

Superdiversity as a trajectory of diversity in Norwegian early childhood education and care: From a collection of differences to participation and becoming

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Abstract

This article uses the concept of ‘superdiversity’ as a lens through which various conceptualisations of diversity in Norwegian early childhood education and care policies and professionals’ understandings are made visible. Although Norwegian early childhood education and care is expected to highlight, value, and promote diversity and mutual respect, little has been written on how diversity is actually understood by professionals as part of early childhood education and care institutional practice. On the basis of interviews with 2 migration pedagogues, 10 early childhood education and care teachers, and 15 early childhood education and care teacher education students, the following conceptualisations of diversity were reconstructed: diversity as embodied by different children and families; diversity as a social context for every child’s becoming; and diversity as equal participation. Each of these accounts involved ways of working with children and families from minority and majority backgrounds, and ‘diversity as a social context for every child’s becoming’ seemed to be most in line with the Norwegian curriculum. The curriculum focuses on the process of formative development/becoming, which overlaps with and may be meaningfully supplemented by superdiversity. However, superdiversity as a sociological concept requires careful operationalisation in dialogue with the field and its empirics .

Keywords

becoming, diversity’s trajectories, Norwegian early childhood education and care, participation, superdiversity

Introduction

The Norwegian state has officially declared itself an intercultural society in which diversity is expected to be practised through inclusion and participation, and there are many ways to be Norwegian (White Paper no. 49, 2003–2004). The Norwegian curriculum for early childhood

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education and care (ECEC) standards thus obliges kindergartens to ‘promote respect for human dignity by highlighting, valuing and promoting diversity and mutual respect’ and ‘give the children a shared experience and highlight the value of community’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017: 9).¹ Balancing these two priorities leads to the development of various ways of understanding diversity and educational work within the daily practice of ECEC.

This article aims to reconstruct such conceptualisations of diversity, as well as its operationalisation, in institutional contexts. Since the picture may be both complex and dynamic, the ECEC term ‘superdiversity’ is applied as a categorical lens. Superdiversity focuses on trajectories rather than static subcategories of diversity. ‘Trajectory’ is a concept that originates from physics, embracing the path that an object follows through space. It was imported into sociology to describe individual and collective processes of suffering or paths to criminality, and later evolved into descriptions of diverse status passages and life courses involving individual experiences and social/organisational contexts (Riemann and Schütze, 1991). Using the lens of superdiversity, the trajectories examined in this article relate to paths of meanings that ECEC staff have connected to diversity, as well as their perceptions of their implementation of diversity in their own practice.

As ECEC settings do not operate in sociocultural or organisational vacuums, the meanings attached to diversity in ECEC-related policy documents and the professional literature are also important. Therefore, superdiversity as a theoretical concept is presented first in this article and then the paths of diversity within the Norwegian curriculum and Norwegian professional literature are examined. Within this analysis, the overlap between superdiversity and the concept of formative development or ‘becoming’ (*danning* in Norwegian) is explored. Next, the study’s methodology, which involves various groups of professionals such as migration pedagogues, ECEC teachers and ECEC teacher education students, is presented. The results reconstruct the following conceptualisations of diversity: (a) diversity as embodied by different children and families; (b) diversity as a social context for every child’s becoming; and (c) diversity as equal participation. These conceptualisations mostly differ from each other by associating diversity with particular individuals who are ‘different’ (a) or a general social context (b) in which people from different backgrounds can participate equally (c). The understandings of diversity presented here relate to how professionals understand their work with diversity. I argue that operationalisations of diversity that are focused on children’s ‘becoming’ through dialogical involvement with diverse cultural texts and artefacts (b and c) are closest to the concept of superdiversity. The concluding remarks point to the added value of superdiversity in relation to the concept of ‘becoming’ as strongly anchored in the Norwegian tradition.

Superdiversity

Superdiversity is a sociological concept that seems to have been created for two reasons. The first involves the increasing spread, speed and scale of migration (Meissner and Vertovec, 2014) and the growing ‘diversification’ of diversity, which created the need for a term that would be able to embrace the dynamics and complexity of ethnic diversity and the evolving character of migration, as well as the ‘new conjunctions and interactions of variables [that] have arisen’ (Vertovec, 2007: 1025). Superdiversity is therefore driven by the intent to overcome the ethno-focal lens of migration studies by inviting multidimensional articulations combining diverse types of migration (including labour-related, short-term, long-term, refugee, asylum-seeking, expatriate and student-exchange migration) with other differences, such as socio-economic status, migration status, age, gender and (dis)ability (Meissner and Vertovec, 2014; Siebers, 2018).

The second reason for the creation of the term ‘superdiversity’ appears to be connected to the intense dynamics, over time, of categories describing individuals’ particular situations. In this

sense, the ‘super’ brought to attention by ‘superdiversity’ refers to the increased focus on the social trajectories of individuals living at the intersections of various categories of diversity. This means that superdiversity as a conceptual lens allows for the embracing of individual and group societal paths and social trajectories (Meissner, 2016), as well as the process of their ‘becoming’ across and within diverse communities in particular localities.

In this article, the concept of superdiversity is used to embrace the conceptual paths of diversity implied in the ECEC steering documents and the literature, as well as those implemented by ECEC professionals in different branches of the sector. The reconstructed meanings associated with diversity and understandings of its implementation in ECEC practice are intended to create a basis for discussion of superdiversity’s relevance and necessity in discourse on Norwegian ECEC. Therefore, in this article, superdiversity constitutes the researcher’s standpoint, from which policy-implied and theoretically or practically developed understandings of diversity are examined.

(Super)diversity in the Norwegian ECEC curriculum

The Norwegian curriculum for ECEC (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017) is a 64-page document in which the word ‘diversity’ is used 22 times.² More specifically, ‘diversity’ is mentioned in the chapters on core values, objectives and content, and learning areas.

In the section on ECEC values, diversity appears in a subsection which is introduced by the following statement: ‘The children shall be able to discover that there are many ways in which to think, act and live’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017: 9). However, it is noted that this must be done within the framework of a community, as ECEC ‘shall also give the children shared experiences and highlight the value of community’ (9). These ideas are in line with the section on democracy, which is first mentioned and establishes the circumstances of living in a diverse community: ‘All children shall be able to experience democratic participation by contributing to and taking part in kindergarten activities regardless of their communication and language skills’ (8). This relates democracy to the equal possibilities for all children for participation in institutional life. Diversity at the level of values is not linked to any particular sociological variables apart from language and communication skills, neither of which should limit children’s levels of participation. The focus on facilitating contributions when discovering ‘many ways in which to think, act and live’ may be interpreted as in line with the idea that superdiversity involves the attempt to avoid the static labelling categories of social division by instead focusing on ‘trajectories’. The curriculum thus sheds light on trajectories of participation in institutional life and joint explorations of diversity in society.

In the section of the curriculum on objectives and content, diversity is mentioned in relation to ‘formative development’ (*danning*), which, in international discourse, also functions as cultural formation or ‘becoming’ (Ødegaard and White, 2016). The curriculum refers to facilitating children’s ‘probing and inquisitive approach to the world’, which promotes the sharing of values and norms through solidarity and democracy, while endorsing the strengthening of ‘courageous, independent and responsible participation’ and the valuing of ‘individual expressions and actions’ (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017: 21). In such a context, diversity is to be highlighted by staff ‘as a starting point for discovery, exploration and learning’ (21).

Another mention of diversity in this chapter refers to communication and language. It is pointed out that staff are expected to ‘help ensure that linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children and encourage multilingual children to use their mother tongue, while also actively promoting developing the children’s Norwegian/Sami language skills’ (24). This relates diversity to linguistic diversity, which is supposed to be used and made visible and accessible as a resource for all children. At the same time, skills in the official Norwegian languages (*bokmål* and

nynorsk), as well as Norwegian indigenous languages (Sami), are to be developed. There is, however, the expectation that the linguistic diversity of the children in the kindergarten class will not hinder the development of the majority language, as it is the latter that, in the long run, safeguards participation in play and the educational institutions they will attend in the future. Nevertheless, as underlined in the section on values, participation should not depend on the children's skills in the majority language.

A further chapter that mentions diversity contains the learning areas that children must access. These learning areas are 'art, culture and creativity', 'ethics, religion and philosophy', and 'local community and society' (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017). Within the first area, ECEC 'shall allow the children to experience artistic and cultural expressions that reflect social diversity and different time periods' (50). Within the second, ECEC 'shall create an interest in the diversity of our society and an understanding of others' life worlds and ways of life' (54), while the third is a means of familiarising children with their local communities and encouraging participation through play and other activities that provide them with listening and negotiation experiences.

In this part of the curriculum, diversity is connected to particular sociological variables. For instance, it is stated that 'cultural diversity, different ways of living and different family structures are important aspects of this learning area' (55). Cultural diversity is described not only in terms of different ways of life, world views and family structures, but also in terms of art, the experience of listening, the formulation of one's own expressions and negotiations. It is up to each ECEC setting to determine how these ideals are implemented so that positive processes of children's learning about diversity are ensured. It is also important for children to be able to create own meanings, objects, and relationships through exploratory experiences and expression. Here again, the process of a child's 'formative development' is highlighted, which opens up various trajectories of 'becoming' an individual subject as framed by access to diverse cultural meanings and the possibility of participation.

It seems that the Norwegian ECEC policy is open to superdiversity in terms of embracing diversity within general categories of different ways of life, world views, ways of acting and family structures, as well as the concept of 'becoming', which starts with curiosity and is followed by explorations that are specific to each individual's path of self-creation.

(Super)diversity in the literature

'Becoming' in the context of diversity

An individual's 'becoming' is described as happening through involvement with diverse cultural values, interactions with other individuals and generations, and access to meanings established in relations with others (Løvlie, 2003; Ødegaard and White, 2016). It is thus a social and mutual process through which, in the ECEC institutional context, 'children and teachers shape themselves and are shaped in dialogical processes with other people, culture and history, nature and society' (Ødegaard, 2016: 50). 'Becoming' also emerges on the collective level in interactions with others who may have access to different sets of meanings and values. Formal development intensifies and becomes even more complex and immersive in increasingly pluralistic societies (Løvlie, 2003; Ødegaard and White, 2016).

'Becoming', as a process starting with explorative and curious engagement with one's social or material surroundings, initiates individual and collective experiences of meanings, values and things other 'than mine', and it may thus facilitate a critical reception of one's own heritage (Løvlie, 2003: 70). Therefore, there are unlimited possibilities for 'becoming' across accessible cultural

values, meanings and heritage in the intercultural contexts of ECEC and society, and these possibilities seem to be in line with the open and trajectory-oriented concept of superdiversity.

Celebrating diversity by highlighting the differences of others or as a context for all: limiting and activating 'becoming'

The Norwegian literature presents resource-oriented and problem-oriented perspectives as possible attitudes for exploring diversity (Gjervan et al., 2012). The former embraces difference as a resource for the whole group, while the latter focuses on the lack of knowledge and experiences, which creates a burden for staff. Within such defined alternatives, the resource-oriented perspective seems to be the only professional alternative. By making diversity visible, the ECEC setting becomes more familiar to minority children, families and staff (Giæver, 2019, 2020; Gjervan et al., 2012). Celebrating diverse cultural and religious holidays, asking caregivers to prepare their typical food for special occasions and visiting children's homes are presented as aspects of the resource-oriented approach (Gjervan et al., 2012). Creating room for children's religious expression by, for example, allowing them to fast during the period of Ramadan is also supported (Giæver, 2019).

Such diversity-appreciating practices can be used to frame the 'becoming' of diverse groups of children. As they define diversity and develop specific practices by pointing out individuals from *different* backgrounds, they also institutionally confirm that difference. This labelling and the responsibility of representing caregivers' culture, meanings and values in the ECEC setting seems to limit the 'becoming' possibilities of children with non-Norwegian backgrounds. Therefore, this approach is criticised as locking children into the identity of their caregivers and thus blocking the possibility for them to create themselves through full and equal participation in ECEC and their home culture (Sadownik, 2018). It may also raise questions about the power relations between so-called 'nice', inclusive Norwegians and the 'different ones', the collection of whom confirms the goodness and inclusiveness of Norwegian ECEC. This again influences Norwegian children, who are 'becoming' into paradoxically privileged positions in the inclusive community of ECEC. Moreover, it limits their possible paths of self-creation by reducing diversity to a few specific attributes that are present in the group of children.

An approach to diversity that activates and stimulates the becoming processes of all children, regardless of their background, identifies diversity as a sociocultural context in which we all live without making anyone an ambassador of a particular country or culture (Bergen Kommune, 2015). This approach is about making various cultures and languages visible in ECEC's materiality or artefacts, and making them accessible for children (without making anyone a defined representative of particular artefacts or materials). The children, through their own cultural knowledge and curiosity, interact with different meanings and artefacts when using, exploring and negotiating the accessible content on their own terms (Bergen Kommune, 2015). 'Becoming' then emerges in playful and explorative situations, facilitated by diversity, which is materialised in the spatial and material ECEC context.

Diversity as addressing the need for equal participation

Joint participation in play, explorations or negotiations assumes certain forms of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2004) of children, and access to this capital is culturally mediated (Sadownik, 2018; Zachrisen, 2015). Starting in Norwegian ECEC as a migrant child over three years old is reported to result in a high level of stress and the feeling for a child that they are outside the

community and lack the necessary ‘tools’ (language) to enter the main activity (play) (Sadownik, 2018). The experience of stress and exclusion was reported to be much lower among migrant children who were receiving extra help in acquiring the necessary capital – for example, through playgroups or language groups, or when some ECEC activities were transformed to expect and reward other cultural and linguistic capital (Sadownik, 2018). However, the needs of children (and caregivers) that must be fulfilled in order to provide the experience of community and participation may not be recognised if the resource-oriented perspective of diversity is employed. Through this lens, equipping minority children with Norwegian cultural capital may be interpreted as resulting from a problem-oriented perspective. Nevertheless, voices arguing for ECEC’s response to particular knowledge and experience-related needs in order to enable participation on equal grounds are being heard increasingly often in the ECEC discourse (Arnesen, 2017; Sadownik, 2018; Zachrisen, 2015). These voices are in line with the Norwegian ECEC curriculum’s identification of participation and community experience as a necessary framework for the experience of diversity and as constituting (formative) development (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017).

Summing up the relevant theoretical interpretations, one can say that the ECEC curriculum relates diversity to the full participation of all children in the institutional setting, embracing the balance between recognition of family backgrounds and opportunities to access and explore other meanings, values and languages in order to ‘become’ and create oneself through dialogical engagement with diverse meanings, values and languages. However, defining diversity through specific *others* – children and families with other cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds – (which is present in the literature) invites practices that (with the best intentions) stabilise differences and lock children into their caregivers’ cultural identities. Such practices are anchored in a resource-oriented (Gjervan et al., 2012), as opposed to problem-oriented, attitude to diversity. These dichotomies may block professionals’ perceptions of the needs of families and children that must be fulfilled to enable participation in ECEC services and facilitate unlimited ‘becoming’ processes.

Methodology

The research question driving the present study asks how diversity, as defined in the Norwegian ECEC curriculum, is conceptualised by professionals at different levels of the Norwegian ECEC sector, and how diversity is operationalised in their daily practice. Therefore, the research question concerns professionals’ understandings of diversity as well as their implementation of diversity-related practices. However, the researcher was only able to access the operationalisation of diversity in ECEC practices through professionals’ understandings of their work. To arrive at these understandings, individual and group interviews were conducted with the following groups of ECEC professionals: migration pedagogues (one group interview with two participants conducted in February 2020); teachers (six individual interviews and one group interview with four participants conducted between August 2019 and March 2020); and ECEC teacher education students (one group interview with 13 full-time students conducted in December 2019 and one group interview with 2 part-time students conducted in January 2020). The interviews were semi-structured and started with questions about understandings of diversity and the participants’ own work related to diversity before turning to their experiences of working with children from minority and migrant backgrounds.

Research ethics

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data recognised the project as being in line with the ethical guidelines for the social sciences. The participants signed informed consent forms that indicated their agreement to participate in the research and have their voices recorded. It was explained how

their personal data (voice recordings and signatures) would be treated and anonymised. Some of the participants did not consent to voice-recording; in such cases, handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. All of the participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

As the research ethics also relate to communication of the limitations of the study, it is important to mention that the study would have benefitted from observations to triangulate the data gathered through the interviews. The interviews only indicated how each informant understood their own work with diversity, while observations could have provided evidence of how practices were conducted.

Data analysis

Since the present study aimed to understand and conceptualise diversity in the practice of Norwegian ECEC, the data from the interviews was analysed using phenomenological hermeneutics (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004). This means that certain methods of analysis were employed in the following order:

1. Naive reading, in which ‘the text is read several times to grasp its meaning as a whole’ (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004: 149).
2. Structural analysis, which involves the identification of themes, where a theme ‘is a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few’ (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004: 149). The structural analysis was performed by identifying themes across the utterances of the various actors.
3. Comprehensive understanding, where ‘the main themes, themes and sub-themes are summarised and reflected on in relation to the research question and the context of the study’ (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004: 150). Here, comprehensive understanding was related to superdiversity as a perspective through which one could examine trajectories of diversity in policy and professional understandings and practice.

During the analysis, all of the utterances were labelled with anonymising abbreviations, where MP = migration pedagogues, ET = ECEC teachers and TES = ECEC teacher education students. The addition of ‘_n’ after these abbreviations indicated that the material originated from notes instead of transcripts, such as in the cases where the participants agreed to participate in the interviews but did not allow the recording of their voices.

Results

The results present the trajectories of diversity that cross the professionals’ understandings of the phenomenon itself and their perceptions of their own practice. The reconstructed trajectories operationalise the understanding of diversity presented in the curriculum and the literature.

Diversity as embodied by different children and families

The first conceptualisation of diversity reconstructed in the analysis assumes that diversity is a feature which is attached to particular people representing a different cultural or ethnic background, the presence of which may or may not lead to changes in ECEC practice. In the analysed empirical material, the diversity brought by particular ‘others’ was related to a migrant or indigenous background and family structures. The presence or absence of particular ‘different others’ was, in such cases, thought to determine eventual changes in institutional practices:

In our ECEC, there is no diversity, so it is difficult to address it in our practice. We don't have migrants, or Sami; we don't even have children of homosexual couples, so we feel released from the diversity-related chapters of the curriculum [*laughter*]. (ET4_n)

The presence of particular others, however, is not necessarily followed by changes in institutional practices. In fact, there may be a more conscious effort to stick to established practices, as illustrated in the example below:

We have a lot of migrant parents and children, but we do not change anything because of them. We meet them as if they were Norwegian parents or children, and we talk to them as if they were Norwegian parents or children. We want to show them ECEC and Norwegian society. (ET1)

However, the presence of particular others may lead to various changes in practice. The 'diversity' of others is not only about particular people being different on an individual level, but also about individuals serving as representatives of other nationalities or languages. Reconstructed changes of practice, intended to make diversity visible, involve collecting and exhibiting established symbols referencing nations or languages, such as national flags and 'good morning' written in different languages. The following examples illustrate how diversity was incorporated into the ECEC physical space and the morning circle routine:

We have all the flags in the entrance, and every child knows who has which flag. It's often that we talk about different countries during the morning circle. (ET6_n)

Altogether, we have children from 65 countries, so we have 'good morning' written in every language . . . It's hanging in the entrance. We often say 'good morning' in every language during the morning circles and attach it to the flags we have. The children representing the countries and languages are then the experts, obviously. (ET1)

These practices of making diversity visible were connected by the teachers to the 'curriculum's expectation of making diversity a resource for all children', as 'everyone will need knowledge on flags and basic phrases in other languages' (ET1). Using language as a platform to show 'how many languages we are speaking together, [and] what extra language can a particular child contribute with' (MP2) was appreciated by the migration pedagogues. Even though they were generally against locking children into their caregivers' identity, they claimed that 'attaching language to a particular individual was more all right, as it is not about making a child a representative of a particular country, but presenting him or her as someone who has some extra skills, here linguistic skills' (MP1).

Diversity as a social context: trajectories of exploration and becoming

The migrant pedagogues who were interviewed, as well as some of the teachers and ECEC teacher education students, understood diversity as a social context in which professionals, families and children live on a daily basis. The diversity of society was associated with national, linguistic and cultural diversity, and the goal of their practices was to make it visible and beneficial to all children. However, giving up the focus on individuals representing particular nations, cultures and languages was followed by institutional practices that went beyond decorating walls and repeating phrases during morning circle time:

It is about introducing diversity as the context in which we all live. We suggest thereby using a neutral figure that is travelling around the world with a suitcase, visiting places, collecting things . . . and bringing these experiences to the ECEC setting. (MP1)

This ‘neutral figure’ – ‘often a teddy bear’ (MP2) – could be introduced during morning circle time. However, the artefacts that the figure brings with them are not intended to be exhibited; instead, they are incorporated into the physical environment in the ECEC unit, making them accessible for child-initiated activities and enabling children’s interactions and identification with the objects: ‘It may mean equipping the play corners with different kinds of clothes, by which I mean not only princess dresses but [also] various ethnic pieces of clothing’ (MP1). The main goal here is to introduce diversity in the form of cultural texts, values and artefacts without making anyone responsible for the content presented; thus, every child feels free to get involved with the material diversity ‘out of [their] own home and family-based knowledge’ (MP2).

The children seemed to identify with and relate to the accessibility of such artefacts in different ways, such as through play, which opened the door to various negotiations on how to use the artefacts:

My observation during placements was that the children explored different ways of using various things. I saw an Elsa and Anna with a hijab and a superman in a kimono, or a singing bowl from Tibet was used as a helmet. It was up to the negotiations among the children. (TES3)

However, it was observed that such episodes were not merely innocent explorations. In some cases, children (especially children who identified with the objects and had home-based knowledge connected to them) were marginalised from the play as their knowledge about the so-called ‘correct’ usage of the objects impeded collective imaginary processes:

I saw an episode where a girl from a particular culture was marginalised from play because she couldn’t slip out of her cultural knowledge about how the objects were supposed to be used. When trying to correct her peers, she was told that she couldn’t play. (TES5)

Such episodes were also used as arguments for sticking to the most culturally neutral artefacts in the following conceptualisation of diversity.

Diversity as equal participation: practices of intervention for participation, enjoyment and becoming

The conceptualisation of diversity as togetherness, based on all children’s identities (regardless of background), activates participation in the daily institutional life of an ECEC setting. Individual backgrounds, either minority or majority, were of importance as valid or invalid cultural capital within the institution of Norwegian ECEC. Invalid cultural capital was, in this sense, restricting the participation of particular individuals in institutional activities (Sadownik, 2018). This conceptualisation of diversity was thus based on an awareness of clearly defined but silent expectations and assumptions about individuals implied in the play-based, child-centred Norwegian model of ECEC. In this sense, ECEC’s work with diversity was about equalising everyone’s participation, which, in the case of children with invalid cultural capital, was about equipping them with the skills, dispositions and experiences they needed to participate with others on equal terms:

Coming from another language or from a culture where it is not so common to be outside when it is cold or where children are more guided in their activities is not easy. You need the language and the codes of

play to play, and you need to be a bit used to the outdoors in order to enjoy yourself here. We are very aware of this. And we are very much helping each new child here to start liking it. If you like it, you can participate, and if you participate, you enjoy yourself and you explore and play and create yourself in all these experiences you get access to. This is why we invest so much time and help in extra language activities, small play and language groups for the new children and fun-based activities outside. (ET7_n)

This conceptualisation of diversity involves awareness of the culturally anchored character of ECEC and its institutional practices, and thus focuses on equalising children's chances of participation. This equalisation may happen through adjusting activities for everyone to more inclusive and thus meaningful contexts in order to gain new cultural capital:

This is why we try to make the staff transform the usual activities – for example, by changing the morning circle into an activity that can be engaging and meaningful for a child with limited Norwegian skills . . . This implies that an adult cannot talk through the whole morning circle, and many mix it with some movements or dances. It is about continuous reflection on ‘How can I make this activity accessible for a minority-language child, and how I can give them some Norwegian words through this activity?’ (MP1)

In terms of the physical environment, the intention to equalise the chances for participation involved offering objects that were less culturally coded. This invited everyone to contribute their own knowledge:

[It is important to] provide access to toys that are not defined by cultures and that can be used in different ways. Here, I mean undefined materials, like planks, blankets and shawls, which can be used by the children and shared with the group based on the knowledge they have from their homes, and no one can tell the child that it is the wrong use. (ET5_n)

Enabling participation could also happen through equipping the children with some useful words or expressions in advance so that they could participate with others in play or a particular activity:

[A] language group may sometimes be very useful, when organised as preparation . . . before an activity for the whole group, where particular words and concepts will be used. Such language groups can be based on vocabulary often used by the children who this particular child tries to join. The child can then get in touch with some content in advance and process it . . . It is very important to reflect on the language-learning cohesion with other activities during the day or week. Not only like, ‘Oh, now you know the names of all the colours, great!’ (MP2)

This illustrates how equipping children with cultural capital can not only help them adapt to a new institutional context, but also equip them with dispositions that enable participation, togetherness with other children, and becoming through full participation in ECEC and their home culture.

Discussion

Diversity through the lens of superdiversity

In the analysis presented here, superdiversity functions first as a lens that enables the perception of various trajectories of diversity's conceptualisation in Norwegian policy documents and locally used theories, as well as among ECEC professionals working at different levels. Using superdiversity in this way enables the depiction of various interpretations of the

general diversity policy imposed on the sector by the ECEC curriculum. The curriculum seems to balance introducing children to diverse ways of living, acting and thinking with providing them with joint experiences and references that strengthen their sense of belonging to a group of children and thus their participation in institutional (play-based) activities. While languages must be recognised and used as resources for all, making particular children representatives of multilingualism is in line with the curriculum. However, exhibiting diversity in the form of flags and food, or putting particular children and families in the role of ambassadors, may not be consistent with the ECEC curriculum, especially if it limits children's right to participation, decision-making and, as a result, 'becoming' (through child-initiated engagement with the presented content) across cultures.

The focus on children's 'becoming' was strongly present among those professionals who understood diversity as a 'social context'. This conceptualisation enabled practices that used a third or neutral figure to travel and collect various objects, which were often strongly culturally coded and later made accessible to the children, creating an open context for their identification with culturally coded objects. Identification with a particular culture is in line with the curriculum as it appears as a result of children's explorative activity, dialogical involvement with an artefact and decision-making. In this case, the child takes on a particular identity (in the moment) but is not put into it and defined as someone who is different. Moreover, the identity a child adopts on one day may change or be extended the next day when exploring other stories, artefacts or meanings. It is, then, the child who (in and through dialogue with others) decides to what extent their home knowledge or family background is relevant to be performed and reproduced in the ECEC context. Equipping the physical environment with less culturally coded materials may be seen as having an analogical intention, which allows a child to use or limit their home-based knowledge when creating imaginary usage of universal toys – such as blocks, for example.

As the findings show, such activities are not always peaceful and conflict-free; however, they seem to be meaningful for children. As children's various cultural knowledge may encourage different ways of using particular artefacts, negotiations are necessary and should ideally be facilitated by staff so that conflict does not end with winners and losers but opens a formative meaning exchange. In such cases, the exploration of diversity not only takes place at the level of materiality, but also relates to a living peer who knows and wants to do something else. Ødegaard and White (2016) point to daily interactions in contexts that are meaningful for children and involve cultural knowledge as important aspects of their 'becoming'.

Safeguarding the access of all children to such meaningful interactions and negotiations was mostly the focus of the third conceptualisation of diversity – that is, equal participation. Here, some professionals focused on equipping children with the skills and capital needed for participation, while others pointed to the necessity of making the main activities more friendly and meaningful for children with other types of linguistic and cultural capital. Both approaches were in line with the curriculum, as it does not describe the ways in which migrant children's participation should be encouraged.

Conclusion

In this article, superdiversity functions as a categorical lens, tracing and reflecting on different trajectories of meanings attached to diversity by professional actors involved in Norwegian ECEC. Children's daily explorations and identifications, encouraged within the conceptualisations of diversity as a social context and equal participation, seem to be most in line with the ECEC curriculum. It opens up child-initiated explorations and negotiations of their sociocultural surroundings, and thus 'becoming' at the intersection of diverse cultural heritages. Meanwhile, superdiversity

embraces status passages and trajectories of becoming a part of the community and institution, as well as the dynamics of sociocultural and socio-economic variables. Superdiversity is thus a descriptive sociological concept that has the potential to supplement existing Norwegian theories on 'becoming' by, for example, embracing the trajectories through which children access meaningful activities and thereby the process of cultural formation. However, superdiversity requires operationalisation in dialogue with the ECEC field and its empirics, which could be accomplished through further studies that reconstruct the trajectories of children and families from minority and majority backgrounds to and within ECEC settings, and how those settings 'cultivate' diverse ways of understanding and working with diversity.

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Notes

1. The translation for an ECEC setting that is used in official documents is 'kindergarten'. A 'kindergarten' (*barnehage*) is an ECEC setting for children from birth to six years of age where a holistic offering of care, play, learning and cultural formation is provided and regulated by the Act of Kindergarten and the ECEC curriculum – 'Framework plan for kindergartens: Content and tasks' (Norwegian Directorate for Education, 2017). In this article, the term 'ECEC setting' will be used to refer to the Norwegian kindergarten.
2. Two of these uses refer to the diversity of the natural world and two refer to the indigenous group of the Sami. As these uses did not appear in the empirical material, the related policies are not presented here (although the policy approach with respect to the Sami issue is certainly interesting enough to warrant a separate discussion).

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