The limitations of multiculturalism in Norwegian early childhood education

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Under the Kindergarten Act, every child in Norway has the right to attend a publicly funded kindergarten, and around 90 per cent of Norwegian children aged between one and five do so (see Kindergarten Act, section 12a and Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens 2011). Admittedly, the proportion of children from immigrant backgrounds attending kindergartens is considerably less (under 60 per cent), but overall, most children in Norway today attend a kindergarten (http://www.ssb.no). Back in 1970 it was only 2.8 per cent (Tveter Thoresen 2009). Compulsory education also ensures that almost all children living in Norway start school in the year they turn six, and, unlike most other European countries, almost all children in Norway attend public schools (97 per cent in 2012 (http://www.ssb.no)).

Kindergartens and schools are regulated by the Kindergarten Act and the Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education respectively, which, apart from a few exceptions, also apply to private alternatives. It is quite unique for Norway that the state is sponsoring both public and private kindergartens. Both gets almost full state funding except a relatively small maximum price parents pay for each child per month. Thus, combined with relatively detailed regulations, Norwegian law regulates most of the content of Norwegian children's everyday lives between the age of one and sixteen. During this comprehensive education programme, children meet across cultural and social boundaries and undergo a cultural socialisation process through interaction with other children and adults. The institutionalised early childhood education of today is therefore of key importance in the states effort in communicating values and morals in contemporary multicultural Norwegian society. [1] This occurs through a process of cultural learning, some examples of which are language acquisition and learning how to behave towards others. Norwegian public institutions have traditionally been rooted in Christian values, but this has proved increasingly problematic in recent years, in line with the fact that a

[1] A summary of Norwegian research on early childhood education is given in Alvestad et al. (2009). An important study on the promotion of values and the place of religion in the kindergarten is Sturla Sagberg's doctoral dissertation *Autentisitet og undring [Authenticity and Wonder]* from 2001 (Sagberg (2001)). An overview of research on cultural diversity in Norwegian kindergartens is given in Otterstad and Andersen 2012.

steadily declining proportion of the population has clear Christian affiliations (cf. Botvar and Schmidt (eds.) 2010; Hovdelien 2013).

Norway today is a multicultural society, by which is meant a society in which cultural diversity is becoming increasingly evident and which increasingly comprises many different cultures which partly coexist and partly are interwoven (cf. Parekh 2006).[2] In a kindergarten setting, some cultural differences, such as Jewish and Muslim children not eating pork or humanist children not celebrating Christmas, cause no problems. Other differences, however, such as corporal punishment of children and perhaps patriarchal family structures, cause significant problems. Not least the public controversies that have taken place around Muslim difference have raised questions and put to the test established frames of thought (cf. Casanova 2009:146-147). Both the problematic and unproblematic aspects of such cultural differences represent expressions of cultural diversity. Nilüfer Göle and Julie Billaud point to how the principles of 'equality' and 'difference', two seemingly opposite principles, both have been influential in shaping our modern imaginations: "On the one hand, modern nation-states homogenise and unify different ethnicities, cultures and languages, while on the other recognition and representation of differences becomes a test for democratic mediation." (Göle and Billaud 2012:116). How can states strive for equality among citizens without imposing uniformity?, asks Göle and Billaud. Cultural diversity in itself is not necessarily a positive phenomenon; for one thing, it depends on the consequences this type of diversity has for individuals, cultural groups, and society at large.

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Framework Plan) (2011) states that the kindergarten should "help to ensure that children develop confidence and pride in their own backgrounds, and respect for the cultural values and expressions of others." What does respect for the cultural value and expressions of others entail? And what implications does it have for how cultural diversity in the kindergartens is handled? These are some of the issues that will be discussed in this paper. The structure of this paper is as follows: first, a brief account of the concept of culture and of what the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2011) says about cultural diversity. Second, three different positions will be presented of how cultural diversity ought to be handled in society. These theoretically reasoned standpoints have been developed by leading multiculturalist theorists such as Bhikhu Parekh, Brian Barry, and Nancy Fraser. In the third section of this paper, the positions will be applied to kindergartens. Finally, we will look at the implications these positions have for value-based priorities in the kindergartens. The focus will be on the kindergarten's espoused values, so as to tie in with the American organisational theorist Edgar H.

[2] For an overview on other European countries as multicultural countries, and different policy development in coping with this, cf. Meer and Modood 2012.

Schein's widely cited terms (Schein 2004 [1985]: 25-30). By this is meant the goals as they are expressed in the legal documents underlying the kindergartens, not how they are pursued in practice.

Understanding of culture

Few words have as many meanings as does 'culture'. Edward Burnett Tylor, to whom modern social science's understanding of culture owes much, defined the term 'culture' as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"(Tylor 1974 [1871])). The influence of such an understanding of culture can also be seen in the work of the political theorist Bhikhu Parekh. His definition is:

> Culture is a historically created system of meaning and significance or, what comes to the same thing, a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives. (Parekh 2006:142-143)

Parekh and his theory of multiculturalism is a key theoretical reference for the interpretation and discussion presented below. Based on this understanding of the concept of culture, it is not difficult to see that it is also intended to embrace an understanding of values, that is, an understanding of what is valuable and worth aspiring to. Both Tylor and Parekh's definitions focus on the inner totality of a society's culture, which is useful when different cultures are compared in order to capture culturally distinctive features. An understanding of culture as a collective system of symbols is also in line with the cultural understanding laid down in the Framework Plan (2011: 36):

> Culture is here taken to mean art and aesthetics, as well as common patterns of behaviour, knowledge, values, attitudes, experiences and modes of expression. Culture is about heritage and traditions, about creating and about bringing to life, renewing and making relevant. Culture arises out of the tension between tradition and renewal.

Based on an understanding of culture as a system of meaning and significance, language and religion are without doubt two examples of what could be considered cultural phenomena. Language is culture because collective systems of symbols must always be expressed linguistically in order to be meaningful (cf. Parekh 2006:142-143). Similarly, religion is culture because it is an example of a tentative, integrated, linguistically

expressed system of symbols. Consequently, language and religion will be regarded here as cultural products.

There are two misguided understandings of culture that must be avoided when making a closer study of the content cultural diversity as a concept. The first one is an understanding of culture that is overly static, where culture is regarded as a fixed phenomenon with clearly defined inherent boundaries between, for example, Japanese culture and Sami culture. Although Japanese and Sami people have respective cultural features in common due to the fact that they, for example, share the same language and, to some extent, common religious customs, etc., it is not the case in a multicultural society that different cultures exist separately from one another. On the contrary, a considerable amount of cultural interactions goes on, which means that cultures in wider society are constantly undergoing change. Nevertheless, there is something that remains fixed and that makes the concept of culture a meaningful analytical concept.

The second misguided understanding lies in focusing exclusively on individual differences without taking into account the fact that individuals also belong to cultural communities. Focusing exclusively on individual differences would make the concept of culture redundant and the concept of cultural diversity meaningless. Such dilution of these concepts would have obscured them and prevented us from dealing with certain empirical differences between people. The point is that we need the concept of culture as an analytical concept, yet a meaningful provision of content of the concept of cultural diversity cannot, on the one hand, simply refer to a static, group diversity alone nor, on the other hand, refer exclusively to individual differences. Cultural diversity indicates a diversity that lies between these extremes, between the individual and wider society. More specifically, in the context of kindergartens this implies a balance between respecting each child's cultural affiliation and society's need for citizens who respect certain common, value-based rules.

Cultural diversity in the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of early childhood education

The Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan are normative documents in the sense that they define a direction and a framework for the value-based influence the kindergartens should exert. And, since the concept of values represents a central element of the concept of culture, this is a matter of cultural influence. Collectively, these choices form the kindergartens' social mandate and are also laid down in the first part of the Framework Plan (2011: 7-24). Like most laws, the form of the Kindergarten Act is concise. It contains few clear guidelines dealing with cultural diversity or how the kindergartens should address it. The closest it comes to providing such guidelines is in the third and fourth paragraphs of section 2, Content of Kindergartens, where it states:

> Kindergartens 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. Kindergartens shall impart values and culture, provide room for children's own cultural creativity and help to ensure that all children experience joy and ability to cope in a social and cultural community.

It explicitly states that kindergartens must take into account children's ethnic and cultural background, wording which may seem unnecessarily repetitive, as ethnicity is precisely about perceived cultural community life (cf. Hylland Eriksen and Sørheim 2006: 52-54). However, the crucial point with respect to dealing with cultural diversity in kindergartens is the purpose clause in section 1 of the Kindergarten Act. Here, the Christian values base in the previous purpose clause, as expressed in the wording "The kindergarten shall help provide children with an upbringing that is in accordance with basic Christian values," was replaced by the following, more detailed, wording with effect from 1 August 2010 (Besl.O. nr. 43 (2008-2009)):

> The Kindergarten shall, in collaboration and close understanding with the home, safeguard the children's need for care and play, and promote learning and formation as a basis for all-round development. The Kindergarten shall be based on fundamental values in the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and that are rooted in human rights.

This purpose clause can be interpreted in different ways. When focus is placed on how cultural diversity should be handled in the kindergartens, the first sentence is central. If kindergarten activities should be conducted "in collaboration and close understanding with the home," this means that kindergartens must take into account the multicultural nature of society and allow for this, because in today's Norwegian society the composition of parent groups is often highly complex (Kindergarten Act, section 1; see also section 4 on the provisions regarding parents' councils and coordinating committees). The rest of the new purpose clause is so broadly worded that all values and distinctive cultural features must be accommodated as long as they do not conflict with human rights (Hovdelien 2011). Furthermore, the purpose clause stipulates that kindergartens must "counteract all forms of discrimination," and counteracting discrimination on the basis of culture must be assumed to constitute a key element in this connection. This is followed

up in the Framework Plan, where efforts to safeguard cultural diversity in kindergartens are made by insisting that "linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity enriches and strengthens the kindergarten as a community," and that kindergartens should therefore "facilitate dialogue and interaction between different groups, on an equal footing." (Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens 2011: 36).

The discussion on multiculturalism

So far, we have seen that guidelines have been laid down in both the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan aimed at safeguarding cultural diversity in kindergartens. But this is not sufficient; we also need to qualify in more detail what we really mean by cultural diversity. A relevant theoretical discussion in this connection could be what might be described as the multiculturalism debate. In Europe the term Multiculturalism refers to the political accomodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race, ethnicity or religion (Triandafyllidou, Modood and Meer 2012:5). Put simply, this is a discussion on how kindergartens and other public institutions in society should deal with cultural diversity, or more specifically, whether, and to what degree, these social institutions should offer special treatment on the basis of cultural affiliation. The term 'multiculturalism' is used in many different ways. A simple definition might be that multiculturalism is a school of thought rooted in a positive attitude towards a society's multicultural diversity. Understood thus, multiculturalism constitutes a specific but at the same time much debated normative political response to the phenomenon of cultural diversity.

Bhikhu Parekh's multicultural vision

An important theorist in the discussion on multiculturalism is Bhikhu Parekh, who in his book *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2006) developed a theoretical rationale for why modern society ought to become multiculturalist, arguing that this was the only way to properly safeguard cultural diversity.

Parekh's bases his theory on three key assumptions about human life: first, that human beings are inescapably culturally embedded, meaning that they grow up and live their lives in a structured world in which they organise their lives and social relationships inside a cultural community. They are not conditioned by their cultural context in a way that prevents them from thinking critically about its values and systems of meaning. Nonetheless, they are shaped by the cultural context in which they live in a way that makes it impossible for them to view the world from the outside, free from cultural embeddedness. This applies whether cultural embeddedness is inherited and uncritically accepted or critically accepted and considered or (in rare cases) adopted, that is, adopted

by newcomers to a cultural context. Almost all societies have a more or less well-organised community that follows its own cultural systems of meaning and significance and related practices (Parekh 2006: 3-4). Or, put in another way: cultural diversity exists in all large societies today, and we must take this into account if we want to develop a society to which everyone feels they belong and can contribute on equal terms.

Parekh's second assumption is that different cultures represent different systems of meaning and views about what a good life entails. Parekh does not come to the conclusion that all cultures are equally good or are equally entitled to respect or that every culture is good for its members. Cultural criticism is –and must be – legitimate. At the same time, Parekh clearly distances himself from ethnocentrism, that is, a belief in the superiority of one's own culture over others, by emphasizing that all cultures have positive aspects, and that they therefore – at least to some extent – deserve respect. His fundamental view is that since no culture is perfect, no culture is entitled to force itself on others (Parekh 1999a:2).

Parekh's third assumption is that multiculturalism also means that each culture is inherently diverse, and thus reflects continuous dialogue between different traditions and points of view. A culture is always diverse, fluid, open, and constantly changing, says Parekh, and will always define itself in relation to others (Parekh 1999a:2). Based on this, Parekh's hope is for some form of creative dialogue to develop between cultural groups in a society where their respective moral visions are discussed and considered on equal terms (Parekh 2006:14-15). For this to happen, citizens' respective cultural views must be respected, and their capacity for self-criticism, imagination, intellect, and morals be challenged in the best interests of the community. One cannot demand binding commitment to common goals, a common direction for society or a common understanding of history of a society's citizens, says Parekh, but one can demand a certain degree of binding commitment to society's raison d'être and to its best interests – or at least enough commitment to avoid sabotaging society or attempts to harm its integrity. Loyalty to a society must always form the basis of any criticism of its governance, institutions or values, etc. For Parekh, this is naturally based on the assumption that society also commits itself to supporting everyone as citizens on the same level as others. This means, among other things, equal rights to citizenship and decent living conditions, and opportunities for personal development and participation in society. For this to be possible, we must develop a society in which all cultural communities can feel they belong on equal terms, but the distinctive qualities of cultural groups must then be acknowledged by wider society (Parekh 2006:127). Put simply, Parekh's main project is to attempt to encourage humility on behalf of one's own culture and to be open to the possibility that the values and statements of other cultures may also have positive qualities, even though they may seem alien and sometimes offensive. This approach could also be useful in the context of Norwegian kindergartens. However, the type of

multiculturalism which Parekh advocates is highly controversial and has been heavily criticised. I will review this criticism from two perspectives below, firstly by examining the political philosopher Brian Barry's criticism before proceeding to the Marxist-inspired criticism of critical theorist Nancy Fraser. Like Parekh, both of them have been selected on the basis of their key contributions to the international debate on multiculturalism.

Liberal criticism of multiculturalism

Brian Barry is one of multiculturalism's fiercest critics. Barry (2001) rejects the assertion of fundamental rights put forward by multiculturalists – and spearheaded by Parekh – and their attempts to accommodate minority cultures' inherent value and cultural pluralism as a value in itself within the framework of a national state. Barry thus declares his position in the liberal tradition of the French Revolution, where the individual's religious and cultural characteristics are moved from the public to the private sphere. He defends the idea that all human beings have equal rights irrespective of cultural attributes, and accuses multiculturalism of ignoring this. This is a serious accusation against multiculturalism and its supporters, and one which Barry validates by referring to human rights thinking and to numerous examples of how wrong things can go if the ideas of multiculturalism gain political influence. A key element in Barry's argument is to question the wisdom of developing any public policy whatsoever that accommodates difference, since this inevitably leads to special treatment and discrimination of citizens based on cultural attributes and religious beliefs.

Barry thus takes a firm position in the debate on whether the modern state should respect different cultural and religious expressions on the basis of the distinctiveness of their respective values. This means that such expressions of difference belong in the private sphere and have no right to special treatment by society. According to Barry, the multiculturalists have squandered their liberal legacy. He accuses multiculturalists of undermining fundamental social values such as freedom and equality. According to him, the multiculturalists betray the fundamental ideas of the rational Enlightenment inheritance (Barry 2001:9-12). Those who have most to lose if multiculturalist ideas gain influence are – according to Barry – women, children, and dissidents, because multiculturalism will empower those who support traditional patriarchal and authoritarian cultural norms (Barry 2001: 327).

Despite his strong attack on multiculturalism as ideology, Barry must not be understood as a spokesperson for intolerance or as an opponent of diversity of cultural expression; far from it. His main argument is that this diversity belongs in the private sphere (Barry 2001:25). According to him, religious and cultural expressions should be relegated to the private sphere precisely to maintain order in the public sphere. This is the only way in which liberal states can offer a neutral ground on which people from different cultural

backgrounds can meet and coexist. Barry argues that such neutrality would require *all* religious communities to relinquish their ambitions of influencing the public sphere, even if it placed a greater burden on some religious communities than on others. From an egalitarian liberal position, it is a matter of equality of opportunity (Barry 2001:32). Barry goes on to present several examples of how multiculturalism not only leads to discrimination and unfair discrimination, but also that, as ideology, multiculturalism can reinforces oppression of vulnerable groups and be directly dangerous. His message is crystal clear: culture should never be accepted as an excuse to abuse human beings. No-one should be discriminated against on the basis of cultural attributes, ethnicity, religion, or other cultural characteristics. Different cultural and religious practices should be tolerated as a natural part of the private sphere, though only as long as they do not violate democratically elected laws.

In a response to this criticism, Parekh points out that Barry misunderstands key elements of multiculturalism (2006:345). It is not the case that liberal political philosophy and multiculturalism are incompatible systems of thought. Barry is wrong to assert that multiculturalism represents a barbaric decline from true and purely liberal thinking. Parekh, for his part, problematises the idea that equitable treatment is the same as identical treatment, contending that it is not self-evident that social values and certain interests are objective and universally valid (Parekh 2006:347-348). Social values and human interests are culturally embedded, and cannot be removed from their cultural contexts and held to be universally valid (Parekh 2006:348). Furthermore, Parekh asserts that Barry misunderstands and caricatures multiculturalists. Their intent is not to propagandise for different treatment in wider society's laws on the basis of distinctive cultural attributes; multiculturalists regard cultural diversity as a vital moral good. Parekh's main point is that wider society must treat its citizens equally. He does not claim that cultures have nothing to learn from each other. The crux of the disagreement between the multiculturalist Parekh and the classic liberal thinker Barry lies in what belongs in the laws of wider society and the public sphere and what belongs in the private sphere.

Marxist-inspired criticism: Nancy Fraser

The American social scientist and feminist Nancy Fraser presents a Marxist-inspired criticism of multiculturalism (Fraser 1995; Fraser 1997). [3] She assets that the struggle for recognition is fast becoming a key political conflict in modern society, and that such demand for recognition of diversity is playing a part in mobilising groups under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality to fight for their rights. Fraser

[3] Another voice in this debate is Susan Moller Okin. Cf. Moller Okin 1998, Cohen, J., Howard, M and Nussbaum, M.C. (eds.) (1999).

describes these conflicts as 'post-socialist,' where group identity replaces class interests as the primary motivation for political mobilisation (Fraser 1995:68). Fraser draws attention to a new situation, where cultural domination seems to be replacing exploitation as what is regarded as the most important form of injustice in society (1995:70). Correspondingly, the struggle for cultural recognition is becoming regarded as the main goal of political struggle. This is replacing the previous struggle for socioeconomic redistribution of resources, despite the continued lack of justice in the world in terms of redistribution of material goods and resources. According to Fraser, a new task has emerged, namely that of developing a critical theory that combines the new demand for recognition of cultural difference with those of social equality and just socioeconomic distribution. In other words, she sees a dual challenge, and the necessity to develop ways of combating both injustices simultaneously.

Fraser's concern is that multiculturalism will detract attention from the class perspective and the class struggle and thereby maintain the unjust socioeconomic distribution of goods and resources, despite the ideas of the multiculturalists gaining ground. How can this be avoided? According to Fraser, the problem lies in multiculturalism's demand for recognition of the internal rationality of social groups. This sustains unjust political-economic structures which multiculturalism either ignores or is unwilling to address. This is Fraser's chief objection to multiculturalism. As long as the demand for cultural recognition is not combined with the demand for redistribution of a society's goods and resources, multiculturalism will only lead to reinforcing unjust socioeconomic structures.

She takes this issue a step further by asking whether it is nonetheless possible to combine these two perspectives, meaning to combine multiculturalism with classic socialism. Her own answer to this question is that it is highly unlikely that these two perspectives can be combined. For this to be possible, it would be necessary to find approaches to minimising the conflict between the recognition of group specificity which wider society is demanded to respect and the redistribution of social goods and socioeconomic resources. Fraser thus presents reasons why a Marxist-oriented approach would still prove superior to any alternatives offered. In her view, it is first of all important to maintain a socialist approach because of its capacity and potential to change and improve the conditions of existence for economically disadvantaged groups (Fraser 1995:92-93). Fraser makes it blatantly clear: redistribution of material goods is far more important than cultural recognition for the world's poor and oppressed. For example, as individuals, black working-class lesbians have little to gain from multiculturalist recognition (Fraser 1995: 93).

Discussion on multiculturalism and early childhood education

Key provisions that tend towards multiculturalism in the Kindergarten Act are contained in section 2, which states that kindergarten owners "may adapt the framework plan to local conditions," and in section 1, which states that private kindergartens may decide not to adopt the values referred to in section 1, that is, those of the Christian and humanist heritage and tradition (Kindergarten Act, section 1a, first paragraph; cf. Framework Plan 2011: 53). The provision implicitly implies that private kindergartens owned or run by congregations in the state church may adopt special provisions concerning religious or philosophical purposes, and that it is possible to choose religions or philosophies other than Christianity (Kindergarten Act, section 1a, second paragraph). This makes it clear that, from a multiculturalist perspective, there is nothing stopping a wide diversity of kindergartens rooted in cultures other than the Norwegian majority culture. If a group of parents wants to start a kindergarten based on, for example, Buddhist values, it would be a matter of course for wider society to accommodate this. In this context it is also natural to mention the statutory protection of the language and culture of Sami children (see Kindergarten Act, sections 2 and 8). Such protection is a clear example of multiculturalist policy, whereby an ethnic group's cultural specificity is protected at the same time as the Sami people are granted special rights by virtue of their status as an indigenous people (see the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). In the *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* the perhaps most explicit expression of multiculturalist thinking appears on page 36. It states:

> The population of Norway is linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse, which enriches and strengthens the communities in the kindergartens. Kindergartens shall therefore facilitate dialogue and interaction between different groups, on an equal footing. Children who belong to the Sami indigenous population, to national minorities or to ethnic minority cultures must be supported in the development of their dual cultural affiliations.

This excerpt clearly supports multiculturalist thinking as we have seen it expressed by Parekh.

Criticism of liberal multiculturalism applied to early childhood education

In the context of kindergartens, supporters of Barry's theoretical position will be concerned with the rights of the individual child and of the rights of parents to decide what is best for their child. Both parental rights and children's rights to participate are in

line with liberal thinking, although both could also be used to argue for more multiculturalism in the kindergartens. It would depend on whether the focus was on children and parents as individuals or as representatives of cultural groups. Sometimes it can be difficult to identify this form of liberal thinking in Norwegian legislation because it flows almost like an undercurrent through much of what is explicitly expressed. This can be seen in the way in which both the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan focus on child development and self-expression (cf. Kindergarten Act, sections 2 and 12). Where multiculturalists would give priority to safeguard cultural conditions, perhaps at the expense of the individual, liberal critics would insist that individual conditions constitute the most important issue to consider in the kindergartens.

We could perhaps say that Barry's main point is that we should be 'colour blind' with respect to different cultures and to focus on the contributions and needs of individuals rather than on cultural backgrounds. Sociologist Olav Kasin argues in favour of a similar view in the context of kindergartens in his article 'Kultur som mangfold og enfold i barnehagen' [Cultural diversity and cultural naiveté in early childhood education and care] (Kasin 2010; cf. Kasin 2008). He argues that the cultural understanding expressed in the Framework Plan is too narrow when culture is mainly presented as something that should be rendered visible. According to Kasin, such 'culturalisation' leads to stereotypes whereby children are viewed as representatives of a cultural group rather than as individuals with individual wants and needs:

> If one thinks of cultural diversity as represented by which children should be gathered in a kindergarten, there is a risk of placing an unduly heavy burden of responsibility on individual children. The children's cultural backgrounds may end up overfocused, overinterpreted, and oversimplified. At the same time, there is a danger of having unduly simple ideas of what cultural diversity actually is: differences in people's cultural backgrounds, often reduced to differences in language, skin colour, religion, and national affiliation. (Kasin 2010:67).

The key issue here is that children enter kindergartens as representatives of nothing more than themselves. The kindergartens should therefore take the consequences of this by treating each child as individuals with distinctive personalities and social backgrounds, not as representatives of Somali an, Muslim or British culture, etc. Such criticism could be characterised as liberal because it primarily focuses on safeguarding the rights of the individual, and thus resembles Barry's position, only in this case applied to kindergartens.

Marxist-inspired criticism of multiculturalism applied to early childhood education

In the context of kindergartens, thinking that aligns with Fraser's Marxist-inspired criticism of multiculturalism is highly evident in the emphasis on the importance of the contribution of kindergartens to social cohesion. This is expressed in section 2 of the Kindergarten Act as follows: "Kindergartens shall have a health-promoting and preventive function, and contribute to even out social inequalities." The same applies for the insistence in the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan that kindergartens work for gender equality, as referred to in the third paragraph of the purpose clause in connection with the provision to combat all forms of discrimination. For example, some cultural minorities practice other gender role patterns than those promoted by the kindergartens. To criticise this would accord with key points in Fraser's argument, and could then stand in direct opposition to the idea of multiculturalism. Such a way of thinking is supported in the Framework Plan when it insists that physical play should "break with traditional gender roles" (Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, 2011:42). This clearly supports Western equality ideology. Overall, the basic documents for kindergartens contain very little trace of classic Marxist-inspired social cohesion and practically nothing about how this should be handled in practice.

Cash-for-care benefits

An example that could help clarify the different positions in the debate on multiculturalism is the cash-for-care benefits scheme. This scheme, which was introduced by the Bondevik II Government, entitles parents of children aged between one and three who do not or who only partly use state-subsidised day-care facilities to a cash payment (see http://www.nav.no/Familie/Kontantstøtte). The cash-for-care benefit scheme was introduced on 1 August 1998 for one-year-olds and was expanded to apply for two-year-olds from 1 January 1999. From a multiculturalist position like that held by Parekh, such a scheme would be welcomed because it would strengthen opportunities for cultural minorities to maintain their cultural specificity and thus respect parental rights and wishes to decide how to raise their children, something which in turn would better accommodate cultural diversity in wider society. The liberal position, as expressed by Barry, would prioritise the freedom of choice that lies in the cash-for-care scheme for individual parents and would thus be positive towards such a scheme, but only as long as it does not defeat its objective. Marxist-oriented critics of multiculturalism would oppose the cash-for-care benefits scheme because it could be said to reinforce oppression disguised as safeguarding cultural diversity. Put simply, values such as social cohesion and equality would be prioritised over cultural diversity and multiculturalism. This implies lower priority being given to cultural diversity, despite the fact that it is often parties to the political left that are most critical of the cash-for-care benefits scheme yet are positive to cultural diversity.

Value-based priorities in Norwegian early childhood education

The kindergartens' social mandate is an ambitious project aimed at safeguarding all of the three issues that concern Parekh, Barry, and Fraser. At the same time, we have seen from the above review how difficult this is to achieve in practice. It is therefore necessary to define value-based priorities in the kindergartens, something that is done in the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan. In these terms of reference, priority is given to safeguarding and supporting the cultural diversity that exists in kindergartens in the sense of strengthening children's cultural group identity (multiculturalism). It is regarded as positive and necessary that children and parents from cultural backgrounds other than ethnic Norwegian bring their cultural specificity with them into the kindergartens and that these are accommodated alongside the majority culture. The Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan (2011) contain several provisions that lean towards multiculturalism. This insistence on regarding cultural diversity positively is a clear expression of multiculturalist thinking, though it is probably not as deeply rooted theoretically in the terms of reference for kindergartens as in Parekh.

Nonetheless, if applied to the kindergartens, the ideas of Parekh, Barry and Fraser could be identified in the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan to varying degrees, even though these documents, as already mentioned, place more emphasis on multiculturalist ideas. Prioritising such thinking in the Framework Plan means that categories other than culture, such as social cohesion and equality, are overshadowed. Essentially, this means that if safeguarding cultural diversity is prioritised in the kindergartens, issues such as equality and gender equality will inevitably receive less attention, quite simply because Western equality ideology is on a collision course with prevailing values inside many of the cultural groups that make up today's wider society.

Kindergartens will often have to make concrete decisions of an educational or value-based nature. Of course, this can be done without having read Parekh, Barry or Fraser and without taking a position in the debate over principles of multiculturalism. At the same time, these concrete decisions could be placed in a more theoretical understanding framework such as the one represented by the discussion on multiculturalism. It is up to the kindergartens to make these decisions and to interpret and render concrete the provisions in the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens according to local conditions and subject to the responsibilities and obligations this work entails. Thus, the questions are whether the individual kindergartens are as influenced by multiculturalist ideas and are facilitating cultural diversity as much as the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan (2011) set out, or whether the wording in these two documents is set aside in favour of a more fundamental ethnocentric practice.

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