fosters a common culture and structure, in terms of creating good relationships between colleagues, and at the same time represents the outcome of such relationships. Indeed, these allow meanings to be shared and constructed together through the interplay between a sense of self and the ability to perceive others' standpoint (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). This is a process that allows educators to learn and develop both individually and collectively. These informal learning processes are valued in both cases and materialized through the exchange of opinions in meetings, the learning from each other through observation, and adaptation to the group, which is emphasized particularly strongly in the Mexican centre.

A culture of resistance

While education practices are embedded in and often correspond to the surrounding socio-cultural context, it is interesting to note that both centres have, although to differing extents and according to different parameters, developed a culture of resistance to norms which are experienced as limiting their visions and work. Indeed, if agency is implicitly associated with the idea of educational change through actors' creativity and initiative, it can at the same time encompass resistance to change, especially in cases where it is imposed "from above", such as through policy (Priestley et al., 2015).

As seen above, the Mexican centre was created to respond to the needs of the local disadvantaged population in what was aimed to offer an alternative to mainstream ECEC services. They created their own curricula to fit their vision which they describe as education for transformation. The Norwegian centre on the other hand is public and obliged to follow

the national curriculum, to which they added several paragraphs in a document called the year-plan ("*årsplan*"). However, participants characterize their centre as being different from others in its organization, practices, as well as its relationship to policy. Indeed, they underlined their ability as a group to effectively challenge the pressures and expectations placed upon them by higher authorities in order to avoid sacrificing practices they considered as protecting children's participatory rights.

In this sense, both centres encourage their staff, independently and collectively, to adopt a critical attitude and defend their positions and visions. In both centres their respective curriculums are seen by the majority as a document of reference while underlining the importance of critical thinking and following one's instinct as key to the quality of both their educational practices and children's experiences, even if it means distancing oneself from the curriculum's recommendations. In that sense, both centres foster educators' agency through trusting their professional judgement (Priestley et al., 2015). In do doing, both also empower their staff in transcending the prescribed role of knowledge and skill transmitters and counteract the tendency of educators to identify and conform to the policy and external expectations which may lead them to downplay their own beliefs built both in the iterational and projective dimensions (ibid.).

6.4 Summary

Linked to the socio-cultural contexts, political traditions, and individual commitment of the centres, it can be said that the Norwegian case displays a normalizing and routinized discourse on childhood and may take children's participatory rights for granted, whereas the Mexican participants take distance from normalizing definitions of childhood and view participation as a moral matter and a right which it is important to keep questioning. Second, whether they understand participation in terms of expression, decision-making, or socialization, Norwegian participants describe participation mainly in instrumental terms, while their Mexican counterparts additionally defend its intrinsic and non-economic value.

When it comes to the adult-child relationship, the Norwegian participants locate themselves on the outside of the child's experience as frame setters and organizers. They value reciprocity and dialogue as means to achieving pedagogical goals, assuming the roles of interpreters of children's expression, which subsequently entails the risk of disempowering

110

the latter in their own participation process. On the other side, the Mexican participants see themselves as explicitly involved in the child's world and define the adult-child relationship as unfolding within a community of practice. They also attribute more responsibility to the Child, the child thus being the main protagonist of their participation process.

Self-reflection and willingness to learn is emphasized across both cases as crucial if educators and their practices are to facilitate the realization of children's participatory rights, a process viewed as happening between colleagues (as in Norway) or through their interaction with children (as in Mexico).

Results show that in both cases participants consider their past personal experiences and personalities to have more significantly influenced their beliefs and attitudes than their level of formal education. Additionally, the long-term projections of participants differ, from ECEC being oriented towards socialization and preparation in the Norwegian case, to it being envisioned as transformative education in the Mexican. In the here and now of the education practice, horizontal relationships are considered within both cases to foster positive collaborative practices that enable each individual to feel valued and heard and with the freedom to contribute with their own visions to the shaping of a culture they can identify with and more easily translate into real life practices. The importance of remaining critical to pressures and expectations from external bodies are emphasized by all participants in order to protect as well as practice children's right to participate.

In this chapter different topics brought up through the interviews have been discussed along with observations of participants within two ECEC centres in Mexico and Norway. In the following and final chapter a thorough summary of this discussion will be provided which will lead to the study's final conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

7 Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple-case study has been to explore how educators from two ECEC centres, one in Mexico and the other in Norway, make sense of children's right to participate, and their perspectives on their roles as educators in realizing this right. Educators' beliefs were linked to the concept of agency, as it is assumed that beliefs and attitudes, along with other factors found in the centres' organization, influence their ability to translate their beliefs into those practices which facilitate the realization of children's participatory rights.

In this chapter the conclusions drawn from discussion of the findings will be presented to answer the three specific research questions that have led the research process. Obstacles and challenges met with during the research and writing process will then be summarized, addressing the possible limitations of the study. Finally, the impact of the study will be discussed and recommendations suggested for future research. suggested.

7.1 Research questions

7.1.1 How do educators in Mexico and Norway make sense of children's right to participate?

The findings show both similarities and differences in the way educators across both cases understand the principle of children's right to participate.

Differences are very likely rooted in the contrasting socio-political background the centres are embedded in. Indeed, it seems that the long democratic and social pedagogical traditions found in Norway contribute to the way in which educators legitimize and even take for granted specific views on childhood as well as the rights children are entitled to. This attitude has a tendency to normalize expectations about the child, along with his/her process of identity building and behaviours which may limit their potential to act as unique individuals. In contrast, the Mexican participants' involvement in the political and social reality of their region and city appears to fosters an attitude of constant questioning and challenging of complex concepts and principles such as Childhood and children's rights. Based on that attitude, their discourse doesn't take children's participatory rights for granted, but rather considers them as a moral issue that acknowledges children's individuality and unique

112

processes of individuation and identity building. By placing the uniqueness of each child's personality and experiences at the core of educational practice, heterogeneity is evidently a fundamental aspect of their views on childhood.

Views on childhood and rights go hand in hand with beliefs about the purpose of children's participation. While the Norwegian educators justify participation by citing objectives concerning the preparation of children to school and life in general, through the development of skills and competencies, such as adapting to the group and decision-making, the Mexican participants emphasize participation's intrinsic value. The principle is viewed by the latter as benefitting the individual child in the here and now, as well as the children and adults as a whole sharing the experience of a life in community. While the long-term benefits of such participatory practices are certainly not excluded, educators do not intend to direct them towards any specific course nor to fulfil pre-determined goals.

Participation is mentioned in both cases in terms of expression, decision-making and socializing. However, in the Norwegian case, children's ability to participate is viewed as dependent on the adults' presence and interpretation, with adults framing both the decisions to be made and the processes through which they are to be arrived at, which conforms to understandings of majority-rule democracy.

Children's ability to express themselves autonomously in the Norwegian centre is not thought of as enough with regards to participation; adults must see and hear the child for it to be considered as such. Educators in the Norwegian institution have thus great power of definition over the child, an authority that enables as well as limits the latter's ability to participate on their own terms as unique individuals.

In contrast, the Mexican participants view decision-making and guiding children towards taking responsibility for their actions and decisions as the core of their educational practices, rooted in the principle of the assembly. Participation thus happens within principles of deliberation, a process in which everyone's voice has a place and where the main objectives involve common understanding and the experience of being part of the same community. When it comes to the understandings of the link between participation and socialization, it can be said that the Norwegian educators value socialization for its instrumental benefits, through the learning of specific skills and the development of competencies that allow the child to adapt to life in society, participation within the group of children being the way to achieve this. Participation is thus viewed as a means rather than as an end goal in itself.

The Mexican understanding of socialization is strikingly different. Indeed, participation within the group is valued in itself, rather than seen as a means to developing certain predefined skills. Participation in the community is the foundation of the practice and includes both children and adults. While the group is the main entity, the dynamic fostering of individuality and the encounter with the other means homogeny is actively avoided. other.

7.1.2 How do educators perceive their role in the realization of this right?

The Nordic tradition views the world of the child and that of the adult as separate, a romantic view on childhood that emphasizes children's culture, mainly based on free play, as one potentially threatened by adult intervention. This view can be criticized for its failure to acknowledge the natural authority of the adult who has to guide and protect the child into the world. Interpreting the findings of this study one can make the link between such views on the child's world and the position of the educators in the Norwegian case. Indeed, they defined their roles first and foremost as being the organisers of activities, their main tasks being planning, regulating, and observing children. By setting the frames around children's play and decision-making processes, educators seem to locate themselves outside of the child's experience, even when playing or conversing with them. Adults are thus positioned to serve the child's learning experience. The relationships they create with the children, and the importance of dialogue and reciprocity, are therefore valued on instrumental grounds. Participants mention the importance of observing, talking to, and listening to children in order to know them, which in turn allows them to plan activities which will ostensibly interest them and which are suitably adapted to their level. This is illustrated by the way Norwegian participants describe their role as *enablers* of children's participation. According to them, it is their task to determine children's interests and intentions, mainly through observation, and then translate them into appropriate activities, a process they equal with children's participation even though the child remains unaware of it and passive throughout.

Participants from the Mexican case present a very different view of their own roles. In line with the centre's educational vision based on principles of community living, assembly, and horizontality, educators here do not locate themselves outside the children's world, although they do acknowledge that children have their own experiences. Instead, adults and children share the same space within the community. Reciprocity and dialogue are thus not viewed in

114

instrumental terms, as means to achieving something else such as the development of applicable skills. Rather, they form the foundation of the relationship, as they would in any human relationship based on respect. Giving space ~~to~~ for children's intentions and interests is in this case also considered an educator's responsibility, but the role of the adult in that process does not detract from the active part played by the child. The adult is here imagined as a sensitive support for the child, accompanying him/her in making their voice heard, rather than taking the lead and framing the way intentions may play out in practice.

These principles of horizontality and reciprocity also affect the way the Mexican educators view themselves. Indeed, they mention as crucial the learning and development processes they go through as a consequence of working with young children. They defend an attitude of self-criticism and openness to learning from the human interaction and encounter with the children. This encounter challenges the adult as a human being and their ego and intentionality towards the child along with their position as educational professionals. Such an attitude is considered essential to foster and promote children's participatory rights within the centre.

Being open to learning from others in order to develop one's practice and enhance the possibility for children to participate is also central in the Norwegian participants' discourses. However, the "others" they mention are the other adults rather than the children, a view that concords with the idea of adults and children living in two different worlds of experiences.

7.1.3 How do ecological factors affect educators' ability to negotiate principles of participation in their work?

Ecological factors contribute to shaping the educators' beliefs described above. In addition, they play a great part in how these beliefs play out in real life practices.

Past experiences, both personal and professional, shape educators' beliefs about childhood as well as their short and long-term projections. Within both cases, findings show that participants' formal education informs their attitudes towards children to a lesser extent. Rather, it is their personal experiences and personality, built through time, that most appear to influence educators' ability to transform beliefs into attitudes and practices. These are directly linked to educators' long-term beliefs concerning the purpose of education and of their work as professionals. The main difference between cases in that respect has to do with the personal commitment of educators. Norwegian participants define the purpose of

115

education in terms similar to those of the hegemonic discourse found in policy, which emphasizes children's preparation for later life in society. The Mexican participants however envision ECEC and their own role as allowing for individualities to thrive together and their transformative potential to develop, in other words, the opposite of preparation.

These beliefs interact with and are potentially transformed by the structural and cultural factors inherent to the institution educators belong to. A collaborative culture within centres is viewed by participants across both cases as crucial for their ability to take initiative, make their voices heard, feel valued as both individuals and professionals, and maintain strong motivation. Both cases share similar structural patterns in terms of the relationships they intend to foster between educators. Flexibility, trust and dialogue, as well as horizontality are valued as important for the realization of their agentic potential.

Furthermore, structural and cultural factors found in wider society and educational policies are of significance for the extent to which educators' personal beliefs, as well as those shared within the centres, may be realizable. The findings show that although the centres are located within drastically different socio-cultural contexts and are subject to different expectations from policy makers, they both emphasize the importance of being critical to such pressures and to think critically in order to preserve their own visions and priorities, especially if children's right to participate has to be realized in practice. The structural and cultural organization of both centres thus seems to empower educators individually and collectively to translate their beliefs into practice and fulfil their agentic potential.

7.2   Impact and recommendations for future research

As Biesta (2006) argues, trends within education theory, based on constructivsts and socio-cultural theories, have come to focus on learning and the activities of the learner, rather than the activities of the teacher. A consequence of such a shift of attention has been that of turning teachers into providers of a service fulfilling the child's needs, a process that has often reduced educational questions to technical ones. This study has deliberately focused on educators' perspectives in order to bring the attention back to the educator, as more than a mere "factor" but as an agent, and to their responsibility and role in the educational experience. It has also tried to avoid reducing practices to methodologies or technical questions by focusing rather on meaning making and attitudes.

116

This study has taken educators' beliefs and perspectives as a point of departure to develop an understanding of how children's participatory rights may unfold in practice. Future research on the topic could take the focus on educators' beliefs further by actively involving them in the research process, deepening the understanding of the topic as well as the linking of theory to practice. Indeed, involving educators in the investigation through the medium of discussion groups, practical exercises, and the like, could help create develop awareness, clarify taken for granted principles, as well as empower educators through the taking of matters into their own hands. Such an approach could provide insights as to how practice evolves alongside investigation.

Another interesting approach to future research could involve the comparing of educators' different backgrounds and the extent to which it affects their practice within each ECEC centre. This could provide for a better understanding of the factors informing the variation of practices within and across centres, and for the development of tools to further improve the environment surrounding educators' experiences, collaboration practices, school culture, and meaning-making processes among the staff. Further, a comparison of different ECEC centres from the same two countries would allow for wider and deeper understanding of socio-cultural influences on practices.

7.3   Limitations to the study

7.3.1 Language

As mentioned earlier, this project was conducted in three languages; Spanish and Norwegian and English. As much as I have strived to remain faithful to the original meanings expressed in both Spanish and Norwegian during the translation process, vocabulary issues may have influenced the accuracy of some expressions. Indeed, some concepts have subtly different meanings in different languages, such as that of "participation" itself. In Norwegian, participation regroups terms such as "*Medvirkning*" (literally "working with") and "*Deltakelse*" (taking part). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed spending time clarifying such concepts in order to avoid simplifying or misunderstanding them.

To make translation and interpretation issues transparent, an appendix with excerpts of the interviews in the original languages was created (Appendix 6).

7.3.2 Comparability

The two cases were chosen both for their similarities and differences. The socio-cultural contexts in which the centres are embedded are particularly different, which makes the comparison difficult. The way these socio-cultural factors influence and shape the ECEC centres' practices and the educators' beliefs should be carefully considered to better understand the results of the research and the nuance of their interpretations. However, characteristics linked to the nature of the Mexican institution have a significant impact on the practices unfolding within it (attracting a particular educator profile), which compensates for the socio-cultural difference and makes the comparison both relevant and interesting.

7.3.3 Time constraints

The two fieldwork projects had to be conducted in two different countries within a limited timeframe, putting pressure on the effectiveness of the research process at each stage; preparation, data collection, and analysis. In Mexico interviews had to be done during the participants' free time, meaning I had to adapt to their sometimes tight schedule. In Norway they had to be conducted during working hours which meant finding the appropriate moment to conduct interviews of a meaningful length was not always easy. While the interviews were planned to last between 45 and 60 minutes, they had to be adapted for the amount of time available. In Mexico the duration ranged from 40 minutes to 1,5 hour, and in Norway from 30 minutes to one hour. The result of this was that in some interviews the focus had to be narrowed to core questions, while in others the participants could go deeper into some topics. Although testimonies are not all equally informative on all the addressed topics, attention was paid to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to discuss the main concepts of interest, if not during formal interviews, through informal talk during the day.

7.4 Conclusion

This study has attempted to answer the following general research question: How do educators in Mexico and Norway negotiate children's right to participate in their practices?

Drawing on the findings we can conclude that Mexican educators in the case concerned here, build their practice upon a political awareness and vision that helps them transform their beliefs into action. Their views on children and the purpose of their work as educators are founded on the principle of participation, not only as a right but also as a moral obligation. The educational experience is understood in terms of a shared space where heterogeneity is central and where individualities meet, pertaining to both children and adults. They intend not to foster socializing processes wherein homogeneity and adaptation to predetermined social norms is the goal. Rather, their vision is to educate to transform, not on adults' own terms, but by letting children express their individuality and enjoy their own experience of the world. The sharing of a common world within an educational community, where everyone's voice has a place, fosters the kind of encounter that promotes participation. This participation is not thought of as a temporary activity that can be organised along pedagogical goals, but as a constant; the pillar of the interpersonal relationships between unique individuals. We can thus conclude that the Mexican educators' understandings and practice of participation concord with Biesta's (2006) idea of action-centred education, which places subjectification rather than socialization or qualification at the core of educational practices. Ecological factors in the iterational, practical-evaluative, and projective dimension are constantly reflected upon and transformed both individually and collectively in order to serve educators' ability to transform their beliefs into real life practices centred on participation.

In Norway it would appear that educators' beliefs about participation and use of related concepts are to a certain extent taken for granted. The focus of the educational experience is set according to goals involving socialization, participation becoming a means to fulfil these objectives. The educator's role is to organize the child's experience and set frames within which participation can be practiced. The findings show that the adult acts as the main protagonist and the interpreter of children's expressions, without which participation is not thought possible. While this view concords to some extent with Biesta's (2006) notion of action-centred education, whereby the conditions for action and participation to exist depend upon one's expression being taken up by the other, it seems that the reciprocity this entails is not prioritized by the participants in this particular case. Indeed, the emphasis placed upon the adult role as organizer, frame setter, and interpreter, implies that the child has a rather passive role in their own participation practices. Additionally, although developing one's identity is mentioned as important, priority seems to be given to goals relating to socialization and preparation. The challenges that might arise from working with unclear and taken for

granted concepts are intended dealt with through an efficient collaborative culture and regular meetings, where topics are discussed and awareness developed.

Concerning any recommendations offered on how to foster the realization of children's right to participate based on our participants' perspectives, salient is that beliefs about children and participation should be made visible and routinely discussed in order to avoid concepts being taken for granted. Furthermore, a collaborative culture fostering horizontality, trust, and autonomy seems to empower educators and enable them to effectively transform beliefs into practice. However, the extent to which such factors may foster the realization of children's right to participate are very likely limited by educators' personality, long-term projections, as well as socio-cultural constraints and policy. Most importantly, the theoretical background of this study helps towards envisioning ways in which the inevitable tension arising from viewing children as participants and creating space for this participation to be enacted in the institutions' daily life, can be overcome. It suggests that if educators distanced themselves from a technical understanding of participation as mere decision-making, and alternatively viewed participation in relational terms, as made possible through the encounter and dialogue between individuals who take up each other's contributions in order to create something new and unique, the gap between words and action could be bridged.

However, it is important to keep in mind that practices are not necessarily transferrable from one case to another and through time. Biesta (2006) warns against reducing educational research to technical questions of what works, and how to make schools more democratic. Taking distance from a view on democratic education that only focuses on preparing students for their *future* participation as democratic subjects, a view that detracts attention away from the here and now of interaction, he advocates for the need to constantly question the extent to which students' democratic subjectivity is given space within the frames of school life.

> We cannot make or force our students to expose themselves to what is other and different and strange. The only thing we can do is to make sure that there are at least opportunities within education to meet and encounter what is different and strange and other and also that there are opportunities for our students to really respond, to find their own voice, their own ways of speaking. We as educators should be aware that what disrupts the smooth operation of the rational community is not necessarily a disturbance of the educational process, but might as well be the very point at which students begin to find their own responsive and responsible voice (Biesta, 2006:69).

120

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122

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter of consent (Spanish)

Solicitud de participación en proyecto de investigación

"Participación democrática: entre perspectivas y practicas de educadores en ambiente preescolar. Un estudio comparativo entre Noruega y México."

Propósito

Este estudio forma parte de un proyecto de tesis en *Comparative and International Education* en la Universidad de Oslo. El propósito del estudio es investigar como los educadores entienden el derecho de los niños a participar y el concepto de democracia en ambiente maternal/preescolar. El foco de atención es las perspectivas, papel y practicas de los educadores.

Que implica tu participación en el estudio?

Este estudio se basará sobre datos recogidos a través de entrevistas de educadores, y observaciones de las actividades e interacciones entre adultos y niños. Las entrevistas serán conversaciones informales. Las preguntas trataran de las refecciones de los participantes sobre el concepto de participación democrática y su papel y practicas. Las observaciones tendrán como propósito ver diferentes formas en que las interacciones entre adultos y niños hacen posible la participación democrática. Los niños no estarán entrevistados u observados, y ninguna información personal sobre los niños estará registrada.

Que sucede con tu información?

Todas las informaciones personales estarán tratadas de forma anónima. El investigador es el único que tendrá acceso a informaciones personales sobre participantes (como nombres por ejemplo). Estas informaciones personales no estarán compartidas o discutidas con el supervisor del estudio. Los participantes estarán anonimizados en la versión publicada del proyecto del master.

El proyecto terminará el 1. de junio 2016.

Participación voluntaria

La participación en el estudio es voluntaria, y puedes en cualquier momento retirarte del proyecto sin justificación. Si te retiras, todas las informaciones sobre ti estarán anonimizadas.

126

Si tienes preguntas sobre el proyecto, puedes tomar contacto con Lea Maison, tlf: +47 45039390, epost: leamm@student.uv.uio.no (líder del proyecto). También se puede contactar el supervisor del proyecto: Fengshu Liu, fengshu.liu@iped.uio.no

El estudio esta registrado en *Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS. (*

Consentimiento para participar en el estudio

He recibido información sobre el estudio y quiero participar

(Firma del participante, fecha)

Appendix 2: Letter of consent (Norwegian)

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

"Barnehageansattes perspektiv og praksis: hvilken betydning for barnas rett til medvirkning? En sammenlignende studie mellom Norge og Mexico"

Bakgrunn og formål

Denne studie er en mastergradsstudie i *Comparative and International Education* ved Universitet i Oslo. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan barnehageansatte forstår prinsippet om barnas rett til medvirkning og demokrati i barnehage, på både små- og storebarnsavdelinger. Fokuset blir de ansattes perspektiv, rolle og praksis.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Denne studien vil bygge på data som blir samlet gjennom intervjuer av de voksne som jobber i barnehagen, og gjennom observasjoner av aktiviteter og interaksjoner mellom voksne og barn. Intervjuene vil være åpne, uformelle samtaler. Spørsmålene vil handle om informantenes egne tanker rundt begrepet "demokratisk deltakelse" og deres rolle og praksis. Observasjonene vil ha som mål å fange ulike måter deltakelse blir muliggjort for barn gjennom voksen-barn interaksjoner. Barn blir ikke intervjuet eller observert for seg selv, og ingen personlig informasjon om barna blir samlet.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Ingen andre enn forskeren selv vil ha tilgang til personopplysninger sånn som navnet til deltakerne. Personopplysninger blir ikke diskutert med studieveilederen. Deltakerne vil bli anonymisert i den publiserte masteroppgaven.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes den 1. Juni 2016. All innsamlet data blir anonymisert ved prosjektets slutt.

Frivillig deltakelse
Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

128

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Lea Maison, tlf: 45039390, epost: leamm@student.uv.uio.no (prosjektleder). Eventuelt kan du ta kontakt med veilederen: Fengshu Liu, fengshu.liu@iped.uio.no

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

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

----
(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 3: Interview guide

The interview guide is organized in the following manner: main questions were organised by topics. Then questions, here called "developing questions" were added to help the informants develop on the topic. In addition to these planned questions, spontaneous ones appeared as a consequence of the informal nature of the interviews and to clarify informants' statements. These are not referred to here.

1. Introductory questions:

1.1.   Personal path:

a) Can you tell me a little about how you started working in this centre?

Developing questions
        -*Did you have experience from the same sector?*
        -*How did you adapt to the school?*
        -*Did you receive any information about the school functioning upon arrival?*
        -*Did you receive some kind of training when you started?*
        -*Did you know how the school worked when you arrived?*

b) What does your background mean to your work as educator?

Developing questions
        -*How do you use your past experiences in your work?*

1.2.   **Role as educator**:

a) Can you tell me a little about your position in the school?

Developing questions
        -*What are your responsibilities?*

b) What does it mean to you to be educator ("acompañante", "assistant", or "pedagogical leader", depending on the wording used in the school).

Developing questions
        -*What is the difference between accompany and educate?*
        -*What do you enjoy the most doing?*
        -*What do you think are important qualities for an educator to have?*

2.   The everyday school life.

2.1.   Organisation:

a) How is your day organised?

Developing questions
  -*How do you prepare for your day?*
  -*How important is it to plan the day?*
  -*How do you decide what you are going to do during the day?*
  -*Do you involve children in the daily organization?*

2.2. Adult-child relationship

a) What does the relationship with the children mean to you and your work?

Developing questions
  -*How would you describe it?*
  -*How do you build the relationship with the children?*
  -*How do you experience your relationship with the children?*
  -*How does your relationship with the children influence the way you plan the activities?*
  -*How can the children be involved in the planning?*

b) What do you feel is your major responsibility towards the children?

Developing questions
  -*How do you include the children in decision-making?*
  -*How do you react when children take initiatives?*
  -*What is the role of the adult confronted with the child's individual choice?*
  -*What do feel is your role during free play?*
  -*How important is it to participate in the children's activities?*
  -*Do you experience any challenges in your work as educator?*
  -*How are the activities suggested?*
  -*What place does the individual have in the group?*
  -*How do you deal with issues of power?*
  -*What is the adult's intention in suggesting activities?*
  -*How important is it to develop individuality compared to socializing?*
  -*How do you react in case of conflicts?*
  -*How do you divide your attention among children?*

3. The right to participate

3.1. Meaning

a) How do you understand the idea of participation in general? In the context of education?

b) How do you understand the idea of participation as a right?

Developing questions
  -*How do you understand the idea of children's right to participation?*

3.2. Practice

a) What would be your role as educator to allow for participation?

b) Are there areas where children can participate and other where they can't?

Developing questions
> -*Are there moments that are not open to participation?*
> -*How do you decide?*

c) How would you work with participation across ages?

Developing questions
> -*Do you feel that they are different ways of working with participation across age groups?*

d) Are there any challenges related to participation?

4. School's environment

4.1. Personal experience

a) What do you like about this school?

b) How do you feel taking initiatives?

Developing questions
> -*Do you feel that you have the possibility to influence?*
> -*Do you use the school's curriculum in your work?*
> -*Do you feel that you can contribute to the collaboration?*
> -*How do your colleagues influence you in your work?*

4.2. Interpersonal experience

a) How do you experience the collaboration within the school?

Developing questions
> -*How does the collaboration across classes work?*
> -*How do your colleagues influence you?*
> -*Do you use the curriculum when you discuss between colleagues?*
> -*Do you discuss the topic of participation with your colleagues?*
> -*Do you discuss the concept of participation?*
> -*Do you feel responsibility towards your newest colleagues?*
> -*What is the process to include a new adult in the group?*

6. School and society

a) What do you think is the school's role in society?

Developing questions
 -What do you mean by "education for change"?
 -How do you think the location of the school influences the purpose of the school?
 - What is the school's mission?
 -What is the school's purpose?
 -What do you think about early childhood education at the national level?
 -What is this school's particularities compared to other schools?

b) What do you think is your role as educator in society?

Developing questions
 -Do you feel that as an educator you have to involve yourself in social and political matters?
 -Do you feel that you have a role to play in society as educator?

Appendix 4: List of participants

Mexican school

Staff member	Classroom nr	Position	Type of training	%	Observed	Interviewed	Informal talk	Present at staff meeting	Wasn't observed because	Wasn't interviewed because
1	-	Legal representative	Informal**	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
2	1	Coordinator and Educator	Formal*	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
3	1	Educator	Formal*	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
4	2	Coordinator and Educator	Informal**	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
5	2	Educator	Informal**	100%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-

*Educated within the field of education or other field relevant to their position
**Introduced by peers to the school's pedagogy while in service

	Number of employees	Number observed	Number interviewed	Number refused to participate	Number refused interview
Total	5	5	5	0	0

Norwegian school

Staff member	Classroom nr	Position	Type of training	%	Observed	Interviewed	Informal talk	Present at staff meeting	Wasn't observed because	Wasn't interviewed because
1	-	Leader	Formal*	100	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
2	1	Pedagogical leader	Formal*	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
3	1	Educator	Formal*	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
4	1	Educator	Formal*	100	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	-	Enough interviewees
5	2	Pedagogical leader	Formal*	80%	Yes	Yes	No	No	-	-
6	2	Pedagogical leader	Formal*	20%	No	No	Yes	No	Absent	Absent
7	2	Educator	Informal**	100	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	-	Refused
8	2	Educator	Informal**	100	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	-	-
9	3	Pedagogical leader	Formal*	100	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-
10	3	Educator	Formal*	80	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	-	-
11	3	Educator	Formal*	100	Yes	No	No	Yes	-	Enough interviewees
12	3	Educator	Formal*	60	No	No	No	No	Absent	Absent

	Number of employees	Number observed	Number interviewed	Refused to participate	Refused interview
Total	12	9	7	0	1

*Educated within the field of education or other field relevant to their position (prior to or while in service)
**Introduced by peers to the school's pedagogy while in service

Appendix 5: Observation database

Here are registered the number of filed observations per participants. Here the centres' leaders are included as they were observed in their interaction with their colleagues.

Mexican school

Situations (moments/ number of observed interactions in each)	Circle time		Mealtime		Organized activity		Free play		Transition		Meetings	
	Mom.*	Nr of inter-actions**	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions
Participant 1	-	-	-	-	1 1	3 3	-	-	-	-	1	5
Participant 2	1 1	3 3	1 1	1 1	1 1 1	4 3 1	1	3	1 1 1	1 2 1	1	10
Participant 3	1 1 1	2 1 4	1 1 1	1 1 1	1 1 1 1	2 3 4 1	1 1 1	2 1 1	1 1 1 1	1 1 3 1	1	4
Participant 4	1	1	1 1 1 1	1 1 1 1	1	2	1 1 1	1 1 1	1 1 1 1	2 1 1 1	1	1
Participant 5	1	1	1	1	1 1	1 1	1 1 1	2 1 1	1	1	1	-

| Participant 6 (External) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 4 |

*Moments: refers to the number of isolated activity when the observation took place
**Number of interactions: Refers to the number of interactions that were filed (not the total number of interactions happening during the activity).

Norwegian school

Situations (moments/ number of observed interactions in each)	Circle time		Meal		Organized activity		Free play (inside and outside)		Transition		meetings	
	Mom.*	Nr of inter-actions**	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions	Mom.	Nr of inter-actions
Participant 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 1	18 37
Participant 2	1 1	2 10	1 1	7 1	1	10	1 1 1 1	1 1 2 9	1 1 1 1	2 2 1 1	1 1	9 21
Participant 3	1	6	1	6	1 1	14 8	1 1	7 1	1 1 1	3 2 5	1	15

Participant 4	1 1 1	1	1	5	-	-	1 1 1	11 7 5	1 1 1	1 3 2	1	4
Participant 5	1	6	1	4	-	-	1	10	1 1 1	3 2 2	-	-
Participant 6	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6
Participant 7	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	8	-	-	1	6
Participant 8	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	1	1	1
Participant 9	1 1 1	2 3 3	1	5	1 1	12 5	1	4	1 1 1 1	1 3 2 3	1	9
Participant 10	1 1 1	14 8 2	1	7	1	8	1 1	13 1	1 1	1 1	1 1	7 24
Participant 11	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	1	5
Participant 12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Moments: refers to the number of isolated activity when the observation took place

**Number of interactions: Refers to the number of interactions that were filed (not the total number of interactions happening during the activity).

Appendix 6: Interview quotes in original language

(1) "Alle har rett til å bli møtt med respect, uansett om man er ett eller 50 det er ingen forskjell, man møter mennesker og mennesker er baby, barn eller voksne, det har ingenting å si."

(2) "Yo creo que en el momento que tu decides acompañar una persona, que sea un niño o un adulto, en la institución que sea, creo que es un deber, acompañar hacia la participación y crear espacios de libertad. Si tu acompañas a una persona tu estas eligiendo acompañar a una libertad de elegir del otro."

(3) "La responsabilidad que tienes como adulto en este acompañamiento es la responsabilidad de dar lugar al otro ser. Es la de abrir al desarrollo de la particularidad de cada uno."

(4) "Jeg har ikke noe mere rett til mine meninger enn de som er 2, de har like stor rett til sine meninger som jeg har."

(5) "Det er ikke bare de voksne som snakker og har meninger. Og da må vi høre."

(6) "Det viktigste ift medvirkning er at ungene er aktivt deltakende i sin egen hverdag"

(7) "Når jeg tenker på medvirkning så tenker jeg på et barnesyn hvor barn er aktive aktører i sitt eget liv. Medvirkning impliserer at man må se på barn som kompetente, som aktører med relevant innspill til hvordan de ønsker å ha sitt liv."

(8) "Es importante reconocer la libertad del otro, como niño, como persona, y permitirle encontrarse con una oja en blanco donde puedan escribir su propia historia."

(9) "Hvis barna ikke utvikler sosial kompetanse, kommer de til å få problemer med å skaffe seg venner på skolen, også senere i livet."

(10) "Det er viktigere at de blir sett og hørt som individer, og være en del av en gruppe, delta i hverdagen sin, ha venner."

(11) "Etter noe arbeid har de akseptert at hun skal være med. det er det som er det viktigste, å knytte dem sammen, a skape noe som er felles."

(12) "Man føler at man er viktig for de som er rundt, ikke bare for seg selv, men også dette å ta vare på hverandre, på venner."

(13) "Cada uno tiene que buscar su lugar, su papel en el grupo. Esta educación que no viene de un ser pasivo, viene de valorar el proceso colectivo."

(14) "Den dagen de gå utifra barnehagen at de er trygge unger, at dem, vi har et motto som heter trygge, glade og sterke barn. Og det er kjempe viktig fordi at de møter en mye tøffere hverdag på skolen."

(15) "Vi skal gjøre barn trygge og sterke og glade og forberedt til skolen sånn at de har de beste muligheter for å klare seg i livet sitt."

(16) "Det vårt mål å ha et demokratisk valg, for de vil være med på demokratiske valg på skolen."

(17) "Se trabaja para la comunidad para el grupo, desde el grupo como unidad, como cuidado."

(18) "Vi skiller barna i aldersgruper."

(19) "Vi har en skolegruppe."

(20) "Vi har en jente som var veldig sjenert, nå (…) klarer hun å ta kontakt med andre, ta initiative i lek, hun bidrar masse. (…) hun trenger ikke å være rundt meg, hun føler seg mer selvstendig."

(21) "La participación en maternal no conlleva muchísima responsabilidad en maternal, y en preescolar si. te conlleva. (…) por ejemplo a Maria le vamos a decir por favor responde y no responde, luego le vamos a dejar que no responda para que otro día en otra oportunidad ella pueda responder un poquito. y le vamos a decir gracias por responder, y que responda un poquito mas y poquito mas."

(22) "Jeg vil at barna skal være trygge på seg selv, tør å si ifra når tinger ikke riktig, (…) klare seg selv, føle at de er ikke alltid avhengig av en voksen, men at de kan klare ting selv, ta valg selv, bli hørt."

(24) "Jeg syns at barnehagen er en arena hvor barna skal oppdage seg selv, bli kjent med seg selv. (…) De blir ikke seg selv hvis de voksne styrer veldig mye."

(25) "De setter rammene selv, (…) som regel så synes jeg at de oppsøker det de har behov for."

140

(26) "Si quieres ser solo, es muy fácil (…) pero el grupo te permite desarollar el individuo, el grupo en este sentido seria el regulador. (…) El grupo te va a ayudar a que seas lo máximo que puedas ser."

(27) "Estamos trabajando desde la asamblea, desde el respeto de la voz de todos y todas. Se esta trabajando la capacidad del niño de poder escuchar la voz del otro, su propia voz."

(28) "Barnas medvirkning betyr at de har rett til å bli sett og hørt."

(29) "Å medvirke betyr ikke nødvendigvis å få viljen sin hele tiden (…), men at man blir sett og hørt".

(30) "Jeg som pedagog, må sørge for at alle barn har lik mulighet til å få sine intensjonene fram, og bli sett og hørt".

(31) "Pues la participación es placer en acción, plazerisacion!"

(32) "Vi observerte ungene i lek og vi brukte det videre for å lage planer og jobbe videre med barna."

(33) "Så kan du høre at ungene har lyst til å gjøre noe, også kan du tilrettelegge for at de kan få gjort det."

(34) "Hay días que venimos con las propuestas mas marcadas y los niños deciden si seguirlas o no, y hay días que están mucho mas abiertos, pero siempre desde una temática, que ellos mismos han escogido. Para el tema de los cavernícolas abrieron elección sobre que es lo que les gustaría tener, en la asamblea, ellos escogieron esto. Todos los contenidos que se están trabajando van encaminados a esto."

(35) "Medvirkning kan ikke være tilstedet uten anerkjennelse. da er det ikke medvirkning. da blir det bare medbestemmelse."

(36) "Så tenker jeg også at det er fint for ungene å styre hverdan sin selv. (…) jeg tenker at de trenger å få lov til å bestemme en del selv. (…) har de lyst å leke så får de leke, er de sultne så får de hente matboksen sin."

(37) "Medvirkning betyr å være oppmerksom på at det er ikke jeg som skal bestemme, det er ikke jeg som vet hva som er best for deg. Men du og jeg sammen skal finne ut av hvordan din dag skal være.

(38) "Alle sammen får lov å ha en medbestemmelse."

(39) "Nå er det sånn at noen har lyst å leke skole inne der, hvor det har vært togstasjon, (…) så da får de 2 lapper å velge mellom. (…) vi ser den som har flest lapper, den skal vi lage inni rommet. (…) da er det et demokratisk valg.

(40) "No decimos la palabra democracia, (…) porque es una construcción muy adulta. El niño tiene su imaginario y su mundo, (…) dentro de estos universos trabajar y apostar hacia esta participación, usamos asamblea si. escucha, de respeto... mas que hablar es practicar, reflexionar."

(41) "En relación a nuestras capacidades intentar generar un espacio horizontal donde todos se enriquezcan de la propuesta del mayor y todos antendamos a las necesidades del chiquito."

(42) "Si un niño trae un juguete pero tu juguete justo cuando pasa por la puerta se convierte en nuestro juguete. Entonces tienes que aprender, (…) lo traes para compartirlo (…) con el riesgo que le pase algo. Con la propiedad intentamos cuestionar esto. En vez de poseer, ser. (…) si no estas listo para compartir guarda, no lo traigas. Aquí a todos."

(43) "En el momento en que tu decides acompañar en la elección del otro, (…) el otro toma la responsabilidad de su elección. Por ejemplo los juguetes que los niños traen de su casa. (…) el niño se responsabiliza de su objeto en este contexto. Pero tu estas acompañándole."

(44) "Declaramos tu puedes desobedecer todo lo que quieras, pero me lo argumentas. me das una alternativa. Entre lo que te planteo yo y lo que me planteas tu, ahí hay un encuentro en el que se resulta una serie de consecuencias. Propones y asumes las consecuencias. Yo soy la estructura mas sensible que puedas encontrar."

(45) "Mas bien es que la participación en maternal no conlleva muchísima responsabilidad en maternal, y en preescolar si. (…) se te pide mas autonomía."

(46) "Medvirkning betyr at man har en stemme, er en del av gruppen."

(47) "Når du har støttet dem til å få venner, inkludert i gruppe, da ser du at stemmen begynner å øke opp."

(48) "La participación esta marcada por los valores de la convivencia."

(49) "Kanskje hun som du vil skal være med kan ikke så mye om leken så må du prøve å støtte henne, (…) men hvis de andre aksepterer og hun klarer så bare trekker du deg tilbake."

(50) "Jeg tenker at medvirkning kommer mer når de fysisk får vært med på det... Sammen med en voksen, eller med andre barn."

(51) "Barna vet ikke at de blir lært språk, men da kan du si at du bruker medvirkning som veien inn også til å få oppnå de instrumentelle mål som man har."

(52) "Den nyeste forskningen viser jo at det gjennom lek. gjennom dialog, i samtalen. du vinner mye mer av å gå gjennom barns interesser. (…) så kan jeg putte inn ekstra elementer (…) det blir skjult læring."

(53) "Barna kan bestemme hva de har lyst å gjøre. Så lenge man ser læringssituasjonen med det de holder på med så er det ok."

(54) "Det er hyggelig at de kommer med ideer. Vi støtter dem. Vi kan hjelpe og du setter inn litt kunnskap også."

(55) "En maternal se procura (…) que siempre estén en todas las areas, hay niveles, los de preescolarr pueden sembrar, pueden trabajar mas la tierra, los de maternal, empezar a descubrir que hay en la tierra, pero por lo menos ya se están relacionando. (…) entonces participar tambien incluye poder experimentar."

(56) "Ponemos el acento en lo colectivo porque, no es una educación que primordialmente sea cognitiva. Que si sabes eres y si no sabes no vales. el ser no es apartir del saber. El ser es apartir del ser."

(57) "De som er små må sove, hvile seg. Du må se hva de trenger. hvem trenger mest hjelp, i andre barnehager de blir ikke lyttet til, de er opptatt av de barna som er aktive. men hva med de andre, de vet ikke hvordan de føler seg, hva de trenger.

(58) "Jeg er end el av dette livet her, (…) du er inne inni deres liv. og derfor føler jeg at jeg ikke trenger å endre noe."

(59) "Ahora llegamos a un momento que lo llamamos recuperar la presencia. (…) nos apropriamos el espacio, cuando construimos esta cuestión de grupo."

(60) "La responsabilidad mayor es el cuestionamiento propio de mis propios valores, sobre mi propia propuesta de de ser en el mundo."

(61) "Det som er nødvendig er konstant bevissthet, hvor er jeg, hvor er det behov for meg å være nå sånn ar barn skal få si sin mening. Vi også må være bevisst at vi må aktivt ut å innhente informasjon."

(62) "Det er noe man må tenke på hele tiden. Mye er ubevisst av hvordan man jobber... jeg tenker medvirkning er så ... en del av oss på en måte, eller hvertfall måten jeg er oppdratt på, så det kan bli noen ganger vanskelig å skille mellom hva jeg vet og hva jeg tror jeg vet."

(63) "Med Per så kan du på en måte si at han gir tegn på å ikke ville være i kontakt med de voksne, men det er ikke sant. sånn at du må på en måte bare må bli kjent med ham, han er

utrygg å reagerer med å gå fra. det handler om å lese de forskjellige barna, se hvilke behov de har og handle etter det. det blir deres form for medvirkning.

(64) "Creo en este tipo de pedagogía es que el ego del adulto tiene que apartarse para ver lo que sucede con el niño (…) para mi fue duro, porque constantemente queria proponer cosas que hacer…"

(65) "De små, kan ikke snakke så mye. Da må jeg spørre, (…) noen ganger må jeg gjette."

(66) "Hvis du skal få med de minste på at de skal medvirke, så må du faktisk studere de og observe de en del."

(67) "La responsabilidad que tienes como adulto en este acompañamiento es la de (…) abrir al desarrollo de la particularidad de cada uno de ellos, y la vez, del grupo. sin entrar en el juicio, (…) porque eres parte del grupo."

(68) "Los primeros días casi casi que es jugar. y uno se va acercando a los pequeños y asi cuando bajan las defensas van creando vínculos y luego estos vínculos se van a hacer mas fuertes, luego se van estabilizando."

(69) "Están con toda la libertad de no querer acercarse, yo voy a estar ahi, y en el momento que quieran acercarse. Prefiero que se vaya dando poco a poco, y que ellos se vayan acercando en lugar de forzar el proceso."

(70) "I begynelsen, hvis det er et barn som er sjenert så går jeg ikke med en gang, jeg sitter og begynner å snakke litt, små ting, spørre ham hva det liker å gjøre for å bli kjent, etterhvert kommer denne relasjonen."

(71) "De også må ha en relasjonen til meg at de har såpass tillit til meg at de faktisk vil utlevere sine ønsker også."

(72) "Jeg må bli kjent med barna såpass godt at jeg kan finne måter å sørge for at de også får definere sine dager. Hva er det de trenger, hva er det de ønsker, hva er deres interesser."

(73) "Vi bruker mest barnas medvirkning for å bli kjent med barna."

(74) "I skolegruppa kan man jo snake om at i skolegruppa så forbereder vi oss på skolen og på skolen så kan man ikke velge om du være med eller ikke."

(75) "Mi idea es le voy a poner atención a el porque me esta poniendo atención a mi."

(76) "A veces nos embarcamos mucho en teorías historias rebuscadas... a veces es lo mas esencial, el mundo.. Es tu yo como lo resolvemos."

(77) "Si hablamos de ser una comunidad entonces nuestras necesidades como adultos, cuidarnos a nosotros mismos, tambien es importante."

(78) "Me pregunto donde están mis limites también como persona, y hasta donde permito también… y hasta donde puedo, o sea para no hacerme daño a mi y no hacerles daño a ellos no."

(79) "La norma...es complejo pero al final son estas decisiones que el adulto puede cambiar. es muy elástico."

(80) "Man har en plan også blir kanskje ikke slutten sånn som man tenker hvis man hører på hva ungene også vil i den planen."

(81) "Tu jefe es como se va desarrollando las cosas, que se desencadenan al dia. es una sorpresa. Nunca vas a llegar y vas a decir, hoy voy a hacer esto y esto. (…) y ahí es donde esta el ego, me frustro porque no he hecho ... pero he hecho cosas mucho mas productivas y mas importantes que las que venimos pensando desde casa."

(82) "Vi har et barn med autism. Det stiller store krav til at vi finner måter å jobbe på som ivaretar integriteten til den enkelte."

(83) "Så i teori skal det ikke være forskjell mellom en 1åring og en 6åring. i praksis så må du jobbe mye mer bevisst med de minste fordi det er vanskeligere å få tak i deres intensjoner."

(84) "De har forskjellige kompetanser ift å gjøre sine meninger gjeldende. Noen er gode til å ta kontakt, noen er gode på å kommunisere, noen har gått i barnehagen lenge og er veldig trygg, noen er ikke det."

(85) "Utfordringen er vel å se de som ikke klarer å ytre hva de vil. Sånn at alle kan medvirke på sitt nivå."

(86) "El grupo les da un lugar. Por ejemplo xx dice pues yo no soy el, no puedo hacer esto (…) pero Eric dentro del grupo encontró otro lugar donde se siente mas seguro. lo que están haciendo es una construccion de sus cuestión mas así, psicoemocionales."

(87) "Det går på situasjonen. hvis det er bare jeg og mange barn på avdeling, så må vi vente på andre voksne for å ordne det. hvis jeg må ut for å hente maling for eksempel."

(88) "Mye er ift organisering av tid og ift dessverre når det er sykdom blant personalet. Men da er det på en måte hvordan kan jeg forenkle det ned, hvordan kan jeg gjøre det best mulig for at de ikke skal føle et tap av det de hadde gledet seg til i dag da."

(89) "Det er 45 barn så er det 45 forskjellige måter, og så går det 6 måneder og så må du tenke på noe nytt."

(90) "Siempre estamos cuestionandonos el metodo. Nunca hay una manera. hay una idea general, y es como, como vamos hacia ella. Sobre todo es dejar vivir, hacer, con esta propuesta."

(91) "Yo soy así con esto, que si la norma nos ayuda que chido, pero si la norma no nos ayuda, pues si la pusimos nosotros la quitamos cuando queremos."

(92) "Depende de como estamos (…) una educación así que educas o hablas del corazón, las relaciones de los corazones y todo, pues también cuando esta tu corazón mas contento también influye. es una cosa viva, somos personas, estamos aprendiendo, en realidad son cosas muy intuítivas."

(93) "El gran enemigo es las cuestiones de seguridad. (…) Es lo que tienes a cambio de que los espacios estén abiertos."

(94) "Det er ikke alltid du må bruke autoritet. Men noen ganger, når du er på tur, du har det ansvaret, da må du sette grenser."

(95) "Så skolegruppa kan ikke velge å ikke være med, for det har litt med å øve seg på å gå på skolen og mestre det at man blir satt krav til."

(96) "Så skrenkes inn denne friheten fordi nå trenger vi å få spist, å få skiftet bleier, nå trenger vi å få gjort disse fysiske behovene, og da er det mer organisert form."

(97) "También hay una rutina, unas bases que se tienen que sostener, unos limites para el cuidado del otro como para el cuidado del grupo."

(98) "A veces hay que ejercer este limite ahí de confrontación, tu eres el adulto que le ayuda a relacionarse con el colectivo, decir que hasta aquí no. Que entienda mejor como estar en el grupo."

(99) "Que el niño crezca feliz: que le respeten los tiempos del niño, escuchen al niño, enseñen al niño, le lo quieren, lo apapachan, se siente seguro. Todo esto seria como el niño feliz."

(100) "Vi ønsker å gjøre barn trygge og sterke og glade og forberedt til skolen sånn at de har de beste muligheter for å klare seg i livet sitt. Gi de en god start. Både ift kunnskap, men mye ift det å stå for seg selv."

(101) "Det tryggeste stedet hvor barna mine kan være det er barnehagen. da vet du at de får alt. kunnskap, utvikling, det skjer mye, det sosiale, emosjonelt, kognitivt, språket. Du ser jo forskjellen mellom barn som har gått i barnehagen og de som går rett til skolen."

(102) "Det er noe med å bidra til oppfostring av neste generasjonen. Å være lærer i barnehage gir mulighet til å treffe disse menneskene helt i starten."

(103) "Det spiller en veldig stor rolle i samfunnet. Mange familier er avhengige av barnehagen (…) barnehagen veileder og støtter familier."

(104) "Un impacto esta en la persona y en la sociedad. Porque ya una persona que esta viendo la vida de manera diferente ya esta construyendo cambio, puede ayudar a cambiar el mundo."

(105) "Es un proyecto que esta comprometido con la idea de una pedagogía cambiante, respetuosa de los niños, una proyección social, idea de vincularse con el mundo, desde la participación o desde la solidaridad."

(106) "(Chiapas) es un estado muy volteado. Desde el movimiento zapatista, desde muchas cosas que surgieron como, darle otra sentido a la vida. Hay esta necesidad de abrir mas espacios en los que la gente se pueda expresar. Entonces estos espacios como xx han dado la oportunidad de empezar a conocer y empezar a valorar mas espacios también."

(107) "Es un proyecto que toma en cuenta la realidad social que nos rodea. Al contrario de escuelas cerradas, que no dejan ver el mundo que hay detrás de la malla de la escuela. xx siempre ha estado presente en esta red que hay en la ciudad de la gente comprometida en una educación para la transformación, para acompañar a seta gente que son los que van a hacer algo diferente, nuestros hijos."

(108) "Es la política de vida (…) las herramientas que yo utilizo como adulto acompañante, las opciones que yo estoy dando, realmente implican valores, cuestionamiento hacia la realidad (…) y eso es una practica política."

(109) "No quiero hacerlos anarquistas, no quiero que sea una cosa que les entre por la teoría. El 5% de las cosas que ellos aprenden de nosotros es con la palabra el otro 95% lo ven, y ven que actitudes tiene uno, esas actitudes personales tienen que trascender a la aula de alguna forma. (…) Ellos ven los procesos en que estas tu puesto. (…) pero tenemos muchísimo cuidado con esto de la intencionaldad."

(110) "Det var et naturlig valg for meg, jeg har alltid vært glad i barn."

(111) "Jeg føler at jeg som barne og ungdomsarbeider har mulighet til å gjøre noe jeg er god på."

(112) "Jeg søkte her pga hvordan de jobber. Jeg visste jeg at de har et barnesyn som er likt som mitt."

(113) "Me interesaba la pedagogía de xx, por mi experiencia en el pasado dentro de la educación libre y trabajo social, y pensé que podía seguir aprendiendo con xx."

(114) "Yo trabaje hace un tiempo atrás con xx. Haciendo teatro del oprimido, que tambien trabaja desde cuestionar la realidad social. Tambien estudié desarollo social. Y mi familia es descendiente de indígena. entonces una forma de ver la vida diferente también. entonces esto también me permite a mi ver las cosas de forma diferente."

(115) "Jeg hadde jo en erfaring fra før, jeg har jo hatt barn her, men det ble noe helt annet å være en medarbeider."

(116) "Jeg har jo gått i den barnehagen selv som barn, og moren min har vært ped leder her, sånn at jeg kjenner jo barnehagen ganske godt egentlig, men allikevel så er det noe annet å jobbe her."

(117) "Hay mil maneras de trabajar tu itinerario profesional dentro del mundo de la educación pero confluye mucho tu como quieres ser como persona. Ser educador es una lección de vida."

(118) "Yo soy yo, entonces tiene que ver mucho el proceso que lleva en grupo con quien soy yo. Mas alla de tener sus carreras, sus títulos, es mas bien una cuestión de que proceso personal estas llevando, de donde vienes, que tienes para dar, cual es tu virtud."

(119) "Men det er egentlig noe jeg må jobbe med selv, for å på en måte gi barn den muligheten de har til å bruke hele huset. (…) Det er nok et kontroll behov som jeg må slappe litt av på. Og det tror jeg jeg aldri kommer til å bli kvitt, men det er blitt bedre."

(120) "Me digo 'estas aprendiendo. También estas en este proceso y también permitetelo.' Es importante porque estamos compartiendo, estan aprendiendo ellos, y estoy aprendiendo de ellos tambien."

(121) "Tengo muy claro que tengo mucho que aprender, y que va a ser toda la vida así."

(122) "La gente que tiene este cuestionamiento interno es gente que creo que tiene algo que aportar (…) es importante el cuestionarse uno mismo y a la institución."

(123) "Når man har vært på skolen forstår man hva man gjør. Du har den kompetanse. da jeg var vanlig assistent, jeg hadde ikke så mye erfaring. Nå kan jeg se ting på en annen måte. (…) Jeg kan se hvem som trenger meg. Du har den kunnskapen. (…) Du forstår det pedagogiske arbeidet når dere sitter på møter og snakker om barn og forskjellige pedagogiske mål, hva du kan gjøre, hva du kan bidra til."

148

(124) "Altså nå har jeg jobbet en del før jeg ble barne og ungdomsfagarbeider, så føler jeg ikke at de ble så veldig mye annerledes… men vi har da et fagbrev... det er det som er den største forskjellen, for meg. mye av det som jeg lærte på skolen, hadde jeg hørt om før, fordi jeg hadde vært her, i systemet, med barn i 15 år."

(125) "Le pregunté si tengo que leer algo, y el me decía que lo vaya viviendo día a día, en la practica y que observe mucho, esto es como aprendo."

(126) "Ella esta muy abierta, me da la confianza para decirle oye sabes que no se como resolver esto. Es mi compañera, me da la libertad de experimentar."

(127) "Vi er rundt å ser hvordan andre jobber, sånn at vi kan ta med oss ting tilbake til egen avdeling, og de andre kan se sider ved barna enn det jeg har sett, sånn at man kan få en helere forståelse av barnet som gjør at som gjør at jeg er nødt til å endre min atferd overfor det barnet for eksempel."

(128) "Es muy positivo abrir a las nuevas que llegamos porque también tienen cosas que aportar. Y es algo vivo... también algo vivo es el equipo, el equipo va cambiando y las influencias van enriqueciendo."

(129) "En los vínculos de equipos educativos es como una convivencia mas, hay como un proyecto en común, que es de cuidar el proyecto, los niños, pero no implica una única verdad, un único estilo educativo. Cuanta mas complementacion y mas estilos educativos haya mucho mejor."

(130) "Jeg har et medansvar, (…) men det er jo å se helheten, hva som skal gjøres, og at vi er en barnehage, som fungerer som helhet."

(131) "No conseguimos hablar cada semana de casos así formalmente. Pero comentamos siempre los casos mas relevantes día a día."

(132) "Vi sliter litt for å ha avdelingsmøter men vi prater når vi kan på avdeling."

(133) "Vi har egen avdelingsgruppe på facebook, (…) de kommer jo med forslag og tilbud og organisering."

(134) "Esta el otro adulto acompañante que esta conténiendo al niño y mi cuando ando de pallaso."

(135) "Om vi har helt lik praksis det tviler jeg sterkt på, for vi er preget av de menneskene som jobber her, og det å få en forståelse av et begrep som medvirkning tar mange år, og så

har det noe med hvilke forståelse du har før du kommer... da jeg kom kjente jeg meg igjen. Andre har en annen vei å gå."

(136) "Vi gjør stort sett som vi vil, så lenge det ikke går utover sikerhet og helse og...så her føler man at man kan være med å medbestemme. Og medvirke. På alle plan."

(137) "Jobben er organisert sånn at den enkelte ansatte har mye frihet. Sammelignet med skolen."

(138) "Jeg føler meg helt fri, for gjøre hva jeg tenker på, har lyst til å gjøre."

(139) "Jeg tror kanskje ikke bestandig det er så tydelig på avdeling hvem som er ped leder eller hvem som er barne og ungdomsarbeider eller assistent."

(140) "I alle andre barnehager så er det de voksne som styrer."

(141) "De som jobber er kan involvere seg mye mer i det pedagogiske arbeidet, I andre barnehager ikke så mye fordi jeg tror det er veldig mye hierarki."

(142) "Lo que me gusta con xx es que trabajamos desde la sensibilidad de los niños. Al contrario, en las escuelas publicas obligan a los niños a comportarse de ciertas formas, no pueden experimentar con nada."

(143) "Creo que es importante tener xx aqui, como es importante tener este tipo de initiativas en el mundo, no solo en Chiapas."

(144) "Det er mye press på oss ift språkarbeid, det er viktig at ungene får med seg mest mulig før skolen ift språk. Og så er det begrensninger. De er nødt til å kunne få utvikle seg i et eget tempo."

(145) "Kravene leder hverdagen vår mere... men vi er ikke så gode heller til å følge alle de kravene (…) vi prøver å gjøre det på en sånn måte at det fungerer for oss, ikke for de som bestemmer over oss... og de barna de ikke kjenner."

(146) "Innenfor disse 4 veggene har vi mye frihet. Utenfor er det litt annerledes, det er ting som kommer utenifra fra de som bestemmer over oss, da er vi begrenset."

(147) "Det påvirker oss ift det at det er litt slitsomt å føle at man blir litt motarbeidet. At man hele tiden må finne nye løsninger for å få ting til å fungere... fordi vi ikke syns at barnehagen skal være skole, rett og slett, for å bevare medvirkningsperspektivet."

(148) "Rammeplanen er vi jo pliktig til å bruke. Den bruker vi ift tema. For meg er det viktig at i løpet av et år har vært gjennom alle syv fagområder beskrevet i rammeplanen."

(149) "Hvor mye jeg bruker rammeplanen, det er litt opp og ned ... noen ganger har jeg litt mer fokus på det, andre ganger så gjør jeg ting som jeg synes er viktig. Vi har årsplanen uansett. Det er den vi bør tenke mest på."

(150) "Jeg er mere impulsiv på her og nå, og så noen ganger kan du gjøre noe med årsplanen i tankene."

(151) "Rammeplanen har lite innvirkning i planlegging av tilbud og aktivitet, men den bruker vi i verdidiskusjonene i personal gruppen."

(152) "No he leido toda la curricula, porque la verdadera curricula es una cosa viva, cambia al ritmo que se desarolla el equipo."

Appendix 7: Observations' details

1. After the calendar activity Educator1 and Educator2 gather the kids for circle time. Twelve children and two educators are gathered in the corridor, sitting on benches facing a wall where a white poster is hanging. Educator2 is sitting among the children while Educator1 sits by the poster.

When everybody is sitting Ed1 starts leading. She stands up next to the poster.

She explains what a thought-map is and writes "Christmas" in capital letters. Then she tells the group: "When I think about Christmas I think about…" and writes the word "Christmas tree" on the poster. Then she asks the closest child to say what he thinks about when thinking of Christmas. One by one the children as well as Ed2 come with answers after being asked by Ed1 following a question answer principle.

The circle only lasts a few minutes. When everybody has said one word each Ed1 says with a humoristic tone of voice: "Now I'm thinking that I'm hungry!" The children understand it is the end of the circle and the beginning of mealtime and they stand up and start walking towards the dining room.

2. 14 children are sitting on their respective spot in the hallway and wait for Ed3 to arrive, in a cheerful atmosphere.

Ed3 arrives and says in a light tone of voice: "Everybody, now we are going to make a bridge. And then we are going to sing. Who wants to be a bridge?" Most children raise their hands. Ed3 points at two: "you and you, come here." The two children stand up and come to her. She grabs their hands and make them hold hands to form a bridge. Then she continues: "and now the others who want to join can come and wait in a queue here. Then we can sing and go under the bridge. Ed4 helps by guiding the children in the right direction so that they go under the bridge.

When the song is finished, Ed3 asks the children to go and wash their hands before mealtime and Ed4 assists in taking the children to the bathroom.

3. 14 children are gathered in a circle sitting on a bench and the educator on a chair. The educator tells the children: "Today we are going to learn a new song. We are going to learn a song about a centipede! A centipede has a lot of legs!"

She then asks the children if they know anything about centipedes. The interaction is based on questions and answers. "what happens when it goes in ponds?!", the educator asks. The children don't answer so she moves on.

"Now I'm going to sing about the centipede". She starts singing and stops every few line to explain the lyrics.

When she's finished with the song she turns the page she is holding "Now, I have a counting-song" and starts singing it. She interrupts the song after each sentence to ask the children questions about the lyrics, and concludes "so we are going to learn this one as well".

After they are finished singing one more song she explains "we have to chose one or two that we can share with the other children in the common circle on Friday."

Obs box 9: Organised activity (Mexican case – preschool case). Details*

Six children and an educator are gathered in a room. The children are sitting at tables while the educator stands by the blackboard. The educator asks for the children's attention and informs them of his idea through questions: "have you noticed that there are only the big children in this group? I have the idea that we can play with letters so that little by little we can learn how to read and write." Some children show great enthusiasm, some are distracted. The general attitude of the teacher is not to let himself disturb by the one who are not paying attention, and focus on those who show interest. From time to time he reminds the one or two that are playing with planes: "Listen; now I am explaining something, I suggest that you leave the plane for later and that we do this game of letters all together." As the children continue playing he continues, " I notice that you haven't taken into consideration what I said, so now I take your plane and put it over there."
José explains the game in different ways and put me to contribution (to cut paper letters). Motivating some of the children seems challenging so he adds, "I'm proposing this activity and then you can see what you think about it." Concentrating his attention on one child at a time based on their interest he manages to engage them and then help another child. In general the attention of the children is quite volatile: conversations and games interrupt their writing but they all manage to finish, even though the ideas that the educator gives are not always receipted by the children and stay as open questions. He helps the different children with their task (giving glue, cutting, answering, questions) and doesn't insist on the children who leave the room or simply don't do the activity.

Obs. Box 13: Circle time (Mexican case – preschool level). Details*

12 children and two educators are gathered in a room around tables for circle time. When one it is one child's turn to share with the circle another one starts talking and his neighbour who wants him to be silent covers his mouth with his hand but miscalculates his strength and hits him in the face instead. The immediate reaction of the educator is "Hey, careful, this is a body!", expressed with loud voice and eye contact. The child who was hit starts to cry. The educator gets closer and puts his hand on his shoulder and head and tries to comfort him, while talking to the other child asking him to help his friend get better ("take care of him") putting his arm around his friend's shoulder. Then the educator says "he will get better now." and talks to the one who hit to see what he has to say. While this happened the sharing in the circle had stopped and the kids continued with their distractions. The educator then decides to share with the rest of the group what happened before opening for the sharing in the circle to continue.

Obs. Box 14: Staff meeting (Norwegian case). Excerpt*

In the biggest room of the centre 8 educators and the leader are sitting around a table. The goal is to evaluate last year's year-plan. Two educators are responsible for presenting and mediating the meeting. The document is distributed to the staff.

The leader starts reading the document.

Ed1: "It could be reformulated to 'develop knowledge about children's literature.' Because to make it work we need knowledge.

Leader: "Do you mean that the staff needs more knowledge? Let's move forward to the topic of play".

Ed2 presents a new goal that came out of the previous meeting.

Ed3 suggests reformulation "Everybody experience joy out of the whole kindergarten being a playground"

Leader "I think this year's goal is better, more committing". When he gives his opinion he looks at everybody and tries to get a feedback.

Ed2: "Anybody else has an opinion about that goal?"

Ed4 "I agree. What we have is much better, much more concrete. The new one is very diffuse."

Ed2: "Ed5, what do you think?"

Ed5 "I agree that the wording is weird but the content is good. I like that the focus is on the physical aspect.

Leader: I don't understand, what do you mean? Ed5 explains.

Ed3: "I disagree with Ed5. I don't think all kids do that. The word "living space" focuses on the fact that we use the whole kindergarten.

Ed6: "Can I say something?"

Ed2: "We have a list. I wrote your name down"

Ed6: "Sorry, I'm not used to it."

Ed2: "Now it's your turn."

Ed6: "Is it a goal that all kids play with everything every day? I think it is important to show that we use the whole kindergarten. It is our particularity."

Leader: "It is not that important that all kids participate in all play every day. There is no contradiction between going deep into one game and having varied play". I think the word "joy" makes it difficult to measure."

Appendix 8: Case specificities and curricula

The Mexican case

> ➢ Curricula

The Mexican national curriculum for ECE was published in 2004 by the SEP (Secretariat for Public Education) and updated in 2011 as a consequence of a national education reform resulting in the "Study program 2011, Guide for the educator" (*Programa de estudio 2011, Guía para la educadora*). The curriculum is concerned with the preschool level, involving children from three to six years old, and excludes nursery level (one to three years old). The curriculum is divided into two main parts. The first details the standard competencies and achievements children are supposed to have fulfilled when finishing preschool, as well as six core disciplines within their respective competencies and skills (language and communication, mathematics, knowledge of the world, physical development and health, personal and social development, and artistic expression). The second part is a practical guide to be used by the educators in order to achieve these goals, including learning atmosphere, didactic planning and evaluation (SEP, 2011). The curriculum makes no reference to the CRC and children's participatory rights. The few times it does mention children's participation it is in instrumental terms, used as a means for achieving learning goals.

The Mexican ECEC centre that participated in this study follows an additional curriculum, which has been developed over the years since the creation of the centre and which includes both nursery and preschool level. The curriculum grounds their educational mission in philosophical principles which include love and respect, permaculture, and freedom. The child's right to participate is not explicitly mentioned therein but is implicitly referred to through these philosophical principles. Furthermore, the curriculum specifies the centre's focus on the holistic development of the child through 7 dimensions (cognitive, emotional, spiritual, social, personal, sexual, and physical). It also describes specific disciplines, some similar to those included in the national curriculum (artistic expression, mathematics, language and communication) and additional disciplines (music and movement, physical awareness, natural world, social world, internal world, community living).

> ➢ Specificity of the ECEC centre

The Mexican ECEC centre is located in the city centre of San Cristobal de las Casas, in a rented two-floor house. On the ground level there is an open space consisting of the nursery space and a dining room with a direct access to a patio, separated by a neutral area and a staircase. The kitchen, a small bathroom, and an office are also to be found on this level. The first floor is dedicated to the preschool group and consists of four rooms (assembly room, painting, library, and yoga room) and one bathroom.

At the time of the fieldwork the nursery enrolled 9 children from 1,5 to 2,5 years old and employed 2 adults, while the preschool enrolled 12 children from 3 to 6 years old with two adults.

Both the preschool and nursery have the same routine:

08:00: Doors open

09:00: Circle time

10:00: Breakfast

11:00: Various organised activities

13:00: Lunch and free play until doors close

15:00: Doors close.

The content of the circle time and organised activities are adapted to the children's level. Circle time in preschool takes the form of an assembly where everybody, children as well as adults, share how they feel and what they want to do etc. with the rest of the group. In the nursery the circle time is more routinized and led by the adults and consisting of singing and playing.

The organised activities in preschool are suggested by the adults during the assembly based on a topic chosen by the children. At the time of the fieldwork the chosen topic was "cavemen". There are usually two or more activities running at the same time (which could also include free play) to satisfy the interests of the children.

Meals are held on the first floor. Occasionally nursery and preschool children eat together. The meals start with singing a specific song. Children are asked to wash their plates when they are finished, as well as their teeth.

The staff meets formally once a week after working hours to discuss cases and share ideas. Parents are gathered several times a year in meetings taking the form of an assembly to exchange ideas and wishes.

The Norwegian case

> Curricula

The latest Norwegian national curriculum for ECEC was published in 2006 by the Ministry of Education. It is divided into 5 chapters. The first defines the purpose of ECEC centres, the second the importance of play, care, socialization, and learning, while the third chapter presents 7 core disciplines (communication and language, body, movement and health, art, culture and creativity, nature, environment and technology, ethics, religion and philosophy, society, number, space and shapes), their goals and how to fulfil them. The fourth chapter is about planning and evaluation and the last chapter emphasizes the importance of collaborating with families and schools. The first chapter not only presents the ECEC purpose but also the core values it builds on. In this chapter a paragraph is dedicated to children's participation with a direct reference to the UNCRC (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2006).

In addition to this national curriculum and in line with the Ministry of Education's prescription, the centre has its own curriculum, a "year- plan" ("*Årsplan*"). It is re-written each year by the staff and specifies concrete ways the centre plans to work towards set goals. Participation is also explicitly mentioned in this document.

> Specificity of the ECEC centre

The Norwegian ECEC centre is located at the city's periphery, in a one-floor building. There are three classrooms which each consists of a large playroom (that also serves as a dining room and is equipped with a small kitchen corner), a smaller playroom, and a bathroom reserved for children, as well as a changing room where children's clothes are stored. These three classrooms communicate via a corridor that also connects to the main kitchen. Several other rooms, such as the director's office, a meeting room, a computer room, and a changing room for the staff are found off this same corridor.

At the time of fieldwork each classroom enrolled 15 children aged 1,5 to 6 years old and employed an average of 3 adults.

Each class has roughly the same daily routine:

07:30: Doors open – breakfast and free play

09:00: Organised activities (changing according to the day of the week)

11:00: Lunch

12:00: Free play outside

14:00: Second lunch – then free play until doors close.

17:00: Doors close

Activities are both organized and suggested differently in the three classrooms. Most of the time the doors are open so that children can play and participate in activities across classrooms.

Circle time is also organised differently across classrooms, usually as a short gathering before lunch, where a concrete activity such as singing or telling a story is led by the adult.

The staff meets once a week during working hours, including a representative from each class and the director in order to discuss the week's activities. Additionally, several times a year they have meetings attended by all members of staff after working hours to discuss more general issues. They also organize meetings with the families a few times a year.