



Brief

“We must do what Norwegians do, go hiking and stuff, and integrate”: Refugee parents’ experiences with ECEC

Hilde Hjertager Lund

Western Norway University College, Norway

Contact corresponding author: Hilde Hjertager Lund, e-mail: hhl@hvl.no

Today’s children grow up in a society that is increasingly culturally diverse. In 2020, the number of children with minority backgrounds in Norwegian kindergartens was 19.3% (Statistics Norway). Good cooperation with parents in kindergarten is fundamental for a good start and is both a statutory right and duty and an essential factor for quality in kindergarten. Parents shall also be entitled to participate in the kindergarten’s educational content. Research has shown a wide variation in how kindergartens safeguard parental cooperation with minority parents. Several researchers have also found that the kindergarten staff find it challenging to cooperate with this parent group. The article examines minority parents’ understanding of the cooperation with the kindergarten and is based on parental interviews with 12 minority parents and their experiences with kindergarten. The minority parents have a refugee background and relatively short residence in Norway, 1–3 years. In addition, observational material from the kindergarten and interviews with pedagogical leaders contribute to contextualising the perspectives of minority parents. The analysis of minority parents’ experiences considering institutionalised kindergarten practices, perceptions of parenthood, and structural societal conditions uses Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and Berry’s acculturation theory. The article raises and discusses the following research questions: *How do refugee parents experience cooperation with the kindergarten? What factors in parental cooperation contribute to belonging and recognition?* Findings show that the minority parents experience tensions between experiences of respect from the staff and the adaptation to cultural norms. Language and cultural barriers of “not knowing” lead to anxiety and stress linked to the safety of the children in the ECEC. Several also point out that inadequate

knowledge of Norwegian and a lack of understanding of cultural codes that apply within the kindergarten context make communication and cooperation with kindergarten staff challenging. This article highlights the refugee parents' voices and experiences cooperating with the kindergarten. The study shows how kindergarten and staff practices by promoting authoritative images of the "others" disqualify the minority parents' notions of parenthood in kindergarten, which maintains power hierarchies and symbolic violence over minorities. At the same time, pedagogical practices contribute to recognition and inclusion. Looking at the integration processes of minorities in modern societies as liquid integration can be a more fruitful approach to integration and inclusion (Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019). Integration processes such as liquid integration shift the analytical focus from static and fast to the more changeable in the development of individuals in a complex interaction between the personal, social and structural in liquid modernity and society (Bauman, 2013) and a liquid migration (Engbersen, 2012; Skrobanek & Jobst, 2019). Complex relationships between the individual and the structuring mechanisms as liquid integration, thus open to individual variations of integration processes as changeable.

Keywords: *parenthood; refugees; cultural capital; belonging*