

Food practices and risk constructions in Norwegian and French kindergartens

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Abstract

Food practices are culturally and historically situated, and so are conceptions of ‘risk’. Comparative studies of food practices can highlight these cultural norms and conceptions. In this article we will present results from a study that investigated food practices in Norwegian and French kindergartens with a particular focus on constructions of ‘risk’. We used a polyphonic ethnographic approach, where teachers and assistants from both countries were invited to reflect upon video clips that we filmed of their kindergarten settings, to discuss and critically reflect on their own and others’ practices. The results show that ‘risk’ can be seen in light of ‘risk’ discourses in the society. We identified both health-related and pedagogical ‘risks’. Food practices in early childhood education and care become a socio-political tool to either support or avoid and work against the experiences and food customs the children bring from home. The study can contribute to reflections on the taken-for-granted—on both a practical and a political level.

Key words

Food practices; risk; cultural context, inequality

Introduction

Food is fundamental to all human life, at all historical times. Further, food practices are culturally and historically situated (Douglas 1972), and are therefore suitable as empirical objects for a range of analytical aims and comparative studies (Burke and Duncan 2015).

Food is also a significant material object in transactions between children and their caregivers—one that holds strong symbolic significance, especially as small children depend on others for their food supply. Children's food in schools and kindergartens is a focus of both professional and public debate on what is good and desirable, and what is perceived as 'risky'. It may actualize a broad range of issues, such as nutrition, health, education, social inequality, and economy. The study of food practices in childhood institutions may also highlight intergenerational power relations between adults and children, as well as power relations between the state and the family, which actualize Michel Foucault's (1998) concept of biopolitics. Biopolitics, in this context, refers to the state's interest in controlling the population's reproduction, life and health and to enhance the populations' workforce and the production of people's subjectivity. Kindergartens constitute an arena for political interventions and childhood politics in general (Ulvik 2018).

Cultural contextualizing seems to lead to different interpretations of health authority recommendations. From a pedagogical perspective, it is important to consider the conceptualizations of children and childhood that create the basis for the negotiations around 'risk'—and, above all, to ask, what kinds of restraints and affordances are provided for children's agency (Rayna and Garnier 2018)?

In this article, we will present results from a comparative study that investigated practices in Norwegian and French kindergartens with a particular focus on constructions of 'risk'. Mary Douglas (1972) claims that 'risk' is culturally constructed: i.e. what is considered to be 'risky' may vary between cultures. In our study, we define 'risk' as a potential threat that is

connected to an undesirable outcome (Burke and Duncan 2015, 77), and we study what is perceived as ‘risk’ in the respective study settings. In doing so, we understand ‘risks’ not only as unpredictable dangers but also as potential safety hazards produced by industrial societies that can be evaluated and prevented (Beck 1992). As a result, we see an increasing use of expert groups that advise both parents, institutions and politicians. The increasing power of experts goes hand and in hand with the internationalization and globalization of ‘risks’ (Beck 1999). Anthony Giddens (1999, 3) underlines that a ‘risky’ society does not necessarily mean a more hazardous society, but rather a society that is preoccupied with safety and with the future. This is especially the case in relation to early childhood education and care. In contemporary society, parents and professionals are given a tremendous responsibility regarding children’s growth, development, academic skills and avoidance of harmful external influence (Guldberg 2009). Food plays an important role in each of these aspects, particularly with regards to young children’s present and future through the acquisition of ‘good habits’ as early as possible.

There appear to be major differences between the conceptions of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Norway and France—especially in relation to differences between Norway’s child-centered curriculum and France’s academic school-centered curriculum (Greve 2018; Garnier and Rayna 2018). The countries are therefore suitable for a comparative study, which focused on the research question (and topic of this article): How are constructions of ‘risk’ in connection to food practices understood, handled and negotiated by ECEC professionals in Norway and France?

Research and perspectives on food practices in childhood institutions

Food practices in childhood institutions can be addressed from a range of perspectives. In the literature, school meals are a particular focus of research, although studies of food practices in

kindergartens are less common. A health perspective dominates the concerns about food and eating expressed in whitepapers, policy documents and curricula in school and preschool education (Ulvik 2018, Ulvik forthcoming). Traditionally, school meals were intended to solve problems of hunger or malnutrition; today, the challenge is not only malnutrition but also obesity (Andresen and Elvbakken 2007). It seems that school meals may have an influence on children's health in the short term, but there is a lack of knowledge regarding long-term influences (Oostindjer et al. 2017). The pedagogical aspects of school meals—how schools serve as instruments for teaching children as well as parents about healthy eating—is a theme in several studies (Pike and Leahy 2012; Burke and Duncan 2015); regulation of children's food in childhood institutions may thus serve as a way of disciplining of both children and parents (Pike and Leahy 2012; Ulvik 2018).

Deborah Lupton (1996), in her book *Food, the Body and the Self*, presents theoretical perspectives on food and eating. The discussion of nutritional science and biological perspectives versus sociocultural perspectives is of relevance here. Nutrition may concern health and body function, separated from food practices as culturally and historically situated (Douglas 1972). Within recent childhood studies, food practices serve as a lens for exploring social aspects of children's everyday life. It is emphasized that food not only works on a material level, but also on a symbolic level, and is therefore a symbol of thoughts, feelings and relationships (Punch, McIntosh and Emond 2010). In this research, the social aspects of meals have been prioritized before the nutritional aspects. For example, researchers have shown how power relations between children and adults are played out and negotiated by food practices (Punch, McIntosh and Emond 2010). The study of food practices may thus highlight a range of relationships between adults and children—including care, affection, manipulation and power—in both families and institutions.

Methodology

Our aim was to explore the professionals' understanding of 'risk' from a pragmatic perspective. For the international comparison, group interviews with five teams of professionals were conducted in France and Norway, one in each of the five ECEC settings selected for this research. In Norway, we chose two *barnehager* (kindergartens) in Oslo: one with the youngest children (1–2 years of age); and one group of the oldest (3–6 years of age). In France, our research field included the oldest group (2 years of age) from one *crèche* (day care centre), which had children aged 0–3 years; and two *écoles maternelles* (nursery schools) in the Paris area. From our data, although all of the participating kindergartens were situated in urban settings and under the supervision of local authorities and national regulations, we cannot generalize practices as being specifically 'French' or 'Norwegian'. Generalisation and typicality were also questioned by the participants themselves: i.e., whether the choice of video clips and the choice of the settings may have had an impact on the issues discussed. We do, however, regard the participating kindergartens as globally representative of the respective countries.

A polyphonic ethnographic research design

We have followed a polyphonic ethnographic approach developed by Joseph Tobin's comparison of preschool education in three cultures, using video as a tool for stimulating a multi-vocal, inter-cultural dialogue (Tobin, Wu and Davidson 1989; Tobin and Davidson 1990). This methodology has also been used in an international research project involving five countries—which resulted in the book *Children Crossing Borders: Immigrant Parent and*

Teacher Perspectives on Preschool for Children of Immigrants (Tobin, Arzugiaba and Adair 2013)—as well as in different kinds of ECEC settings in France (Garnier et al. 2017). The principle of this approach is to show focus groups selected episodes from daily life in specific settings in each country under study.

In each setting, after introducing the research project and obtaining the institutional authorization and necessary consent for everyone participating in the video (staff, parents and children), we combined general observations and videotaping of the daily life of three or four children during one week (carried out by combined teams of French and Norwegian researchers). To ensure variation, we chose both boys and girls, with different family backgrounds. We edited four 20-minute video clips from the 10 to 12 hours of video footage in each setting focusing on sequences that included food practices: one video for each *barnehage* in Norway, one for the *crèche* and one for the two *écoles maternelles* in France. The video sequences were chosen to show both the sense of the daily routines in each setting and some critical incidents that involved (or did not involve) an adult's intervention—such as a child asking for help, or disputes among children—to provoke discussion in the interviews about key issues between the participants (Tobin, Hsueh and Karasawa 2009).

We invited the professionals to reflect upon the video, and to discuss and critically reflect on their own and other's practices. For this article, the thematic analysis of the group interviews was focused on food practices and 'risk', comparing cultural norms and local practices in Norwegian and French kindergartens. The dialogue between professionals highlights the institutional constraints, normative principles and the cultural values voiced by the professionals in their everyday practices.

Ethics of the research and limitations of the method

We set out to satisfy the necessary requirements toward the participants, such as consent, anonymity, and agreement for the videos made in their setting (this was done during a previous interview in each setting). The objective of the research was not to ‘rank’ the two ECEC national systems. The research aimed to be exploratory, not normative. The challenge was to make room for dialogue between participants in order to open new possibilities of thinking and doing (Detienne 2000). In this research, *diversity* was seen as a core value in ECEC systems. We also tried to be critically vigilant about underlying conceptions of early childhood, for example normative developmental theories (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999), considering that what constitutes childhood and what is ‘good’ for children can be a matter of critiques and justifications between the professionals themselves (Garnier 2015). In this sense, the challenge was also to understand the conception of children’s agency in each ECEC system as it is expressed and practiced by the professionals.

The number of participants and composition of the group in each setting varied, which might have influenced on the discussions and the results of this study. The teachers from the French *école maternelle* have a more individualistic way of working that may lead to increasing differences of positions towards their conceptions of ‘risk’. The Norwegian teachers are used to more collaboration in their settings, which may lead to teachers speaking with a more collective voice, to express shared positions. Nevertheless, in the analyses we found both differences and commonalities in the views of all groups of participants, regardless of nationality.

ECEC in Norway and France—and regulation of food practices

National curricula and framework plans are policy documents governing what kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes the children are supposed to acquire through education. The French *école maternelle* curriculum is strongly ‘schoolified’ (Garnier 2011), in that it

provides specific learning outcomes and assessments for the children for five different learning domains: language, physical education, arts, maths and natural sciences. The *crèches* are institutions designed for children under the age of three years. These institutions are not under the regulation of the French Ministry of Education, but have their own local organization and, as of 2018, a national framework based on the importance of children's global development. The Norwegian framework plan has no specific learning outcomes for the children. In accordance with the Nordic ECEC model, the plan underlines a holistic view on children's education, emphasizing play, care and learning in the German *Bildung* tradition (Greve 2018).

The Norwegian Public Health Act (2011) states that all public institutions, including kindergartens, must promote health and well being and contribute to equalizing health differences. The Norwegian Directory of Health (2017) has provided guidelines for food and meals in Norwegian kindergartens to ensure nutritionally healthy food for all children. In France, the Ministry of Health publishes general campaigns on the importance of food for health and well-being, for example recommending '5 fruits et légumes par jour' (eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day), but there is no national policy or regulation regarding food in early childhood education.

Meals in both countries are part of a fixed daily schedule: a main meal around 11am, and another meal later in the afternoon (around 3pm). During meals, children in both countries are expected to behave in a certain manner (e.g. to sit down at the table). In the two Norwegian *barnehager* involved in our study (as in most of Norway), there was no cook: for the lunch, kindergarten teachers (*barnehagelærere*) and assistants, who ate with the children, offered them sandwiches (bread is a staple food in Norway). Once a week, the teachers prepared a hot meal. Children who arrived early in the morning (7.30–8.00 am), might have a short meal or bring their own breakfast from home. The main meal consisted mostly of bread and spreads,

either offered by the *barnehage* or brought from the children's homes. For the afternoon meal, children again either ate food from their own lunch boxes brought from home, or had some fruit from the *barnehage*.

One of the Norwegian kindergartens that participated in the study and works in a multicultural context, took part in a special nutrition programme, initiated by the local authorities. This programme encourages the parents as well as the teachers to offer vegetables and fruits and avoid sugar as much as possible. In the three French study settings, there was a kitchen and a cook who prepared meals for children. In the *écoles maternelles*, teachers do not eat with the children, replaced instead by municipal employees; in the *crèches*, the staff stay with the children but do not eat with them—in the *crèche* that participated in the study, children ate their meals in very small groups. Whereas the two Norwegian meals were similar, the children in the French study setting experienced different daily meal patterns: lunch was three or four dishes (i.e. a starter, a main dish, cheese and/or dessert), while *the goûter* (the light afternoon meal), was generally composed of a glass of juice and a piece of cake.

Results

After a thorough review of our data, we chose two analytical themes: 1) Pedagogical risks, and 2) health risks. We have developed the categories of codes, and organized together the interpretation of the results using an inductive approach (Garnier et al. 2017).

1. Pedagogical risks

Food practices may be understood as both disciplining time and place and disciplining of the body. Referring to Foucault's (1998) conception of biopolitics concept, we might say that regulation of the body in time and place serves as a means to prevent unwanted behaviour and a means to enhance health issues.

Time and place

Food practices constitute regulations of both time and place. On the one hand, both these aspects may be accounted for as safety and predictability. On the other, it might lead to fragmentation and restraint. Rules about meal-related aspects, like where and with whom to eat, mark a boundary between what is and is not an acceptable setting for meals (Lupton 1996).

In the French settings, there were rather strict schedules of the day, with a specific time for the meals. One of the French teachers explained that although the strict schedules might cause stressful situations, the fact that there are other staff members who take care of the meals and the nap time is also 'difficult' and 'rough'. The Norwegian teachers, on the other hand, were concerned that the preparation of meals, which they had to do themselves, is time consuming. As one stated: 'I would have liked that—go from the classroom, have meals another place, where someone else has prepared the food; there would be no 'time thief'. They commented that the French teachers 'don't need to spend time in the kitchen', as the meal is prepared by someone else. These teachers pointed to the risk of losing time with the children because of the time spent in the kitchen preparing food.

Disciplining of the body

In the French *école maternelle* and in both Norwegian *barnehager*, all the children ate together. In the French *crèche*, two or three children ate together with one teacher at small tables—half of the group in a first seating, the rest in a second seating. Those children who were not eating, could play as they liked in the same room. In all settings, the children were seated at a table—the French teachers were concerned about the youngest children in Norway who sat on high chairs at tables suited for adults.

T 1:I ask myself if it is not too immobile, if the children are a bit stuck in their chairs and are not able to go down when they like.

T2:And suddenly immobilized. A bit like prisoners.

T1:Exactly, but if they can go down when they want.... (Crèche)

These teachers didn't say anything about 'risk' explicitly, but by comparing children with 'prisoners' they expressed a concern that children are deprived of freedom or the possibility of leaving the table whenever they want.

The Norwegian teachers commented on the French canteens: specifically, the large rooms with many children. They understood why the discipline in these circumstances had to be somewhat strict: 'It was a rather big room, many children, many tables—if you are not in control here, the level of noise will reach chaos'.

These quotes may be interpreted as being about restrictions of the body in some way or another: either children are stuck in chairs or the teachers need to have 'control', highlighting a structural restricting of children's bodies to obtain calm and avoid chaos.

2. Cultural perceptions of risky food

We identified several aspects of what was seen as 'risky' in relation to food through participants' comments on the practices of the other country and their explanations about their own country's practices: concerns about understandings about healthy food; the quantity and quality of food children are given within the specific organizations of the meals in the different institutions; and finally, the risk of social inequality. As we will see, there were both agreements and disagreements between the Norwegian and the French teachers—as well as internal variations—regarding issues related to quality and quantity of food, and about the equality and hygiene issues.

Healthy food

Whilst all the teachers focused on ‘healthy food’, there were distinct cultural differences with regard to what was considered to be healthy. One of the Norwegians’ main concerns of health ‘risk’ was related to excessive consumption of sugar, while for the French teachers the health risk was more focused on milk.

After watching video clips of the French *goûter* (a small meal in the afternoon), the Norwegian teachers—particularly the one working in the multicultural context—was concerned that this meal is composed of sweet food, comparing this to their own practice of limiting sugar and educating families:

- Why are they giving them cakes? Do they think that it is good?
- It’s so strange... Have they eaten the dessert at lunch? [...]
- Then there is this sugar-thing. It is not good for children to eat too much sugar. We know that children today are inactive, playing with their computers and eating too much sugar. That may lead to diabetes. It is not good.
- No, we are not allowed to have sugar in this kindergarten. We are part of a programme to try to reduce sugar.
- It starts at the public health centre, and we follow up. We explain to the parents that the children should eat less sugar and be more healthy. So we don’t have cakes for birthdays, and so on. But sugar is not completely forbidden. (*Barnehage 2*)

Soft drinks and juice were also firmly criticized by Norwegian teachers: ‘the children should learn to drink water’. All consumption of sugar is a matter of particular concern for Norwegian health authorities because of associated health risks such as diabetes, dental problems and certainly obesity. Cakes and soft drinks are therefore not to be given to the children in *barnehage*. Even giving children just one or two small cakes in the afternoon was seen as not really acceptable, but when they were also given a dessert at lunch, eating cakes and drinking juice became ‘strange’. These remarks illustrate a fear of excessive consumption of sugar which can be linked to a prevention policy. This prevention policy has thus had an important impact on the representation of what kind of food children should eat in the preschool institution. Further, it regulates families and what is considered appropriate for the

children to eat. In particular, this influences the numerous migrant families attending the *barnehage* that works in the multicultural context.

On the French side, the teachers in the *crèche*, who also work in a multicultural context, defended the cakes, pointing out that these cakes are made by their own cook: 'Dietarily (...), she put less sugar than the traditional recipe...And it is better than manufactured cakes'. However, the many sandwiches in the *barnehage* surprised them: 'Sandwiches morning, midday and evening!'. At the same time a French teacher remarked: 'They are not more obese than in the United-States', indicating that children's obesity also exists in France. Then another participant explained: 'No, because they are outside (...) they spend their energy'.

From the French point of view, an important element to avoid during children's meals is milk, because it is high in fat and includes lactose. For French teachers, the harmfulness of milk is something that is taken for granted, even if they implicitly admitted that another point of view can exist: 'I'm one of those who says that milk is not good for one's health'. This indicates that there is not only one argument about this issue. Indeed, milk has traditionally been considered an important source of the calcium that children need to grow. However, for these French participants, the real reason behind milk distribution in the past was simply because of industrialists' interest: 'there were the milk lobbies, they needed to get rid of all that stock of milk'. This way of presenting milk consumption as purely the product of commercial strategies immediately discredits the idea that milk actually contains something valuable: i.e. the milk lobby made us believe that milk was good for us, but now we know that this is not true. In this context, drinking milk has become an aberration, a kind of leftover practice that an 'advanced' country like Norway should overcome. Because of the medical education they received in their initial training, the *crèche*'s practitioners were questioning the long-term

effects of milk consumption: not only obesity but also cardiovascular troubles like ‘cholesterol rates’ and ‘infarction’.

Although they were referring to different ingredients (i.e. sugar versus milk), the teachers in both countries described food as being ‘out of place’ (Douglas 1966).

Meanwhile, the French teachers appreciated that children drink water when they are thirsty, all through the day, in the Norwegian kindergarten: ‘I have noticed, there is a little bottle at one moment, is it self-service?’. They also criticized the collective script of the French institutions, which does not respect the children’s individual physiological needs: ‘In the *école maternelle*, everybody drinks at the same time, one goes to pee at the same time’.

Another teacher added: ‘One eats the same thing’.

During meals in the two countries, hygiene and security practices are supposed to protect the children from health problems. Hygiene is very often invoked by French authorities to forbid practices, such as eating in the classroom with the youngest children instead of the collective canteen. French practitioners insisted on the constraining hygiene regulations. If the *crèche*’s practitioners, the majority of whom have received paramedical training, were ‘surprised’ by the ‘flexibility’ of the hygiene regulations in *barnehage*, they also complained paradoxically about the ‘overly constraining’ EU norms on requirements for cooking—for example a diploma and a preliminary training are compulsory in order to serve food, and all this limits parents’ participation in food preparation for the children.

Quantity of food

Professionals in both countries felt that children in the other country were probably not eating enough—or were not eating enough healthy food. While the Norwegian teachers valued the ‘good’ or ‘nice’ lunch provided to children in the *école maternelle* and appreciated that it includes ‘three dishes’, the *goûter* in the *crèche* puzzled them: not only is it full of sugar, it is

too light of a meal. Not eating enough is unfavourable not only because of the lack of nutrition for children's bodies, but also for the general atmosphere and order in the group in the afternoon: 'If there are such long days [at the *crèche*] with so little food, I would imagine more conflicts'. Instead of one big meal at lunch and a light one later, after naptime, the Norwegian teachers preferred to spread out the amount of calories more evenly.

From the French teachers' perspective, the traditional lunch is supposed to be filling enough to give children energy for the rest of the day. However, they felt the children in *barnehage* 'do not seem to starve'. While acknowledging the cultural dimension and their own 'dietary habits', some French teachers underlined the inappropriateness of cold food in regards to 'physical aspects': 'When we are outside, we are generally hungry two hours later, having a picnic'. Compared to 'numerous countries', France's tradition of providing hot meals in a canteen in schools is almost an 'exception'. The Norwegian professionals admitted: 'it's a fair system, everyone eats the same thing'. That was also why the *crèche*'s professionals appreciated the 'hot and healthy' meal prepared once a week by the Norwegian staff, which they felt was 'a good idea'.

Additionally, from the French teachers' comments, we can infer a concern about some children not eating enough because they do not like the food provided by the institution. Thus, despite the dietary problem of sandwiches everyday—i.e. the lack of variety 'on the nutritional level'—the *crèche*'s professionals admitted that providing children with food they like (they 'enjoy bread') does protect children. The French teachers also shared the tension inferred from some Norwegian comments (as mentioned above), between medical norms and children's preferences, as they admitted that they themselves prefer a sandwich over tinned food—they are, after all, in the country of the *baguette*.

Quality and familiarity of food

For some French teachers, if cold sandwiches appeared not so nourishing, homemade cold food represents a means to overcome the problem of those who, for different reasons, do not eat enough of the food provided by the école maternelle:

- It's difficult to conform oneself to food we are not used to eating. I think that can effectively block children. It depends... we are different.
- This is true: there is a pacifier aspect in the food brought from home, prepared by dad or mum
- And when you don't like it, you don't eat. There are children who do not eat [in the canteen].
(*Ecole maternelle 2*)

In addition to these emotional, cultural and relational arguments, these professionals advocated the variability, among municipalities, of the quality of food provided by the écoles maternelles: 'I don't think that what we are giving them is top quality, anyway'. These teachers pointed to a risk of malnutrition, either because the children do not like what is served at the canteen, and thus refuse to eat it, or because the quality of the food at the canteen is not good. The canteen does not accommodate individual choices.

Social inequality

A preoccupation, expressed in particular by the French teachers, is the issue of social inequality concerning meals. The fact that the children in Norway eat food they have brought from their homes may be viewed from this perspective, as seen in the following statements made by teachers working with a significant number of disadvantaged families:

- I'm more sceptical of that [lunchboxes], exactly.
- I like the equality, too.
- The fact that everyone is eating the same thing.
- The fact that everyone shares the same meal, and a hot one.
- I think it's our French 'culinarism' [...].
- For example, today, we had a picnic... And each time [on a picnic], I observe the inequality between the one who has the chips and the one who has the lentil salad [...].

- Culturally, [bringing food from home], this is not the habit here..., I suppose that some parents would complain if they must think about the meal [...].
- You are right, it's evident. It's true, it should be embarrassing for some parents [...].
- The ones who are working a lot, the ones who don't have the money ...
- The ones who have nothing to eat.
- Yes because, for the canteen, there is still the price to pay [...]. (*école maternelle 2*)

For French professionals, the long tradition of collective meals provided by the municipalities is a matter of course. 'Equality' through the provision of the same food to all children at prices adapted to the families' resources is part of the social function of the educational institution. It is believed that letting the parents provide their children with meals (such as for a picnic) would quickly result in an inequitable food distribution: a junk food for children from low income families and a healthy food for children from high-income families. The other teachers expressed the same vision of a dual society, with its contrasting food that children would bring to the *école maternelle*: on the one side, 'only chips and perhaps a packet of biscuits' and on the other side, a 'little salad with meat'.

For the *crèche*'s practitioners, lunchboxes—even though they were considered 'cute' or 'original'—were also questioned with regards to social inequalities, which are increasing in France. For these teachers, the institution can contribute to improving nutritional equality:

It's not very fair because it depends on the parents' economical level, because a child will be provided with always the same thing to eat, not equilibrated and repetitive, whereas for another one, it will be more varied because the parents have money. Thus, the advantage of eating at the *crèche*, it is to be provided with varied food. (*Crèche*)

One of the Norwegian teachers fully agreed with this attention to the parents' situation, i.e. that the canteen limits junk food for some children:

Here, it is up to the parents to prepare the food for the children. And sometimes they do not make good decisions for their children [...], they must be glad [disadvantaged parents in the

école maternelle] because their child eats a good meal every day. No discussion, we do it this way, end of story. Here [in Norway] we have to dialogue with the parents, coordinate according to what they eat at home. Finally, that avoids those who are accustomed to eating a lot of junk food at home coming here without eating what we serve. (*Barnehage 1*)

Confronted with families' practices from ten nationalities, Norwegian teachers from the other *barnehage* had to discuss food with parents: 'We need to tell them what is good for their child—some of them eat food that is too unhealthy'.

Conclusions—future consequences

Our analyses have shown that 'risk' can be seen in the light of different 'risk' discourses in the society (Ulvik 2018). Overweight and obesity (OECD 2017) and international recommendations regarding healthy food for future wellbeing, concerns both French and Norwegian societies.

A common theme presented by the professionals in both countries is that negotiations of how 'risk' seems to be based on top-down instructions rather than bottom-up explorations. The teachers seem to conceive of their role towards the families as being that of an expert—the children's and parents' voices are not present in the teachers' talk. This can be linked to the concept of biopolitics (Foucault 1998), considering children's bodies as particularly suitable for discipline and governmentality. In the French *écoles maternelles* as well as the *crèche*, there are cooks guaranteeing a healthy meal for the children, whereas in the Norwegian *barnehage*, the teachers tell the parents 'what is good for their child'.

'Risk' discourses are connected to responsibility (Burke and Duncan 2015), and the parents seem to be either deprived of this responsibility to a certain degree—when meals are prepared by schools during school time—or are tasked with assuming an individual responsibility for their children's lunchbox. ECEC thus becomes a socio-political tool to either support or avoid and work against the experiences and food customs the children bring from home (Ulvik

2018). This might have an impact on the children's understanding of their own culture and ability to be proud of their home background. As social practices, rooted in cultural traditions, meals show equally how children's bodies support their identity as cultural subjects (Garnier forthcoming).

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