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Multimodal texts in kindergarten rooms

Astrid Granly & Eva Maagerø***

Abstract

This article provides an overview of the results of our project “The Kindergarten Room: A Multimodal Pedagogical Text”. Our major initiative was to investigate what the multimodal texts in kindergarten represent and the extent to which they reflect and provide attributions to the children’s activities. In addition, we wanted to investigate whether kindergarten walls and floors can be called ‘pedagogical texts’, and the extent to which texts on walls and floors establish a particular text culture. The study is being carried out in Norway. Our analytical approach is situated within the theoretical framework of Michael Halliday’s social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics. A kindergarten room is a composite design that spatially utilises the co-deployment of various semiotic resources, such as architecture, language and visual images, and is thus viewed as a multimodal text. Our multimodal analysis is primarily based on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen. Our research is a qualitative study of three kindergartens. The material consists of video observations, photographs, field notes, documents and interviews with teachers and children. We believe that our analysis contributes to the body of knowledge regarding texts in the kindergarten room, the purpose of these texts, and thus the factors that influence the composition of kindergarten rooms.

Keywords: kindergarten, space, pedagogical text, multimodality, social semiotics

Introduction

Kindergarten rooms are characterised by a colourful mixture of items that include toys, furniture, cupboards and boxes with material for drawing and crafts, book shelves, pictures on the walls and name tags. When entering a kindergarten, one can usually immediately recognise the rooms as belonging to a kindergarten. Both verbal and visual texts on the walls and floors in many of the rooms play an important role in characterising these institutions. Traditionally, a text is realised through verbal language, through writing on paper or through spoken language. Recent text research has emphasised that a text may consist of various types of meaning-making signs, including both verbal and non-verbal signs (Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). A text

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is created when meaning is realised through signs. Accompanied by other artefacts, the texts in a kindergarten present a pedagogical institution in which the activities of the children are the centre of focus. These texts relate information about daily life in a kindergarten, trips, projects, games and visits. The nature of these texts spans different kindergartens, and some texts may also communicate important features of one particular kindergarten, such as the activities and ideology that are emphasised there. In addition, texts that are not found among the variety of texts within a room, may also relate information about the kindergarten (e.g. whether all of the texts can be interpreted as mono-cultural in a multicultural world) (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2012).

Children are physically surrounded by a variety of texts in their kindergartens on a daily basis, but texts are also important in the context of their daily lives outside kindergarten and play an important role in the general upbringing of children. The texts on the walls and floors in kindergartens provide the foundation for this research project. We aimed to describe and analyse the variety of texts that could be found in kindergarten rooms. We also wanted to view each room as a text that can be analysed as a meaning-making unit. In addition, we aimed to discover whether the texts on the walls and the floors were used in the daily activities of the kindergartens, or whether the texts served only as colourful decoration. We were also interested in determining whether the kindergarten teachers viewed these texts as potential pedagogical texts. Selander and Skjelbred (2004:32) define a pedagogical text as a cultural artefact that is “used in specific learning situations”, and determined that such texts are intimately related to and used in an institutional framework.

We will provide an overview of our entire research project in this article: therefore we will not conduct a detailed analysis of particular texts but will attempt to answer three of our major research questions:

- What do the multimodal texts on the walls and floors represent?
- Are the texts on the walls and floors integrated into the activities of the children and/or in organised pedagogical activities?
- Can the texts on the walls and floors be considered pedagogical texts?

We will also briefly discuss if there is a special text culture in the kindergarten. According to Berge (2005:15), a text culture is a limited cultural context or a social field in which those who participate in the field in a qualified manner communicate mutually by meaningful utterances that have status as ‘texts’. We will begin with a brief introduction to our theoretical framework and our research methods before we present and discuss our main results.

Theory

This project builds on the view that kindergarten rooms can be considered as pedagogical texts, and that we can reveal the meaning potential of these texts by using text analysis tools from social semiotic theory. To limit our research material, we have concentrated on the walls and floors in the rooms that are defined by the staff as the main rooms in each kindergarten, or department within a kindergarten. Semiotics is the science of meaning-making verbal and non-verbal signs, and in social semiotics, this meaning-making is studied within social and cultural contexts.

The British scholar and social semiotician Michael Halliday states that language is a social construction that performs essential functions for people as social human beings (Halliday, 1978, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday's systemic functional linguistics presents three functions of language which he calls *metafunctions*. Language has an *ideational metafunction* by representing phenomena in the world around us and inside of us. Words represent objects and phenomena and enable us to create mental pictures of the world. By combining words to utterances, we observe relations between them and glean an overview perspective. An utterance is simultaneously a communicative act that involves a speaker or a writer and a listener or a reader, and the listener or reader will consciously or unconsciously react on the utterance. Halliday calls this function the *interpersonal metafunction*. The third function is the ability of language as a meaning-making system to create coherence between utterances, and this ability gives us resources for relating to non-verbal conditions, to the context in which the utterances are realised. Halliday calls this function the *textual metafunction*. Language and context dynamically interact with one another. Kindergarten texts have been created in specific contexts of situation by certain participants in certain places. The participants have desired to communicate something and have chosen ways of expression that they believe are functional within their respective contexts. These texts may also be components of communicative events in the daily life within the kindergartens. In addition, the texts are part of a more general context of culture. Kindergartens serve a specific role in society, and this role is interpreted and operationalised in every kindergarten by genres realised by the participants, and through which they communicate.

Halliday's work concentrates on verbal utterances, and our material contains many verbal texts (e.g., posters, signs, labels, notes, stories from practice). However, Gunther Kress (e.g. 2003) developed the notion of *multimodality* in which modality is understood as *modes of meaning*, such as the mode of writing, the mode of image, the mode of speech and the mode of space. Texts are multimodal when they consist of more than one mode of meaning. Modalities arise as a combination of material forms and ways of organisation created in culture. The similarities and differences between paintings and drawings can illustrate this notion. Drawings and paintings are primarily organised by the same principles, but their material forms differ; thus

drawing and painting are considered different kinds of meaning-making. Collaborating with Theo van Leeuwen, Kress developed a grammar of visual meaning-making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006). Van Leeuwen has also used this framework in his analysis of spatial organisation in villages and museums. In an educational context, the same framework has been used by many researchers, e.g. Kress (2003, 2010), in his studies of children's multimodal texts in school, by Hopperstad (2008) and Maagerø (2005) in an analysis of children's drawings, by Jewitt (2003, 2006), Lancaster (2003), Mavers (2003), and Pahl (2003) in an analysis of multimodal literacy, by Granly (2007), Løvland (2010) and Maagerø (2010) in multimodal approaches to textbooks and Maagerø and Østbye (2012) in an analysis of picture books as multimodal texts. Research on texts on kindergarten and classroom walls (and floors) where this framework has been used is, however, unknown to us.

The multimodal analyses of Kress and van Leeuwen are important to our study of the kindergarten texts. We will use Halliday's three metafunctions as a framework for the discussion of our findings. These metafunctions are also used in the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen.

Method and ethics

Our research is a qualitative study that examines the walls and floors in three kindergartens as multimodal texts. We are also interested in individual texts and units of texts in addition to the kindergarten room as a multimodal room (see above). Two kindergartens that were studied are located on the outskirts of a town in southeast Norway, while the third kindergarten is the Sámi kindergarten in Oslo. We collected our data during three visits to the first kindergarten and four visits to the second kindergarten, and these data consist of photographs and films of the walls and floors, video observations, field notes, and interviews with six teachers and assistants and twelve children. The first day in each kindergarten was used for making photographs and films of the texts on the walls and floors and video observations of the children's activities in the room in order to see if there were any interactions between the children and the texts. The next visits were mainly used for interviews with children and teachers and additional video observations. Field notes were made during all the visits. In addition, we have studied local and national documents for pedagogical work in kindergartens. The children who were interviewed were 4 to 5 years old in one kindergarten and 3 to 4 years old in the other kindergarten. The children were interviewed in pairs, whereas the teachers and assistants were interviewed individually. A semi-structured interview guide (Thagaard, 2009) was used for both the interviews with the children and those with the staff. The Sámi kindergarten was visited only once, and the data for this kindergarten only consist of photographs of the walls and field notes.

Photographs and the films of the walls and floors serve as the main data for our text analysis. The video observations and the interviews with children provide infor-

mation regarding the interactions between the children and the texts and regarding the activities that prompted the creation of the texts that are hanging on the walls or taped on to the floors. The interviews with the teachers and assistants enable us to reflect upon the texts as pedagogical texts.

The kindergartens, teachers and children are treated anonymously. The Norwegian Scientific Board for the collection of data has accepted our data collection methods. The Sámi kindergarten is recognisable; therefore our material from this kindergarten consists only of photographs and field notes, and no children or names are visible in the photographs. Interviews with children are demanding; we tried to take the children's perspective, be active listeners and let the children have the initiative as much as possible. The data material is rich even though we have focused on just three kindergartens and 18 interviews. This makes it challenging to interpret and present an overview of the findings. We are aware of these challenges and have included the findings we find most obvious.

Main results

In this section we will present some of the main results of our study. We will concentrate on findings that provide insight into the three research questions mentioned above.

The multimodal texts on walls and floors and their representations

First, the walls of the kindergarten rooms can be considered rich multimodal texts as various types of texts nearly completely cover many of the walls, with few empty spaces remaining. The material and the colour of the walls serve as a background, and the texts that hang on the walls are visually prominent through their materials and their expressions and thus salient in the interpretation of the walls as texts (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, several parts of the floors, primarily along the walls and in the corners, are used as texts. Many meaning-making resources are realised as the texts consist of verbal language, photographs, drawings, paintings, illustrations from books, paper decorations, collages of different types of material (e.g., glitter, feathers, wool), and toys, such as puppets and teddies etc. The texts are also characterised by strong and bright colours. Many texts (e.g., individual texts that were created by a group of children) are placed together and form a composition or *cluster* (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) that a viewer would interpret as one unit of meaning. Drawings, paintings and different types of paper work, such as coloured hands or feet of the children, often form visual clusters. Other clusters contain photographs and verbal texts documenting a trip to the woods or to the beach. The clusters are sometimes held together by a frame (e.g., a paper with a special colour serving as common background for the individual texts) that separates the unit from other units and assists in the reading of the texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition to the mentioned texts, shelves with books and different types of materials, games and

toys are placed near the walls. Notes with the names of the items on the shelves are sometimes placed in front of the shelves. Thus, the walls and partly the floors represent a rather complex environment for children and staff in which many different expressions metaphorically compete for the attention of viewers.

Most of the texts represent the activities of the children in the kindergartens. The drawings and paintings of the children in connection with different projects are frequently hung on the walls. In some instances, the children are given concrete tasks, such as the task of drawing characters in books; in other instances, the experience with a material is more important than the content, and the children are allowed to choose the motifs themselves. The interviews with the children aided our understanding of many of the drawings; for example, monsters, planes and rockets were often mentioned by the boys. In their interviews, the teachers and assistants emphasised that only works with a certain quality were displayed on the walls. Other texts were created by the staff and primarily consisted of documentation from trips and celebrations. Photographic series often represented special activities that occurred outside of the kindergarten room (e.g., children creating a bonfire in the woods). In one of the kindergartens, an assistant had created collages of illustrations from books she had read to the children. Many of the texts that were created by the staff were verbal texts, including both printed and handwritten texts. The printed texts primarily consisted of relatively long documentations of the children's work or reports from trips outside the kindergarten and were often arranged as part of a cluster, with photographs. Other texts included instructions for hand washing or coughing without transmitting infections to others. The handwritten texts primarily consisted of stories from different types of events that were held in the kindergartens. In these texts, the names of individual children were sometimes mentioned, and the content was related to activities in which these children had played a role.

Some of the texts were placed in a high position on the walls and were difficult to observe from the perspective of a child. Such texts would not be salient for the children as viewers. In one of the kindergartens, the letters of the alphabet had been drawn on separate sheets of paper, and each letter was accompanied by an animal or a thing beginning with that particular letter. These letters were placed in a row immediately below the ceiling. When the oldest children worked with the letters through rhymes and songs, several children were asked to show one special letter. Even when rising from their seats, walking to the middle of the room and standing on their toes, the children had difficulties when attempting to see the letters. As many schools also place these letters in a high position on their walls, this placement might be a traditional practice in educational institutions. In the Sámi kindergarten, precious dolls in Sámi folk costumes and other items from the Sámi culture were also placed on shelves located high up on the walls. During the interviews, the staff mentioned that valuable things were hung in a high position to ensure that the youngest children could not damage them.

In the Sámi kindergarten, the texts on the walls primarily represented the Sámi culture. For example, a collage of individual texts showing running reindeer dominated one wall. Because the individual texts were arranged so that a viewer would observe them in the form of a visual cluster, the reindeer formed a running herd, which is an element of the lives of many Sámi people. The material emphasised the cultural meaning as the individual pictures were composed of reindeer skin and bits of wood.



Picture 1: The reindeer collage

Posters of a reindeer's body with all of its intestines, which are used for food and household items in the Sámi culture, and posters featuring the Sámi language were also placed in prominent positions. In addition, some texts signified the urban culture of Oslo. In the other two kindergartens, few texts contained multicultural content. A collage of pictures of an Indian girl and verbal texts relating to her life story in India were found in one of the kindergartens and, because a few of the children in this particular kindergarten had multicultural backgrounds, the names of these children on the birthday poster and on the shelves were representative of other cultures.

Further, the walls as texts change over the course of a year in the kindergarten. During the interviews, the staff emphasised a correlation between the rhythm of the year and the change of the seasons, in addition to special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, as important factors for the selection of texts. Nevertheless, some texts were 'forgotten' and remained mounted on the walls for a full calendar year or longer.

The interaction between the children and the texts on the walls

During the interviews, the children were asked to identify which texts on the walls and floors were important to them. In all cases, the children pointed to texts they had created themselves or created with others, or photographs in which they were

represented. In one of the kindergartens, the oldest children had created colourful abstract paintings on black sheets of paper and used glitter to make the paintings shine. These pictures covered a large portion of the wall in front of the viewer when entering the room, and thus had a prominent position. The colours and the glitter also rendered these texts more obvious when compared with other texts. Some of the children immediately led us to this particular wall and informed us about the process of creating the paintings, especially the glitter aspect. These children were also eager to draw attention to the paintings that they had created themselves. In the other kindergarten, the children had become familiar with stories about Pulverheksa (Pulver witch), a series of books by the Norwegian author Ingunn Aamodt. When the kindergarten participated in a recycling project, this group of children created a collective collage of Pulverheksa and her companion, Grønnskollingen (The Green Head) from materials that included used paper, milk cartoons, yoghurt cups, garbage bags and corks to create meaning within this context. The collages were hung on the wall together with verbal texts that explained the process. The project was a long and difficult but pleasant work regarding a topic in which the children were interested and the children whom we interviewed immediately led us to this wall.



Picture 2: Pulverheksa

Both kindergartens featured presentations of the children with their photographs, names and dates of birth. These texts were formed in the shape of a snake in one kindergarten and in the shape of a millipede in the other kindergarten. When a child had a birthday,

this text was used to present the child and to sing the birthday song. The children in both kindergartens also called attention to these texts as being important to them, and they climbed on a chair to show us their photographs and names. In some instances, the children showed us series of photographs as important texts. Two boys led us to photographs that were taped on the floor and displayed a trip in the woods. The boys were lying on the floor and pointed to the details in the photographs that reminded them of events from the trip. These children spent a significant amount of time recalling their enjoyment on this trip and relating the details to us. Again, the photographs with representations of the boys themselves were the most interesting to these children.

The video observations conveyed information regarding the importance of the texts on the walls and floors in the daily activities of the kindergarten. When the children played in the room, they did not appear to be occupied with the texts. The walls were merely walls in the rooms and were not integrated into their activities. This observation also applied to the structured activities of the teachers. However, we did observe some interactions with the texts initiated by the teachers. These activities can be characterised as literacy events (see Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998), including the work with letters that was mentioned above and the reading of children's books. In the kindergarten with the youngest children, reading was a frequent activity, and some of the illustrations from their favourite books were placed on the walls. During the reading process the teacher emphasised these illustrations to the children. However, our primary observation is that these texts were less directly involved in the daily life activities of the kindergarten, and were merely regarded as colourful surroundings for the ongoing activities.

The walls as pedagogical texts

In the interviews, the six teachers and assistants were asked about their purpose for placing the texts on the walls. All of them emphasised the importance of documenting the children's activities. The *National Framework Plan for Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (2006)*¹ indicates the importance of general documentation of activities and the texts on the walls assist in fulfilling the claim for pedagogical documentation. The teachers and assistants explained that this documentation was intended for both the children and the parents. The children felt proud when they observed their works and their activities documented on the walls, and the texts enabled the events behind these works to endure in the minds of the children. The parents should also be able to visualise the activities of the children in kindergarten, and both creative work and outdoor trips were important to display. However, none of the interviewees stated that the kindergarten had a general plan for the texts on the walls regarding their selection and execution; rather, these texts were placed and arranged spontaneously in most instances. Nevertheless, some conventions were observed, such as the letters mentioned above that were placed near the ceiling. Precious works by the children, such as the paintings with glitter and the collages of Pulverheksa and Grønnskollingen,

appear to receive prominent placement in areas in which they are obvious and can attract the attention of the viewers. This particular placement adheres to another convention: it appears to be more suitable for adults than for children because the texts are often in a physically high position from a child's perspective.

It was also stated that the texts were rarely used in further activities, and there were no conscious strategies for using the texts for such purposes. The birthday texts and the letters were two exceptions to this general trend. However, in instances in which a child expressed interest in something on the wall, the teachers would then discuss that particular text with the child. The texts were primarily pertained to past activities and served a memory function more than as a resource for ongoing activities.

The teachers and assistants also mentioned the importance of a cosy and visually appealing kindergarten, and the walls with a wide range of colourful multimodal texts play an important role to fulfil this intention. The texts provide a warm and welcoming impression to children, parents and staff when they enter these rooms. Empty walls give a cold impression. These texts are components of the decoration in the kindergarten rooms, in addition to other items, such as brightly coloured furniture, flowers, bookshelves, and shelves with nice toys etc. Thus, the texts contribute to creating a friendly atmosphere and making the kindergarten room a desirable place to be.

Discussion

In this section of our article, we discuss the findings in relation to our three research questions. We must emphasise that because our research uses only three sample cases, it is impossible to draw general conclusions on a broader scale. However, our results are based on three examples that have been studied using several types of data. According to Flyvbjerg (1991), good examples can provide valuable and relevant information on research topics of interest.

First, we find that the walls in the three kindergartens represent a great variety of modes, such as pictures, paintings, drawings, collages, toys and written language, which contribute to creating rich multimodal contexts for the children. We believe that it is possible to claim that there is a kindergarten text culture (Berge, 2005). Although we have included only three kindergartens in our research, we recognise that kindergartens in many societies around the world similarly feature a great number and variation of colourful texts. One question that our research does not attempt to answer is whether the walls with their strong colours containing many modes of meaning could make the surroundings excessively distracting for children.

The different texts are often organised in clusters on the wall that provide a certain organisation and relation amongst these texts (see Baldry & Thibault, 2006). We believe that the main organising principle is the content of the texts (i.e., what they represent in the world). Halliday refers to this concept as the ideational metafunction (Halliday, 1994), e.g., the reindeer collage in the Sámi kindergarten and the collages of Pulverheksa and Grønnskollingen in one of the other kindergartens. The reindeer

collage represents a prominent feature in the Sámi way of living and in the culture of the Sámi people and occupied a prominent place on a white wall close to a table at which the children ate and worked with colours, papers and other materials. The placement made the collage obvious in the room (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The reindeer collage reminded the children and the teachers of one important aspect of Sámi life in a place in which the children spent a significant amount of time each day. The Framework Plan (2006:13) states that the Sámi children should be assisted in retaining and developing their language and culture regardless of where they live in Norway. The Sámi culture is clearly present, as shown in the texts on the walls in the Sámi kindergarten in Oslo.

The collages of Pulverheksa and Grønnskollingen are conceptual representations (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of the two main characters of the books that the children in one of the kindergartens had read. The characters are shown in full size without context, and the colours of the clothes and other items correspond to those in the books. Both collages were based on working drawings (copies from the books) that were hung beside the collages themselves. According to the interviews with the assistants, this design was chosen to render the two characters as realistically as possible for the children. The degree of closeness to reality in the representation appeared to signal quality in this instance. The large collages were arranged on a white wall. Again, these texts were prominent as meaning-making expressions in the room and, by serving as representations of the book illustrations, the main function of these texts was ideational, according to the framework of Halliday (1994). Representations from important pedagogical work seem to be part of the text culture in a more general educational context, having a parallel in maps, posters, articles etc. in school classrooms.

Writing as a mode of meaning was represented more frequently than we expected during our first visit. Children in Norwegian kindergartens are exposed to written language in kindergarten, but unlike preschool children in many other societies they do not learn to read and write at a level that enables them to read the many written texts on the walls. Some of the written texts were printed, while other texts were handwritten (see above). Most of these texts communicated information regarding the activities in the kindergarten and were arranged in clusters with, for example, drawings, paintings or photographs. One photographic series showed two girls playing with water. The written text conveyed the enjoyment they derived from this activity and their closeness as friends. The multimodality of this cluster expands the meaning of the girls' activities and emotions of the girls through both visual and verbal representations. However, the multimodal meaning applies only to those who can read it (i.e., parents and teachers).

As mentioned above, every text invites to communication (the interpersonal metafunction) (Halliday, 1994). To communicate, a text must have an audience, a viewer or a reader. In the presentation of our findings, we determined that the texts on the walls and floors were actually used infrequently in the children's freeform and

organised activities. Therefore, the question is whether the texts are purely decorative or whether they also have a pedagogical purpose. The texts appear to be a dynamic source for playing and learning (for meaning-making) in the kindergarten only to a certain degree. This lack of use contrasts with the great number and variation of texts that characterise the kindergarten rooms. However, the texts may interact with individual children without being a part of a certain activity. Such texts are always present and may offer information or emotional engagement. The interviews with the children informed us that at least some of the texts held personal meaning for them, primarily the texts in which they were actually represented. To be exhibited through photographs, name tags and products is important for most individuals, especially for children who are attempting to find an identity and a place among other children. The texts communicate that the children are important to the extent that their images and paintings hang on walls. This communicative function was clearly demonstrated when the children led us to the texts they found important.

Our study demonstrated that the communicative aspect of the texts had limited importance to the children in their activities. Another communicative aspect is that of *pedagogical documentation*. The documentation of activities has become increasingly important in Norwegian kindergartens as it has in kindergartens and preschools in many other societies. The Norwegian Framework Plan (2006) emphasises documentation in numerous respects. For example, it is said that “staff at kindergartens must be able to justify value judgements relating to children’s upbringing both to themselves and to the parents” (2006:15). This justification also goes for the choice of everyday activities in kindergarten and for the organisation of the physical environment of the kindergarten for the children. Cooperation between parents and kindergartens is an important issue in the Framework plan (2006:9), and documentation is often considered a component of this cooperative relationship. In this respect, the texts on the walls and floors convey information to parents regarding the activities that have occurred in the kindergarten. In the interviews, the teachers emphasised this purpose of the texts and explained that it was important to show the parents what occurs in the kindergarten and that the texts should also exhibit activities of which the children were proud. The latter objective was especially emphasised when two assistants commented on the purpose of the collages of Pulverheksa and Grønnskollingen. These interviews demonstrated that the assistants were as proud of the collages as the children were and that these assistants were as excited as the children to show them to the parents.

As Halliday (1994) explains, texts offer information and viewers or readers can choose whether to receive the information or not. In the interviews, the teachers mentioned that some of the parents did not express an interest in the texts that were hung on the walls. These parents were busy when they delivered and collected their children. Other parents noticed the texts that were created by their own children or photographs in which their children could be identified. Few parents actually demonstrated an interest in the texts as documentation of the pedagogical activities in

kindergarten. If this lack of interest is widespread, then the purpose of documentation for the benefit of the parents has little value.

The last of our three research questions was whether the texts on the kindergarten walls and floors could be interpreted as pedagogical texts: texts that are used in specific learning situations within the framework of a pedagogical institution (Selander & Skjelbred, 2004). We observed that the texts on the walls and floors in the kindergartens are distinct cultural artefacts. These texts are characteristic of Norwegian kindergartens and they dominate the main rooms in most kindergartens. The texts that we viewed during our observations were used only rarely in the pedagogic activities of the kindergarten, as affirmed in the interviews with the teachers and assistants. However, many of the texts exhibited the results of pedagogical activities, including reading books or painting with special materials such as glitter. Other texts were created by the staff to encourage the development of literacy, such as the letter sheets in one of the kindergartens. We questioned whether the teachers could use the texts more actively as pedagogical texts in the daily kindergarten activities. As text researchers, we see a meaning potential in these texts that could be an important part of the development of multimodal text competence.

Based on our findings, we raised the question of whether there is a specific kindergarten text culture. Kindergartens have (as we have shown) a cultural context, and the texts in the rooms represent texts that are meaningful in this context. A text culture has textual norms that make certain texts valuable and valid in this culture (Berge, 2005). The texts in the kindergarten rooms are valuable within the kindergarten culture and appear to follow norms for the representation of children and their work, documentation for staff and parents and appealing decoration for the daily life in kindergartens. We surmise that the texts on the walls and floors in this text culture are intended to demonstrate active, happy, positive and creative children through colourful and varied expressions. As all teachers state in the interviews, the most successful texts are the ones that are hung on the walls, i.e. the texts they define as the best paintings and collages, the photos from good trips, the copies from the books that received most attention etc. This aspect emphasises the importance of the texts in creating a positive and successful kindergarten.

Summing up

In this article, we have presented our research on texts in kindergarten rooms. We have not conducted a detailed analysis of the individual texts, clusters of texts or kindergarten rooms as texts. However, we have attempted to provide an overview of our findings by providing an insight into all three of our research questions through an investigation of the texts as multimodal texts based on their representation (ideational metafunction) and the manner in which they communicate (interpersonal metafunction). In addition, we wanted to discuss to the extent to which we can label texts on the walls and floors in kindergarten rooms pedagogical texts. We have used a broad

definition of the concept of a text and devoted attention to visual, verbal and material modes of meaning. In this respect, multimodality is an important notion. We have based our research on Halliday's social semiotic theory and methods for analysing multimodal texts (Halliday, 1978, 1994; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006); this framework has provided us with the tools that are necessary to perform a detailed text analysis. In this article, however, we have concentrated our presentation more generally on two metafunctions; the ideational and the interpersonal metafunctions. We have only briefly mentioned the textual metafunction by commenting on the cluster organisation of the texts in the kindergarten rooms.

Our main findings reveal a rich multimodal text culture in the three kindergartens, which we believe is shared with many other kindergartens in Norway and elsewhere. Through drawings, paintings, collages and photographs, the texts represent the activities that have occurred in the kindergartens. Many of the texts were created by the children and organised into clusters by the staff. Other texts, such as photographic series, letter sheets and verbal texts, were created by the teachers and assistants. We observed that most of these texts are used infrequently when the children play or in the more organised activities between staff and children. These texts document past experiences and do not appear to be important in ongoing activities. However, these texts do offer documentation pertaining to individual children, common activities and projects for parents if these parents have the opportunity to study the texts. In addition, the texts communicate a high level of activity to all visitors, children and staff and create appealing and colourful surroundings. We believe that kindergartens, as social and cultural institutions, establish a particular text culture. However, as mentioned above, we believe that the pedagogical potential of these texts is not seriously considered.

Notes

- 1 We refer to the Framework Plan from 2006 which was valid when we collected our data. The revised plan from 2011 can be found: Ministry of Education and Research (2011). *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens*. Retrieved from http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/KD/Vedlegg/Barnehager/engelsk/Framework_Plan_for_the_Content_and_Tasks_of_Kindergartens_2011.pdf

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