

Introduction

A good Norwegian childhood is usually associated with children playing outdoors, in the street and in nature, according to their own rules. Playing outdoors is a tradition, and a part of the traditional upbringing of children (Gullestad, 1989). In 2016 we experienced a so-called *kindergarten rebellion* in connection with a new parliamentary bill concerning the kindergarten. Scholars and kindergarten employees all over the country stood up arguing for *children's right to play* at kindergartens. Feature articles were written, and kindergarten employees demanded that teaching – understood as teaching as practiced at school – should not, to any significant degree, take place at Norwegian kindergartens. Playing outdoors is what is essential at kindergartens in this country. In this book I wish to discuss several theoretical perspectives concerning play in order to achieve a greater understanding of children and outdoor playing. I will present examples and then discuss them. I hope that readers will gain new knowledge of the intrinsic value of children's self-directed outdoor play, and that they will contribute to the distribution of this knowledge so that more people, professionals as well as parents, will also reach this greater understanding.

Playing outdoors is and always has been an important part of children's lives. It may mean building dens, climbing trees, running up and down hills, playing in the mud, jumping in puddles, or pretending to be mermaids. This book is about play's intrinsic value *and* its usefulness. It is based on research and studies, and it has been evaluated by fellow scholars. It is written for scholars and research workers within the field of early childhood, and for kindergarten employees – put plainly, it is written for professionals involved in the field of children and childhood. I hope that teachers, after-school supervisors, public health nurses, physiotherapists, and even parents will also find it useful. This book is about children's self-organized outdoor play. It is about children's attitudes to their own bodies while at play, their playfulness, their joy in movement, their need to be challenged, the places they play, its magic and esthetics, and children's imagination and creativity. It is also about how we grown-ups can contribute positively to children's experiences of outdoor play.

OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 1, *Children's right to play*, concentrates on the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), and how play and outdoor play is valued therein. In Norway there is a tradition of children spending a good deal of their time outdoors. How does the plan reflect this? It is also a fact that there are kindergartens, probably not many, that should be able to improve their pedagogical work when it comes to outdoor activities – and perhaps their numbers are increasing.

Chapter 2, *Children are bodies in motion*, focuses on children's physicality and the fact that they are often moving. Children are physical creatures. Through fundamental ways of moving about—by running, jumping, hopping, and throwing—children ought to have many opportunities to practice playing. Mastering movement may prove decisive for their social interaction and play. In this chapter, I write about children's physical senses, about their coordination skills, their physical competences, and the importance of these (Osnes et al., 2015). I also discuss the joy and experiences that physical motion can provide.

In chapter 3, *Play*, I look upon play in a phenomenological perspective. Among others, ideas with a phenomenological approach to play first began with Dutchman Fredrik J. J. Buytendijk in 1933. He connects what we might call the primary, original play to the childlike, in which one plays with no specific purpose in mind. He views play as acts of significance, focusing on physical movement and the purposefulness of any bodily expression. Scholars working with phenomenological play research have attempted to describe the spontaneous features of play, and they have been concerned with what characterizes play in the here and now (Hangaard Rasmussen, 1992).

Chapter 4, *Children's world of imagination*, is to some degree a continuation of chapter 3. Children's play often contains elements of fantasy and movement (Fasting, 2014b). In order to view children's play seriously, we must have some understanding of their ways of thinking and imagining. I discuss children's creativity and explain from my point of view the concept of esthetics. Esthetics may concern the creating of patterns, and combining, repeating and reassembling them in ever-new ways (Hansson, 2016).

In chapter 5, *Children's places*, I discuss what "good places" for children may mean. I urge educators to reflect consciously upon why they take children to any specific place. At the beginning of this chapter, I will briefly describe which rights and privileges children are entitled to concerning areas and places for outdoor play. I will discuss the concept "place". I also wish to discuss the difference

between “children’s places” and “places for children” (Rasmussen, 2004), and to make this difference apparent to the reader.

In chapter 6 I will elaborate on the research project *Children’s physicality at play in kindergarten*. I have studied children at two kindergartens in southern Norway. I observed these children during outdoor activities, including excursions to forests and fields. My goal was to understand the play-world of children. Where do they play? What do they play? How do they play, and what experiences and emotions do their activities give them? In this chapter I try to understand children as physical beings.

Chapter 7 concerns my doctoral thesis, *We play outdoors!* (Fasting, 2012). Here, my intention is to establish an understanding of how ten-year-old children play, and where they play at school and in their free time. I joined along with them, observing and playing with them in the school grounds, following the class into the forest, and riding bicycles alongside them. I selected five girls and five boys for my study. In this chapter I also intend to present more thoroughly certain aspects of these children’s play activities. Finally, I will discuss what is important about children playing in nature.

I conclude with chapter 8, *Further thoughts*. Here I look ahead towards research work that remains to be done concerning children’s outdoor play when it comes to public health.

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