



An institutional ethnographic study on the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC Centers

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

My mom, *Noame Gaiti Thurania*, whose hard work and resilience got me here.

My son, *Jabali Mwenda Kimathi*, for the wonderful gift that you are, and for evoking a new form of love in me.

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Eric Kimathi

Kristiansand, January 2024

Sammendrag

Denne artikkelbaserte avhandlingen utforsker barnehagens rolle som integrasjonsarena for foreldre og barn med flyktningsbakgrunn i Norge. Avhandlingen består av fire artikler. Tidligere forskning viser at de siste årene har vært et økende fokus på barnehagens rolle som kontaktpunkt for barn og foreldre med flyktningsbakgrunn. Barnehager er institusjoner preget av «supermangfold», kjennetegnet ved at de omfatter personer fra ‘ulike bakgrunner, som er forbundet på tvers av land og kultur, og som er sosioøkonomisk og juridisk lagdelt’ (Vertovec, 2007 p.2, min oversettelse). Supermangfold gir muligheter, men også utfordringer, spesielt når det gjelder spenningene som oppstår i integreringsarbeidet i barnehagen. I Norge, som er et land med sosial-demokratiske røtter (Esping Andersen, 1990), spiller barnehagelærerne en viktig rolle i integrasjonsprosessen for flyktninger. De anses som bakkebyråkrater og statens forlengede arm (Lipsky, 2010), og forventes å spille en sentral rolle i integrasjonen av flyktninger.

Institusjonell etnografi (IE) fungerer som det overgripende metodologiske og teoretiske rammeverket for studien. Begrepene ståsted, styringsrelasjoner, institusjonelle diskurser og virksomhetskunnskap er spesielt viktige i analysen (Smith, 2005; 2006). Gjennom en abduktiv analyse kombinerer jeg begrep fra IE med andre teoretiske begrep for å utforske de empiriske funnene. Disse begrepene er blant annet *siviliseringsprosessen*, av Norbert Elias (1994) slik det er videreutviklet av Gilliam og Gulløv (2017), Erving Goffmans begrep *stigma* (1963) og *inntrykkskontroll* (1959), samt Ian Hackings begrep «*making up people*» (2002).

I studien benytter jeg et eksplorativt kvalitativt forskningsdesign (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Data ble samlet inn fra to informantgrupper, nemlig barnehageansatte og foreldre med flyktningsbakgrunn, som ble rekruttert gjennom strategisk utvelgelse og snøballmetoden. 28 informanter deltok i studien. Først gjennomførte jeg intervjuer med 13 barnehageansatte. Deretter arrangerte jeg en fokusgruppe med tre foreldre med

flyktningbakgrunn, før jeg gjennomførte individuelle intervjuer med 12 foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn.

Målet med studien er å utvikle kunnskap om hvordan integrasjon er sosialt organisert, med utgangspunkt i erfaringene til barnehageansatte og foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn. Som en institusjonell etnografi, starter utforskningen med erfaringene fra det daglige integrasjonsarbeidet som gjøres av barnehageansatte. Fra deres ståsted identifiserte jeg problematikken for studien, og gikk videre til å utforske erfaringene til foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn. Det overgripende forskningsspørsmålet er: Hvilken rolle spiller barnehager i integreringen av barn og foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn i Norge? I tillegg til hovedspørsmålet har jeg utviklet seks underspørsmål, som jeg utforsker i de fire artiklene.

Den første artikkelen er skrevet sammen med Ann Christin Eklund Nilsen, og har tittelen: “Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers’ work to promote early intervention and integration”. Artikkelen er publisert i tidsskriftet *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*. Forskningsspørsmålet som besvares i denne artikkelen er: Hvordan «gjør» barnehageansatte tidlig innsats og integrering i sitt daglige arbeid? Artikkelen er basert på to studier, hvorav den ene er min, som begge benytter institusjonell etnografi som forskningstilnærming. Mitt bidrag til artikkelen er data fra 13 barnehageansatte, som brukes for å synliggjøre hvordan sosiale teknologier, i form av foreldreprogram som the International Child Development Programme (ICDP), inneholder innebygde forståelser av traumer, og hvordan dominerende kunnskap fra psy-diskurser former hvordan de barnehageansatte gjør integrasjonsarbeid med barn som har flyktningbakgrunn. Det gjennomgående argumentet i denne artikkelen er at de barnehageansattes ambisjoner om integrering av barn med flyktningbakgrunn i stor grad handler om å håndtere kategorier som stammer fra dominerende kunnskapsregimer, som psy-diskurser, og som er nedfelt i innflytelsesrik sosial teknologi (ICDP).

Den andre artikkelen har tittelen: “The construction of a ‘traumatised’ refugee child in need of safety in Norwegian kindergartens”. Artikkelen er publisert i the *Journal of Comparative Social Work* (2022). Som en forlengelse av artikkel 1, utforsker artikkel 2 hvordan barnehageansatte forholder seg til trygghet i arbeidet med å integrere barn med flyktningbakgrunn. Mens artikkel 1 synliggjør makten som ligger i sosial teknologi (ICDP) i integreringsarbeidet, viser jeg i artikkel 2 hvordan jeg identifiserte trygghetsbegrepet som er en del av et bredere institusjonelt kompleks som omfavner integreringsarbeidet. Begrepet “trygghet” ble nevnt i alle intervjuene med barnehageansatte. Først trodde jeg at det handlet om at de ansatte ønsket å holde barna trygge for farer, men funnene viste at barnehagelærerne refererte til en annen type trygghet. Denne typen trygghet er forbundet med emosjonell trygghet, og er basert på en antagelse om at barn med flyktningbakgrunn er traumatiserte og at de derfor har behov for mye emosjonell kontakt. Jeg sporet denne verdiladede forståelsen av trygghet fra foreldrekurs som ICDP og traumekurs i regi av Regionalt ressurscenter for traumer og vold (RVTS-Sør), der flyktninger blir konstruert som «traumatiserte», i risiko og sårbare. Analysen synliggjør tekstlig medierte styringsrelasjoner mellom den sosiale teknologien og trygghetsdiskursen og det daglige integreringsarbeidet som gjøres i barnehagen. Hovedargumentet i artikkel 2 er at selv om sosiale teknologier, som ICDP, blir brukt med gode intensjoner for å hjelpe barn og familier med spesielle behov, så kan det ha uintenderte negative konsekvenser som at disse gruppene av barn blir kategorisert som «traumatiserte». Denne artikkelen er nært forbundet med den første, og artikkelens bidrag er at den utforsker hvordan barnehageansatte er viklet inn i styringsrelasjoner i sitt integreringsarbeid. Når de barnehageansatte beskriver hvordan de gjør integreringsarbeid i barnehagen understreker de viktigheten av at barna skal føle seg «trygge». Studiens funn viser at de barnehageansatte deltar i et foreldreprogram som ICDP og at det er derfra de får kunnskapen om sammenhengen mellom barn med flyktningbakgrunn og traumer. Studien viser at de profesjonelle har tillit til sosiale teknologier som er styrt av innflytelsesrike kunnskapsregimer assosiert med psykologiske disipliner (Rose, 1999). ICDP er et eksempel på slik teknologi, der standardisert ekspertkunnskap benyttes for å finne løsninger på lokalt og individuelt plan.

Artikkel 3 har tittelen: “Tensions of difference in the integration of refugee children in Norwegian ECEC centres”, og er publisert i the *Nordic Journal of Early Childhood Research* (2023). Denne artikkelen utforsker hverdagslige utfordringer som barnehageansatte møter i integreringsarbeidet. Barnehager mottar barn med flyktningbakgrunn fra mange ulike land, som Somalia, Eritrea, Irak, Tyrkia, Afghanistan, og mer nylig Ukraina. Etter hvert som den norske befolkningen har blitt mer mangfoldig, har integrasjon i barnehagen blitt et viktig politisk og profesjonelt anliggende. Funnene som presenteres i denne artikkelen viser at de barnehageansatte opplever spenninger mellom behovet for å vise kulturell sensitivitet og følsomhet ovenfor flyktninger på den ene siden, og de institusjonelle retningslinjene og politiske føringene - som blant annet inngår i rammeplanen - som de må stå til ansvar for. Jeg utforsker rollen barnehager spiller som «siviliserende institusjoner» i tråd med velferdsstatens interesser, normer og verdier, ved å ta i bruk Norbert Elias teori om siviliseringsprosessen (Gilliam and Gulløv 2017). Funnene i artikkel tre viser først og fremst at barnehageansatte strever med å finne balansen mellom bruk av barnas morsmål og opplæring i norsk. For det andre viser studien at barnehagepersonalet opplever en spenning i ambisjonen om å «sivilisere» barna med flyktning bakgrunn ved å lære dem de idealene, normene og rutineene som de anser som viktige for å tilpasse seg barnehagehverdagen slik den også er rammet inn av institusjonelle og politiske føringer. For det tredje viser funnene at de barnehageansatte opplever utfordringer i arbeidet med å «sivilisere» foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn ut fra dominerende norske forventninger til foreldreskap. Den fjerde artikkelen har tittelen “Dealing with surveillance in Norwegian early childhood education centers—The perspectives of refugee parents” er under fagfelleevaluering i *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*. Denne artikkelen utforsker foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn sine erfaringer med integrering i norske barnehager. Norge er kjent for sin generøse velferdsstat og omfattende offentlige støttetilbud til familier. Barnehager fungerer som en integrert del av den norske velferdsstaten og er kraftig subsidiert av staten, for enkelte grupper familier er det gratis. Disse omfattende velferdsordningene er generelt sett høyt verdsatt i befolkningen, men

studiens funn viser at flere av foreldrene med flyktningbakgrunn er engstelige og skeptiske til de offentlige tilbudene. I lys av Erving Goffmans (1959; 1963) teoretiske begreper stigma og inntrykkskontroll viser funnene at foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn opplever barnehagen som en type overvåkning basert på en offentlig mistro til deres foreldreferdigheter. Funnene viser at følelsen av overvåking og frykt for stigmatisering blant foreldrene er forbundet med deres opplevelse av å bli vurdert opp mot norske normative forståelser av foreldreskap. For å håndtere overvåkingen og frykten for stigmatisering tyr foreldrene til inntrykkskontroll. I praksis betyr det at de deltar på møter og foreldreprogrammer, hvorav noen er obligatoriske, som en måte å bli vel ansett på blant barnehageansatte. Studien viser også at noen foreldre er selvsikre og tør å gå inn i en åpen dialog med de barnehageansatte der de argumenterer for egne valg.

I avhandlingens diskusjon og konklusjon presenterer jeg to overgripende bidrag fra de fire artiklene. For det første viser studien at integreringsarbeidet i barnehagen er basert på en trygghetsdiskurs som implisitt kategoriserer barn med flyktningbakgrunn som sårbare og i risiko. For det andre viser funnene at integreringsarbeid i barnehagen skjer gjennom en «sivilisering» av barn og foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn. Denne «siviliseringen» konstruerer implisitt foreldrene som potensielt skadelige for sine barn. Jeg argumenterer for at integreringsarbeid i barnehagen er et uttrykk for styringsrelasjoner som produserer visse måter å forstå barn og foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn gjennom blant annet forståelser av trygghets- og siviliseringsdiskurser. Integrering av flyktninger gjennom «trygghet» og «sivilisering» er organisert utfra antakelser som er nedfelt i tekster. En analyse av disse tekstene muliggjør en synliggjøring av skjulte former for styring, som ikke er lett å oppdage fra et lokalt ståsted, som for eksempel fra ståstedet til en barnehageansatt eller en forelder med flyktningbakgrunn (Smith, 2005, s. 226).

Studien synliggjør viktigheten av integreringsarbeidet som gjøres i barnehagen. Barnehagene tilbyr et læringsmiljø som støtter norsklæring, selvregulering og sosialisering. Videre fungere barnehagen som en bro mellom familier med flyktningbakgrunn og det

norske samfunnet. På den annen side viser studien hvordan integreringsprosessene i barnehagen er preget av spenninger, dilemmaer og utfordringer. Dette krever at barnehageansatte, foreldre med flyktningbakgrunn og andre aktører som jobber med flyktninger fortsetter å arbeide mot åpenhet og gjør skjønnsmessige vurderinger i møte med utfordringer som oppstår i integreringsarbeidet.

Abstract

In this article-based dissertation, I explore the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centers. This thesis begins from the standpoint of ECEC professionals as entry-level participants and refugee parents as second-level participants. Institutional ethnography has been used as the overarching methodological and theoretical approach. The concepts of ruling relations and work knowledge from institutional ethnography combined abductively with other theoretical concepts, namely, the civilising process (civilising institutions), stigma, impression management, and making up of people comprise the overall theoretical framework of this thesis.

This study employs explorative institutional ethnographic qualitative methods, and its findings and analyses are presented in four articles. The aims of this study are to explore the institutional complex within which integration is organised from the standpoint of ECEC professionals as entry-level participants and to explore the institutional complex within which integration in ECEC centers is organised from the standpoint of refugee parents as second-level participants. The main research question for this study is: How is the integration of refugees in ECEC centres socially organised from the standpoint of ECEC professionals and refugee parents? The study has other specific research questions that are addressed in each of the four respective articles.

To answer the research questions, I adopted a qualitative approach and explorative research design informed by institutional ethnography. Data was collected from two sets of participants: ECEC professionals and refugee parents. First, I conducted individual interviews with 13 ECEC professionals connected to three different centers. Second, I conducted a focus group interview with three refugee parents, and

third, I conducted individual interviews with 12 refugee parents. In total, 28 participants were sampled using purposive and snowball methods.

Article 1, coauthored with Prof Ann Christin Nilsen, explores how ECEC professionals carry out integration and early intervention work. This article contributes to the research by highlighting how integration work in ECEC centers revolves around managing categories, whether making categories fit people or making people fit categories. The findings discuss how knowledge from psychology relates to social technologies which seemingly mediates everyday ECEC practice and work knowledge of ECEC professionals.

Article 2 presents a follow-up to Article 1 and explores how ECEC professionals relate to the concept of safety in the integration of refugee children. Article 2 explores how I discovered the discourse of “safety” among ECEC professionals. The findings show that safety discourse is part of an institutional complex that organises how integration is carried out. In explaining how they do integration work, ECEC professionals consistently refer to professional language that expresses the ambition to make refugee children feel “safe.” The study found that, when working with refugee children and parents, ECEC professionals apply knowledge on trauma from social technology in the form of parenting programs, such as the International Child Development Program (ICDP). The discourse of safety is traceable in social technologies such as ICDP and courses on trauma, such as RVTS. This article shows that there is an awareness that social technologies can be used with good intentions to bring about solutions that can help refugee children and parents but also argues for a need to explore the consequences of leaving influential ‘psy’ discourses uninterrogated. The findings from this study show that the ‘psy’ discourses may contribute to unintended outcomes, such as categorising refugee children as representing a particular category, whereby refugee children are portrayed as vulnerable and “traumatised.”

Article 3 explores the perspectives of ECEC professionals on the tensions that they face in the integration of refugee children and parents. The results show that ECEC professionals face tensions between their ambition to exercise cultural and linguistic inclusivity toward refugees and the need to uphold the institutional guidelines and practices as envisaged in policy guidelines such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017). The findings show how the participants deal with three areas of tension, namely, language, ‘civilising’ educating children on everyday norms and values and ‘civilising’ parents on child-rearing practices. The ECEC professionals perceive this to be a way of contributing to the civic integration of refugee children and parents, which is key for social cohesion and produces acceptable citizens for the community. The findings also reveal that the civic integration of ECEC professionals is characterised by power relations between the refugee children and parents, which explains the tensions experienced during integration into Norwegian society.

Article 4 explores the perspectives of refugee parents regarding how they deal with perceived surveillance and fear of stigma from ECEC professionals. The findings reveal that refugee parents feel that they are being surveilled and fear that their capacity to be “good” parents is questioned because it is measured against normative and dominant norms of “good” parenting. The findings show that, to deal with the surveillance and fear of stigma, refugee parents resort to impression management and dialogue/communication with ECEC professionals.

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List of publications

Article 1

Kimathi, E., & Nilsen, A. C. E. (2021). Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers' work to promote early intervention and integration. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 146394912110454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491211045419>

Article 2

Kimathi, E. (2022). Construction of a 'traumatized' refugee child in need of safety in Norwegian kindergartens. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, 17(2), 53–78. <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v17i2.386>

Article 3

Kimathi, E. (2023). Tensions of Difference in Integrating Refugee Children in Norwegian ECEC Centers. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 20(4), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v20.409>

Article 4

Dealing with surveillance in Norwegian Early Childhood Education Centers – The perspectives of refugee parents.” Under review in the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*.

1.0 Introduction

The increase in migration in recent years has brought about demographic changes and challenged the assumed homogeneity that exists in Nordic countries (Vertovec, 2015). The present dissertation explores the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers. Currently, international debates have widely recognised the need to improve the quality of ECEC for all children and families (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020). Recent research has revealed that little attention has been given to refugee children in political conversations even though many refugees emigrating to Western countries tend to have young children (0–4 years) (Scholz, 2021; Verdeckhove & Aarsen, 2020). Although there has been a focus on providing food and housing to refugees, inequalities have remained in terms of support, care, and education for families with a refugee background.

While Norway has enacted policies to tackle the challenges related to educating migrants, there remains a need to develop the capacity to do so, especially in the effort to make ECEC centers more responsive to the country's increasing linguistic and cultural diversity (Engel et al., 2015). ECEC centers are increasingly becoming microcosms for the complex patterns of migration, representing an arena where children from diverse religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds come together (Vertovec, 2007). In light of this, modern ECEC centers in Norway and other Nordic countries are representative of the challenges of immigration and integration that are imminent in the Western world.

Previous research has shown that partnership between ECEC institutions and the children's families is essential for helping refugees integrate into their new countries by offering them access to other forms of support (De Gioia, 2015; Lunneblad, 2017). ECEC centers have attracted attention for being one of the first points of contact between refugees and their host communities, where both parties meet to negotiate their values and identities and form cultural and national memberships (e.g., Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020; Lunneblad, 2017).

In Norway, the public sector is comprehensive, and trust in the state is high (Skirbekk, 2009; Rothstein, 2013; Lund & Nilsen, 2019). ECEC institutions, whether public or private, receive universal funding from the state and are providers of public welfare services at the local or “street” level (Scholz, 2021). On this premise, ECEC professionals are street-level bureaucrats and an extension of the welfare state (Lipsky, 2010). In this sense, they play a crucial role in “civilising” children and promoting social cohesion toward building an inclusive society (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017).

ECEC centers are sites where refugee children experience different forms of socialisation, which shape them as social beings (Kuusisto, 2017). Within the Norwegian welfare state, facilitating integration is a professional obligation of the street-level bureaucrats employed in these institutions (Hagelund, 2005). While ECEC centers work to facilitate learning of the host nation languages, they must contend with other challenges relating to the cultural and religious worldviews of the children, families, and ECEC staff (Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020).

There are claims that Norway is facing challenges in education policy and practice in relation to the integration of refugees and immigrants (Pastoor, 2017). The underlying challenge for ECEC professionals performing integration is related to the tensions between cultural responsiveness and the institutional guidelines and practices to which professionals are held accountable, as well as the way social culture from the majority groups shapes the habitus and discourses of refugee integration (Lunneblad, 2017; Mitchell & Bateman, 2018; Norheim & Moser, 2020; Sønsthagen 2020; Tobin, 2020). The ambitions geared toward integration encompass both challenges and ambiguities. Some scholars have claimed that welfare institutions, despite their positive intentions, have leaned toward instilling the dominant culture as a prerequisite for the integration of immigrants and refugees (Valenta & Bunar, 2010). To achieve integration, governments and state institutions have turned

toward civic integration programs, which focus on employment, language, and knowledge about society and culture (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012; Goodman, 2019; Joppke, 2017). In a similar line of logic, ECEC professionals have been regarded as cultural gatekeepers who ‘civilise’ children and protect the ‘good and natural’ norms of Norwegian childhood (Gullestad, 1997).

In this context, ECEC institutions have a direct effect on how refugee children and families experience integration in Norway. The integration of refugees as a minority group has continued to gain attention among researchers (Lunneblad, 2017; Scholz, 2021). In addition, there are claims that the research on how ECEC centers receive refugees has relied mostly on survey-guided research (see Gambaro et al., 2021) on refugee children performed by clinicians and psychologists; therefore, the understanding of the needs of refugee children has been predominantly understood from a psychological lens as opposed to an educational and sociological lens (Lunneblad, 2017). However, other studies have shown that the voices of refugee parents are crucial in creating positive integration outcomes for children and their families (Norheim, 2022; Sønsthagen, 2021). Hence, there is a need for more studies on the views of both refugees and ECEC professionals that focus on their ordinary realities and living conditions. The current dissertation aims to contribute to the contemporary body of knowledge by addressing this need.

1.1 Norway and refugees – Background and context

Although once a rather monocultural and homogenous country, Norway has experienced increased diversity among its population. Immigration to Norway began in the 1960s and increased steadily in the 1970s due to heightened demand for workers in the oil industry, among others, which opened doors for immigrants from India, Turkey, and Pakistan until 1975 (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2021). The “immigration stop” was intended to cushion the welfare state from vulnerabilities related to low-skilled labour immigration to Norway, as a high supply of labour would lower wages and potentially lead to high unemployment,

which would burden the state budget (Brochmann, 2022 p. 158). Debates on immigration have, in recent times, been connected to concerns over the long-term sustainability of the welfare state, with policymakers arguing that immigrants, especially refugees who arrive with relatively lower education and skill levels, face challenges in the highly paid and skilled Norwegian labour market, which raises the possibility of welfare dependence (Brochmann, 2022; Naess, 2020). Although the immigration stop of 1975 achieved its objective of reducing the labour influx, other forms of immigration to Norway that could not be addressed by the policies generated for labour immigration continued to emerge, as Norwegian borders remained open for refugees, asylum seekers, and family reunifications in accordance with international immigration rules.

Since the 1990s, the immigration of people from Eastern Europe and the Global South to Norway has been steady. Researchers claim that between 1990 and 2017, the bulk of the population increase in Norway and other Nordic countries could be attributed to immigration (Hervik, 2018; Karlsdottir et al., 2018). Although immigration was not initially problematised, concerns over the sustainability of the Norwegian welfare state have been debated due to Norway's reception of people who are considered to have less education and skills compared with the general population (Brochman & Hagelund, 2011).

In 2015, the so-called refugee "crisis" attracted the attention of politicians and the public in Norway due, in part, to the heavy media attention regarding the refugee situation in the Mediterranean. The reaction of the Norwegian public was characterised by hospitality and empathy for refugees who were arriving in Europe from Syria (Helge Lurås, NRK, 22 November 2015)¹. However, claims of an increase in the number of refugees arrivals contributed to the government's ambitions for stricter immigration policies (Stokke, 2019). These claims have been challenged by other studies that argue that reliable evidence and

¹ <https://radio.nrk.no/serie/ytring/sesong/201511/NMAG06001915>

statistics on the cross-border movements of refugees are often inaccessible, making it difficult to ascertain how many people arrived because of double reporting and the rapid movement of migrants (Karlsdottir et al., 2018). In addition, debates have erupted over how to define and categorise diverse types of migrants—a topic that has posed a challenge to authorities and policymakers working with integration.

Over the past three decades, policymakers in Norway have debated topics related to the integration of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from the Balkans, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Congo, Eritrea and, lately, Ukraine, among others. Over time, protracted immigration flows have increased the ratio of immigrants to the general population. Norway has in recent decades become a diverse nation, with 16% of its total population being immigrants or born to immigrant parents (Statistics Norway, 2023)². Currently, the number of persons with a refugee background is 280,018 accounting for 5.1% of the total population in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2023)³.

Policies regarding refugees have attracted contrasting perspectives within the political landscape in Norway. For instance, the immediate former conservative government, which was comprised of the ‘Hoyre’ Conservative Party of Norway and the ‘Fremskrittspartiet’ progressive party, made efforts to install tough immigration laws in 2015 but failed to consolidate universal political support. The ‘Kristelig Folkeparti’ Christian democrats and ‘Venstre’ liberals objected to the restrictions, while the Labor Party (Arbeiderpartiet) largely supported them. The immigration minister at the time, Sylvi Listhaug, who represented the Progress party, drew up a revised immigration law in 2016, as reported by Norwegian newspaper VG in an article titled “Here are the government’s asylum

²<https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/innvandrerestatistikk/innvandrerestatistikk-og-norskfodte-med-innvandrerforeldre>

³ <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/innvandrerestatistikk/personer-med-flyktningbakgrunn>

restrictions”(Amundsen, 5 April 2016).⁴ The new law championed the reduction of asylum seeker arrivals and the closure of asylum centers, and presented a new white paper on inclusion and diversity that appeared to problematise refugees in Norway (Stokke, 2019).

The increasing migration and ethnocultural diversification in Norway has continued to raise doubts, instigate policy changes, and lead to the evolution of institutional practices. Questions of who is integrated and who is not have been featured in the media and on academic and political platforms (Naess, 2020). The contemporary Norwegian state faces a dilemma when it comes to the question of refugees. Toward the end of 2021, there were calls for an increase in the quota of refugees from camps in Greece, which were met with split reception among the populace. Resistance against the reception of more refugees in Norway is based on concerns over the pressure such initiatives place on the welfare state, alongside calls for fairer “burden sharing” among the wealthiest nations (Valenta & Bunar, 2010). However, it is arguable that there was almost universal support across the political parties for resettling and supporting Ukrainian refugees in 2022.

Norway has adopted a differentiated approach to the integration of refugees and immigrants based on the realisation that the respective groups are highly heterogeneous. Norway currently implements a specially designed “Introduction Program,” which was created through the Introductory Act of 2004 for refugees and their families, along with a general policy for labour immigrants, their families, and descendants of immigrants (Brochmann, 2022 pg. 161). The introduction program was established to enable refugees and their families to increase their potential to participate in working life and become less dependent on social assistance because people with refugee backgrounds appeared to have

⁴ <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/8yr3r/her-er-regjeringens-asylinnstramminger>

significantly lower employment rates on average compared with other immigrants and natives.

1.2 Integration - A contested concept

Immigration and the integration of minorities are now among the top three most important political issues in every election campaign in Norway, with debates and research around the issues growing since the 1970s (Eriksen, 2016). The reception of refugees and immigrants in host countries takes place in three ways: assimilation, integration, and segregation (Eriksen, 2010). The assimilation of immigrants is conceptualised based on the idea that there are dominant norms that individuals must follow to be accepted as members of a particular group/community or country. As such, there is a prerequisite that immigrants must change their behaviour to act like the majority group. Segregation is understood as the division of people within various facets of life, such as education, healthcare, housing, and the general social/cultural fabric of society (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2021).

Scholars have shown that Norway initially embraced a policy of assimilation in which everyone was expected to identify as Norwegian, which has been criticised as the reason behind the efforts to forcefully assimilate the Sami people and other cultural and linguistic minorities—an unwelcome part of the country's history. During the 1960s and 1970s, the increase in immigration to Norway, coupled with periods of political activism over various social issues such as women's rights, peace, and solidarity against injustices in other parts of the world, opened the door for deeper consciousness regarding diversity in Europe. This era can be seen as the beginning of the turn from assimilation to integration policies in Norway (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2021). Scholarly debates surrounding the concept of integration in both policy and practice are seen as a departure from assimilation approaches, whereby integration adopts a more liberal approach centered on human rights and cultural pluralism (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

Integration has been conceptualised as a middle ground between assimilation and segregation in that it promotes the participation of refugees and immigrants in shared social institutions while attempting to maintain a group identity and some level of cultural distinctiveness (Eriksen, 2015). In contrast to assimilation, integration is seen as offering the space to affirm differences among groups seeking to coexist together. Societies seeking to practice integration tend to view diversity and multiculturalism in a positive light (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2021). Integration is seemingly presented as being a more immigrant-friendly approach that is less likely to result in the marginalisation and segregation of immigrants (Valenta, 2008, Valenta & Bunar, 2010).

Generally, scholars do not seem to agree on what integration is (Castles et al., 2001; Hagelund, 2005; Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012; Scholten 2013). Hence, there is no single commonly accepted definition, theory or model of refugee integration (Castles et al., 2001; Scholten et al., 2011). Nevertheless, most studies exploring integration have focused on different facets of refugees' livelihoods, such as work, housing, childcare, school participation (socio-economic integration), residence, immigration status, rights (legal-political integration), family life, group interactions, language, religion (cultural integration), and how these facets facilitate better social cohesion compared with social stratification and social conflicts (Ager & Strang 2008; Hagelund & Brockmann, 2011; Heckmann, 2005; Penninx & Garcés-Mascreñas 2016). When taken as a buzzword or as a vague concept, integration carries multiple meanings and can be interpreted differently in practice. Discursively, integration can be seen as sensitising concept, meaning that ECEC professionals promote the concept of integration based on theoretical knowledge and familiarity with institutional discourse, even if the discourse itself has no agency (Blumer, 1954). One challenge faced by sociological researchers in institutional settings such as ECEC centers is that the participants may “speak from the generalised and generalising discourses” (Smith 2001, p. 9). This means that the participants, when talking about integration, for instance, may move into the normalised ideological language of the

institutional discourse, which may lack descriptive empirical content and may not be meaningful to the researcher.

In Norway, there is a universal acceptance that the welfare state is responsible for the integration of refugees and that publicly funded institutions play a significant role in this process. Nordic welfare states have been lauded for their apparent commitment to solidarity and equal rights, offering opportunities for all and being tolerant and generous toward immigrants and refugees (Alseth, 2018; Olwig and Pærregaard, 2011; Valenta & Bunar, 2010). Norway offers numerous refugee integration services, including reception/settlement, education and training, healthcare, and family support. In this sense, the connection between the welfare state and the social integration of refugee children and families is apparent (Valenta, 2008).

In Norway, integration has been the official policy with respect to refugee reception (Øland, 2019). Integration is understood through the lens of “civic integration,” which denotes how immigrant integration is promoted through state policies, with the responsibilities placed on welfare state institutions to facilitate employment, language acquisition, and knowledge about society and culture (Borevi et al., 2017; Brochman & Mitbøen 2021). Immigration to Norway has steadily increased over the past few decades, and one of the challenges for people working with integration policy and in practice is to find ways to avoid being captured by normative aspects that result in the categorisation and othering of refugees and other minority people. Categorisation and othering are more likely to occur when people who carry out integration lean on the distinctions between the minority and majority population, where the minority group is defined by cultural traits such as language and religion (Stolcke, 1995; Schinkel, 2018). Hence, a need for knowledge that challenges the categorisation of refugees based on both their individual and collective traits is crucial.

Norway is regarded as a social democratic state with a highly developed welfare system, institutionalised social rights, universal access, egalitarianism, and generous benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Norway's welfare state has almost become an organic part of the nation's identity since World War Two (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2011), and there remains a national ambition to maintain it. Integration efforts in Norway have been anchored on the inclusiveness of the welfare state which emphasises facilitating the participation in work for all people in Norway including refugees. The expectation of the welfare state to facilitate integration has been used to fuel the argument that the welfare model is under pressure from the increasing demands on it related to immigration (Brochmann, 2022; Brochmann & Jurado 2013).

Research has shown that integration is a challenge for liberal democracies (Goodman, 2010), and many Western European countries have adopted policies and practices that signal a move toward mandatory integration, which requires immigrants to acquire the respective country's language, norms, and values as conditions for long-term settlement and citizenship (Joppke, 2017 p. 1156). The idea behind these requirements is that promoting such civic skills among refugees and immigrants makes it easier for them to integrate into the host countries and participate more fully in the wider society (Goodman & Wright, 2015; Mouritsen et al., 2019). Among the Scandinavian countries, Norway's integration model has been seen as a middle ground between Sweden's relatively welcoming policies and Denmark's highly restrictive policies. On the one hand, many Norwegian policymakers are optimistic that social cohesion with immigrants can be achieved, while on the other, some are pessimistic about the will and ability of immigrants to adapt (Borevi et al. 2017; Brochman & Hagelund, 2012; Brochman & Mitbøen 2020).

There are numerous debates over where Norway stands regarding integration. Official government reports show an ambition toward building a greater understanding of cultural

diversity, but these good intentions remain a challenge in practice (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2021). Critics of government's civic integration approach argue that it is a new form of assimilation in that national policies for integration abandon the idea of mutuality between refugees and immigrants and host nations by establishing explicit conditions for settlement and citizenship (Borevi, 2010; Goodman & Wright, 2015). This places the responsibility of integration on refugees by implying that they have an obligation to adapt and change while the majority culture remains the same (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016).

Further criticism directed at a government-led form of integration is that it is a political discourse among politicians and state bureaucrats whose ambition is to create metrics through which refugees' and immigrants' integration is "measured," for instance, regarding enrollment in schools, vocational training, and labour market participation (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Goodman & Wright, 2015; Favell, 2022). These metrics are targeted and evaluated through social policy and practice, for example, in employment and education numbers. The primary criticism is that, although these metrics are well intended, this manner of conceptualising integration tends to omit refugees' socio-cultural attributes, such as religion, language, and family relations, among others. Recent debates have moved toward discussing whether obligatory civic integration influences the outcomes of integration in host countries, along with how this integration impacts the experiences of immigrants and refugees during the resettlement process (Goodman & Wright, 2015; Borevi et al., 2017; Mouritsen et al., 2019; Brochmann & Mitbøen, 2020).

1.3 Immigrant families and the Norwegian welfare state

The Norwegian welfare state provides family support and services that are usually perceived as entitlements by tax-paying citizens and residents (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This provision guarantees that the Norwegian state is closely involved in various aspects of family life (Leira, 2008). Because the state enjoys a relatively high level of trust among

the populace, its involvement in family life is also normalised (Johansson, 2010). The welfare state provides services that ease the burdens of family life and ensure that children are protected. In this context, the welfare state has been seen as being child-centric in that it prioritises the rights and best interests of children (Hennum, 2014; Hollekim et al., 2016; Tembo et al., 2021). Among the numerous benefits of Norway’s child-centered system are comprehensive and free education, paid parental leave, and a child welfare service referred to as “*barnevern*,”⁵ which is a public agency that protects children and upholds the legal standards of children’s upbringing in Norway (Hennum, 2014).

Although the welfare state has been acknowledged for the generous privileges it affords to residents in Norway, there are claims that the perception immigrants hold of the child welfare services (CWS) and ECEC centres does not reflect that of the majority population (Handulle & Vassenden, 2021; Tembo et al., 2021). Some claim that the increased family intervention through ECEC and other institutions is tantamount to increased social control over family life, which immigrants and refugees may not understand due to their different experiences regarding the family–state relationship in their countries (Tembo, 2020). In this sense, the child-oriented focus of the Norwegian state represents both the support and protection of children while simultaneously working as a tool for exercising social control over the family life of citizens (Ericsson, 2000). In connection with refugee integration, critics have argued that institutions use welfare systems to ensure that immigrants and refugees submit to institutionalised control (Øland, 2019).

Research on migration, parenting, and social control has shown that some immigrant parents have ambivalent relationships with Norwegian society (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019). As such, welfare state institutions have faced considerable challenges in providing services that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. ECEC centers (Handulle, 2022)

⁵ <https://www.bufdir.no/barnevern/>

and CWS (Handulle, 2022; Tembo, 2020; Tembo and Studsrød, 2022) are among the state institutions that have been associated with social control. There are claims that CWS work perpetuates social ideals and norms regarding “good parenting” and desirable circumstances for children’s lives (Hennum, 2012; Tembo, 2020).

The implication is that refugee parents are expected to adapt to the norms of welfare state institutions in their family life and find strategies to deal with seemingly intrusive state policies and practices (Ellingsæter & Pedersen, 2016). The Norwegian state’s involvement in childcare is based on the notion that “it takes a welfare state to raise the child” (Tuastad & Studsrød, 2017 p. 9), which both supports and opposes the widespread belief in other parts of the world, especially in African societies, that “it takes a village to raise the child” (Tembo & Studsrød, 2022, p. 3). While both notions are anchored on the involvement of society in raising children, they oppose each other in the belief held by numerous countries that the immediate family and community carry the responsibility of child-rearing, which does not necessarily involve state institutions (Tembo & Studsrød, 2022).

The need to control immigrants has been associated with the perceived differences in parenting methods upheld by CWS (Tembo et al., 2021). In Norway, immigrant parents represent a higher number of cases registered by CWS, and that may have contributed to increased mistrust between CWS and immigrants (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Handulle, 2022). Researchers (see Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020) have posited that CWS professionals should consider that working with immigrant parents requires specific skills, knowledge, and awareness, especially in situations relating to culture.

Newly arrived refugees are obliged to attend the welfare state–funded introduction program in various municipalities where they are educated in the Norwegian language and social studies, including knowledge of family life in Norway. Participation is mandatory, and the main ambition of the introduction program is to prepare refugees for employment, although

it is not limited to this pursuit (Brochmann, 2022). Moreover, refugees must attend parenting programs, such as the ICDP, which has been formalised as part of the Norwegian government's Parental Support Program and is usually used in parental training programs for refugees and other minorities (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs).⁶ The ICDP aims to strengthen the care and upbringing of children and young people as well as the competence of caregivers (Tembo & Studsrød, 2022).

1.4 ECEC in Norway

For a continued period, there has been international consensus regarding the need for higher-quality ECEC for children and families. This argument is supported by recent research showing that quality ECEC leads to significant improvement in the well-being of children and families in potentially vulnerable circumstances, such as refugees (Bove and Sharhamd, 2020; Sønsthagen, 2021). The general term for ECEC in Norway is “kindergartens,” which translates directly to “child garden” in English. Kindergarten is a service for children between 0 and 6 years old (Karila, 2012). The Norwegian ECEC sector is founded on the Nordic ideal of child-centeredness, which upholds tenets relating to a positive and natural childhood, such as equality, egalitarianism, free play in nature, autonomy and solidarity (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015; Gullestad, 1997; Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2008). Similar to other Nordic countries, ECEC policy and practice in Norway is founded on the ideals of the Nordic welfare model, such as social inclusion and equal opportunities for participation. Hence, ECEC services are embedded in the idea of universal access for all (Einarsdóttir et al., 2015; Karila, 2012).

There are three different types of ECEC centres in Norway. First, ordinary kindergartens (*barnehager*) offer half-day and full-day services all year round and are either public or private. This is the most common type of ECEC service available in Norway. Second,

⁶ <https://www.bufdir.no/familie/tilbud/icdp-grupper/#30318>

family kindergartens (*familiebarnehager*) are based in private homes, where assistants work with small groups of children under the supervision of qualified kindergarten teachers. Third, open kindergartens are usually part-time drop-in centres for children and parents and are run by qualified ECEC teachers (Engel et al., 2015). Family kindergartens and open kindergartens have nearly become extinct.⁷ In 2006, the responsibility for kindergartens was shifted from the Ministry of Children and Families to the Ministry of Education, rendering them more “school-like.” The central government, through the Directorate for Education and Training, holds the overall responsibility for management, quality development, and financing of the ECEC sector and allocates earmarked funds for the running of kindergartens. In addition, the municipalities are tasked with providing and running public municipal kindergartens as well as approving and supervising both public and private kindergartens in the municipality (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2007).

Similar to other Nordic countries, the expansion of the ECEC in Norway was borne from the need to share childcare between families and institutions beginning in the 1970s as women began to participate in the labour market (Kampmann, 2004; Karila, 2012; Nilsen, 2021a). As it became obvious that children would spend time in organised institutional care centres, the professionalisation of services became necessary to ensure that children had access to qualified and knowledgeable care professionals (Korsvold, 2012). As ECEC moved higher up in the policy and political agenda, so too did the quality of the ECEC workforce. Unlike their global counterparts, a qualified and relatively well-remunerated workforce became the backbone of ECEC services across Nordic countries. Moreover, the professionalisation of childcare led to increased work and the need for expertise coupled

⁷ <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/barnehager/artikler/utvikling-av-familiebarnehager-og-apne-barnehager-de-siste-20-arene>

with higher bureaucratisation and increased demands for formal procedures included in the everyday work of ECEC professionals (Korsvold, 2012).

ECEC has become an umbrella term for any public, private, or voluntary preschool childcare provision subject to a national regulatory framework (Van Belle, 2016). The term ECEC has been adopted by governments and regional authorities such as the European Union through the European Commission and the European Parliament, which has prioritised the “universal provision of ECEC.” The argument for the universal provision of quality ECEC is that it underpins the wishes of many societies to ensure quality education and care for their youngest members through public intervention in the form of social and educational policy (Rosenthal, 2003).

In Norway, the idea of universal, institutionalised ECEC services is well established in legislation (Karila, 2012). Compared with other regions of the world where ECEC is considered the responsibility of the family and, at most, the community, in Norway and other Nordic countries, ECEC is considered the responsibility of the state based on the democratic principle of supporting an equal society (Broström et al., 2018). The outcome of the universal provision of ECEC services in Nordic countries is close to 100% participation by children in ECEC centers. The high enrollment is reflective of both parent’s participation in the workforce as well as the importance of ECEC to children in society (Broström et al., 2018). This positive acknowledgement is reflected in the high numbers of children currently enrolled in ECEC services, standing at 93.4% among children aged 1–5 years old and 97.4% among children aged 3–5 years old as of March 2023 (Statistics Norway, 2023).⁸ Although it remains unknown how many children with a refugee background are enrolled in ECEC, 19% of the total ECEC population is defined as minority language children. Children with minority language backgrounds are those who

⁸ <https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/barnehager/statistikk/barnehager>

have a native language other than Norwegian, Sami, Swedish, Danish or English (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018⁹; Jahreie, 2023).

1.5 Recent research on ECEC centers and integration

The Framework Plan for Kindertartens (2017), which is the authoritative policy guideline, does not explicitly mention the concept of integration. However, it states that ECEC centers are “arenas that highlight linguistic and cultural diversity, support the children’s different cultural expressions and identities and promote diversity in communication, language and other forms of expression” (2017 p. 48). Moreover, the framework emphasises that ECEC centers are areas where cultures meet and where pedagogical practice is organised in a manner that supports, empowers, and responds to children’s respective cultural and individual circumstances while acknowledging and highlighting differences in values, religions and worldviews.¹⁰ Moreover, the Kindergarten Act of Norway (2005 amended in 2018) does not mention integration but states that “Kindertartens shall take account of children’s age, level of functioning, gender, and social, ethnic and cultural background, including the language and culture of Sami children” (p. 1).

Research on the role of ECEC centers as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents is limited in Norway. The available research appears to explore similar issues as the present study, with recent studies focusing on concepts such as the inclusion of refugee parents in Norwegian ECEC centers (Sønsthagen, 2021), educational management and parenting in culturally diverse kindertartens (Lund, 2022), and partnership with immigrant and refugee parents in ECEC centers (Kalkman et al., 2017; Norheim and Moser, 2020; Norheim, 2022). Some studies have explored refugees’ interactions with ECEC centres,

⁹<https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/statistikk/statistikk-barnehage/tall-og-analyse-av-barnehager-2018/barnehager/>

¹⁰<https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kd/vedlegg/barnehager/engelsk/frameworkplanforthecontentandtasksofkindertartens.pdf>

framing them as encounters with the welfare state. For instance, Bundgaard and Gulløv, (2006), Bregnbæk (2021), and Lunneblad (2017) have conducted studies exploring the relationships between refugee children and parents and ECEC professionals in Danish and Swedish preschools. Similarly, Gilliam and Gulløv (2017) have explored ECEC centres as ‘civilising’ institutions of the welfare state. I will discuss how I use the notion of ‘civilising’ in my research later. Recent studies by Jahreie (2022) and Handulle and Vassenden (2021) have explored encounters between immigrant parents and ECEC in Norway and highlighted the barriers in interactions between parents and professionals, respectively.

Moreover, a cross-national study by Vandekerckhove and Aarssen (2020) involving the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway focused on how ECEC centers can offer institutional support to refugee children and families, while another cross-national study by Tobin (2020) involving the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States investigated how ECEC can address the needs of refugee children and families. Similar research from Australia (See De Gioia, 2015) explored the experiences of immigrant and refugee mothers during the transition to childcare. Mitchel and Bateman’s (2018) study in New Zealand investigated how the cultural constructs of refugee families can be incorporated into pedagogy to enhance refugee children’s sense of belonging in ECEC centers.

As mentioned earlier, except for the study by Lunneblad (2017), the studies highlighted above do not explore the concept of integration, whether discursively or in practice, as I have done in the present study. However, the studies offer an important starting point and knowledge base for the present study. The overarching issues identified in the existing literature include but are not limited to barriers and facilitators in the relationship between ECEC and refugee/immigrant parents, power dynamics in the encounter between ECEC professionals and immigrant/refugee parents, the discourses that inform ECEC professionals’ work with refugees, for example, discourses on trauma and vulnerability, the diversity of parenting practices that become visible in ECEC centers, and the

opportunities and challenges faced by ECEC professionals, children, and parents relating to linguistic and cultural differences (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020; Kalkman et al., 2017; Lund, 2022; Lunneblad, 2017; Norheim, 2022; Sønsthagen, 2021; Tobin, 2020; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020). While I build on these ideas in the current study, my focus remains on integration, as this is a concept that has been minimally addressed in previous research on ECEC centres and professionals in Norway. I also build on previous studies that have explored the perspectives of refugee parents in their encounters with ECEC centres.

1.6 Academic positioning of the study

The present thesis contributes to knowledge in fields that intersect with sociology, particularly migration studies and education. First, the present dissertation departs from a sociological approach that is anchored within institutional ethnography, both theoretically and methodologically. Dorothy Smith's ideas on how to conduct sociological research that "extend[s] people's knowledge as practitioners of their everyday lives into realms of power and relations that go beyond their daily lives" (2005 p. xi) have been intellectually inspiring to me in carrying out this study. In addition, the works of well-known sociologists Erving Goffman (1959, 1963), Norbert Elias (1939/1994) and philosopher Ian Hacking (1999, 2002) have greatly influenced my exploration and writing of the present thesis.

Second, I situate this thesis within migration studies as a research field. In recent decades, there has been tremendous interest in migration and integration, with scholars seeking to explore poignant questions relating to how migration affects Norwegian society and the outcomes of integration measures in Norway (Institute for Social Research, 2017).¹¹ In this context, my research seeks to contribute to knowledge that focuses on the "politics of migration" by exploring the complex process through which various political, social, and economic actors negotiate access to and membership in a particular community or society

¹¹ <https://www.samfunnsforskning.no/english/our-research/migration-and-integration/>

at the macro and micro levels (Joppke, 2005; Weinar et al., 2019). Third, the present dissertation is situated within the field of ECEC, where it elucidates knowledge on the intersection between early childhood education centres, the integration of refugees, and the role that state-funded welfare institutions and related actors play in the socialisation of children and their parents. Conducting an institutional ethnographic study has enabled me to explore the everyday integration work from ECEC professionals as entry-level participants and refugee parents as second-level participants, respectively and how the integration work is socially organised (Smith, 2005)

1.7 Motivation for this study

My interest in refugee welfare began when I spent a semester in the Fall of 2015 at the University of Malta during my graduate studies in Oslo. During that time, I took a course on global issues, which covered the topic of refugees and migration. It was also at this time that the image of the drowned three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, captured global media headlines. This horrifying story awakened my interest in researching what was happening to refugees in the Mediterranean region. At that time, refugee migration had become a political issue not only in Malta but also within the European Union.

After returning to Norway in 2016 to conclude my graduate studies in Oslo, I kept abreast of the plight of refugees, paying close attention to political debates on the issue. During the subsequent months, I began developing ideas for my PhD project and eventually began my research in the summer of 2018. These ideas stemmed from curiosity about the role that ECEC plays in the integration of refugee children and parents into Norwegian society. Moreover, through personal exploration of the literature, I found that previous research about the integration of refugees in Norwegian ECEC centers is limited, which inspired my ambition to add to the body of knowledge in this area. Immigration and integration are among the top three political issues that exist in Norway, and every election cycle presents an opportunity for politicians and bureaucrats in local municipalities, counties, and the

national government to debate policy measures that are feasible for the welfare state. Being an immigrant myself, these are issues I follow closely, and the opportunity to research a theme that relates to my everyday life in Norway was a logical one. Immigration and integration are also important research topics for social scientists, including sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists, among others. The motivation for this study was to explore and contribute to existing knowledge on these topics. In my current work as an assistant professor, this knowledge from my research has been relevant and meaningful for students studying at the University.

1.8 Aim of the study

My aim in the present study was to add to the existing knowledge on the social organisation of integration work by ECEC professionals and refugee parents. In doing so, I have contributed important new knowledge regarding the role of ECEC centres as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents. Being an IE, the present study started from the standpoint of ECEC professionals. From there, I developed a problematic that led me to interview refugee parents. A problematic within IE refers to a puzzle that emerges within the accounts of the participants in a research process (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2005). Starting the exploration from the standpoint of ECEC professionals was a crucial step toward developing both the overarching research question and the sub-questions that were explored in the respective research articles. Notably, the research questions emerged from interviewing ECEC professionals' and refugee parents' accounts of the integration process. I then explored the institutional complexes to determine how integration is performed and organised. This "exploration is not limited just to the data but to discourses," which become visible when engaging with participant's accounts of their work/life experiences (Smith, 2005 p. 34).

The current study has two distinct aims. First, it seeks to explore an institutional complex within which integration is organised, beginning with ECEC professionals as first-entry

participants. Secondly, to explore an institutional complex within which integration in ECEC centers is organised from the standpoint of refugee parents as second-level participants.

To address these two aims, I have explored the following overarching research question:

RQ: How is the integration of refugees into ECEC centers socially organised from the standpoint of ECEC professionals and refugee parents?

Other explorative sub-questions have formed the basis of four individual research papers connected to this main research question. These sub-questions emerged progressively during research exploration and are all interlinked with the main research question. The research sub-questions are presented in the table below based on the order of the papers in the dissertation.

Article 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do ECEC staff “do” integration in their everyday work? 2. What is the role of social technology in the everyday integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers?
Article 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the notion of doing safety work emerge as a coordinator of everyday social relations of kindergarten teachers? 2. How does the discourse of trauma bring about the categorisation of refugee children by kindergarten teachers?
Article 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What tensions arise during ECEC teachers’ integration work? 2. How do ECEC teachers navigate between divergent ideals or notions of child-rearing?
Article 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do refugee parents experience surveillance from the ECEC centers? 2. How do refugee parents deal with the surveillance of their parenting by ECEC professionals?

Table 1: Sub-questions for each research paper

2.0 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical perspectives and concepts used in the analysis in this thesis. I used IE as the overarching methodological and theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of people's standpoint, ruling relations, institutional discourses, and work (Smith, 2005, 2006). The notion of work appears consistently and frequently in this thesis, and I discuss this notion below in the section on "integration work" in this chapter. I also reveal my approach to IE and discuss how I combined analytical elements of IE with other theoretical perspectives abductively to explore the social organisation of integration work among both ECEC professionals and refugee parents. The other theoretical concepts discussed in this thesis include making up of people (Hacking, 2002), the civilising process (Elias, et.al., 1939/1994; Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017), stigma (Goffman, 1963), and impression management (Goffman, 1959). I combine the theoretical perspectives to either ask new questions or to enable a better understanding of the surprising findings in my study (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 174; Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022). I will describe the notion of abduction further below in this chapter and discuss the theoretical perspectives (named above) that have informed my analysis.

2.1 Institutional ethnography

In this section, I present the social ontology of IE and discuss how I have used IE to explore the social organisation of integration work and how the concept of work and work knowledge enabled me to explore the participants' accounts of integration.

2.1.1 A social ontology

IE emerges from the influences from other theoretical traditions such as feminist theory, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Bakhtin's dialogism, and Marxist materialism to begin the inquiry into people's lived experiences while also drawing from symbolic interactionism (Smith, 2005; Matsau 2013; Devault, 2021). Inspired by the above-named traditions, Smith

developed IE as both a critique and an alternative to what she referred to as mainstream sociology (Smith, 1999 p. 54-62; Smith, 2005). Smith described mainstream sociology as a field of study that begins and ends with theory in that it “clamps a conceptual framework over any project of inquiry ... where the framework determines how the actual will be attended to, dominating and constraining selection and interpretation, setting up ... a monologic that suppresses and displaces the essential dialogic of the social” (Smith, 2005, p. 50). Smith (2005, p. xii) claims that, unlike other ethnographies which tend to be constrained by a priori conceptual frameworks, IE avoids a predetermined theoretical influence by resisting the dominance of theory in the exploration of social phenomena (Smith, 2005).

One thing that drew my intellectual aspirations toward IE is its explicit ontology on which focused my research on the materiality of ECEC professionals and refugee parents and the social organisation that coordinate and shape how ECEC professionals and refugee parents experience and perform integration (Mc Coy, 2021). In IE, the focus is on what Smith (2005) referred to as the ontology of the social, which means that IE studies begin from the ontological premise that human beings are essentially social beings who engage in actual social relations involving the ongoing coordination of integration. Smith emphasises the need to explore “the institutions,” which can be seen as “complexes of cultural rules, that [have been] rationalised through the actions of the professions, nation-states, and the mass media and that have supported the development of more, and more types of organisations’ which are components of the complex of ruling relations” (Smith, 2001, p. 161).

IE studies are anchored on discovering various modes of generalising people’s everyday experiences across different places and time (Smith, 2005). For instance, the present study focuses on how integration work is coordinated through discoverable ruling relations across different ECEC professionals and refugee parents and at different times. This coordination implies that people think, act, and feel in ways that are socially organised. As a method of inquiry, IE brings together different organisations, texts, and people’s activities

which form complex relations and hierarchical organisations that coordinate functions within various welfare state institutions such as schools, hospitals, and ECEC centers. Institutional complexes, also referred to as “functional complexes,” are distinctive in that they encompass specific activities or “doings” while also being visible in the relations that organise and standardise “doings” or understandings across different localities (Smith, 1987, p. 572; Smith, 2005, p.206). In this study, I use the terms institutional and institutions to refer to complexes embedded in the ruling relations that are organised around a distinctive function, such as education or health care (Smith, 2005). Departing from IE allows me to map how the daily activities (work) of ECEC professionals and refugee parents at the local level are textually mediated by ruling relations at a trans-local level (Smith, 2005).

The use of IE enabled me to think differently about my exploration of the integration work of ECEC professionals, where my ambition was not to look for what happens but rather to identify ruling relations that could help me discover how the activities and experiences of ECEC teachers and refugee parents were organised.

Therefore, my goal was to explore the everyday integration actualities as experienced, spoken about, or written about by the ECEC professionals and refugee parents. For me, IE presented a certain feeling of paradox regarding the role of theory in that IE does not ultimately proceed without theory, nor does it refrain from drawing on mainstream theoretical thinking. One of the dilemmas that researchers face in using IE lies in determining the boundaries of sociological theory and other research practices (Luken, 2021 p.5-7). To resolve this paradox, I found that many institutional ethnographers engage in an abductive approach by asking new questions or bringing new knowledge to the fore (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 174). The abductive approach is said to have roots within American pragmatism (Peirce, 1934), wherein the researcher adopts an “openness about which theory is best suited to shed light on the empirical data before us” (Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022 p.11).

Abduction carries elements of both inductive and deductive approaches to research and involves a reciprocal relationship between theory and empirical data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012 p.10). In this study, I did not aim to reconstruct theory. Rather, my aim was to combine IE and other theories (i.e., theoretical hybridisation) (Wideberg, 2019), which could aid in the exploration and analysis of data material.

Abduction involves developing “the art of being curious at the opportune but unexpected moment” in the research process (Merton & Barber, 2004 p. 210) and creating room for “surprises or puzzles” in the research design. Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 169) contend that it is possible to explore “anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories.” This exploration demands flexibility to negotiate and renegotiate theories and “cultivate puzzlement” towards reconstructing these theories (Vassenden, 2018 p.147-148) or towards theoretical hybridisation.

After engaging with the data material, I realised that I needed to adopt additional theoretical perspectives to support the concepts of ruling relations, standpoint, and work knowledge from institutional ethnography. Therefore, I looked to the theories of stigma and impression management by Goffman (1959 and 1963) respectively, Making up of people by Hacking (1999 and 2002), and the civilising process by Elias (1939/1994). I relied on theoretical openness to identify which empirical findings were ‘surprises’ rather than on theoretical atheism or monotheism i.e., a commitment to a favourite theory (Burawoy, 1998; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

In recent years, scholars from Nordic countries working with institutional ethnography (See Wideberg 2015; Lund and Nilsen 2019; Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022; Nilsen, Magnussen and Lund, 2023) have sought to reconstruct IE’s theoretical framework and

link it to other sociological theories in order to develop knowledge that does not end in empirical descriptions. Departing from this position, I also seek to highlight the potential of the abductive approach to inform IE theory, practice, and policy.

A pragmatic approach to IE also makes it possible to challenge the dogmatic notion of IE as an alternative way of practising sociology and a closed academic tradition that is only possible within limited understanding. I adopted the so-called “hybrid approach,” which makes it possible for IE to have a “dialogue with other theoretical and methodological perspectives” (Lund & Nilsen, 2019; DeVault, 2021; Nilsen, Magnussen, and Lund, 2023). Arguably, this approach can open up IE as a research tradition in the vein of theoretical reconstruction, which would contribute to its visibility (Widerberg, 2019, Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022; Nilsen, Magnussen, and Lund, 2023).

It is notable that referring to this approach as “hybrid” elicits new contestations, with Mathiesen and Volckmar-Eeg (2022) arguing that it facilitates the creation of a dichotomy within the same tradition, meaning that one theory is an off-shoot of the other. However, proponents of the hybrid approach (see Widerberg, 2019 p. 33) assert that IE studies that integrate other sociological theories meet the requirements of being institutional ethnographies and that sociological research should contribute to theoretical debates and political discussions. In the same vein, Nilsen, Magnussen, and Lund (2023 p.144) assert that the “hybrid” notion emerged from the way in which IE has been received, adapted, and challenged in the Nordic region, where IE was framed as a qualitative methodology that shares a similar history with other sociological traditions. In essence, IE is not an alternative approach but is its own form of sociology that expands on an already strong tradition of sociological inquiry in Norway.

This approach may draw criticism from IE purists who are strict on the formalities of writing and performing IE, despite the argument by Smith (2006) that there is no one way of conducting IE research. However, my understanding of IE as a qualitative method is that

it refrains from being a methodological “recipe” for researchers, as it reflects a monotheistic approach to knowledge development. By contrast, it seeks to guide researchers towards empirical discovery and theoretical innovation.

I note a similarity between the basic foundation of IE and the abductive approach in that they both share a keen interest in the discovery of the “puzzle” or “mystery” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, Vassenden, 2018; Mathiesen & Volckmar-Eeg, 2022). In my study, the role of theory is analytical rather than hypothetical. Departing from an empirical exploration of integration work, I discovered empirical “surprises” that triggered me to use theoretical concepts to understand and discuss my findings. An abductive approach to IE allowed me to combine the theories that best illuminated the discoveries from my study. My research also benefited from the use of the abductive approach in terms of explaining and discussing the empirical anomalies in the data material. For example, abduction strengthened my analysis of the notion of “safety.” My use abduction in analysis reveals that the use of other theories together with IE contributes to a superior empirical analysis, as similarly argued by Lund and Nilsen (2019).

This pragmatic orientation allowed me to utilise IE as an overarching theoretical and analytical framework to explore the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers as arenas for integration. To do so, I integrated the concepts of ruling relations and work and knowledge from IE with other sociological concepts derived from other theories. Concepts from IE have helped me gain insights into how ECEC professionals and refugee parents engage in integration work, while the other sociological concepts have also been integral in increasing my understanding of the empirical material and making new discoveries which I have presented in the four articles. For instance, in articles 1 and 2, I discuss how the concepts of ruling relations enabled me to discover how ECEC professionals invoke certain categories of children, whereas Hacking’s theory of making up of people enabled me to discuss how objectified forms of knowledge are

invoked to establish particular categories of children and render these categories as governable subjects (Rose, 1999)

Theoretically, IE enabled me to establish the sensitising notions from the empirical material that guided my inquiry and analysis but did not determine the scope of perceivable findings (Blumer, 1954). Sensitising concepts hereby act as “shells” devoid of empirical content because they lack definitive actions and provide an interesting entry point for empirical analysis (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2021 p.427). While IE acts as the overarching theoretical basis for my exploration of integration work among ECEC professionals and refugee parents it did not hinder my application of other theoretical concepts to account for the puzzling empirical material.

I adopted an explorative approach, foregrounding discovery as a fundamental aspect of my project (Smith, 2005, p. 50). Sociological research based on IE has no preceding “interpretive commitment” to concepts from existing theory; rather, it is based on inquiry and discovery (Smith, 2005, p. 36). Accordingly, I focused on discovering how the integration experiences of ECEC professionals and refugee parents are articulated and coordinated by ruling relations that are invisible from the accounts of everyday integration work as gathered from the participants (Smith, 2005).

The ontology of IE represents a departure from mainstream sociology’s tendency to confine research inquiries to conceptual frames, which, in turn, determines how the actual realities are interrogated and interpreted. IE is anchored in an ambition to conduct an inquiry whose findings are not predetermined or prejudged by a conceptual framework. Using IE to map the ruling relations of integration work by exploring the institutional complex in which ECEC professionals and refugee parents participate, inversely enable me to explore how these institutions have come to shape the local experiences of the participants.

The IE method of inquiry can be beneficial to scholars with activist lenses who aim to develop knowledge that can inform social activism within communities and beyond. Many IE studies emerge from existing problems and concerns for social issues that people experience (Smith, 2005). Activist-oriented scholarship seeks to critique social issues through strategies that attempt to improve existing textually mediated social relations (Luken, 2021). While methodologically different, this research is similar to other qualitative studies that seek to work outside of traditional approaches to negotiate and understand everyday experiences, particularly those of silenced or oppressed individuals. Linda Tuwahi Smith (2006 p. 152) contends that “researchers work the borders, betwixt and between institutions, and communities, systems of power and systemic injustice, cultures of dominance and cultures in survival mode, politics, and theory, theory and practice.” Researchers establish a problematic of exploration based on individuals’ concerns and experiences. Smith (2005 p.40) asserts that it is important “not to be constrained by the concerns or remain constrained by people’s prejudgements, but learn from their experiences, and seek to understand how they participate with institutional process.” Departing from an activist-oriented approach such as IE offers an opportunity to make visible the existing conceptual practices of power within integration work.

2.1.2 The significance of standpoint

Epistemologically, IE is commonly placed within feminist standpoint theory. However, Smith’s work was influenced by a range of theories, including Marxism, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism, which means that an exclusive positioning of IE within standpoint theory is not straightforward. Feminist standpoint epistemology is based on the belief that knowledge production is predominantly a contested space because it occurs within specific political, social, and historical processes and from within specific social positions or standpoints (Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1999; Lund, 2015). Smith adopted the concept of standpoint from Sandra Harding (1986), who

explored the “social positioning of the subject of knowledge, the knower and creator of knowledge toward developing an epistemology of diversity based on subject positioning of particular groups in social-economic and political regimes of colonialism and imperialism” (Smith, 2005 p. 10).

It is important to note that Smith’s concept of standpoint represents a departure from Harding’s (1986) more commonly known notion of feminist standpoint (Hartstock, 1998). Smith’s conceptualisation does not seek to identify a socially determined position or category of position in society such as gender, race, or class, but instead seeks to explore “people’s standpoint as a subject position for IE, which is a site for the knower open to everyone” (Smith, 2005, p. 10). Smith centered the social positioning of the people’s knowledge and advocated for a methodology that “starts from the local actualities of people’s lives and aims at explicating the social relations organising everyday worlds across multiple sites” (Smith, 2005, p. 205).

The implication of this notion is that knowledge production should represent a departure from the “situated knowledge” and “actualities” (Haraway 1988; Smith 1987; Harding; 2007) of people whose knowledge and experiences are marginalised from dominant ways of knowing, discourses, and institutions. Although Haraway’s idea of “situated knowledge” focuses on the researcher’s embodied location in the research context, Smith’s concept of “people’s standpoint” focuses on the researcher’s entry point to the experiences of the participants as seen from where they are located within particular social relations (Smith, 2005).

Both Smith and Harding drew on the overarching notion within feminist standpoint epistemology that all knowledge production is value-laden and a result of historical processes and socio-political epistemic struggles. However, Smith’s (2005) version of standpoint theory regards individuals’ everyday experiences as entry points (starting places) from where the IE inquiry begins. Harding’s (1988) feminist standpoint is based on

conceptual categories (e.g., women and other underprivileged groups are recognised as the starting point). In IE, standpoint is understood as the entry point to discovery and the starting point of a social inquiry rather than the standpoint of a group. Smith's notion of standpoint moves away from identifying the position or category of an individual and focuses on establishing the subject position for IE as an inquiry (Smith, 2005 p. 10).

Smith (2005 p.10) writes that her conceptualisation of IE evolved from that of a sociology for women to that of a sociology for people. She explicitly clarifies that, within the IE framework, women's standpoint is not just about women, nor does it assume that women are a homogenous group. In other words, sociology cannot be confined to a particular social category of gender, class, or race within a society. In my study, I adopt the version of the standpoint established in IE, which refers to "a position intended for directing attention to particular problems or questions in the institutional or ruling order" (Smith 2005, p. 9). The subject position in which a researcher begins an inquiry is crucial in IE. For instance, a researcher may adopt the position of street-level bureaucrats, policymakers, or ordinary people to reflect the institution from a certain standpoint (Jahreie, 2023).

In my study, I interviewed two diverse groups of participants (ECEC professionals and refugee parents), which means there are two sites of knowers representing different subject positions. The entry point of my inquiry was the standpoint of ECEC professionals.

My interest in this research was borne from my desire to explore the ruling relations under which integration work takes place within a particular institutional complex. Based on IE's ontology, I considered integration to be a social reality that takes place within a particular social organisation as mediated by ruling relations (Smith, 2005). I began my inquiry into the social organisation of integration in ECEC centers from the standpoint of professionals as entry-level informants. In doing so, I aimed to direct attention to the ruling relations within an institutional complex in which integration takes place (Smith 2005, p. 9 and p.157). The entry-level data describes individual experiences among ECEC professionals

as standpoint I chose for exploring the ruling relations of integration work at a local level (Campbell and Gregor, 2004). Based on the findings from my interviews with ECEC professionals, I moved on to explore the social organisation of integration work from a different site (i.e., refugee parents). This inquiry was triggered by the discovery of an institutional discourse that positioned refugee children as vulnerable, traumatised, and in need of safety. Implicitly, their parents were constructed as lacking the ability, means, or skills to parent their children in acceptable ways. Mediated by different texts and representations, notably, in the ICDP programme and RVTS training as mentioned by ECEC professionals, both the children and parents were perceived as “at-risk.” Having traced how this textually mediated institutional discourse shaped the integration work of ECEC professionals, I became curious about how refugee parents took part in the same ruling relations. Hence, refugee parents occupy a position as “second-level” informants. Moving the inquiry to the standpoint of refugee parents enabled me to explore the institutional complex of integration from a different site.

Both ECEC professionals and refugee parents are perceived as knowers in the exploration, and it is their knowledge or experience of integration that is under exploration. This is not to say that the individual ECEC professionals or parents would necessarily have a shared understanding of the ECEC settings and how integration work occurs. Rather, the respective accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents of the everyday integration work that make it visible the ruling relations of integration, which they all take part in (Smith 1987, p. 78; Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

2.1.2 Using IE to explore ruling relations of integration

The term “ruling relations” refers to the “textually mediated relations that connect people across space and time and organise their everyday lives, including the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourses, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them” (Smith, 2005 p. 10). The current dissertation

explores the social organisation of integration work in the Norwegian ECEC from the standpoint of ECEC professionals and refugee parents. By drawing on IE, I show how the everyday experiences of these individuals in relation to integration are part of wider ruling relations governed by authoritative institutional texts.

To gain a better understanding of the social organisation of integration among refugee children and parents in Norwegian ECEC centers, I focused on exploring textually organised ruling relations. These texts were central to understanding “how things work.” Smith (2005) posits that texts are important components of developing an IE inquiry. Texts in IE are replicable material objects that carry messages and can be reproduced in various places, for example, in printed documents, mass-produced images or films, and on the internet (Smith & Turner, 2014, p. 5).

Texts provide “both the material basis of institutions and the ruling relations and function as a bridge between the local and the trans-local, connecting the local site to the rest of the social world” (Murray, 2019 p. 33). As such, any replicable texts can be used to reveal the social organisation of a particular experience because they have the capacity to co-ordinate people’s actions within an institutional complex (Smith & Turner, 2014 p. 5). Like Smith (2005), I explored how texts enter into and coordinate the actions of ECEC professionals and refugee parents and how these texts are activated across various places and times. Smith (2005 p.107) contends that the “sameness” of replicable texts should not be understood to mean that they are read in a comparable manner. A single text can be subject to numerous interpretations. Nonetheless, the text is constant despite the variations in interpretation.

Using texts make it possible to map and discover ruling relations to show how ECEC professionals and refugee parents are socially organised in institutional processes that reach far beyond their immediate localised experiences. The concept of ruling relations enabled me to direct my exploration toward establishing how ECEC professionals and participants

interact with the ruling relations that connect them across space and time by organising the everyday integration work (Smith, 2005, p. 10).

As a concept, ruling relations is valuable in that it is built from the idea that individuals working in organisations, institutions, and professional settings do not rule as themselves but rather “derive their capacities from the respective organisations that they produce and are produced by” (Smith, 2005, p. 18). There is an overarching understanding that everyday mundane actions are founded on discourses (often implicit) that organise and coordinate such actions. The organisation of integration work takes place outside of any one individual’s experience, and it became an important ambition for my study to highlight this “complex of social relations” within which ECEC centers act as arenas for the integration of refugees in Norway (Smith, 1987, p. 151).

Unlike Foucault’s (1970) conceptualisation of the order of discourse as regulating how people’s subjectivities are coordinated and, thus, prioritising the discursive over actual and everyday lived experiences, Smith (2005) proposed a more relational use of discourse that explores everyday activities like feeding, walking, and social interactions. The focus of IE is centered on how “these daily acts articulate us into social relations of the order referred to as *ruling*” (Smith, 2005, p. 18).

Smith’s writing is a call to action to not only engage with the discourse at the discursive level but, more importantly, to move toward the exploration and discovery of the actual realities that are accessible from an individual standpoint. My use of IE incorporates the mapping of text and ruling to show how texts are taken up by ECEC professionals and refugee parents and activated in the everyday integration work in ECEC centers. Moreover, the effort to establish the social in IE entails connecting how people across various ECEC centers are organised to engage in integration, and this exploration enabled me to empirically explore the ruling as manifested within texts and institutional discourses.

2.1.3 Integration work

The concept of work became central to the exploration in the present study because a researcher's ambition when using IE is to ask questions. These questions focus on the "how" to discover what people are doing. For example, my research explores how ECEC professionals and refugee parents carry out integration work and how integration work is organised (Smith, 2005). Smith emphasises that the concept of "work" is used in a general sense to extend to "anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about" (2005, p.151–152). I have used the concept of work to engage with two elements. Firstly, I explore the ECEC professionals' and refugee parents' experiences of their own work i.e., what they do and how they do it, including what they think and feel. Secondly, I explore "the implicit or explicit coordination of integration work/experiences across time and places."

This goes beyond the commonly used understanding of work as labour performed to earn money or paid for in other forms. Smith's use of the concept of work is built on the understanding that people in different places engage in activities that are unpaid for, for example, in hygiene work, childcare work at home, meetings, and other mundane everyday activities that take time and effort and lead to stress, worry, and anxiety. Ultimately, this unpaid work helps sustain the capitalist system of paid jobs. Smith is critical of the capitalist system that deems some aspects of everyday life as "work" while ignoring others, and she argues that researchers ought to imagine the things that require time and effort as "work." Such invisible work tends to go unrecognised, making it an important focus of institutional ethnography. The focus on work as an analytical element is what makes IE an empirically valid method of inquiry (Smith, 1987). In this context, the analytical focus of my study was not on what ECEC professionals and refugee parents do intentionally for money or any other gain but on what happens, what they do, and how they do it, including how they think and feel (Smith, 2005, p. 151).

By using IE to frame my research, I have increased my awareness of the importance of exploring the participants' experiential accounts of their work and experiences because this became the doorway through which I gained a deeper understanding of the participants' everyday integration experiences. I achieved this enhanced understanding by asking questions like "What do you do?" and "Why do you do that?" while taking note of the texts they mentioned, such as policy documents and lower-level texts such as the International Child Development Programme (ICDP). This approach enabled me to understand how work processes are textually connected across different ECEC centres and among refugee children and parents (Smith, 2006, p. 29). I further elaborate about the texts that I mapped in the next chapter of this thesis.

Smith (2005) contends that the concept of work is a crucial element in an IE analysis. The concept of work is based on the ideas that "people know how to do their work, and how to *gear into* institutions" (McCoy, 2008, p. 110). Work knowledge comes in different forms, such as job descriptions, explicit training and instruction, workplace rules, and discourses that underpin people's integration experiences and practices (Smith, 2005). Work knowledge can also be discretionary and tacit. The concept of work knowledge is highlighted in IE's social ontological approach, which encourages researchers to describe the social world as it happens (Rankin, 2017; Smith, 2005). Exploring the concept of work helped direct my lens toward understanding how ECEC professionals and refugee parents participate in the institutional process of integration, as well as how their work is coordinated with the work of others within the institutional complex of integration.

The concept of work introduces the possibility of investigating how integration discourses are ordered by exploring the concepts of work and work knowledge based on the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents. By focusing on the concepts of work, I found it possible to unpack the concrete everyday particularities rather than ideological generalisations with the awareness that both the subjective and objectified descriptions of integration are not differentiated.

My study investigates the institutional discourses that have socially organised the work of ECEC professionals through academic training, policy documents, or relevant social technologies. To establish the institutional discourse, I embarked on finding the words and phrases that ECEC professionals used to describe their work experiences. Smith (2005, p. 111) contends that such words and phrases function as “shells” that, in themselves, are devoid of empirical substance and agency. Buzzwords such as integration provide an entry point for empirical analysis for sociological research, even though such words lack empirical content. In this light, opening the inquiry by asking about integration from the ECEC professionals did not in predetermine the discoveries I found from the accounts, as the discoveries emerged from exploring the ruling relations of integration as mediated by text.

2.2 How IE speaks to other theoretical perspectives

Countries that have previously relied heavily on homogeneity to maintain a cohesive society must now contend with an increasingly altered value system (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Norway, like other Scandinavian countries, is founded on a cohesive and generous welfare state model interlinked with family life and the socialisation of children through childcare institutions. The concept of “civilising” by Norbert Elias (1994), as adapted by Gilliam and Gulløv (2017), seems to consolidate aspects of formative integration efforts, although not necessarily focusing on specific universal values or applicable norms of conduct.

In its most simplistic form, Elias’s theory of “civilising processes” focuses on power relations and processes of integration between social groups. The notion of the “civilising” process calls for the interrogation of relations and hierarchies of power, social interdependencies, and processes of distinction. In this study, this concept enabled me to explore how welfare state institutions such as ECEC centers serve the state’s ambitions to carry out integration of refugee children and parents into the Norwegian society.

Both the works by Smith (2005) and Gilliam and Gulløv (2017) are strongly focused on the role of the institution. However, the institution has a different conceptualisation within IE and Elias's civilising process. Within IE, the term "institution" refers to the complex within which ruling relations are a unit of exploratory interest, as opposed to merely focusing on the narratives from the informants alone (Lund & Nilsen, 2019; Smith, 1990). In the work of Gilliam and Gulløv (2017), the concept of the institution is used to explore the practice of civilising children, with a focus on ECEC centers and schools. ECEC centers and schools are publicly funded and are presented as crucial sites that contribute to passing on of child-rearing norms through professionals to parents.

Moreover, Gilliam and Gulløv (2017 p.4) contend that ECEC centres and schools are "central civilising and integrating organs in the welfare state and contribute to civilising and care, but also are part of the construction process for ideas of what civilised behaviour, and a civilised society entail." The authors appear to focus on how behavioural norms are becoming institutionalised, that is, being routinised. The two theoretical perspectives are relevant both in their distinct form and in converging ideas, to my study which sought to explore social organisation of integration work in ECEC centers in Norway. Exploring how ECEC professionals and refugee parents deal with the institutional discourses in their everyday integration work was important for this study. This is an important question within sociological research, particularly within the sociology of childhood and the sociology of migration, as the research topic sits thematically at the intersection between ECEC, welfare state institutions, and immigration and integration. In Norway, ECEC centres play an important role as an extension of the welfare state in that professionals are responsible for putting government policies into practice (Lipsky, 2010). It is, therefore, relevant to study how integration work is constructed and organised by people's actions and experiences in ECEC centers as social sites.

Hacking (2002) argued that any idea (including work) that is debated, assessed, and applied is situated in a social setting. Hacking's work in philosophy has contributed to the

understanding of the social constructionist approach in addition to other areas of interest, such as statistics and transient mental illness (Hacking, 2002; Reijula, 2021). Hacking's work has contributed to scholarly work on how people are classified, how they think about themselves, and how they become aware of their options (Hacking, 2002). Though Smith and Hacking evolved from differing philosophical foundations, their respective sociological and philosophical writings can be used to explore the underlying structures within which ECEC professionals participate in categorisation as part of their everyday work. For example, I have shown how ECEC professionals may risk categorising the children they have ambitions to integrate into the ECEC centers when they rely on uninterrogated and influential regimes of knowledge in their everyday work.

Hacking claimed that his work was partly inspired by Smith—particularly his emphasis on how phenomena evolve over time (Hacking, 2004). He shared that Smith suggested that he explore child abuse as an example of an evolving phenomenon. In this exploration, Hacking focused on individuals' attitudes towards child abuse, how child abuse is defined, laws relating to child abuse, practices of child abuse, and how preventive practices have evolved over time (Hacking, 2004, p. 280). Like Hacking's example, I view integration work as a social reality that is constantly evolving. The dynamics and dialectics of refugee integration are active and open to new possibilities (Hacking, 2004, p. 280). The concept of categorisation can be linked to Smith's ideas of ruling relations, which explore how categories emerge as ideas, not real objects or people, and how they are incorporated into and function as part of a matrix (Hacking, 1999; Nilsen, 2019).

Closely related to Hacking's ideas, I use Erving Goffman's notions of stigma and impression management to explore refugee parents' standpoints on integration work in ECEC centers. Although IE explores the ruling relations that are explicated from the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents, Goffman's ideas are important in locating how the refugee parents enter and navigate social relations with ECEC professionals.

Like Goffman, Hacking also sought to explore how people are “made up,” i.e. how they understand themselves, and how they are understood by others. As such, the interest in interactions and the notions of front and backstage are relevant when exploring the relations between welfare state frontline workers and refugees. Similar to the notion of civilising, which explores the role of welfare state institutions (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017), Goffman explored what he referred to as total institutions, such as schools and prisons, which he claimed are arenas for change as a result of coercion. Goffman argued that this change is not intentional but instead circumstantial in the sense that it occurs through social interactions, that is, behaviour (words, glances, etc.). Goffman’s concept of social processes culminated in his work on stigma, in which he contended that people tend to accept or reject others based on “the possession of undesired characteristics/traits [that are] different from what is anticipated” (Goffman, 1963, p.15). In the following sections, I discuss the theoretical concepts of making up of people (Hacking, 1999 and 2002), the civilising process (Elias, 1939/1990; Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017), stigma (Goffman, 1963), and impression management (Goffman, 1959).

2.2.1 ECEC centres as “civilising” institutions

To understand how integration work occurs, I conceptualise ECEC centers as institutions of the Norwegian welfare state that “civilise” refugee children and parents (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Norbert Elias’s original text, “The Civilising Process” (published in 1939/1994), was directed at understanding the nature of social change, which has traditionally been understood as an empirical process (Aya, 1978). The term “civilising” describes “a process, or at least the result of a process.” Further, notions of “civilised” and “uncivilised” do not represent the antithetical ideas of “good” and “bad”, but rather ongoing stages of development (Elias, 1978 p.5). Gilliam and Gulløv (2017 p.3) further adapted the notion of “civilising” in an effort to understand culturally specific norms of proper and cultivated behaviour, which contribute to cultural distinctions and social

hierarchies and evolve through the changing power relations between social groups. This is the notion that I apply in the analysis of my findings.

Social behaviour that is considered “civilised” in one generation might evoke sentiments of displeasure amongst people of another generation. The concept evolves across time and space in a process or part of a process in which the people are involved (Elias, et.al., 2000). This process is characterised by evolutions in machinery, scientific discovery, and governmental forms that occur alongside particular social structures and corresponding behaviours.

By analyzing previous writings from the 13th to 18th centuries, Elias focused on the changing conceptions of shame among people in European societies. Elias was particularly interested in understanding bodily autonomy and violence in relation to increased state monopolies of power and economic interdependence, in other words, the changing social bonds among people (Elias, 1939/1994 pg. 289; Linklater & Mennel, 2010). Elias’s ideas were predominantly centered on wider societal and inter- and intrastate relations, as opposed to micro-level institutions such as ECEC centers.

The Eliasian concept of civilising can be understood as capturing the theoretical specificity of both universality and particularity. Elias claims that people become who they are at both an individual and collective level. Thus, the concept of “civilisation” is not just about individual behaviours but also the invisible structures that govern these behaviours (Mandalios, 2003).

The analytical potential of an Eliasian approach in analysing integration work lies in “its focus on social distinctions and human hierarchies” (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017 p.3). The caveat surrounding the use of the notion of “civilising” is the need to avoid making normative assertions about people’s behaviours. Like Gilliam and Gulløv (2017), I avoid

using the concept of “civilising” to denote particular universal values or a set of universal practices due to the wide potential for variation in what is considered “civilised”.

Moreover, I do not suggest that one such conceptualisation of “civility” is more advanced than or morally superior to another. Such an attitude is crucial because the concept of “civilising” is widely considered controversial due to the history of European imperialist occupation globally. However, at an abstract level, the notion of “civilising” relates to Elias’ endeavour to “understand how people evolve towards a particular standard that is considered ‘civilised’ closely interrelated to the organisation of Western societies in the form of states” (Elias, 2000 p xii). In the evolution of individual behaviour, some groups appear to be able to exert more influence over others in terms of defining what is acceptable or respectable, and if this occurs over a long period of time, individuals can begin to view it as natural.

Thus, the notion of “civilising” is a theoretical concept aimed at understanding what is considered the correct behaviour, relationships, and coexistence in a given context. The civilising process can be understood as the establishment of a discourse surrounding cultural values, how they are passed on, and the interpersonal relations of interdependence and domination that lead to their naturalisation (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Although Elias did not study welfare institutions, his ideas on cultural values and social cohesion and the need for mutual interdependence are useful when exploring the values, norms, and social consequences of behaviour (Elias et al., 2000). Elias asserted that members of society must develop self-control, curb aggression and behaviours that offend others, and learn behaviours that align with other people’s expectations (adapt) (Elias, 1994[1939]).

Over time, this need to conform leads to internalised self-restraint/shame based on the fear of judgment from others, in other words, a fear of being excluded or rejected (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017, p. 9). Although unintentional at times, “civilising” occurs when people learn

to adapt to the external requirements of the behaviour expected from them. This is because people fear being judged for “uncivilised” behaviour and/or being excluded and, thus, aspire to conform to expected behaviours to gain status and respectability (Elias, 1994). Similar to adults, children adapt to markers of social behaviour by observing the norms of conduct that are perceived as acceptable or “civilised” over time. In their integration work, ECEC professionals and refugee parents transfer knowledge on “civilised” conduct by teaching children how to behave properly (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017, p.19). Similarly, refugee parents take part in integration work by either working to adapt (or not) to what is perceived as “ideal” norms and values in Norway. Socialisation is a core mechanism of social and cultural integration in which people are shaped to be members of different societies and cultures (Frønes, 2016). In a globalised modern world, the socialisation process is met with numerous challenges as cultural integration becomes increasingly complex. While families and communities are part of the same “society”, they are being socialised into different value systems and cultural practices (Frønes, 2016).

The concept of “civilising” is influenced by the evolution of social norms and values over time due to “changes in social power among social groups through dynamic processes of social mobility, social struggles, integration and distinction” (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017, p. 10). Elias’s theory of civilising is analytically beneficial for exploring how welfare state institutions that seek to uphold equality, such as ECEC centers, negotiate and conceptualise civilised conduct amidst an environment characterised by power hierarchies between social groups. ECEC centres represent the state’s ambitions to transform children and parents into “civilised” individuals who are able to participate in society in a socially accepted manner (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017).

Analytically, the notion of “civilising process” makes it possible to shed light on the “civilising” ambitions of the Norwegian welfare through important institutions such as ECEC centres, the education system, CWS and the family. ECEC centers are expected to

negotiate diverse cultural norms and processes. They both “civilise” children and also contribute to the construction of what “civilised” conduct is (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017 p.4).

One of the ideas that I adopted from the work of Gilliam and Gulløv (2017) is that the responsibility of raising children in Norway is public as much as it is private. This places significant institutional responsibility on frontline workers such as ECEC professionals in the “civilising” process, which aims to produce acceptable citizens. This analysis is captured in Articles 3 and 4, which focus on the tensions that arise in ECEC during the integration process and on how refugee parents deal with surveillance by ECEC professionals in Norway, respectively.

2.2.2 How refugee parents deal with surveillance by ECEC professionals

A growing body of research has aimed at discovering the relationship between immigrant parents and welfare state frontline workers such as ECEC professionals and child welfare professionals (Park & Vandekerckhove 2016; Norheim & Moser, 2020; Sønsthagen, 2020; Vanderkerckhove & Aarsen, 2020; Handulle & Vassenden, 2021; Tembo, 2022). Research in Norway and internationally has shown that language barrier is a core experience among refugee and immigrant parents, coupled with a lack of opportunity to establish meaningful partnerships with ECEC professionals (De Gioia, 2015; Van Laere et al., 2018). In an environment where opportunities for meaningful partnerships are lacking, it is likely that the relationship between parents and ECEC professionals may be characterised by uncertainty (Sønsthagen, 2021; Lund, 2022).

To understand how refugee parents manage the expectations of parenting and the surveillance from ECEC professionals, I use Goffman’s theories of impression management (1959) and stigma (Goffman, 1963) as an analytical framework in the fourth article. Erving Goffman is considered one of the most prominent contemporary sociologists. It is claimed that Goffman was an iconoclast who did not commit or situate

himself within a specified sociological tradition (Appelrouth and Edles, 2012 p. 467). Apparently, Goffman's writings were inspired by the work of earlier scholars of symbolic interactionism, such as George Herbert Mead, particularly the idea of self as socially constructed and rooted in the ability for people to see themselves as objects.

Goffman developed a dramaturgical approach to the study of social life in which he used the analogy of the theatre. In his approach, Goffman (1959 p. 22) introduces the notions of the front and backstage, where the front is the "part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance". By contrast, the backstage refers to the "region of the performance normally unobserved by and restricted from members of the audience where the performer can relax; drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1959 p.112). This notion of frontstage and backstage can help us identify new insights regarding how parents deal with surveillance from ECEC professionals. I conceptualise the front stage as the space where ECEC professionals and parents interact through everyday life activities such as written communication and face-to-face conversations, while the backstage is the private space where the audience is absent and participants can revert to their true, unchoreographed selves (Goffman 1959).

Goffman aimed to elucidate how actors choreograph social interactions to create a concerted "impression" that influences outcomes in everyday life experiences (Goffman 1983, p. 45). Goffman claims that during social interactions, people wear a metaphorical "mask" that enables them to assume multiple desired identities that emulate "our truer self, the self we would like to be" (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). For instance, people may conceal information about themselves that is incompatible with the image that they are trying to project, or they may resort to "audience segregation" depending on what role a person chooses to play in a particular situation. This happens through careful selection of what to say and what to do, as well as what not to say and what not to do in order to successfully project a certain

image. The interaction between individuals is largely influenced by how actors imagine that others will respond to their actions. Ensuring that the individual actions are predictable makes the interaction functional.

Goffman's scholarly interest lies in exploring how social arrangement (i.e., the "interaction order") shapes the organisation of the self (Goffman, 1967 pg. 84-85). Goffman departs from Mead, whose central argument is that social interaction is rooted within one's imagination. By contrast, Goffman's ideas are built on the premise that interaction occurs in a "scene", wherein an individual orients their actions based on the persona of another individual. With his belief that "life itself is a dramatically enacted thing", Goffman conceptualises social encounters as involving the symbolic dimension as he explores how the self relates to the wider moral code which shapes interaction (Goffman, 1959, p.72). The essence of the self lies in the interaction itself rather than in the imagination, as posited by Mead. Social encounters rely on the willingness of an individual to "go along with a person's image/impression that one is seeking to show" (Appelrouth and Edles, 2012 p. 469).

Stigma is premised on the idea of a person being disqualified from full social acceptance and functions as a means of formal social control (Goffman 1963). The concept of stigma encompasses a mismatch between a person's ideal social identity and their real social identity and is largely associated with negative stereotypes. Blumer (1986) contends that stigma entails psychological and social elements that affect people and frame how meanings are created and how people behave based on these meanings. Self-stigma is the experience or anticipation of stigma (Bos, Reeder & Stutterheim, 2013). Goffman (1963) distinguishes between two forms of stigma (i.e. the visible (or known) stigma that leads to a person being discredited (or revealed) and the invisible (or unknown stigma).

Stigma involves reactions to perceived "negative deviance" and can be experienced as public stigma or self-stigma (Bos, Reeder & Stutterheim 2013, p. 2). The author's concepts

of stigma and impression management have provided an analytical tool by which to explore the accounts of refugee parents and their relations with Norwegian welfare state institutions such as ECEC professionals and child welfare services.

Goffman argues that impression management occurs in both public and private spaces, such as restaurants or private homes, respectively. To understand the role of space in managing performances and impressions, Goffman (1959) conceptualises “the nature of self” by drawing a distinction between the self as a character and the self as a performer. As a character, the self is concerned if it will be credited or discredited (p. 253). By contrast, in referring to the self as a performer, Goffman suggests that a person possesses a unique self in which one presents a contrived image to an audience on the front stage while they relax and become their true selves at the backstage. In this case, the self is not conceptualised as a character but rather as a performer, “a fabricator of impressions.....who has capacity to learn” (Goffman, 1959 p.252-253).

During everyday interactions, people engage in impression management, which involves modifying one’s behaviour and actions to neutralise, confirm, or contest cultural stereotypes to maintain “desirability” (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1963) posits that impression management involves strategies of “passing” and “covering.” Passing occurs when an individual is perceived as “normal” as a result of concealing their stigma. However, Goffman (1963) contends that those who “pass” remain “discreditable” because their stigma can still be revealed. Those who engage in “covering” seek to conceal their failings through strategies such as selective disclosure and compensatory efforts, for example, over-expressiveness, isolation, and projection. Covering is a type of stigma management that occurs when there is a risk of one’s character or conduct being profiled or stereotyped (Goffman 1963, p. 67).

Goffman’s notion of “two-team interaction” is relevant for understanding how impression management is visible in the interaction between ECEC centres and parents. According to Goffman (1959, p.86), interactions should not be seen as individual performances but rather as the performance of an entire “team.” For instance, the interaction between ECEC professionals and

refugee parents represents a two-team interaction, with each person involved representing a team. The interaction becomes a two-team performance involving “a kind of dialogue” because there is an element of cooperation based on a need for/dependency on cooperation (Goffman 1959, p.96).

Goffman’s ideas were central to developing an understanding of how refugee parents choreograph social interactions to create a concerted “impression” based on the need to be viewed as “good” (Goffman, 1983, p. 45). I did not seek to explore whether refugee parents encounter stigma from ECEC centers. Rather, I chose to explore the subtle forms of stigma that emerged from the data. For instance, Article 4 of this thesis describes parents’ experiences of surveillance by ECEC professionals, in which they point out that there is subtle suspicion of their parenting. Stigma is a meaningful concept because integration is a discursive site where ideas regarding what is culturally ideal are passed onto refugees and immigrants.

Surveillance is a concept that is gaining attention among researchers in the social sciences. Surveillance is commonly defined as focused, systematic, and routine attention to personal details with the intent of influencing, managing, protecting, or directing the use of administrative apparatuses that characterise modern societies to gain some form of subtle influence or control (Lyon, 2001). In his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argued that surveillance is a strategy that is used to discipline the public and works “to impose a particular form of conduct on a human multiplicity” (1979, p. 205).

In the present thesis, I used Lyon’s (2018) anthropological conceptualisation, in which surveillance involves two agents, namely, those who initiate it and those who are targets of surveillance. Such a conceptualisation has become increasingly common due to advancements in technology and public institutions, which make it possible to study people’s everyday lives, customs, habits, and ways of interpreting the world. For instance, ECEC professionals and refugee parents are part of the institutional complex of integration work which is possible to explore via a sociological inquiry. Surveillance can be discursively linked with the concept of social technology, which refers to the use of

particular methods and theories anchored in particular knowledge regimes through assessment manuals and training programs to achieve expert knowledge and arrive at solutions for particular social issues (Leibetseder, 2011). Professionals, for example in ECEC centres rely on expert knowledge to describe specific measures and conduct of the people they “manage.”

Surveillance necessitates advanced preparedness to counter potential ethnic and cultural stigma (Handulle & Vassenden, 2021). This is especially so for those who interact with welfare state workers who apply state sanctioned social technologies to produce certain outcomes on the front line (Griffith and Smith, 2014, p.340). The need to counter surveillance is seen as crucial by immigrant parents because the consequences from state institutions such as Child Welfare Services (CWS) may result in children being separated from their biological parents in some extreme cases (Tembo et.al, 2021) or being reported in the least consequential outcomes. Hence, refugee parents’ efforts to create positive impressions of themselves and their parenting are necessitated by everyday life situations where their identities, values, and realities are contested (Park, 2002). Impression management has been cited by other scholars (see Handulle and Vassenden, 2021) as a strategy that refugee parents use to modify their behaviour and actions in order to create an impression of being “good” parents. In the next section, I explore how social technologies relate to the stigmatisation and surveillance of refugee children and parents.

2.2.3 Social technologies and tracing categories

Hacking’s theory rejects the idea that categories are socially constructed. Hacking (2002) proposed that ways of talking about certain people’s experiences can shape or even transform what is known to be their experience. These ideas represent a departure from a social constructionist paradigm that states that people’s realities are socially constructed rather than objective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Research that adopts a social

constructionist outlook provides the space to unpack taken-for-granted understandings of reality and experiences and aims to create change (Nilsen, 2017b).

Social constructionist ideas were particularly relevant to my study in explicating how integration is understood and exploring how people talk about integration. Hacking (1999) emphasised that his work on categorisation does not focus on individuals or groups but rather on ideas. Hacking (1999) pointed out that categories, such as “refugees” or “traumatised” children, represent ideas rather than individuals. This concept is discussed in both Articles 1 and 2 of this thesis. In Article 1, I focused on the idea of the “traumatised” refugee child as being socially constructed rather than representative of the individuals that form the category. Similar to the concept of the institutional complex in IE (Smith, 2005), Hacking (1999, p. 24) asserts that ideas do not exist in a vacuum but are part of and can only function in a matrix of discursive elements formed in a complex interplay between institutions, procedures, stakeholders, and media reports.

Hacking’s work on how categories are constructed and the consequences of these categorisations has inspired me to investigate what happens when ECEC professionals encounter refugee children and parents. For instance, I used Hacking’s theory of “how people are made up” to explore how ECEC professionals create the category of the “traumatised” child in need of safety. The concept of categorisation contributes to the understanding of how refugee children and parents are seen and understood. The “traumatised” label emerges from ECEC professionals’ need to identify a problem, as they do during the integration process (Kimathi, 2022).

The relevance of Hacking’s notion of making up people was founded on his concern about how socially constructed categories have labelling effects on an individual scale, but also based on the idea that labelling processes take place on an institutional level and are maintained through the very institutions they are a part of (Hacking, 2002). People working with children who are positioned as actors within specific institutional complexes learn to

understand how certain types or groups of children are “made up” in ways that have a feedback effect on the classification systems themselves (Hacking, 2002).

In using the label of “traumatised” refugee children in need of safety, ECEC professionals may be constructing a social category or reproducing an already existing one. The category is “invoked when ECEC professionals attribute specific needs and abilities to people assigned to that category, which renders the categorised people manageable” (Kimathi and Nilsen, 2021 p.5). When children are categorised as “traumatised,” for instance, the discursive aspect of such a category is interlinked with empirical observations (Nilsen, 2017a). As such, the social construction of people into different categories has consequences because the classification may influence how professional people like ECEC teachers deal with children who have been ascribed to a particular category. Moreover, how the child is described by the professionals is important for the child’s self-understanding, along with how the child as an individual is perceived by those around them. Nilsen (2017a), inspired by Hacking, elucidated this by pointing out that categories influence people and create recognised ways of being.

The implicit role of categorisation is of significance in professional work because categories are socially constructed, and the way in which individuals are categorised influences their relationship with themselves and others. It is significant to explore how categorisation affects the categorised, along with how people change because of being categorised (Hacking, 2004, p. 99). As actors in specific institutional complexes, ECEC professionals learn how certain types of children “are”, and these children are implicitly “made up” in ways that have feedback effects on the classification systems themselves (Hacking, 2002). This potential for implicitly “making up” children opens the door for the exploration of how people experience or react to perceived stigma in a similar manner as argued in Goffman’s theory of stigma. Hacking’s theory adds to the understanding that categorisation not only influences individuals but also systems of classification. My research on the social organisation of integration work creates a space to explore how

ECEC professionals construct the concept of a “good” parent and how refugee parents perceive the social labels surrounding their parenting, which they perceive as contributing to subtle stigmatisation.

Closely connected to the social construction of children is the knowledge upon which the categorisation is based. For instance, knowledge of childhood trauma is largely anchored in developmental psychology and paediatrics, which have contributed to the understanding of normality and deviance (Rose, 1999). Rose’s (1999) work highlighted the existence of regimes of knowledge that play a critical role in the construction of governable subjects. This construction of governable subjects is central to categorisation (Nilsen, 2017b). These forms of knowledge are called psy-disciplines or psy-expertise (Bjerre et al., 2021; Rose, 1999; White et al., 2019). Influenced by the works of Michel Foucault, Rose contended that “psy discipline” greatly influences how we understand and categorise individuals, including ourselves. Recent studies have shown that knowledge on trauma related founded on ‘psy’ discourses is becoming increasingly dominant in ECEC professionals’ interactions with refugees (Lunneblad, 2017; Rutter, 2006).

Psy knowledge is applied in practice through social technologies and enters into accountability circuits when these technologies are activated to justify decisions. In the ECEC sector, professionals undergo various forms of skills training, from which they acquire knowledge on how to respond to everyday work situations. As frontline workers, ECEC professionals use social technologies both directly and indirectly. Welfare workers are part of an accountability circuit which entails how people’s realities are rendered representable through a sequence of textually coordinated actions, thereby making the realities actionable or accountable (Smith & Turner, 2014). Accountability denotes the moral responsibility of “being answerable to” knowledge regimes.

More attention should be given to social technologies to determine what knowledge and discourses they are founded on and the potential consequences of their use, such as categorisation. I do not claim that all social technologies lead to categorisation but aim to

provide an example demonstrating that, through social technologies, psy discourses are influential in everyday practice and ought to be interrogated to avert potential negative outcomes.

2.3 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical framework used in the present research thesis. First, I have presented a comprehensive discussion of IE, its ontology, and its analytical contribution to my study in terms of the concepts governing relations. Moreover, I have discussed the supplementary theoretical concepts that I employ in my analysis, namely, the concept of making up of people (Hacking, 199 and 2002), civilising processes (Elias, 1939/1990) and Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017), stigma (Goffman, 1963), and impression management (Goffman, 1959). I have discussed the abductive potential of these concepts as they relate to my study, particularly their meaningfulness to the analysis and discussion of my findings. I have explained how institutional ethnography as the overarching theoretical framework speaks to the three supplementary concepts. I then have elaborated how I explored the analytical potential of the theory of making of people together with the significant role of social technologies in understanding how categories come to be. The figure below illustrates how I have combined the supplementary theories with the IE in the four articles and in the thesis.

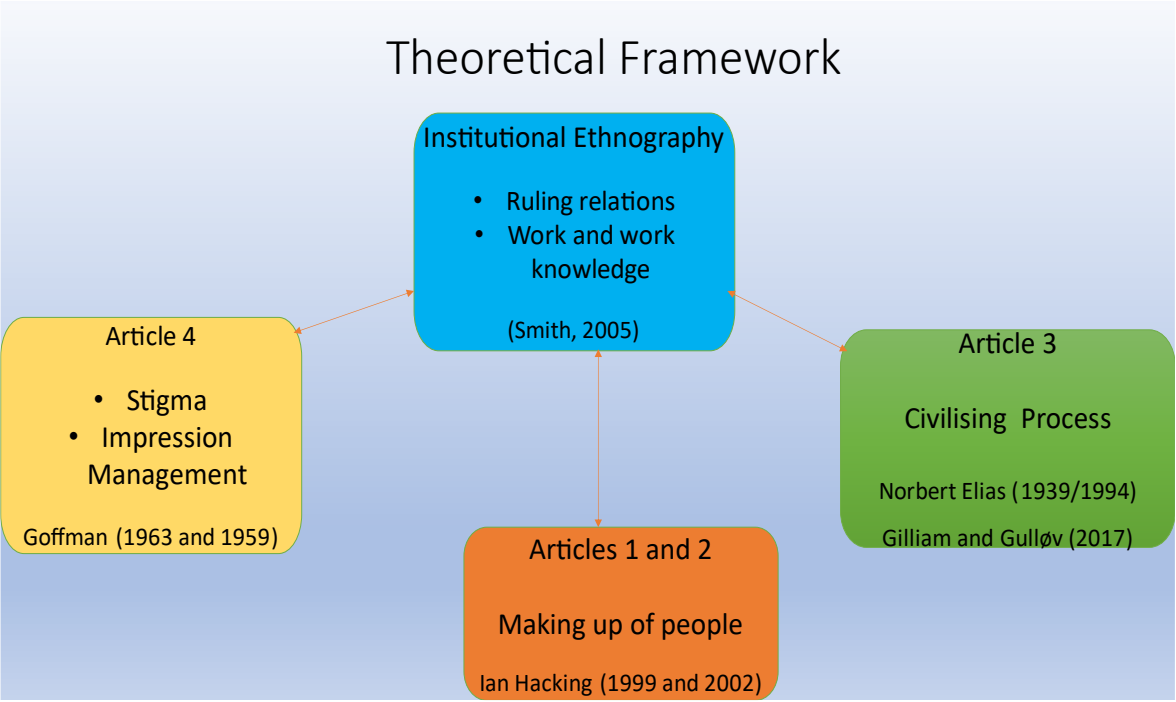


Figure 1: Overview of theoretical perspectives

3.0 Methodology

At the start of this PhD project in 2018, my plan was to conduct a mixed methods study. A few months into the project, I decided to use IE as the method of inquiry. Initially, I did not know much about the ontology of IE. The first paper I read on IE was Devault's (2006) paper titled "What is Institutional Ethnography?" At about the same time, my supervisor suggested that I read Campbell and Gregor's (2004) book, *Mapping Social Relations – A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnographer*. What intrigued me about the book was its elucidation of how people's work is coordinated and organised within a complex outside their everyday activities but which they are a part of.

Later in the year, I attended a PhD course on IE at the University of Agder organised by the Nordic Institutional Ethnography Network. This course challenged my prior thinking about research, theory, and ways of knowing. Sociology, as approached from the lens of IE, involves "discovering 'how things are actually put together,' 'how things work'" (Smith, 2006, p. 1). Reading Smith's work on the theory of knowledge and the potential of IE in the discovery and analysis of power relations was intriguing, and this marked the beginning of a journey in which I use IE to explore the social organisation of integration work in ECEC centers in Norway. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the research design and methods. I then discuss the procedure for sampling and data collection, the data analysis, methodological limitations, research ethics, and my research positionality.

3.1 Research design

The present study adopts an explorative qualitative research design to describe what people say and do in contexts that are not structured by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Methodologically, it adopts an institutional ethnographic inquiry, which begins from where people are in their embodied localised experience and investigates how their everyday doings are socially organised (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2005). ECEC

professionals' integration work was the point of entry in the exploration (Smith, 1987, 2005).

My interest in the participants' standpoint focuses on their everyday realities and experiences as the position of experience where knowledge is discovered (Smith, 1999). My exploration began with exploring the accounts of ECEC professionals as entry-level participants in integration work. After reviewing these accounts, I realised that I needed to explore further, which led me to consider the standpoint of refugee parents as second-order data. In this chapter, I discuss the difference between entry-level data and second-order data. I conceptualised the ECEC professionals' accounts of integration as a site of exploration without seeking specific answers from the participants but rather treating the accounts as an open space of discovery.

This approach was inspired by Smith's concept of a research problematic, through which the researcher identifies a puzzle from the participant's accounts. From this puzzle, it becomes possible to figure out which complex of concerns, issues, and questions could generate possible investigations (Smith, 2005). My focus and the access point to data was on what ECEC professionals do and what they think about their experiences and realities. In addition, I focused on the ruling relations of integration work, whereby I explicated the role of institutional texts as coordinators of everyday integration. In this chapter, under data analysis, I describe the texts that coordinate integration work.

To obtain the data, I used semi-structured interviews with ECEC professionals, semi-structured interviews with refugee parents, and one focus group interview with refugee parents, in addition to the exploration of texts. The study relied exclusively on one-on-one interviews because the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in place during the data collection period led to difficulties in organising more focus groups and conducting participant observations in ECEC centers, which was part of the original design. IE studies also use

participant observations in combination with interviews, either one after another or co-currently (McCoy, 2006).

All data collection was carried out in a city in the south of Norway. I began by recruiting ECEC professionals as my standpoint informants. Later in the research process, I decided to also include refugee parents. In recruiting both sets of participants, I employed convenience snowball sampling (Clark et al., 2019 p. 170), in which I identified several ECEC professionals and refugee participants who met the criteria for this study. The participants either worked in an ECEC center or had a refugee background and had a child in an ECEC center at the time of the study. The use of snowball sampling proved effective, as I was new to the research site and had no prior contacts.

To begin recruiting ECEC professionals, I wrote an email request to one ECEC center and on social media groups requesting to recruit people working in Norwegian ECEC centers. Initially, I did not get any responses, so I spoke to colleagues and friends who knew people working in different ECEC centers. These individuals were able to recruit direct contacts and sent them emails with an attachment of the project information letter explaining what the project was about. A few individuals agreed to participate in the study, and once I began meeting them, I was able to recruit some of their colleagues as participants as well.

In municipality A, where I conducted interviews with ECEC professionals, there are 103 public and private ECEC centres offering a variety of childcare services that are said to range from small to large in terms of child and staff population. Many of the participants in the initial round of interviews were recruited from a special centre for refugees which has since been closed. No official details are available on closure but there exist debates and information about it in the local newspapers.

I was able to interview many participants from this centre after establishing rapport with the manager, who sent word to her colleagues about the ongoing research study. During the interview with participants from the refugee ECEC centre, I obtained contact details for other professionals who worked in two other ECEC centers. Using these contacts, I wrote direct emails to these professionals, asking them to participate in my study.

Based on the accounts from the participants, the first ECEC centre was relatively different from the other two. While the first was a special ECEC center for refugees, the other two were tagged as “normal” ECEC centres, meaning that they admitted children from both majority and minority groups in the locality.

All the ECEC professionals who participated in the study were women, which is reflective of a higher gender imbalance rate among ECEC professionals where female employees in represent 89.2 % of the total workforce (Statistics Norway, 2023).¹² In addition, the majority of ECEC professionals are identified as ethnically Norwegian. More than half of the interviews took place in Norwegian with the support of the research assistant. Of the 13 ECEC staff interviewed, two identified themselves as immigrants, with one having come to Norway as a refugee child with her parents. They both spoke Norwegian and Arabic, which they mentioned was crucial in helping them engage with the refugees at the center, especially those coming from Arabic-speaking countries.

Interviews with refugee parents were conducted with participants who resided in two municipalities coded “Municipality A” and “Municipality B” in Agder County in the south of Norway. All participants among refugee parents were from Municipality A except two. The decision to include municipality B was because the interviews for the two participants mentioned above were conducted in the said municipality as the participants lived there

¹² <https://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/barnehager/statistikk/ansatte-i-barnehage-og-skole>

within and around the administrative centers of the two municipalities. The two municipalities have well-organised settlement and integration departments, which play a key role in the organisation of the introduction programme for refugees in collaboration with other government agencies such as The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Agency (NAV) and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). Moreover, ECEC centers are cited on their websites as key institutions that work closely to facilitate the integration of refugees. The two municipalities are adjacent to each other, and A is considered a city while B is considered a town. Municipality A is relatively bigger in terms of population size while municipality B has a medium size population according to Statistics Norway.

When I began recruiting refugee parents, I used snowball sampling as a way of accessing participants. Although it was difficult to recruit ECEC professionals, finding participants among refugee parents was slightly easier because I had contacts with refugees whom I had earlier met through gatherings for immigrants. I wrote private messages on social media to request that they participate in the study or help me find participants. Once someone accepted, I sent the project description letter via email, including a consent form that we would sign at the beginning of the interviews. Although many refugee parents initially agreed to participate in the interviews, many withdrew once the COVID-19 lockdowns were announced. I had to reschedule many appointments and recruit participants to replace the ones who had withdrawn once the lockdowns were lifted.

Like the ECEC professionals, the refugee parents were recruited through the snowball sampling method. I knew four refugee parents from a social integration program in Municipality A where I engaged in volunteer programme for welcoming new refugees. From the four refugees that I knew, I obtained the contact details of other refugees who I contacted and asked to participate in the project. While I initially believed that it would be easy to recruit many refugees, the task proved difficult in reality because not all the refugees I knew had children in the ECEC centers at the time. In addition, others became unavailable because of study and work commitments. Even then, I got help from the ECEC

center for refugees to recruit other refugee parents who agreed to participate. Refugee participants had to have a refugee background and have children enrolled in the Norwegian ECEC. In accordance with regional demographics, the refugee parents who participated came from different countries and regions, including East and Central Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Eurasia. In terms of their characteristics, on a general level, the participants' ages ranged between 27 and 55 years old, and their children were aged between 1 and 5 years old. Moreover, of the 12 participants, all were married except one, who was a single mother. In terms of gender, there were six men and six women among the participants. I also inquired how long they had lived in Norway, and their time of living in Norway ranged from 1 year and 6 months as the shortest time and 22 years as the longest time, with the participant pointing out that he came to Norway as a teenager and now was middle-aged.

3.2 Doing interviews

In the recent past, qualitative interviews have increasingly become a primary source of data in social research, especially research by sociologists (Hammersley, 2008; Lamont and Swidler, 2014). The interviewing process entails implementing good practices to gain access to participants, developing positive relationships with participants, and planning and conducting interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Conducting interviews in studies that use IE is not different to other qualitative methods. However, IE interviews are unique in terms of their purpose, which is to reveal how the accounts, experiences, and activities shared by the participants are socially organised. Although the researcher usually explores the work of the participants and remains close to their everyday lives, it is not these experiences that are the object of research but the social organisation that comes to shape these experiences.

In this light, my focus in conducting interviews was to investigate how the local integration work of ECEC professionals and refugee parents is organised and mediated by the activation of institutional texts and discourses, thereby shaping both the local and the

translocal experiences (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). It is important to highlight that the aim of interviews in IE is “not to generate representative samples or to make generalisable claims, but rather to enable the description of generalising effects that shape the experiences of participants shaped within a complex of discourses and organisational processes” (Lund, 2015 pg. 87).

Using interviews as the single data collection method in my study presented both limitations and opportunities. In terms of opportunities, interviewing in IE takes the form of a dialogue (Smith and Griffith, 2022). Within the dialogue, the focus is on people’s experience of their doings, from which a researcher seeks to discover, from the participants' accounts, how things are put together from the perspective of the participants. For instance, interviewing ECEC professionals and refugee parents was an opportunity to discover from their own accounts how integration work is organised.

In IE, the opportunity lies in the possibility to access the ECEC professionals and, subsequently, the refugee parents’ knowledge of integration work, but also how integration work is connected to wider sequences of actions beyond the professionals and parents (Smith and Griffith, 2022). To identify and understand the sequences of actions beyond the participants, I had to focus on concrete details and deeper elaboration of the participants' accounts. Similar to Smith (2005), the majority of the participants in my study appeared very eager to be part of the research because it provided an exclusive opportunity for them to speak in-depth about the ordinary aspects of their lives, with my focus being on their experiences. IE research takes two directions. First, it addresses the local experience of the participants' everyday lives and, second, the institutional processes and arrangements that come to shape these experiences.

The language/lexicon which participants use to elucidate their experience is important in IE inquiry since it helps discover the link between everyday activities and the social relations being reflected through the particular language. Besides, it is the social relations that lead to making visible the institutional from the local (Smith, 2005). Smith contends that the use of interviews in IE is not to

elucidate the perspectives of the participants, but rather, interviews represent the first step of two rounds of dialogue (Smith, 2005, pg. 142-143). In the case of my study, the first dialogue took place between myself and the ECEC professionals and refugee parents, where I engaged in conversations that enabled me to understand their integration experiences.

The second level of dialogue in IE involves the process in which I engaged in a dialogue with the interview transcripts (material produced from the first dialogue) in order to establish the “connections, linkages, and the various forms of coordination that tie their doings into those of others” (Smith, 2005, p. 143; Murray, 2019; Lund and Nilsen, 2019). My interviews with ECEC professionals as standpoint participants focused on their lived experiences at the local level first, while in the analysis, I focused on the ruling relations that shape those local experiences (Lund and Nilsen, 2019).

Embedded within IE’s ontology is the need to establish the connections of how ECEC professionals and refugee parents are socially coordinated through textual connections. By establishing this relationship, it is possible to explore the ruling relations of integration work at the local level and the institutional level. I focused on the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents in which they described everyday integration work and how the described work is organised within an institutional complex as mediated by texts (Smith, 2005; Smith and Griffith, 2022).

In terms of limitations, interviewing in IE is premised on the authority of the participants’ experience to inform the ethnographer's ignorance (Smith, 2005). In the case of my study, the asymmetries of power between me and the participants were less significant. Although I led the interviewing process as the initiator of the research topic, an IE interview relies heavily on the participant’s willingness to give in-depth, concrete details of their experiential accounts, and at times, some participants were unable to do this. On the flip side, other participants appeared to “interpret their experiences in terms of dominant

language”, as captured in professional documents about work routines, values, and priority areas such as the use of the Norwegian language, which made it a challenge to extricate participants’ actual experiences (DeVault, 1999 pg.66).

I acknowledge that it was a challenge to maintain the participants’ focus on their actual experiences with integration and guide them away from focusing on professional or institutional language from government policy documents and other authoritative sources. This was more apparent among ECEC professionals in comparison to refugee parents and is indeed a common challenge amongst IE scholars, especially those who interview professionals. DeVault and McCoy (2006) argue that professionals are taught to use institutional words and phrases and, thus, can be difficult to interview. Nilsen (2021b p. 364) shares a similar experience to mine, stating that in her study with a social worker named Sara, she found that Sara predominantly answered the interview questions using learned academic jargon and professional language. Nilsen had to revert to a different way of interviewing the participant, which involved asking “stupid” questions with the expectation that this would allow Sara to express her own thoughts and feelings without being captured by institutionalised discourses.

Within IE, "Ignorance is a great advantage" (Smith and Griffith, 2022, p. 28). Lareau (2021, p. 263) makes a similar claim by referring to the strength of weak ties", where participants can be meaningful in a research inquiry. In my study, I was aware that I did not have a prior rapport with most of the participants and therefore utilised it as an opportunity to activate the 'ignorant tag,' in which I was able to question and problematise some taken-for-granted knowledge from the participants (Kimathi, 2023). In this situation, the balance in power relations was altered because of my dependence on the experiential authority of the ECEC professionals and refugee parents. As a researcher, I was, therefore, doing the interview as a form of learning through dialogue with the participants, not knowing what to expect, what I would discover, or which direction the inquiry would take (Smith and Griffith, 2022). It is a challenge for a researcher when participants’ responses

adopt professionals' discourses through concepts and phrases, as was the case with some participants in my study, but in this challenge lies the opportunity to direct a researcher's sensibility to 'discover institutional discourses and ideological codes often taken for granted, which tacitly come to shape professional practice' (Nilsen, 2021b, p. 364).

In conducting the interviews, I realised that it was possible to pose questions to the participants and then let them tell the story of their experiences. In some instances, I would follow it up with probing questions in a dialogic form whenever they mentioned concepts or phrases with which I was unfamiliar. My interviewing experience shed light on the role of the co-construction of data in the research process. At various stages of the research process, my level of interaction with the participants varied. The type of information that results from these interactions represents a co-production or co-construction of knowledge (Silverman 2010; Denzin and Lincoln 2008).

Even then, I still led the interview process since I initiated the topic and the research questions (Murray, 2019). Although the transcripts of the oral interviews contained the accounts of the participants, they do not entirely reflect the 'voice of the participants' because they involved framing and interpretation by me as the researcher and the interpreter who participated in interviewing and later transcribed them. In this regard, one critique apportioned to qualitative interviewing is that the participant's responses are largely shaped by the context and the influence of the interviewer (and the translator in my case), which can potentially make the data less original (Hammersley, 2008). While this is relatively logical, I experienced that interviewing as a data collection method is a convenient way for participants to share their personal unique experiences that informed my research inquiry. I acknowledge that interviews are at times criticised, especially in circumstances when participants have difficulties putting their experiences into words, which can undermine the use of interviews as a source of data. In my study, all the ECEC professionals were quite expressive, and I felt that they were eager and able to speak about their everyday integration work in the ECEC centres. However, this was not entirely the case with refugee parents. For instance, two participants

among the parents were not as expressive during the interviews, which seemingly was due to language competence or self-censorship.

One of the refugee parents confessed during the interview that he is normally wary of participating in research and other public initiatives due to security concerns since the government of his country is known to spy on its own citizens abroad. Another participant among the refugee parents admitted that he found it difficult to speak about integration since he was worried; he may have to be critical of Norway, which, despite the challenges he and his family may have experienced, had used a lot of resources in resettling him, and he remained grateful for that. I assured the participant that the study was not about criticising Norway but rather an opportunity for him to speak about his experiences.

Interviews have also been criticised for only relying on what people say about their everyday realities since there could be doubts if the participants' accounts represent the truth, unlike participant observations where the researcher is able to see and build an account of what happens (Lamont and Swidler, 2014). In other words, the concern is whether interviewing as a data collection method is a basis for an accurate representation of reality that goes beyond the interview itself. While this critique may be valid in some form, conducting interviews, particularly guided by institutional ethnography, makes it possible to produce data that helps explore the social organisation of integration work of ECEC professionals and refugee parents rather than focusing on whether the accounts are accurate and generalisable. The object of the study is to illuminate the institutional relations/complex within which integration work happens. Smith argues that IE inquiries can adopt interviews and focus groups to build an understanding of a particular situation and develop work knowledge, which also signals the beginning of the inquiry (Smith, 2005, pg. 31).

Overall, interviewing is an accepted method of data collection in the social sciences as “a social practice which involves an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee”, which makes it possible to collaborate in the co-construction of knowledge (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 32).

Interviewing is an ideal method when other methods of data collection are unfeasible, as it was in my case that the planned participant observations were not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. I used interviews in the belief that they would facilitate the production of appropriate data that would aid the analysis of my inquiry amidst an awareness and acknowledgement of the potential limitations of interviewing as a data collection method (Lamont and Swidler, 2014).

As mentioned earlier, this study entails interviews with ECEC professionals and refugee parents (see the table below for timelines when the interviews took place). The interviews with ECEC professionals represent entry-level data, which I use in the study to describe individual experiences at a local level within an institution. In this case, this data was generated from the experiences of ECEC professionals who occupied the chosen standpoint for exploring the ruling relations of integration work. Moreover, the interviews with refugee parents represent second-order data, which I use to describe what goes on beyond the experiential accounts of the ECEC teachers to expand on the findings in the entry-level data (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Jahreie, 2023). Based on the accounts of both ECEC professionals and refugee parents, I explore the social organisation of integration work in ECEC centres.

Interview type	Participants	Number of participants	Time frame
One-on-one interviews	ECEC professionals	13	April 2019 to August 2019
Focus group interview	Refugee parents	3	One meeting in October 2019
One-on-one interviews	Refugee parents	12	August 2020 to October 2021

Table 2: Participants and dates of data collection

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews with ECEC professionals

Researchers who use IE tend to be flexible in how they plan their data collection (Smith, 2005) because IE research does not seek out specific answers to research questions but rather creates a space for discovery from the participants' accounts. When carrying out my research, I did the same. The flexibility of data collection was an advantage in that I did not set up the data collection to look for specific information, even though I had a few research questions that served as a guide for the interviews. Considering this, the interviews were not unstructured or open-ended but had rather a flexible semi-structured approach. I began by interviewing 13 ECEC professionals in individual interviews.

In the interviews, I posed questions that encompassed what activities were prioritised when handling the children, how the staff interacted with refugee children and their parents, and how they related to texts. The participants of the study included ECEC-trained teachers (barnhagelærer), teacher assistants, and language support professionals. In this study, I use the concept of professionals since they all work directly with children and parents in ECEC centres where integration work happens. The notion of profession, in this case, is not based on academic qualifications but on the nature of their everyday work where they enact professional roles guided by institutional texts.

The interviews were conducted in English, aided by an ethnic Norwegian research assistant for interpretation when needed. Ethnicity was not my main consideration when selecting a research assistant, but I did look for someone who was competent in the Norwegian language.

As a non-native researcher in Norway, I entered the research field from a position of both familiarity and unfamiliarity. There was unfamiliarity in the sense that I had no prior practical work experiences like the ECEC professionals I interviewed, and familiarity because I had some knowledge of how the ECEC sector is organised, especially at the policy

level, and an understanding of Norwegian cultural practices of child-rearing, having lived in Norway for six years before the research project. The research assistant was helpful during the data collection because her presence, knowledge of the subject area, and familiarity with the language made the participants feel at ease. In addition, she played her role as a translator between me and the participants. We had agreed that, while the interviews were in progress, she would not introduce her ideas but rather translate what I said and help the participants understand my questions before interpreting their feedback to me. If anything was unclear, I would ask for her clarification. However, this does not mean she had no agency because she would suggest ideas to me where possible during and after interviews.

She transcribed the interviews recorded in Norwegian into English. To address the question of reliability and validity of research that involves research assistants as translators and transcribers, we agreed that, during the interviews and transcriptions, she would translate or transcribe words as directly spoken during the interview, and if anything was unclear, we would ask the participants to clarify. This was meant to ensure that the research process accurately captured the meaning of the participants' words (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was essential because the translator and I came from different cultures, which can add complexity to the data collection and analysis (Shimpuku & Norr, 2012).

By directly translating and transcribing the words of the participants, we intended to ensure that I, as the project researcher, was positioned closer to the participant and their intended meaning of the interview questions. Hence, the research assistant did not occupy the role of the invisible translator but rather was actively involved in the collection and management of the data (transcription and contextualising), except for the analysis. This role can be conceptualised as a form of 'integrated research collaboration' as opposed to the 'invisible research assistant' (Shimpuku & Norr, 2012, p. 1692).

Other than a focus on how the involvement of the research assistant might have taken away from the research study, based on my experience in this project, I view the presence of the research assistant as an advantage to me as a foreign researcher facing linguistic and cultural challenges to navigate (Xian, 2008). Seen through the lens of interpretative qualitative research, I argue that the translator's role is not a technical one, that is, of transferring objective knowledge from one language to another, but that of a cultural interpreter who can help the researcher make sense of what is said and what is probably unsaid, that is, underlying cultural assumptions that the researcher may pick up in the interviewing process (Xian, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, I employed a semi-structured approach to interviewing and made follow-up questions on the answers, focusing on personal experiences or work experiences. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, where every participant was given enough time to provide an account of their experiences of working with refugee children.

Based on the content of the interviews, I noticed that the professionals who worked in the ECEC centre for refugees focused on broader aspects of integration, especially their aspect of parental involvement and communication with parents and how to mitigate challenges with language barriers. The participants from the "normal" centres appeared to focus more on children, especially on how to expedite the acquisition of the Norwegian language and appeared to believe that children would be fine without mother tongue language assistants. Besides that, I didn't notice any other difference depending on where the ECEC professional worked.

I noted that most of the ECEC professionals would revert to institutional discourses as part of their answers, and it was clear that was embedded in how they understood and viewed their work. When people use professional language, they use words, concepts, phrases, and

abbreviations that are aimed to give some meaning within a professional context that can appear abstract to an outsider (Nilsen, 2021b).

For instance, during the interviews, the participants referred to the Framework Plan for Kindergartens, which is the official ECEC policy/curriculum in Norway. They also referred to parenting programs such as ICDP, from which I came to discover phrases such as making the refugee child “feel safe”. The phrase, while understandable in its basic form, did not initially seem to mean something different until I later discovered that it was part of an institutional discourse. This happened after further following up with the ECEC professionals and noting that it also featured in more than half of the interviews. I discovered that it is a phrase traceable from particular social technologies related to parenting courses in Norway, in which some of the ECEC professionals were actively involved. I was able to discover how the parental training discourse led to a particular association and activities that the ECEC professionals referred to. The safety discourse, as I call it, seemed to originate from professional courses the ECEC staff took, such as ICDP, where they are trained in parenting and trauma care for children.

My discovery of the notion of safety, whereby the ECEC professionals mentioned in the interviews that integration work related to making the refugee child “feel safe,” is an example of institutional discourse. While I did not realise this during the interviews, I later traced where the notion emerged from. When participants mentioned ICDP, I began to research the concept and discovered the textual mediation of the notion of safety, which organises integration work among ECEC professionals.

3.2.2 Focus group interviews with refugee parents

During the data collection period, I conducted one focus group interview with three refugee parents. Although other forms of interviewing are limited to a one-on-one format, focus groups bring together more than one interviewee who shares similar experiences to explore

their insights, consensus, or disagreement on a commonly shared experience or topic (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). Through focus groups, I could explicitly observe the participants' interactions to discover the views of the refugee parents on different aspects of their integration experiences, particularly those related to ECEC centres (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 2).

From the focus group, it was possible for me to explore the social norms, values, and experiences that the refugee parent participants considered important (Wilkinson, 1999). For instance, during the focus group meeting, one participant was very vocal that he had problems with the ECEC professionals at the centre that his daughter attended because he did not want a male member of the staff to change her diapers. Another participant was very enthusiastic about food and further explained how his family finds it difficult to cope with guidelines from the ECEC centre about food restrictions. Such topics can provide not only an avenue for exploring contested issues and experiences but also an opportunity to explore issues that may not emerge in a one-on-one interview.

Other topics that were extensively discussed in this focus group included perceived control from the state and how to manage issues related to religion. This is due to Norway being predominantly a secular state, officially since 2012 when the parliament voted to abolish the state church.¹³ Through conducting this focus group, I discovered that this method can be effective for research topics that do not target specific answers from the participants, allowing for a dialogue between themselves. The translator and I were able to ask questions and allow the participants to discuss among themselves by responding to each other, enabling them to listen to alternative standpoints (Frisina, 2018).

¹³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/tro-og-livssyn/forvaltningsreform-for-et-tydelig-skille-mellom-kirke-og-stat/id2424037/>

The difference between individual interviews and the focus group during my data collection was that I noticed different personal opinions on issues that would easily be assumed to be common among refugees. For instance, in the group, there were two participants who subscribed to Islam, and they had different views on whether ECEC professionals should bring all children to religious places such as churches and mosques. One believed that only Christian children should be taken to churches, while Muslim children should be taken to the mosque, and non-religious children should be allowed to stay behind. The second Muslim participant, however, did not have an issue as long as the parents had consented, and their children would only go there for educational purposes and would not partake in any religious activity while there.

3.2.3 Individual interviews with refugee parents

As mentioned earlier, conducting interviews with refugee parents after conducting the interviews with ECEC professionals was an important choice for my study. During the interviews, it was notable that the refugee parents, in contrast to the ECEC professionals, seemed a bit hesitant to share personal information, with one participant explaining that he came from a country with an authoritarian regime and even being in Norway, he did not feel comfortable enough to speak freely about his life. He pointed out that this is because his country's government had the capacity to send secret agencies to spy on people in their host countries after they had been granted refugee status. Another parent who participated confessed that he had been jailed without charges and forced to join the military but was able to escape and, therefore, was very conscious of what to say, even to the government agencies here in Norway. He kept reminding me to be careful about the information I would include in my thesis.

The interviews ranged between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. All interviews with individual parents were conducted in English, except for two that were conducted in mixed languages: Swahili and English/Norwegian. One interview was conducted in Swahili because the participant was uncomfortable conducting the interview in English, while I was uncomfortable conducting it in Norwegian in the absence of the translator. Because we both spoke Swahili as a common language, we agreed to use it in the interview. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Seven individual interviews took place at the university premises, while two interviews were conducted in open outdoor spaces: one in the public library in the municipality and two at a restaurant in the city.

Reflecting on the venues and how they impacted the interviewing, the interviews that were done indoors in the meeting rooms at the university flowed better than those in the restaurants and outdoor sitting areas. For instance, an interview I conducted outdoors on a very windy day had very poor sound quality, and I had to engage two different transcribers, which meant there were financial and time implications for the decision. The interview I conducted in the public library went quite well, and even though there were people moving around and talking, we chose a good spot to sit, which ensured the interview flowed well. However, the most difficult interview was one of the two interviews I conducted in a restaurant in the city. The location we had picked in the backyard seemed deserted during the day, and my participant suggested it was a good place to sit. A few minutes after we began the interview, a crowd of people came and sat closer to us and began smoking and chatting loudly. We were forced to move, and unfortunately, we could not locate a better spot, so we left and looked for another restaurant that was relatively okay. This meant that I had to restart the interviewing procedure all over again and had to record the new interview anew. I was concerned about the ethical considerations for the privacy of the participant, but she assured me she was fine

with completing the interview in public because the topic we were discussing was not sensitive in any way.

Most refugee parents answered the interview questions in similar ways, with the majority focusing on kindergarten routines, expectations for parenting in the ECEC, and CWS. However, the interview with the single mother highlighted the challenges of being an only parent when dealing with ECEC professionals, with her arguing that they expected the same perfection from her as they did from two-parent households that could share childcare responsibilities and other obligations. She expressed that it was difficult to find a balance between raising her children and meeting her work obligations. Being new in her locality and lacking social support to help with childcare appeared overwhelming. Even then, she was grateful that her children could spend time in the ECEC centre, without which would have been a difficult situation.

3.3 Data analysis

When using IE, “analytic thinking begins in the data collection process” (Devault & McCoy, 2006, p. 757). The essence is not to get straight answers to specific questions but to gain an understanding of the participant’s standpoint, which allows for the discovery of the ruling relations that mediate how things happen. I analysed the interview transcripts of the raw data collected from ECEC professionals, and after making some discoveries, I began interviewing refugee parents. However, the timelines did not follow each other as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the planned data collection, especially among refugee parents. Articles 1, 2, and 3 rely on the analysis of the same data set collected from ECEC professionals, while article 4 is based on the analysis of data collected from refugee parents.

3.3.1 Texts that organise integration work

The significance of texts in my study is based on the understanding of how textualisation contributes to hierarchies of knowledge systems as well as their ability to objectify people. People use texts such as forms, policy documents, and work guidelines (Smith, 2006). The power of texts lies in their ability to organise people's actions across time and space (Smith, 2005; Nichols and Griffith, 2009). Integration work as part of education and care in ECEC centres is part of textually organised relations that entail coordinated actions of ECEC professionals and refugee parents. In this study, my interest was not in the content of the texts (since I did not conduct document analysis) but rather in mapping how the texts were "materially present" in the everyday "local relations" (i.e., the integration experiences for ECEC professionals and refugee parents) (Smith, 2005 p. 228; Smith & Turner, 2014). By identifying the institutional texts and processes that ECEC professionals referred to in their work and those which refugee parents mentioned in relation to their experiences in the ECEC centres, I was able to keep the analytical focus on the ruling relations that coordinated through identifying particular phrases and words during the interviews and when reading interview transcripts (McCoy 2006; p. 109–110).

Smith and Griffith (2022, p. 51) urge IE scholars not to "dissociate texts from actual sequences of action, because texts do not act, but come into play in individuals' work as they coordinate the foregoing and subsequent moments of a sequence of action." The "text-reader conversation" is about how an individual occupies the role of a recipient and activator of a particular text at the same time. As opposed to face-to-face interactions, the text-reader conversation appears to be one-sided and non-responsive as the reader interprets and acts from the written word, but the text remains active rather than passive. When a reader engages with a text, it is activated as the reader seeks to understand its sense and later tries to talk about the text, share it with others, or make changes to the text (DeVault, 2021, p.25). This shows that people who use texts in their daily work, such as ECEC professionals and refugee parents, can interact with the text and activate it to

produce certain outcomes among themselves and others. This highlights the ruling potential that texts have in terms of organising integration work activities but also enabling them to participate in the organising.

In this process, integration work for ECEC professionals and experiences of refugee parents are organised around the text-act-text sequences, making it possible to see the bureaucratic processes that surround them, as well as those in which they participate, along with institutional discourses in use (Smith & Turner, 2014; Nilsen, 2021; Murray, 2022). Through text-reader conversations, it is possible in my study to trace and discuss how texts coordinate integration work among ECEC teachers and parents' experiences of integration. The texts operate across time and space and, in so, have a unique organising capacity compared to specific actions of individuals, although texts do not work in isolation and cannot be understood in isolation. To ensure accountability, the professionals are expected to follow laws, rules, and guidelines, as well as use their own discretion in making decisions and following those decisions with action (Nilsen, 2021b). Here, the ECEC professionals function as 'agents' of the text because 'by understanding what the words mean, the reader is organised by the text, informing her future thinking and activities, her ongoing understanding of the text and other texts and events (Smith, 2005, p.108).

Exploring texts entailed looking for clues that could shed light on how participants in my study gained knowledge to speak about their work and experiences of integration within ECEC centres and how integration work and experiences are socially organised. To trace the texts and discourses in my study, I asked two questions of the transcribed data. The questions included: are there clues that the participants' accounts were learned from particular texts or people? How does the learned knowledge inform the participants' everyday work or experience? McCoy (2006) refers to this as 'interviewing the interviews.' Using these questions was essential because they helped guide me in tracing the texts that

organised the local integration experiences of the participants within translocal intertextual relations (Smith, 2005; Smith & Turner, 2014; Lund, 2015).

I chose the texts for this study both during and after the interviewing process. This is because, during the interviews, I keenly followed the participants' accounts of integration work and would pick up any words or phrases that could lead me to establishing a related text. In case during the interview the participants mentioned anything that arose my curiosity, I would ask about it, and after the interview, I would search for information about it. This continued until the interview ended, and later, I started analysing the data in the transcripts. This analysis introduced another opportunity to look for traces of texts and discourses. I studied the interview transcripts repeatedly to explore, from the participants' accounts, when their actions meet texts. This entailed, as mentioned earlier, looking for words or phrases which would lead me to identify particular textual relations. The most compelling instance of this, as shared earlier in this thesis, was the use of the concept of "trygghet," which was used by several participants when they spoke about the everyday interactions with refugee children.

In most interviews with ECEC professionals and refugee parents, many did not mention laws or policy guidelines, while a few did. However, I was able to trace that the notion of "trygghet," translated as "promoting safety" amongst children, is anchored in the Norwegian Framework Plan (2017, p. 20). Moreover, the ECEC professionals repeatedly mentioned trauma among refugee children and connected the "trauma discourse" to the training they got from the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) and the Resource Centre for Violence and Trauma (RVTS). For parents with a refugee background, ICDP training is currently formalised by the government and is an obligatory component of the introduction program, and while ECEC professionals did not mention this, a few parents who have attended ICDP training mentioned it.

Information on ICDP in relation to ECEC centres is accessible from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs website and on the Municipality A website. For municipality B, there is no information about ICDP. However, the website indicates that it offers a parental guidance course called "Circle of Security Parenting" (COSP), which is offered to parents with children aged between 4 months and 6 years. COSP is like ICDP in that it is anchored in the attachment theories developed by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1990), as well as more broad research within the field of developmental psychology. COSP is recommended by the Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs in Norway and is offered to all parents. There is no indication that it is targeted at refugees or parents from minority backgrounds. While ICDP has featured prominently in the conversations with participants in my study, COSP was not mentioned, but I came across it when I searched for information on how municipality B deals with ECEC centres and its approach to refugee integration. I found it relevant to this study because it builds on theoretical foundations and concepts similar to ICDP.

During the data collection, the ECEC professionals mentioned municipality A's ambitions for increased participation of children with minority backgrounds and the need to facilitate native languages among them. Moreover, they highlighted the dilemma of promoting native languages while at the same time ensuring that children had a good proficiency in Norwegian before they started school. While the professionals did not mention any texts in relation to language, I traced that these issues are addressed in a number of national government policy documents and reports which include the Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005), The integration strategy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), and government reports such as "How to get more minority language children to go to kindergarten" by the Directorate for Education and Training (2022) and Immigration and integration 2021–2022: Report for Norway to the OECD (Thorud, 2022).

At the local level in the municipality, I was able to locate a number of documents that relate to ECEC centres and the work of professionals, as well as those that relate to parents. Municipality A has its own assessment policies and practices, which are administered together with standardised tools, reporting systems, and procedures issued by the national government. These include the “Strategy Plan for Education – a framework for quality and mastery” as well as a standardised observation tool for the language assessment of children, which examines language development amongst children, especially those who are considered to exhibit weak language development. The document is labelled “Language Standard for Language Supervisors”. This document introduces the TRAS tool, which is used by pedagogic and psychological services in Norway for children who need further referrals for evaluation or when applying for extra resources from state agencies. It can also be used to assess children’s linguistic skills. TRAS is a language mapping tool consisting of closed-ended questions that the ECEC professionals, in theory, can fill in without the child’s active presence (Espenakk et al., 2011; Jahreie, 2023).

On the website for Municipality A, language is addressed in a document called “Language standard for supervisors”, which is meant for use by ECEC professionals during meetings with the parents. The document can be understood as a framework that offers a broad range of guidelines on areas such as health, family relations, routines in ECEC centres, the application of TRAS, as well as other relevant services related to the child or the family, such as the health centre, pedagogical psychological services (PPT), the Department for Children and Young People's Mental Health (ABUP), habilitation services for children and young people (HABU), and child protection services (CSW). The guidelines also clearly state that ECEC professionals must notify the parents of their (the professionals’) legal obligation to inform the CWS if there is reason to believe that a child is being mistreated or exposed to other forms of serious neglect or if the child shows persistent serious behavioural difficulties.

When carrying out IE research, it is possible to locate both the “boss texts,” which are created at a higher level of institutional decision-making, and the “lower level” texts, which offer guidance to front-line workers such as ECEC professionals who are part of an institutional complex (Smith, 2005; DeVault, 2021; Murray, 2019). This classification of higher and lower-level texts suggests that there is a hierarchy of texts in an IE inquiry where “higher order texts regulate and standardise texts that enter directly into the organisation of work in multiple local settings” (Smith 2006 p. 79). This hierarchy does not emerge by itself but rather through a keen mapping of texts during the research inquiry (Turner, 2006). It is also important to clarify that texts do not have the same functions when organising people’s experiences. Texts can have an authoritative and standardising effect regardless of whether they are higher-level texts or lower-level texts (Smith, 2005; Magnussen, 2023).

The table below shows the texts I have included in my study, which are categorised as either higher-level or lower level.

Level	Name and source of the text
Higher-level texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="395 1323 1350 1413">• Framework plan for kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017) <li data-bbox="395 1451 1350 1487">• The Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005) <li data-bbox="395 1525 1350 1673">• The integration strategy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019) Notify. St. 6. "A comprehensive integration policy" (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012)

- Lower-level texts
- “Language Standard for Language Supervisors” (Web document from Municipality A)
 - International Child Development Programme (ICDP) (<https://www.bufdir.no/familie/tilbud/icdp-grupper/#30318>)
 - A safe and good kindergarten environment in “Municipality A”
 - Strategy plan for growth 2020–2025 - Stronger together for children and young people (Web document in Municipality A)
 - «Kvalitetsmeldingen for oppvekst» - The quality report for childhood (Web document in Municipality A, 2021)
 - Immigration and integration 2021–2022: Report for Norway to the OECD (Thorud, 2022).
 - “How to get more minority language children to go to kindergarten” Report by the Directorate for Education and Training (2022)

Table 3.0: Higher and lower texts included in this study

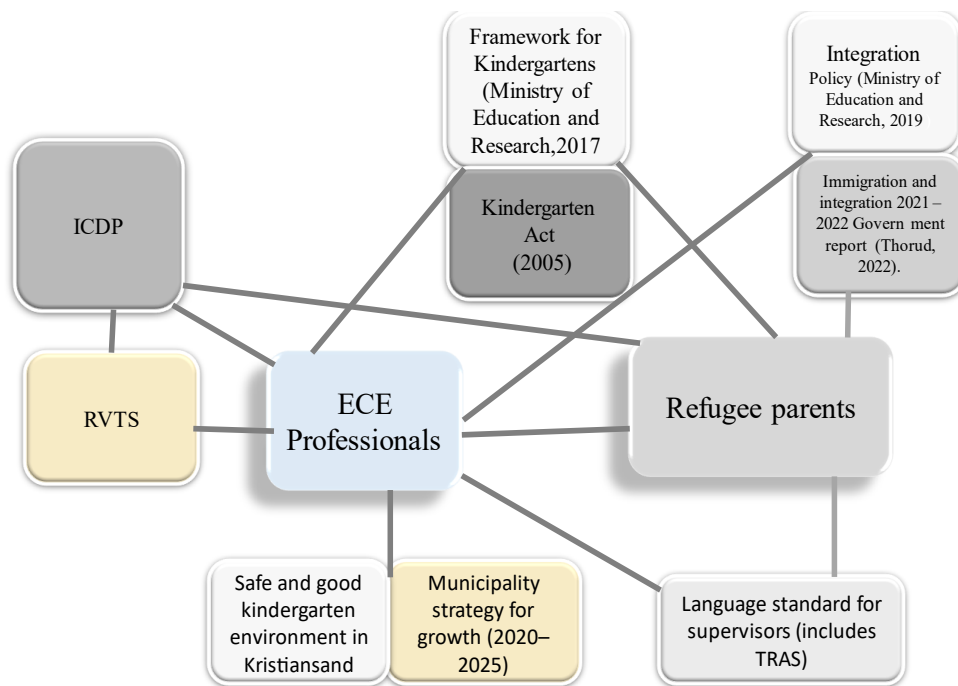


Figure 2 : Cartography of texts and institutions that are part of integration in ECEC centers

3.3.2 Identification of the standpoint of analysis

The ECEC professionals' (standpoint informants) explanation of integration work from the interview data was the point of departure in the analysis. Hence, when reading the interview transcripts, I posed the following question: What does this tell me about how integration occurs in the ECEC centres? I performed a search of the transcribed material to purposively identify clues from the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents on how they perform integration and how this integration is socially organised.

With each participant's account, I was able to map how integration is organised. The analysis did not focus on one specific account (Smith, 2005, p. 211). Instead, various accounts contributed to a collective account, from which a bigger picture emerged regarding what the participants do and know. IE researchers usually "interview" the interview material (McCoy, 2006) to learn about the individual work experience of the

participants. This is crucial because, as in the work of Smith (2005, p 210), individuals' experiences formed the major source of data for me. In other words, the individual experiences and activities of integration formed the entry point into the exploration of the institutional relations that ECEC professionals and refugee parents become a part of. Obtaining ordinary knowledge of the integration experiences of ECEC professionals and refugee parents is the first step of the analytical process in IE.

The data were analysed through the transcription and translation of interviews. Next, I developed an in-depth description of the everyday experiences of ECEC professionals and refugee parents based on individual accounts. The analysis focused on using the interviews to locate the ruling relations that organise the work of integration experienced by the ECEC professionals and refugee parents as mediated by boss/regulatory texts such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) and Integration Strategy for Norway (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019)¹⁴, as well as social technology, such as the ICDP and the "Language Standard for Language Supervisors" used in municipality A, which I have conceptualised as lower-level texts. Texts are crucial to mapping and explicating ruling relations between the local (participants' accounts) and the translocal (institutional complex) (Smith & Turner, 2014a, p. 65).

3.3.3 Discovering the ruling relations

After exploring the integration work from the participants' accounts, the second stage of the analysis involved making visible how the institutional complex creates the conditions for the individual experiences of the ECEC professionals and refugee parents (McCoy, 2006). My challenge in the analysis was to find a way to ensure that the institution remained

¹⁴

<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/519f5492da984d1083e8047011a311bd/norway-integration-strategy.pdf>

visible and avoided focusing only on the accounts of the participants. Maintaining the institution as a central figure in the research is an essential part of the second level of analysis because it is here that I explored how the higher-level and lower-level texts mediate between the everyday local integration practices and how integration is organised and coordinated. Analysing data from ECEC professionals (first entry data) and later from refugee parents (second level data) together with mapping of the text was necessary to discover the institutional complex of integration.

I directed my analytical lens toward connecting how the participants' accounts of integration work interlink with external translocal relations at a wider scope of coordination, as mediated by various texts (McCoy, 2006; Smith, 2005). I developed this lens through a mapping or pattern analysis process in which I searched the interview transcripts for clues on how ECEC professionals and refugee parents talked about how they knew/learned about integration work. For instance, the ECEC professionals often referred to the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017), the regional resource centres on violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention (RVTS) training¹⁵, and the ICDP. Similarly, the refugee parents referred to ICDP and the introduction program for refugees as places that encountered knowledge on how to be “good” parents.

Initially, such references did not mean much. However, as they became increasingly visible across different participants' accounts, I saw traces of ruling relations emerge, and the picture of how these relations organised their individual integration experiences became more nuanced. Such an approach can be described as a “hermeneutical process” of reading the interview transcripts, wherein the participants' accounts prompted me toward further exploration of the institutional framework of integration experiences (McCoy, 2006, p. 113).

¹⁵ <https://rvtssor.no/aktuelt/294/de-tre-pilarene-i-traumebevisst-omsorg/>

Mapping in IE is a metaphoric activity that involves tracing institutional processes and events during the inquiry, for instance, from empirical data material and then explaining them through diagrams and extended written narratives on how texts and work materials fit together into extended sequences of activity (Murray, 2019). I chose to map the texts in order to identify institutions that coordinate and organise integration work. The ability or power to organise and coordinate people's actions across space and time makes the ICDP handbook and the Norwegian curriculum framework plan authoritative texts within which institutions and ruling relations are embedded (Smith, 2005, p. 213; Smith & Turner, 2014, p. 4). When ECEC professionals and refugee parents read or have access to texts in various locations and times, the texts become coordinators of their everyday realities and cannot be left out of the exploration of the social relations of integration.

3.4 Research ethics

As part of adhering to ethical considerations, I observed the values and norms that regulate scientific activities and can be understood as “scientific moral in practice”, as stipulated in the research guidelines for research ethics in social sciences, humanities, law, and theology from the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee, which is an independent administrative agency under the Ministry of Education and Research (NESH, 2019).¹⁶ Among the ethical guidelines that I considered when entering the field were those related to personal disclosure, privacy, and the role of the researcher in cross-cultural settings. These considerations were especially pertinent as I was involved in close contact with

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<https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanitieslaw-and-theology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanitieslaw-and-theology/>

participants and needed to ensure that I considered the integrity of the research process (Israel, 2016; McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015).

3.4.1 Ethical clearance

During the first five months of starting the PhD position, I applied for a research ethical clearance from the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD), now Sikt.¹⁷ I received approval on the 19th of February 2019 (see Appendix 1). Hence, the recruitment of participants and handling of data collected in my study adhered to the NSD guidelines as set forth in the approval letter.

3.4.2 Consent to participate in the study

At the start of the present study, I prepared an information letter that described the aim of the study, its methodology, what participation involves, and any potential risks related to participation, along with how the data will be used (Israel, 2016; see Appendix 2). This letter was part of the application that was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (See appendices) for the current study. All participants received the information letter either in person or via email and signed it before the start of the interview.

3.4.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

The data and participants presented in the current thesis have been anonymised, including all possible identifying information to hide the identity of the participants and centres. To accomplish this, I gave the participants aliases. I used Norwegian names for participants with English names and used English names for those with Norwegian names to ensure that the participants were protected from any means of identification through name (Clark

¹⁷ <https://sikt.no/en/home>

et al., 2019). This was particularly important for some refugee parents who asked for absolute assurance that they would remain anonymous.

3.4.4 Researching vulnerable groups

The immigrant population is often considered to be a vulnerable group in research studies (McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015). The NESH guidelines state that “Researchers have a special responsibility to respect the interests of vulnerable groups throughout the entire research process.” Hence, I ensured that I gave special consideration to my conduct during my interviews with refugee parents. Although research ethics are an important consideration across various study populations, researching refugees necessitates an extra layer of ethical consideration because of the sensitive and confidential nature of some of the issues experienced by this population. Some of the refugee participants seemed worried about my identity as a researcher and appeared to wonder whether I could be trusted to uphold confidentiality.

I faced an ethical dilemma in my attempt to determine which questions to pose to the refugee parents and how to frame my questioning. Here, I wanted to avoid asking intrusive questions that would cause the participants discomfort. I also wanted to ensure that I conducted the research with the utmost respect for the participants, irrespective of their background or social status. This approach is reflective of the IE’s privilege of the participant’s standpoint, which avoids a perception of the participant as an “object” to be researched.

3.4.5 Ethical considerations regarding the involvement of a translator

Although it is common to employ research assistants as translators and interpreters during social research, it is crucial to uphold high ethical standards. I recruited a Norwegian-speaking graduate student in social work studies as a research assistant, and she participated in every part of my research process, from recruiting the participants to carrying out and

transcribing the actual interviews. I ensured that the assistant signed a research contract that bound her to uphold all the ethical guidelines for research in social sciences, according to the National Committee for Research Ethics in Social Sciences (NESH).

3.5 Research positionality

In carrying out research from an IE orientation, the researcher cannot remain invisible from the inquiry (Diamond, 2006). Although I have discussed my research exploration from the standpoints of ECEC professionals and refugee parents, my positionality was also part of the exploration process because my familiarity or unfamiliarity with the discourses and the organisation of integration has implications for what I am able to see, along with what I am unable to. My positionality is reflective of my embodied experiences, which lead me to make specific choices during data collection, participant recruitment, and the actual analysis of the data (Lund, 2015; Smith, 1987; Walby, 2007).

In a research study, the status of the researcher and the research participants intersect in various ways (Smith, 2021). For instance, I was confronted with the need to discover how relations with participants, whether similar or different, may influence my research process and its findings. Reflexivity has gained popularity as a core component of social science research and is significant in helping researchers and readers understand research findings (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Ellis & Berger, 2002).

Developing an understanding of where I stood in my research process helped increase the trustworthiness and transparency of the work, thus advancing its legitimacy (Hammersley & Gomm, 2008). Moreover, the need to preserve the voices of the participants throughout the research process made reflexivity important from an IE perspective (Smith, 2005). Here, reflexivity refers to my understanding of my position as a researcher and my shifting and complex relationship with the ECEC professional and refugee participants. Engaging with reflexivity helps me better understand my research and engage in the process of

“preserving” participants’ voices, knowledge, and embodied experiences (Berger 2015; Ryan 2015; Walby, 2007). Becoming reflexive meant that I had to engage in the process of critical reflection on my experience as a researcher, that is, the experience of coming to know myself within the research process as both an inquirer and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To achieve this, I began to interrogate the different identities that represented my fluid positionality during the research process (Alcoff & Porter, 1993).

The literature on positionality attempts to deconstruct and look beyond the insider–outsider dichotomy to explore the implication of research positionality (Adeagbo, 2021; Carling et al., 2014; Gair, 2012; Kee et al., 2001; Ochieng, 2010; Tewolde, 2020; Zhao, 2016). This dichotomy is premised on the belief that a researcher is predominately an insider or an outsider—positions that are accompanied by specific advantages and disadvantages in the research process. This lens is common in migration studies, where ethnicity, race, and other social categories have been centred as key aspects of the research (Merton, 1972; Ryan, 2015). However, such an approach to understanding positionality has been criticised for being methodologically simplistic. This simplistic lens may lead to “othering”, wherein researchers tend to objectify the researched groups (Carling et al., 2014; Nowicka & Ryan, 2015; Ryan, 2015).

During data collection, I occupied different positionalities in my interviews with ECEC professionals and refugees due to my experiential and embodied similarities and differences with the two groups (Kimathi, 2023). I sought to look for a concept that would be relevant in expressing my hybrid positionality. I chose to operationalise the concept of “outsider within”, which is widely associated with the work of Patricia Hill Collins. According to Collins (1999), the “outsider within” refers to the researcher’s unequal position within the power dynamics of social relationships. I use this lens to explore my placement in the social relations between ECEC professionals and refugee parents.

As a non-native, black male researcher with a work immigration background and a permanent residence in Norway, my positionality did not fully fit with either the ECEC professionals or the refugee parents. Due to my hybrid positionality, I had to switch back and forth between insider and outsider status depending on the individual and group (Kimathi, 2023). In engaging with the ECEC professionals, I felt like an outsider because I did not have sufficient experience in ECEC settings in Norway. At the same time, refugee parents tended to regard me as both an insider and outsider since I could relate to being an immigrant in Norway but could not relate to many of their experiences with culture, religion, parenthood, gender, and immigration.

The dynamics of occupying a hybrid positionality were revealed when I interviewed a woman from an East African country who asked me if I could conduct the interview in Swahili rather than English or Norwegian. Despite coming from the same region, having some shared cultural values, and speaking a common language, our realities were very different. This was most evident in terms of gender difference, as the participant was a single woman raising three children alone. I found that it was easier to develop rapport during my interviews with men compared with women, especially those women who identified as Muslim. The gender dynamic also influenced the interviewing process in terms of the timing, as most women seemed to only be available during the daytime, while men were more flexible.

My experiences during the interviews led me to question whether my “outsider within” positionality generated something new during this research. Albeit implicitly, carrying out research from an immigrant standpoint put me in a middle position in relation to the experiences of the ECEC professionals and refugee parents. As an immigrant, I have faced some challenges that refugee parents may relate to, such as adjustment stress, navigating cultural differences, learning Norwegian, and being a minority in many social settings. I was aware that meeting participants with shared characteristics would facilitate better

rapport, smoother recruitment, and better communication during the data collection process (Berger, 2015; Kusow, 2003). However, this was not always the case, as I have highlighted in my example above.

Due to our shared characteristics, some refugee participants were eager to share their experiences with me because they perceived me as seeing these experiences from a similar perspective and, therefore, as being sympathetic to their situation (De Tona, 2006). Previous research has revealed that when researchers disclose experiences that are common to those of the research participants, this tends to motivate participants to narrate and share their experiences with the researcher (De Tona, 2006; Ellis & Berger, 2003). In some situations, my status as an academic might have influenced the power dynamics with the participants, especially the refugee parents, as some confessed that they were happy to speak about their realities to a non-native researcher.

When interviewing the ECEC professionals, I approached the interviews from an “ignorant” positionality, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, because I was studying unfamiliar practices within ECEC settings. The ECEC professionals viewed me as an outsider to their everyday work realities, presumably because I was a non-native and had a minimal grasp of the Norwegian language. Although I was an “outsider” in the context of the ECEC in Norway, I shared a common experience with two non-native professional workers. While this shared experience could be seen as a form of insider positioning, this is not quite accurate in my case, as I was not versed in the professionals’ everyday personal and work experiences. The two ECEC professionals who were non-natives appeared to align more with Norwegian culture than their parent’s culture of origin, having immigrated to Norway as children. I noted that the two non-native ECEC professionals also occupied the role of cultural and language translators for their peers, as highlighted in the following quote from Joanna:

“It makes it easier to understand where they are coming from, how they might think. I see myself as a mediator between the Norwegians and the foreigners. I often assist in explaining what they (refugee parents) are saying so they gain a better understanding, but I am not able to understand every culture, but still, it seems like it has some value” (Joanna).

Caro, who is a native Norwegian, adds:

“But we also have teachers and assistants who speak the mother language (i.e., the children’s ethnic language). (...) I have to ask the woman (teacher) who can speak Arabic to come and help me because I cannot speak Arabic, and the children cannot speak Norwegian. So, the children need people who can speak their language, and then they can slowly start to speak Norwegian. But first, we focus on how to make them feel safe.”

During the interviewing process, aware that the use of English when interviewing would reveal my identity as an “outsider” because Norwegian is the common language in everyday work. I made efforts to speak the basic Norwegian at the time, but also was frank with participants that I couldn’t conduct the interview in Norwegian and explained that it was the reason for the presence of the translator. However, rather than seeing my “outsider” positionality as an obstacle to accessing the site and the interviews, I was of the view that my “ignorant tag” during interviews would help me discover some surprises from the accounts of the participants.

The use of English and presence of a translator may have altered the dynamic of interaction with the participants, the use of translation during interviews proved effective. This was possible because of good planning for every interview in advance, and good communication between me and the translator on areas that need improvement during

interactions with the participants. I experienced that the interviews with ECEC professionals flowed better than those with refugee parents. This was because some refugee parents did not feel very confident in using either English or Norwegian. The use of a translator meant that the interviews may have lost some untranslatable cultural meaning and expressions (Lund, 2015). Whenever I used the translator during the interviews, my role as the primary researcher changed, since it appeared like we were two researchers interviewing one participant. Hence, I was aware that I relinquished some control over the research process to the translator to ensure during the interviews. The presence of the translator made it possible for me to take notes since she could keep the participants engaged. This was relatively different when I did interviews alone, as I have to be focused on listening to the participant at the time. As other researchers have observed, (See Bujra 2006, pp. 10–11) research that involves translators and interpreters requires careful negotiation on the part of the researcher to maintain a good dynamic of interactions and ensure the interview process is effective when collecting data.

This study reveals that the researcher is not automatically an insider or outsider in the research process. Rather, it is possible to occupy a hybrid positionality, as I did in this study. Debates surrounding symbolic boundaries are crucial in social sciences, especially in the ambition to expand the voices of non-Western researchers carrying out ethnographic research on migration issues in the global North, where most ethnographic studies on refugees and immigrants reflect the voices of Western scholars (Suarez Delucchi, 2018)

3.6 Validity, reliability, and methodological limitations

Although the concepts of reliability and validity are more common in quantitative studies than qualitative ones, it is essential to reflect on the reliability of qualitative studies (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Kothari (2004) argued that all types of research need to be subjected to checks for validity and reliability as a criterion for good research. To do this, I ensured that I gave a comprehensive account of my process for data gathering,

transcription, and analysis. In doing so, I sought to explicate how integration work is organised from the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents.

My aim has been to show what happens but not reproduce it (Hammersley, 1992). The analysis of validity and reliability in ethnographic research entails questioning whether the accounts of the participants during the interview reflect their experiences outside of the interview situation (Silverman, 2010, p. 225). This reflection becomes possible through IE using the textual relations that emerged from the interviews. After the interviews, I had the chance to look for both the higher-level texts and low-level texts (as discussed earlier in the chapter).

Although the findings may not be generalisable, the present thesis provides room for transferability, which entails using the study as a form of hypothesis to be used in a different setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides *transferability*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed a strategy for evaluating reliability and validity in qualitative studies using the following elements: 1. *credibility*, which aims to determine whether the findings represent the verifiable and correct presentation of the participant's original views; 2. *dependability*, which assesses whether participants can evaluate the findings; 3. *confirmability*, which relates to the degree to which the findings could be confirmed by others, with a focus on replicability; and 4. *reflexivity*, which entails the researcher's ability to engage in critical self-reflection about their positionality as a researcher and their relationship with research participants and context (my reflexivity and positionality are discussed in greater depth earlier in this chapter).

Although it is important to verify the reliability and validity of the research, all research studies are subject to some form of methodological limitation. Earlier in this section, I discussed my positionality and how adopting a reflexive approach during my data collection led me to figure out my fluid positionality. Being an outsider in the experiences

of ECEC professionals meant there were aspects of the interviews that I may have overlooked or was unable to see. Moreover, being a partial insider and partial outsider to the refugee parents' experiences means there may have been aspects of the research that I took for granted. The professionals and refugee parents who participated in the study only elucidated their individual experiences, and based on my study's need for real-life experiences, it was not possible to generalise the findings.

4.0 Summary of the findings

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the four research articles that comprise the present study. Each article highlights the research findings, which collectively contribute to the understanding of the role ECEC centres play as an arena for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway. In this chapter, I bring together the findings from the respective articles to show how they have contributed to answering the main and supporting the research questions. The first three articles are based on the data set from ECEC professionals, while Article 4 uses data from refugee parents. While I expected to include more data from my interviews with the refugee parents, COVID-19 restrictions prevented me from completing these interviews until lockdowns were lifted. In the meantime, I focused on analysing the data from the ECEC professionals, which was already available.

4.1 Articles 1 & 2

Kimathi, E., & Nilsen, A. C. E. (2021). Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers' work to promote early intervention and integration. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 146394912110454.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491211045419>

Kimathi, E. (2022). Construction of a "traumatized" refugee child in need of safety in Norwegian kindergartens. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, 17(2), 53–78.

<https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v17i2.386>

In this section, I present a joint summary of Articles 1 and 2 because the research questions and findings from these articles are interconnected. Article 1 is co-authored by Professor Ann Christin Eklund Nilsen. We bring together our two research projects, which are informed by IE, to address the following research question: How do kindergarten staff “do” early intervention and integration in their everyday work? To contribute to this article, I used data from interviews with ECEC professionals to show how these professionals

engage in integration work that revolves around managing categories. The data from my study consists of 13 empirical interviews with ECEC professionals. By using Smith's (2005) concept of work, we explored insights from the participants regarding their intervention and integration activities in the ECEC centres. In the discussion, we explicate the perspectives of ECEC professionals as "concern work" and "safety work." We adopt the term "social technology" in a social scientific sense to refer to the application of methods and theories, such as assessment manuals and training programs, to obtain a science-based analysis for specific purposes (Leibetseder, 2011). Social technology offers expertise that can be used to define and arrive at solutions for welfare state workers. In the article, we explore the paradox that emerges when the dominant knowledge regimes anchored on social technology are at odds with the policy measures to which the ECEC professionals are held accountable.

Informed by IE, we explore the psy discourse as an institutional discourse to which ECEC professionals are accountable, removing the connection between language and experience. Authoritative texts such as government policy guidelines play a role in concerting and coordinating the work of ECEC professionals (Kimathi and Nilsen, 2021 p.3). As such, we aimed to determine how ECEC professionals relate to authoritative texts such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens when carrying out integration. The findings reveal that integration work for ECEC professionals involves making refugee children "feel safe.", I discuss the notion of safety in article and later explore the discourse of safety in greater depth in Article 2, as outlined below. Based on the findings, the continued emphasis on children's "safety" was part of an interventional measure by ECEC professionals towards refugee children who had potentially experienced trauma or whose parents had potentially experienced it. The study findings indicate that the knowledge of and language on trauma appeared to have come from social technologies such as ICDP which is a programme for parenting, as I show in Article 2. The language on trauma was also accessible in professional courses on trauma from RVTS -Sør. This is explicated by Linet in the excerpt below.

Linet: I think for a child to be able to learn, you need to have a calm head. We've been discussing this a lot amongst our colleagues. Is it better for the children to go directly to the other kindergartens where they learn Norwegian faster? If they're traumatised, let's say the children came directly from war straight into kindergarten, are they able to learn properly? I believe language comes second. First, they need to solve their feelings and reduce the trauma. It goes hand in hand with learning, but you need to build the calm foundation for learning first.

Interviewer: So, what is being done about it in the kindergarten?

Linet: This year, we had, in the municipality and the county, like three days of training on trauma for all the staff from all kindergartens. We have been working with this (in this kindergarten) for many years since I started in 2010, and that was the first year with this connection with RVTS- Sør. That was the beginning of learning about it. Now, it's 2019, and all kindergarten professionals receive this training, although it is only three days. Still, it's better than nothing. I think if they're (the children) traumatised, maybe it is better to first get stability together with the family first.

The findings show that ECEC professionals rely on social technology that is influenced by a “psy-discourse” (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2021, p. 2), which has increasingly become an influential body of knowledge coming from disciplines such as psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and psychotherapy (Rose, 1999; Rutter, 2006; Bjerre et.al., 2021). Despite their positive intentions, the professionals' use of this discourse runs the risk of reconstructing the very categories among children that they aim to “heal.” In summary, Article 1 highlights how social technology, such as ICDP and RVTS-Sør trauma courses, is embedded in a notion of trauma and how knowledge from psy discourses mediates everyday integration work with refugee children.

As a follow-up to Article 1, Article 2 unpacks how ECEC professionals relate to the concept of safety in the integration of refugee children. Even though they make different contributions to my thesis, Articles 1 and 2 are interlinked. Although Article 1 examines the power of social technology (in this case, ICDP & RVTS-Sør trauma courses), it does not go further in explicating how I discovered the safety discourse, which is textually mediated and socially organises the everyday integration work in ECEC centers. I explore the organising power of safety discourse in Article 2. In Article 2, I sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How does the notion of doing safety work emerge as a coordinator of everyday social relations among kindergarten teachers? (2) How does the discourse of trauma bring about the categorisation of refugee children by kindergarten teachers? Drawing on 13 interviews with ECEC professionals, the findings reveal that the concept of safety is understood as the ability to provide emotional support and comfort to refugee children. The concept of *safety* was uttered consistently by the participants as they spoke about their everyday work with refugee children (Kimathi, 2022, p. 2).

The quotes below from Ruth who is working in the ECEC center for refugee children elucidate her account relating to providing safety to refugee children:

Interviewer: Tell me more about the training on trauma.

Ruth: The course about trauma helps primarily with the understanding of the ‘baggage’ the children are arriving with. Through the course, we get to know what's important regarding traumas and how to work with the children to make them feel safe because—I'm thinking—that's where it all starts. Ehmm, if the children aren't feeling safe in kindergarten, then they won't learn, so first, they have to feel safe. The children need help on how to cope with the strong emotional outbursts (...) But also, need help with how to be with other children learn, learning language, in natural settings, you know, with something the child enjoys, and repeating it in normal everyday life. So, our work is about building a relation and giving the child

a confirmation, yeah (...) I think that's the most important, it is how to make children feel safe, to include them in play and interaction with the others.

Interviewer: Is this the same in the other kindergartens you are involved in?

The municipality has chosen to have this special refugee kindergarten, where there is special competence on refugees, and this is good, but these children are vulnerable, and they are moving to another kindergarten in 1 year. It is tremendously frustrating to meet them when they move because, from my experience, they seem to have become secure here (in the refugee kindergarten), and then they're supposed to move to another kindergarten so quickly. It can be hard for Norwegian children as well, who might not have that much baggage to change kindergartens. My hope has been that in the other kindergartens, competent and resourceful people, such as language assistants, would be available. In this kindergarten, they've got mother tongue language assistants who have the same background themselves. They are refugees and speak the language the children are speaking, and they should also be involved in the other kindergartens as extra support. That's my opinion, that it would be great if the children meet the mother tongue assistants again in the new kindergartens. I often see the children who are struggling the most, and I think, "How is this going to be when they get into school?" When there is so much anger and aggressive behaviour and the like, and many kindergartens are not able to follow up in the way they should, and they sometimes lack the competence to make the child feel safe and a good follow-up. Then you see, it's these children who struggle later in school too, so you see the importance of "early intervention" - there are a lot of nice words, but they don't work in practice. They don't. Not good enough!
[laughs]

The ECEC staff emphasised that the integration of refugee children involves ensuring that the children "feel safe". They further mentioned that safety work encapsulates actions and activities that provide emotional comfort and calmness to refugee children. Talking,

comforting, hugging, and holding children is synonymous with what I refer to as “safety work”. This concept is related to previous literature that emphasises that ECEC professionals can provide a safe, stabilising experience for children and families from refugee backgrounds who have experienced trauma and a platform for them to overcome their vulnerability (Lamb, 2020; Park et al., 2018; Signorelli et al., 2017; Strekalova & Hoot, 2008; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020).

The notion of *safety* emerges as an important value-laden concept that shapes the ECEC professionals’ everyday integration work. In line with Norwegian ECEC centres’ long tradition of creating a home-like environment that emphasises intimacy, warmth, and safety (Korsvold, 1998; Seland, 2009), the notion of safety is also traceable within an institutional discourse mediated by parenting programs such as the ICDP (Christie et al, 2011), as well as in policy documents such as the Framework Plan for Kindertartens (2017).

It is possible to identify the safety discourse in the ECEC professionals’ numerous references to the ICDP parenting program and the course on trauma organised by the Regional Resource Center for Trauma and Violence (RVTS-Sør). Based on the interview accounts, the ECEC professionals believed that refugees were likely to have experienced trauma. In addition to the quotes that I have shared in Articles 1 and 2, I include quotes from Britney and Salome who are ECEC professionals regarding the “unique” needs of refugees.

Britney: I think there is a lack of deeper understanding from a personal level of what it means to be a human being in a refugee situation. It is not easy to find a balance to think of people as resourceful human beings who can contribute to society and, at the same time, admit that such a human being also carries some “luggage” (i.e. trauma) that is too heavy to carry alone. For instance, we have one child who, before arriving in Norway, had moved 11 times with the parents before turning one year

[old]. We try to offer safety and stability to those children and their families when they arrive here. In this kindergarten, we see huge differences between regular families from Norway and those who come here from abroad. We receive a notification when they arrive, and we only have 14 days to sort out the children's placement.

The quote below from Salome also highlights the increased focus on trauma among ECEC professionals.

Salome: We often get trained on trauma, and that's very good for us working here (in the ECEC center) because we know that many of the refugee children and the parents have a lot of 'baggage' with them (.....) In this center we don't receive children from Norwegian families here, it is only refugees, so our work is focused on helping them integrated in the Norwegian society. My job with the families here, is essentially about teaching them normal Norwegian routines in a kindergarten before they go to another.

Anchored on psy discourse, the trauma discourse and concept of safety reflect the powerful scientific regimes that mediate everyday professional work in institutions such as ECEC centers. The risk is that these powerful knowledge regimes can go uninterrogated at times, rendering them immune to critique (Nilsen, 2021a). The study shows that, through the interpretation of authoritative texts, ECEC professionals activate the category of the "traumatised" refugee child. When using this discourse in their daily work, ECEC professionals contribute to constructing and reproducing a specific category that I refer to as the "traumatised" refugee child in need of safety.

Using Hacking's (1999) ideas of "making up" people, the use of concepts such as "refugees" represents particular ideas of who and what refugees are. Knowledge regimes mediated by psy discourses have increasingly been used to provide solutions to deviance

and construct “governable subjects” (Rose 1999) in children’s institutions (Bjerre et al., 2021). Based on the findings, I argue that the use of ICDP, despite its good intentions, activates an implicit assumption that a refugee child may be or is traumatised, hence requiring the need for safety. This assumption then creates a category where refugee children become synonymous with “trauma or vulnerability”, thereby strengthening the standardisation of refugee children based on the particular category. The risk involved in when discourses create such a category as “traumatised” rather than helping, professionals reinforce stereotypes that objectify refugees.

My findings indicate that when refugee children are seen as “traumatised”, ECEC professionals may interact with them as representations of this category. Each category carries with it a preconceived meaning because “categories are socially constructed” (Nilsen, 2017a p.921). When a category is used in an institutional setting, it becomes the foundation upon which certain practices and outcomes are justified. More often the practices are well intended and lead to positive outcomes, but there is a risk that categories can lead to negative outcomes too. Categories represent ideas that are incorporated into a social matrix, which includes institutions, regulations, media and other forms of text and experiences. The category of “traumatised” refugee children serves as the basis upon which kindergarten teachers engage in safety work. According to Hacking, when the category is used, it is the representation of the category and the matrix it is part of that becomes visible, and not the bodily experience or behaviour (Hacking, 1999). The category here becomes significant because it forms the basis for decisions and actions.

In summary, the study findings show that attention to trauma is potentially helpful for traumatised children, and it is reflective of the good intentions of ECEC professionals. This is possible because the findings show that ‘psy’ discourses are well taken in by the professionals, and there is visible influence on how they perceive integration work. I do not claim that ECEC professionals do not understand children and parents as individuals in

everyday integration work or that they intentionally apply the category of “traumatised” refugee children in their daily work. Nonetheless, in Articles 1 and 2, I propose that ECEC professionals can end up creating a category of “traumatised” children—a discourse that influences professionals’ and wider society’s understanding of and interaction with refugees as a social group.

4.3 Article 3

Kimathi, E. (2023). Tensions of Difference in Integrating Refugee Children in Norwegian ECEC Centers. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, 20(4), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v20.409>

Article 3 explores the perspectives of ECEC professionals on the tensions that characterise the integration work of refugee children and parents. The paper adds to the literature by placing ECEC centers in a key role as arenas for the integration of refugees (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020; Gambaro et al., 2021; Lamb, 2020; Lunneblad, 2017; Scholz, 2021; Sønsthagen, 2021; Tobin, 2020; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020). In this context, the article sought to answer the following research questions: What are the perspectives of ECEC professionals on the tensions arising during the integration of refugee children in Norwegian ECEC centers? How do ECEC professionals deal with different notions of child-rearing in Norwegian ECEC centers?

The findings indicate that the underlying challenge to welfare institutions carrying out integration work is related to the tensions between cultural responsiveness and the institutional guidelines and practices to which professionals are held accountable. In working with individuals from a range of cultural and national backgrounds from countries like Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan, the findings indicate that ECEC professionals perceive three forms of tension in their encounters between refugee families and ECEC centres in Norway. In this article, I adopt the theoretical concept of the

“civilising process” by Norbert Elias (1939/1994) as operationalised by Gilliam and Gulløv (2017) in the overarching analytical concept. By using the “civilising process” as a theoretical concept, I analytically explore the process of negotiation among ECEC professionals, refugee children, and parents regarding what is “civilised” conduct and who decides what such conduct is (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017)

The findings in Article 3 show that ECEC professionals believe that they face tensions in their ambition to find a balance between making use of refugee children’s native languages while simultaneously ensuring that the children learn the Norwegian language. Government policy documents such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens, the integration strategy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), the local municipality Strategy plan for growth 2020–2025 – called “Stronger together for children and young people” all appear vague on how this balance should be achieved in practice but emphasise that ECEC professionals should ensure that children learn the Norwegian language. Similarly same for the recent government reports such as Immigration and integration 2021–2022: Report for Norway to the OECD (Thorud, 2022) and “How to get more minority language children to go to kindergarten” Report by the Directorate for Education and Training (2022) are equally vague how ECEC professionals can ensure refugee and immigrant children learn Norwegian while promoting native languages. Even then, the texts I have mapped especially ‘Language Standard for Language Supervisors’ appears to promote the use of TRAS, which is a tool used nationally by pedagogic and Psychological Services in Norway to assess children’s linguistic skills as well for use on deciding further referrals of children for evaluation or when applying for extra resources from the state agencies (Kimathi and Nilsen, 2021; Jahreie, 2023).

While professionals are expected to follow the texts (institutional guidelines and laws) in their everyday work, not all of them follow these laws. Findings from my study indicate

that ECEC employees use their professional discretion to determine what is best for the children they are working with at a particular time. Integration work involves an implicit boundary between the established regulations and professional documents and the professionals' personal values, which guide the decisions they make and which, at times, contradict the textual values. The findings show that ECEC professionals can have divergent standpoints on how to work with texts that guide their everyday work. When this happens, it appears that the professionals find ways to overrule the textual demands or come up with a substitute explanation based on concerns that textual guidelines are not suitable for the child's unique circumstances. Here, the overriding factor appears to be the interest of the child. This can be argued to be a form of implicit resistance to the language evaluation system, although it was not clear that this resistance goes beyond individual actions in an open sense. The quote below from Sheila highlights the professionals' implicit resistance to textual guidelines:

Sheila: About TRAS, the language testing tool, the municipality has decided that every multilingual child is to be tested with this tool. However, I don't agree, so I don't do the testing because this tool is made for Norwegian-speaking children. For a multilingual child, my knowledge tells me it's wrong to test the refugee children in Norwegian, especially at the start of the kindergarten. If you're going to find out how much Norwegian this child knows, you need to see the whole picture. This is one of the tools I am saying no to unless the child speaks perfect Norwegian, and if I notice so, then again, there's no point in using it. TRAS is closely connected with the government's push for ensuring that the focus for integration in the kindergartens is on language, which I feel can be wrong if that is the only focus because it creates tension with the parents. The idea is that children need good language skills before they start school, but I know some children who are not speaking good Norwegian in the kindergarten who are doing well later in school.....they

just need the right teachers and support network around them. So, for me, testing is not the answer, even though the municipality decided to follow the national government on this.

ECEC professionals also claimed that “good” integration of refugee children in the ECEC centers is premised on the acquisition of Norwegian and native language skills, as highlighted in the quote below from Linet.

Linet: The important issue for us is figuring out how the staff, for example, can stimulate the native language, which I think is important for children and encourage the parents to speak their own language to the children. I think all of this is slowly progressing as well because one has to be sure of one’s own identity to fully integrate. If the children start early in kindergarten, they learn the language equally to the rest, so that’s good. It builds language competence, and that makes you more integrated. Researchers say if you’re behind on language, you will be so on other things as well.

Sheila: We are now very keen on how to develop the language environment for the children. In the municipality, they’re also bringing more resources for the assistance for native languages within the kindergartens.

While I do not make use of the findings from the refugee parents Article 3, in this section below, I include quotes from the parents to nuance those of the professionals on the issue of language, which the findings in article 3 show are crucial for ECEC professionals’ integration work. Overall, the findings show that refugee parents are concerned about how the ECEC professionals feel about their children’s language development. It is visible that both parents and ECEC professionals have a keen focus on language, yet their opinions on how parents should approach the language development of their children diverge. In the

quote below, Anne highlights how she dealt with professionals' concerns over her son's use of English.

Anne: I was asked at the kindergarten if he (Anne's son) could not speak, but I told them that I was also really concerned about that, and he really does not communicate but can say some words in English, and he understands English, and it is fine. So, they started judging me saying that I only spoke to him in English. I felt wrongly accused, so I had to explain myself. I told them I never wanted such a thing to happen because I live in Norway and speak Norwegian, which I consider to be my second language. I had to defend myself, and that was helpful because they thought that I might have intentionally decided that my son would not speak Norwegian; that is, I wanted him to learn only one language. At the same time, when I went home, I thought about it and felt that it was wrong. They should support that—that the child knows another language and it is their job to teach a new language. They were worried that he could not speak Norwegian and said we had to practice.

While the quote shows that both parents and professionals emphasise the importance of language, it appears that there is a clear misunderstanding between the parents and the professionals. Both local and national textual guidelines (Framework Plan for Kindergartens) for language used by the professionals support the development of more than one language among ECEC-going children. In particular, the Language Standard for Language Supervisors which is the document on language in the municipality clearly urges parents to promote their native languages at home. It should be noted that the Framework Plan for Kindergartens favours the acquisition of Norwegian among ECEC-going children. Professionals are accountable to the policy guidelines that inform the information given to parents. This may have been why Anne (parent participant) felt “judged” for saying her child only spoke a few English words. This sentiment is shared by Kelvin, who was one of the parent participants.

Kevin: The only challenge in kindergarten is language. They use Norwegian as the main language of communication, but sometimes English is used in exceptional circumstances where parents and children do not speak Norwegian. At home, we use our mother tongue. In the kindergarten, we are advised to teach the children both Norwegian and their mother tongue. Children must learn their own mother tongue at home because that one is not provided in kindergarten. So, the parents are more resourceful in teaching their children their mother tongue.

In addition to discussing the tensions that relate to language, Article 3 also presents the perception of ECEC professionals in relation to the tensions they experience in their work to “civilise” refugee children based on the appropriate routines and norms. For instance, in the interviews, the ECEC professionals made statements such as, “They should learn to be outside ... they should know about what clothes to wear we want them to eat by themselves”. I perceived such expectations to be reflective of the professionals’ perceptions of their roles in caring for and integrating refugee children and parents.

Third, the ECEC professionals face tension in their ambition to “civilise” refugee parents in their child-rearing practices. In addition to perceiving their role in passing on norms and values to the refugee children, the ECEC professionals further highlighted that they played a role in educating the refugee parents about their children’s food and nutrition, clothing, outdoor play and sleep routines according to the guidelines set for ECEC centers. The quote below from Kelvin highlights how parents approach the issue of children’s packed lunches in the ECEC center.

Kelvin: I heard a story about a mother who sent her child to the kindergarten with Injera (a delicacy from East Africa), but she did not know that this is unusual in Norway. For her, she knew that it was food and could not hurt the child, but it was

not normal because of the environment she was in. In my family, we try to make our child be more like the other kids by sending her there with the same kind of food, same kind of clothes. When we come to the way of speaking and thinking, it is difficult to deal with this, but we try to make her be like them. We feel it would be difficult for the child to understand why she has different food from others.

The findings show that ECEC professionals perceive their work as a duty that involves the civic integration of refugee families. The form of civic education shared by the professionals is geared toward ensuring that there is order and normalcy in the ECEC centers, and if achieved, then the ECEC center has contributed to the state's ambition for integration. However, the study shows that this form of integration appear straight forward and does not take into consideration the complexities surrounding refugee children and parents. The findings reveal that integration is a relational process characterised by a power dynamic, which the ECEC professionals seem to be aware of, especially when they invoke authoritative texts such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens and TRAS to demand conformity from the parents. Article 3 frames Norwegian ECEC centers as “civilising” sites where refugee children, parents and ECEC professionals are expected to follow the “civilising” ideals of the welfare state. This is because ruling relations of integration work mediate across the work of both ECEC professionals and refugee parents. Thus, integration is an institutionalised process, socially organised through ruling relations which are embedded in textual relations of various influential government texts at both local and national levels where the idea of integration is premised on the demands placed on refugees and ECEC professionals as street level bureaucrats (Löthman & Puskás, 2021; Øland, 2019).

4.4 Article 4

“Dealing with surveillance in Norwegian Early Childhood Education Centers – The perspectives of refugee parents.” Under review in the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*.

Article 4 explores refugee parents' perspectives on how they deal with perceived surveillance from ECEC professionals. This article also builds on the previous research that articulates that immigrant parents and ECEC professionals continue to face challenges in finding a consensus regarding how the children are integrated into the ECEC centers where institutional and cultural norms and values from the host societies tend to dominate child-rearing practices (Löthman & Puskás, 2021; Sønsthagen, 2020; Tobin, 2020). The article answers two research questions: How do the refugee parents experience perceived surveillance from the ECEC centers? How do refugee parents deal with the perceived surveillance of their parenting in the ECEC?

I have utilised data collected from 12 individual interviews and one focus group with refugee parents to explore the above-mentioned research questions. Employing the theoretical concepts of stigma and impression management from Erving Goffman (1959, 1963), the findings reveal how refugee parents experience surveillance of their everyday parenting, related to due to doubts by professionals about their parenting competence. In the article, I demonstrate how participants felt that ECEC professionals are interested in the parents' private family life, making the parents suspicious of the intentions behind it. It is apparent that there is a fear of being "reported to the CWS" among refugee parents. Refugee parents feel they are under surveillance and also express perceptions of subtle forms of stigma due to concerns about their ability to use appropriate discipline methods for their children. The refugee parents believe their capacity to provide "good" parenting is questioned and doubted, characterised by the fear of falling short of the normative norms of "good" parenting. I discuss this finding using Goffman's notion of socially defined stigma (1959). The parents appear to be confronted by a perceived 'negative deviance' of their parenting practices by the professionals.

The study shows that refugee parents seem unaware that ECEC professionals are obliged by law to conduct follow-ups on children's lives at home. However, they are aware that professionals in ECEC centers collaborate with other state agencies to ensure the welfare of children is protected. The findings indicate that ECEC centers and professionals play a crucial role in facilitating state-sanctioned parenting courses. For instance, refugees are obliged to attend parenting programs such as the ICDP, formalised as part of the obligatory introduction program organised by the municipality for refugees. In article 4, I discuss the participation of refugee parents in ICDP as a form of 'covering' in response to the perceived stigma associated with how the refugees perform parenting.

In Article 4, I do not include data from ECEC professionals. However, in this section, I will add quotes drawn from professionals to nuance the discussion on surveillance as expressed by refugee parents. While refugee parents seem to feel that ECEC professionals conduct surveillance due to suspicions about their parenting, the quote below illustrates that ECEC professionals perceive the concerns among refugee parents stem from interactions among themselves, especially on social media, where parents access seemingly alarmist and misleading information about welfare institutions such as CWS. The quote below is part of an interview I had with Nora (ECEC participant), where she explains why parents seem to feel surveilled and fear CWS.

Interviewer: Why do you say that the parents fear CWS?

Nora: Some immigrant parents are saying that in Norway, CWS take your children. Colleagues (at the ECEC center) say that there are different groups on Facebook and other social media apps where they talk about what other people do, and the narrative just spreads. I think that's a pity. Barnevernet (CWS) isn't that bad. Misinformation all the way. They're so frightened.

The findings also show that the fear and concern expressed by the parents emanates from a misunderstanding of CWS and a lack of adequate information about parenting in Norway. The quote below from Salome highlights expresses this.

Salome: We often see that parents have so much going on in their own lives. They feel insecure to be a parent in Norway, thinking that in Norway, children are allowed to do everything and have power over their parents, so they're afraid of being reported to CWS if they say no. They worry that CWS may come and take their children for flimsy reasons, which is not true. They don't get enough information.

To cope with surveillance and perceived stigma, findings reveal that parents resort to impression management and dialogue. Impression management involves appearing to conform to the dominant ideals of parenting propagated by the ECEC professionals related to nutrition, play, sleep and dealing with emotions to avoid surveillance. Findings show that parents do not fully conform but instead create the impression that they accept the ideals and norms of parenting. In the article (4), I analyse this as a form of avoidance using Goffman's concept of impression management (1959). This is because the parents' conformity is performed in the frontstage, however, in the backstage, the parents question and disagree with the proffered way of child rearing by the ECEC professionals. I argue that this is a form of "covering" strategy (Goffman, 1959) meant by parents to compensate for the perceived stigma so as to be seen as "good" parents. Parents use covering as a strategy to potentially protect themselves from being discredited and being surveilled.

Refugee parents also deal with surveillance through dialogue to enhance cultural understanding. They use dialogue with ECEC professionals to explain themselves and their choices on parenting to clear up misrepresentation and misunderstanding that can lead to further surveillance. Article 4 shows that the space for dialogue between parents and professionals represents a performance, reflective of Goffman's analogy of two-teams

(Goffman 1959, p. 96), whereby, the parents and ECEC teachers are both performers and audience, taking turns, with ECEC professionals setting the rules for the performance. The paper shows that integration work involves a need for cooperation and a form of interdependence among the ECEC professionals and parents for the dialogue to be effective.

In summary, in this chapter I have discussed in summary the four articles I have included in this thesis, highlighting the topics, research questions, and key findings presented in each of the four articles. Moreover, I have added new quotes that are not included in the articles from ECEC professionals and refugee parents in various sections of the chapter to nuance the findings and the discussion in this thesis.

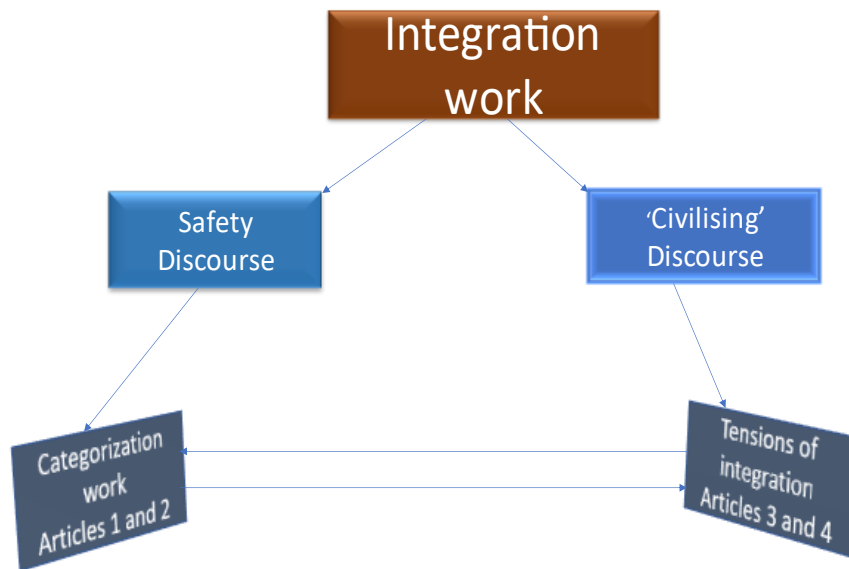
5.0 Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers. The study began from the standpoint of ECEC professionals (standpoint informants) and evolved to include interviews with refugee parents as second-level informants. The study was guided by the following research question: How is the integration of refugees in ECEC centers socially organised from the standpoint of ECEC professionals and refugee parents? Other supplementary research questions emerged progressively during research exploration and are all interlinked with the main research question. These questions are included in the four articles in the thesis.

The four articles make two overarching contributions, as displayed in the framework below:

- i. Integration through the provision of “safety,” which shows that children are implicitly categorised as vulnerable or at risk.
- ii. Integration through “civilising” refugee children and parents and the apparent tensions or dilemmas that face both professionals and parents.

Figure 3: Interpretive Framework



5.1 Integration work through the provision of “safety”

Findings in this study have shown that the discourse of safety contributes to understanding and practice of integration work and understandings of children and childhood in ECEC centres. Previous research has shown how the understandings of children as “traumatised” or in need of “safety” have become intertwined with new pedagogical ideals and standardisation of ECEC practices. Providing ‘safety’ to refugee children can be referred to as “concern work” (Kimathi and Nilsen, 2021). Concern work as a pedagogical ideal involves certain regimes of knowledge that play a crucial role in constructing “governable subjects” (Rose, 1999). The findings in Articles 1 and 2 reveal that safety work is textually mediated through the interpretation of authoritative institutional texts, such as the ICDP and policy documents, such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens and professional training on trauma such as RVTS. As social technology, ICDP and RVTS in particular appears to be influential in the everyday practices of the ECEC professionals and their

provision of safety. The discourse of safety is linked with that of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which plays an influential role in the ICDP's framework, which seeks to establish a safe emotional base for children's development.

Attachment theory has been quite influential in recent decades but has also been the subject of considerable criticism, especially regarding its failure to incorporate cultural variability (White et al, 2019; Bjerre et.al, 2021). This criticism is founded on the argument that attachment theory universalises the emotionality of childcare and invalidates other parenting styles that do not conform to the ideals of care, particularly among Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) countries (Keller, 2018). Departing from the premise that there exist different cultural scripts for parenting (Rogoff, 2003), it is arguable that there could be a missing analytical link between the parents' and ECEC professionals' material conditions and parenting styles (see Scheidecker et al., 2022).

An emerging body of ethnographic scientific research has shown that childcare and children's development pathways vary in relation to cultural, socio-economic, ecological, and political conditions (Scheidecker et al., 2022). This reflects a fundamental disagreement between the attachment theory based 'psy' discourses on one hand, and ethnographic scientific studies on children and childhood on the other hand. Fundamentally, 'Psy'-oriented studies present a discourse of "children at risk" (See World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group, 2018). Scholars who criticise the "children at risk" approach argue for a rethinking of the implicit hegemony of interventions based on attachment theory to avoid its imperialising and categorising effect within the early childhood and care sector (See Pettersvold & Østrem, 2012; Marope & Kaga, 2015; White et al., 2019; Bjerre et al., 2021; Scheidecker et.al 2021). This thesis brings to attention the power of 'psy' discourses in integration work and contends that particular understandings of children can lead to assumptions regarding a specific group of people, such as refugees. Psy discourses, as other scholars have argued

(see Bjerre et al., 2021; Lunneblad, 2017), need to be seen not as arbitrary knowledge; otherwise, they run the risk of being used as the professional language through which actions and decisions on integration work are legitimised. The implication is that professionals should not regard the children as representatives of the “traumatised” category but instead use their professional discretion.

In addition to the language found in the ICDP, the language of safety is visible in authoritative texts such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017 p. 33), which emphasises the need for a safe start and optimal bonding between ECEC professionals and children at a general level. While the text (Framework Plan for Kindergartens) is not as explicit about the notion of “safety” presented in this thesis, when ECEC professionals talk about the need to provide safety to potentially “traumatised” children, it is arguable that they are reconnecting to their professional language. Based on the accounts of ECEC professionals and refugee parents, ICDP, RVTS and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens play a coordinating role in “organising texts” that the ECEC professionals are part of and are ruled by.

The findings in Article 4 reveal that ECEC professionals serve as parent mentors in ICDP training. These findings suggest that this role may influence how refugee parents engage in integration work. Some professionals conducting parenting training in ICDP are also integrating their children into ECEC centres, with expectations for parents to fulfil. Working as ICDP mentors, ECEC professionals occupy a dual role of teaching refugees parenting and evaluating the parents' performance (Erstad, 2015). Article 4 demonstrates that refugee parents feel the need to attend ICDP to avoid surveillance and the perceived stigma of their parenting. This is presented as a form of covering, since those who attend ICDP earn a certain credibility, that they have acquired or been exposed to the dominant ways of parenting and interacting with children. While attendance to ICDP was initially voluntary, it became a mandatory obligation for all refugees in Norway in 2021.

The present study reveals that refugee parents' attendance at ICDP is not solely due to obligation but is also a form of impression management (Goffman, 1963). This strategy allows refugee parents to enhance their image with ECEC professionals and other welfare state professionals whose everyday work involves a form of "surveillance" to ensure children are protected from harmful practices and environments. Surveillance involves imposing a particular form of conduct on people by inducing a perception of being watched (Foucault, 1979). In this study, I present surveillance as an institutional process which ECEC professional and refugee parents participate in, albeit differently. ECEC professionals are accountable to the state and are expected social technology in the form of assessment manuals (TRAS), and parenting programs and courses (ICDP and RVTS) to which provide expert knowledge to define and arrive at solutions for particular social issues (Leibetseder, 2011), in this case integration work. Refugee parents are also accountable to the welfare state, through the obligation to attend the introduction program, parenting courses such as ICDP and COSP (not covered in this research) and following guidelines from ECEC professionals on parenting. The study shows that ECEC centers and CWS are among the "long surveillance chain" of state institutions and their surveillance practices, which function both to define and shape how parenting is performed in Norwegian society (Hennum & Aamodt 2021: 206), as well as how professionals conduct their work. For instance, the consequences of surveillance by government institutions like ECEC centers could in extreme cases lead to notifications to the Norwegian CWS. Viewed from a broader perspective, the role of ECEC professionals as ICDP trainers can be understood as a form of symbolic power they hold over refugee parents (Sønsthagen, 2021; Norheim, 2022). Previous studies (see; Nilsen, 2017a; Franck, 2014) have shown that professionals can, at times, engage in work that leads to unintentional labelling or creates a perception of children as problematic. Awareness about this risk of labelling is crucial because categories produce hierarchies among those who are classified as either "normal" or "deviant". It is the deviance that becomes the focus of intervention measures to maintain normalcy and

social order, as stated in Article 1 (Kimathi and Nilsen, 2021). The contribution of this thesis is that rather than presenting social technologies founded within psy-discourses as a compelling reality of all children, they should be regarded as one of many ways of understanding and constructing children and childhoods and interrogated further for any underlying assumptions and judgements placed on children which professionals and parents may adopt normatively. This means that the argument for professional discretion in integration work is not as straightforward in such circumstances.

5.2 Integration through “civilising” refugee children and parents

The discussion in this section focuses predominately on Articles 3 and 4 of this thesis. As “civilising arenas, ECEC centers practice integration with the interests of the welfare state by organising and maintaining esteemed norms and values (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Findings in this study emphasise the connection between the integration efforts of ECEC professionals and the aspirations to instil culturally dominant norms and values as part of civic integration (Abu El-Haj et al., 2018; Goodman, 2019). In pursuing integration, both ECEC professionals and refugee parents find themselves entangled in textually mediated power dynamics associated with integration work. ECEC professionals play a key role of “civilising” the refugee parents on "best practices" for parenting. Texts which include the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) and the Norwegian Government’s Integration Strategy for 2019–2022 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), and Norway’s Migration and Integration 2021–2022 - Report to the OECD (Thorud, 2022), reveal the government's commitment to refugee integration through ECEC centers in Norway. These documents prioritise Norwegian language acquisition as a key element in integration.

Consistent with prior research (see Kulbrandstad, 2017; Norheim, 2022), findings in this study (See articles 3 and 4), illustrate that both ECEC professionals and refugee parents share concerns about refugees learning the Norwegian language. However, their motivations differ. For ECEC professionals, the aspiration to "civilise" refugee children

and parents through learning Norwegian is a professional obligation outlined in the the above-mentioned texts. Yet, ECEC professionals grapple with the dilemma of integrating refugee children while providing opportunities for them to learn other languages. For refugee parents, the desire to learn Norwegian is rooted in the need to minimise potential misunderstandings with welfare state workers, including ECEC professionals, and consequently reduce surveillance of their parenting. Parents believe that being unable to converse in Norwegian during meetings with ECEC, social workers, or healthcare professionals could potentially lead to stigma. This thesis shows that ECEC professionals and refugee parents engage with the "civilising" discourse and the resulting tensions as they navigate its influence on integration work. Smith's (2005) concepts of work is relevant in highlighting that the actions and perspectives of ECEC professionals and refugee parents in integration work are integral to an institutional complex which they all participate in and are shaped by.

For ECEC professionals, "civilising" refugee children and parents involves language acquisition, adherence to social norms and ideals related to food, sleep, play activities, interaction with nature, and parenting concepts. This brings to light the potential tensions inherent in integration work. While both ECEC professionals and refugee parents engage with the "civilising" discourse, they experience it from different perspectives marked by asymmetrical power relations. Serving as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), ECEC professionals act as an extension of the welfare state, adhering to institutional guidelines and practices outlined in policy documents.

The current study reveals the existence of underlying gaps that warrant attention in the effort to establish a diverse and multicultural Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) environment for all. The tension in integration work, as emphasised earlier, highlights that, as discussed in section 1.2 of this thesis, integration is a contested concept both in discourse and in practice. Drawing on the narratives of ECEC professionals and refugee parents,

integration, as a sensitising concept, is described using generalising discourses, some of which can be traced back to authoritative and lower-level texts (Smith, 2005). Norway's aspirations for "civic integration" of refugees and immigrants through state policies and welfare-funded institutions to promote language, work, and socio-cultural understanding of Norwegian society (Brochmann & Mitbøen, 2020) are evident in the present thesis. The responsibility for this work falls on street-level bureaucrats in various welfare state institutions among other levels of both local and national governments. Meanwhile, refugees bear the primary burden of adapting to the majority culture (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016) meaning that refugees have a critical role in doing integration work and thus are not mere recipients of integration.

The nature of integration work for refugee parents is different to that of ECEC professionals who work in a seemingly structured institutional environment with various hierarchies and guidelines. In contrast, refugee parents do integration within undefined boundaries with their role not as explicitly defined within textual relations as that of ECEC professionals. Moreover, the study shows that while both Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals and refugee parents are objectified within the same textually mediated ruling relations of integration work, it is the parents who seem to experience surveillance related to how they and their children are integrating. As such my research explores how parents deal with surveillance. Integration work for refugee parents involves building rapport with ECEC professionals through dialogue and impression management, as explored through Goffman's (1963) theoretical lens of stigma. This aligns with other previous studies (See Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Goodman, 2019; Sønsthagen, 2021; Handulle, 2022; Magnussen, 2023) in which the overarching issue is the expectations placed upon refugees to be "civilised." The expectations are socially set markers of civic behaviour considered acceptable, which they are expected to fulfil.

An overarching contribution of this thesis is that it presents the opportunities and dilemmas of integration. Specifically, it underscores the important role that ECEC centers play as welfare state "civilising" institutions for refugees and immigrants (Gilliam and Gulløv, 2017; Abu El-Haj et.al, 2018) on the one hand, and the tensions that surround the "civilising" project of welfare institutions seeking to integrate refugees as "acceptable" citizens through dominant values, which at times are not commensurate with Norwegian value systems, on the other hand. This reveals a complex process open to contestation regarding whether integration is an obligation or a choice for both ECEC professionals and refugee parents.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This study explores the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers, connecting with the local experiences of ECEC professionals and refugee parents. All participants in this study were above 18 years of age, and no ECEC-aged child was involved. Thus, the presented findings do not incorporate data from children. The exclusion of children from this research study does not diminish the importance of children's voices in knowledge creation. Norway ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in 1991, making it one of the first countries to do so. Article 12 of the UNCRC underscores children's right to be heard, emphasising that children who can express their concerns should be heard and their views considered. Consequently, there are scholars who have conducted research with refugee children. For instance, Kalkman's (2012) study explored how the fundamental right of expression is promoted and supported concerning young refugee children in daycare centers in Norway. Nevertheless, there are limited studies reflecting the voices of refugee children in relation to ECEC centers. Consequently, my study can only present an exploration of the social organisation of integration work that excludes children, who are a significant part of ECEC local experiences. While this is a limitation of the current study, it provides an opportunity for

future studies on the social organisation of integration work in ECEC centers from the standpoint of ECEC children in Norway.

5.4 Implications for research and practice

The present study contributes to scholarly knowledge concerning the social organisation of integration work in Norwegian ECEC centers. The focus has been on elucidating the ruling relations of integration work, emphasising how texts mediate the organisation of integration work through safety and "civilising" discourses. The findings are relevant to scholars and practitioners in ECEC centers globally, especially those in countries resettling refugees and asylum seekers due to forced migration. Additionally, this sociological inquiry is pertinent to researchers and policymakers working in the broader field of immigrant integration.

The findings reveal that ECEC institutions play a significant role in facilitating children's learning of the Norwegian language, self-regulation, and acceptable norms. Consequently, I conceptualise ECEC centers as "civilising institutions" in line with Gilliam & Gulløv (2017). The present thesis demonstrates that ECEC professionals face the challenge of balancing between institutional expectations and ideals for integration, such as the ability to speak Norwegian and cultural and embodied differences amongst refugee parents.

It remains unclear why integration is omitted from the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) despite being prominently featured in most of the government white papers and reports. Moreover, the texts on which integration is anchored do not define it. For instance, Norway's Migration and Integration 2021–2022 – Report to the OECD (Thorud, 2022, p. 8), the Norwegian government's Integration Strategy for 2019–2022 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018, p. 4), the Migration and Integration Report for Norway to the OECD. It appears that welfare state professionals have room for discretion on how to interpret and implement integration, and broader research is needed. Similarly, theThe

Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) is not prescriptive enabling ECEC professionals to organise the integration work in their own way.

This study can be valuable to practitioners in the ECEC sector and scholars in disciplines focusing on educational institutions, integration, and refugee studies—especially those seeking deeper insights into the ruling relations of which organise and coordinate integration work across people, time and places. Similar to previous studies highlighting dilemmas and tensions around diversity and integration within welfare state institutions, the present study also underscores that integration is not a straightforward path for all involved actors. Continued reflexivity on standpoint is privileged in decision making processes and the ruling relations are evident can inform how integration is organised and done. In this context, an implication would be a shift from "civilising" children and parents towards a dialogical process of understanding each other's standpoints while developing mechanisms for making integration work at both local levels and within higher government agencies.

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Appendix 1 Information letter for ECEC professionals

Request to taking part in my research project

This is a request for you to participate in a doctoral research project whose main purpose is to *explore* the role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway.

In this letter, I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

This study seeks to find out the role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway. The scope of this study covers ECEC professionals, and refugee parents.

The guiding research question for this study is: ***What role do the ECEC centers play as arenas of integration for refugee children and parents in Norway?***

The data collected during this study will be used for the purpose of a doctoral research leading to a doctoral degree in social science at the University of Agder.

The data collected after analysis will be used for to write refereed journal articles as well as academic conferences and research seminars.

Who is responsible for the research project? *The University of Agder, department of sociology and social work is the institution responsible for this project and entirely an individual task to be conducted by myself (Eric Kimathi).*

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are receiving a request to participate in this study courtesy of being recommended to me by a colleague or a kindergarten where you work as a professional. In this light, you fulfill the criteria to participate in the study.

To get the sample for this study, I am relying on snowballing and purposeful methods of recruiting participants.

What does participation involve for you?

Kindergarten teachers

- *If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in a one-to-one interview or a focus group interview. It will take approx. one hour. The interview includes questions about your understanding of the concept of integration for refugee children, professional training and preparedness to work with refugees' families and children, the integration process itself within kindergartens and the complexities relating to the role of kindergartens in doing integration.*
- *The interviews will be conducted at a place agreed upon between us and preferably to be done in English since I am not proficient in Norwegian. However, interviews can be done in Norwegian with the help of a research assistant who will be a translator.*
- *With your consent, I may request the parents to discuss various perspectives in relation to teachers/professionals working to integrate their children.*
- *Please note that this research offers you freedom to discuss/talk about your nationality, ethnicity and religious beliefs and how these influence or connection with your work in the kindergarten.*
- *Children are not participants in this study and therefore will not be interviewed.*
- *Your answers will be recorded electronically for later transcription.*

Participation is voluntary.

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. You will be free to give the information you wish to and will not be coerced to give information against your free will.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

Please note that I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) of this PhD project. Any data acquired will be processed confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- *Only my supervisors, research assistant and I will have access to the data.*
- *As indicated earlier, the personal information will be anonymised to ensure the data remains confidential. I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data and stored in a personal official one drive service with personal password provided for by the University of Agder etc.*
- *After transcription and analysis of data, the discussion will be made into publications such as the PhD thesis and journal articles. Participants of this study will not be recognisable in the said publications.*

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

Anonymous data will be stored for further use in publication and cross checking after the end of the project. There are possibilities for follow up studies and therefore the data will be archived for future research. The data will be stored in a personal official one drive service with personal password provided for by the University of Agder and will only be accessible to me as the primary researcher.

Your rights

Here are your rights during this study. So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you.
- request that your personal data is deleted.
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified.
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Agder, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation and therefore the project is permitted to proceed.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *Eric Kimathi, PhD Research Fellow, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder. Email address [eric.kimathi @uia.no](mailto:eric.kimathi@uia.no).*

Project Supervisor: Ann Christin Ecklund Nilsen, Professor Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder. Email address: ann.c.nilsen@uia.no.

- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Participant consent form for ECEC professionals

I have received and understood information about the project: **The role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway** and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent to participate in *an interview for this research*.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. (*August 2022*)

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 2 Information letter for refugee parents



Request to taking part in my research project

The role of Norwegian Kindergartens in the integration of refugee children

This is a request for you to participate in a research project titled: An institutional ethnographic study on the role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway.

In this letter, I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

This study seeks to find out the role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway. The scope of this study covers ECEC professionals, and refugee parents.

The guiding research question for this study is: *What role do the ECEC centers play as arenas of integration for refugee children and parents in Norway?*

The data collected during this study will be used for the purpose of a doctoral research leading to a doctoral degree in social science at the University of Agder.

The data collected after analysis will be used for to write refereed journal articles as well as used for academic purposes such as conference and research seminars.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Agder, department of sociology and social work is the institution responsible for this project and entirely an individual task to be conducted by myself (Eric Kimathi).

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are receiving a request to participate in this study courtesy of being recommended to me by a friend or a kindergarten leader where your child attends. In this light, you fulfil the criteria to participate in the study.

To get the sample for this study, I am relying on snowballing and purposeful methods of recruiting participants.

What does participation involve?

Parents and guardians

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an interview. It will take approx. 1 hour. The interview includes questions about your understanding of the concept of integration for refugee children, your role in integration process of your children as a parent and relations with the ECEC professionals working at the kindergarten. Your answers will be recorded electronically for later transcription. The interviews will be conducted at a place agreed upon between us and preferably to be done in English since I do not speak Norwegian. However, I am open to doing the interview in Norwegian with the help of a translator who will be part of this project as a research assistant.

- *With your consent, I may request the teachers to discuss important issues connected to you and the child/children regarding integration in the kindergarten.*
- *Please note that this research offers you freedom to discuss/tell about your nationality, ethnicity and religious beliefs and how these influence or connection with your expectations on integration of your children at the kindergarten.*
- *Children are not participants in this study and therefore will not be interviewed.*

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. You will be free to give the information you wish and will not be coerced to give information against your free will. Besides, you will be given a chance to read the transcribed data from the interview to confirm what you said before.

Your personal privacy – how your personal data will be used and stored.

Please note that I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) of this PhD project. Any data acquired will be processed confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act of Norway).

- *Only my supervisors, research assistant and I will have access to the data.*
- *As indicated earlier, the personal information will be anonymised to ensure the data remains confidential. I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data and stored in a personal official one drive service with personal password provided for by the University of Agder etc*
- *After transcription and analysis of data, the discussion will be made into publications such as the PhD thesis and journal articles. Participants of this study will not be recognisable in the said publications.*

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

Anonymous data will be stored for further use in publication and cross checking after the end of the project. There are possibilities for follow up studies and therefore the data will be archived for future research. The data will be stored in a personal official one drive service with personal password provided for by the University of Agder and will only be accessible to me as the primary researcher.

Your rights

Here are your rights during this study. So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you.
- request that your personal data is deleted.
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified.
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Agder, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation and granted approval for the progress of the project.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *Eric Kimathi, PhD Research Fellow, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder. Email address eric.kimathi@uia.no.*

Project Supervisor: Ann Christin Ecklund, Associate Professor Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder. Email address: ann.c.nilsen@uia.no.

- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personvertjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader

Participant consent form for refugee parents

I have received and understood information about the project: The role of ECEC centers (kindergartens) as arenas for the integration of refugee children and parents in Norway and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent to participate in this interview.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *[August 2022]*

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix 3 Interview guide for ECEC professionals

Part 1: Introduction and ethical considerations

Thank you for consenting/agreeing to participate in this study. Before we proceed, I will revisit some of the information you've read in the information letter. My aim in this project is to explore the role of ECEC centers as arenas for integration of refugee children and parents in Norway. I therefore will ask you questions about your experiences and perspectives that relate to this topic.

Moreover, I wish to emphasize that participation in this project is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to answer or say anything you feel uncomfortable with. If you wish to withdraw from this interview or to withdraw your interview material in future, any data or recorded material will be immediately deleted.

I also wish to let you know that this interview will be recorded with an audio device, and this data will remain confidential and used only for the purpose of this study. Besides, I will ensure that you remain entirely anonymous in this research project as agreed upon by signing the information letter.

Part 2: Interview questions.

1. Can you please introduce yourself and give a brief background about yourself?
2. How long have you worked in kindergarten?
3. How long have you been an ECEC teacher?
4. Where did you take your training as a kindergarten professional?
5. What specific duties do you have in your role as a kindergarten professional?
6. Can you describe what characterises a typical day at work for you?
7. As I mentioned in the introduction, my research is about the role of kindergartens as arenas for refugee children and parents in Norway. Have you worked with this topic before?

8. Is integration a concept that you have encountered before as part of your everyday work as a kindergarten professional?
9. Do you receive children and parents who are refugees or have a refugee background in this kindergarten?
10. Can you describe how you as a professional and the kindergarten in general receives refugee children and parents?
11. What would say are specific activities, and ways that you work with integration of refugees?
12. What are the usual issues or areas of concern when you receive refugees in your everyday work?
13. What is your view regarding Norway's integration policy and kindergarten work with refugee children?
14. Can you comment about the kindergarten framework plan and how it connects with integration of refugee children?
15. Have you received any extra training or knowledge that focuses on how to work with refugee children and parents?
16. Who and what determines how integration is practiced in kindergartens?
17. What challenges (if any) have you encountered in your works towards integration of refugee children within kindergartens?
18. What do you think needs to be done to improve or make better how kindergarten staff work with refugee children and parents in Norway?
19. Are there expectations for refugee parents on how to raise their children in connection with your guidelines?
20. How do you prepare them to adapt? And what do you do for those who do not wish to adapt or need longer time.
21. How do you handle disagreements or potential for disagreements with the parents

Appendix 4 Interview guide for Refugee parents

Part 1: Introduction and ethical considerations

Thank you for consenting/agreeing to participate in this study. Before we proceed, I will revisit some of the information you've read in the information letter. My aim in this project is to explore the role of ECEC centers as arenas for integration of refugee children and parents in Norway. I therefore will ask you questions about your experiences and perspectives that relate to this topic.

Moreover, I wish to emphasize that participation in this project is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to answer or say anything you feel uncomfortable with. If you wish to withdraw from this interview or to withdraw your interview material in future, any data or recorded material will be immediately deleted.

I also wish to let you know that this interview will be recorded with an audio device, and this data will remain confidential and used only for the purpose of this study. Besides, I will ensure that you remain entirely anonymous in this research project as agreed upon by signing the information letter.

Part 2: Interview questions.

1. Can you please introduce me and give a brief background about yourself?
2. In which country did you grow up? How old were you when you came to Norway?
3. Kindly tell me about your usual daily routine at home or at work.
4. What language do you use when interacting with your child?
5. How many children do you have?
6. Are the children going to school or kindergartens here in Norway?
7. When did you enroll your children in kindergarten?
8. How did you experience the enrollment process?
9. In what way do you think life is similar to your previous life back in your home country?

10. In what way do you think life is different in Norway?
11. When you moved to Norway, did you attend the introduction programme for refugees and asylum seekers?
12. In Norway there is a big focus on integration for refugees especially by the government and municipalities, what do you think about the process of integration?
13. Have you thought about how kindergartens in Norway contribute to the integration of your children and yourself?
14. How would you describe your relations with the kindergarten staff regarding your child and yourself?
15. Do you have specific expectations for your children's integration within kindergartens that you have communicated to the kindergarten staff?
16. Do you think the staff acknowledges your expectations of how they receive your child/children in kindergarten?
17. In what ways do the kindergarten staff help you to understand their expectations and the regulations that you need to fulfill?
18. Do you think your position as a parent is recognised/appreciated in determining how your children are integrated in the kindergartens?
19. In what way have you been involved by the kindergartens? How would you your relations are?
20. How do you handle disagreements or potential for disagreements with the kindergarten staff?
21. Are there things that you think undermine the integration of refugee's children within kindergartens?
22. If you were to give recommendations on how to improve this process, what would you say?

Appendix 5: SIKT Ethical clearance letter

6/24/2019

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

NSD's assessment

 Print

Project title

The role of Norwegian kindergartens in the integration of refugee children

Reference number

419935

Registered

17.01.2019 av Eric Kimathi - eric.kimathi@uia.no

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Universitetet i Agder / Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap / Institutt for sosiologi og sosialt arbeid

Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

Eric Kimathi, eric.kimathi@uia.no, tlf: 97381603

Type of project

Research Project

Project period

13.08.2018 - 31.08.2022

Status

19.02.2019 - Assessed

Assessment (1)

19.02.2019 - Assessed

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, presupposing that it is carried out in accordance with the information given in the Notification Form and attachments dated 19.02.2019, as well as dialogue with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will be processing special categories of personal data about racial or ethnic origin and religious beliefs in addition to general categories of personal data, until 31.08.2022

LEGAL BASIS

The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (1) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed

and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.

The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is therefore explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a), cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).

<https://meldeskjema.nsd.no/vurdering/5c332c17-c0b5-4606-b867-493074454213>

1/2

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA

NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow up the progress of the project underway (every other year) and at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded/is being carried out in accordance with what is documented.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Silje Fjelberg Opsvik
Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)



[Notification form](#) / [The role of Norwegian kindergartens in the integration of refuge...](#) / Assessment

Assessment of processing of personal data

Reference number
419935

Assessment type
Standard

Date
13.01.2023

Project title

The role of Norwegian kindergartens in the integration of refugee children

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Universitetet i Agder / Fakultet for samfunnsvitenskap / Institutt for sosiologi og sosialt arbeid

Project leader

Eric Kimathi

Project period

13.08.2018 - 31.08.2023

Categories of personal data

General

Special

Legal basis

Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a)

Explicit consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 9 nr. 2 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 31.08.2023.

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Comment

Data Protection Services has assessed the change registered on 10.01.2023.

The period for processing personal data has been extended until 31.08.2023.

If it later becomes necessary to process personal data for a longer period, then it will be necessary to inform your participants.

We will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Contact person: Silje Fjelberg Opsvik
Good luck with the rest of the project!

**Co-author declaration**

For dissertation that includes articles with more than one author, the following applies (10.1 in Regulations for the degree of PhD at the University of Agder):

- The PhD student should provide a brief description of his/her input into each component. The description is to be attached to the dissertation.
- This description is also used as a declaration of associate authorship and should be signed by the PhD student, the principal supervisor (where he/she is an associate author), and the other two most central authors.

Article title: Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers' work to promote early intervention and integration
Place of publication: Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood
Lead author: Eric Kimathi
PhD student: Eric Kimathi
Co-author(s), if any: Ann Christin Eklund Nilsen
<p>PhD student's contribution (please describe (text) in addition to estimate percent (%)):</p> <p>In this article, we bring together our two research projects and use institutional ethnography to address the following research question: how do kindergarten staff 'do' early intervention and integration in their everyday work? The ambition of the article is to show how dominant knowledge regimes anchored on social technology may get at odds with policy measures upon which the ECEC professionals are accountable to when doing integration and early intervention with children deemed in need of the same.</p> <p>My individual contribution to the paper is that I use the analysis from my PhD empirical research with 13 ECEC professionals to elucidate how the professionals engage in integration work that revolves around managing categories. The overarching argument that I contribute in this paper, is that social technology in the form of parenting programmes such as the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) embedd the notion of trauma amongst refugees which seemingly emmerge from psy-discourses. When kindergarten teachers who in my thesis are referred to as ECEC professionals participate in ICDP as a social technology, the knowledge regime from ICDP mediates the everyday integration work with refugee children and parents.</p>

Co-author declaration

I declare that the above information is correct.

16th May 2023



Date and the PhD student's signature

16th May 2023



Date and the lead author's signature

Date and a central author's signature

16/5-23 AnnChristin E. Nilse
Date and the principal supervisor's signature, if required

Appendix 7 Demographic table of participants

Demographic table of participants

Table 1: ECEC Professionals

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Job title</i>	<i>ECEC center¹</i>	<i>Language (Mother tongue)</i>
Sophie	Preschool teacher/Language adviser	B and C	Norwegian
Ruth	Pedagogue/Language adviser	B	Norwegian and Arabic
Emily	Special needs teacher	C	Norwegian
Nancy	Psychiatric nurse/Teacher	C	Norwegian
Caro	Pedagogue	A	Norwegian
Salome	Deputy Manager/Pedagogical leader	B	Norwegian
Nora	Pedagogical leader	A	Norwegian
Britney	Manager	C	Norwegian
Linnet	Pedagogue/Language adviser	A and B	Norwegian
Sheila	Pedagogue/Language adviser	B and C	Norwegian
Olivia	Pedagogue	C	Norwegian
Joanna	Pedagogue	B	Norwegian and Arabic
Purity	Pedagogue	B	Norwegian

¹ ECEC center B is publicly and exclusively run for refugee children, while center C is publicly run for all children. ECEC center A is privately owned. All ECEC centers receive state funding in Norway.

Table 2: Refugee Parents

<i>Random pseudonyms</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>No of children</i>	<i>No. of years in Norway</i>
Ida	Married	28	4	- ²
George	Married	44	2	-
Haron	Married	42	4	-
Linn	Single mother	36	2	-
Kevin	Married	38	2	5
Ole	Married	36	2	8.5
Jonas	Married	30	1	1
Astrid	Married	-	2	5
Lars	Married	38	2	20
Anne	Married	-	2	22
Maya	Married	-	3	-
Anders	Married	-	1	1.5
Espen	Married	38	2	3
Eirik	Married	-	4	3.5
Mary	Married	36	3	4

² This means that the participant did not present the information or wished that it is not indicated in the research.

Appendix 8 List of publications

Article 1

Kimathi, E., & Nilsen, A. C. E. (2021). Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers' work to promote early intervention and integration. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 146394912110454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491211045419>

Article 2

Kimathi, E. (2022). Construction of a 'traumatized' refugee child in need of safety in Norwegian kindergartens. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, 17(2), 53–78. <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v17i2.386>

Article 3

Kimathi, E. (2023). Tensions of Difference in Integrating Refugee Children in Norwegian ECEC Centers. *Nordisk Barnehageforskning*, 20(4), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.23865/nbf.v20.409>

Article 4

Dealing with surveillance in Norwegian Early Childhood Education Centers – The perspectives of refugee parents.” Under review in the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*.

Managing categories: The role of social technology in kindergarten teachers' work to promote early intervention and integration

Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cie**Eric Kimathi** 

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Abstract

Early intervention and integration are highly valued ideals in kindergartens in Norway. Building on two research projects informed by institutional ethnography, the authors address how kindergarten teachers 'do' early intervention and integration in their everyday work. They argue that this work largely revolves around managing categories, whether making categories fit people or making people fit categories. In this work, the kindergarten teachers rely on social technology that is influenced by a 'psy-discourse'. Despite good intentions, the social technology and the professionals' use of it ends up constructing the categories they are intended to help or 'heal'.

Keywords

early intervention, institutional ethnography, integration, psy-discourse, social technology

Introduction

Kindergartens shall promote respect for human dignity by highlighting, valuing and promoting diversity and mutual respect. The children shall be able to discover that there are many ways in which to think, act and live. ... Kindergartens shall help ensure that all children feel they are being seen and acknowledged

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for whom they are and highlight the place and value of each one of them within the group. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 8–9)

The above text is taken from a section describing the core values of Norwegian kindergartens as set out in the ‘Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). The Framework Plan is an authoritative document outlining the values, responsibilities, objectives, working methods and learning areas with which all kindergartens in Norway must comply. Our objective in this article is to explore how kindergarten staff work to realize these ideals.

In Norway, more than 97% of all children aged three to five attend kindergarten, while the enrolment rate among children aged one to two is almost 85%. Compared to the other Nordic countries, the expenditure on kindergartens in Norway is high, at almost 2% of gross domestic product in 2015 (Nygård et al., 2019). In 2017, more than 17% of the children in kindergartens had a minority-language background, defined as children with a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Sami, Danish, Swedish or English (Såheim Bjørkli, 2018). Hence, it is fair to say that kindergartens have become an important arena for social cohesion and integration in the Norwegian welfare state (see also Kuusisto and Garvis, 2020).

The ambitions to which kindergartens should aspire are manifold. They ‘shall promote democracy, diversity and mutual respect, equality, sustainable development, life skills and good health’ and meet ‘every child’s need for care, security, belongingness and respect ... enabling the children to participate in and contribute to the community’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 7). Kindergarten staff are required to

adapt their general pedagogical practices to suit the children’s needs and circumstances, including children who may require additional support for shorter or longer periods. ... For some children, early intervention could mean that staff have to work methodically and systematically – over shorter or longer periods – to include these children in meaningful social relationships. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 40)

In this article, we relate these ambitions to the concepts of ‘early intervention’ and ‘integration’, ideals that are valued highly both in policy pertaining to early childhood, as exemplified in the extract above, and in welfare policy more broadly, as expressed in different White Papers and public reports. For instance, ‘early intervention’ is a key concept not only in White Papers and official reports within the education and child protection sectors (e.g. Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 2016; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019–2020), but also within the financial sector (Norwegian Ministry of Finance, 2009). ‘Integration’ is the stated goal of Norwegian immigration policy (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2012–2013). These concepts undoubtedly stem from good intentions. Indeed, as ideals, they are ‘immune to critique’ (Pettersvold and Østrem, 2012). Our aim in this article is thus not to question the ideals per se, but to explore how these ideals, as they are transformed into practice, may have unintended consequences. The question of interest, therefore, is how kindergarten staff ‘do’ early intervention and integration in their everyday work.

Drawing on two research projects on, respectively, early intervention (Nilsen, 2017b) and integration (Kimathi, in progress) in kindergartens, we argue that professional work to promote these ideals revolves predominantly around categorization. In this work, the kindergarten teachers rely on social technology that is influenced by a ‘psy-discourse’ – the influential body of knowledge produced by the disciplines of psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry and psychotherapy (Rose,

1999). We use the term ‘social technology’ in a social scientific sense to refer to the application of methods and theories, such as assessment manuals and training programmes, to obtain a science-based analysis for specific purposes (Leibetseder, 2011). Social technology provides expert knowledge with which to define and reach solutions to social problems on the front line. We argue that the psy-discourse, mediated by social technology, may at times be at odds with the policy objectives that justify its usage. Paradoxically, therefore, with the intention of doing good and helping children and families in need, kindergarten teachers simultaneously construct the categories of people they are intending to help or ‘heal’. Analytically, our discussion is informed by institutional ethnography, with theoretical inspiration from Ian Hacking’s (2004) theory of how people are ‘made up’.

An analytical framework for tracing categories

Our analysis resembles a ‘keywords approach’ (Hennum and Aamodt, 2021). Hennum and Aamodt (2021: 207) claim that keywords have two main characteristics: they can incorporate multiple meanings, rendering them ‘slippery’ in usage, and they are usually overwhelmingly positive and impossible to be ‘against’. Keywords constitute and delimit a field, reproducing ‘shared matters of concern’ (Hennum and Aamodt, 2021: 208). We start our inquiry with a notion of these concepts as *sensitizing* (Blumer, 1954). When we, as professionals, scholars or practitioners, encounter ‘early intervention’ or ‘integration’ in a statement, we can, based on our experiential or theoretical knowledge and our familiarity with institutional discourse, deduce an interpretation of the concepts, despite their lack of agency and action (indicating who does what to/with whom). They sensitize us to a certain way of thinking and a presumptive course of events. According to Smith (2005: 111), institutional discourses, to which professionals are held accountable, are dominated by nominalization, thus dissolving the intimacy between word and experience. The words and phrases that are used therefore function as ‘shells’, in themselves devoid of empirical substance and agency. In contrast to definitive concepts, denoting specific actions, people, places and so on, sensitizing concepts, or ‘shells’, lack empirical content, although they may well be linked to certain actions or occurrences that can be explored empirically. Thus, sensitizing concepts provide an interesting entry point for empirical analysis.

Both our research projects were informed by institutional ethnography. Associated primarily with the Canadian sociologist Dorothy E Smith (2005), institutional ethnography is a method of inquiry and a research orientation dedicated to exploring the ruling relations of people’s ordinary everyday lives. Ruling relations refer to objectified forms of knowledge that are abstracted from people’s lives yet still inform how people think and act locally. Predominantly mediated by texts, whether authoritative, such as White Papers, frameworks and guidelines, or ‘functional’, such as signs, forms and manuals, ruling relations denote the concerted coordination of consciousnesses that link people across time and space. People working in kindergartens take part in ruling relations when, for instance, they invent rhymes, go for excursions or assess children’s abilities. In different and often concealed ways, they relate to the overall objectives of the kindergarten, as manifested in a framework plan or White Paper, and these objectives are intricately linked to international laws and standards as set out in transnational organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations. While the individual kindergarten teacher is unlikely to be aware of how they relate to these actors in their everyday work, they know this vast institutional complex expertly from their own standpoint. In institutional ethnography, the empirical quest is to explore the institutional complex from the standpoint of people who are situated somewhere within it. It is not the institutional complex per se that is the subject of research but the ruling relations within it that inform the everyday experience. In other words, the quest is to explore how what is being done here and now is linked to actions of other people

situated in another time and place in the institutional complex of which the experience is part. The starting point of the inquiry is thus the standpoint informants' work and knowledge about their work.

In both our projects, we started the inquiry from the standpoint of kindergarten staff. Nilsen conducted interviews with 14 kindergarten teachers and assistants, asking them about their work when 'doing' early intervention. They were asked, for instance, what they looked for when they assessed children, what kinds of activities they did and what kinds of resources they used. Nilsen followed their everyday work filling in forms, attending meetings and taking part in training. She conducted interviews with people with whom the standpoint informants cooperated, such as nurses, child welfare workers and teachers. She discovered that doing early intervention in practice revolved around identifying children who, in different ways, did not conform to a certain standard, and subsequently finding out how to deal with them. These were children who were causing concern; thus, working with them may be called 'concern work' (Nilsen, 2021a). The staff used different tools for assessment. Depending on which tools they used and the outcome of the assessment, children could be categorized as being, for instance, 'at risk' or 'developmentally delayed'. The assessment was essential to justify the need for intervention.

Kimathi conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 kindergarten teachers and assistants on how they experienced the everyday integration of refugee children. The questions that were asked during the interviews included what activities were prioritized when handling the children, how the staff interacted with refugee children and their parents, and how they related to texts such as the kindergarten framework plan and other policy documents. Kimathi discovered that the integration of refugee children to a large extent revolved around children's competency with the Norwegian language and how well they absorbed dominant values, such as play, independence and respect for nature. The kindergarten staff frequently mentioned how important it was for the children to 'feel safe' (Kimathi, forthcoming). The staff appeared to be balancing the children's differences and parental expectations, on the one hand, and the institutionalized integration practices and ideals expected in Norwegian kindergartens, such as the ability to speak Norwegian, on the other. In particular, the teachers highlighted the need to do 'safety work' – for instance, by making the children (and their parents) feel emotionally comfortable (Kimathi, forthcoming). This stemmed from the assumption that the children and their parents, as refugees, suffered from trauma. In providing safety, the informants relied on specific programmes – notably, the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) – in which many of them had received training.

In Kimathi's and Nilsen's projects, the standpoint informants were recruited from, respectively, four and three public kindergartens in southern Norway. The informants had different educational backgrounds and positions in the kindergartens, but all were interacting directly with children in their everyday work. In Kimathi's project, one of the kindergartens was specifically designed for children from refugee or asylum-seeking families, while the other two were ordinary public kindergartens, as were those in Nilsen's project. While Nilsen conducted her interviews in Norwegian, Kimathi conducted his interviews in English, aided by a research assistant for interpretation when needed. Being non-native, he entered the research field with even more unfamiliarity. This offered the possibility to see and experience the fieldwork through an external lens. Neither of us has recent first-hand experience of working in kindergartens, but we know the policy basis of the Norwegian kindergarten system well. We acknowledge that our familiarity, or lack thereof, with the institutional discourses in the field may have an impact on our analysis. In both projects, however, the interviewing was explorative and consciously 'naive', intended to dodge professional jargon that captures predefined institutional understandings (Nilsen, 2021a). Both projects were

conducted in line with the guiding norms for research ethics and were approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

While Nilsen's research focused on how children who deviated from the norm in some way were sorted into manageable categories, Kimathi's research focused on how a specific category – that of 'the traumatized refugee child' – was invoked to attribute specific needs and abilities to people assigned to that category, thus rendering the categorized people manageable. The work of 'doing' early intervention and 'doing' integration is, in other words, all about managing categories, whether making categories fit people or making people fit categories. In this work, social technologies are abundant. In the next section, we introduce the theoretical perspectives that inform our analysis. Thereafter, we present excerpts and examples from the empirical data, demonstrating how social technology is part of chains of action. In the selection of excerpts, we searched the interview material purposively for clues on how kindergarten teachers use social technology in order to manage categories, inspired by McCoy's (2006: 111) recommendation to look for detailed descriptions of work that make visible institutional hooks and traces in the lived experiences of the teller. While the excerpts may not be representative of all encounters with social technology, they pinpoint tendencies that are found across cases.

How are categories constructed?

In his book *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Bauman (1991: 1) claims that classification is a matter of giving the world a structure and an order, where 'one knows how to go on'. Not knowing how to act creates ambivalence and discomfort, and represents a threat to the social order. The importance of classification in modern societies should not therefore be underestimated. As proponents of certain values and morality, and as the extended arm of the state (Lipsky, 1980; Zacka, 2017), professionals in modern societies play a key role in maintaining the social order and, in doing so, rely on systems of classification of people.

Categories are socially constructed. Hacking (1999) points out that categories, such as 'refugees' or 'children at risk', represent ideas and not individuals or species. When using such categories, one draws on an idea or notion of what they are about. The ideas do not exist in a vacuum, Hacking (1999: 24) asserts, but are part of and can only function in a matrix of discursive elements, formed in a complex interplay between institutions, procedures, stakeholders and media reports. When using different categories to describe people, it is the idea of the category and the matrix of which it is a part that we see, not the category as an embodied or material entity. The act of classifying someone as a specific category or type of person thus involves combining empirical observations with discursive features. Smith's (1978) article "'K is mentally ill": The anatomy of a factual account' provides a good example. Here, Smith outlines how a person (K) is constructed as mentally ill through the act of combining specific (empirical) observations of K's behaviour with specific (discursive) understandings and definitions of mental illness. By this 'cutting-out procedure', K is classified as a mentally ill kind of person.

To classify people, statistics are essential, according to Hacking (1999). A movement towards scientific thinking and praxis during the 1800s involved a rejection of determinism, as rooted in religion or tradition, in favour of a reliance on statistics and probability analysis. Equipped with statistical evidence, the population could not only be described, but also predicted. Of special concern was deviance (Hacking, 2004; Turmel, 2008). The graphical notion of normalcy was depicted by the bell curve, where people positioned near the average were considered the norm, whereas people positioned at either end of the curve represented deviance (Turmel, 2008: 81). Weight and height charts, used at public health centres in Norway, and the widely used tool to assess children's language development in kindergartens, TRAS ('Early Registration of

Language Development'), are contemporary examples of the same, indicating a 'normal curve' in children's development. As the reliance on and use of statistics increased, new disciplines – such as developmental psychology and paediatrics – and new professions emerged, focused on handling the deviance. Rose (1999) points out how certain regimes of knowledge, which he refers to as 'psy-disciplines' and 'psy-expertise', have played a key role in constructing 'governable subjects'. Rooted in these 'psy-disciplines', some theories have arguably gained an almost hegemonic status within professions working with children – notably, attachment theory and neuroscience (Bjerre et al., 2021; Brodal, 2018; Wastell and White, 2017; White et al., 2019). Simultaneously, as Bjerre et al. (2021) point out, professionals have adopted a scientific language without necessarily knowing or understanding the scientific insights in which it is rooted. In line with Hacking (1999, 2004), Rose (1999: 133) describes how our understanding of normalcy has grown out of a concern for the 'pathological children' – that is, the disobedient, obstinate and noisy children who demand expert attention. Hence, normalcy is something that is not just observed, but also valued.

Hacking (2004) is concerned about the feedback effects of classification. Categories provide legitimate ways of being, not only orienting how people see themselves and how we see and value other people, but also feeding back into and reproducing the classification system itself. In other words, the categories and the people categorized come into being at the same time, thus upholding the system of classification. Once classified in a category of deviance, the person becomes the responsibility of the professionals tasked with 'healing' or dealing with the deviance and maintaining normalcy and social order.

So, how do professionals proceed in their work with categories? To an increasing extent, fuelled by the accelerating demand for evidence and accountability claims, professionals rely on social technology. Social technology may have the form of material objects, such as a chart or graph, having the capacity to mediate between social actors (Turmel, 2008: 117–118). It may also be programmes and models that rely on expert knowledge to describe specific measures and conduct. Providing expert knowledge to manage social problems, social technology serves as a connection between expertise and government. Sustained by institutional discourse, it incorporates specific understandings and knowledge. As it is used by and circulated among professionals, it can become an entity of its own in a network of translocal relations, and come to inform how people act and think. As such, it is a necessary part of accountability circuits – that is, the work done to make performance or outcomes produced on the front line accountable in terms of managerial categories and objectives (Griffith and Smith, 2014: 340). Indeed, professionals' use of social technologies leads to the construction of social categories of normalcy and deviance, thereby invoking 'the standard child' as an ideological code (Smith, 2012).

Making categories fit people: identifying 'children at risk'

Anna is a trained kindergarten teacher and leads a unit for children aged three to five in a kindergarten in southern Norway. In the following quote, taken from an interview conducted by Nilsen, she talks about how different observations could evoke concern for a child:

The first thing you notice is the contact between the parents and the child. How it works. How they approach the child and how the children approach the parents. And often you see, when you observe the children, that it relates to, well, weak language development. You see that quite quickly. If that's what it is about, then it is quite obvious, then it is visible to most people. But if it is kind of social things and suchlike, then it might be things like, say, hygiene, for instance, you can see that quite

quickly, but after a while you also notice how the children, in a way, how they approach us, what sort of needs they have, and, and of course, like now, Kvello is in the frame, and of course then you also see ... well, certain signs that indicate that there might be some risk – like signals. Say, if the parents are divorced, if the parents, well, if you know that the parents are often in conflict. If we get, say, they divorce and the mother says this and that, and we notice that there is a conflict between mum and dad, then there is a risk factor indicating, well, maybe the child is in the middle of it all, that it kind of affects the child. ... Then there are mental problems – for instance, if you notice that mum has it or dad has it, then there is also a concern for the child. If you see that the child is afraid of things, say, that you notice that the child doesn't eat enough, for instance. Poor clothing, and yes, and, like, kindergarten attendance. Say they turn up in the kindergarten and you feel that something ... And if they don't turn up at meetings, then maybe, well. (our translation)

In this quote, Anna makes reference to the Kvello model. This model, which is named after its author, Øyvind Kvello, is informed by theories in developmental psychology (notably, attachment theory) and is widely used in the child welfare services in Norway. Increasingly, it is also used in kindergartens to identify children in precarious care situations. The kindergarten teachers in the municipality where Anna works had attended training by Kvello, part of which involved familiarizing themselves with his book, which incorporates a list of risk factors (Kvello, 2011). The risk factors are sorted into three categories, pertaining to the 'child', the 'nuclear family' and the 'micro-systems beyond the nuclear family' (Kvello, 2011: 168–169). In assessing risk, the author says that, if three or four risk factors are present, 'the child is defined to be at risk; with five or more it is defined as highly at risk' (Kvello, 2011: 171). In the interview, Anna points out several of the risk factors that are listed, such as divorce, conflicts between parents and mental illness, as well as indicators such as poor hygiene, malnutrition and withdrawal.

'Risk' and 'risk factors' are concepts that were frequently used by the kindergarten teachers interviewed by Author 2, and they were often explicitly associated with Kvello's list. Moreover, the list was used by other professionals with whom the kindergarten teachers collaborated, and who had also attended the training. Observing at an interdisciplinary meeting, Nilsen noticed that the list of risk factors was the guiding tool used when the participants (a public health nurse, a special educational needs teacher, a child welfare counsellor, a physiotherapist, the kindergarten head and two kindergarten teachers) discussed children of concern. If several risk factors were observed, they agreed to intervene. But for that to happen, they had to decide what the problem was and whose (which institution's) responsibility it was to deal with it. In other words, having sorted out which children to help, the professionals had to sort out what kind of problem the children had in order to delegate responsibility to the right profession.

Talking about her collaboration with the kindergarten during an interview, the health nurse, Karianne, pointed out that, in order to intervene, the kindergarten teachers 'have a job to do [in the kindergarten] before they look for others to involve'. The most important job to be done in the kindergarten in that respect was systematic observation, assessment and documentation. In the kindergarten where Anna works, different assessment tools were used, such as forms to assess children's language development (TRAS) and social abilities (ALLE MED ('ALL IN')). TRAS and ALLE MED are widely used forms in Norwegian kindergartens to assess, respectively, children's language development and social abilities. They share the common feature of being based on an age-determined or stage-based conception of normalcy, and they are both developed in a collaboration between universities and municipal or state agencies. Both forms are in the shape of a circle divided into sections. The different sections of the form are supposed to be coloured in according to how well the child masters the various skills – for instance, naming

different objects or understanding prepositions. The child's shortcomings are thus presented as visual gaps on the form. In addition, the kindergarten teacher leading the unit wrote a pedagogical report for each child and, in cases of specific concern, kept a protocol in which observations were documented. Without documentation, outside intervention from professionals cannot be drawn on or justified. Hence, in order to 'do' early intervention in kindergartens, documentation is essential (Nilsen, 2017a).

The Kvello list and assessment tools are examples of social technologies that are suited for classification. Using these technologies, kindergarten teachers take part in the ruling relations of early intervention, where specific knowledge regimes are activated. Children causing concern 'fail' on some dimensions of these technologies, either because they live in families where 'three or more risk factors are present' (Kvello, 2011: 171) or because there are gaps in the TRAS or ALLE MED forms. The understanding of which children are 'at risk' or 'exhibiting delayed development' hinges to a large extent on the social technologies themselves (what elements they cover and which knowledge regimes they rely on). However, it also hinges on the kindergarten teachers' interpretation and use of the technologies. While the forms and reports may appear to give an objective representation of the child, the documented scores are, in practice, largely the result of the kindergarten staff's discretionary judgements. Knowing how the system works, they can manoeuvre the technologies in ways that render their observations interventionable or not by describing the children in ways that fit the categories.

Making people fit categories: working with 'traumatized refugee children'

The participants in Kimathi's study were all working with refugee children and families. As part of building competency for this work, many of the participants in the study had undertaken training specifically aimed at enhancing knowledge of trauma care. One example is Olivia, who has 'a Bachelor's degree as kindergarten teacher ... with a particular focus on special pedagogics. I've also been on ... courses related to trauma. I'm also trained for ICDP'. Similarly, Ruth has 'a Master's degree in kindergarten leadership and I've also had some training in ICDP and I'm a facilitator and also a trainer in ICDP. ... While I've been working here, we've been taking a lot of courses'.

As these quotes exemplify, the kindergarten teachers had attended several training programmes particularly aimed at working with refugee children, on top of their Bachelor's or Master's degrees. In their everyday work and interaction with refugee children, they rely on this training, and the knowledge mediated by the programmes organizes their work and thinking in specific ways. Even among the kindergarten staff who had not attended the training, frequent references were made to concepts that are embedded in these programmes – notably, the ICDP.

On its website, the ICDP is described as 'a simple health-promoting and preventive programme whose goal is to enhance care and improve the experience and circumstances of children and young people. It targets caregivers, with a view to maximizing their competency in their role' (our translation).¹ The ICDP is described as a psycho-social intervention and builds on a broad theoretical background – notably, attachment theory. It has become an integrated part of the introduction programme for newly arrived refugees in Norway (Solberg, 2020). The ICDP is presented as 'culture-sensitive' and 'sensitizing', and its focus is on empowering and supporting caregivers, in contrast to instruction- and manual-based programmes. Despite several evaluations that document a positive effect of the ICDP, some scholars warn that much of this research is related to specific interests that may prohibit critical perspectives and also fail to take parents' perspectives and experiences fully into account (Solberg, 2020; Sundsbø, 2018).

During the interviews, the participants described how refugee children are in need of safety and comfort. They argued, for instance, that building a safe feeling among children is at the core of integration in kindergartens. This is in line with ‘the emotional dialogue’ of the ICDP, which has four guidelines: (1) show the child positive feelings; (2) follow the child’s lead; (3) talk to the child using emotional expressions, gestures and words; and (4) praise and appreciate what the child does. Ruth reported:

I use a calm voice and I say, like, comforting words, because when you say comforting words, you automatically adopt a way of speaking that is calm and reassuring. I use physical contact a lot. I carry and hug them. I sing, [make] eye contact, ... and a lot of talking really – even if they don’t understand – but talking is a kind of therapy and that’s a way to make them feel safe.

Assuming that many of the children ‘had experienced traumatic events’ (Nancy) or had ‘had out-of-the-ordinary [traumatic] experiences’ (Joyce), and that there had been ‘a lot of stress for the child’ (Olivia) both during and after the flight from their home country, the kindergarten teachers frequently referred to both the children and their parents as traumatized. The ICDP is arguably well suited for work with traumatized children (Christie and Døhlie, 2011: 79). In the interviews, it appeared that the kindergarten teachers implicitly assumed that a child with a refugee background would be traumatized – hence, their needs were portrayed in a similar way. Lunneblad (2017) discovered a similar tendency in his research on kindergartens’ work with refugee children in Sweden – notably, that children’s vulnerability and need for safety were emphasized when kindergarten teachers talked about these children. Hence, as a category, ‘refugee children’ seems to connote ‘being vulnerable’ and/or ‘traumatized’. Moreover, it exemplifies how professional jargon is used generically, despite the ICDP’s insistence on cultural sensitivity, hence producing a standardized way of seeing and interacting with the children. In contrast to Nilsen’s study, the kindergarten teachers did not seem to investigate the needs of each individual child to assess if they were, indeed, traumatized or ‘at risk’, but rather relied on a standardized and categorical understanding of what refugee children need.

Some unintended consequences of categorization work

The two projects illustrate how social technologies organize everyday work in kindergartens in specific ways. As we have pointed out, these technologies rely predominantly on attachment theory and neuroscience, which are indicative of what Rose (1999) refers to as ‘psy-disciplines’. Several scholars have pointed out how this knowledge has ‘imperialized’ the professions (e.g. Brodal, 2018; Wastell and White, 2017; White et al., 2019). Acknowledging the good intentions behind the intervention of such technologies, we will point out three interwoven and unintended implications that could have harmful effects.

First, employing social technologies involves a broad categorization of children, in which the professionals rely on standardized descriptions embedded in the technologies. Empirical observations are combined with discursive concepts to assign specific ‘pathologies’ to the children. For instance, a refugee child’s crying is interpreted as emotional stress, and poor clothing is interpreted as poor parenting. Assuming that kindergarten teachers have automated their response to such observations in an almost behaviourist manner would be a misinterpretation. Indeed, our data clearly indicates that the kindergarten teachers make discretionary judgements along the way, while still taking notice of the observations that ‘count’ and that can be transformed into concepts fitting the psy-discourse in order to justify an intervention. In this way, their stories resemble the ‘cutting-out procedure’ described in the abovementioned “‘K is mentally ill’” article (Smith,

1978). 'Doing' early intervention or integration in kindergartens implies being attentive to signs and indications that can serve as documentation. In this work, the social technologies guide the professional gaze. Moreover, the interpretation of the empirical observations pertains to the children as representatives of a social category, not as individuals. Observations that may serve to nuance or broaden the understanding easily remain unnoticed.

Second, as pointed out by, for instance, Bjerre et al. (2021), the current demand for documentation and accountability makes the psy-language powerful, legitimizing the use of psychological concepts. When professionals reproduce the psy-discourse that is incorporated in social technologies, they rely on 'knowledge', but in a fragmented and random way. Used arbitrarily, the concepts may serve to legitimize a decision without necessarily solving the problem. Moreover, the knowledge they rely on is portrayed as 'facts' and 'evidence', whereas it should also be recognized as normative and moral (Bjerre et al., 2021: 10).

Third, interpreting the children's behaviour as representative of a specific deviant category (such as 'at risk' or 'traumatized') implies a specific understanding of normalcy – for instance, of a 'standard child' or a 'standard family'. However, the normalizing discourses also construct deviance by 'othering' those who are different, or who see or do things differently. Using collective characteristics (presenting people as representatives of a category) rather than individual characteristics (presenting people as individuals), the kindergarten teachers interpret some children's behaviours as symptoms of deviance which might otherwise be understood within a frame of normalcy. Thus, the paradox is that, with intentions of doing good and helping the 'needy', the social technology and the professionals' use of it ends up constructing the categories they are intended to help or 'heal'. This is an example of a feedback effect, whereby the category and the people categorized come into being at the same time, thus upholding the current system of classification (Hacking, 2004).

As observed in the introduction, Norwegian kindergartens have a responsibility for 'highlighting, valuing and promoting diversity and mutual respect', showing children that 'there are many ways in which to think, act and live' (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 8–9). At the same time, kindergarten staff are required to 'adapt their general pedagogical practices to suit the children's needs and circumstances' (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017: 40), and work methodically and systematically to meet this end. It appears that, to succeed in this respect, kindergarten teachers depend on social technology that has standardizing effects. Instead of representing real people, these technologies represent ideas of people (Hacking, 1999), which, in turn, rely on statistical prevalence and an authoritative psy-discourse. Acknowledging this, however, does not imply that social technology necessarily serves bad purposes. On the contrary, it may indeed strengthen professionals' work. Our point is that, despite its appeal, social technology cannot replace professional judgement and discretion, since serious problems involve people with different needs and seldom have fixed solutions. To promote integration and early intervention, kindergarten teachers should therefore be encouraged to use social technology in a critical and analytical way rather than as a standard routine. This can be achieved by incorporating reflexivity in everyday occurrences in kindergartens. In line with the thinking of Peter Moss (2008: 125–126), kindergarten teachers should be 'democratic and reflective professionals' who value the qualities of dialogue, critical thinking, researching, listening and openness to otherness, uncertainty and provisionality, subjectivity, border-crossing, multiple perspectives and curiosity. Moreover, learning to be critical of social technologies, both during training and in evaluation and staff meetings, can serve as a starting point towards understanding the potential unintended consequences of such technologies. The core argument is that kindergarten teachers and assistants working with children need to build self-awareness and professional awareness, so that they are not the subject of policies that may constrain them with demands for technician practice

(Osgood, 2006). They should be given opportunities to engage in meaningful critique of the social technologies that have infiltrated the work of early intervention and integration, in order for them to actively renegotiate and reconceptualize the discourses through which they are positioned and defined. Exploring how professionals both use and oppose social technology, how they rely on but also are critical of authoritative knowledge regimes, would be a way of expanding knowledge on the role of social technology in kindergartens while simultaneously challenging current understandings.


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Note

1. See <https://www.icdp.no/>

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Article

The construction of a ‘traumatized’ refugee child in need of safety in Norwegian kindergartens

by

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Abstract

This paper explores how kindergarten teachers relate to the concept of safety in the integration of refugee children. My research findings reveal that the concept of safety, or *trygghet* in Norwegian, is understood as emotional support and comfort accorded to children. The notion of *trygghet* emerges as an important value-laden concept that shapes and largely influences teachers' everyday work, and how they relate to children and their parents. The idea of safety is traceable within an institutional discourse mediated by social technology, such as the International Child Development Programme and the Resource Centre for Violence and Trauma programmes, which have their roots in psy-discourses. My findings indicate that the construction of a potentially 'traumatized' refugee child is interconnected with the assumed need for safety. When using this discourse in their daily work, the kindergarten staff contribute to constructing and reproducing a specific category that I refer to as the 'traumatized' refugee child in need of safety. This standardized understanding risks categorizing refugee children, and highlights how professionals can get caught up in dominant discourses that universalize their routine practices.

Keywords: safety, trauma, psy knowledge, kindergartens, institutional ethnography

Introduction

Kindergartens and childcare centres can provide a safe, stabilizing experience for children and families from refugee backgrounds who have experienced trauma, and can provide a platform for them to overcome their vulnerability (Signorelli et al., 2017). Therefore, access to a good kindergarten experience has been deemed essential to support children's holistic development, and alleviate the impact of potential childhood trauma (Park & Katsiaficas, 2018; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020). However, some studies point out that more training and professional support for kindergartens, to help increase staff potential to identify and respond to the early signs of trauma in children, is needed (Lamb, 2020; Park & Katsiaficas, 2018). This is the case in Norway. For instance, a study in Norway on parents with children living in asylum centres preferred to enrol their children in kindergartens to help provide them with opportunities for interaction with other children, and to get a break from the monotonous life in the asylum centres (Lauritzen & Sivertsen, 2012).

In my research on how Norwegian kindergarten teachers work with the integration of refugee children, the term *safety* was uttered consistently by participants as they spoke about their everyday work for refugee children. In Norwegian, the concept of safety is referred to as *trygghet*. The participants proactively used this term without being prompted. The kindergarten teachers emphasized that the integration of refugee children involves ensuring that the children 'feel safe' by providing emotional comfort and calmness to the children. Talking, comforting, hugging and holding children are synonymous with what I refer to as 'safety work'. The focus is on emotional stability and other kinds of protection, but not necessarily overlapping with the English notions of security (Gullestad, 1997).

Arguably, the notion of *trygghet* is linked with the Norwegian kindergarten's long tradition of creating a home-like environment, emphasizing intimacy, warmth and safety (Korsvold, 1998; Gullestad, 1997). This is anchored in the Norwegian Kindergarten Framework Plan (2017, p. 20), which outlines that kindergarten staff shall 'ensure that all children find safety, belongingness and well-being in kindergarten'. *Trygghet*, thus, emerges as an important ideal in the everyday life of children in the kindergartens including refugees. In this article, I foreground the

concept of safety as a core part of educational and professional training for kindergarten teachers in their work with refugee children.

This article discusses how the notion of safety organizes daily work in the kindergarten as mediated by knowledge acquired from the International Child Development Programme (ICDP)¹ and the Resource Centre for Violence and Trauma (RVTS),² which the participants had attended. This study aims at contributing to debates on trauma and the power of categorization in the kindergarten that emerges from well-intended programmes such as the ICDP and RVTS. This investigation scrutinizes the relationship between assumed trauma among refugee children and its role in the understanding of the safety discourse, as that informs kindergarten teachers' work with children.

In this light, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How does the notion of doing safety work emerge as a coordinator of everyday social relations among kindergarten teachers?, and (2) How does the discourse of trauma bring about the categorization of refugee children by kindergarten teachers?

ICDP and RVTS

The International Child Development Programme (ICDP) was founded in 1992, and has its roots in developmental and cultural psychology, which aims at strengthening the conditions for the upbringing of children through the supervision of their caregivers (Bråten & Sønsterudbråten, 2017). Moreover, it borrows ideas from attachment theory, in particular the emphasis on the need for a safe emotional base for a child as they develop (Bowlby, 1969), by reactivating existing positive patterns of care. The overarching understanding of the safety discourse is that a child needs a safe emotional base (Bowlby, 1969).

The ICDP is used for training parents and professionals on caring for children up to the age of six within contexts such as kindergartens and schools, not only to help improve the interaction between staff and children, but to also curb neglect and abuse, and attend to vulnerable children in childcare settings that deal with abuse,

¹ <https://www.icdp.info/about/training/>

² https://rvtsmidt.no/kompetanseheving/utdanningsprogrammer/traumebevisst-omsorg/#del_0

trauma and abandonment (The Directorate for Children, Youth and Families, 2016, p. 12). According to the ICDP guidelines:

The teacher should try to create a trustful and intimate atmosphere by showing emotional warmth, giving praise and confirmation to each child, and as far as possible, within the scope and limits of the classroom situation, try to respond to the children by establishing dialogues and activities along the lines of their initiatives and interests, and by giving them praise for what they have done well.³

The Resource Centre for Violence and Trauma (RVTS) offers courses, programmes and information geared towards trauma-conscious care for people working with children and adults, especially those who are likely to have experienced trauma.⁴ The main purpose of RVTS is not to offer treatment, but contribute to the professional development of services within refugee health, forced migration, psychological traumas and psychosocial preparedness.⁵ Like ICDP, RVTS is rooted in psychological disciplines and shares similar ambitions, especially concerning the training of professionals working with the reception of refugees in Norway.

Previous research and theoretical framework

The discourse of how refugees are seen and treated is widely observable, and connected with the discourse of mental health interventions within psychiatry and psychology, the so-called 'psy' discourse (Bjerre et al., 2021; Lunneblad, 2017), and less so from social science disciplines such as sociology. This is reflected in studies on refugee children, in which the dominance of knowledge from the psy-disciplines on the mental health and well-being of refugees contributed to a significant focus being placed on traumatic experiences (Lunneblad, 2017). In the Nordic and other Western countries, the general refugee population has become identified with the dominant discourse of portraying refugees as victims of war, traumatized, suffering and in need of care (Eastmond, 2014).

A study on Bosnian refugees in Sweden indicates that the 'traumatized' refugee as a category became an object of interest used to mobilize for acceptance, protection and in political debates, in which lobbying for funding for refugee mental health and care especially by professionals working with refugees in different welfare

³ <https://www.icdp.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Essay-on-ICDP-and-education.pdf>

⁴ <https://rvtssor.no/aktuelt/294/de-tre-pilarene-i-traumebevisst-omsorg/>

⁵ <https://rvtssor.no/dette-er-oss/about-rvts-sor/>

programmes (Eastmond, 2014). Seemingly, trauma awareness has come to permeate the reception of refugees across diverse welfare institutions that help to facilitate the integration of refugees.

Similarly, the trauma discourse (Rutter, 2006) is gaining increasing attention, particularly in the strategies various professionals employ to establish close relations with children. In a study on the reception of refugee children in Swedish kindergartens, Lunneblad (2017) asserted that the children's vulnerability and need for safety were dominant among the teachers when they talked about the children, especially the emphasis on the image of the refugee child as traumatized. In this light, the integration of a refugee child at the kindergarten is premised on the idea that the teacher will create a close relationship with the child. Kindergarten teachers, hereby conceptualized as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980), are responsible for putting policy into practice by delivering care and safety to refugee children on behalf of the state. In so doing, they activate the concepts, categories and discourses embedded in research and policy in their daily work.

The trauma discourse needs to be understood not in isolation, but also in considering the significant influence of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), as well as its linkage with neuroscience and psychology in general (Tobin, 2016). Neuroscience studies reveal that a traumatic childhood experience is linked with a failure in optimal brain development, which, in turn, has potential negative consequences for the holistic development of the child (Tobin, 2016). Recent developments reveal that the common treatment methods for trauma are Trauma Focused Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (TFCBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) (Bisson et al., 2013), Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (Ogden & Minton, 2000) and Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), to mention a few trauma-specific methods (Lie et al., 2014). Launched in 2013, trauma care and support for refugees are part of Norway's national strategy for the health of immigrants (2013-2017),⁶ which recognizes trauma care as a public care responsibility.

⁶

https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/2de7e9efa8d341cfb8787a71eb15e2db/likeverdige_tjenester.pdf

It is a common perception that when a child's secure attachment is disrupted, the potential for more profound developmental consequences exists, particularly in future learning outcomes (De Bellis, 2001). Nevertheless, neuroscience studies have shied away from conclusively establishing a direct relationship between childhood trauma and developmental outcomes because it is difficult to distinctively separate the causes and effects (Veltman & Browne, 2001). Neuroscience has therefore advanced more focus on attachment theory, particularly the link between emotional experiences with caregivers and later neurobiological, emotional and cognitive functioning (Tobin, 2016).

However, attachment theory is criticized for being normative and narrow due to its focus on only a small set of interactions the child experiences early in life. Moreover, it is claimed to be totalizing with little room for alternate views of relations, while at the same time promoting a diagnostic mind-set among street-level bureaucrats such as kindergarten teachers (White et al., 2019). Psychological knowledge, such as attachment theory, has contributed to the formation of government policies and practices in which some experts gain authority over laypeople, and their authority supports preferred ways of what it entails to be a human being (Bjerre et al., 2021). Such policies and practices shape and define how refugees should be viewed and treated. Moreover, the increasing demand for documentation and accountability makes the use of 'psy' knowledge powerful, and legitimizes the use of underlying concepts, such as trauma. Attachment theory operates as a powerful 'psy' discourse in a way that reflects prevailing social, cultural and political beliefs (Keddell, 2017).

When refugee children are viewed as vulnerable, traumatized and in need of safety, a generalized 'adult' understanding of children and childhood is likely to influence the professionals who work with them (Warming, 2011). Rose (1999) argued that certain knowledge regimes, arguably emanating from developmental psychology and paediatrics, play a key role in constructing 'governable subjects'. Finding inspiration in the works of Foucault, Rose argued that the 'psy-disciplines' have had a profound impact on how we understand and categorize people, including ourselves.

These categories do not represent individuals or groups, but ideas about them according to Canadian Sociologist Ian Hacking's (1999) work on the construction of

people. The ideas in this case 'functions within a matrix of discursive elements that are part of an interplay between different processes, institutions, people and technology' (Hacking, 1999 p. 24). When categories are used to refer to people, both the category and the matrix within which it is part of becomes visible. Ideas from Hacking are important in this study, which seeks to challenge the hegemony of psy-discourses, particularly within professions working with children by questioning how categories are made to fit people, which in turn legitimizes the dominant knowledge regimes in use.

Analytical approach

My study is informed by institutional ethnography (IE), widely associated with Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005). Institutional ethnography has been growing within sociological studies because of the methodological commitment to go beyond the individual experience or narrative, i.e., the local, into the institutional complex, i.e., the trans-local (Walby, 2013). In this light, the individual experience and activities serve as the point of entry into the investigation of the institutional processes in which the kindergarten teachers partake (DeVault, 2021). This means beginning a research inquiry from what kindergarten teachers know, and moving 'further' to find out how what they are doing is connected with others' doings in ways 'they cannot see' (Kearney, 2019).

In IE, this means 'keeping the institution in view' by exploring texts such as the ICDP, the RVTS and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens, which mediate between the everyday experiences in the kindergartens, and how integration work is organized and coordinated (McCoy, 2006). In this instance, the integration of refugee children is an institutional process that is part of ruling relations. Ruling relations hereby refer to the social relations that organize work outside of what is going on in a specific scenario (Smith, 2005). Therefore, doing an IE is about tracing the ruling relations, as embedded in the descriptions of everyday work by those who experience it from their standpoint, to reveal what is concealed as seen or experienced from the knower's location (DeVault, 2021).

In my study on the role of Norwegian kindergartens as arenas for the integration of refugees, I conducted research beginning with the standpoint of the kindergarten

staff. The ambition was to explore the ruling relations that organized their knowledge of doing the integration of refugee children. By taking the standpoint of kindergarten teachers, I position them as the knowers of integration work. The kindergarten is the immediate site of experience and activities, which embody integration from the standpoint of the teachers. The analytical attention that this article focuses on is on how and why kindergarten teachers engage in promoting safety for refugee children as a core element of integration work.

Data collection

The findings and discussion in this paper are based on interviews with 13 kindergarten teachers who worked in three kindergartens in southern Norway, which were carried out between April and September 2019. The kindergartens sampled included a reception kindergarten exclusively for refugees and two general kindergartens: one public and one private. The kindergartens rely on funding from the state, and are accountable to the Norwegian national framework plan for kindergartens. The overarching consideration for selection was that participants worked in kindergartens that received refugee children.

Participants included pedagogical leaders, teacher assistants and language and diversity support teachers. Diversity support teachers are employed by the municipality to routinely visit kindergartens to offer consultative and practical assistance, predominantly to minority children. Ethical considerations made before, during and after the study were in tandem with the guidelines from the Norwegian Ethical Committee on Social Science Research (NESH, 2006). The project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to help ascertain that data protection procedures were followed. To comply with the guidelines, comprehensive information was provided via email and orally, with consent forms signed by each participant at the beginning of their interview. All kindergartens and participants remain anonymized, and the information collected remains confidential and was only utilized for my project (Israel & Hay, 2006). I used a non-standardized snowball and purposive sampling technique to recruit participants, through which I gained access to additional participants through networks of those already recruited. The criterion was that the participant worked in a kindergarten with refugee children.

All participants were female, which reflects the general population within kindergartens and childcare centres in Norway.

All interviews were semi-structured and took between 45 to 60 minutes on average. Most were conducted within kindergarten premises, as only three were held on the university premises. The interviews were audio recorded, and then transcribed by a research assistant. The same assistant translated the interviews conducted in Norwegian into English. Since I am not a native Norwegian, I was flexible with my choice of language during the fieldwork. Six interviews were conducted in Norwegian, while the rest were done in English. The decision on which language to use depended on the choice and convenience of individual participants. For the interviews conducted in Norwegian, a native research assistant joined me as a translator and an intermediary in the research process. The native research assistant was initially meant to assume an invisible role in the research process, but that changed as it became increasingly important that the translator served as a cultural decoder during the interviews (Munday, 2008).

Reflecting on the lack of local language competency meant that I was not accustomed to the institutionalized discourses that an 'outsider' (Wolf, 1996) can perceive as taken-for-granted representations (Lund, 2015). Being an outsider provided me with a chance to go with the tag of the 'ignorant' researcher, while the participants were placed in a relatively empowering expert position (Lund, 2015).

Data analysis

The data in this study were analysed through the transcription and translation of interviews, followed by the in-depth task of describing typical accounts of safety work as described by the kindergarten teachers. IE researchers usually 'interview' the interview material (McCoy, 2006) to learn about the individual work experience of the participants. I searched for the transcribed material to purposively identify clues on how kindergarten teachers refer to ICDP and RVTS to do safety work. The effort was to look for detailed descriptions of safety and circumstances surrounding safety, as narrated by the participants in the transcriptions (McCoy, 2006: 111).

The interview excerpts were therefore handpicked because they show how kindergarten teachers are connected to an institutional way of knowing and doing safety work using ICDP and RVTS as forms of social technology. Used in a social scientific sense, the term 'social technology' refers to the application of methods and theories, such as assessment manuals and training programmes, to obtain a science-based analysis for specific purposes (Leibetseder, 2011; Kimathi & Nilsen, 2021). Social technology hereby offers expert knowledge with which professionals like kindergarten teachers define and reach solutions to everyday social problems in their line of work.

The analysis therefore takes on a descriptive perspective. It is through these descriptions that it is possible to uncover the social relations that influence safety work practices in kindergartens, as well as how those experiences become part of a wider complex of institutions (Devault & McCoy, 2006; Smith, 2005). My interest was in using the interviews to unpack the concepts, categories, and wider institutional discourses that kindergarten workers have been socialized and trained to use, as they further reveal how the workers become accustomed to professional ruling relations (Nilsen, 2021).

In addition to tracing and identifying the social processes that connect the safety work across the participant interviews, I followed up with a back-and-forth exploration of the described work considering the dominant texts, and mapped the connections between them. These texts included the Kindergarten Framework Plan, and training programmes like the ICDP and RVTS, as cited by the participants. The importance of texts was to locate how they mediate and govern the processes in routine safety work, as the activities of the kindergarten teachers are coordinated through such objectivized systems of knowledge like text documents, laws and discourses (Smith, 2005). In the final step, I used the transcripts to determine how the refugee children were categorized and conceptualized in the kindergartens, and how existing texts facilitated the coordination of how refugee children were categorized.

The findings from this study cannot be generalized, and the research sample is not representative of all kindergartens and their work with refugee children. While I am familiar with the Norwegian kindergarten policy, I have no first-hand work experience

in the kindergarten, and therefore cannot relate to the institutional discourses in the field. However, from an institutional ethnographic perspective, this is an ideal situation for researching to avoid professional jargon (Nilsen, 2021).

Table 1: *Study Participant Demographics*

Code Name	Job Title	Kindergarten (NB: language advisers have roles in more than one kindergarten)	Language (Mother tongue)	Participation in ICDP or RVTs training
Sophie	Pedagogue/Language adviser	A C	Norwegian	Yes
Ruth	Pedagogue/Language adviser	B	Norwegian and Arabic	No
Emily	Special needs teacher	C	Norwegian	Unknown
Nancy	Psychiatric nurse/Teacher	C	Norwegian	Yes
Caro	Pedagogue	A	Norwegian	Unknown
Salome	Deputy manager/Pedagogic leader	B	Norwegian	Yes
Nora	Pedagogic leader	A	Norwegian	Yes
Britney	Manager	C	Norwegian	Yes
Linet	Pedagogue/Language advisor	A, B	Norwegian	Yes
Sheila	Pedagogue/Language advisor	B, C	Norwegian	Yes
Olivia	Pedagogue	C	Norwegian	Yes
Joana	Pedagogue	C	Norwegian Arabic	No
Purity	Pedagogue	B	Norwegian	Yes

NB: Participants' pseudonyms and work characteristics.

In the presentation of the empirical results, I describe how the safety discourse emerges in the everyday work of the kindergarten teachers, first focusing on how refugee children are understood, and then on how the kindergarten teachers work to provide safety. Next, I turn to the ICDP and the RVTs programme that the kindergarten teachers consistently cited, tracing how their daily work is connected to a textually mediated institutional discourse on safety.

Tracing the safety discourse in kindergarten teachers' everyday work

This project set out to discover how kindergarten teachers work with refugee children. I asked the teacher participants to describe their everyday work, but I did not ask questions specifically relating to safety during the interviews. However, my attention

was drawn to the narrative of safety, which appeared as a common theme, and decided to explore where this discourse emanated from, and how it is activated in kindergarten teachers. The use of the notion of safety, which is a contextual translation of *trygghet* in Norwegian, is used to refer to emotional calmness and comfort for refugee children, unlike the commonly acknowledged understanding of safety as an avoidance of harm and risk.

During the interviews, the kindergarten teachers referred to both the ICDP and the RVTS programme that they had attended. Involvement in both appeared crucial to the teachers' understanding of their work with refugee children who were perceived to be potentially traumatized. Olivia, a participant in the research, related her work experiences as shaped by ICDP and RVTS:

Olivia: We had a child who came from [a country in the Middle East] two months ago. We were sitting with the parents talking about what we are doing here in the kindergarten. I have attended RVTS courses and other courses related to trauma. I also attended ICDP training. I now understand that a feeling of safety is important when I am working with younger refugee children. We tell the parents to be there for as long as the children need them to be. One 1-year-old has been lying here, next to the mother's chest during the flight, feeling the heartbeat. There can be a lot of stress for the child, so it can be a hard transition. It is important to take the children and their needs seriously.

Interviewer: When the parents bring their children here, what do you think is their impression of your work with the children?

Olivia: They feel a need for safety and that we meet their child's needs. Many of them are new to kindergartens, and so they do not know what to expect, so they feel insecure, especially when the child is only one year old. Understandably, it is hard for parents to leave their children here. It is not easy to express their needs either because everything is new. We are always working with making them feel safe – we are filming [the children], taking pictures and sending them to the parents, writing messages. Especially here we know much of what they are going through as refugees, and we have a big focus on making them feel safe.

In this quote, Olivia describes the situation and needs of refugee children, asserting that the children and their parents need to 'feel safe', especially for those who have recently arrived in Norway. Olivia does not refer to any specific individuals but, rather, to a socially constructed idea of refugees as a category. Olivia elucidates how training from the ICDP and RVTS is significant to her understanding of the importance of safety work in kindergartens, and it is evident that her work knowledge is informed by these programmes. Olivia's reference to the ICDP and RVTS helps account for her work knowledge, and the need for interventional support to provide

safety in the kindergarten. The need for safety applies to parents and children, respectively.

Nancy and Nora are kindergarten teachers and participants in this study. During the interviews, they both discussed why the ICDP is important to their work. They highlighted that the potential trauma that refugees may have faced creates an inherent need for trauma-conscious training. In the following, Nancy and Nora explain why the ICDP and RVTS are important to them.

Nancy: I am not a teacher, but a nurse specialist in psychiatry, and I have taken ICDP training. I feel that I can use my knowledge very much here because the refugee children have often experienced traumatic events ... and my colleagues – some of them are refugees. Some have experienced difficult situations, so I think my background is relevant. It is good to have that background.I had one little girl. She was here for one and a half years and had traveled with her mother, through the desert, and ended up in (mentions a country in North Africa), where they were abused. The parents usually don't want to say so much about this, those bad things. From meeting them, I can see that they need to feel safe, and learn about coping with life in general.

Nora: I have the education and participated in a lot of courses, including ICDP and RVTS, mostly here in this kindergarten. Much of the training revolves around the mental state and how the mind is built up, what triggers it, and traumatic experiences. We have a big focus on that here, so I have been to Oslo for RVTS training. I also use a lot of personal experience. I grew up with an English mother here in Norway, and she struggled, so I felt different. We all want the same thing, which is to feel safe.

While Nancy and Nora referred to the ICDP and RVTS, they emphasized the significance of bringing an awareness about trauma and children's mental health. Nancy, in particular, noted that her background in psychiatry gave her the privileged knowledge that she needed to work with refugee children, and cites experiences with refugees who were perceived to have trauma. Joana and Ruth have no ICDP training, but equally highlighted the focus on trauma in their daily work.

Joana: In kindergartens, the biggest challenges are finding ways to make children feel safe, how to welcome children with trauma, and seeing them as a resource and not a burden to the kindergarten.

Ruth: Working with colleagues, we are serious about the refugee children and safety. Yeah, more about their feelings and how to make children feel safe. Some of the children have special traumatic experiences, so it's a very important part of our work, and how we relate with them.

The participants refer to the need for safety work, and why awareness about it is crucial. Indeed, these quotes reveal how the trauma discourse has become an integral part of the daily work life in the kindergartens. It is quite visible that their

participation in ICDP and RVTS programmes may have contributed to this understanding of what to focus on as part of integrating refugee children. This awareness about safety work is indeed crucial. The essence here is not to dismiss the importance of safety, but to highlight covert discourses that become accessible from professional language and challenge some of their implications. In so doing, we can connect the descriptions of the safety work, to the trans-local institutional discourses upon which the work descriptions are founded.

Doing safety work

The interviews indicate that as a social category, refugee children are associated with trauma and, hence, are perceived to be in critical need of safety. In explaining how they handle refugee children in the kindergarten, participants commented on the importance of sensitivity, calmness and providing comfort through physical touch and hugging, as exemplified in the quotes below. Put differently, kindergarten teachers perceive this form of interaction as key to connecting to- and promoting emotional safety with refugee children.

Ruth: I use a calm voice, and I say, like, comforting words because when you say comforting words, you automatically use a way of speaking that is calm, and I very much use physical contact, carrying them tight. I am usually singing, [having] eye contact, and doing things together, and a lot of talking really – even if they do not understand – but talking is a kind of therapy, and that is a way to make them feel safe.

Sophie: I must sit down, be quiet, be calm... ..but I must watch them if they need something. Maybe one of the children is alone, so I need to maybe go to the child and sit down and try to find out how the child is. Is he/she sad, or maybe he wants to play alone? We don't know. We must be at the level where the children are. And of course, we have activities like painting, beading. They are fond of that at this time

According to the participants, a kindergarten teacher equipped to do safety work must be emotionally sensitive, offer comfort, use physical touch (hugging) and partake in play with children. These behaviours can be traced back to the ICDP training that focuses on emotional dialogue, showing loving feelings and praising and acknowledging the child. When the teachers spoke about emotional dialogue, their dialogue resonated with the language used by the ICDP, which is concerned with early emotional-expressive communication between the caregiver and child.

The empirical data in this study emphasize that teachers feel responsible for collaborating with the children, and finding what is best for them as part of making them feel 'safe', as the quote from Ruth illustrates:

Ruth: In the kindergarten where I worked first, we thought of integration as very exciting, and were aware of how we should work with refugees, like ...how we could make them feel safe through collaboration with both the children and parents. We also focused on trauma because that's important, if the children aren't feeling safe, they need support to cope with their strong emotions. I often see the children who are struggling and think, how is this going to be in school when there is so much anger and aggressive behaviour?

The findings in this study reveal that the kindergarten teachers perceived and assumed that the children and their parents were traumatized, e.g., the quotes from Nancy highlighting that refugee children 'had experienced traumatic events', or 'had been abused'. Similarly, Ruth asserts the 'need to focus on trauma if the children are feeling unsafe', and further claims that some children 'have experienced special traumatic events'. According to the findings, the image that is portrayed in the professional language is that of 'traumatized' refugees in need of safety.

Discussion

The textual mediation of the safety discourse

According to the accounts of kindergarten teachers, safety work emerges as a coordinator of their everyday social relations. From an institutional ethnographic perspective, the idea of providing safety relates to their practices, including what they say and do with/for the refugee children. Talking and comforting and hugging and holding children are synonymous with what I refer to as 'safety work'. This is what kindergarten staff do and understand to be important in dealing with refugee children who may have potential trauma. Although not directly located in policy, connections within the policy language imply the significance of safety in the kindergarten. For instance, the kindergarten staff, in partnership with parents, are expected to ensure that the child gets a safe and good start in kindergarten (Norwegian Kindergarten Framework Plan, 2017, p. 33).

In my findings, the centrality of the discourses on trauma and safety visibly illustrated the unseen complex experiences kindergarten teachers engage in when working with refugee children. Through the interpretation of authoritative institutional texts, such as the ICDP and RVTS training programmes, safety work is textually mediated, which,

as the findings indicate, the kindergarten teachers were not necessarily aware of, nor had they paid attention to the ruling relations of safety work. However, most had attended ICDP training to improve their competency to work with refugee children.

The construction of the 'traumatized' refugee child in need of safety as a social category can be linked to the discourses of the ICDP and the RVTS programmes, which advance that refugee children have potential trauma, and that teachers therefore ought to intervene through the provision of safety work. The category is activated when specific ways of understanding and meeting the children's needs align with the ways of managing them. In this light, the ICDP and RVTS serve as mediators of knowledge regimes from which the traumatized refugee category is activated. For instance, based on the ICDP, trauma understanding, and resilience-based intervention have been used on asylum seekers and refugee children under the responsibility of the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (Christie & Dohle, 2011).

Social technologies like the ICDP and RVTS were founded on good intentions, and have contributed to the professions and institutions working with children in Norway and beyond in reactivating existing positive patterns of care and reconceptualizing care (Hundeide, 2010). While the ICDP and RVTS programme appears to have improved teachers' competency in their work with refugee children, and the refugee parent's awareness of their parenting, they are also examples of how psychological discourses continue to shape the construction of the image of refugees who are treated as a category. Categories are socially constructed and represent ideas, and not individuals or species (Hacking, 1999). The use of categories exemplifies how professional language can be utilized generically, despite the ICDP's insistence on cultural sensitivity, hence producing a standardized way of seeing and interacting with the children (Kimathi & Nilsen, 2021). Anchored on psy-discourse, the concept of safety can therefore be seen as a token of accountability, revealing a scientific power that goes uninterrogated at times (Nilsen, 2021).

Implications of the trauma discourse

My findings indicate that the kindergarten teachers were immersed in a safety discourse as a form of intervention against potential trauma during the integration of refugee children. Previous studies reveal that research on refugee children, as well

as practitioners' perspectives, have been dominated by a trauma discourse (Lunneblad, 2017; Rutter, 2006; Watters, 2011) that has been criticized for homogenizing refugee children as weak and vulnerable. Seeing children as traumatized is part of a wider narrative through which refugees are seen in terms of presenting 'problems' (Rutter, 2006), rather than for the gifts and human potential inherent in them. The professional training of staff on trauma and trauma intervention is central to their understanding of what they should prioritize.

Kindergarten teachers are therefore becoming increasingly more accountable to 'psy knowledge' discourses (Rose, 1999) that mediate the social relations of their typical safety work. The dominance of 'psy knowledge', and the widespread unquestioned acceptance into professions such as childcare and kindergarten education, was evident in my study. In this light, the discourse of trauma has increasingly become an ideology that is shaping policy and practice within kindergartens in Norway, and as such, it is shaping the prevailing ideas and construction of refugee children and their needs.

In addition, the discourse of trauma connects different kindergarten professionals in an institutional complex, in which the construct of the 'traumatized' refugee child is made functional for the professionals to make sense of their everyday work. This aligns with previous studies that reveal that vulnerability, deprivation and traumatic experiences have been at the centre of recent research on refugee children, mainstreamed in psychology and psychiatry (Watters, 2011; Lunneblad, 2017). The implication is that if left unquestioned, psy knowledge can become a powerful knowledge regime (Rose, 1999) that influence how professionals understand and categorize refugee children.

This categorization serves as the basis for the implicit standardization of the work kindergarten teachers do (Downey, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2019). Social technologies involve a broad categorization of children, in which the professionals rely on standardized descriptions embedded in the technologies. Empirical observations are combined with discursive concepts to assign specific 'pathologies' to the children. For example, a refugee child's crying is interpreted as emotional stress, and poor clothing is interpreted as poor parenting.

Despite the failure of existing studies to conclusively show a direct relationship between trauma and developmental outcomes among children (Veltman & Browne, 2001), the assumed relationship between safety work and the trauma discourse in kindergartens must be scrutinized. Arguably, trauma-based education for kindergarten staff is important in the sense that children who may have experienced trauma are handled appropriately from an informed point of view. However, it is also equally important to consider that refugee children can feel unsafe without carrying trauma, i.e., not all refugee children who are unsafe have been traumatized.

The application of knowledge designed for trauma intervention not only assigns refugees a traumatized and vulnerable category, but also risks victimizing children with a refugee background, who, like other children, have agency and are resourceful in their routine encounters in and out of kindergartens. The psy discourse that is visible in social technologies such as the ICDP and RVTS is increasingly becoming powerful and legitimizing professional practice, but when used in a fragmented manner it can legitimize, without necessarily solving apparent problems or creating others such as being normative and moralizing (Bjerre et al., 2021: 10). Through safety work, kindergarten teachers are fulfilling the ambition of the authorities (through policy) to ensure that resources and training provided by the state and other interrelated agencies are utilized to help produce the desired outcomes, all with good intentions. As such, they are meeting the objectives of the institutional framework that organizes the processes within kindergartens, such as the Kindergarten Framework Plan and programmes like the ICDP and RVTS. Policymakers, kindergarten teachers and relevant agencies would thus find it meaningful to revisit the theoretical and categorical presumptions that inform classification systems, since they are founded on a theoretical knowledge that is rarely interrogated and implicitly embedded in discourses and texts (Bjerre et al., 2021).

Indeed, uncovering what knowledge has been privileged and how such knowledge becomes authoritative and legitimized, even when not well understood by those who embed it in their practice, would be beneficial. The implication is that in their ambition to promote integration in kindergartens, teachers should use social technology in a critical way that incorporates reflexivity rather than as a standard routine.

Kindergartens can create experiences that offer warmth and affection for refugee children, among others, to help them feel safe and develop a sense of belonging without necessarily putting labels on them (Kalkman et al., 2017).

My findings indicate that when children are seen as traumatized, kindergarten teachers may interact with them as representative of a category, thereby overlooking their individuality. In this case, the individuality is lost not because the children are not catered for individually, but rather because the discourse that emerges out of the work of kindergarten professionals advances the category of the 'traumatized' refugee children. Consequently, this becomes the label that acts as an umbrella for refugee children. The individuality therefore becomes lost in the discourse and not essentially in practice, since my empirical data showed that kindergarten teachers made discretionary judgments that catered to children's individual needs for care and safety.

Each category carries with it a preconceived meaning (Nilsen, 2017). When the category is used in an institutional setting, it becomes the foundation upon which certain practices and outcomes are justified. As a result, the category of the 'traumatized' refugee children serves as the basis upon which kindergarten teachers engage in safety work. The category here becomes significant because it calls for teachers to be accountable, but it can also be used normatively to reveal deviant behaviour among children, e.g., looking unsafe, thereby othering them. The use of social technologies by front-line professionals can consequently end up constructing the categories they are intended to 'help'.

Concluding remarks

Using institutional ethnography, I have explored how kindergarten teachers relate to the concept of safety in the integration of refugee children. The concept of safety in this paper is represented as both a discourse and a practice framed within an institutional complex that includes kindergarten teachers. The article's contribution is to reveal how safety work as a practice is implicitly mediated by authoritative knowledge regimes embedded in texts such as the ICDP, the RVTS programme, and the Kindergarten Framework Plan.

The article also examines how the discourse of trauma is increasingly becoming a dominant ideology to which kindergarten teachers subscribe, and in turn, it has resulted in a categorization of refugee children as potentially traumatized. The construct emerging here, 'traumatized' refugee child in need of safety, is therefore a result of well-intended intervention efforts in the kindergartens. Kindergarten practitioners and policymakers must investigate in more depth the effects of knowledge that, on the one side produces desired outcomes, but on the other, may counterproductively victimize refugee children.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Tensions of Difference in Integrating Refugee Children in Norwegian ECEC Centers

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Abstract

This article explores the tensions arising in the integration process of refugee children in Norwegian early childhood education and care (ECEC) centers. ECEC centers have become important arenas for integrating refugees, particularly in light of the refugees' obligation to participate in Norway's introduction program. For many refugee children, ECEC centers are the first public institutions they encounter, where they learn about norms and values outside of their homes. Using institutional ethnography as the inquiry method, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with ECEC professionals, focusing on how they interact with refugee children and carry out everyday integration work. The article adopts Elias' "civilizing process" as the overarching analytical concept. The findings reveal that the integration of refugee children involves tensions in negotiating language, civilizing children in relation to Norwegian ideals of childhood, and civilizing parents in relation to the Norwegian cultural ideal of parenting.

Keywords: *ECEC; institutional ethnography; integration; refugees; civilization process*

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Introduction

... and I think the parents are the ones who know their children best, and they bring their culture into ours. I'm thinking of the knowledge they have that we don't, that we need to have respect for that, we need to figure things out together so that the child can develop in a good way, instead of telling them, "You have to do it like this because that's how we do it in Norway"—yeah, I don't think that's the best way to do it, especially with those who are used to doing it in other ways; then, I think their ways can work just as well in many cases.

The above quote is from Ruth—a teacher working in an early childhood education and care (ECEC) center exclusively for refugees in Norway—who reveals some of the tensions that ECEC professionals face when working with immigrants in ECEC institutions. Teachers are expected to abide by the legislation while simultaneously using their discretion to act knowledgeably and competently when dealing with immigrants and refugees, for the public good (Scholz, 2021).

ECEC centers, also known as *barnehager* in Norway, are institutions for children aged 0–5 years (Ministry of Education and Research, 2023). All children in Norway have a statutory right to attend ECEC centers, which are not free but are highly subsidized; enrollment is voluntary (Engel et al., 2015; Thorud, 2020). ECEC centers are important arenas for the integration of immigrants into Norway. This aspect of ECEC is evident in government policy documents, white papers, and other legal documents. The underlying challenge facing ECEC professionals in carrying out integration relates to the tensions between cultural responsiveness and the institutional guidelines and practices to which professionals are held accountable (Norheim & Moser, 2020; Sønsthagen, 2020; Tobin, 2020).

The present article aims to highlight the tensions arising during the process of integrating refugee children and parents in Norwegian ECEC centers. The overarching research questions are as follows: What are the perspectives of ECEC professionals on the tensions arising during the integration of refugee children in Norwegian ECEC centers? How do ECEC professionals deal with different notions of child-rearing in Norwegian ECEC centers?

The current article conceptualizes ECEC centers as “civilizing institutions” (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Host countries receiving refugees, especially in the Western world, engage in some form of socialization, especially when children spend time in welfare-state funded institutions such as ECEC centers (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Therefore, the concept of the civilizing process is used analytically to explore the process of negotiation among ECEC professionals, refugee children, and parents, on what is considered to be civilized conduct and who decides what this is (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). The analytical lens is relevant for unpacking how civilized conduct for refugee children is conceived and negotiated in the Norwegian welfare state through institutions striving for equality, even though the institutions are based on norms that reflect and reproduce historical power relations among certain social groups, such as ECEC professionals and refugees.

Background and previous research

Enrollment in ECEC centers

Currently, 4.5% of the Norwegian population has a refugee background (Statistics Norway, 2022a). Syrians constitute the largest group with a refugee background in Norway, followed by Somalis, Eritreans, Iraqis, and Afghans, respectively (Strøm, 2019). Regarding

enrollment in ECEC centers, 93.4% of children aged 1–5 years and 97.4% of children aged 3–5 years attended ECEC centers in 2021 (Statistics Norway, 2022b). Although it is not known how many children with a refugee background are enrolled in Norwegian ECEC centers, 19.5% of children aged 1–5 years enrolled in ECEC centers in 2021 were children with minority-language backgrounds, based on the criteria that the children’s parents or guardians have a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Sami, or English (Directorate for Education and Training, 2022; Thorud, 2022).

ECEC centers as arenas for integration

In Norway, integration and inclusion are concepts that are used almost interchangeably, displaying relative ambiguity in government documents (Korsvold, 2011). For instance, the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017) omits integration but uses inclusion, which focuses on providing equal opportunities and facilitating social participation and inclusive communities (pp. 8, 22, 40). Scholars have highlighted that Norwegian government documents, such as the Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005) and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017), tend to show consensus but remain implicit and simplified regarding the ascribed meaning of important concepts (Burner & Biseth, 2016; Sønsthagen, 2021). For instance, the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) does not define inclusion, instead leaving it open to ECEC professionals to delimit and implement in their own way.

Other government documents use the concept of integration but do not define its meaning, instead focusing on what the government’s ambition for integration is. For instance, Norway’s Migration and Integration 2021–2022 – Report to the OECD (Thorud, 2022, p. 8) and the Norwegian government’s Integration Strategy for 2019–2022 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018, p. 4) both state that Norway’s integration policy aims at providing opportunities for refugees and other immigrants to participate in working life and community life. Moreover, the Migration and Integration Report for Norway to the OECD has a section titled “goals for integration – kindergarten,” where it highlights the Norwegian government’s ambition for increasing the enrollment of minority-language children in ECEC centers and the allocation of more financial resources for the development of professionals working in urban settings with ethnically diverse ECEC centers (Thorud, 2022, p. 65). The same report further points out that kindergartens and schools are important arenas for social inclusion, with a clear focus on enrollment statistics for immigrant children. Hence, inclusion is seen through the lens of enrollment of children in educational institutions.

Recent studies have emphasized that ECEC centers have increasingly become key sites for integrating refugees in host societies (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020; Bregnbæk, 2021; Kimathi & Nilsen, 2021; Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020; Scholz, 2021; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020). ECEC centers can contribute to improving refugee children’s general well-being

and language development (Jahreie, 2021; Kulbrandstad, 2017; Norheim & Moser, 2020; Sønsthagen, 2020). Moreover, previous research has explored ECEC centers as spaces for children's individual development through civic integration, where they learn the norms, values, and skills deemed important during childhood and later in life (Abu El-Haj et al., 2018; Goodman, 2019).

Similarly, there has been a growing political interest in the responsibility of ECEC centers to adequately enable children to learn the Norwegian language in preparation for school (Gambaro et al., 2021; Kulbrandstad, 2017; Norheim, 2022). There have been claims that delays in learning the Norwegian language can pose a risk of negative outcomes in future schooling (Kulbrandstad, 2017). Recent research has also indicated that ECEC professionals do not have the required competence and knowledge in their everyday work with immigrants and, therefore, may exclude minority children and parents (Lund, 2022a; Solberg, 2019; Sønsthagen, 2021). Researching how integration is enacted in ECEC centers allows for exploring both the opportunities accorded to refugees, and also the struggles they face in living up to the required norms of integration into Norwegian society (Bregnbæk, 2021).

In this article, I use the concept of integration to refer to a model through which refugees in Norway are socially incorporated and encouraged to maintain their social-cultural identities as they become a part of a multicultural society in which their distinct characteristics are accepted (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016); hence, integration is a negotiated process between refugees and the host society that takes into consideration the complex interplay of different factors and facets of both their individuality and group dynamics as part of their interaction. This differs from a functionalist perspective in which integration is framed in terms of taken-for-granted norms from the host society embedded in the social processes (Lindo, 2005).

Theoretical framework

The analytical framework is the concept of “the civilizing process,” derived from Elias (1994). The notion of civilization revolves around the need to understand how people regulate their behavior through social interactions, for instance, by developing a sense of self-restraint and shame in order to be perceived as respectable (Elias, 1994). Inspired by this concept, Gilliam and Gulløv (2017) analyze how childhood institutions, such as schools and ECEC centers, can be seen as civilizing institutions where children learn behavioral and cultural norms. Civilizing is a theoretical concept aimed at understanding what is considered appropriate and correct about behavior, relationships, and coexistence in a particular context. Hence, the “civilizing process” refers to the acquisition of cultural values, how they are passed on, and the interpersonal relations of interdependence and domination leading to their naturalization

(Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). The definition of “being civilized” relies on expressions of the culturally dominant perceptions of how children should act and interact among themselves, with others, and within their surroundings. Therefore, ECEC centers, acting as civilizing institutions, practice integration by organizing and maintaining esteemed norms and values as envisaged by the welfare state (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). In their integration work, ECEC professionals transfer knowledge of civilized conduct, which translates integration into teaching children how to behave properly (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017, p. 19). Similar to adults, over time, children adapt to markers of social behavior, observing norms of conduct that are perceived as acceptable civilized behavior. This is because people develop the fear of being judged for uncivilized behavior and/or of being excluded, thus aspiring to conform to expected behaviors to gain status and respectability (Elias, 1994).

Research shows that welfare institutions largely seek to promote civic integration policies (see Goodman, 2019; Joppke, 2017;). Here, civic integration refers to the policies and activities developed by the government and welfare institutions for immigrants, which form the basis upon which their integration is evaluated (Goodman, 2019). These policies and activities relate to competency in the language of the host country, child-rearing practices, dominant norms and values, and ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality, among other things (Goodman, 2019; Joppke, 2017).

In the Nordic countries, these ideals are increasingly being confronted by the complexities of superdiversity, which create relative tensions of exclusion and otherness in ECEC centers (Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020; Olwig, 2017). For instance, recent studies (Lund, 2022b; Sønsthagen, 2021) highlight how welfare institutions such as schools and ECEC centers covertly enforce compliance through unequal relations of power between professionals and refugees; the professionals take up the role of “civilizing” the refugees by imparting to them the social norms of the host societies, albeit concealed in the institutional practices that privilege the dominant values of the majority. By researching how ECEC professionals perceive their participation in integration, this is an opportunity to see how integration is organized to make people learn to adapt to the external requirements of the behavior expected of them, which is generally done with good intentions, but also risks becoming a form of covert assimilation (Jaffe-Walter, 2016).

Methodology

My inquiry was informed by institutional ethnography (IE), a method of inquiry associated with Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005). IE is both a theoretical approach and a method of inquiry that draws upon feminist standpoint epistemology, in which the research focus is on the social coordination of people’s everyday experiences (Smith, 2005, 2006). My intention in using IE was to conduct a sociological exploration that foregrounds

the standpoint of ECEC professionals as “knowers” with an ambition to explore how everyday integration work is organized through texts (Smith, 2005).

By using IE, I endeavor to unpack ECEC professionals’ integration work knowledge at a local site and the way this work is organized within institutional/macro processes of translocal relations, which, in IE, are referred to as ruling relations (Smith, 2005, 2006; Lund & Nilsen, 2020). I use work knowledge as a concept to refer to “descriptions and explications of what people know by virtue of what they do that ordinarily remain unspoken” (Smith, 2005, p. 210). To access the ruling relations of integration work, institutional ethnographers identify texts that mediate, regulate, and authorize the doings of ECEC professionals (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Smith, 2005). Here, texts refer to “definite forms of words, figures, or images which exist in material form and can be replicated in a different site, and therefore connect people within social relations of that particular action” (Smith, 2001, p. 164). For instance, ECEC professionals partake in integration work that is socially organized by authoritative texts, such as the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) and Norway’s integration strategy policy documents. The overarching reason behind the choice of IE is to explore the power of texts and language in people’s everyday work experiences as seen from their standpoint, along with how the messages in the texts are reproduced across different sites (Smith & Turner, 2014).

Participants and data collection

The analysis was based on semi-structured interviews with 13 ECEC teachers working in three ECEC centers in a southern city in Norway; the interviews were conducted between April and August in 2019. The sampled ECEC centers include a reception ECEC center run exclusively for refugees and two general ECEC centers (one public and the other private), all of which rely on funding from the state and are required to adhere to the Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Two of the participants worked in the reception ECEC center but also visited the other two centers as language consultants. They mainly worked with helping the children, after they had attended the reception ECEC center for a year, to make the transition to the general ECEC centers.

Except for the reception ECEC center, the spoken language was mainly Norwegian. The reception ECEC center also had part-time language interpreters who came in during parents’ meetings and when there were children in need of language support. The demographic of the ECEC professionals was homogenous—they were all women, predominantly ethnic Norwegian, and had Norwegian as their mother tongue. This has probably influenced the perspectives of the participants in relation to the areas of tension that the professionals perceived while conducting integration work in the ECEC centers.

The participants included pedagogical leaders, teacher assistants, and language support professionals. I used nonstandardized snowball and purposive sampling to recruit

the participants. The criterion was that the participants had to work at a site (an ECEC center) aimed at integrating refugees. Sampling in institutional ethnographic studies is not focused on being representative of or generalizable to the research population the participants belong to; instead, it focuses on finding a sample that operates within the examined institutional process (Smith, 2002, p. 26). The questions asked during the interviews covered the activities that ECEC professionals prioritized when interacting with refugee children, how the professionals interacted with such children and their parents, and how the professionals related to policy documents such as the Framework Plan for kindergartens.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, using the aid of a research assistant to interpret when needed. As a non-native researcher in Norway, I entered the research field from a position of unfamiliarity. Even though I was unfamiliar with the ECEC sector at a practical level in Norway, I was acquainted with the policies and organization of ECEC programs in the country, having lived there for eight years. The research was part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Agder in the south of Norway. My position as an outsider offered me an opportunity to see and experience fieldwork through an external lens (Smith, 2005). My positionality can be understood as the perspective of a “stranger” (Schuetz, 1944) who finds themselves attempting to interpret the activities of ECEC professionals to orient themselves in their everyday work. In positioning myself as a “stranger”, I do not have the privilege of insider knowledge or the basic assumptions on how integration work is carried out by ECEC professionals. Hence, the ECEC professionals could occupy the expert position, offering me a chance to be the inquirer who questions everything that appears unquestionable or “ignorant” and to “see” what is taken for granted by those in the dominant position (Schuetz, 1944; Zhao, 2016).

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, and every participant was given enough time to provide an account of their experiences of working with refugee children. More than half of the interviews were conducted in the Norwegian language with the support of a research assistant, who helped to translate and transcribe the interviews in English. The involvement of a research assistant ensured that the participants expressed themselves in the language with which they were most comfortable. The ethical considerations made before, during, and after the study were in line with the guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (2022). For instance, I sent a consent letter to all of the participants via postal delivery and email, which they all signed. The consent letter indicated that the project would anonymize the participants, that the whole exercise would be carried out confidentially, and that they had a free choice to join and withdraw from the project. The project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to ensure that the required data protection procedures were followed.

Data analysis

When performing data analysis, I began by identifying/ “mapping” the integration experiences and activities from the interview transcripts. Integration experiences refer to everything done by ECEC professionals that they deemed important for integration, as stated in the interviews. I tracked how ECEC professionals talked about their everyday experiences (Rankin, 2017). Mapping in IE involves engaging in a “dialogue” with the data in search of pointers on how the work is organized (Smith, 2005). Some of the commonly mentioned examples included conversations with parents, close attention to refugee children, guiding children on self-care, and language support. The focus was not only to explicate how ECEC teachers performed integration work but also how they were embedded in an institutionally standardized way of understanding their work. Mapping and explication of ECEC teachers’ experiences formed the basis from which the tensions emerged during the analysis.

During analysis, I identified three different tensions. I have termed these tensions *negotiating language*, *civilizing children*, and *civilizing parents*. Through the interviews, I familiarized myself with the lived experiences of the teachers, where I realized that there was a “puzzle” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Here, the “puzzle” was the tensions related to integration work that emerged from the expressed perspectives of the ECEC professionals and that, therefore, became the sociological issue within my investigation (Grahame, 1998; Smith, 2005).

The findings are presented with excerpts from the empirical data to demonstrate the three emerging tensions that ECEC professionals experienced when conducting integration work. In selecting the excerpts, I purposefully explored the interview material for clues in the verbatim transcriptions of the participants’ responses. This was inspired by IE’s recommendation to “look for detailed descriptions of work that make visible institutional hooks and traces in the lived experiences of the teller” (McCoy, 2006, p. 111).

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample.

Pseudonym	Job title	ECEC center ¹	Language (mother tongue)
Sophie	Preschool teacher/Language adviser	B and C	Norwegian
Ruth	Pedagogue/Language adviser	B	Norwegian and Arabic
Emily	Special needs teacher	C	Norwegian
Nancy	Psychiatric nurse/Teacher	C	Norwegian
Caro	Pedagogue	A	Norwegian
Salome	Deputy manager/Pedagogical leader	B	Norwegian
Nora	Pedagogical leader	A	Norwegian
Britney	Manager	C	Norwegian
Linnet	Pedagogue/Language adviser	A and B	Norwegian
Sheila	Pedagogue/Language adviser	B and C	Norwegian
Olivia	Pedagogue	C	Norwegian
Joanna	Pedagogue	B	Norwegian and Arabic
Purity	Pedagogue	B	Norwegian

¹ECEC center B is publicly and exclusively run for refugee children, while center C is publicly run for all children. ECEC center A is privately owned. All ECEC centers receive state funding in Norway.

Findings

This section presents the empirical findings and discussion. The analysis reveals three tensions that arose in the integration work carried out at ECEC centers, as seen in the interviews of ECEC professionals:

- i. Negotiating language, that is, learning Norwegian versus retaining their mother tongue.
- ii. Civilizing children, that is, exposing children to the ideals of “proper” Norwegian childhood versus incorporating refugee children’s diverse childhoods.
- iii. Civilizing parents, that is, teaching them to be “ideal parents” versus acknowledging their diverse parenting experiences and orientations.

Negotiating language

The interviews showed that ECEC professionals must contend with the tension relating to the expectation for refugee children to learn the Norwegian language vis-à-vis the retention of their mother tongue. Based on the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017, p. 47), children should receive appropriate language-stimulation instruction from teachers “to expose children to different languages, vernaculars, and dialects ... [and] create a diverse linguistic environment, highlight linguistic and cultural diversity.” Although this quote underscores a tolerance for language diversity in ECEC centers, refugee and other immigrant parents are first and foremost encouraged to enroll their children in ECEC centers for the sake of learning Norwegian (Directorate for Education and Training, 2022).

The findings revealed that because of the high number of children with foreign backgrounds, there was an elaborate arrangement for hiring foreign-language assistants who could speak languages such as Arabic, Somali, and Tigrinya (as reported by one ECEC leader). However, these language assistants were not full-time employees at this ECEC center, and they operated on a temporary basis when needed. The narratives provided by the participants indicate that the presence of language assistants played a significant role in promoting integration work at this ECEC center, as the following quote from Caro indicates:

Caro: However, we also have teachers and assistants who speak the mother language, that is, the children’s ethnic language ... I have to ask the woman who can speak Arabic to come and help me because I cannot speak Arabic, and the children cannot speak Norwegian ... So, the children need people who can speak their language, and then, they can slowly start to speak Norwegian; but first, we focus on how to make them feel safe ... If I want to have a conversation with the children or if I want to explain something ..., then I have to speak to the language assistant, who then explains to the children what we are going to do. So, they know what we will do and what will be needed.

The interviews indicated that the ECEC professionals prioritized the acquisition of Norwegian language competency among refugee children. Furthermore, there was consensus among the interview participants that refugee children were expected to learn the Norwegian language while in ECEC centers, which they said would give the children optimal preparation for the transition to other levels of the Norwegian education system. This is reflected in the quote from Joanna:

Joanna: I think my most important job is getting them integrated into the Norwegian society and essentially working with the families regarding everyday life here to help the children get better at Norwegian before they start in the Norwegian ECEC center ... And teach them normal Norwegian routines, too; that is our way of integrating. I think, for the language, it is best to go to the ECEC center with no home language support because then families have children who speak Norwegian, and they will learn the language faster.

Although the above quote reveals that priority was given to facilitating the children's learning of Norwegian, some responses indicate that they were aware of the importance of promoting the children's native languages, as Sheila stated:

I work a lot with these children. I'm pushing them to say something in their language and show them that I'm interested ... You're taking away a part of their identity if the ECEC professionals always push them to only use Norwegian.

The findings indicate that there was no consensus among ECEC professionals regarding how to negotiate the tensions of language and whether to focus solely on the Norwegian language or incorporate other mother-tongue languages in the integration process. Indeed, the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) seems to prioritize the Norwegian language for all children attending ECEC centers, including refugee children, giving ECEC leaders the liberty to decide the manner in which to negotiate the language tension. Those ECEC centers that receive refugee children, therefore, seemingly face the dilemma of how to incorporate the mother-tongue language, because Norwegian is embedded in the integration strategy 2019–2022 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018). The experiences of refugee children with their mother tongue while attending ECEC centers depends on which center they are enrolled in, because the centers have autonomy regarding how they work with languages.

Civilizing refugee children

The ECEC professionals revealed that integration work involves ensuring that refugee children understand the expected conduct and norms that they must follow. For instance,

they mentioned playing freely in nature, learning about personal space and autonomy, coping with different weather conditions, and independently resolving conflicts as important aspects of ideals that children learn at ECEC centers. The ECEC professionals emphasized that Norwegian children are expected to be independent; accordingly, most participants expressed the need for children to learn to follow instructions and perform self-care activities independently. Nora compared Norway with other countries regarding how children are encouraged to become more independent:

We have a lot of people coming from Turkey and Syria. In Turkey, ECEC centers are like schools. Children sit down and learn a lot. Here, we tell them, “You should sit on a chair; you have to wait for your turn, etc.” We have a play activity where we try to get the children to invest themselves, take their shoes off, jackets off ... In Syria, the parents do it for them, they don’t start so early like in Norway, and that’s a conflict. I give them some time and talk a bit about it, but I try to tell them why we are doing this. We want the children to eat by themselves. We also have people from Turkey who feed their children. But I don’t push them.

The ECEC professionals emphasized the need for children to develop independence as a core value of Norwegian childhood. Seemingly, integration work involves navigating the tension arising from the expectation by ECEC professionals that the children should learn to be independent. Moreover, the findings reveal that ECEC professionals noted contrasting ideals of child-rearing, particularly in relation to independence, children’s experiences of play, and their interaction with nature. For instance, the idea of children playing outside on wet days or during the winter was contested by refugee parents, who worried about the welfare of their children under such weather conditions, as Ruth indicated:

Many refugees come from countries with no snow, and once they bring their children to us, we tell them that their children will be playing in snow for 4–5 hours a day. This is very hard for them to accept at the beginning ... so I try to reason with them and promise to do less time in the snow.

The children’s encounters with Norwegian nature and play form the core values of the everyday Norwegian ECEC experience, in line with the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017). From the findings, it is arguable that facilitating refugee children in adapting to these ideals is part of the civilizing process of children in ECEC centers.

“Civilizing” parents

The ECEC professionals seemed aware of the tension that they faced when managing the cultural differences emerging during their interactions with refugee children and parents.

These differences included aspects related to food, religious celebrations, play, and outdoor activities, as Sheila indicated:

What's not acceptable in Norwegian ECEC centers is unhealthy food. Some of the parents put cake, chocolate, or juice in the lunch box. But we need to have patience with the parents and just tell them that won't be accepted in Norwegian institutions. We give them time to adjust ... As long as we are following the Norwegian law, we can have lots of discussions. It is very important to meet them with respect because there are so many different backgrounds. Some things we do are not in line with what they expect. We cannot expect that they will change just like that; things take time, and we need to be patient. They arrange things from food and clothing, how they treat and raise the children, and I have also experienced these conflicting experiences when I arrived here myself.

The quote reveals that ECEC professionals understand the challenges that emerge from cultural diversity in ECEC centers. In addition, it shows the strategies that they use to manage the differences in expectations, such as giving parents more time to adjust and advocating for respect, despite having conflicting experiences. This view aligns with the ambition of the Framework Plan for Kindergartens that seeks to foreground and celebrate diversity. Nonetheless, resourcefulness is also a source of potential conflict between teachers and parents. The ECEC professionals acknowledged that having different religious celebrations, such as Easter, Christmas, and Eid, a variety of foods, and different ways of dressing were all positive experiences for the children. Although some aspects of cultural diversity were celebrated, others appeared to cause tension because they represented different ideals of child-rearing, as Emily highlighted:

It's about things such as being outside when it's raining; lunch boxes as well, with two boring slices of bread. In a Norwegian ECEC center, you have to know many things, such as which boots to wear for what weather, and the expectations of the ECEC center from the parents.

Although some ECEC professionals stuck to the established practices and routines of ECEC centers, others seemed uncertain. For instance, Emily's quote shows some of the things that ECEC professionals expect the parents to fulfill, but at times, there is tension when these expectations are not met. It is equally notable from the quote that the professionals have ways of managing tensions through dialogue with the parents. Further, they exercised patience with those who might need more time to adjust to the demands of the ECEC centers. Here, the overarching priority of ECEC professionals seemed to be ensuring that parents knew what they were not allowed to do according to the law, that is, the legal limits of expected behavior and parenting ideals. The findings show that ECEC

professionals conceptualized their work with refugee parents as including “civilizing” them into the norms and ideals of the majority.

Discussion

The study findings revealed three forms of tension that the ECEC professionals perceived regarding how they carry out integration work with refugee children and parents. This discussion focuses on how ECEC professionals negotiated language, how they “civilized” refugee children, and how they “civilized” refugee parents. In exercising their professional responsibilities as organized in the authoritative texts (Smith, 2005), the ECEC professionals aligned with the “civilizing” project of the welfare state, which seeks to integrate refugees and is characterized by three forms of tension. The first tension that emerged from the study participants’ perceptions was how to negotiate the language of instruction and interaction in ECEC centers. This relates to the expectation that ECEC professionals should work to ensure that children acquire Norwegian language competency because kindergarten is conceptualized as an arena where different languages, cultures, and diversities meet (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This tension is compounded by the Norwegian Government’s efforts to increase the enrollment of children with minority language backgrounds in ECEC centers to better prepare them for subsequent schooling (Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Ministry of Education and Research, 2018).

Exposing children to the Norwegian language can be seen as the “civilizing” project of ECEC centers, which comes with good intentions to perform the function of ECEC centers as part of the state’s wider ambitions of facilitating individuals to become culturally acceptable citizens (Gambaro et al. 2021; Gilliam, 2017; Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Olwig; 2017). While adult refugees attend the obligatory introduction program to learn Norwegian in institutions for adults run by municipalities, the ECEC centers play a similar role, particularly the reception ECEC centers that are run exclusively for refugee children. The present study shows that that the ECEC professionals perceive that refugees are expected to acquire competence in Norwegian language for them to be seen as integrated in the wider Norwegian society (Gilliam, 2017; Goodman, 2019; Jaffe-Walter, 2016).

Demands for this form of civic integration force ECEC professionals to confront the dilemma of how to integrate other language domains (Kalkman & Clark, 2017; Kulbrandstad, 2017). Although the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) remains nonrestrictive, urging ECEC professionals to make use of rich linguistic diversity, it places strong emphasis on local Norwegian-language ECEC centers. The present study has shown that professionals have varying standpoints and strategies on how to work with language and, therefore, the tension that emerges. For instance, some ECEC centers have interpreters

and language-support teachers, while others do not, indicating that the overall language strategy may not be coherent.

Furthermore, the present study shows that the participants perceived that they had an obligation to “civilize” refugee children regarding appropriate routines and norms. The ECEC professionals deemed the ability of children to be tactful in terms of behavior and following instructions as a crucial aspect of integration (Norheim & Moser, 2020). The ability to follow a routine establishes a sense of normalcy, making the teachers feel confident in the children’s ability to adapt to a new environment and people. That norms have been routinized in the ECEC centers indicates that they were institutionalized and disseminated through the ECEC centers (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). Further, the teachers emphasized that it was crucial for children to develop independence. The findings show that ECEC centers in Norway are “civilizing” sites where refugee children experience early forms of civic integration, as ECEC professionals prepare them to be proper citizens of society (Abu El-Haj et al., 2018; Goodman, 2019).

Therefore, civilizing refugee children occurred through the civic lessons embedded in the routine practices of everyday life in the ECEC centers, in which they learned to take care of their own hygiene needs, feeding, and regulation of their own emotions (Abu El-Haj et al., 2018). Hence, it is understandable that this would be part of ECEC professionals’ perceptions of integration work, which they have a mandatory obligation to carry out. Recent studies have revealed that integration work is characterized by asymmetrical power relations between ECEC professionals and immigrant parents in Norway (Lund, 2022b; Norheim, 2022; Sønsthagen, 2021). Integration as a “civilizing” process is besieged by the tension between the civilizing project of welfare institutions, such as ECEC centers, which aim to integrate refugees into the dominant social values of being, and the civilizing project that ensures that refugees and immigrants enjoy the freedom of living within their identities in a socially cohesive environment (Jaffe-Walter, 2016).

It is unclear from the study whether the ECEC professionals were aware of the pressure to integrate that the refugee children and parents face in the ECEC centers. This pressure relates to the ambitions for civic integration that can be used to label those who conform as “the civilized” and those who do not as the “not-yet civilized” (Olwig, 2017). However, the ECEC professionals perceived that integration work involves cultural tensions that arise between them and the parents; they seemed aware of their professional role to guide, or “civilize,” the parents about how they are expected to raise children in Norway, because most refugees come from countries where child-care practices are different from those in Norway. Here, ECEC professionals occupy the position of experts as the authoritative texts conceptualize this, hence having the obligation to “civilize” refugee parents. For instance, some teachers invoked institutional means, such as national laws and curriculum guides, to get parents to cooperate. The Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017) points out that

parents are welcome to participate in dialogue and present views to the professionals, but it is the professionals' mandate to uphold the social and set core values (p. 29). Here, questions can be raised as to whether the "civilizing" process is about making refugees "behave Norwegian" and whether integration is seen as a feasible relational process. In this regard, the debate is about whether integration takes a relational stance or a coercive stance, in which ECEC teachers' obligation is to make the refugees "behave Norwegian" (Goodman, 2019; Lund, 2022b; Sønsthagen, 2021).

Conclusion and implications

The present article contributes to the literature on cross-cultural integration in ECEC through the identification and discussion of three tensions in the institutionalized work of integrating refugee children: *negotiating the Norwegian language*, *civilizing refugee children*, and *civilizing refugee parents*. First, many refugee children and their parents may lack fluency in the Norwegian language, and ECEC centers have prioritized their focus on this. However, ECEC professionals are, at times, unsure of how to address other mother tongues. This implies that there is a need for more dialogue between parents and ECEC professionals regarding how to incorporate different mother tongues (Löthman & Puskás, 2022; Tobin, 2020). Second, the findings reveal how the teachers emphasized the importance of children developing independence by teaching them how to take care of their own hygiene needs, feeding, and emotional regulation. Third, there are many differences with respect to child-rearing norms between ECEC professionals and refugee parents. Integration work, therefore, is embedded in the relational and institutional power activated by ECEC professionals as they engage in integration work and the raising of socially cohesive citizens (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017; Löthman & Puskás, 2022).

In a Norwegian society that has experienced demographic changes recently, the ideals of what it means to be civilized, good civic demeanor, and child-rearing practices can no longer be perceived as static. The implication is that ECEC professionals require training that equips them with the skills and strategies to aid in collaboration when dealing with refugee children and parents (O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Moreover, a good relationship between professionals and parents at ECEC centers is vital during the integration of refugee families in their host countries (Gambaro et al., 2021; Norheim & Moser, 2020; Scholz, 2020). To build such relationships, strategies are needed to ameliorate the power differentials that may contribute to the marginalization of the voices and realities of the refugees in ECEC centers (Norheim & Moser, 2020). Recent research suggests that professionals need the skills and knowledge to handle tensions, and need to be aware of their own values and broaden their perspectives toward more flexible and culturally sensitive practices (Lund, 2022a, 2022b). In addition, ECEC professionals should be involved

in efforts that seek to reconfigure the dominant social discourses within policies, especially those that coordinate everyday integration work, not only at local level but equally at translocal level (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017).

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