

A Breath of Fresh Air

**A Qualitative Study on Outdoor Play and Learning
in Norwegian Barnehage**

By

Nora Simone Bryne Happny

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Supervised by Åse Nylenna Akslen and Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter



“Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.” –Thomas Berry



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Although I had traveled to Norway several times when I was younger, I could not believe my ears and had to investigate further. I struggled to find literature about Norwegian preschools or “barnehage” as they are called in Norwegian. Luckily Dr. Ponte knew someone in Bergen who had extensive experience on the subject, Professor Åse Nylenna Akslen. Professor Akslen (I now know her as Åse) answered my initial questions and helped me find more sources in English. After I handed in that thesis I sent along a copy to Åse and she challenged me by saying that if I really wanted to see what Norwegian barnehage was like I should come and experience it myself. First, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Iris Ponte for planting this seed of an idea into my mind, encouraging me to water it through contacting Åse, and helping me to see the sunlight in the cloudy Bergen days.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In Norway the term “Barnehage” is used to describe all types of childhood institutions and preschool experiences before children start primary school. Barnehage is a direct translation from the German word Kindergarten, both referring to a “garden for children.” The word itself comes from Friedrich Froebel who established kindergarten in the early 1800s, classes in Germany that were grounded in traditional religious values with a belief in the importance of learning through supervised play (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). Kindertartens in Norway are for children from birth to five years old and offer care, childrearing, play and learning (Lillemyr, 2009). The first kindergarten in Norway started in Trondheim in 1837, but it was not until 1975 that kindertartens in Norway were given their own legislation. In 1984 Norwegian kindertartens were given handbooks called “Goal Directed Work in Preschool,” which at the time was the first public document for people working with children. In 1992 the first National Framework Plan was developed and by 1996 the “Framework Plan for Day Care Institutions” was implemented into all government sponsored Norwegian kindertartens (Alvestad & Samuelsson, 1999). Since then the framework plan has been updated in 2006 and again in 2011. The Norwegian government has declared that it will attempt to work towards enhancing children's opportunities for developing physically, mentally and socially through playing and experiencing nature in order to preserve Norwegian environmental and health ideals (Nilsen, 2008).

The 2011 Framework Plan states the purpose for Norwegian kindertartens as promoting all-around development based on fundamental Christian and humanist values, giving children the opportunity to develop their creative zest, teaching children how to take care of themselves, each other and nature as well as acknowledging the intrinsic value of childhood (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 7). The plan goes on to lay out many aspects of Norwegian kindergarten with hopes of giving pedagogical leaders a means of assessment as well as providing information for parents and authorities. The plan emphasizes a focus on building a holistic, pedagogical philosophy with care, play, learning and formation at the forefront of core activities for children. The purpose of the plan is to give children a foundation for all-around

development and opportunities to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The plan requires kindergartens to instill in children the intrinsic value of childhood and promote equality and democracy. The framework plan is based mainly on a holistic view of childhood that sees development of children as interweaving interactions between the physical and mental circumstances and the environment in which the children grow up.

One of the most notable aspects of the framework plan is the idea that “kindergartens’ programs shall be built on a holistic pedagogical philosophy, with care, play, learning and formation being at the core of activities. Social and linguistic skills, as well as seven learning areas, are also important to the pedagogical environment provided by kindergartens (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 5).” The word “formation” is what the authors of the plan have used as a translation from the Norwegian word *danning* and more internationally known term *Bildung*. *Danning* is an important concept that means that the child develops as a whole person or whole being. The idea is that a child is not just educated in the mind but that he or she learns to be a better person. *Danning* is a shaping of ones own personality. More specifically, the framework plan says that,

Formation is more than merely development, more than learning, more than care, more than upbringing, and more than socialization. And yet, formation includes all of this. Children must be given challenges, opportunities to develop knowledge and skills and support in order to act with compassion and care and make choices based on ethical foundation. Formation provides a foundation for a child’s all-around development (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 13).

Whether it is called formation, *danning*, or *bildung*, this concept is at the core of Norwegian *barnehage* and shapes the overarching goal for children.

1.2 Importance of this Study

Over two decades ago Joseph Tobin, David Wu, and Dana Davidson studied the preschools in Japan, China and the United States, compiling their findings into a well-known book called “Preschools Across Cultures.” In the book, they say early on that “we view preschools as complex institutions serving children, parents, and indirectly the wider society. Embedded in

communities, nations, and cultures, preschools both reflect and affect social change (Tobin et. al. 1989).” Therefore they looked at the preschools they studied as lenses that captured cultural identity. This is the overall approach that I took in studying Norwegian barnehage. As an American with Norwegian roots I look at what is going on in Norway through a different lens than Norwegians who chose to study barnehage. We may agree with the quote above and acknowledge that all barnehage in Norway are indirect reflections of Norwegian society, but I found through my observations and interviews that because I am an outsider, I questioned things that the teachers may never have considered.

In a TED talk Ken Robinson said that, “education is meant to take us into this future that we cannot grasp (Robinson, 2006).” He goes on to discuss that schools are killing creativity in children, that the systems we have in place now are crushing kids’ talents. There is evidence that barnehage in Norway, especially those that keep children outdoors for a significant portion of the day, allow children’s passions to be fed and flourish in the organic way that Robinson discusses. He makes another very keen observation early on in this talk that “kids will take a chance if they don’t know they’ll have a go...they are not frightened of being wrong (Robinson, 2006).” When children are educated in a natural outdoor environment they are allowed the freedom of taking many physical and mental chances that not only prepare them for schooling but also for life in a Norwegian climate. Although the idea of having children outside and playing freely may be a fundamentally old school tradition for Norway, there is no questioning its importance in an uncertain future.

In this study I have reviewed selective literature that helped me develop a main research topic of *outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage*. This literature review in itself is a unique composition of articles, books, and dissertations on the topic. All were quite insightful for my study and could be the same for outsiders. Also my research provides a unique perspective derived from what I observed over the course of spending twelve days in three different barnehage. It also includes the perspectives from six educated teachers that I interviewed after my observation period. Then I attempt to connect my observations with what I interpreted from the teacher’s interviews and bring it all back to correlate with what literature has said in the past. The research therefore has a unique angle as well as an outsider’s perspective that may shed new

light on many aspects of Norwegian culture as seen through practices in outdoor-based barnehage.

1.3 Why You Should Care

Norway is a part of Scandinavia that stands out for many reasons. The country itself is incredibly long and known for drawing strength from the sea from the Viking era up to the present day. There are approximately 4.5 million people living in Norway, a good portion of them residing in the larger cities of Oslo and Bergen. Norwegians are known for things like fishing, the fjords, newly found oil, an expensive standard of living, high ranking UN happiness scores and strong, beautiful people (National Geographic, 2013). Perhaps what is not as well known as it should be is how Norwegian people celebrate childhood. To most Norwegians childhood is looked at as a time where children should experience freedom and happiness. The people of Norway have a simple saying that “there is no bad weather only bad clothes,” and they hold true to this philosophy in how they approach training their children for life in Norway. Norwegian barnehage give children a time to experience all aspects of the culture including one of Norway’s most prized possessions, the outdoors.

I started wondering what Norwegian children gained by spending a majority of their time outside while in their preschool years. Of course they needed to learn how to dress and handle an often challenging and cold Norwegian climate, but beyond learning about the weather, what were these children doing? After I thought through all these questions extensively, my research topic morphed into looking at outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage. In a similar way to Tobin et. al. I did not set out to elicit specific pedagogical meanings from Norwegian barnehage or attempt to understand how the all barnehage relate to the culture of Norway. Instead I focused specifically on what are called “friluftsbarnhage” which translates to fresh air gardens for children or more directly, outdoor kindergartens. My greater goal in picking this topic (looking at play and learning in Norwegian barnehage) was to discuss and discover what barnehage was meant to do and be within a Norwegian society. I also asked in individual interviews with various teachers what types of play children are engaging in, what teachers think children are learning and what skill sets children develop through outdoor play. I attempt to explore a deeper side of

Norwegian culture, one that seems innate to a native but may be looked at as dangerous, irrelevant to learning, and/or just plain odd to an outsider.

Part of what Robinson (2006) is upset about is that schools begin to educate children from the waist up. He says that at a certain level all education takes place in the head and the head only. There are many preschools all over the world that mainly focus on this type of intellect. But he goes on to point out that in fact we can and should experience thinking through using the body. In my early athletic career I was a gymnast. I would watch and read about certain moves or tricks that other more advanced gymnasts could do. It was not until my physical body had done the move that I could say I had truly learned it. In the same way, Norwegian barnehage encourages children to learn how to use their bodies to climb, hike and be in nature. Instead of simply reading about aspects of nature and systems of life, children are able to experience those things first hand. Just as I could not understand the concept of a cartwheel until my body had actually done the trick, Norwegian children begin to understand how they themselves work, how nature functions and how to respond to their natural environment.

1.4 Why This Study is Significant

On a very basic level this study provides an interesting view of what is going on in outdoor based Norwegian barnehage. On a greater scale, there is simply not enough written or oral material about Scandinavian based early childhood education centers in English and this study will address that. I will try to explain through literature, observation and interviews what occurs in Norwegian barnehage through the voice of the teachers but inevitably also through my own perspective. Perhaps an American can never truly grasp all of what is going on in barnehage, but I am confident that both readers who are native to Norway and those who are foreign to the culture will at the very least come out with a few new thoughts after reading this study. At the very least this thesis will address what is happening in outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage and how that relates to the Norwegian societal ideals.

All societies are unique. Although there are people advocating for a nature-based childhood all over the world, there are simply some places that could not take children into the woods. In fact

there are barnehage in Oslo, the capital of Norway, that do not have access to some of the natural resources that the three barnehage I observed do. There is no denying that this idea of “nature-deficit disorder” coined by Richard Louv is fast enveloping our global society. Children are spending more time indoors and less time in the natural environment. Nature gives children a chance to humbly place themselves in the vast world, to find reality, to be a part of our humanity and to be in the wilderness (Louv, 2008). Robinson (2010) begs for a learning revolution that encourages innovation while challenging what we take for granted. We are living in a time where we have taken our resources for granted for far too long. Until we teach children to love and respect nature in the way Norwegian barnehage is so successfully doing, we will continue to fail the environment. When we educate children’s whole being from top to bottom, we give them the chance to use their body, both sides of their brain and inevitably give them the tools to prepare for an uncertain future.

1.5 Organization of this Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter one: Introduction

In the introductory chapter I establish a general background of Norway as a culture and set the tone for the thesis as a whole. First I give a brief historical background for the development of Norwegian barnehage. Then I give the reader some important background information about my study, why I am personally interested in outdoor Norwegian preschools, and why my study has relevance to the field of early childhood education. I will introduce some of the main themes of my study as well as highlight how this study fits within larger global educational trends.

Chapter two: Interpreted Literature Review

The second chapter is an interpretive literature review. In this section I present a wide range of theoretical and research literature that gives relevance to my study. My literature review is divided into five sub-sections: exploring Norwegian barnehage, potential risks in outdoor play, differences in indoor play versus outdoor play, developing the concept of play in Norwegian

barnehage and the transition from play to creative learning. The literature review provides a foundation for the themes of analysis set in chapter four and sets the stage for the rest of the thesis.

Chapter three: Research Methodology

In the third chapter I explain the process I went through in conducting this qualitative empirical study in Norway. I discuss why I came to use a qualitative format for this research, relating it to some of Dewey's theories as well as phenomenology philosophies of Merleau-Ponty. This chapter explains the process I went through in selecting my participants, generating data through observation and interviews and making sense of that data. The trustworthiness and ethics of my study are also discussed here.

Chapter four: Analysis of the Data

The fourth chapter is a comprehensive presentation of the information I gathered over twelve days of intensive observation and interviews with teachers in barnehage. In this chapter I review what the teachers collectively discussed with me in their one on one interviews as well as give examples of what I observed. In this chapter I present the six main themes that emerge from the interviews and help give meaning to the main research topic while answering the three sub questions.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

This chapter summarizes the whole thesis, highlighting my main points and the key issues discussed. Here I give an overview of the most pertinent contributions and also the limitation of this study for the Norwegian culture as well as for outside societies. Then I discuss what implications my study addresses has for practice and practitioners. I conclude by referring back to the most distinctive aspects of my findings.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERPRETIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one I stated that the main purpose of this study is to explore outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage. Therefore, within this chapter, I present relevant theoretical and research literature on Norwegian barnehage to give a context for my study. The interpretive selected literature that is presented in this chapter is organized into important themes that build on one another, giving a range of insight into this phenomenon. The chapter starts where the introduction left off by giving a bit more background on the development of barnehage within Scandinavia. Then I discuss sources on risks in the outdoor context of play as well as differences between playing outdoors and indoors. Then the review shifts to explaining the concept of play within this type of school and is followed by a section on how that play creatively turns into potential learning experiences.

2.2 Elements of the Outdoors in Norwegian Barnehage

2.2.1 Exploring Friluftsbarnhage

The idea of a “forest day-care center” developed in Denmark around 1985 and quickly moved over to Norway and Sweden. Nature is the primary pedagogical tool and inspiration for learning in these centers (Borge et al, 2003). Furthermore, the framework plan directly addresses that outdoor play and activities are an important aspect of childhood culture that should be part of play regardless of geographic location in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). Children have been found to develop better physical skills and have the opportunity for more creative play in the wild outdoor environment (Fjørtoft, 2001; Kaarby, 2003).

The Norwegian child is expected to live a life in which the relationship between the child and his or her environment can be developed. Being outdoors provides children with the opportunity to learn about the seasons and extreme weather, which is a crucial element of life in Norway. Children are healthier while learning values and cultural identity in outdoor preschools (Borge et al. 2003). According to Borge et al., three main ideas for forming outdoor or forest schools were to foster an attachment to nature, to improve the image of childhood and to allow the parents the choice of this kind of care.

To foster an attachment to nature describes the need to achieve the cultural ideal of the Norwegians to being outdoors for leisure activities. Parents want their children to grow up appreciating the wilderness and experiencing outdoor life (Borge et al. 2003). Outdoor kindergartens typically spend half the day (10am-2pm) in various locations in the woodland that are often fenced or roped off for their purposes and may involve taking a short walk or hike to get to. This routine occurs regardless of the weather (Nilsen, 2008). One telling philosophy of a natural outdoor kindergarten is that “everything you can do indoors, you can do outdoors, but not the other way around.” Another common Norwegian saying is that ‘there is no bad weather, only bad clothing’ (Kaarby, 2003). Children learn and experience how to dress for the weather in order to be physically and mentally comfortable as well as how to use their bodies to keep themselves warm (Nilsen, 2008).

The second ideal was to improve image of a childhood, to reflect the image of a happy childhood. Norwegians picture their children playing outside in the wild. Lately, researchers found that a common norm for Norwegian parents is the belief that happy children play outdoors most of the day regardless of the season or weather (Borge et al. 2003). Lastly, parents want the option of outdoor-based childcare centers for their children more and more so the need for them is increasing.

2.2.2 Potential Risks in Outdoor Play

Outdoor play has roots deeply tied to Norwegian culture and society, but one cannot deny potential risks associated with free play in nature. Children are known to search for excitement

and thrills through play, but risky play is associated with the potential for physical injury and uncertainty (Sandseter, 2007). Risky play from an adult's perspective offers children the opportunity to test boundaries and explore risks that are harmful. From a child's perspective, such play can help overcome fears, could be on the borderline of being out of control, and might be a type of play that a child has never explored before (Sandseter, 2010). Risky play can have both positive and negative associations and consequences. The culture at hand acknowledges whether these practices are risks worth taking, but "playing it safe" may keep children from having valuable learning experiences (New, et al., 2005). When children are given the opportunity to test risks they gain mastery and can find confidence to face new challenges, however physical risk is often associated negatively among teachers and parents (Little & Wyver, 2008).

Ellen B. H. Sandseter has researched risky play in Norwegian kindergartens as well as written numerous articles and conducted studies on the topic. She has found that children intentionally seek risks within six categories: great heights, high speed, play with dangerous tools, play near dangerous elements, rough-and-tumble play and play where the children can disappear/get lost (Sandseter, 2007). Her later research results suggest that children's risk-taking decisions have a balance between positive and negative outcomes within a given play situation (Sandseter, 2009).

Sandseter uses John Adams' "thermostat" for risk taking in most of her studies. His model shows how an individual's propensity to take risks is connected to the potential rewards, assessed accidents, and perceived danger,—all interconnected within a child's mind, balancing his or her behavior (Sandseter, 2010). Often the inevitable outcome for taking a new risk is connected to previous risk taking experiences where children will regard their past negative experiences in deciding whether to partake in a new risky situation. In comparison with many other cultures, children in Norway are more widely encouraged to master risk through various weather conditions and exploration of natural landscapes (New, et al., 2005).

There has been extensive research on how Norwegian children experience and engage in risky play and how risk is managed by children and supervising adults. There has also been unbiased documentation on general risky play in the outdoor context, as well as discussion of the potential

positive and negative factors of risky play. Yet, risk is still a contemporary issue up for debate within Norway (Sandseter 2007, 2008, 2010).

Researchers have documented that Norwegian kindergarten teachers have fewer concerns about children's risk-taking than early childhood educators from other countries (New, et al., 2005; Sandseter, 2009).

Risk can have a very positive connotation as long as children are taking risks within their comfort zone and capacity (Smith, 1998). The balancing act of letting children explore nature and natural playscapes while keeping them away from potential injuries is not an easy one. Various cultures will have to come up with their own conclusions as to how much risk in play is allowable (Smith, 1998; Sandseter, 2009).

2.2.3 Differences Between Indoor Play and Outdoor Play

An important notion regarding the difference between indoor and outdoor play is Gibson's (1979) concept of *affordances*, which describes how different layouts and compositions of environment offer children varying functions for play (Gibson, 1979; Fjørtoft, 2001; Kaarby, 2003). The diversity of a given outdoor environment offers children a wide variety of possibilities that can change based on the season. There are some key areas in outdoor playscapes that are used frequently and others may be used more in certain seasons (Fjørtoft & Sageie, 2000). For example, a slope that might offer a challenge for a child to hike up in the springtime could change into a slippery slide down the hill when covered in snow during the winter.

Fjørtoft & Sageie (2000) found in their study that children's flexibility and strength were developed regardless of the location of play, but motor fitness, which has correlation to motor learning, was developed specifically in the outdoor playgroup. Moreover, children's play has been found to be more vigorous outdoors than indoors. Children themselves prefer outdoor play to indoor play (Fjørtoft, 2000). Children were found to have the ability to interact with their physical environment, using the vegetation and geography to fill various functions for play (Fjørtoft & Sageie, 2000). The natural environment becomes a stimulating arena for children to learn about nature as well as develop individual motor fitness training and skill.

Kaarby (2003) studied how children played in the outdoor environment by dividing play into four categories: physical activity play, role-play, exploring, and traditional play. She concludes her study by acknowledging that the most common type of play in outdoor kindergartens is physical activity play. She offers examples like: climbing steep hillsides and sliding down, jumping from rocks, climbing trees, throwing cones, rolling on the ground, balancing on stones or fallen trees, and carving. The choices are based on what the environment afforded and give children the opportunity to creatively transform those playscapes into valuable play opportunities. Nien (2008) develops the idea that children who encounter everyday life in nature including physical and mental endurances, develop resilience and vigor becoming what she labels “robust” children:

The robust child subject fits well within the national context: to become and be a subject who loves the Norwegian version of ‘nature’ encompasses an *independent* subject with the competence necessary to roam about in ‘unspoiled’ nature. The children in nature centre (sic) *learned* through experiences how to handle the necessary tools for coping in such environments, whilst also learning about flora and fauna and environmental issues that reoccur in daily life (Nien, 2008, 54).

Thus, the outdoor environment offers children the unique ability to develop motor skills through physical play activity as well as the opportunity to become robust children infused with ideals and norms of Norwegian culture.

2.3 Developing the Concept of Play in Norwegian Barnehage

2.3.1 Defining and Explaining Play

Play as a concept and in definition differs according to settings, individuals, cultures, and age-groups (Sandseter, 2010). Throughout history, play has been a central piece of early childhood development and a dominant part of how children learn and develop. For instance, “playful children develop their own play in their own ways and on their own terms. They let play happen, by becoming immersed in the mood or spirit of play. They see the world from the perspective of play, creating their own playful meanings, symbols and practices, which are imbued with cultural significance and result in self-development and self-actualization” (Wood, 2010: 14). Words associated with play range from providing children with excitement, fun, arousal, merriment, joy

and lightheartedness, where the act of playing is commonly more important than its ends (Sutton-Smith, 1997). With that working definition many categories of play have been developed.

Here is an example of the many ways that educators of the past have defined play:

- Seashore: free self-expression for the pleasure of expression
- Froebel: the natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood.
- Hall: the motor habits and spirit of the past persisting in the present.
- Groos: instinctive practice, without serious intent, of activities which will later be essential to life.
- Dewey: activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves
- Schiller: the aimless expenditure of exuberant energy.
- Spenser: superfluous actions taking place instinctively in the absence of real actions...activity performed for the immediate gratification derived without regard for ulterior benefits.
- Lazarus: activity in itself free, aimless, amusing or diverting.
- Shand: a type of play directed at the maintenance of joy.
- Dulles: an instinctive form of self-expression and emotional escape value.
- Curti: highly motivated activity which, as free from conflicts, is usually, though not always, pleasurable.

Each of these definitions implies a particular interpretation of play yet shows how different the idea of play can be according to whom defines it (Saracho & Spodek, 1998).

Bekoff and Byers (1981) divide play into three categories: *social play*, where the activity is directed toward another living individual; *object play*, where the activity is directed toward an inanimate object; and *locomotor play*, where the activity places the individual in a seemingly frantic environment (Sandseter, 2010). In all three categories, play has an ends to its means. There are four dimensions of play, which are *intrinsic motivation*, *children's suspension of reality*, *internal base of control* and *children's play as social integration or communication at different levels*. These four dimensions help us to understand play where children are deeply

involved and interact in different roles (Lillemyr, 2001). Both the categories of play and dimensions of play show that play in itself is a complex and varied activity.

Another approach to giving play a more well-bodied perspective is seen by looking at the criteria developed by Rubin et al. (1983):

1. Play is personally motivated by the satisfaction embedded in the activity and not governed either by basic needs and drives, or by social demands.
2. Players are concerned with activities more than with goals. Goals are self-imposed and the behavior of the players is spontaneous.
3. Play occurs with familiar objects, or following the exploration of unfamiliar objects. Children supply their own meanings to play activities and control the activities themselves.
4. Play activities can be nonliteral.
5. Play is free from the rules imposed from the outside and the rules that do exist can be modified by the players.
6. Play requires the active engagement of the players.

Taking all of these aspects into account, these criteria help explain play behavior, but they do not explain *why* children play (Saracho & Spodek, 1998).

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has worked to develop an extensive theory on what he calls “flow” which may uncover reasons children play. Flow can be explained as the state in which an individual is fully absorbed in a task whereby the basic physical needs are often forgotten and time can be disoriented (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, 2004). There are three conditions for flow to occur. First, an individual must have a task that is neither too challenging nor too easy. Second, the activity that the individual partakes in must give that person immediate feedback. Third, this feedback helps assist the individual in making progress and therefore succeeding in achieving their goal (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). During flow, individuals can experience a wide range of things including feelings of control over the situation, clarity, and the merging of action and awareness. When children develop the ability to experience this aspect of flow

through play they can become intrinsically motivated and experience the rewards of learning more easily. Children will tend to repeat those experiences because of the positive rewards (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). When play and flow merge together successfully, there are many potential benefits.

Play can be many things, including a spontaneous activity, but ideally children develop intellectually, creatively, physically, socially and emotionally through play. Some argue that children learn most effectively through first-hand experiences and free play while others insist that structured play gives children more ownership of their learning (Wood, 2010). To help understand play, Bruce (1994) developed twelve forms of free-flow play:

1. Free-flow play actively uses first-hand experiences, including struggles, manipulations, exploration, discovery and practice.
2. Free-flow play exerts no external pressure to conform to rules, pressures, goals, or tasks or definite direction.
3. Free-flow play is an active process without a product.
4. Free-flow play is intrinsically motivated.
5. Free-flow play is possible, alternative worlds that involve supposing and ‘as if’, which lift participants to a higher level of functioning. This involves being imaginative, creative, original and innovative.
6. Free-flow play is sustained, and when in full flow helps us to function in advance of what we can actually do in our real lives.
7. Free-flow play can be initiated by a child or an adult; if it is initiated by an adult, he or she must pay attention to features in points 2, 9 and 10 of this list.
8. Free-flow play can be solitary.
9. Free-flow play can be in partnership with other children or groups of adults and/or children who will be sensitive to each other’s personal agendas.
10. Free-flow play is about participants wallowing in ideas, feelings, relationships, reflecting on and becoming aware of what we know (meta-cognition).
11. During free-flow play we use the technical prowess, mastery and competence we have previously developed, and so can be in control.

12. Free-flow play is an integrating mechanism that brings together everything we learn, know, feel and understand.

When children can engage in meaningful free-flow play, they can bridge the gap between play and learning. When children become the main ‘actors’ or facilitators for their learning and engage in activities that are based in real life, they are able to create meaningful learning experiences (Hujala et al. 2010).

With both the definition of play and categories of play still up for debate among academics for the sake of this study play will be defined through the aid of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research’s Framework Plan, laid out in 2006 and amended in 2011. Play in the kindergarten setting can offer Norwegian children a complex set of skills for both social and intellectual development. As directly stated in the Framework Plan for Norwegian kindergartens:

Play shall play a prominent role in life at kindergartens. Play has intrinsic value and is an important part of child culture. Play is a universal human phenomenon, which children are skilled at and enjoy. It is a fundamental lifestyle and way of learning through which children can express themselves (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 27-28).

The plan goes on to state that play is important for the well-being of children as well as being an important aspect of well-rounded development. Play in its entirety is a social phenomenon understated by the idea that childhood itself is socially constructed (Riihelä 2002; Nilsen, 2008). The framework plan declares that “play is part of a child culture, and reflects both the environment in which children grow up and society in general” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 28). Outdoor play in the Norwegian kindergartens becomes a place for children to engage in self-governed play directly correlated to the ideal Norwegian tradition of strong bonds with nature and enjoyment for leisure outdoor activities (Gibson, 1979; Nilsen, 2008).

2.3.2 The Transition from Play to Creative Learning

The 2011 Framework Plan for Norwegian kindergartens says that learning should take place in daily interactions with others and must be linked with care, play and formation. It declares that kindergartens should nurture children's curiosity, creativity and desire to learn based on the child's interests, knowledge and skills (2.3 Learning). The plan says that "children can learn from everything they experience in all areas of life," (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 29). The framework plan acknowledges learning in formal and informal settings and that there is a pedagogical purpose for each. A major part of the child's learning process, according to the plan, comes from both learning on their own as well as quality interactions with their teachers. The plan encourages teachers to use the interests of the child as a starting point for developing and searching for more knowledge with the children. In short, the framework highlights the importance of a child-centered learning approach and encourages kindergarten staff to support and promote children's active learning.

The framework plan addresses seven "learning areas" that cover a wide range of learning with an ultimate goal of promoting the development of children's experiences and learning as expressed through process aim. The framework plan defines each of the seven learning areas, then gives examples of ways staff can work towards achieving the goals of each area.

The seven learning areas are:

1. Communication, language and text provides a good linguistic base for children. Children are encouraged to listen, learn to express themselves through their own voice and become familiar with books.

2. Body, movement and health allows children to acquire motor skills and body control through physical activity. In doing so children are able to learn about the world around them. This fosters development of body control, gross motor skills, fine motor skills and sense of rhythm and motor sensitivity.

3. Art, culture and creativity help children develop cohesion, create their own culture, and learn about the world around them. Thus they are able to use their imaginations to think creatively.

4. *Nature, environment and technology* allows children to learn about nature and the love for the outdoors. Here children can learn to observe, wonder and explore links between humans and nature.

5. *Ethics, religion and philosophy* ask that kindergartens teach societal values and norms through learning about religion, ethics and philosophy in the eyes of culture and society.

6. *Local community and society* declares that the kindergartens have a role in increasing knowledge about the local community.

7. *Numbers, space and shapes* highlights that through play children are given the ability to develop mathematical and investigative skills. In doing so children are allowed to explore and play with numbers, shapes, patterns.

Individual barnehage are given freedom to adapt the learning areas into their curriculum set out in their own annual plans. Yet through their promotion of these seven areas it is clear what the government has deemed the important aspects of learning.

Learning in an early childhood education setting is closely connected to a child's own experiences regardless of the environmental setting. This orientation for learning through play focuses on children as active meaning makers, learning as a cooperation process and environments as active participants in playing and learning (Hujala et al. 2010). When children are active meaning makers in their own play environment they have the ability to experience that space through social contact and activities, which give the child cognitive dimensions that affect their learning and growth. Learning as a cooperative process suggests that children's core development revolves around the quality of their social experiences and interactions with their peers and adults.

Finally, active learning environments offer the children possibilities for exploration and experimentation. Richard Louv, an American who is advocating for saving children from what he

calls “nature-deficit disorder” says “nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses. Given a chance, a child will bring the confusion of the world to the woods, wash it in the creek, turn it over to see what lives on the unseen side of that confusion.” A case could be made here that children are given more opportunities for learning in an outdoor based setting where there are more chances for exploring and experimenting with nature (Louv, 2008).

Play and learning can become dichotomous when children begin to engage in mature play, which emphasizes the three orientations of learning described above. Mature play integrates play and learning through seven core qualities,—embodiment, emotions, collaboration, action, narration, creativity and insight. Embodiment describes play learned through the whole body. Emotions are always involved in activities and learning and emotional competence is developed through play. Collaboration is linked to social competence and explains that events where children can collaborate increase opportunity for learning. Action emphasizes physical activities which are important for children’s motor learning. Narration functions as a tool for creative play in which children are able to learn, develop and transform. Creativity is linked to imagination, whimsical ideas and problem solving where humor and divergent thinking can come together. Lastly, insight gives children the opportunity to make discoveries and solve problems on their own. When all of these elements come together thorough mature play, children are learning at a peak level, which most often takes place when engaging in role-play (Hujala et al. 2010).

Ken Robinson defines creativity as “the process of having original ideas that have value” and Jacob Barnett believes that the only way we can have creative ideas is to stop learning, start thinking and therefore creating (Robinson, 2010; Barnett, 2012). What both intellectuals agree on is that the future of education is unpredictable. Both Robinson and Barnett reject conventional education and see that a revolution needs to happen. Perhaps part of the future of schooling rests in allowing children more self-exploration, getting rid of this nature-deficit disorder (Louv, 2008) in turn helping to mold children into robust human beings (Nien, 2008). There are undoubtedly more risks associated with learning and playing outdoors but as Sandsetter and Smith point out, as long as children are taking those risks within their comfort zone, they are necessary.

Education may look very different in five years, but with the tools that children can learn through

outdoor education they will be better equipped to take on challenges of life in a well-rounded, creative approach.

2.4 Rationale for Selecting Literature

The process of finding literature to review for this chapter proved to be quite difficult. Much of what is written about Norwegian barnehage is in Norwegian. Although the interest in the subject is increasing rapidly, many quality sources have not yet been translated into English. Luckily there are a fair amount of doctoral dissertations, quality articles and a few very good books on the subject. Another source I found quite useful was the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research's framework plan, which is fully translated into English. This document helped to provide useful background and insight into the goals of barnehage. My goal was to use as many sources that were written by Norwegians and translated into English as possible, though I connected some of the ideas, theories, and notions to outside sources.

The literature review helped to inform my study in multiple ways. First the review helped me to shape a context and history behind Norwegian barnehage. Then this review helped me place barnehage within a societal context and understand more about this type of schooling. In essence, this review helped me shape and identify the main focus of my study. As I read and reported on many aspects of barnehage including some history, potential dangers, and various types of play, what became clear to me was that I wanted to delve deeper into the specifics on outdoor play and learning.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I discuss and review literature in the field of Norwegian barnehage. I have given a brief background and context of how barnehage was developed within Scandinavia. I then examine potential risks associated with play in Norwegian barnehage. I discuss literature that presents some differences on what may occur while children play inside the school building versus what may occur while they play outside. After, I present selected literature that discusses and develops a concept of play in barnehage as well as how that play might potentially be linked to learning and development with a key focus on motor development. I then give examples of

how play and learning have the potential to become dichotomous both now and in the future. I conclude by explaining my rationale behind choosing to review the literature that is presented in this chapter. In the next chapter, I describe the research methodology that I used for my study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the theoretical research process that helped me develop and shape how I conducted my study. I present literature to explain why I chose a qualitative based study and how that shaped my research design, give some theoretical background for the research, then I address my main research topic and related questions followed by the area of study and negotiation for access. I account for my reasoning behind choosing individual interviews and personal observation for my main methods of research and how I went about generating data from both methods. I conclude this section with a discussion of the trustworthiness of my study, which highlights ethical precautions that I took. In short, within this study I sought to explore how children experience the outdoors in Norwegian barnehage, to gain more knowledge about the importance of outdoor play, to understand what children learn while playing outside and to attempt to discover what types of skills they acquire. This chapter concludes with a summary.

3.2 Research Design and Methodological Theory

3.2.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative study with an emphasis on an active participant observation as well as in-depth one on one interviews. Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, highlighting the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied and how various situational constraints may or may not shape the final inquiry (Denzil & Lincoln, 2011). Moreover, quantitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer or researcher in the world. It involves interpretation and demands the researcher to have a naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative research aims to study things or people in their natural setting and attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena giving meaning to the object at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Qualitative research offers meanings and interpretations that are negotiated through human data sources, have no absolute truths, and are a result of understanding the participant's reality (Cresswell, 2012). This study is based in an ethnographic design, which aims to interpret a group's shared patterns and explore central themes that develop to create a cohesive portrait of

the group (Cresswell, 2012). In this case the group that I am studying are teachers and children in barnehage and I will thematically describe what is occurring in outdoor play. For Merleau-Ponty what mattered in describing your research was not to describe it as precisely and meticulously as possible, but to explain and analyze what was said or discovered. In this phenomenological philosophy the goal is to “investigate the essences” by describing phenomena and searching for their common essence or meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this approach you must see the world through your own point of view or perspective, but describe, not analyze what you see or discover (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

This study aims to use a phenomenological philosophy especially within the analysis. In qualitative phenomenological studies it is imperative that one avoids making generalizations about any study in order not to distort the uniqueness of the case (Yin, 2011). More specifically Merleau-Ponty says that nothing is more difficult than to know what we see. In research we must theme our lived experience in order to give them objective expression and meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). The notion of “lived experience” is broken down to the immediacy of experience and the content of what is experienced, moreover the notion that the world is not what we think but what we live through (Van Manen, 2003). Lived experiences aim to provide concrete insights into qualitative meanings of phenomena in people’s lives. Lived experiences are stories or examples of how people see the world.

For my research it is important that my interviewees can share their own lived experiences as teachers as in the same way that I can observe and discover my own experiences before interviewing them. Through these direct descriptions of experiences I can begin to gain insight into concrete dimensions of people’s reality as teachers and how those teachers perceive the children’s reality (Van Manen, 2003 & Merleau-Ponty, 1945). For Dewey, learning was the result of the transaction between the individual learner and the environment, and that a main aspect of gaining knowledge was dependent on the context. (Giles & Eyler, 1994). Dewey’s approach to gaining knowledge has important implications on the theory behind giving children the chance to learn about their environment while outdoors.

3.2.2 Theoretical Backdrop

John Dewey contributed quite a lot to the framework for epistemology, contemporary pragmatism, and knowledge theories, among other things. Dewey approached the question of how we gain knowledge by an action-based theory, which he called the theory of knowledge but could be more aptly referred to the theory of knowing. In this theory, he explains that through the transaction between living things and their environment we gain experience and thus the ability to grasp the relationship between those actions and their consequences (Biesta, 2010). In a more broad theoretical sense it is through experience that we can learn anything. For Dewey there were two parts within a quality experience, agreeableness and effect on the later experience. If one of these is missing it will not be an educational experience. The *Principle of Continuity* and *Principle of Interaction* further explains this notion of an educative experience (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

The *Principle of Continuity* says that our experiences occur along an experiential continuum. This concept explains that our experiences are built on ones we had previously and shows how learning is a linear continual process. The *Principle of Interaction* says that learning is the result of the transaction between the individual learner and his or her environment. When these two notions interact and connect, there is an acquisition of knowledge and a potential for application of knowledge (Dewey 1938; Giles & Eyler, 1994). A paramount idea for Dewey is that thinking and actions are undeniably linked (Giles & Eyler, 1994). Dewey says that our ideas are originated by suggestions and those ideas have the potential to become functional if they may resolve a given situation (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey set forth four criteria that must be present to create learning and knowledge based experiences. These are: 1. It must generate interest, 2. It must be worthwhile intrinsically, 3. It must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information, and 4. It must cover a considerable time span and be capable of fostering development over time (Dewey 1938; Giles & Eyler, 1994). It is my goal that through using many aspects of Dewey's epistemology this research will serve to become a means of transferring the lived experiences of the children seen through the teachers eyes into explaining how these children have the potential to develop knowledge. For Dewey research can indicate what has worked and in my case this

research explains a cultural and societal educational technique that is prevalent and unique to Norwegian culture (Biesta, 2010).

3.3 Significant Aspects of the Research Plan

3.3.1 Research Topic

This study has a main research topic of *outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage*. The three sub-questions for this study are:

1. *What types of play do children partake in while outdoors?*
2. *According to the teachers, what skills do children acquire through outdoor activity?*
3. *What in the perspective of teachers do children learn through outdoor activity?*

3.3.2 Area of Study

This study was conducted in three preschools in the Bergen, Norway area within a twenty-five kilometer distance of each other. The three preschools were picked because of their emphasis on outdoor play, the director's willingness to participate and consent from head teachers to be interviewed. I chose to study schools that were a bit outside of the central Bergen city center because these three schools placed a central emphasis on outdoor play and had surrounding wilderness to take advantage of. I also chose these three schools because they all had well developed outdoor playscapes directly next to the schools, more commonly referred to as playgrounds. Two of the three schools had playgrounds that were very open, sparse, and had few excess toys. The third preschool had a conventional playground with a slide and swings set, but directly across from the school was a small fenced in woodland area. Thus all three schools provided ample access for outdoor play.

3.3.3 Negotiation for Access

According to Singleton & Straits (2005) gaining access to respondents involves three steps: getting official permission or endorsement for the study, mailing a cover letter introducing the study to the person(s) in the sample, and securing the cooperation of the respondents. In order to carry out my research, I had to gain authority from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) (see Appendix I & II). Under the supervision of my advisor, I filled out the application. On 22/8/12, I gained consent to pursue my research, provided no personal data would be used in the project. I then contacted the directors of the preschools I hoped to observe and asked if they were willing to take part in this project (see Appendix III). All three of the directors were very positive and consented.

We set up the four-day observation and they were in charge of informing the teachers and parents of my being there. I was not allowed to take any pictures or record any videos of the children. There were different circumstances that dictated who I interviewed at each barnehage. At one barnehage the head teacher picked the two teachers who were willing to interview with me. At another the decision was totally up to me, and at the third I worked only with three teachers during the observation so I asked to interview the two who had the most experience. I also had to maintain anonymity while recording my interviews making sure that nothing could be traced to the individuals interviewed. No one but my advisors and myself had access to the recordings while I coded the interviews. Once I coded the interviews I deleted all records of the interviews from my files.

3.3.4 Selection of Participants

For this research I used purposeful sampling, which Creswell (2012) describes as to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (p.206).” With my advisors advice I focused on three preschools that spent a majority of their day outdoors and could provide me with “information rich” experiences. Although the three barnehage that I observed were all in the Bergen area, they each had unique philosophies, individual characteristics and varying activities for the children. Two of the preschools were run by men

and the third was directed by a female. I asked the directors of the preschools to allow me to observe a group or groups of children from ages 4-5 during the four-day period. In Preschool A I was with the same ten to twelve children for the entire duration. In Preschool B there was an open door policy where the younger children were allowed to join the older children during both indoor and outdoor play so the group was mixed most of the time. In Preschool C, I was with a very specified group of sixteen children ranging from 3-5.

Preschool A was a private preschool with only female teachers. The preschool is located in a more rural area outside of Bergen where at times the local cows graze directly behind the preschool. The preschool has a main building with three classrooms, a large two-sectioned playground surrounding the main building and a fenced off wooded area directly across from the main building. The playground has a small swing set, a wooden boat and bus structures, a little house to play in, a sandbox and a small hill to run and climb on. The wooded area across the street has an abundance of trees, moss, places to run and climb with an overall appeal appearance of forest play. The teachers also took the children on trips where they could hike a longer distance into the forest.

Preschool B was another private preschool located in a small community just outside of Bergen. The school had as many male as female teachers. This preschool had a main building with two classroom spaces in which the doors were almost always opened for children to roam freely between rooms. The outdoor play area had a large man-made hill for children to climb and bike across, one very big climbing tree, a huge tire swing, a smaller set of swings, a large sand-pit, a wooden teepee shaped hut, and a somewhat steep rock wall that the children could climb as high as they felt comfortable. The teachers also sometimes helped build beams and obstacles for the children to climb and play on. The children took trips to the local swimming pool, traveling by bus, and also participated in hikes into the nearby forest.

Preschool C was a private preschool run by both men and women also located a bit outside of Bergen. This preschool has a very cabin-like feeling to the school. The main building is sectioned off into four classrooms with doors that can be opened for more free play. The playground has a nice steep hill where the children engaged in climbing up. This preschool also

has a full barn with sheep, pigs, roosters, and a rabbit. A bit beyond the preschool is a real teepee where the teachers often cook lunch. A bit outside the school are opportunities to walk along and play on ice when the streams freeze over. Beyond the school there is also a trail to hike that has beams and swings and areas to slide set up for the children.

3.4 Data Generating Methods

3.4.1 Generating Data Through Participant Observations

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) see the researcher as a quilt maker whereby the qualitative researcher deploys various “interconnected interpretive practices” with the aim of obtaining a better understanding of the subject at hand. It remains in the hands of the researcher to choose how to deploy these tactics in order to successfully put together their research quilt. In my case, I decided to start my research by observing the three barnehage that I had selected through purposeful sampling. Denzin & Lincoln suggest, “the qualitative researcher who uses montage is like a quilt maker or jazz improviser. The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience (p.5).” Through twelve days of observation of the children it was my aim to become that quilt maker that could help stitch together an outsider perspective of the barnehage experience.

I spent four days in each of the preschools observing the children and teachers. In my four days of observation, I participated in all of the activities, which ranged from indoor play—a Christmas party, feeding a few pigs—to outdoor play on the ice—hiking through snowy terrain and a trip to a swimming pool. My study focused on observing four to five year olds, but in two of the three preschools children of other ages were present, although I focused my attention on the older children. I decided to observe the children and teachers before interviewing the teachers because I thought it could contribute both to the depth of the interviews and my own understanding of what goes on at the barnehage.

The observations proved to be quite useful in focusing my interviews and asking more poignant or pertinent questions of the teachers. The observational data was recorded as field notes, which I

kept in a somewhat waterproof notebook. During this time I took extensive field notes and drew pictures to remind myself of daily play and activities. At the end of the day I would handwrite a page or two of a memorable moment that occurred during the day and note any questions I had for the teachers. In each school I was an active participant with the children in order to blend into their environment. On some days I spent more time playing with the children in order to get on their level. Other days I hung back with the teachers to observe how they interacted with the children and gain perspective from them. In all three schools I felt I found a balance between being an observer, playing on a level with the children and communicating with the adults. It was my goal that I would blend with the group yet not be thought of as one of the teachers by the children.

From the very beginning I planned to be an active participant, sometimes sitting and engaging with the children more than the teachers. My plan was to blend into the environment so that the children would see me as somewhat of a confidant. I deliberately tried not to blend in with the teachers, although on some days I would try to get a feel for their role. By doing this I think I was able to play more at the level of the children and engage with them on an equal playing field. I tried to go into each day of observation with an open mind ready for anything and everything. I asked the head teachers at the beginning of each week for an idea of what the schedule was for the week, but other than getting a synopsis of the plans, I stayed as excited as the children to learn what would be the daily activities. Each day at each barnehage provided me with new experiences, interesting moments and further questions. I found the observation period educational, at times challenging, and overall very rewarding.

3.4.2 Generating Data Through One on One Interviews

Cresswell (2012) describes one on one interviews as a data collection process in which the researcher asks and records questions of one participant at a time and says that these are ideal for interviewing participants who are not afraid to speak and can share ideas with ease. All of my interviews were semi-structured, which Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) say “seeks to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena; it will have a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as some suggested

questions. Yet at the same time there is openness to changes of the sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the specific answers given and the stories told by the subjects (p.124).” A good script of an interview combines both a thematic and dynamic dimension where the thematic focuses on producing knowledge through the “what” of the interview and the dynamic deals with the interpersonal relationship of the interview where the questions pertain to the “how” of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

At the end of the observation I asked two of the head teachers that had been leading the group(s) I observed if I could interview them in English. I made sure that all of my interviewees had at least three years of University level bachelor in pedagogy teacher training. Two of the six teachers I focused on had further education beyond teacher training. Two of the teachers had rock climbing training, two of the teachers were certified lifeguards, one of the teachers mentioned taking art courses, two teachers had further education for children with special needs and one teacher had her master’s degree. All of these head teachers were willing to conduct the interviews with me in English as well as answer my miscellaneous questions throughout the observation period. A few teachers asked to answer some of the questions in Norwegian or clarify a word or answer in Norwegian, but the majority of all the interviews took place in English. In the end I conducted six interviews, each of which lasted from thirty minutes to an hour.

At first I considered asking the children questions that might provoke answers as to what they were learning while playing outside, but using children, especially those in the age bracket between three to five years old is both time consuming as well as challenging. One issue here was the language barrier. In order to ask the children direct questions I would have needed a translator. Another problem is that I would have needed further consent from the parents as well as greater approval by the NSD. When I looked through most of the research about what children are learning in an early childhood education setting, the majority of the findings come from the perspective of adults. In the end I decided to focus on what the teachers thought the children were learning in outdoor play in order to keep the research manageable as well as to gain access to a culture that I did not grow up in.

The interviews were held in staff rooms or offices so as to not bother the children or other teachers. All six teachers gave verbal consent before being interviewed. I told the teachers that if at any point during the interviews they did not feel comfortable answering a question they absolutely did not have to. Two male teachers and four female teachers were interviewed. I had observed all six participants during my four days at each barnehage. I spent at least two full days with each teacher that I interviewed so I had an idea of their style of communicating with the children, their role in the preschool and had a relationship with each of them. At the beginning of the interview I told the participants that the main objective of my research was to address what they thought children learned through playing outdoors and explained that the audience reading my thesis may have little knowledge of Norwegian culture.

All of the interviews had a script of questions that I aimed to ask but they were semi-structured interviews. I added two to three questions to each interview based on questions I had jotted down during my observation. The script I used had key broad-based questions to give the teachers freedom to express their opinions. One potential bias here is the response effect that even though my main objective was to gain valid responses, I may have unknowingly affected the responses in various ways. For instance the interviewers may have been (consciously or subconsciously) concerned with gaining my approval (Singleton & Straits, 1998). They also may have answered questions differently because of the language barrier and/or the difficulty of discussing issues with someone from outside of Norwegian culture. At the end of each interview I asked the teachers if there was anything else they may like to add. Each of the respondents had a few interesting final points. My interest was in understanding how they interpreted the children's actions and activities while playing outdoors in the different environments we played in.

The interviews all went well. All but two of the teachers were concerned at first about interviewing in English but as the interviews got going no one struggled too much. There were a few words in each interview that proved difficult to translate into English. One participant gave two or three answers in Norwegian but spent the majority of the interview speaking English. Another participant had her son in the interview room, which proved to be a bit distracting at first until she gave him something to eat which kept him entertained for the remainder of the interview. All of the participants stayed on topic remarkably well and gave interesting answers to

most of the questions I asked. All interviews were recorded on a backup iPhone then uploaded electronically as an audio file into iTunes and placed on CDs for transcription. Once the transcriptions were completed all files were deleted and destroyed.

3.5 Making Sense of the Data

I had two sets of usable data; the first were my extensive field notes that I took during observation, and the second were the recordings of my interviews. The first step of my process was listening through each recording and transcribing what was said during each interview. Creswell (2012) says that “the object of the coding process is to make sense out of the text data, divide it into text or dancy and collapse these codes into broad themes (p.243).” After all six interviews were fully coded, I identified main themes through the reoccurring ideas and words. The six themes that I ended up with were motor development, play, creativity, learning, outdoor vs. indoor activity and the definition of barnehage. For each theme I began to develop descriptions for explaining how the participants addressed them. I also found at least three direct quotes from different participants for each theme.

My observation notes were kept in a notebook. These notes had drawings of the landscape of the barnehage, drawings of interesting play activities or events with some jotted down notes that I took during the day and a few pages of written reflection after the days of observation. I decided to keep those as raw data rather than type them up because seeing the drawings in combination with my writing served to trigger my memories of events. Once I determined my main themes I looked back through the observation notes to see if I had predicted some of the recurring themes in the interviews. Although I did not use all of the same words as the final six themes that I used, many of my drawings and foci for the daily log centered on the same ideas. My observations proved useful for both framing some of my interview questions as well as complementing my interview data.

After I looked back through the scripts from the interviews, and cross referenced my themes with my rough observation notes several times, I attempted to come up with a greater idea of how to answer my research question. As an American I am an outsider to Norwegian culture even

though I have Norwegian relatives and have spent a few years studying in Bergen. Given this, I tried to look at my data through the lens of someone who has insight into the culture and may look at the overall concept of Norwegian barnehage in a new light. While conducting my interviews I noticed that many of the participants were surprised at some of my questions. Outdoor play and love of nature, for instance, is something that goes without saying to most Norwegians. In telling the story of my research and data, I tried to reach a happy medium between learning and summarizing what the participants say about barnehage and explaining this Scandinavian based early childhood education ideal to those outside of this society.

The majority of my analysis will focus on what the participants, in this case the head teachers, directly say about the various themes that I mention above. I do use my individual observation to support some of the explanations. They gave me as a researcher more of an understanding of what was going on in each barnehage. But as I relate the story of my data and attempt to answer my main and sub research questions I am trying to convey an overall understanding and perspective of a Norwegian barnehage teacher. Nevertheless, there is a simple fact that I am indeed not Norwegian and only took part in twelve total days of observation, so the story that I tell is undoubtedly from my perspective. By paraphrasing what some of the teachers say, using direct quotes and backing everything up with observations, I am confident that in the end my narrative is as true to what the teachers told me as possible.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

It is important that a study be trustworthy and give accurate findings from and to the researcher, participant, and reader (Creswell, 2012). There are a few ways that I dealt with the issue of trustworthiness within my own research. I used thick and rich descriptions of my findings that came directly from the participants themselves. Doing so offers both real accounts of a Norwegian barnehage teacher's perspective on various topics as well as gives the reader first hand accounts on such issues. I also used triangulation in my research, which means that I obtained my data from six different teachers in three different preschools. My participants were both male and female with a range in ages as well as work experience. In drawing on multiple

sources my data became more accurate and credible. In the process of my research I used a form of member checking my data by asking the same broad questions to the participants and only using themes that came up in almost all if not every one of the interviews. Finally, I have attempted to include information from the research that may have not been initially a critical focus of my research.

3.7 Role as a Researcher

There is a lot of power and responsibility that comes with being in a research position. I have the power to script the interviews, the power of asking certain questions and not others, and also the power to interpret what the participants said. There is a good deal of gray area involved with being a researcher that while in that role one must try his or her best to stay as clear and alert as possible. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stress the importance of having morally responsibly research behavior but say that, “in the end, however, the integrity of the researcher—his or her knowledge, experience, honesty and fairness—is the decisive factor (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; 74).” They go on to discuss the “field of uncertainty” that comes about through the potential tension that a researcher faces when finding a happy medium between a professional and a friend. This is something I could relate to because I had spent four days with all six of my interviewees so we had developed at least a base level of friendship. At some level this helped during the interview process because my interviewees knew a bit about me. Perhaps I still had the dominant power as a researcher with the role of directing the questions, but I think there was a balance of power and respect due to the relationships I had built over the observation period.

3.8 Ethical Consideration of my Research

As mentioned previously, as my first step in making sure to keep my research ethical, I applied to the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD). To do this I had to fill out a form that asked for basic information about my research. In this form I explained the objective of my research, how I was going to enlist participants, what I would do while being with the participants, how I would go about recording my research and how I would protect my participants. The application asked for consent forms as well. I submitted two consent forms,—one that the director of each barnehave had to sign consenting to my being at the barnehave for

four days, and the second that the directors were to send home to have the parents sign. As a secondary source to this, I also submitted a twenty-page synopsis of my research project that I turned into my program in order to get consent from the College to go ahead with my thesis. The NSD approved my application within a month of submitting it.

Before I began interviewing the six teachers I asked for their verbal consent to being interviewed. I told them that if at any point during the interview they did not want to answer a question or wanted to stop the interview they could do so. I asked each participant if I could record our interview and let them know that completing my research those recordings would be erased. I also explained that the only people who would hear the interview would be my two advisors and myself and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be kept in full and whatever information they gave could not be used against them or their barnehage in any way. I used codes for each of the interviewees so that even my advisors did not know the names of the participants. I explained that their participation was voluntary and there would be no reward for them doing so other than helping me out with my thesis. I promised each participant that I would send him or her a copy of my thesis when I finished if they would like. Only after they gave verbal consent to all of these things did I begin my questioning. All six of the participants I set out to interview gave consent.

The perspective of my study encourages and supports the outdoor education system that was prominent in all three of the barnehage I observed. Therefore when interviewing the teachers the questions I asked were complimentary to the fundamental pedagogical beliefs they held as teachers. The six teachers that I interviewed specifically chose to work in barnehage that emphasized outdoor play and learning so at the very least they thought that this was important for the children. My goal is that this research honors Norwegian culture as well as sheds light on what happens in outdoor barnehage.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter I explain the main methodological aspects of my study. I discuss the qualitative based research design and how I drew from the works of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty in shaping

my theoretical and methodological approaches. Then I stated my main research topic as well as its sub-questions. I reviewe the negotiation for access process as well as how I generated data from observations and one on one interviews. I then highlight the important aspect of my role as a researcher and how I went about looking at the data. The end of the chapter focuses on the trustworthiness of my study and ethical considerations I took during the entirety of my study. In the next chapter I provide the main findings from my study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this section I reflect on my main research topic about *outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage*. I answer three sub questions,—first, *what types of play do children partake in while outdoors*, second, *according to the barnehage teachers, what skills do children acquire through outdoor activity* and finally, *what do children learn through outdoor activity?* After spending twelve days observing three different Norwegian barnheage, then having the opportunity to directly discuss these questions and more with six educated and experienced barnehage teachers, I am confident I have gained insight not only into my initial research questions, but beyond what I first expected to discover. For the sake of reporting my findings I will present the six main themes that emerged through interviews with the six different barnehage teachers.

This analysis section is divided into the six themes that emerged when I coded the interviews (for direct quotes from the themes see Appendix V). These themes represent common trends, phrases and quotes that came up while interviewing the teachers. I used a common script as a baseline for the interviews so some of the questions lead directly to the themes. For example I asked “Do you think there are risks for the children playing outdoors?” so naturally they all responded in such a way that *risk in outdoor play* became a theme. However if my research topic were thought of as the main tree, and the sub questions the branches, the roots of the tree would have to be these six themes. I will describe what all the teachers say about the theme, sometimes highlighting direct quotes (see Appendix V for full list). I then add a bit of extra information from my own observation before summing up the theme by connecting the findings back to the literature. At the end of this chapter I will conclude by summarizing the essential message that these six themes share.

4.2 Discussion of the Six Themes

After coding all six of the interviews, re-listening to them a few times, and finally going over the interviews for quotes and ideas that overlap, I grouped the main ideas into what I call the six main themes. These themes are:

1. Play in Barnehave
2. Risk in Outdoor Play
3. Outdoor vs. Indoor Interaction
4. Sources of Knowledge and Learning
5. Creativity in Barnehave
6. Gaining Skill Sets

Once themes were developed I went back and found meaningful quotes from each of my interviewees on the themes and began to shape how the teachers viewed them as a whole and on a more individual basis. I also looked back through my observation notes to see if I had discussed or referenced any of these ideas while observing. It was not until after I developed these six themes that I noticed how well they began to reflect on what I had discovered through my literature review. Since what the teachers who participated in the interviews say coincides very well with the literature on Norwegian barnehave, I am confident my data is reliable. In analyzing my research as themes I attempt to give a collective narrative where the teachers' individual voices can be heard as much as possible. In doing so I provide reliable and cogent conclusions that highlight important aspects of early childhood education in Norway.

At the end of each interview I asked the teachers if they had anything more they would like to share with me that we may not have covered during the interview or that may help explain the philosophies behind barnehave to those outside of Norway. Although I did not necessarily expect to get any answers after discussing a range of questions for an average of a half an hour, almost every teacher answered this question in an interesting and unique way. When thinking about what barnehave means to the children, the parents and to Norway, many common ideas emerged. Most teachers stated that the most important thing for the children was to develop motor skills, to learn to play and be together, to learn respect for the family, to cook and experience fire outside,

or take the play that is happening inside and transfer it outside. To summarize a collective idea, here is a direct quote from one participant, who said,

“The point of (friluftsbarnhage) is to give the kids a chance to get to know the nature and to get to know themselves in a natural environment. I think that’s the most important thing, to see the possibilities in the nature. In Norway we have a culture doing the nature thing, hiking in the mountains and all that, and that’s part of getting to know that. To learn to respect the nature...the long perspective is to enjoy moving around, to use the body.” –P6

In fact the most common idea to explain the concepts behind barnhage was nature. Barnhage encourages opportunities for children to explore the natural Norwegian landscape. To the teachers it seemed the ideas of learning skills, acquiring knowledge of self and the world and being in nature all went together like an unspoken rule.

As an outside observer, barnhage is something that I have had a hard time defining and explaining to someone who is not a native of Norway. I experienced many things during my twelve days of observation but one thing that I discovered was that the children participating in barnhage were so tremendously joyful and lively. In fact what barnhage became to me was a collection of the themes that the teachers discussed. From my observation, beyond a physical definition the idea of barnhage was more than a word, phrase, or definable concrete thing. Barnhage is so connected to Norwegian society and the societal norm focusing on a child having the right to have a childhood. Norway is still a culture that lets children run free, truly protecting children from being anything other than children. In a world where childhood is so often taken away from children, there is no questioning how unique Norwegian barnhage is.

These children get to experience their early years in a free environment that allows them opportunities to become one with their environment. Kids are allowed to play in nature, to see and experience the seasons outdoors and to learn in interesting ways. When one teacher said the kids get a chance to get bored in the forest, that becomes their own problem and they have to figure out what to do from there, I saw this as a metaphor for life. One of my favorite moments of observation was when a group of four children were sitting a bit higher up a hill than I was. They had a moment of boredom and instead of complaining, they took the leaves and began to

throw them into the air, acting as if those leaves were snow. Somehow this simple act provided over a half an hour of laughter and entertainment for the four of them, and even for me. Barnehage became finding joy in the simplest places and perhaps when small children acquire those skills early on, they have them for life.

4.3 Explaining Data Through the Six Themes

4.3.1 Theme 1: Play in Barnehage

In defining what the children do outdoors, a central theme would be to play since they are playing all the time. Children in Norway are playing to learn and learning to play. In the woods the teachers said that the children were able to make their own play. Sometimes when the children played outdoors in the enclosed playground areas directly outside the barnehage where there were pails and shovels or bikes or swings, all these things in some way distracted the children from the free play that the forest provides. Instead, “(when the children are outside they are) climbing in the trees, climbing the hill, they are running, they are hitting each other, they are sliding, and they are sailing down. They are getting a natural rush, and they are looking for nuts and sticks, and I think they are stimulated.” –P2. One teacher explained that in the forest they do not have the toys that they may have in the playground so they have to use their physical bodies and what is provided by nature to create the toys and therefore the play develops better. A good way of summarizing what the teachers collectively thought about outdoor play was simply stated by one teacher who said “In the woods they make their own play.” –P1.

Much of the play I observed was either based in using motor abilities such as climbing, sledding or running around. A good amount of the play the children seemed to participate in also involved complicated and intricate games or stories that were often reenactments of what they may see at home or do indoors. Children pretended to cook or bake dinner or were building a house in the trees where one child took on the role of father, another the mother, and so on. The play varied by child, by day and by what and where the environment allowed. One of the days of observing I was outside in the woods with seven boys. Perhaps because of the male gender domination, the play for the day revolved around a sort of sword fighting with sticks game that turned into a

complex story about the boys rescuing a precious treasure while fighting their way through the forest. In my observation the play had many levels of storytelling, social interaction, plotting, development of motor skills, and creative use of natural elements.

In all three of the barnehage I observed I noticed that they adhered to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research framework plan's idea that play should hold a dominant role in the day to day life of a child in barnehage (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). I also noticed that children participated in social play, object play, and locomotor play categories described by Bekoff and Byers (Sandseter, 2010). Many of the teachers discussed how children create their own play outdoors and how they are very stimulated by that play which Hujala et. al (2010) would say can lead to meaningful learning experiences. Play in the outdoors allows children to have ownership of their own learning through free-flow play (Bruce, 2004; Wood, 2010) which is something the teachers noted and coincided with my observations in different ways at all of the barnehage. Although none of the teachers connected the idea of how children play as a reflection of greater Norwegian society, I think this is something so obvious to them that they would not address it. Much of what I observed as well as what the teachers discussed about play reflects back to the literature. The central idea is that free and creative play is incredibly important for these children.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Risks in Outdoor Play

All of the teachers that I interviewed acknowledge that there were potential risks in outdoor barnehage but seemed to think that they were minimal. None of the teachers had seen a major accident or experienced a child getting lost in the woods on their watch. They all seemed to think that if a child cut himself, fell down and got bruised or even broke an arm, that was something they would learn not to do again and it could just as easily have happened while they were spending time with their mom or dad. One teacher said,

“I think it's good for them (to be out in nature), of course there is risks, but they need it. If it's too strict then they don't learn any boundaries. If someone says, no don't do that, don't do that, what happens when they are away and they haven't learned their own boundaries? Children, if they can run free, most of them know their boundaries. They

need to work it out, you know. There is some you have to push, you can do it, you can do it, because they are anxious, and there are some you have to stop.” –P1

For many of the teachers, learning boundaries was a central idea in why taking risks were so important. Children need to take risks in order to gain climbing skills, challenge themselves, and test themselves. Taking risks keeps children engaged and satisfied. All of the teachers said that they encouraged the children to take small steps to challenge their comfort zones and in doing so they grew. In many ways it seems that the teachers saw learning to get back up after a child falls as a life lesson which will only help them in the long run.

As an observer I found myself more concerned with the risks of the outdoors than I thought the teachers were. I associate this concern with the fact that I am American and grew up in a society that largely protects children from taking risks. One day at barnehage the teacher set up a beam on a few stumps while we were outside in the playground next to the school. At first the children walked across the beam, some holding onto a teacher’s hand while they did. Then most of the children began walking faster or trying to ride their bikes across, upping the risk potential, which in turn seemed to enhance their joy. Not only was this something the children did on their own without any of the teachers encouragement (other than the initial setting up the object) but also the situation showed me exactly what many of the teachers were saying, that risk is a part of playing outdoors and can be exciting, challenging and engaging. Each day I observed the children, risk became less of a factor that I worried about. These children seemed in control of their own bodies and most of them seemed to understand the landscape and physical boundaries. In the few instances where things got out of control or the children were sliding from areas that put them at too much risk, the teachers stepped in before anything serious occurred.

I found that the teachers I interviewed put risk on a back burner just as the literature suggested (New, et al., 2005; Sandseter, 2009). The teachers all seemed to focus on the positive aspects that risk provided, none of them highlighting the negative. Perhaps the teachers were defending outdoor play and barnehage in doing so, or maybe they truly felt that there was not much harm in the types of outdoor play these children engaged in. Many of the teachers seemed to suggest that they controlled the risk by choosing which areas play occurred in and by keeping a close eye on the children who were known to often push the boundaries too far. I observed that there is a very

high level of uncertainty in outdoor play that could lead to physical injury as discussed by Sandseter (2007) but the worst injury I saw in my twelve day observation period was a minor bruise from one child bumping another child while sledding. The risks of being outside in the cold or rough weather is not something any of the teachers brought up (New, et al., 2005) which again may be because it is part of the Norwegian norm. Many of the teachers said that as long as the children were dressed for the outdoors they were okay. In the end, it seems that the teachers did not focus as much on risk as the literature suggested or have the same level of concern that cultures outside of Norway might have.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Outdoors vs. Indoors Interaction

One of the things I asked the teachers was if they noticed any differences in how the children played when they were outdoors as opposed to when they were indoors. Many of the teachers said that the children brought a lot of their play from indoor into the outdoor environment. Some of the teachers discussed that the children had more room to discover themselves and more potential for risks outdoors. An overarching undertone of the collective was that playing outdoors provided something for everyone. Nature provided an ample supply of things to play with as well as challenges for all ages and abilities of child. “There are other opportunities in the forest, the kids are finding their own trees, this is mine, this is yours. It’s more settled, the nature is already there, this is what nature has to offer you, so use it. There are even more opportunities... everybody can find something at their own level.” –P6 Most of the teachers agreed that when playing outdoors there was less conflict among the children and that maybe this had to do with the fresh air, the open space or having no toys to fight over. The children seemed somehow calmer the more they got away from the school structure and into the woods. The rules and restrictions of play and activity seemed to be lifted once the children were allowed to play outside. They could be loud and noisy and do what they pleased; they were allowed to be children.

One teacher said “Isn’t it normal for every child to play outside? I think children are just doing it because it’s so normal for Norwegian kids to be outside because it’s something we do from the birth so it’s just a normal thing.” –P5 In Norway the idea of playing outside and childhood go

hand in hand. The teachers all agreed that children belong outdoors playing in nature, having the freedom to use what nature provides to entertain themselves while playing and communicating with their bodies. The children can still play freely indoors, but in many ways the games they play are determined by what the space allows and by the toys provided. There are also more rules indoors. Outside, children are forced to use their imagination and are given ample space in which to play and do so. In my observation and in discussion with the teachers, it seemed both the teachers and children preferred to be outdoors. There is something remarkable about being able to learn and play in an environment that is created for you naturally rather than being man made which changes sometimes unpredictably with the seasons, that pushes both the teachers and children to approach the days differently.

One cold December day while observing at one of the barnehage, we took a little walk down the road looking for a place to play. The first thing that struck the kids fancy was a small pond that had frozen over. After one of the teachers tested the ice to make sure it was strong enough to hold two teachers, about eight children and myself all got on the ice and slid around for a bit. Once this became slushy we walked further down the road to an area that was well frozen but had a steep iced over incline that became a slide for the children. This playscape also had two large round black tubes with water frozen to the bottom of them. At first the children just crawled through the tubes but somehow the game merged into one teacher standing on each end as the children were pushed through while lying down on a plastic sled. The children screamed with glee and excitement, breaking off to look for little things frozen in the ice and develop new games. I watched how games progressed upon each other, the children working with the teachers on this very cold day to come up with different activities to keep them warm and amused. Taking what the outdoors had to offer and using the environment in all sorts of interesting ways certainly made me an advocate for extended outdoor play in barnehage.

The teachers and I could not have agreed more with the literature when it comes to how much more the outdoors affords and offers for play opportunities (Gibson, 1979; Fjørtoft, 2001; Kaarby, 2003). All my observation and most of the teachers suggested that physical active play was the most dominant form of play while outdoors (Kaarby, 2003). Although none of the teachers directly used the word “robust” they seemed to describe and agree that outdoor play can

form robust children (Nien, 2008). Almost all of the teachers talked about how the outdoors helped children to develop motor skills and begin to understand their bodies (Fjørtoft & Sageie 2000; Kaarby, 2003; Nien, 2008). The teachers directly brought up most of what the literature suggests with regards to outdoor play while being interviewed which corroborated my observations. The teachers had a resounding appreciation for being outdoors and many preferred having the children outdoors than indoors. The literature leans towards this notion but does not directly address that there may be more potential for development outdoors.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Sources of Knowledge and Learning

When the children are playing outdoors they are constantly learning. They are learning about aspects of nature, seasonal changes, about their bodies, engaging with each other, and interacting with the environment. The teachers all put great emphasis on how much the children learn about how to move their bodies. One teacher observed that,

“I think that the children now they learn through their bodies and through movement, everything is so physical. So I think it’s a really important part of children’s mental progression, that they face physical challenges, that they have to overcome challenges that they are in, and that helps them evolve, you know, and that is just as important. I think that if you lose the physical aspect of the childhood in such an early age, then I don’t think it will help when they grow up or become teenagers. I think it’s really important they have to learn how to face challenges and learn how to fend for themselves.” –P3

For these children, part of growing up is to face the challenges found nature and the environment. All the teachers discussed that when they learn how to develop the motor skills, for example the ability to climb up a mountain on their own, they are learning more than just a physical skill, they are developing confidence. Children need to move and one of the best things for them is to learn while moving. There are so many things to learn about in nature, let alone for the children to learn about themselves.

Children learn to socialize while in nature and around each other. Some of the complications they encounter may come from weather and climate, others from nature being in control. A child may want a certain stick or branch to play with that the tree is just not ready to let go of. The children have to discover that they are not always in control. One of the teachers said,

“Children have to meet complication, they have to be socialized.” –P4. Nature gives the children ample opportunities to learn about themselves and about the world they live in and to learn to love and respect nature itself. Some of what the children learn by being and playing outdoors simply cannot be quantified or explained. These children are learning more than we as teachers and observers can see or describe. They are developing physically, mentally and emotionally in tune the natural environment. One teacher said that children can put their mind at ease while outdoors, that somehow pressure just lifts off them and they are free to explore and play as they wish. In a sense the children are free to learn while in tune with the outdoors, can learn at their own pace, and in the act of learning they are forming knowledge.

It is hard to quantify anything I saw personally while observing the children as learning. Part of the difficulty in doing so was that I only had four days with the children at each barnehave so seeing change and development was restricted accordingly. I can certainly see that over an extended period of time children learn so much about the outdoors, their bodies, each other, and in doing so develop tremendous knowledge. The main thing I took away from the observation was that there is more opportunity for the children to learn on their own when they spend time outdoors. The children are forced to take nature as it comes and adapt to whatever happens with the weather and in the environment on any given day. They are active learners outside. Once something transfers from the mind to the body it crosses into a deep level of learning and knowledge building. I think these children are learning about themselves, their environment, and Norwegian society at large. But undoubtedly, learning should be fun and these children looked like they were having plenty of fun.

The Norwegian framework plan wants children to learn in informal and formal settings, which is something I noticed the children doing (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). In fact I would go as far as to say that the children I observed were getting exposed to all seven “learning areas” described by the plan. The teachers all said that children learned best when they were active participants using and testing their bodies (Hujala et al., 2010). The framework plan suggests that by learning about their bodies children are learning about the world around them, which is something most of the teachers described (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). One of the interesting aspects about learning for these children when they are

outside is their level of control. A teacher said that they learn they are not always in control and that is very important. The idea of not always being in control of oneself within an ever changing environment is something that these children are forced to acknowledge early on. This is something that the literature did not address and should. Overall what these children are collectively learning seems to be difficult to grasp and quantify both for the literature and the teachers as well as myself, but there is no question as to its seen and unseen importance.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Creativity in Barnehage

Part of playing outdoors on a regular basis requires creativity for both the children and the teachers. The teachers all discussed how the children had to use imagination and fantasy while playing outdoors. One teacher said “First of all we like to be outside in the kindergarten in the woods because it helps the children use their imagination, they have to find objects to play with, and it’s very interesting to see how they make use of the nature and things around them and how their imagination kind of brings them to life.” –P3. Another teacher said that the physical size of the forest allowed for more fantasy play. A few of the teachers said that the nature lets the children turn a tree branch into a sword for instance, whereas on the playground they use the objects and toys that are already there for what they are instead of trying to find new ways to use them. In the woods they are forced to be more creative and use what they find in the environment. Almost all of the teachers suggested that being in the woods helped foster and encourage the children’s level of creativity in very positive ways.

Bringing nature to life through fantasy is something the children grew to be very good at. A tree quickly became a place to hide out, a simple stick became a sword or gun for the children to play with. Natural objects transformed into many different things over the course of my observations. One day I saw a girl take a stick she had tied acorns to and pretend to cook the them over an imaginary fire made of leaves as if they were hot dogs. I found out that the teachers had cooked hot dogs outdoors one day for lunch with the children, so it seemed that the children reenacted what they had observed or experienced previously. I began to see that there is no wrong answer in the forest, the children can take what nature has provided and create endless opportunities. I found myself being more creative in the forest. When the children started using the roots of a

fallen tree as a living space I began to see what they were seeing. In the end of my observation I could not agree more with the teachers that the forest allowed for a tremendous amount of fantasy and creative play experiences.

Richard Louv believes that nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding they use their full senses, which is a philosophy that all of the teachers I interviewed would agree with (Louv, 2008). The framework plan encourages “art, creativity and culture” in order to learn about the world around them (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). None of the teachers described being creative in the woods as a means to learn about the greater world, though I am fairly certain most would agree that it inevitably occurs. Part of having the opportunity for creative play is due to the teachers giving children space to play on their own and form free-flow play (Bruce, 1994). I think that the creative play happening while in the forest is especially connected to building knowledge and should be studied and discussed further in the literature. I observed these children turning simple objects found in nature into intricate toys, stories and experiences. This has to be important cognitively and when they are reenacting events from their day-to-day lives it is an important component for their development and understanding of the greater society (Riihelä 2002; Nilsen, 2008). Having an active imagination is such an important part of childhood and these children are given the freedom to use it well and often while in the forest.

4.3.6 Theme 6: Gaining Skill Sets

An unequivocal area of importance in playing outdoors is the opportunity for the children to learn motor skills. Motor development encompasses the children learning about their physical bodies through the challenges of being in the outdoor environment. All of the teachers discussed how important it was both for children to learn this and how as they get older the challenges increase. One teacher said that when a child knows how to move his whole body, learning to hold a pencil and develop fine motor skills in the classroom during primary school years becomes a very simple task. Many of the teachers cited motor development as the most important thing that they could teach the children and for the children to learn while in barnhage. One teachers said, “the children, they have to try with their body, to go out in the woods, or balance, they are made for it,

they are made for trying, they are made for jumping so don't stop them.” –P4 The teachers all advocated that children are truly made for the outdoors, they are happiest when running and playing and experiencing their bodies in all sorts of new ways. Thus, when the children learn to connect their movement to their brains they are developing at the highest capacity.

In my observation I saw that the children were forced to master motor development from a young age because of the different aspects that being outdoors demanded of them. They are facing weather that changes rapidly and can be difficult to handle even with the right clothes, which is a skill in itself that is of utmost importance in Norway. There were many days during my observation period when the weather in the morning would be dreadfully cold, or it rained the whole day, or perhaps there was a mix of both. The weather was unpredictable to say the least, so the teachers had to make sure the children were layered with wool long underwear, fleece jumpers, rainproof winter coats and pants, hats, gloves and sometimes neck protectors. But in the end, it is up to the children themselves to learn to move their bodies in order to stay warm. Almost everything these children do while outdoors has some aspect of motor development. When climbing they begin to discover which paths are best and how to avoid slippery spots. I noticed that the children sometimes learned more quickly than the teachers which parts of a slope may have them sliding faster down the hill than others. Some of the teachers allowed the children to help in the outdoor cooking process, which is another important skill. Just learning to cope with the elements in nature is a valuable skill. There are many potential skills for these children to learn while outdoors but motor development may be the most valuable in the long run.

The literature agrees with the teachers in that a very important part of barnehave is for a child to learn to develop physical skills (Fjørtoft, 2001; Kaarby, 2003). The physical play that is so dominant in the outdoor environment is a primary factor of what encourages this high level of motor development (Kaarby, 2003; Nien, 2008). Fjørtoft (2000) goes further to say that children develop perceptual-motor skills through natural spontaneous relationships with the environment and in turn these interactions help children relate to themselves. The framework plan lists “body, movement, and health” as one of their important learning areas. It says that children should acquire motor skills and body control through physical activity, which is something I directly experienced observing them doing (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). The

framework plan also says that barnehage should offer skills for social development and intellectual development. It seems most of the teachers agree that this as well is something that being outdoors provides. The teachers suggest that in gaining a wide range of motor skills these children opened the door for easier learning of skills such as holding a pencil later on though the literature did not directly address this. In the end it seems both the teachers and the literature recognize that one of the most important skills learned is motor development (Gibson, 1979; Kaarby, 2003).

4.4 Further Discussion

In describing what the teachers individually and collectively thought about each theme, adding some of my personal observations and thoughts, and concluding each section with ideas of how the theme relates back to literature, I look for a broad understanding for the main research topic of outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage. The themes in themselves are six aspects that I think are central to the core of barnehage and therefore help to answer the sub-questions as well. Childhood in Norway is looked at as having an intrinsic value where children are able to develop physically and mentally within an outdoor environment. The Framework Plan says, “One characteristic of childhood is interaction through play, which provides scope for initiative, imagination and enthusiasm (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 14).” This opens up the main concepts behind the topic of my study, but first I look at how some of the sub questions of the study were discussed.

To answer the sub question of *what types of play do children partake in while outdoors?* The first theme “play in barnehage” directly addresses this as well as the theme “risk in outdoor play” which adds new details, while the theme “creativity in barnehage” explains that aspect of outdoor play. Children play outdoors in all sorts of ways and yes, some of those ways are risky, though usually the benefits of taking those risks outweigh the negatives. Common ways that the teachers described children playing were reenacting through role play, playing the games they played indoors while they were outdoors, and using all sorts of fantasy and creativity while playing outdoors. Some of the play such as sledding down a hill or sliding across a pond of ice was for

pure enjoyment. At times there were instances of character play where the children might pretend to be pirates or different characters from books or television shows they enjoyed. The play varied depending on the day, the location of play, and what the children were in the mood for, but each type of play provided a way for children to learn about themselves and others around them in a meaningful way.

I addressed the sub question, *according to the barnebage teachers, what skills do children acquire through outdoor activity?* directly through the theme “gaining skill sets” as well as in the discussion of the theme “outdoor versus indoor play.” The major skill that children learned while playing outdoors that all the teachers discussed was developing their motor skills through activities like climbing, hiking, sledding, running, jumping, and balancing. There are many skills that the children learned just by being outside such as how to handle the weather, how to dress for the cold, and how to keep warm through moving their bodies. Part of what the Framework plan cites as the reason why this skill is so important to develop is that through physical activity children are able to learn about their own bodies as well as about the greater world around them (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). Developing motor skills is an important part of a Norwegian childhood and assimilation into Norwegian culture.

Finally, I addressed the third sub question, *what in the perspective of teachers do children learn through outdoor activity?* in the theme “sources of learning and knowledge” and I could argue that this question was indirectly addressed as an undertone in many of the themes provided. The teachers all agreed that children are learning about nature, their bodies, and socializing while outdoors. Learning about themselves while also observing those around them is an important aspect of growing up for these children. At all of the barnebage the children with physical and mental disabilities were grouped in with the other children. This gave children the opportunity to learn about each other while learning that they were also unique and different. Children learned to respect nature in a special way through playing in the woods. Much of what the children learn in nature is hard to quantify, but there is no denying that both the teachers and the literature advocate for outdoor learning and its many benefits.

The most important way to summarize my main research topic is to acknowledge that outdoor play and learning go hand in hand. As Fjørtoft (2000) explained, many researchers, including myself, are seeing play as an important medium in the learning and development process for children, where play might indeed be the hidden curriculum to learning and development. Through outdoor play children are offered a unique landscape that provides tremendous opportunities for creativity in play while learning motor skills. These children are becoming robust children, resilient in nature while developing mental and physical stamina (Nien, 2008). The children learn to socialize, to respect nature and learn how to become an active member in the Norwegian society at large. These children truly are playing to learn and learning to play while outdoors. They are given the freedom of large playscapes with an undertone of risk, with the benefits outweighing the potential risks. While outdoors the children become active learners and interact well with each other and with their teachers.

The most valuable thing about outdoor barnehage is that it allows children to do is to learn at their own pace. Children are given ample space, freedom and fresh air when engaged in this self-learning or concept of danning. The outdoors provides unique places to play, ways of playing, and means for development. The framework plan declares “play is of importance for the wellbeing of the children as a fundamental aspect of life and learning. In kindergartens children must be able to experience play as both an intrinsic value and as a basis for learning and a well-rounded development (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2011: 13).” It is through play that children are able to become whole, gain insight about themselves, and learn to be active members of Norwegian society.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I discuss the main findings to my study. I first explain how I determined the six main themes which encompass an overview of what the teachers collectively described as central issues within Norwegian barnehage. Then I recount what the teachers said about the theme and gave an overall perspective of the six participants, at times highlighting an important quote from an individual. I describe instances where I observed the theme at hand from a personal perspective. Finally, I connect how the theme relates back to the literature and therefore put together a full perspective of each theme. I include a brief further discussion on how these

themes envelop my main research topic and cohesively answered all three sub-questions. The six themes discussed above are the central and essential roots of what the teachers described about barnehage in their interviews and what I personally observed, and through them, both the sub questions and the main research topic are addressed. In the next chapter I conclude my study by discussing its contributions, limitations, and implications.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Overview of the Study

In this study I presented and analyzed some of the important aspects of outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage. I have done so through personal observation and discussion of what teachers' views are on the implications of outdoor play. I carried out this research with the idea that the greater population would be interesting in knowing more about Norwegian barnehage as a whole as well as a specific look at what children are learning, how they are playing, and what types of skills they are acquiring. I wanted to know more about what was taking place in outdoor education and wished to write about it in English because I found a lack of literature in the field written in or translated into English. By presenting an overview of the literature that is supportive of my findings with discussions of how they relate to each other, I cast light on this unique approach to early childhood education.

After observing three schools located in the Bergen, Norway area for four days apiece, I interviewed two teachers from each of the barnehage. My main research topic was *outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage* with three sub questions of:

1. What types of play do children partake in while outdoors?
2. According to the barnehage teachers, what skills do children acquire through outdoor activity?
3. What in the perspective of teachers do children learn through outdoor activity?

The literature that I interpreted and selected for my study fit within the analysis, data and results I discovered through the observation and interviews. After coding and reviewing the interviews I identified six core themes of analysis which were:

1. play in barnehage
2. risk in outdoor play
3. outdoor versus indoor play
4. sources of knowledge and learning in barnehage

5. creativity in barnehage
6. gaining skill sets

These six themes became the basis and main framework for my analysis and are what I believe are primary objectives of Norwegian barnehage.

It is important to note that not all barnehage are outdoor based or focused. The issue of play and learning is complex. There is a potential that if I interviewed teachers in other parts of Norway they would have differing opinions on these subjects. Norway is a very long country so there could be variation from place to place. It is very possible that in a more immigrant populated barnehage in Oslo, for instance, the teachers would answer some of the interview questions differently. This is only conjecture because I have not seen literature saying so, nor found or read such studies. Furthermore, I would like to note that I do not mean to imply that this type of barnehage is the only kind found in the Bergen area. There are many types of schools in the area. Not all of them focus on the outdoors, and some hardly spend any time outdoors at all. Just like most other countries, there are main objectives and ideas that are common in all barnehage in Norway but there are also differences.

This study is a quantitative study with a phenomenological orientation. The study explores the implication of outdoor activity for play and learning in Norwegian barnehage through the views of the teachers on the subject. A major part of what shapes this research is from my perspective. I first observed the teachers and children for a little less than a school week, then shaped a script of common interview questions based around my observations. The questions and therefore the results lean towards what I viewed as important, interesting and meaningful. I attempt to report these findings as much as possible from the viewpoint of the participants, but I must acknowledge that my own opinions permeate the greater implications of this study. The data was generated over the course of a month and a half and is analyzed thematically, presented in a narrative form. The data forms the basis for the analysis and the purpose of this study and the selected literature.

In a general sense this study revealed that an essential part of outdoor play and learning is for children to develop motor skills in a free and creative manner. Another aspect of the outdoor education is that children learn to respect and enjoy being in nature from a very early age. With this comes an appreciation and growing knowledge of how to handle the climate, terrain and potential risks associated with the wilderness. In learning how to adjust to many of the elements of the outdoors the children are becoming active members of Norwegian society. Being outdoors also forces the children to use what nature provides as tools for creative play. The outdoors offers learning opportunities for every level and age. There are risks involved in being outdoors in an environment that we as human beings cannot totally control, but the teachers overwhelmingly felt that these risks are critical to developing boundaries. Outdoor play provides many layers of stimulation for the bodies and the minds of children.

5.2 Contributions of the Study

Based on the literature that I have reviewed and my knowledge and understanding of Norwegian society I believe that this study makes a contribution to the field of early childhood education by helping to describe some of the positive aspects of outdoor barnehage. Scandinavian education is known for its high level of quality and in the case of outdoor education, its unique approach for learning. I think this study has the potential to educate those who are unaware of or curious about this model of early childhood education in Norway by giving some reasons and examples of why and how children are learning outdoors. I am not advocating all other societies take on this approach to learning. Indeed there are few other societies that would have the same cultural and societal reasons for having children learn outdoors as in Norway. In a sense this type of education is and will remain quite unique to Norwegian culture, but there is no reason that other societies could not implement aspects of outdoor play. My ultimate goal is that this type of education is further researched, discussed and potentially practiced if even in a small way, on a global scale.

Scandinavian early childhood education is becoming a very relevant and important aspect of the pedagogical world. We are in a time where many societies are placing more of an emphasis on

rote learning and preparing for school in the kindergarten years rather than allowing for and/or focusing on play. Norwegian barnehage has not only kept play as a central and main focus but also holds that play should take place in a unique environment. It is important to reassess what we feel are the most valuable aspects of childhood. My objective for this study is that it serve as an educational tool for those outside of Norway that are interested in the field as well as a potential new perspective for Norwegians.

This study therefore makes a contribution to those in the field within Norway and those who are interested in learning more about Norwegian barnehage. In this study I have reviewed literature that all suggests the importance of outdoor play and education. There is some discussion in Norway about the potential inclusion of more preparation for schooling. It is my goal that this study provides reasons, even if only in small ways, for why outdoor play and learning is very important for Norwegian children and should remain the central focus of barnehage. Outdoor play gives children the best opportunity to learn motor development, learn at their own pace, and learn to respect and handle themselves within a natural environment. Nature gives children the means to develop into well-rounded youth and should be considered a top priority in the future of Norwegian barnehage.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that this study had limitations. The literature that I selected and reviewed was almost all based in English and therefore many texts that could be both relevant and important to this study are not included. Also the fact that my understanding of the Norwegian language is only moderate could have contributed to what I understood through observation. My Norwegian language skill level also may have hindered the interviews since they were all conducted in English. Although all but one of the participants seemed more than comfortable being interviewed in English, there are terms and ideas that may have been missed due to the language barrier. The interviewees may have explained certain things differently to me because I am an outsider, which could be both beneficial and harmful to my study. Another important limitation is that I am not a Norwegian citizen. There are some aspects of Norwegian society that I may not understand due to the fact that I was not raised in this environment.

With regards to methodology, one of the main limitations for this study is the amount of time I had to conduct it. I would have liked to observe for a longer period of time at potentially more schools and have conducted more extensive interviews, but due to the time constraints that was not possible. The three schools that I observed were all located in a limited area around Bergen. It would have been interesting to observe schools in broader and more diverse areas of Norway and compare all of those results. Again time and funding were the main reasons why I could not do so. One limitation in my observation relates back to my outsider perspective in that through my eyes some of Norwegian societal norms seem out of the ordinary. The idea of keeping children outside especially when the weather is unpleasant is outside of what I would consider normal. Also there were some activities that I considered risky but the teachers did not.

Another potential limitation is the time of year that I observed the children. My observations took place during the months of November and December so the outdoor play took place on the ice, snow, and wet soil. Although Bergen is best known for its rainy season, there is no question that if I did my observation in other months I may have seen different types of play and activities. This might affect how the children interact with each other and what creative play they choose to do as well as change the level of risks associated with their play. I would have liked to have a second tier of the study where I would go back to the same three barnehage for another round of observation in a different season but there was not enough time to do so.

5.4 Implications of the Study for Practice

The findings and discussion of this study indicate the importance of the outdoors for these children's education, development and happiness. This study puts emphasis on giving children the freedom to play freely in nature with little direction and intervention from the teachers. This study aims to encourage Norwegian barnehage teachers to keep doing what they are doing and to give children the opportunity to be outdoors as much as possible. I challenge those teachers to give their students as many different opportunities for outdoor play and development on varied landscapes. Bergen is surrounded by mountains and blessed with many places for children to experience nature that the teachers can hopefully continue to take advantage of. The more children are challenged to try new things, the better they can become those well-rounded children.

Another implication for this study is that it helps bring discussion of the advantages of outdoor education to places where it may not already exist. An aspect of this is my wish that this study encourages more Norwegians to publish more information and articles about friluftsbarnhage in English. There have been some nature-based preschools developing in the United States, but I would like to see more all over the country that include some of the Norwegian ideals of free and unstructured play in wilderness settings at an early age. I think more information about Norwegian outdoor education written in English will help spark this conversation as well as may convince preschools and kindergartens to use outdoor barnhage as a model for their schools. Part of learning about nature implies a level of respecting nature. If you can teach children to respect nature in a natural environment they will inevitably learn to grasp the reasoning and benefits of doing so on a much more concrete level and we could use this knowledge all over the world.

The main objective that I hope this study imparts is the importance for play in early childhood education. Many of the benefits of play discussed in this study relate to playing outdoors, but some, specifically creativity and fantasy are prominent in play regardless of where it occurs. I think this study underlines the importance for play in a child's life for many reasons. This is something that I would push those in charge of the Norwegian Framework Plan to continue to hold as a core aspect of Norwegian barnhage as well as for those outside Norway to reassess the importance of and aim to allow more time for. The great outdoors gives children a unique and ever changing landscape with plenty of space in which to play. Space is a central part of why and how children are able to expand their creativity through fantasy play. I would encourage schools to consider what they put on their playgrounds and to take on the model that sometimes less is more.

5.5 Conclusions

I have studied the way children learn to count and worked with developing children's fitness programs in the United States, volunteered in two Norwegian barnhage for two months after earning my bachelor's degree, and have now lived in Norway for two years and conducted this

study while studying for my masters degree. In doing so I have gained new perspectives that have made me critical of how I view childhood as a whole and what I think is important that children learn in the early childhood education years. Through this study I have come to respect the Norwegian outdoor barnehage as an institution as well as admire the teachers for the hard work they do. I also have come to be an advocate for outdoor education as an ideal way for children to learn about themselves and the world around them, especially for but not limited to the Norwegian society.

Generally this study is limited to outdoor based schools in the Bergen, Norway area, but due to the relatively homogenous nature of Norwegian society, I would hypothesize that many of the findings would relate to outdoor based barnehage all over Norway. Through observations and interviews I found that the central themes developed were play in barnehage, risk in outdoor play, outdoor versus indoor play, sources of knowledge and learning, creativity in barnehage and gaining skill sets. In analyzing all six of those themes I aimed to present an accurate representation of what the teachers discussed as well as what I observed and back those findings up through the literature. My primary objective was to give an overview of Norwegian outdoor barnehage through these themes that gives meaning to my main research topic of outdoor play and learning in Norwegian barnehage.

Accordingly, conclusions drawn from this study are limited as in all qualitative research. This study can help us to acknowledge the importance of outdoor play for learning, physical and mental development, creativity, socialization, risk taking and gaining various skills. Even with this study's limited range, because of this studies empirical and theoretical scope, it can be compared with similar types of schools throughout Norway and in Scandinavia. There is potential that in comparing such schools within Norway and outside societies, they may learn something from one another. I am optimistic that this study will contribute to the emphasis for play as an important central focus in the field of early childhood education with an underlying emphasis outdoor play.

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APPENDIX I

Outdoor Play in Norwegian Kindergartens, Written Proposal for NSD

The objective of this proposal is to lay out the groundwork for this Master's thesis fieldwork. The responsible institution for this study is NLA Høgskolen (NLA University College) in Bergen, directly advised by Åse Nylenna Akslen (NLA Høgskolen, Bergen) and Ellen Beate Sandseter (Dronning Mauds Minne Høgskolen, Trondheim.) The major aim of this research is to investigate how Norwegian children play outdoors within the confines of the institution of kindergarten and what they learn while they play. Also the study aims to understand what types of physical play take place while children play outdoors. Since the concept of play is broad the study will concentrate on play only taking place in and on the way to the forest. In light of all of this, the main research questions of this study is: What in the opinions of teachers do children learn through play in the forest? With sub questions of: Why do children play in nature? What type(s) of play are children doing in the forest? How do children play in the forest? How do children interact while playing in nature? What is learned while playing in the forest? The backdrop of this study aims to understand what the teachers think the children are learning by playing outside in Norway and how this type of play relates to understanding Norwegian society.

There will be two, potentially three sample groups, with small groups of children ages 4-5 from two to three outdoor based barnehage (kindergartens) in Bergen. Selecting the barnehage will be based on the Barnehage's willingness with both advisors help and input. Once parents have agreed through a sent home signed consent form, that their children will participant, the researcher will observe the children for 3-5 days, within their outdoor settings in each barnehage, taking copious field notes. At the end of each observation session the researcher will meet with a few head teachers to discuss what she observed and experienced during the time as well as their opinions on outdoor play. The head teachers will be asked to give verbal consent to the focus group interviews before any questions will be asked. The children, teachers, and barnehage will not be identified in any part of the findings. All children will be given a number when written about in the field notes, and recordings of the teachers will be deleted immediately after transcriptions are documented. Notes and transcriptions will be stored on the head researcher computer as well as her personal back up drive which are all password protected, therefore completely protecting the confidentiality of all parties. Ideally data collection will occur in October/November 2012.



MELDESKJEMA

Meldeskjema (versjon 1.4) for forsknings- og studentprosjekt som medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt (jf. personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter).

1. Prosjekttittel		
Tittel	Outdoor Play in Norwegian Kindergartens	
2. Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon		
Institusjon	NLA Høgskolen AS	Velg den institusjonen du er tilknyttet. Alle nivå må oppgis. Ved studentprosjekt er det studentens tilknytning som er avgjørende. Dersom institusjonen ikke finnes på listen, vennligst ta kontakt med personvernombudet.
Avdeling/Fakultet		
Institutt		
3. Daglig ansvarlig (forsker, veileder, stipendiat)		
Fornavn	Åse	Før opp navnet på den som har det daglige ansvaret for prosjektet. Veileder er vanligvis daglig ansvarlig ved studentprosjekt.
Etternavn	Nylenna Akslen	
Akademisk grad	Høyere grad	Veileder og student må være tilknyttet samme institusjon. Dersom studenten har ekstern veileder, kan biveileder eller fagansvarlig ved studiestedet stå som daglig ansvarlig. Arbeidssted må være tilknyttet behandlingsansvarlig institusjon, f.eks. underavdeling, institutt etc. NB! Det er viktig at du oppgir en e-postadresse som brukes aktivt. Vennligst gi oss beskjed dersom den endres.
Stilling	Høgskolelektor	
Arbeidssted	NLA Høgskolen	
Adresse (arb.sted)	Olav Bjordals vei 41	
Postnr/sted (arb.sted)	5111 Breistein	
Telefon/mobil (arb.sted)	55536942 /	
E-post	AseNylenna.Akslen@NLA.no	
4. Student (master, bachelor)		
Studentprosjekt	Ja ● Nei ○	NB! Det er viktig at du oppgir en e-postadresse som brukes aktivt. Vennligst gi oss beskjed dersom den endres.
Fornavn	Nora	
Etternavn	Happny	
Akademisk grad	Høyere grad	
Privatadresse	frekhaugskogen 6	
Postnr/sted (privatadresse)	5918 Frekhaug	
Telefon/mobil	92638044 /	
E-post	norahappny@me.com	
5. Formålet med prosjektet		
Formål	The major aim of this research is to investigate how Norwegian children play outdoors within the confines of the institution of kindergarten and what they learn while they play. The main research questions of this study is: What in the opinions of teachers do children learn through play in the forest? With sub questions of: Why do children play in nature? What type(s) of play are children doing in the forest? How do children play in the forest? How do children interact while playing in nature? What is learned while playing in the forest? The backdrop of this study aims to understand what the teachers think the children are learning by playing outside in Norway and how this type of play relates to understanding Norwegian society.	Redegjør kort for prosjektets formål, problemstilling, forskningsspørsmål e.l. Maks 750 tegn.
6. Prosjektomfang		

Velg omfang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enkel institusjon ○ Nasjonalt samarbeidsprosjekt ○ Internasjonalt samarbeidsprosjekt 	Med samarbeidsprosjekt menes prosjekt som gjennomføres av flere institusjoner samtidig, som har samme formål og hvor personopplysninger utveksles.
Oppgi øvrige institusjoner		
Oppgi hvordan samarbeidet foregår		
7. Utvalgsbeskrivelse		
Utvalget	The study will be two part. The first part will be observations where there will be two, potentially three sample groups, with small groups of children ages 4-5 from two outdoor based barnehage (kindergartens) in the Bergen area. The second part will be interviews taken with the head teachers observed.	Med utvalg menes dem som deltar i undersøkelsen eller dem det innhentes opplysninger om. F.eks. et representativt utvalg av befolkningen, skoleelever med lese- og skrivevansker, pasienter, innsatte.
Rekruttering og trekking	Selecting the barnehage will be based on the Barnehage's willingness with both advisors help and input. The children will be picked by the head teachers of the barnehage who are willing to be a part of this project. Children will only be allowed to participate if their parents have signed consent forms giving permission. Teachers will give verbal consent to being interviewed as well.	Beskriv hvordan utvalget trekkes eller rekrutteres og oppgi hvem som foretar den. Et utvalg kan trekkes fra registre som f.eks. Folkeregisteret, SSB-registre, pasientregistre, eller det kan rekrutteres gjennom f.eks. en bedrift, skole, idrettsmiljø, eget nettverk.
Førstegangskontakt	Initial contact with the Barnehage will be in combined effort of the advisor and researcher.	Beskriv hvordan førstegangskontakten opprettes og oppgi hvem som foretar den. Les mer om dette på temasidene Hva skal du forske på?
Alder på utvalget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Barn (0-15 år) □ Ungdom (16-17 år) ■ Voksne (over 18 år) 	
Antall personer som inngår i utvalget	Anywhere from 15-25 children and up to six adults.	
Inkluderes det myndige personer med redusert eller manglende samtykkekompetanse?	Ja ○ Nei ●	Begrunn hvorfor det er nødvendig å inkludere myndige personer med redusert eller manglende samtykkekompetanse.
Hvis ja, begrunn		Les mer om Pasienter, brukere og personer med redusert eller manglende samtykkekompetanse
8. Metode for innsamling av personopplysninger		
Kryss av for hvilke datainnsamlingsmetoder og datakilder som vil benyttes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Spørreskjema ■ Personlig intervju ■ Gruppeintervju ■ Observasjon □ Psykologiske/pedagogiske tester □ Medisinske undersøkelser/tester □ Journaldata □ Registerdata □ Annen innsamlingsmetode 	Personopplysninger kan innhentes direkte fra den registrerte f.eks. gjennom spørreskjema, intervju, tester, og/eller ulike journaler (f.eks. elevmapper, NAV, PPT, sykehus) og/eller registre (f.eks. Statistisk sentralbyrå, sentrale helseregistre).
Annen innsamlingsmetode, oppgi hvilken		
Kommentar	The head researcher will decide if the second interview section of this project should be with group interviews or personal interviews based on the teacher's preference, availability of time, and consent.	
9. Datamaterialets innhold		

Redegjør for hvilke opplysninger som samles inn	Once parents have agreed through a sent home signed consent form, that their children will participate, the researcher will observe the children for 3-5 days, within their outdoor settings in each barnehage, taking copious field notes. At the end of each observation session the researcher will meet with a few head teachers to discuss what she observed and experienced during the time as well as their opinions on outdoor play.	Spørreskjema, intervju-/temaguide, observasjonsbeskrivelse m.m. sendes inn sammen med meldeskjemaet. NB! Vedleggene lastes opp til sist i meldeskjema, se punkt 16 Vedlegg.
Samles det inn direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dersom det krysses av for ja her, se nærmere under punkt 11 Informasjonssikkerhet.
Hvis ja, hvilke?	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-sifret fødselsnummer <input type="checkbox"/> Navn, fødselsdato, adresse, e-postadresse og/eller telefonnummer	Les mer om hva personopplysninger er NB! Selv om opplysningene er anonymiserte i oppgave/rapport, må det krysses av dersom direkte og/eller indirekte personidentifiserende opplysninger innhentes/registreres i forbindelse med prosjektet.
Spesifiser hvilke		
Samles det inn indirekte personidentifiserende opplysninger?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	En person vil være indirekte identifiserbar dersom det er mulig å identifisere vedkommende gjennom bakgrunnsopplysninger som for eksempel bostedskommune eller arbeidsplass/skole kombinert med opplysninger som alder, kjønn, yrke, diagnose, etc.
Hvis ja, hvilke?		Kryss også av dersom ip-adresse registreres.
Samles det inn sensitive personopplysninger?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
Hvis ja, hvilke?	<input type="checkbox"/> Rasemessig eller etnisk bakgrunn, eller politisk, filosofisk eller religiøs oppfatning <input type="checkbox"/> At en person har vært mistenkt, siktet, tiltalt eller dømt for en straffbar handling <input type="checkbox"/> Helseforhold <input type="checkbox"/> Seksuelle forhold <input type="checkbox"/> Medlemskap i fagforeninger	
Samles det inn opplysninger om tredjeperson?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Med opplysninger om tredjeperson menes opplysninger som kan spores tilbake til personer som ikke inngår i utvalget. Eksempler på tredjeperson er kollega, elev, klient, familiemedlem.
Hvis ja, hvem er tredjeperson og hvilke opplysninger registreres?		
Hvordan informeres tredjeperson om behandlingen?	<input type="checkbox"/> Skriftlig <input type="checkbox"/> Muntlig <input type="checkbox"/> Informeres ikke	
Informeres ikke, begrunn		
10. Informasjon og samtykke		
Oppgi hvordan utvalget informeres	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Skriftlig <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Muntlig <input type="checkbox"/> Informeres ikke	Vennligst send inn informasjonsskrivet eller mal for muntlig informasjon sammen med meldeskjema.
Begrunn		NB! Vedlegg lastes opp til sist i meldeskjemaet, se punkt 16 Vedlegg. Dersom utvalget ikke skal informeres om behandlingen av personopplysninger må det begrunnes. Last ned vår veiledende mal til informasjonsskriv
Oppgi hvordan samtykke fra utvalget innhentes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Skriftlig <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Muntlig <input type="checkbox"/> Innhentes ikke	Dersom det innhentes skriftlig samtykke anbefales det at samtykkeerklæringen utformes som en svarslipp eller på eget ark. Dersom det ikke skal innhentes samtykke, må det begrunnes.
Innhentes ikke, begrunn		
11. Informasjonssikkerhet		

Direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger erstattes med et referansenummer som viser til en atskilt navneliste (koblingsnøkkel)	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Har du krysset av for ja under punkt 9 Datamaterialets innhold må det merkes av for hvordan direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger registreres.
Hvordan oppbevares navnelisten/koblingsnøkkelen og hvem har tilgang til den?		NB! Som hovedregel bør ikke direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger registreres sammen med det øvrige datamaterialet.
Direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger oppbevares sammen med det øvrige materialet	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
Hvorfor oppbevares direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger sammen med det øvrige datamaterialet?		
Oppbevares direkte personidentifiserbare opplysninger på andre måter?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
Spesifiser		
Hvordan registreres og oppbevares datamaterialet?	<input type="checkbox"/> Fysisk isolert datamaskin tilhørende virksomheten <input type="checkbox"/> Datamaskin i nettverkssystem tilhørende virksomheten <input type="checkbox"/> Datamaskin i nettverkssystem tilknyttet Internett tilhørende virksomheten <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fysisk isolert privat datamaskin <input type="checkbox"/> Privat datamaskin tilknyttet Internett <input type="checkbox"/> Videoopptak/fotografi <input type="checkbox"/> Lydopptak <input type="checkbox"/> Notater/papir <input type="checkbox"/> Annen registreringsmetode	Merk av for hvilke hjelpemidler som benyttes for registrering og analyse av opplysninger. Sett flere kryss dersom opplysningene registreres på flere måter.
Annen registreringsmetode beskriv		
Behandles lyd-/videoopptak og/eller fotografi ved hjelp av datamaskinbasert utstyr?	Ja <input checked="" type="radio"/> Nei <input type="radio"/>	Kryss av for ja dersom opptak eller foto behandles som lyd-/bildefil. Les mer om behandling av lyd og bilde.
Hvordan er datamaterialet beskyttet mot at uvedkommende får innsyn?	The data will be stored on a personal password locked laptop in which only the main researcher has access.	Er f.eks. datamaskintilgangen beskyttet med brukernavn og passord, står datamaskinen i et låsbart rom, og hvordan sikres bærbare enheter, utskrifter og opptak?
Dersom det benyttes mobile lagringsenheter (bærbar datamaskin, minnepenn, minnekort, cd, eksterne harddisk, mobiltelefon), oppgi hvilke	Data will be stored on an external hard drive that also is password protected to maintain that the files are kept safe but secure.	NB! Mobile lagringsenheter bør ha mulighet for kryptering.
Vil medarbeidere ha tilgang til datamaterialet på lik linje med daglig ansvarlig/student?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
Hvis ja, hvem?		
Overføres personopplysninger ved hjelp av e-post/Internett?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	F.eks. ved bruk av elektronisk spørreskjema, overføring av data til samarbeidspartner/databehandler mm.
Hvis ja, hvilke?		
Vil personopplysninger bli utlevert til andre enn prosjektgruppen?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
Hvis ja, til hvem?		
Samles opplysningene inn/behandles av en databehandler?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dersom det benyttes eksterne til helt eller delvis å behandle personopplysninger, f.eks. Questback,

Hvis ja, hvilken?		Synovate MMI, Norfakta eller transkriberingsassistent eller tolk, er dette å betrakte som en databehandler. Slike oppdrag må kontraktsreguleres
12. Vurdering/godkjenning fra andre instanser		
Søkes det om dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten for å få tilgang til data?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	For å få tilgang til taushetsbelagte opplysninger fra f.eks. NAV, PPT, sykehus, må det søkes om dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten. Dispensasjon søkes vanligvis fra aktuelt departement. Dispensasjon fra taushetsplikten for helseopplysninger skal for alle typer forskning søkes
Kommentar		Regional komité for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskningsetikk
Søkes det godkjenning fra andre instanser?	Ja <input type="radio"/> Nei <input checked="" type="radio"/>	F.eks. søke registreier om tilgang til data, en ledelse om tilgang til forskning i virksomhet, skole, etc.
Hvis ja, hvilke?		
13. Prosjektperiode		
Prosjektperiode	Prosjektstart:01.10.2012 Prosjektslutt:01.12.2012	Prosjektstart Vennligst oppgi tidspunktet for når førstegangskontakten med utvalget opprettes og/eller datainnsamlingen starter. Prosjektslutt Vennligst oppgi tidspunktet for når datamaterialet enten skal anonymiseres/slettes, eller arkiveres i påvente av oppfølgingsstudier eller annet. Prosjektet anses vanligvis som avsluttet når de oppgitte analyser er ferdigstilt og resultatene publisert, eller oppgave/avhandling er innlevert og sensurert.
Hva skal skje med datamaterialet ved prosjektslutt?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Datamaterialet anonymiseres <input type="checkbox"/> Datamaterialet oppbevares med personidentifikasjon	Med anonymisering menes at datamaterialet bearbejdes slik at det ikke lenger er mulig å føre opplysningene tilbake til enkeltpersoner.NB! Merk at dette omfatter både oppgave/publikasjon og rådata. Les mer om anonymisering
Hvordan skal datamaterialet anonymiseres?	The data will be kept anonymous by making sure not to name any of the children observed in the study or teachers interview. Also the names of the Barnehage will not be directly stated in the final research.	Hovedregelen for videre oppbevaring av data med personidentifikasjon er samtykke fra den registrerte. Årsaker til oppbevaring kan være planlagte oppfølgingsstudier, undervisningsformål eller annet.
Hvorfor skal datamaterialet oppbevares med personidentifikasjon?		Datamaterialet kan oppbevares ved egen institusjon, offentlig arkiv eller annet.
Hvor skal datamaterialet oppbevares, og hvor lenge?		Les om arkivering hos NSD
14. Finansiering		
Hvordan finansieres prosjektet?	The project will be self-financed by the student.	
15. Tilleggsopplysninger		
Tilleggsopplysninger		
16. Vedlegg		
Antall vedlegg	4	

APPENDIX III

September 2012

Dear Styrrer,

I would like to observe groups of children playing or taking tours out in nature from ages 4-5 for a full week at your Barnehage. Then I would like to interview (in English) a few of their teachers about their perspective on what the children learn while playing in nature.

No photographs, video or names of children will be taken or used during the research. I plan to take field notes while observing the children. If the teachers are willing and sign a consent form, I hope to record our interviews with a tape recorder. Åse, Ellen and I will be the only people to hear and process the recording as well as see the field notes.

My project has been approved by the NSD (Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste) provided I keep anonymity for your barnehage, the children, and your staff.

Will your Barnehage consent to:

-Meeting with Åse and Nora in the middle of October to set up a schedule.

-Helping to get parents sign a consent form giving permission for me to observe their children for a week at your barnehage

-Finding two to three teachers, male or female, who would be willing to let me observe children ages 4-5 years for a week and interview them in English on the last day.

If you agree to all of the above please sign here:

Thank You,

Nora Simone Bryne Happny

APPENDIX IV

INFORMED CONSENT PARENT PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This Autumn we are conducting a research study entitled “Outdoor Play in Norwegian Kindergartens” with children ages 4-5 at _____ Barnehage. We are interested in examining how children play and interact in nature. Ultimately, our hope is to learn more about outdoor play.

A researcher will be visiting your child's Barnehage and observing the children playing outdoors. No names will be mentioned in the field notes or thesis writing so your children will remain anonymous. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and there will be no penalty for not participating.

Please give your permission by signing the bottom form and return it to your child's head teacher. Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Nora Simone Happny
NLA Høgskolen, Graduate Student in the Philosophy of Education

Consent to Participate

I have read the attached informed consent letter and agree to have my youngster participate in the study entitled “Outdoor Play in Norwegian Kindergartens.”

Child's Name:

Parent's or Guardian's Name (please print):

Parent's or Guardian's Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX V

Themes for Analysis:

THEME 1: Play in Barnehage

“In the woods they make their own play.” –P1

“(when the children are outside they are) climbing in the trees, climbing the hill, they are running, they are hitting each other, they are sliding, and they are sailing down. They are getting a natural rush, and they are looking for nuts, and sticks, and I think they are stimulated.” –P2

“We are always making fire, during this autumn all the children made their own fire, so they are always making fire, and they take all that they find in the nature to play, this is an animal, oh I want to play, and they are singing, and they have roll play, so you see they play inside but they can also move their play outside. The inside play become like the play outside. All the sticks or whatever they find in nature, they can be playing.” –P4

“We don’t have play toys, we have carousel and that’s okay, so they are more using their fantasy and that’s okay, so a car doesn’t have to be a car, so they have to think and they have to use the physical and have to use their body to move and they have to learn to go in the forest and climb and jump. So I think their development is better than to have all this stuff (toys).” –P4

THEME 2: Risk in Outdoor Play

“I think its good for them (to be out in nature) of course there is risks, but they need it. If it’s too strict then they don’t learn any boundaries. If someone says, no don’t do that, don’t do that, what happens when they are away and they haven’t learned their own boundaries? Children, if they can run free, most of them know their boundaries. They need to work it out, you know. There is some you have to push, you can do it, you can do it, because they are anxious, and there are some you have to stop.” –P1

“I think it’s really important that they have to face challenges, that they have to learn to fend for themselves. The smallest children know that we will help them a bit, but we always try to challenge them.” –P3

“The places we go in the woods and play there aren’t any really dangers. If the child falls over, maybe the child will roll down a small slope or something. But if theres going to be an accident, its going to be some kind of freak of nature accident that something special happens. Also kids can take a lot. For me I think that if a child falls and it is an area that I know nothing bad is going to happen to them it is a good thing.” –P3

"I think you have to let your child get to know the elements of nature...its allowed to get bored in the forest. The kids get a chance to get bored in the forest. Okay what are you going to do? It's your problem. You have the whole world in front of you." -P6

THEME 3: Outdoor vs. Indoor Interaction

"That's the good thing about being out in the woods, there is something for everyone, those that struggle can practice on going up and down on rocks or something, and those that can climb on trees can." -P1

"The most important thing that we give them is to be outdoors and give them the physical activity and also like we do, when we work with math or Norwegian or whatever we do it outside basically, and that's really important too. And also kids get to see that when we have the warm food, we always make our food our dinner outside on the fire, somewhere on the woods, and that is also something that is great for the kids to see and experience." -P3

"Isn't it normal for every child to play outside? I think children are just doing it because its so normal for Norwegian kids to be outside because its something we do from the birth so its just a normal thing." -P5

"The children can do the same thing they do inside outside without the dolls and all the materials we have in here." -P5

"They children are playing so good in the nature, they are using the nature, they are playing so good together." -P5

"I can see how the children enjoy playing in the forest and having the freedom of nature." -P6

"There are other opportunities in the forest, the kids are finding their own trees, this is mine, this is yours, its more settle, the nature is already there, this is what nature has to offer you, so use it. There are even more opportunities...everybody can find something at their own level." -P6

"Outside its more physical play and communicating play through body language and through talking to each other, its more space, its more freedom to get to know each other and themself." -P6

THEME 4: Sources of Knowledge and Learning

"I think a lot of Norwegians can put their mind at ease when they are in nature, they can relax, well they can run around and have fun, but it is some pressure that just lifts off them, they are free, they can relax." –P1

"I think that the children now they learn through their bodies and through movement, everything is so physical. So I think its a really important part of children's mental progression, that they face physical challenges, that they have to overcome challenges that they are in, and that helps them evolve, you know, and that is just as important. I think that if you lose the physical aspect of the childhood in such an early age, then I don't think it will help when they grow up or become teenagers. I think its really important they have to learn how to face challenges and learn how to fend for themselves." –P3

"The animals are a really big part of the kindergarten and its an important part of learning the children how to take care of the animals and how to love them and also watch them live and die, because animals do die here sometimes, and also they get to see how animals turn into food, its the full life cycle..." –P3

"Children have to meet complication, they have to be socialized." –P4

"I think when they learn how to use movement and they know what it is then they can concentrate better when sitting there. So you have to do both. You cant just have cozy time, doing drawing. Kids are natural, they have to do something physical as well." –P6

THEME 5: Creativity in Barnehage

"(in the forest) they are more creative, I think, they see things and they use their imagination, what does this look like, what can it be, you know, and in the area in the kindergarten they have the same things, they can make things and be creative but not in the same way. They might use the nature but they would put it in their toys." –P1

"I think its more natural (for the children to be in the forest) and they can use their fantasy, and the area is bigger." –P2

"First of all we like to be outside in the kindergarten in the woods because it helps the children use their imagination, they have to find objects to play with, and it's very interesting to see how they make use of the nature and things around them and how their imagination kind of brings them to life." –P3

THEME 6: Gaining Skill Sets

“Kids should have friluftsbarnhage to develop their motor skills.” –P1

“The most important thing is their motor development, you know, especially when they are small, if they don’t get it then, then they really, really need it when they are four or five.” –P1

“Children can face challenges and then they can get another crack at it. Its like the first time we go to a place in the woods, they have to go around the stone, the next time they have to crawl over it, and then they can just jump over it.” –P3

“I think its important that we give the children a lot of physical activity and challenges.” –P3

“The children, they have to try with their body, to go out in the woods, or balance, they are made for it, they are made for trying, they are made for jumping so don’t stop them.” –P4

“Outside the children use the body more, for motor development, and inside its more finer skills, writing and so on, I think outside they can be more physical, because they want to be inside too, but sometimes its too much noise.” –P5

“The parents come here saying the kid is not doing this or that so we show them, we are going to mjyfella, two hours with train into the mountains, we are staying there for three days. Everyone is invited, parents and children. Then we go skiing and doing some activities on skis and some kids are going without parents and some with. And we see a big difference between the kids with and without. When the parents are there the kids are like hold my hand all the time and they are using the parents, of course they are, but when the kids are alone they are challenging themselves so much.” –P6

“The point of (friluftsbarnhage) is to give the kids a chance to get to know the nature and to get to know themselves in a natural environment. I think that’s the most important thing, to see the possibilities in the nature. In Norway we have a culture doing the nature thing, hiking in the mountains and all that, and that’s part of getting to know that. To learn to respect the nature...the long perspective is to enjoy moving around, to use the body.” –P6

“Yeah, our most important theme is that the family is most important. To the children we are number two. The closer you can get to the family and get the family together than the better job you are doing. Because the kids are close to us but if we could get the family here and the kid could show what they have done than that’s most important!” –P6